

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

AMBASSADOR GORDON GRAY

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial Interview Date: February 10, 2016
Copyright 2017 ADST*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	
Growing Up	
Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco	
Joining the Foreign Service	
Karachi, Pakistan	1983-1985
Amman, Jordan	1985-1987
Initial Tours in the Department	
Staff Assistant, NEA	
Soviet Desk Officer	
Ottawa, Canada	1992-1996
Counter Terrorism	1996-1999
UN Peacekeeping & Sanctions	1999-2001
Director, Office of Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Operations, International Organizations Bureau (IO)	
Office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs (ARP)	2001-2002
Cairo, Egypt	2002-2005
Deputy Chief of Mission	
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, NEA	2005-2008
Baghdad, Iraq	2008-2009
Senior Advisor to Ryan Crocker	
Tunisia	2009-2012
Ambassador	

Concluding Thoughts

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 10th of February 2016 with Gordon Gray. Do you have a middle initial?

GRAY: No, no middle initial.

Q: Gordon Gray, G-R-A-Y?

GRAY: That's right.

Q: This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stewart Kennedy. You go by Gordon?

GRAY: Yes.

GROWING UP

Q: Well, Gordon, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

GRAY: That is the beginning! I was born in New York City in 1956.

Q: Do you want to give us a little bit about your family background. What do you know about the Gray's on your father's side of the family first?

GRAY: On my paternal grandfather's side of the family, given the last name, it looks like we are of Scottish-Irish decent. Many times folks have asked, at least folks who were interested in national security issues and have some grounding in mid-twentieth century history, if I am related to the Gordon Gray who was President Eisenhower's national security advisor and was president of the University of North Carolina, etc. His son is Boyden Gray, so perhaps you've interviewed him. He was our ambassador to the European Union among other jobs, including White House Counsel. There must be some distant relationship, but I think their family stayed in North Carolina and settled in tobacco country, while my family – perhaps unwisely – migrated west. My paternal grandfather grew up in Minnesota and graduated from the University of Missouri.

Q: What was your grandfather doing there?

GRAY: My great-grandfather – his father - was in World War I and, as a matter of fact, died not in the war but died as a result of a mustard gas attack. I recall my grandfather talking about it once or twice. My grandfather went into the broadcast business.

Q: Now your father where did he grow up?

GRAY: Because of his business, my grandfather and his family moved around the country. My father was born in Kansas City, Kansas, but grew up on the East Coast, and lived in New York City.

Q: What was his occupation?

GRAY: He was an advertising salesman for radio, and then for cable television at the end of his career.

Q: Where did he go to college?

GRAY: He did two years at VMI, Virginia Military Institute, and then transferred to Bucknell, where he graduated.

Q: Where was your mother born?

GRAY: She was born in Chicago, Illinois. My maternal grandparents were graduates of the University of Illinois and met there. Her mother was born there and they lived there for a good part of her life. During World War II, my grandfather was too old to serve, so he joined the Naval Reserve and worked here in Washington at the Naval Yard. He worked here for two years and then went back to the mid-West. He and his family then moved to Pennsylvania, which is where my mother went to high school and then Bucknell, which is where she met my father.

Q: So they met at Bucknell?

GRAY: Yes.

Q: You grew actually in New York City?

GRAY: No, I lived there for a few years and then grew up in Rockland County, which is about 20 miles north of the City.

Q: What was Rockland like for you?

GRAY: It was a nice place to grow up. I liked being near the City, and I have favorable memories of it. I'm sure if I'd grown up somewhere else I would have had a favorable memory of that, too.

Q: Where did you go to elementary school?

GRAY: We moved when I was in second grade, so I first went to Tappan Elementary School in Tappan, New York, in Rockland County and then I went to Hilltop Elementary School, which I do not believe is there anymore.

Q: Did you like school?

GRAY: I did, a lot.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

GRAY: Yes.

Q: Do you recall any early books that you read that really struck you or interested you?

GRAY: How early?

Q: As early as you want.

GRAY: Or how late, I should ask.

Q: As late as you like.

GRAY: Yes, there were two books that I think influenced my eventual decision to pursue a career in the Foreign Service. One was Fail Safe, and I realize I'm dating myself by saying that. There is a scene very early on in the book...did you read the book?

Q: I've read the book and seen the movie.

GRAY: In the scene I am thinking of, one of the protagonists – the interpreter – is at an academic conference, where one of his colleagues is giving a paper in Russian, and the colleague makes just the smallest of grammatical mistakes. The protagonist is one of the elite people in the interpretation corps, if you will. The protagonist and a few of his elite colleagues exchange knowing glances; no one says a word. Attaining that level of expertise and knowledge was something that appealed to me, as did the understated approach. He didn't jump up and say, "The tenth declension of the fourth verb was incorrect." It was just a knowing glance. I recalled that vignette from the novel much later in my career when I was in an interagency meeting. A colleague from the Justice Department, a very senior attorney in the Criminal Division, made a very slight misstatement. It was a minor point of law, and I am not a lawyer at all, but a State Department colleague and I were the only two in the room to catch the mistake, and we just glanced at each other across the room nodded slightly. It just flashed back to Fail Safe. Maybe the interagency meeting is why I remember it. The other book was The China Hands, which I guess you'd say like Fail Safe did not have a happy ending either. I am not a negative person, and I am not citing those two books because neither of them

had a happy ending. Rather, both books highlighted a corps of very dedicated public servants who became real experts on their regions.

Q: I would have thought The China Hands could have turned you off....

GRAY: It could have.

Q: ...because the outcome was not.

GRAY: It was not pretty at all.

Q: No, because the China hands, the China experts, were put down by Senator McCarthy and his ilk.

GRAY: Yes, exactly.

Q: Did The China Hands raise the Foreign Service's...

GRAY: Yes, I think so.

Q: Well then high school, where did you go to high school?

GRAY: I went to high school in Rockland County for my first two years and graduated from high school in Chicago.

Q: How did you find high school?

GRAY: It was fine. You'd asked if I was always interested in school....

Q: I was wondering about again in high school you end up usually by sort of majoring or certain subjects appeal to you and certain don't. How about you?

GRAY: I had always been interested in politics and government, and I was also interested in languages, and I was able to take those courses.

Q: What languages were you taking?

GRAY: In eight and ninth grades I took Latin, I took Spanish in tenth grade, and from sixth grade on I took French.

Q: Did you get involved in any extracurricular activities?

GRAY: The usual: I was in student government, I was on the soccer team, and things like that.

Q: When did you graduate from high school?

GRAY: 1974.

Q: Had you been following events in any particular countries in the newspapers or TV at all?

GRAY: Not really. When I graduated from high school I would say my interest was more in domestic politics and U.S. government, as opposed to international affairs.

Q: Did you follow the Watergate business?

GRAY: Certainly, pretty closely.

Q: Well the when you graduated in '74 what were you looking towards obviously you were going to college or university?

GRAY: I was probably as unimaginative as many of my peers, and thought law school was a possibility. I was thinking of law school, government, something like that.

Q: Where did you go?

GRAY: Undergraduate?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: To Yale.

Q: What was Yale like in those days?

GRAY: It had gone coed a couple years before I arrived, in 1969; the class of '71 was the first class to graduate female undergraduate students. I do not know exactly what the ratio was when I was there, but it certainly was not fifty-fifty. Perhaps it was maybe 60 percent male and 40 percent female, but to me it was not a noticeable imbalance. I wouldn't have gone there if it had been an all-male school. Nixon resigned in August of 1974, and we began a month later, so as you can imagine the introduction to American politics class I took was pretty fully subscribed; there was a lot of interest.

Q: That's true. Well did you get involved in any extracurricular activities at Yale?

GRAY: I was on the intramural sports teams: soccer and flag football. Probably the best preparation for things like my diplomatic career was serving on the housing committee for Saybrook College. Yale is divided into residential colleges; Saybrook was my residential college. I learned a lot about human nature, diplomacy, and negotiation through my time on the housing committee; I did that all four years.

Q: What sort of issues did you have to deal with?

GRAY: Interpersonal problems, for example if someone did not get along with his or her roommate and had to move out; and how to make the system as fair as possible. It was a lottery system but there were many different types of rooms. There were opportunities to try to game the system, but we just tried to make it as transparent and fair as possible.

Q: While you were in college did you have a chance to go overseas?

GRAY: I had the chance, but I didn't avail myself of it. I would say this generation of students is more mobile, having one son who did a summer term in Cairo and another son who did a fall term in Osaka. People didn't take terms abroad as frequently then as they do now.

Q: Oh yeah.

GRAY: Yale had a very good program, which I considered seriously. It was called the Five Year B.A. (Bachelors of Arts), wherein after your junior year you would go abroad for a year. I had a friend who did it, an architecture student, and I presume he spoke Spanish. He went to Peru for a year and helped build a church there. I thought about it pretty seriously, but I was close to my roommates and decided not to do it. That was one of the reasons I went into the Peace Corps, so that I could live overseas. So I did a six-year B.A.: four years undergraduate and then two years in Morocco.

Q: You had full immersion. We will come to that in a moment but in college what was your major?

GRAY: Political science.

Q: Political science. Was that concentrated on American politics?

GRAY: No, not at all. I took a couple classes in that concentration. As you can imagine, in the fall semester of 1974 the American government class was very well subscribed. In the spring semester of my freshman year I took an introduction to international relations course. That really hooked me, and I took more and more classes along those lines.

Q: During that time of year did you have any contact with the Foreign Service?

GRAY: No.

Q: Did any of your colleagues talk about it and going in?

GRAY: No, not that I can recall.

Q: I forgot to ask, where did your family fall politically?

GRAY: I would say in the center, in the moderate element of the spectrum.

Q: Was church much of an influence?

GRAY: No..

Q: So you graduated in '78 was it?

GRAY: That's right.

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER IN MOROCCO

Q: Where? Did you go into Peace Corps right away?

GRAY: I graduated in May, and then six weeks later I was on my way to Morocco.

Q: What intrigued you about the Peace Corps?

GRAY: I was interested in the Foreign Service but thought I should test drive living overseas, so that was part of it. I asked to go to an Arabic speaking country and I was fortunate enough to receive Morocco as an assignment. Morocco seemed like a great country to go to. I certainly did not know much about it before I got there, but I was happy to go there and I had a great two years.

Q: What was the recruitment or the preparation process like?

GRAY: Recruitment or preparation?

Q: Well recruitment.

GRAY: It was pretty straight forward. There was an application, which you filled out and, of course, nothing was filled out on-line, because on-line hadn't been invented. I sent that in. I don't remember it being a particularly onerous application. I do remember someone affiliated with the Peace Corps came to campus and I interviewed with him. What I don't recall is whether that was a requirement or just an information exchange. The Peace Corps then sent me a letter asking me if I would be interested in going to Morocco. I thought Morocco sounded pretty darn interesting, so I said sign me up.

Q: It was two years?

GRAY: Two years in Morocco - that's right.

Q: Do you want to talk about what you were doing?

GRAY: I arrived in Morocco at the end of June, and must have had two and a half months of training in Rabat. They put us in a high school that wasn't being used because it was the summer. We had a pretty basic dormitory – it was the housing for that high

school. We had intensive Arabic language instruction. I was in the TEFL program: teaching English as a foreign language. Most of us were. I think there were 55 of us or so in this group. After we taught we joked that TEFEL actually stood for Teaching English as a Fourth or Fifth Language because the Moroccan students are excellent at learning languages. They spoke as their native language Moroccan Arabic or Berber. They learned classical Arabic in school, they learned French in school, and then we were adding English to bring them up to four or five languages. They were pretty good and adept at languages. In addition to the language training there was also pedagogical training. I thought it was a great program: students in Rabat signed up for English language instruction that mirrored their curriculum during the school year. They had to pay a modest fee – ten dirhams, if I remember correctly, which at the time was equivalent to \$2.50. But if their attendance was good and they completed the course they got their ten dirhams back. We got through most but not all of the year's curriculum, and they were being taught by native speakers. Now, we were learning how to teach and we started out by observing experienced teachers, volunteers who had taught for a year, or Moroccan teachers who had done it for years. Then we went into classrooms ourselves and taught. So the preparation was very good.

Then we got our assignments to the towns we wanted to go to. I went to a small mining town in the Tadla Plains, inside the Atlas Mountains. There was a large phosphate mine nearby, so it may not have been the most beautiful town, but I liked it. It was “my” town, and I taught English there for two years.

Q: How did you find the reaction of the people to this foreigner in this place?

GRAY: That's a good question. They had had volunteers there a number of years back, but another volunteer from my training group and I were the first volunteers in a while; I don't know how many years there were in between. I found that they put us in the foreign box. They weren't quite sure what to make of us, but we were their town's foreigners, their town's Americans, so they decided we were basically okay. I think the fact that we spoke Arabic, and made the effort to learn Arabic, went a very long way in earning good will with the Moroccans. Many of the teachers and a very, very high percentage of the foreign teachers (certainly over 90 percent) then were French. At that time, the French could fulfill their requirement for military service by teaching abroad.

Q: What do they call them?

GRAY: There is a term that I don't remember. It was a pretty good deal for the French teachers, because it was a Francophone country and they could drive home over the summer. Many of them stayed on after they completed their required service, and then their pay went up significantly. Anyway, long story short, when Moroccans outside our town saw someone who looked like me, their first assumption was that I was French, which was not a bad assumption on their part. But when they heard me speak Arabic, though, it went a long way. Americans have the advantage of not having had any colonial baggage in Morocco.

Q: How was the King viewed there?

GRAY: I can only speak for my town, but I would say he was highly regarded. I will give you two specific examples to illustrate the point, both related to celebrations. The first was the Feast of the Sacrifice, which commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Anyone with means in Morocco - and many people without the means (as people would go into debt, unfortunately) - would buy a sheep to slaughter. It's a very nice holiday in my opinion, a bit like our Thanksgiving in the sense that families would travel and come together, and food was the centerpiece. We would still have to work on the football part, but two thirds of it overlaps. No one would slaughter a sheep until the King went on television and slit the throat of a sheep. He had real religious legitimacy and - fast forwarding to 2011 - I think that's one of the reasons why Morocco has not been buffeted by the Arab Spring in the same way many other countries were.

The second example was on Green March Day, which commemorated the mobilization of Moroccans into the Western Sahara. I got to Morocco in 1978, and the actual Green March was in 1975, so it was a very recent event. Taxis would have pictures of the King on them on Green March Day; in talking to average people, they were 100 percent behind the King and what he did. Now that being said, I'm talking about Oued Zem, my town in Morocco. A year later there were a lot of demonstrations, and PhD student reading this transcript who does the research will find that in the summer of 1979 there were all kinds of articles, at least in American magazines like Time and Newsweek, asking if the King was going to survive. You will remember that the Shah of Iran came to Morocco after leaving Iran. One piece of graffiti I saw stuck in my mind: "One Shah in Morocco was Enough." So, yes the King was highly regarded in Oued Zem, but at the same time a year later there were also demonstrations there. The King was a survivor, though, and he stayed in power for another twenty years until he passed away in 1999.

Q: I have people talking about two events the airplane and the birthday party.

GRAY: Exactly. They were in the early 70s, a few years before I got there.

Q: These really stick out.

GRAY: Certainly.

Q: Survivor ability.

GRAY: Absolutely.

Q: What about social life there? Could you go out with Moroccan women or go with the guys down to the tea parlor or whatever?

GRAY: You couldn't go out with Moroccan women, so the answer is 'no', and certainly not in my town. Maybe an American could in Rabat or Casablanca, but certainly not in my town. Moroccan students would invite me to their family's homes. Even the poorest

families were very hospitable. My roommate was a Moroccan teacher during my second year in Oued Zem, and we taught at the same school, so that gave me an entree with his friends as well.

Q: Since you are out in the outlands did you have any contact with the embassy?

GRAY: Just a little bit. During our training when we arrived there was an embassy briefing. Also, a friend and I wrote for the volunteer newsletter (volunteer in the sense it was a newsletter for Peace Corps Volunteers; it came out on no fixed schedule). So the two of us interviewed the Ambassador. Lillian Carter, a former Peace Corps volunteer herself came to Rabat so they did a meet and greet with Peace Corps volunteers. The embassy people were very kind on Thanksgiving to invite us to their homes...I'm not saying everyone did, but some did. I don't know that I've had them since, but those mini-marshmallows on sweet potatoes were a little touch of home, which was nice.

JOINING THE FOREIGN SERVICE

Q: What was this doing to you Foreign Service-wise? I mean was it making it more attractive?

GRAY: Oh, absolutely. I took the written part of the exam while I was there so that I could start the process when I came back to the States. I learned pretty quickly that there are certain advantages to having the U.S. government pay for your travel, pay to instruct you in a language, and send you to interesting places; rightly or wrongly I thought it was a pretty good deal.

Q: You took the exam while you were there did you pass it?

GRAY: Yes.

Q: Where did you take the oral exam?

GRAY: In New York, because I was in grad school in Columbia then when I came back.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions that they asked you?

GRAY: Yes, I recall two questions but let me back up. I took the oral exam in Rosslyn, Virginia, in the Board of Examiners' office. I want to say they were almost *pro forma* current event questions. The reason I say *pro forma* is they don't stick in my mind, but clearly I must have fooled them into thinking I knew something about current events because they didn't dwell on those. One of the questions I do recall was about fiscal policy and monetary policy. I was a political science major, not an economics major, and to be honest I didn't spend my free time reading economic texts or The Wealth of Nations. But I had a great lecturer in international economics, Elliot Zupnick, and I took two courses with him at Columbia. He was a very popular lecturer. I was very well prepared for that question, thanks to Professor Zupnick more than to Gordon Gray. The

other question I remember posited that I was a cultural affairs officer and needed to set up an American film festival in my country of assignment. I was asked which films would I screen? The second term of my senior year at Yale I took an American studies course on American film, so I was able to go through the syllabus, and I think I gave a good answer. Two of the movies I remember naming were The Best Years of Our Lives, the one with the...

Q: Oh yes, The Best Years of Our Lives with...

GRAY: The Best Years of Our Lives, in which the World War II veterans had to readjust to civilian life.

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: That was one of them, and The Graduate was another one, because both films reflected their times so well. I named a few other movies, but I don't recall which ones. I also had the in-basket examination and the group negotiation exercise, all of which I thought were fine at the time. Then, after I had joined the Foreign Service, I really saw the value in those tests.

Q: Did you get any feel for the other people taking the exam at the time the in-basket group and all?

GRAY: The group negotiation exercise was really the only time we had interaction with one another apart from sitting in the waiting room. It seemed like a pretty collegial group; there weren't any Type A people who may have misinterpreted the point of the exercise and instead tried at all costs to get their proposal adopted by all of us. But no, it was a collegial group and we came to a good outcome I thought.

Q: So what happened? Did you have to wait a while?

GRAY: Not really, because I took the written exam twice in Morocco, so I had two bites of the apple, if you will, and took the oral exam twice. I must have passed the oral assessment part the second time with a higher score, because I was offered a position not long thereafter. I was at Columbia getting my master's degree, and I remember I was very pleased to get the letter (it was done by letter then) at the end of January, when I had just started my fourth of four terms. I was offered a place in the class that began March 3rd, 1982. I was thinking I wouldn't be able to graduate, but I knew I wanted to join the Foreign Service. The master's degree, while nice to have, was not as important to me as joining the Foreign Service. And President Reagan was talking about keeping the size of the government small, it was right after the air controllers strike, etc. The classes were small and I called a very nice person in the registrar's office for the Board of Examiners and she said, "No guarantees." Anyway, to make a long story short I accepted the offer, which was the right decision. As it turned out, Columbia was very flexible. I had a few extra course credits in the bank, so to speak, and the administration at Columbia told me I

could get my degree as long as I wrote my papers before I left. The professors and the administration were understanding. So I was able to get my degree and it all worked out.

Q: So you went to the A-100 course was in March?

GRAY: March 3rd, the Ninth class.

Q: What was your beginning officer's class like?

GRAY: There were 31 of us: 28 folks were junior officers like me, or entry level officers as we call them now, and three mid-level, lateral entrants all from the civil service. It was about 55 percent male, 45 percent female, so gender-wise it was pretty close to equality. It was not as diverse as classes are now in a racial sense. It seems like the new officers are coming in now with terrific language abilities; I don't remember that. I'm not trying at all to denigrate the accomplishments of my classmates, as I'm squarely putting myself in that boat, but I don't remember us being as talented as the folks are coming in now.

Q: Each generation is different. I was in the Foreign Service when you were born.

GRAY: Okay.

Q: I came in in '55 and my class was about 30 and in those days it just started renumbering after the McCarthy period. No women, all male, one minority who was Chinese from Hawaii and almost all of us had military experience; World War II and the Korean War.

GRAY: Right.

Q: They weren't having these wonderful trips abroad on their own. I've been in Korea and Japan and Germany thanks to Uncle Sam. So each generation has its own input and it's usually a positive input but it's different.

GRAY: Exactly.

Q: So what did you think about the A-100 course?

GRAY: It was a six and a half week course, if I remember correctly. I thought it did a good job of introducing us to the Foreign Service and the national security environment. One of the understated goals that I think is important is to have people bond as a class. Just a few months ago I went to the swearing-in of an A-100 classmate, whom I had barely seen since A-100 concluded, and there were a number of us there from the Ninth class. So I thought it was successful in that regard.

Q: Did most people have some place where they wanted to go in mind?

GRAY: I was hoping to go to an Arabic-speaking post, but there had been a number of Arabic-speaking posts available for the January class, to be in synch for when the Arabic course began at FSI (Foreign Service Institute). But I knew I wanted to go into NEA (the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs), and the only NEA post on our list was Karachi, Pakistan, so I figured that's close enough, so I put it at the top of my bid list. I was very popular among my A-100 classmates because no one else wanted to go there.

KARACHI

Q: You were in Karachi from when to when?

GRAY: I was there from 1983-1985.

Q: How was it then because now it's a very dangerous place isn't it?

GRAY: It was certainly not as dangerous as it is now. It was a few years after the Embassy fire in November 1979. I got there in February 1983, and there were still some people in Karachi and Islamabad who had been at post for the attack against our Embassy.

Q: Yeah this was a horrible experience where a bomb had attacked our embassy and nearly burned everybody up but luckily got them out just in time.

GRAY: Two servicemen were killed. A mob marched on the Consulate General in Karachi but someone who was there told me there were more robust countermeasures taken by the Pakistani authorities. But there was still some ill feeling, totally understandably, among those who had been there for that experience. In addition, driving outside the city was prohibited. There was a great word used in South Asia - "dacoits." Perhaps it comes from Hindustani.

Q: That was the name of the bandits.

GRAY: Bandits, exactly. As a result, we weren't allowed to drive outside of Karachi. When we arrived at post, the house we were assigned to needed some renovations, so we were staying at the hotel right across the side street from the Consulate General. On our third night in country, I heard a very loud noise that sounded like a bomb had gone off. But I was new and didn't want to seem like I was a "Nervous Nellie," so I called our sponsor. The phones worked, which I already knew was something you didn't take for granted. In any event, our sponsor advised us to call Post 1, the Marine Security Guard who is always on duty at an Embassy or Consulate General. I called Post 1; the Marine advised us to come to the Consulate General, so my wife and I walked across the street. In fact, a bomb had gone off. It didn't cause any structural damage, and I'm being somewhat cavalier because to my knowledge no one had been injured. France had recently announced an agreement to sell fighter jets to Iraq. There was a large indigenous Shi'a community in Karachi, and the presumption was that either they on their own or with Iranian encouragement, shall we say, planted this bomb. A lot of hotels that cater to

foreigners have offices for various airlines, and the bomb blew out all the windows of the Air France office at the hotel at which we were staying. As I said, the bomb made a lot of noise, but I don't think anyone was hurt. So there was still an element of danger.

That was right after we got there, in February 1983. In December 1984 a Kuwait Airways flight – flight 221 - was hijacked with three of our colleagues from Karachi on board. The Agency for International Development (AID) had a regional inspection office in Karachi, because Karachi at that time had great air connections. Two of our colleagues were murdered: Chuck Hegna and Bill Stanford. Bill was killed on the tarmac in Tehran. A third colleague was brutally beaten but survived. The hijackers were Lebanese Hizballah and I later learned they were tied to Imad Mughniyeh, so I did not shed any tears when I learned of his death. Their demand was the freedom of 17 people in Kuwaiti prison in connection with the 1983 embassy bombings. I'll never forget interviewing American citizens from the flight when they finally landed in Karachi. And I'll always remember the graceful memorial service for Chuck and Bill, led by our Consul General, Larry Grahl, who said all the right things to comfort the community.

Q: Were there movements in Pakistan at the time? I'm trying to figure out was anything going on at the time in Afghanistan?

GRAY: There were, but can we go back for a second on security? I did a rotational tour as general services officer, then vice consul, so my first boss was the administrative officer. He had been an RSO who then became an administrative officer. He thought we needed a fence around the Consulate General in Karachi. Can you believe that in Karachi, Pakistan, a few years after the Embassy fire, there was no fence around the Consulate General? So a fence was installed. I am not talking about a twenty foot granite wall with concertina wire on top or anything like that. It was an iron fence, and it may have been eight feet high if that; it was not an obtrusive fence. Incredibly there were a number of people at the Consulate General who were wringing their hands saying, "Oh my goodness, why are you doing this," which I did not understand at all, even though I was brand new to the Foreign Service. Just two months after my arrival in Karachi, however, our Embassy in Beirut was blown up, at which point the hand-wringers began to see the wisdom of the fence. (As an aside, when I was Ambassador in Tunisia I instituted a mission-wide ceremony to remember the victims of that bombing, in part because two were on temporary duty from Embassy Tunis.) I mention the fence to answer your question about safety in a broader sense, and to note that when I joined the Foreign Service there was a completely different ethos about security.

Q: I was in Athens during the '60s and it was a glass building and a Greek-Cypriot had set off an explosion in the parking lot. He and an Italian leftist girl were doing this they had put it in a van but it went off too soon. They were killed but no one else was but there was no fence around us at all.

GRAY: They were different times.

Q: You mentioned that you were married.

GRAY: Yes.

Q: What background is your wife?

GRAY: She's from Montréal. She is a registered dietitian and was getting her degree in nutrition at Columbia; we were both living in International House and that's how we met. It was lucky because we were studying at completely different campuses. I offered her the opportunity of six months of Urdu language training followed by a two-year honeymoon in Karachi - who could turn down that offer? She did not, and we have been very happily married ever after.

Q: How did she find society and living in Karachi? I think in many ways she would have a more difficult time?

GRAY: She had only lived in Montréal and New York City, so it was different. In other words, she had not had a Peace Corps experience. Since she was able to find work right away, that may have made transition a lot easier than it would have been otherwise.

Q: You said you had two jobs: GSO and...?

GRAY: I had a rotational assignment, so I did one year as GSO and then one year as vice consul.

Q: As GSO what were you doing?

GRAY: Odd jobs. I oversaw procurement; supplies and equipment; housing; and the motor pool. That was always fun: trying to keep the air-conditioning running in armored cars that were not originally built to have armor added to them. In all seriousness, the job was fun and it gave me a good overview of how a mission ran. When I joined the Foreign Service, assignments were for only eighteen months if one was doing only one job. I figured that since I was devoting six months of my life to learn Urdu, I would rather have a two year tour. I was also very pleased to have two different jobs so that I could get a better sense of the Foreign Service right from the start.

I had an airport pass for my GSO duties, and I was also the newest Foreign Service officer, so I was often called upon to serve as a control officer. Many visitors would transit Karachi. The most memorable one was Congressman Charlie Wilson. The first time I met him was on the tarmac at the airport in Karachi. He walked over to me, stuck out his hand, and with a big smile said "Hi, I'm Charlie Wilson from Texas." Given his height, his Stetson, and his cowboy boots, I had figured as much. He was accompanied by a young lady whom he introduced as a belly dancer, just as depicted in the movie. Years later I saw Charlie Wilson's War, in which Tom Hanks portrayed the Congressman, and I thought he did a great job of capturing his essence.

Q: What were you doing on the consular side?

GRAY: In the morning I was interviewing non-immigrant visa (NIV) applicants, and in the afternoon immigrant visa applicants. There was also some American citizens services work, but not too much.

Q: Were you deluged with people trying to get to the States to work?

GRAY: Absolutely, and this was before there was an appointment system for NIVs, so I interviewed until there wasn't anyone left to interview each day. I bet I did a hundred interviews a day. I think it's a very valuable experience for everyone to have. It is good that it is still a requirement for tenure. Consular work is great for language skills and great for teaching new officers that they have to make decisions quickly, based on less than perfect percent information.

Q: Did you find it hard making these decisions? Some people really just can't do it.

GRAY: No. In a few cases when I began, instead of making a decision, I asked the applicant to come back with additional documentation, using the 221G provision of the Immigration and Naturalization Act. I had a very experienced, very good Consul, who was also our next door neighbor. She said, "Listen; if you want a document and you tell applicants to go out and get that document, they will bring that document back. Make the decision." From then on I just made the decision. You had earlier asked about the value of the A-100 course. I remember two very good pieces of advice we received in A-100 which on their own would have made the course worthwhile. One was to buy real estate in the Washington area. It was great advice, but at that time interest rates were perhaps 18 percent. I joined the Foreign Service after two years in the Peace Corps, and then graduate school, which was expensive even though I was lucky to have a scholarship. I wasn't making a whole bunch of money, let's put it that way. So it was great advice, but not great advice that I could implement. The other piece of advice, which was more relevant to your question, was being told "You were hired for your judgment." That stuck with me my whole career. I think it was a very important piece of advice. I tried to apply that in each of my jobs, including on the visa line.

Q: I'm a consular officer by trade that's what I've done mainly. It's very hard for some people to make up their minds they are always asking for more and more paper in order to stall.

GRAY: Exactly. Colin Powell's rule is to make decisions when you are in the zone between 40 percent and 70 percent of information, since you will never get to 100 percent in time. I also think it is very important for senior officers to understand the pressures that people on the visa line are going through. When I was the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) in Cairo, Maura Harty – the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, a great officer and a good friend as well – visited for our junior officer conference. We were talking informally over coffee, and I remember saying that I could tell her how many visa referrals I had sent to the consular section. (The answer was zero.) Maura, who was on top of everything, replied "I can tell you as well." The reason the answer was zero was

because front offices should not be monkeying around with consular sections; they have enough headaches.

Q: How did you see Karachi as a city and a political force then?

GRAY: At the time Pakistan was under military rule, and Zia-ul-Haq was in charge. He had deposed and later hung Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was from the Sindh Province. Sindh is where Karachi is located, and it was the base of his party, the Pakistan People's Party. So from talking to colleagues in Islamabad, Karachi was just a completely different climate than there was in Islamabad. It was a lot easier for us to mix with Pakistanis because they didn't feel as if the government was looking over their shoulders. Islamabad was a government town and Karachi was a port city more interested in business. And obviously Zia wasn't overwhelmingly popular in the Sindh Province in general.

Q: Did Pakistanis you met test you how you felt about India?

GRAY: It was certainly always on their minds, but I never got the impression they were testing; I don't have a recollection of that. From their perspective, anything that went wrong in Pakistan was because of India – since they “knew” that they didn't have to test me on that.

Q: Was there any place where the Pakistani immigrant and non-immigrants were going particularly?

GRAY: Yes, there are these magnet communities, many of which were in New Jersey, if I remember correctly. There must have been other areas as well which I knew at the time but it slipped my mind.

Q: Who was your Consul General?

GRAY: We had two. When I first got there it was Alex Rattray, who had been the economic counselor in Islamabad, and then came down to Karachi as Consul General, and then went back to the Embassy as DCM. The second Consul General was Larry Grahl, whose previous assignment was with INR. He also had a lot of AF background.

Q: How did you find the post?

GRAY: It was a nice sized post. At the time it was our third largest Consulate General after Frankfurt and Hong Kong. (I don't remember which of those two was the largest.) We had a lot of folks with regional responsibilities based in Karachi. I would say that there were 51 U.S. direct hire employees - 51 is the number that sticks in my mind. It was big enough so that you knew everyone, but not too small and not too big. I guess was kind of a Goldilocks-sized post. It was good in that sense. We got to know the Marines very well. We played volleyball once a week with them, and there was a lot of mixing among different groups.

Q: Did the Indian side - I'm using the term subcontinent side of things - there having learned Urdu, did that wean you away from Arabic or not?

GRAY: Do you mean linguistically?

Q: I was wondering whether I mean when you are projecting yourself did you think about maybe this might be a more interesting area?

GRAY: It was a fascinating area, I was glad to be there, but our second tour was in Jordan, and I was glad to go to Jordan.

Q: You are getting a good mixture.

GRAY: Yes.

Q: Did you get to travel much in Pakistan?

GRAY: Not a too much. Part of the reason was, as I had said, you could not drive because of the "bandits," so that meant getting on an airplane. While it probably wasn't excessively expensive, when you are starting out in your career, you are watching your spending.

Q: Absolutely.

GRAY: I went to Islamabad a few times on business, and I went to Lahore a couple of times. Then-Vice President Bush was coming to Lahore, a beautiful city, and the post only had about ten American employees, so it needed lots of help, even though it was only a day stop. I went there for ten days to help out, which I enjoyed a great deal. Then my wife and I went back to Lahore because I wanted to make sure she saw it. We also went to Peshawar, and to Sri Lanka for one Christmas vacation.

AMMAN

Q: You mentioned traveling around. I interviewed, a long time ago, Elinor Constable, and she got back the draft of her oral history that had been typed by somebody and it talked about her being in the shower with Ollie. Peshawar. Well, then where did you go after this?

GRAY: After Karachi we went to Amman, Jordan.

Q: How did you find the transfers of Maghrebi Arabic to Jordanian?

GRAY: In Maghrebi Arabic, or at least the Moroccan dialect, vowels tend to be swallowed, and the grammar is not as precise - just as it is imprecise in any dialect when compared to modern standard Arabic. I took modern standard Arabic at Columbia, so I

was already used to the transition, if you will, and in Amman the Embassy had a good language program.

Q: Well Jordan what was the situation in Jordan with Jordan at the time you were there? You were there from?

GRAY: 1985-1987.

Q: '85-'87.

GRAY: It was a fascinating time to be there. Oman had never severed relations with Egypt following its signing of the Camp David Accords, but the Jordanians were the first Arab country to reestablish relations with Egypt after Egypt was suspended from the Arab League. The re-establishment of relations came when I was in Jordan. The Jordanians were very engaged on the Palestinian issue, and when I first arrived Jordan was trying to improve relations with the Palestinians on the West Bank and, to a lesser extent, Gaza. During my tour King Hussein gave a very famous speech in which he said – and this may be close to a verbatim quotation - “Arafat has lied to me and I’m done with him.” We had a lot of high-level visitors, as there was a lot of interest in Jordan. The Assistant Secretary Dick Murphy, a phenomenal diplomat...

Q: He was in my A-100 class.

GRAY: When you said you had joined in 1955 I almost asked you if you were in the same A-100 class. He had served in Jordan. We saw him a great deal. It was my introduction to the peace process, and to the Arab-Israeli issue. So from a policy prospective I was incredibly fortunate to be a second tour officer there.

Q: What was your job?

GRAY: I was a political reporting officer; it is the best job in the Foreign Service. I’ve loved all my jobs, but being political reporting officer - particularly in a country where people want to talk to you: you can’t beat it with a stick, as they say. I had gone from a Consulate General to an Embassy; that was a transition. I also went from a Consulate General in which there were very few generalist Foreign Service Officers to a post where people who did phenomenally well in their careers. Paul Boeker was our ambassador. He had been an ambassador at the age of 40, to Colombia, and Jordan was his second ambassadorship. Skip Gnehm, whom I’m still...

Q: I’m seeing Skip Gnehm at one o’clock.

GRAY: I’m still good friends with him. He was DCM and you know how well he did in his career. He was very interested in junior officers, and was great at junior officer development. My political counselors were first Ken Brill, then David Welch. I was lucky enough to work for David in a number of different jobs subsequently. Johnny Young was the administrative counselor when I first arrived, and then Eric Boswell. I

apologize to any other stars that I missed. NEA sent its A-team to Amman, and I was lucky to be there and learn from all of them.

Q: How stood relations with Israel? Was there something going on or was there anything going on?

GRAY: In the...?

Q: Between Israel and Jordan.

GRAY: There were many high-level secret talks, many of which occurred outside of the region. Discussion of such talks was limited to NODIS cables and the talks were well above my pay grade. That was fine: I had no need to know.

Q: Were you following events in Israel as a political officer?

GRAY: Not per se but we'd listen to Kohl Israel on the radio. Israel is a fascinating country, and one couldn't help but be interested in it.

Q: How about the West Bank or the East Bank? I mean, the King had disavowed it by this point.

GRAY: During the time I was there, yes.

Q: How had that hit the area and how was that received in Jordan?

GRAY: The King was popular, so it was obviously very well received by the East Bankers. The Palestinians didn't know what to make of it, but the more one knew of Arafat, the less one liked him. There was not blind allegiance to Arafat.

Q: I'm interviewing now by telephone in Brasilia Ed Abington; he was sitting at Arafat's side.

GRAY: Yes.

Q: Full time, wasn't he?

GRAY: Yes, but after I was in Amman.

Q: It's interesting to catch his view. He doesn't think much of Netanyahu.

GRAY: I bet. I know Ed.

Q: Was there still a rather distinct division between the East Bankers who were now Jordanians and the ones who were original Jordanians?

GRAY: Do you mean between East Bankers and Palestinians? Or...

Q: I was thinking about those Palestinians who basically moved into Jordan.

GRAY: As opposed to East Bankers who had lived there forever?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: Yes, and if I understand your question correctly let me give you an excellent example. We had a Jordanian political assistant Foreign Service National who considered himself Palestinian. He was not just self-identified, but others considered him Palestinian as well. I got to know him well, and felt I could ask when his family came to the East Bank. He said the 1600s - and he's still is perceived and identified as a Palestinian. That pretty much says it all.

Q: Did you view the King as somebody who was keeping it all together?

GRAY: Yes, absolutely. We all had a tremendous amount of admiration for him. That being said, I remember Ambassador Boeker (who was not at all a micromanager) circulating a cable from another post in a country ruled by a monarch. It referred to the monarch as His Royal Highness. I won't name the country.

Q: I'm sure you're talking about Morocco. Go ahead.

GRAY: I'm not going to give names.

Q: I know.

GRAY: But anyway he...

Q: People talk about that.

GRAY: ...he circled that and wrote something to the effect of "I've never seen this in our reporting and I hope I never do." It was good to reinforce that. People at post understood what American interests were, but objectively speaking it's hard to not come to the conclusion that King Hussein played a difficult hand very well.

Q: I met him when I was vice counsel in Dhahran this was back in '58.

GRAY: Okay.

Q: He was then a very young and I felt this poor guy he's not going to be around long.

GRAY: The Jordanians really felt a connection with him.

Q: As a political officer how did you operate?

GRAY: When I first got to Amman my beat was Parliament, which had just been reconstituted. I drew a lot on my Peace Corps experience. You benefited by showing up and drinking a lot of tea with folks. I covered a lot of sessions, and I could go into offices and speak with parliamentarians; they were very open.

Q: When I was in Dhahran I used to find when I had some business to do I'd sit in an office and wait until your turn came up.

GRAY: Exactly.

Q: And other people listening in.

GRAY: I also got a lot of good tips from David Welch, who told me to be sure to speak with people like money changers. So I tried to go out and have a wide array of contacts. Jordanians were very open; it wasn't as if I was operating in Moscow.

Q: Was there any sense of menace from Syria or Iraq there?

GRAY: Not from Iraq. Jordan and Iraq had a pretty decent relationship, notwithstanding the fact that the Iraqis had deposed their Hashemite leader. Relations with Syria were delicate. Jordan paid a lot of attention to making sure that it kept that relationship as smooth as possible. When I was there the border between Syria and Jordan was open and that wasn't an issue.

Q: Could you travel around?

GRAY: Around?

Q: Jordan and all.

GRAY: Certainly. There were great things to see there.

Q: Did you get out in the tents?

GRAY: We didn't go camping, partly because our eldest son was born during our tour and we were grappling with larger mysteries of life such as parenthood. But one could travel all around Jordan.

Q: And Petra?

GRAY: Petra, Aqaba, up north. It's not that big of a country, so it was easy to get around.

Q: Did the British have much influence there?

GRAY: Absolutely. The King's second wife was the daughter of the military attaché. They were married for ten years and she is the mother of King Abdullah. One of King Hussein's first big leadership moves, if you will, was removing the British military adviser, the famous Glubb Pasha, in the fifties. The British had a great deal of residual influence and assigned good diplomats to Amman.

Q: The King made periodic trips to the States didn't he?

GRAY: Yes he did.

Q: Did you get any presidential visits or anything like that?

GRAY: We didn't have a Presidential visit, but Vice President Bush and Secretary Shultz each came to Jordan. I don't believe President Reagan ever visited Jordan; if so, it was not when I was there.

Q: Relations with the United States were good when you were there? When did you leave?

GRAY: 1987 - the summer of 1987, before the *intifada* began.

INITIAL TOURS IN THE DEPARTMENT

Q: Well I think this might be a good place to stop and we will pick it up the next time.

GRAY: Okay.

GRAY: Back to Washington to work for Dick Murphy.

Q: Okay well let's set up something.

Q: Gordon? Ready to do a little interview?

GRAY: Certainly.

Q: Today is the 17th of February 2016 in an interview with Gordon Gray. Gordon you left Jordan when?

GRAY: I left Jordan in June, 1987.

Q: Okay, and you went back to the Department, is that right?

GRAY: That's right. The first job I had back in the Department after my assignment in Jordan was as staff assistant in NEA, what was then the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs.

Q: Okay well let's talk about the staff assistant job. Whom were you working for and what were you doing?

GRAY: The Assistant Secretary was Dick Murphy, who had been ambassador to several countries: Mauritania, Syria, the Philippines, and then Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the Reagan administration. He was named Assistant Secretary in 1983. He was a very experienced Arabist, and a true gentleman; he was such a pleasure to work for. The Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS) was Ed Djerejian, who went on to become our ambassador to Syria, our ambassador to Israel, and who for over twenty years now has headed the Baker Institute at Rice University in Houston. I really enjoyed the job because it gave me great overview of how the Department works, which is what I wanted in my initial tour in Washington. It gave me a good overview of how the Bureau worked and what the issues were in the Bureau. There were two of us: my other colleague was Deborah Jones, who served as our ambassador to Kuwait and then more recently as our ambassador to Libya. NEA always felt they did a very good of grooming its junior officers, and at the time Deborah and I were staff assistants there was no special assistant between the staff assistants and the assistant secretary as there were in other bureaus. So when the Assistant Secretary traveled, one of the staff assistants went with him. The trips were tremendously educational. When I was in Jordan, after I'd been assigned to the job, I asked Wat Cluverius for advice on the job. (At that time Wat was special envoy for Middle East peace, and since he was based in Jerusalem, he came through Jordan quite frequently. When he did I was his control officer, and we had a good relationship; he was a very warm person.) He gave me excellent guidance, which was never say that the other staff assistant is working on something when you are asked for a status update. Deborah and I followed that advice, and we were in constant communication. It was a great working relationship and I am friends with her until this day. We recently reminisced about the time Phil Habib chewed me out because I made a copy of a document he had wanted me to deliver directly to the Seventh Floor. The copy was for our PDAS, Ed Djerejian, who was certainly pleased that I had done so.

Q: Where is she now?

GRAY: She is the Deputy Commandant at the Eisenhower School at National Defense University.

Q: Ah ha. What were the major issues, you can talk about them in time, that you were dealing with or at least working on?

GRAY: It was a pretty exciting time to be in this bureau, although there is never a dull moment in NEA. The work on resolving the Arab-Israeli issue was very high on the list of the Bureau's priorities. The Assistant Secretary was frequently traveling to countries involved with that issue. The United States had previously not spoken with members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), so much so that toward the end of his tenure Secretary Shultz was criticized for meeting with Edward Said, the professor of literature from Columbia University who was an American citizen and a member of the

Palestinian National Congress. Bob Pelletreau, who was our Ambassador in Tunis at the time, became the official conduit for our discussions with the PLO.

The Lebanon civil war was also very high on the list of priorities. The issue resonated in particular with the senior generation of people in the Bureau who had studied Arabic in Beirut before the outbreak of the civil war, when the language school was moved to Tunis. So there was certainly an understanding of Lebanon and an attachment to it and a desire to help find a solution there.

At the same time, 1987-1988, there was the so-called Tanker War, when the Iranians targeted Kuwaiti tankers carrying oil. As staff assistant I accompanied Assistant Secretary Murphy on a trip to Iraq and I recall sitting in on a tough session with Tariq Aziz, who was the Foreign Minister. I made the transition from staff assistant to Kuwait desk officer over the Fourth of July weekend, which was when the USS Vincennes mistakenly shot down a civilian Iranian airliner flying out of Iran to Dubai. The war ended shortly thereafter.

At the same time, South Asia was also in the Bureau's AOR (Area of Responsibility). So the efforts to convince the Soviets to get out of Afghanistan were ongoing. All in all, it was a fascinating time to be in the Bureau, it was a wonderful education in the bureaucracy on how things worked, and it taught me that talent usually trumped wiring diagrams.

Q: Going back to right at the beginning what was the mood in the Bureau about the situation in the West Bank, Arafat, and all?

GRAY: I think there was a pretty healthy skepticism about Arafat as the so-called leader of the Palestinian movement. At the same time, I think there was recognition that - even though the policy was not there yet - it would be exceedingly difficult to find a solution acceptable to the Palestinians that did not have the support of Arafat and/or the PLO.

Q: How about Israel? There have been charges that the Arabists were too friendly to the Arab cause and not loyal enough to our so-called ally Israel.

GRAY: The charges about to whom? I'm sorry.

Q: About Israel.

GRAY: Whom were the charges levied against?

Q: I guess basically the Foreign Service that...

GRAY: I saw that the Bureau had a number of people who had served in the Arab world who also served successfully in Israel. I think there was an appreciation for the Israeli democracy and an appreciation of the fact there were legitimate grievances on both sides of the equation. I mentioned just a few minutes ago that Ed Djerejian had served as

ambassador in Syria and that he had served as ambassador in Israel. He spoke Arabic and I think he was very successful in his tenure in Tel Aviv. There were a number of people in the Bureau who had served in both the Arab world and in Tel Aviv.

Q: Was there any feeling towards the Israeli leadership at that particular time?

GRAY: About whose leadership?

Q: Israeli leadership.

GRAY: I am sure there were feelings, very distinct feelings, about who the leadership was, but that was certainly nothing that I recollect myself. I think what is noteworthy about that time was that we had a Secretary of State who had formerly served as Treasury Secretary and knew a thing or two about economics. Secretary Shultz placed a great deal of emphasis on trying to move the Israeli economy to a more free market economy and away from its socialist roots. One of the many ironies, perhaps, of this whole issue was that the Palestinians were more oriented toward free markets than the Israelis had been, but the Palestinians never drew on that distinction to make the economic case as to why they should have a great say in their affairs.

Q: What was the situation in Jerusalem at the time?

GRAY: I'm going back to when I was in Jordan because I visited Jerusalem from time-to-time. We had a wonderful set-up in Amman: a non-professional courier run that allowed Embassy personnel, on a rotating basis, to visit Jerusalem every so often. The U.S. Embassy in Jordan and the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem had one of the very few automobiles registered on both sides of the frontier. So we would drive to what the Jordanians called the King Hussein Bridge and what the Israelis called the Allenby Bridge. It spanned the Jordan River, which at that geographical point was not the mighty Jordan that one hears from the spirituals. It may have been more than a stream, but not very much more. We would drive across the bridge and then change license plates, as if we were in a John Le Carré novel about Cold War Berlin. It was a nice opportunity for those of us in Jordan to get to Jerusalem, and it gave us a sense for what life was like on the West Bank, what life was like in Jerusalem, and what life was like in Israel. I was in Jordan before the *intifada*; the mood was obviously less tense than it became shortly thereafter.

Q: Did you feel pressure particularly from the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC, American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, and all or was that a problem or not?

GRAY: I did not. Neither when I was in Jordan nor as staff assistant can I say that the pro-Israel lobby in the United States had any direct impact on the work that I was doing personally. When I was in Jordan, we had a great number of congressional visitors who would go to Israel and come to Jordan as well, or vice versa, and many of them had their own positions on the issue, and some of them were very pro-Israel. Some of them were pro-Israeli and pro-Jordanian at the same time. I'd say where the pro-Israel lobby only

really affected the work that I did was when I was Kuwait desk officer after being staff assistant. There was a proposal to sell F-18 fighter aircraft to Kuwait, to which some elements the pro-Israel lobby objected. Rightly or wrongly, I felt at the time that they were going through the motions, as it was a hard intellectual case to make that those fighter aircraft would have posed a threat to the State of Israel or to Israel's qualitative military edge. At the end of the day the sale went through Congress without any objection and without any serious delay or problem.

Q: Did you have much to do with the immigrant community in the United States with either relatives or interests in your country or not?

GRAY: I'm sorry, which immigrant community in the States?

Q: Well there are a lot of people who came from the Middle East and settled in the United States and often you have issues dealing with them.

GRAY: No, it was not in the nature of the job that I had. As staff assistant, I was working on all issues across the board, if you will, rather than having country-specific responsibilities. Certainly there are countries where there are large diaspora communities in the United States. For example, the Lebanese-American community was (and is to this day) active. I was then desk officer for Kuwait, but there is not a Kuwaiti diaspora in the United States, so it was not any additional work for me. We can talk about this much later, but it was really only after the revolution in Tunisia that I came to deal with the Tunisian diaspora here in the United States. Even though it was small, it became a very positive force.

Q: When you were Kuwaiti desk officer what was the situation in Kuwait?

GRAY: Following my assignment as staff assistant I wanted to follow up with an assignment as a desk officer. In some ways a staff assistant is a mile wide but a couple of inches deep. You know a little bit about everything, but you do not go in-depth on anything. I wanted to reverse that to complement my experience, and I figured that working on a desk would give me the opportunity to do so. I must say I greatly enjoyed it. In particular, it was a lot of fun supporting our embassies. I was assigned to the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs for two years. I was the desk officer for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait for the first six to eight months of my tour. We then did a bit of reorganization (which I had actually advocated) and succeeded in adding an officer. So the new officer became the desk officer for the UAE. I maintained my responsibilities for Kuwait as desk officer, and also became the political/military action officer for Saudi Arabia and for the Gulf in general.

I got to the desk right as the Iran-Iraq War was ending, which was of course a source of relief for the Kuwaitis. One of the big issues that we worked on, which was tremendously educational for me in a bureaucratic sense, was the deflagging of Kuwait oil tankers. You remember they were placed under the American flag so that the U.S. Navy could protect them, in accordance with long-standing U.S. policy, going back several administrations,

that one of our fundamental national security interests was to protect the free flow of oil from the Gulf. As the hostilities ended, the Kuwaitis wanted to deflag the tankers. There were a number of other perspectives within the United States, however. For example, the U.S. Maritime Administration was initially not particularly keen on the idea. But we were able to find a precedent for doing so, and we found a win-win solution that deflagged the tankers and left everyone satisfied at the end of the day.

For most of my time there was a sense that there would be a return to normalcy, if you will. In the early eighties, there had been a number of terrorist attacks in Kuwait, including an attack against our Embassy and an assassination attack against the Emir. And of course there was the Iran-Iraq War. The Kuwaitis have a long mercantile tradition, and they certainly hoped that they would be able to get back to that tradition rather than dealing with external threats. With apologies for a bad pun and the cliché, if you define Iran as a hard place, then Kuwait really is between a rock and a hard place. It was not the easiest neighborhood to live in especially if you are a small, relatively under-populated country like Kuwait was. That sums up the mood during the lead-up to the Iraqi invasion.

Q: Did that happen on your watch?

GRAY: It did, right towards the end of my tenure. I suppose the point of an oral history is to tell personal stories, so I will. Employee Evaluation Reports (EERs), as we all know, contain a mandatory area for improvement. I received an EER while I was Kuwait desk officer, right before the Iraqi invasion, which was very complimentary. I was pleased to get it. I had a very good relationship with my office director, but he wrote in the area for improvement that I was a bit too defensive of Kuwait vis-à-vis its border issues. It was a simple disagreement of perspective. I thought the border issues were clear, the office director had another perspective, and it was simply an honest, difference of opinion. There was not any rancor. In any event, my EER was written before the invasion of Kuwait, but in 1990 the promotion boards were delayed. There was even some thought that there were not going to be any promotions that year. To make a long story somewhat shorter, by the time the promotion boards read my file Iraq had crossed the border into Kuwait and the President had deployed upwards of 500,000 U.S. troops to reverse the invasion. I suppose that that area for improvement probably helped me rather than hurt me, and I was promoted that year.

Q: Can you tell me what you were doing when Iraq was making menacing noises about moving troops up and all. What was the general feeling with you and with others in this difficult period?

GRAY: Iraq had long claimed Kuwait as its 19th province, so there were no illusions about either Iraqi policy in general, or, for that matter, Saddam in particular. I remember speaking with the desk officer for Iraq right after Saddam made a very inflammatory and threatening speech a couple weeks before the invasion, and I remember the desk officer expressing his concern about what this could mean. From a military perspective everyone knew that that Iraq had been at war with Iran for eight years, and everyone knew that

their military vastly outmatched Kuwaiti capabilities. The question was not Iraqi capabilities; it was Iraqi intentions. That was the proverbial \$64,000 question. In the days and weeks before the invasion, there was a lot of talk among Arab leaders such as the Saudis and the Egyptians to the effect that it was an Arab problem that was going to be resolved by the Arabs themselves. They clearly said that they did not want any outside interference. Shortly before the invasion, the Saudi Ambassador (Prince Bandar) came to see Bob Kimmitt, who at the time was the Undersecretary for Political Affairs. (Due to the travel of Secretary Baker Deputy Secretary Eagleburger, he was the Acting Secretary. With modern technology I don't believe we use that term anymore, but we did at the time.) I sat in on the meeting as a notetaker. It was my first meeting with Bob Kimmitt, and I remember that he made a point of introducing himself to me. It was a nice touch, which he did not have to do, and I appreciated it enough to remember it. Prince Bandar's approach in the meetings was along the lines of "we adults will take care of this problem and you don't have to worry about it." Saddam then invited the Kuwaiti Crown Prince, Sheikh Saad, to Iraq for talks, so there was some hope that there would be a negotiated settlement and that the Iraqis would not invade. But they did before the meeting was scheduled to take place – it was obviously a meeting the Iraqis never meant to happen.

Q: What was the initial reaction or feeling when they went in by the Bureau?

GRAY: The initial mood was "here we go again, here's another crisis." What surprised people, perhaps, was the extent of the invasion, the fact that Iraqi forces went all the way though Kuwait City to Kuwait's southern border with Saudi Arabia. In retrospect, Saddam likely could have achieved his aims without occupying so much of the country. I remember talking right after the invasion with a colleague of mine who knew the Middle East well. He had been in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and was serving on the Policy Planning Staff at the time we spoke. He had the best explanation for Saddam's behavior I have heard, which was he was a sense of entitlement fueled by grievance. In effect, Saddam thought that Iraq deserved Kuwait because it had spent blood and treasure fighting the Persians for so long. In other words, Iraq deserved not just recognition but some compensation, and Kuwait was going to be the compensation.

Q: How did you feel initially about our reaction to this?

GRAY: It was a clear case of aggression, and President Bush's declaration that this would not stand was exactly right. I thought he and Secretary Baker did exactly what was needed to be done.

Q: I think that was pretty much the general feeling. I mean all of us grew up in the post-Munich age and aggression shall not stand is pretty much the answer.

GRAY: I would make two observations. Munich long predates me and many of my contemporaries, and many of us influenced not by Munich but by the U.S. experience in Viet Nam. So I think in some circles there was a great amount of angst about the U. S. deployment of 500,000 troops. The other point is that unlike our involvement in Viet Nam, the President had a very clear objective. He spelled it out; there was no

incrementalism; there was no mission creep. He went to Congress for approval. All this being said, the Senate only approved the use of force by a 52-47 margin, so it was a pretty close call.

Q: That's right. I've been doing this long interview with Skip Gnehm he was designated to go to Kuwait. Did you two have...

GRAY: As desk officer I went to his confirmation hearing before the invasion. As I mentioned before, Skip was my DCM in Amman. In addition, when I was on the Kuwait desk I worked with his desk officers when he was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense. I then worked for him when he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State.

Q: How did you find your work with the court in exile I imagine you dealt with the court in exile didn't you?

GRAY: No, because my tour ended right at the time of the invasion due to the way the assignment and transfer process worked. I left the desk shortly after the invasion, and moved across the hall. I was the Middle East watcher on what was then the Soviet desk and so I was dealing with the same issue, just from a different perspective.

Q: What was your job and title?

GRAY: On the Soviet desk?

Q: Yeah. What were the responsibilities?

GRAY: I had the Middle East portfolio on the Soviet desk during the three-quarters of my tour. Once the Soviet Union dissolved (on Christmas Day 1991), I focused on Russian foreign policy in general.

Q: Okay you talked about the initial Soviet reaction to the invasion to Kuwait, and our concerns. What were we up to?

GRAY: There was a real schism within Soviet policymaking circles about the invasion of Kuwait. On the one hand, just as Syria today is a client important to Russia, the same was true of Iraq at the time. There was a very strong relationship between Soviet diplomats and the Iraqi government; a large number of Soviet diplomats had served there. There was also a strong military and intelligence relationship. Yevgeny Primakov was a confidante of Saddam Hussein. In sum, there were many within Soviet foreign policymaking circles who reflexively and with great determination supported Saddam and the invasion. On the other hand, there were those like Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze who saw the bigger picture of the changing U.S.-Soviet relationship. Fortunately for us, Secretary Baker had developed a very strong relationship with him. I do not want to make it sound as if it was a foregone conclusion that the United States and the USSR would cooperate on this issue, because it certainly wasn't. But at the highest levels, the Baker-Shevardnadze relationship succeeded in keeping the Soviets on side.

You'll recall all of the Security Council resolutions passed. The Soviets supported them and did not use their veto.

Q: What was your impression of being in the Soviet sphere of influence in the State Department? Was it a different world?

GRAY: The Soviet what?

Q: I mean dealing with Soviet affairs it must have been quite a different world wasn't it for you?

GRAY: It was, and particularly for me as I had only served in NEA to that point. Moreover, the Soviet desk was sufficiently large and sufficiently influential that it was in effect a mini-bureau. I found it a very collegial place to work. I really lucked out in the sense that being there at such a pivotal time when the Soviet Union disintegrated.

Q: Did you find that your colleagues appreciated the various sensitivities and currents that ran in the Middle Eastern bureau?

GRAY: I'm not sure that I fully understand the question.

Q: The issues of the Middle East I mean they were dealing with one of the two major concerns of the State Department at the time; the Soviet Union and the Middle East.

GRAY: If the question you are getting at is was there any friction with the Near East Bureau or anything like that, I didn't...

Q: Yeah, well that's it or a difference. I mean you are a new boy on the block and I was wondering if you felt any strains or difficulties in dealing with the Near Eastern problem.

GRAY: No, I think in some ways the people on the Soviet desk appreciated the fact that I had good relationships with people in NEA personally, and had insights as to what was going on. I think the opposite was true as well; my friends in NEA appreciated that I could share perspectives from the Soviet desk. There is a great expression in Arabic which is that "the fish rots from the head." Getting back to my comment before, wiring diagrams are never as important as the people. We had a very strong leadership on the Soviet desk and it was also extremely collegial leadership. Sandy Vershbow was the director my first year; he later became Ambassador to Russia. The deputy director during my entire tour was John Tefft, who is our current ambassador to Russia. The director my second year was Larry Napper, who was later named ambassador twice, including to Kazakhstan. The head of my section was John Ordway, who, like Larry, was also named ambassador twice, including to Kazakhstan. While they were all obviously very accomplished, they were also low-key and collegial individuals, so there was no "us versus them" mentality.

Q: Were the people dealing with the Soviet Union per se having problems in our taking their longtime colleague Syria on as an enemy?

GRAY: I'm sorry – again?

Q: Was your group getting reports of this policy of siding with Kuwait against Iraq causing difficulty within the Soviet Union or Russia at the time?

GRAY: I wouldn't put it as with Kuwait against Iraq; it was more siding more with the United States. It did cause problems within, and we saw manifestations such as Primakov trying another shuttle mission to Baghdad to get Saddam to back down, virtually at the last minute. But at the end of the day Gorbachev and Shevardnadze had the upper hand and their perspective prevailed. I am sure that behind the scenes there was a lot of bureaucratic intrigue that was opaque to us at the time. Maybe we'll learn more when the Soviet archives are opened.

Q: Were there any particular problems that you dealt with while you were on that job?

GRAY: It seemed as if I was doing press coverage every day Primakov said something or traveled, but that's the life of an action officer in the State Department. Iraq was obviously the big issue for my first six months on the Soviet desk. We were also working on Soviet disengagement from Afghanistan. The policy direction was clear and the Undersecretary for Political Affairs at the time, Mike Armacost, very much led that effort. While there was plenty of work to do at the action officer level, it was not contentious. The third issue was the transformation of the Soviet Union. There was a failed coup attempt against Gorbachev in 1991, followed by his Christmas Day 1991 announcement that the Soviet Union was no more. We then saw the rise of Yeltsin. It really was a new world in U.S.-Russian relations. (I'll say 'Russian' now since the Soviet Union had dissolved.) It affected the work of everyone on the Soviet desk because just about everything was possible. We were cooperating in ways that had been unimaginable before. On a lot of issues, we were able to find a resolution. I think we all had an appreciation at the time that we were living in special times and that the bilateral relationship was so good it could only go in one direction.

Q: It really had a terribly exciting time.

GRAY: It was great. That's why one joins the Foreign Service – to see history being made. I wasn't the one making history, and I wasn't a Soviet expert, but if you are interested in foreign policy it was just a tremendous experience. I was fortunate to be surrounded by not just experts, but collegial ones at that. If I may, let me digress again with a personal story. It was the day after Thanksgiving, when offices in Washington tend to be under-staffed. There may have been a couple of other people on the Soviet desk that day, but it seemed like my colleague and I were the only two in the office. Neither of us had served in Moscow, and neither of us spoke Russian, so of course we got an urgent request from the White House on how to translate the term "make way for ducklings." You may remember that Barbara Bush, then the First Lady, was going to Moscow, and

she wanted to present a replica of the statue of the ducklings from the children's book to a park in Moscow. (The original is in Boston Commons if I am not mistaken.) Jack and I looked at each other and we said, "There's got to be an interpreter somewhere - we sure can't answer that question." Those were the easy crises to deal with.

Q: Were we concerned about developments in Russia at the time or was it a positive feeling?

GRAY: At the risk of giving a very State Department-like answer, I would say both. It was a very positive atmosphere because there were so many avenues for cooperation. At the same time, the experience we had had with Soviet policymakers over Iraq was illustrative of the very strong currents that resisted Gorbachev and the Gorbachev-Shevardnadze policies. To quote Alan Greenspan in a completely different context, I don't think there was any "irrational exuberance."

Q: You know from the outside I felt a great deal of pleasure for George Bush I and his State Department in dealing with a whole post 1989 period.

GRAY: There was a masterful vision of what the post-1989 world should look like. The strategy was strong and there was also was a terrific execution of the policy.

Q: I think one of the amazing things I looked at was we were very careful not to exude triumphalism at the top. Other people were but we weren't.

GRAY: That's right - there was no gloating. I certainly don't recall a "no gloating" memorandum, but that was clearly the message. I don't know if you've read Jon Meacham's biography of the first President Bush but it makes it very clear that was the way his mother raised him.

Q: You don't gloat.

GRAY: I think that translated very effectively into the way he and Secretary Baker managed the post-1989 world.

Q: Did you feel like you are sitting in the midst of masters of the universe at the time?

GRAY: Very much so, because the State Department had two extremely effective Secretaries of State who had the great confidence of the President. Once when Secretary Shultz was traveling, his staff - who knew that the staff assistants toiled in the vineyards - invited us to his inner office. Secretary Shultz had Captain's Chairs with a seal from each of the Cabinet-level posts that he had held. So there was one from when he was director of OMB, one from when he was Secretary of Treasury, etc. Secretary Shultz's value was not just his experience, but his integrity. He didn't need to be Secretary of State - he had already done it all and could go back to Stanford and live a much less stressful life. My guess is that President Reagan understood that. And certainly the relationship between President Bush 41 and Secretary Baker was even closer. When the

Department has a Secretary who is that close to the President and that well-regarded, it makes everybody's life in the Department a lot easier, and, I suspect, everybody's life in the interagency community as well.

Q: One has the contrast it when Henry Kissinger seemed to want to accept all the glory to himself and personalize it so much.

GRAY: Yes.

Q: Well, what did you do after this time? Is there anything else we should talk about on the Russia desk?

GRAY: No, I think we hit the high points. As I said, it was a wonderful time to be on the desk, and a wonderful time to be in the State Department for that matter.

Q: I was just going to say were they still paying you for having this wonderful job? I mean what the hell.

GRAY: They were still paying me, which was good as I had growing family. They may have been paying me my market value, but I would have accepted more money as well.

OTTAWA

Q: Where did you go afterwards?

GRAY: Afterwards we went to Ottawa, where I served in the political section, working on foreign policy and political/military issues.

Q: I would have thought you would have viewed this initially anyway as being put out to pasture.

GRAY: Being put out to what?

Q: Being put out to pasture.

GRAY: It was a job that I very vigorously pursued. If I recall correctly, there were 65 bidders on the job. My wife is from Montréal, and one of our children had a class II (restricted) medical clearance, so we had good family reasons to go. As I had said before, there is probably no better job in the Foreign Service than being a political reporting officer, and it was a great deal of fun.

Q: You were there from when to when?

GRAY: I was there from 1992-1996.

Q: How would you say what was the political situation within Canada and what were relations with the United States at the time?

GRAY: I got there just as the Progressive Conservatives (Tories) were coming to the end of their mandate. Brian Mulroney was very unpopular for two reasons. One was the Free Trade Agreement he had championed and then signed with the United States, and the other was the federal sales tax called the Goods and Services Tax or GST. Both were tremendously unpopular. Hindsight is always 20/20, but if one looks at the Canadian economy, the fact that its small domestic market means it needs to export, and the overall Canadian fiscal picture, then both decisions were good ones. The Canadian economy would have been sunk without the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, and the government's budget would have been equally sunk if it wasn't for the GST. Mulroney may not have been popular when he left office, but I think he made the right policy changes for Canada. He was succeeded briefly by Kim Campbell, who had been in his cabinet as Minister of National Defense. She was a Member of Parliament from British Columbia. Then the elections swept the Liberal Party into office and Jean Chretien was Prime Minister for the rest of my tour and afterwards - he had a long tenure.

There was a referendum in Québec in 1995 on the question of sovereignty, or independence from Canada. The Québécois ended up voting against it by a very thin margin; it may have been closer than 51-49 and the margin certainly wasn't more. That was the biggest domestic issue. Most of the bilateral issues were more at the state level than the federal one: I am thinking of issues such as Pacific salmon and softwood lumber. These were issues that I was glad I did not have to deal with, but they were very important to constituencies on both sides of the border.

On the foreign policy side, we obviously have enjoyed good relations with Canada historically. One of the biggest issues vis-à-vis Canada during my tour was how NATO should deal with Bosnia. The Canadians were much more reluctant to get involved than we were, and we were not very forward-leaning at first ourselves.

Canada historically has been a champion of international peacekeeping; Lester Pearson received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in this regard. But after an interagency review, Ottawa decided to remove its contingent from UNFICYP, the UN Forces in Cyprus Peacekeeping Operation. All of a sudden Washington was up in arms about the decision, predicting that terrible things were going to happen in Cyprus as a result, etc. We were not able to reverse the Canadian decision, which was made on the grounds that their peacekeepers were not truly needed and that – with no resolution in sight – their resources could be better used elsewhere. I would note that over twenty years later, UNFICYP has survived without Canadian peacekeepers.

Another significant peacekeeping issue was related to Rwanda. The Force Commander of the UN contingent in Rwanda (UNAMIR) was a Canadian General, Roméo Dallaire. He was very critical that his mandate was so limited. After his retirement from the military he became a very forceful proponent of being more active to try and prevent genocide.

Q: How did we feel toward his stand?

GRAY: I think there was great sympathy for it, but I was removed from Washington so I can't confidently give you an overview of Washington's stance. After our experience in Somalia, though, I think there was a very strong reluctance to become involved in peacekeeping missions.

Q: Oh yes. You arrived there just before the referendum?

GRAY: No, the referendum was in 1995 and I got there in 1992.

Q: Okay. What was the feeling in the embassy with you and maybe others about is this a good thing, a bad thing or what?

GRAY: The referendum?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: U.S. policy had always been very clear: I think the mantra was that this decision was for Canadians to make, and we would respect that decision. That being said, on a personal level many of us felt - certainly I did - that this was a potentially monumental decision. In the United States we do not make monumental decisions based on a fifty percent plus one vote, so it was difficult for us to understand why the rest of Canada seemingly would agree to a process based on such a slender majority. From a policy perspective, we saw a great sense of perhaps entitlement from many Québécois, which is ironic Canada's Prime Ministers from 1968 to 2006 were almost continuously from Québec: Pierre Trudeau, Brian Mulroney, Jean Chretien, and Paul Martin. There were a few times during that span that the Prime Minister was from another province, but those Prime Ministers - I am thinking of Joe Clarke and Kim Campbell - did not stay in power for even a year. That does not exactly qualify as political under-representation in my book.

Similarly, people in Québec thought that they were paying more in taxes that they were receiving in benefits. At a macroeconomic level, that simply was not true; the province had a positive net inflow. (My guess is that this misimpression is similar to the one in the United States; when pollsters what percentage of the federal budget goes to foreign assistance, the average answer is 25 percent; in fact, it is one percent or below.) People in Quebec think that at least at the time, thought they were paying more in taxes than they were receiving in benefits whereas that just wasn't true they had a positive inflow.

Looking at it from what would have been best for Québec, it was not clear to any of us that the province would have been better off politically or economically if it were independent. Canada certainly would have been weaker. I remember Jean Chretien speaking against the independence option; he said "The dollar," referring to the Canadian dollar, "doesn't speak English or French - it seeks stability." At the end of the day, that view prevailed. As far as U.S. interests were concerned, I am not sure our interests would

have been affected much one way or another if the referendum had passed, but on a personal level none of us thought it was a particularly good idea.

Q: Turning to foreign relations as an outsiders looking at this and I have some cousins up in Canada who take off for Cuba every once in a while this is where we have strict isolation with Cuba policy.

GRAY: Right.

Q: It seems like the Canadian viewed Cuba as an issue to tweak the United States and it was almost a political ploy that wasn't particularly affective one way or the other. How did we feel about it?

GRAY: By the time I got there these were long-standing differences. It was a basically “agree to disagree” approach, and I don't recall any discussions about it.

Q: On the military side what were we doing with the Canadians or not doing?

GRAY: The relationship between the two military forces was strong. In 1940 – so before Pearl Harbor – the United States and Canada established the Permanent Joint Board on Defense. It brought together senior military officers and officials from the Defense and State Departments with their Canadian equivalents twice a year to make sure there were no policy surprises in store. Of course, there was a great deal of interaction over and above that. We were certainly concerned that Canada was typically hollowing out its capabilities. I am not saying it was a bone of contention, but the United States gave a friendly warning, coming from a concerned neighbor.

Q: It seems like this was a period of diminishing Canadian capabilities - they could put up a peacekeeping force but that was about it.

GRAY: True. It was something we expressed concern about, but to put it in perspective, the Berlin Wall had fallen, the Soviet Union had dissolved, and influential Americans were writing books called The End of History. Simply put, the feeling that a military force did not have to be maintained was not limited only to Canada, and the government's policy was consistent with what the Canadian people wanted. We go through this cyclically ourselves as well.

Regarding capabilities, I was struck by a comment a Canadian general made when we were flying to one of the Permanent Joint Board on Defense meetings from Ottawa. The meeting was held at Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City, Florida. The general was a pilot and he looked down at the aircraft parked on the tarmac, whistled, and said, “There are more aircraft here than we have in our entire inventory in all of Canada.”

Q: I would think that you would have found the Canadian military for some time you might say disgruntled not with us, but with political situation?

GRAY: I think it is a good question, but I can't say I ever picked that up.

Q: How did you find the perception of the United States? I mean one of the definitions for Canadians is we are not Americans? They take considerable pride in it.

GRAY: I spoke to a few different audiences about the United States and Canada, and I recall saying "For an American to say, 'oh you are just like us' is one of the highest compliments an American can pay. For a Canadian to hear an American say 'you are just like us' is one of the gravest insults." It is similar to how Pierre Trudeau characterized the U.S.-Canadian relationship. He likened it to an elephant and a mouse sleeping in the same bed. "No matter how good the relationship is, every time the elephant twitches the mouse gets a little nervous." That is just the way it is.

Q: Did you find a strong stream of anti-Americanism in your social life or not?

GRAY: Not at all. Most people who didn't know I worked at the Embassy thought I was Canadian. First of all, Gordon is probably a more prevalent name in Canada than it is in the United States. Second, my wife is from Montreal, and third, our kids went to the local public schools. I never sensed any anti-Americanism at all. I played volleyball once a week at the community center and one night after playing one of my teammates turned to me in the parking lot and asked "Hey, how did you get diplomatic plates?" He just thought I was Canadian and couldn't understand why I had diplomatic plates. I never felt any anti-Americanism whatsoever. There was some anti-Americanism in some academic circles – for example, you'd get the occasional academic publishing an article suggesting that the only reason that United States maintained Fort Drum (in upstate New York) was for the invasion of Canada, but that was really on the fringe.

Q: Yeah. Yeah particularly during the Viet Nam War what I gather there was a strong anti-Americanism of vain in the academic world.

GRAY: That's what I've heard anecdotally.

Q: Did you get a lot of "You Americans don't pay any attention to us." I have to say this as a retired diplomat I remember going up with a couple of oh about five years ago to my wife's cousins in Canada. They were saying, "What do you think about our prime minister?" I felt so embarrassed because I couldn't remember who the hell the prime minister was.

GRAY: Right. I think it was said with more resignation to that than anything else.

Q: But they pay rather close attention to what's going on in the States don't they?

GRAY: Sure. About 80 percent or so of the Canadian population lives within 100 miles of the border. American television is regularly accessible. I would also make a distinction between the average citizen and what people in government or political circles thought. While people in government or political circles might have wished we paid more

attention to Canada, my wife's family in Montréal does not obsess about what the United States thinks about Canada.

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

GRAY: Okay.

Q: We can pick it up the next time but where did you go when you left Canada?

GRAY: I came back to Washington and worked in our counter-terrorism office.

Q: Okay well we will pick it up then if that is alright with you.

GRAY: That sounds good.

Q: Gordon?

GRAY: How are you?

Q: Can we start?

GRAY: Sure, let's go.

COUNTER_TERRORISM

Q: Okay, today is the 8th of March 2016 with Gordon Gray. Gordon you went to the terrorism bureau after Canada, when was that?

GRAY: I got there in July of 1996.

Q: How long did you have that job?

GRAY: Three years: 1996-1999.

Q: What was it?

GRAY: I was the Director for Regional Affairs. A Coordinator, with Ambassador-at-Large status, oversaw the counter-terrorism office. The Senate confirmed his Ambassador-at-Large status, but the Coordinator position was not one that required Senate confirmation. There was an Associate Coordinator who served as his deputy and two office directors. The Regional Affairs office, which I headed, took care of the policy side of the house. We also had an active duty Army Colonel on detail to the State Department, who was the head of our operation section.

Q: Sort of a peculiar question but what was the status of terrorism when you got there?

GRAY: It's not an unusual question at all; I think it is a very relevant question. I would divide the question into two parts: what was the status of terrorism on the one hand and what was the status of the U.S. government's response to terrorism on the other hand. Unfortunately terrorism was alive and well in the nineties. The people responsible for blowing up our embassy in Kuwait, our embassy in Lebanon, and the Marine barracks in Lebanon, just to cite a few examples from the eighties, were still very active. In the nineties, we saw the first attack against the World Trade Center in 1993; the Oklahoma City bombing, an act of domestic terrorism; in Saudi Arabia, the attack against OPM-SANG and the subsequent attack against Khobar Towers; and the emergence of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Unfortunately, terrorism was alive and even thriving.

At the same time, in the nineties there was a feeling that we had won the Cold War and international developments were breaking our way. (I had previously mentioned The End of History in this regard.) Certainly there was no particular interest in addressing the issue of counter-terrorism. I'll just give you an example what I'm talking about. I'm looking at the 9/11 Commission Report and on page 95 it says, "Secretaries of State after Shultz took less personal interest in the problem. Only Congressional opposition prevented President Clinton's first Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, from merging terrorism into a new bureau that would have dealt with narcotics and crime. The Coordinator under Madeleine Albright told the Commission that his job was seen as a minor one within the Department."

I would add it wasn't just a question of the first term of the Clinton administration. When I served in the counter-terrorism office following President Clinton's re-election, the position of the Coordinator for counter-terrorism went unfilled for about nine or ten months. The Department considered whether or not it was going to merge the office into another bureau. It would not have been able to for the same reasons it didn't go anywhere in 1993: Congressman Benjamin Gilman was opposed and he was a very influential voice in the House Foreign Affairs Committee. In fact, he was the leading Republican on that committee, and each year he introduced a sense of the Congress resolution saying that the office for Coordinator for counter- terrorism should remain an independent office reporting directly to the Secretary. Each year it passed overwhelmingly; the vote was something like 400-5 in favor. I don't know why the Department leadership even entertained the idea; as our military colleagues would say, "The squeeze wouldn't have been worth the juice." Even though the Department did not pay particular attention to counter-terrorism (maybe a kinder way to put it was that the Department did not choose to devote the resources to tackling the issue), that wasn't the case for the other parts of the national security apparatus. Certainly our colleagues at Justice, our colleagues at the FBI, and our colleagues at the CIA were augmenting their resources.

Q: Did you feel professionally that you were a backwater or dead-end or what?

GRAY: Certainly not personally, because I was a newly promoted FSO-1 serving in an office director job in an exciting policy bureau with very interesting issues - too many interesting issues, unfortunately. So I didn't feel personally that it was a backwater. We had a great deal of interaction with the regional bureaus. Let me put it this way: I think

it's fair to say if you were conducting an oral history interview with Department leadership from that era, and presuming they were completely honest with you, with the benefit of hindsight I bet they would have said, "We did not pay enough attention to counter- terrorism."

Q: How did you bring yourself up to snuff? Obviously this couldn't have been on your, you might say. intellectual plate in any great detail at this point in your career.

GRAY: Yes and no. I had had several years' experience in the Near East/South Asia Bureau by then. When we were speaking previously, I mentioned that on my third day in Karachi a bomb went off in our hotel, and that colleagues were kidnapped from a hijacked Kuwaiti airliner and murdered, including one on the tarmac in Tehran. When I was in Amman I accompanied Terry Waite to Jordan's border with Syria; I believe it was his last trip before he was taken hostage and held for so many years.

Q: He was an Episcopalian figure.

GRAY: I'm sorry?

Q: He was an Episcopalian, not a priest wasn't he, Terry Waite?

GRAY: I want to say Church of England...

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: I believe he was the Archbishop of Canterbury's envoy.

Q: So what did you do? In your particular job how did you feel about coming up to snuff and operating?

GRAY: One of the aspects of the counter-terrorism job that I enjoyed was that it expanded my horizons. Notwithstanding the fact that I was coming from a political reporting job in Ottawa, most of my focus had been on the Middle East or Middle East-related issues. Terrorism was obviously a global threat, though. For instance, not long after I joined the counter-terrorism office the terrorist group Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) took hundreds of hostages at the Japanese national day reception at the Ambassador's residence. Many hostages were released soon afterwards but many were kept. Four months later, in the spring of 1997, Peruvian security forces freed them in a very daring raid, in which they had tunneled underneath the Ambassador's residence, planted an explosive, and blew a hole under the dining room because they knew the hostages' guards played soccer there at a set time each day.

There were several statutory requirements dealing with terrorism, and they were fairly complex, so I became good friends and good colleagues with the Legal Advisor's office, and particularly with my colleagues who dealt with counter-terrorism issues there. For example, each year the Secretary of State was required to designate state sponsors of

terrorism. In 1996, shortly before I arrived in the office, Congress passed the marvelously entitled Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which called on the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Treasury and the Attorney General, to designate groups as foreign terrorist organizations. The idea was to prevent members from coming into the United States and to freeze their assets in the United States. Due to the obvious possibility of litigation, we had to work very closely with our legal colleagues, and particularly those from the Departments of Justice and Treasury, to make sure that the administrative records could withstand any judicial challenge. Some groups challenged their designations but the courts ruled in favor of the U.S. government. The criterion, as I recall, was that the Secretary's decision could not be "arbitrary or capricious." Believe me, based on the work we did, the decisions were not at all arbitrary or capricious.

That process took up a great deal of our time and energy. It was a good effort, and I think it was something that needed to be done, but at the same time terrorist organizations were not hiding their money in the United States in bank accounts. There was no Hizballah bank account in the United States, for example, and one cannot say we froze millions and millions of dollars that would have gone to fund terrorist activities. Most terrorists are a bit brighter than that. But it was also useful because of the demonstration effect. I had a number of discussions about the issue of freezing terrorist assets with European Union experts during biannual consultations with them. I led a team to Brussels each six months, and there was also a G-7 expert group on terrorism.

I also want to point out to a shift in the terrorist threat, which the counter-terrorism community appreciated very fully at the time. There had been a great focus on state sponsorship of terrorism, which was understandable. Governments are used to dealing with other governments, and there was a long record of states such as Iran or Syria sponsoring terrorist activity. What we saw when I was in the counter-terrorism office was the emergence of loosely-knit groups based on their shared experience in fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. We saw the bin Laden threat emerging, and unfortunately then the rest of the policy community woke up on August 7, 1998, when our two embassies in East Africa were bombed.

Q: Did you feel we were getting pretty good penetration of these various organizations from the intelligence point of view?

GRAY: I'd rather not go into any intelligence or operational issues.

Q: I'll pass on that. Did you sense at the time that we weren't sharing our information in the community as well as we might because later after 9/11 there was much discussion?

GRAY: I see where you are going: this is the famous "connecting the dots" question. Frankly, I had a different perspective. When I came to my new job, I made a number of courtesy calls around town, which is standard practice. One of my early courtesy calls was at the FBI's terrorism branch. The director was, obviously, an FBI agent, but his deputy was on detail from the CIA. When I went to the Counter-terrorism Center (CTC)

at the CIA, I saw the same phenomenon in reverse: the head of CTC was from the Agency and his deputy was from the FBI. I am not at all being Pollyannaish and saying that there was no bureaucratic friction. But to suggest that there was not good interagency cooperation well in advance of 9/11 does not tell the full story.

Second of all, I think the NSC staff deserves a great deal of credit, and particularly Dick Clarke, who was the senior director there. He did everything possible to focus attention on the issue of terrorism and to foster interagency cooperation. At my level, as an FSO-1 mid-level officer, I felt there was good cooperation.

Q: Well do you want to talk about any issues that developed while you were there that particularly you want to talk about?

GRAY: One comment I'd make was there is always a tension in the State Department between regional bureaus and functional bureaus (or functional offices, as the counter-terrorism office was). I certainly saw it from the perspective of working the terrorism office; people said the most amazing things to me when I was in the terrorism office. When I was in the counter-terrorism office we were arguing for more robust measures against the Taliban. I think that even then we could all agree they were not our friends. I'm not going to name names because I don't want to embarrass anyone, but someone from the South Asia bureau told me with a straight face that Mullah Omar had invited bin Laden to Kandahar so he could keep a better eye on him, no pun intended.

The South Asia bureau was very protective of its clients and very resistant to our efforts to take any action against the Taliban. Let me refer again to the 9/11 report, so I can be sure that I am not saying anything classified. I'll read from the 9/11 report again, this time page 122: "But State Department counter-terrorism officials wanted a stronger position. The Department's acting counter-terrorism coordinator advised Secretary Albright to designate Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism." Going on, it says "This recommendation was opposed by the State Department's South Asia bureau which was concerned that it would damage already sensitive relations with Pakistan..." On page 123 it says, "Secretary Albright rejected the recommendation on August 5, 1998, just two days before the embassy bombings." And, quoting from the same page in the report, "... an NSC counter-terrorism official noted that Pakistan's pro-Taliban military intelligence service had been training Kashmiri Jihadists..." There was an unfortunate overdose of clientism from some of the regional bureaus. That was one issue we dealt with, and one issue where in retrospect people would have wanted to have taken a slightly different position than the one they did. I think the historical record suggests that the counter-terrorism bureau's position was the one that should have been adopted in light of what happened later on.

One of the stranger experiences I had in the counter-terrorism office was outlining to North Korean officials what steps they would have to take to have their designation as a state sponsor of terrorism rescinded. I had two sets of discussions, perhaps a year apart. Since no progress was made after the first set of discussion, I just took the exact same

talking points I had used the first time from the files and used them again - with the same lack of success, I would add.

There was also a great deal of activity related to the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act. It had had potentially negative effects on our European partners and on our trading relationships with them since they did not have the same sanctions regimes. Both the European bureau and the Economic and Business Affairs bureau wanted to play up how much the Europeans were doing to combat terrorism. For our part, we were trying to encourage the Europeans to actually do something substantive to combat terrorism. Remember, those were different times; it was before 9/11. Bureaucratically, it worked out in the end, and one of the reasons it did was that Tom Pickering (who was Undersecretary for Political Affairs at the time) stepped in and took a leadership role. I have never discussed it with him, but he took the lead in the Department on these issues, so we came to a reasonable position that advanced our interests in both countering terrorism interest and maintaining the Atlantic Alliance.

Q: You know looking at it I realize you are pretty far down the line but did you get any feel of the European powers and Japan as how serious they took counter terrorism at the time?

GRAY: As on so many issues, our British colleagues were very alert to, and cognizant of, the threat posed by terrorism. That makes sense, as they had dealt with their own terrorist problems with the Irish Republican Army. The Turks, of course, were very active. But, on the other hand, some of our European allies, with all due respect, were feckless. I would cite as a prime example the time when Abdullah Ocalan, the head of the PKK, was on the run. Several of our close European allies turned a blind eye and let him escape. He was eventually captured in Kenya, and returned to Turkey where he is still in captivity. Our European friends had a very mixed record.

Q: Were we tarred with the same brush dealing with the IRA?

GRAY: What do you mean "tarred with the same brush"?

Q: In other words we were making an exception I'm asking about the IRA?

GRAY: Let me put it this way. When we made the initial tranche of recommendations for designating organizations as foreign terrorist organizations, our office's recommendation was that the IRA be designated as a foreign terrorist organization using the criteria in the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. The IRA clearly met the criteria. Secretary Albright did not take any action on that recommendation one way or the other, so the IRA was not designated.

Q: Were you aware of other countries concerned about terrorism kind of pointing out this discrepancy?

GRAY: No, because shortly thereafter the Good Friday Accords were reached. Plus the United States was forward leading on terrorism issues. Even before 9/11, it would be hard to imagine another country pointing its finger at us - not because we were perfect, which we certainly weren't, but because we had a very good record on the issue.

Q: I got you. While you were there were there any major terrorist incidents that bit you?

GRAY: I'm sorry?

Q: Were there any major terrorist incidents on your watch?

GRAY: Oh definitely. There was the Peru hostage-taking incident that I mentioned. The biggest one was the East Africa bombings on August 7, 1998. It was the biggest in the sense that it affected us most directly because we were targeted, we lost so many personnel, and so many Kenyans were killed. Over and above all that, it generated the beginning of awareness within the broader policy community that terrorism in general was an issue and in the broadest sense and also more specifically that bin Laden and al Qaeda were a growing threat.

Q: Was it immediately clear with the African embassies that this was an al Qaeda operation?

GRAY: Yes – there was no doubt on that score.

Q: I speak as a consular officer and with 9/11 there was some criticism that the FBI did not share some suspicions on people who put them on the visa lookout list. Was that an issue when you were there?

GRAY: We worked closely with our colleagues in Consular Affairs and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research on the visa lookout list, but I certainly don't recall anyone raising the issue of other agencies withholding information.

Q: Did you feel that you were treated as a problem distributor or sort of oh my God here he comes with the geographic bureaus?

GRAY: Frankly, it really depended frankly upon the professional maturity of the interlocutor. I spent most of my time in regional bureaus, as did most of us in the counter-terrorism office. People joked in both S/CT and NEA that the office was really "NEA South," referring to both our location and our personnel. When I joined the office, Ambassador Phil Wilcox was the Coordinator. He had a great deal of NEA service and I first got to know him when I served as staff assistant and he was an office director, then Deputy Assistant Secretary, in NEA. His previous overseas post had been as Consul General in Jerusalem. Phil was one of the fairest people I worked with. The Associate Coordinator, Ken McKune, was a fluent Arabic speaker and had previously served as the Political Counselor in Riyadh. Most of my background was in NEA. In other words, there was a very collegial approach to the issues, and many of the issues were with NEA. Let

me give you an example of what I mean by professional maturity, or the lack thereof. When I was in the office, there was a new legal requirement to designate countries not fully cooperating in the fight against terrorism. This requirement was distinct from the state sponsorship designations. I thought that it was obvious that if the Secretary of State had decided that X was a state sponsor of terrorism, common sense would argue that country X was also not fully cooperating with us in the fight against terrorism. I don't think that's an intellectual leap.

Q: No.

GRAY: I am glad to hear you agree with me and that I am not – and was not – making assumptions or missing something. All this being said, a desk officer for Syria came to our office and tried to argue that Syria, which was and still is a state sponsor of terrorism, should not be listed as a country not fully cooperating with us against terrorism. That line of argument did not pass the straight-face test to us, to the Secretary, or to anyone else. On the other hand, the desk officer for Lebanon - at the same time and in the same office directorate – was professionally mature and we enjoyed an excellent relationship, notwithstanding the great potential for friction. In other words, a lot of our working relationships depended on the individual rather than anything else. We tried hard to avoid the approach that we were on a mission from God. We did not want to suggest that we had a direct line. And our experience in regional bureaus meant we were able to minimize friction. I'm not saying there were not honest differences of opinion, but even when we disagreed, it wasn't personal.

Q: What I'm trying to do in these interviews is to give some idea to the person who reads them to understand how bureaucracies work. I mean everybody has issues and often they hear the issues somebody else has.

GRAY: That's a good point and I think that's illustrative for anyone who delves into this oral history and any of the others. I want to underline that I think that's particularly important today, when one looks at the current political atmosphere, to note that people can disagree without being disagreeable.

Q: So when did you leave terrorism?

GRAY: I left the counter-terrorism office in June 1999. I really enjoyed the assignment. I extended for a year – most Washington assignments are for two years - because I enjoyed the work so much. That being said, one of the highlights of my career was handing my beeper to my successor on my last afternoon in the job. (We had beepers back in those days.) I really did feel a tremendous weight was lifted. I am not trying to exaggerate my role, but the ops tempo was high and people do not call you at three o'clock in the morning with good news.

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: It was a great tour and my colleagues were great. The office had a great blend of Foreign Service officers, civil servants, and military officers; everyone was pulling on the oar and rowing in the right direction. There was a true sense of mission and collegiality. Let me tell a story to illustrate the point. You may recall that a Pakistani named Mir Aimal Kasi murdered two CIA employees on Route 123 at the stoplight just before one turns to entering the gates at the entrance to the CIA. He immediately fled to Pakistan, but he was eventually apprehended and returned to the United States for trial. The Counter-Terrorism Center distributed a poster, which we proudly displayed in the waiting area in our office, which included the phrase “However long it takes” and referred to his successful rendition to the United States. I remember someone from another bureau, sitting in the waiting area, who looked up at that poster and saying, “You know, I feel like I’ve never had an accomplishment in my career.” No one in the counter- terrorism office ever felt that way; we all felt as if we made a contribution to an important mission. I am not claiming that I had anything to do with Kasi’s rendition or deserve any credit, but all of us in the office shared the sense of mission and great job satisfaction as a result.

Q: So often what we deal with is people have been dealing with fisheries since the conception of the United States and so you can’t really point to a full accomplishment in fisheries.

GRAY: Right.

Q: But with the terrorism thing I mean you get the bastard you’ve done something.

GRAY: Exactly.

UN PEACEKEEPING AND SANCTIONS

Q: So then where did you go?

GRAY: I ended my tour on a Friday, and then on Monday I started my new job as the director of the Office of Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Operations in our International Organizations bureau (IO). Most of the work was related to UN peacekeeping missions and UN sanctions regimes, and particularly the Oil for Food Program, which was related to the sanctions in place against Saddam Hussein. The office was somewhat similar to the counter-terrorism office in the sense that it was a nice blend of personnel: we had civil servants, we had Foreign Service officers, and we had an active duty colonel and an active duty lieutenant colonel on detail to our office. We came from different bureaucratic cultures, but everyone was collegial and worked well together. I was there from 1999 to 2001 so we saw the transition from Secretary Albright to Secretary Powell. We did a number of team building exercises in anticipation of the transition. One was an off-site at the Foreign Service Institute, which was very useful. It was led by a terrific FSI trainer, Chris Powers, who was kind enough to conduct off-sites for me when I served as DAS and wanted to make sure the three offices I oversaw were on the same page, and again when I was about to depart for Tunisia and wanted to be certain that the desk and Embassy staff knew one another and had a common understanding of how best to support

one another. Chris also came to Baghdad when I was there, and she led the Ambassadorial Seminar before my wife and I headed to Tunisia. We're still in touch.

Another team building exercise was a brown-bag lunch led by the Army colonel on detail to our office. He circulated an article written by a student at the Army War College entitled *State is From Venus, Defense is From Mars*. It was a very humorous description of the differences our two cultures. It was not mean-spirited at all; it was good-natured and also very informative. When I was teaching at the National War College, which was my last assignment in government, I used the article in one of the classes that I taught, and I also used it in presentations that I gave to military groups. I always asked my students if they knew what had happened to the Army colonel who wrote it, and eventually learned that he got his star and was promoted to Brigadier General. I think he should have been promoted just on the strength on humor and his insight alone, but he obviously had other skills going for him as well.

It was a very interesting time to be in the office for a couple of reasons. One was bureaucratic: we had a Secretary of State whose previous assignment was Permanent Representative to the United Nations; we had an Undersecretary of State, Tom Pickering, who had been in the same job; and we had a very active PermRep who was certainly interested in becoming the next Secretary of State, Richard Holbrooke. There was no lack of interest in UN-related issues. We also had very, very strong leadership in the Bureau of International Affairs. I had been fortunate enough to work for David Welch in Amman for David Welch; he was the Assistant Secretary and he clearly had Secretary Albright's confidence because she promoted him from the NEA Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary to become the assistant secretary for IO. Then Bill Wood was the number two, and he had spent four years in New York as the political counselor, so I don't think anyone knew how the Security Council operated any better than he did. My Deputy Assistant Secretary was Len Hawley. Although technically speaking he was a Schedule C appointee, he was a West Point graduate, a career Army officer, and he had served at both the Pentagon and on the NSC staff on peacekeeping. We were dealing extensively with peacekeeping and I learned a great deal from him about the issue and about the missions. He knew the peacekeeping portfolio as well as anyone in the U.S. government. As I said, IO had very strong leadership across the board.

Q: What was the status of peacekeeping when you took over?

GRAY: As far as the different peacekeeping operations were concerned, some fell into the very static category. In a previous interview we talked about the peacekeeping mission in Cyprus, or UNFICYP, which was not a big focus of anyone's attention while I was in IO. Then there was the UN mission in Kosovo, or UNMIK, which was different from most peacekeeping operations due to the strong NATO presence and those connections. A third type of peacekeeping mission was the one in East Timor. Since it was headed by Sergio de Mello it was superbly run and it was a very, very successful peacekeeping mission. Australia also deserves credit for being the regional champion of the mission. A fourth category of peacekeeping missions were the ones with more difficulties; I am thinking particularly of Sierra Leone, which was a peacekeeping

mission that did not have very good military leadership. Nor was there a good performance by the troops. It was really on the ropes until the British went over and above to provide support and right the peacekeeping mission.

I drew a few lessons from my time in IO. One is the need for a capable champion, be it British support for the Sierra Leone mission or Australian support for the East Timor mission. Peacekeeping missions received a great deal of scrutiny on Capitol Hill. There was a statutory requirement for monthly briefings, which we called “round-the-worlds,” so virtually every month for two years I was on the Hill briefing people. Members hardly ever attended, but the staffers always did. I briefed the Foreign Affairs Committee on the House side, and the Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees, separately, on the Senate side. I learned never to say something is a vital U.S. interest, which was a good point intellectually as we tend to say everything is a vital U.S. interest. In light of subsequent events I was advised before I gave my first briefing to avoid the term “nation building” altogether, and I never used it once. The reason was that staffers from the Republican side of the House were opposed to nation building, at least during the Clinton administration. Due to the requirement for constant briefings, and due to intervening meetings with authorizers and appropriators, we were on the Hill all the time, and we probably had a better sense of what the Hill thought about our issues than anyone else in the State Department. I hope that doesn’t come off as if I’m putting my nose in the air; I don’t mean we were smarter or more virtuous than anyone else. But by the nature of our job, we were up there so often that we had a very good sense of what the Hill was thinking. Believe me, the staffers were not reluctant to share their perspectives with us.

Q: What were the good and bad peacekeeping situations from your perspective?

GRAY: The good and the bad operations?

Q: Yeah I mean which ones were really doing something and which ones were either not necessary or not working very well?

GRAY: Sierra Leone was one that was not working well at first, but, as I said, that ship righted. East Timor was a success story and Kosovo was a success story. On the other hand, the observer mission in the Western Sahara was not a success in the sense that it had been set up originally to oversee a referendum, but the referendum never took place. At the same time, it’s probably a good idea for the international community to have military and civilian observers in a conflict zone such as that one. It did not require a lot of resources. Even the ones that did not lead to a resolution may have at least stabilized the situation. Some people argue that it is better, if you will, to rip the band aid off rather than to have conflicts frozen in amber. I certainly understand that from an academic perspective but you are also talking about human lives being at stake.

When we were preparing for new missions to present to either the interagency or (following interagency approval) to the Hill, one of the administration’s internal requirements was that the planning for each peacekeeping mission explicitly discuss the exit strategy. I thought that was a good idea at the time, and as the years have gone by my

appreciation for that requirement has grown. Planning for new missions was well done: funding resources were considered, the exit strategy was considered, and the objectives were considered. It was a rigorous process. I believe it was von Moltke who first said that “No plan survives first contact with the enemy,” which is certainly true. But if you don’t have a planning process, you are really doomed.

Q: Looking at it what national troops were the most effective and which ones were not really effective?

GRAY: A lot depended on the leadership. You never knew if a military sent personnel to lead a peacekeeping mission because they were rising stars, or because they needed to park someone as far away from the capital as possible. Most western countries did not provide peacekeeping troops. The United States provided some military observers, but we don’t provide any peacekeeping troops for UN peacekeeping missions because we want to maintain a clearly American chain of command. We also do not want our troops to become targets. Unfortunately some – and not just a few – of the countries that provide troops do not always the most capable militaries.

Q: Did anyone of these peacekeeping situations cause you particular trouble?

GRAY: Sierra Leone. The stakes were so high because it was a gruesome civil war: young kids were being used as child soldiers and people’s limbs were being hacked off indiscriminately. Shortly after I joined the office I visited Sierra Leone as part of a familiarization tour. I didn’t visit all the peacekeeping missions, but that was one of the missions I did get to see. When you see human nature at its worst, you obviously want to do something anything to counteract it to protect the innocent. The fact that the mission had its ups and downs before it righted itself caused me a great deal of concern - I’ll even use the term personal angst. But by the same token by the end of my tour the mission was working and eventually it was a success story.

Let me give you a sense of how the peacekeeping missions grew. Toward the end of the nineties, when I joined the office, the budget for our Contributions to International Peacekeeping Activities, or CIPA, was \$231 million; it grew to \$500 million the next fiscal year (2000) and in fiscal year 2001 it was \$846 million. I’m sure it’s much larger now even.

Q: I’ve heard that there is considerable discomfort in some of these African peacekeeping things mainly because the troops really aren’t that professional. Was this a problem or not?

GRAY: We recognized there was a problem of the troops that were either poorly disciplined or were just not as capable as Western troops. It was not always the case, but the variances in professionalism were a big concern. But there is no standing UN military, so the UN is dependent on its member states to volunteer to contribute troops for these missions. That is one of the structural weaknesses of UN peacekeeping. At the same time, over and above the benefit of keeping our own troops from being exposed to

danger, the cost to field a peacekeeper from a less advantaged country is far less than the cost of fielding a U.S. soldier.

Q: Did you get any particular difficulty with Congress on any particular operation?

GRAY: Sierra Leone was a tough sell. I remember we had one briefing at which our Assistant Secretary, David Welch, spoke. He ended his meeting saying, "Listen, there is only a 50-50 chance that this is going to work." I remember a colleague from the General Accounting Office, who followed peacekeeping closely, saying to me afterwards "You could hear a pin drop" during his remarks because David was so honest and clear about assessing the risks and opportunities. I am a big proponent of the Congressional scrutiny, but I found the appropriators I dealt with were far more interested in the facts and far less interested in scoring points when compared to some of the authorizers. One of my more disappointing moments in the job came after the government of Israel announced that it was going to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon. We started to assess the potential effects on the UN Mission in Lebanon, or UNIFIL. We briefed the Hill, not because we were seeking additional funding, but out of a desire to be transparent. We received a mostly negative, suspicious reaction to the briefings, which we had meant to be offered in the spirit of cooperation. One of the appropriators after one of the briefings asked me how I could put up with what he termed "pointless adversarial questioning." I still remember the phrase. But it was part of the job, and you just need to roll with the punches. I will say that while the policies did not change at all after January 20th, 2001, the White House did, and thus so did the label on the policies, so the adversarial questions went by the wayside.

Q: Overall did you come away with the impression you really were contributing to world peace?

GRAY: Sorry, can you repeat the question?

Q: Did you feel that you were making a real contribution to world peace in this?

GRAY: I think the peacekeeping operations were a force for good. East Timor and Sierra Leone and Kosovo were all good examples from the time. Again, there are lots of imperfections with UN peacekeeping missions, but I think on balance the ones we saw at the time and helped develop I think contributed significantly to improving security for civilians.

Q: Did you get any feel for the effectiveness of the United Nations as an entity?

GRAY: To paraphrase Voltaire, if the UN didn't exist we'd have to invent it. When people talk about the UN they are using the term to describe three parts of the UN: the Secretariat, or the UN staff; the Security Council, which obviously has a great deal of power and influence; and the member nations. They all had their strengths and weaknesses. Does the UN system as a whole does it make a positive contribution? Certainly. Is it the most efficient entity in the world? No, but when its steered by a 15-

member committee, five of whose members have veto power, it is a pretty tall order for moving ahead.

Q: In the time you were there what was the situation by using Chinese or Russian troops?

GRAY: I don't remember any offers by China or Russia to use their troops, it just wasn't an issue.

Q: Do you have any idea why not?

GRAY: I'm not an expert on the Chinese military. but traditionally – or at least at the time at the end of the last century - it was not a military that conducted many operations beyond its borders. My guess is that China also had a very strongly held belief in the sanctity in the Westphalian system and the importance of state sovereignty. That could have also been a reason it did not contribute peacekeeping troops. As for Russia, it was going through a great deal of internal turmoil at the time.

Q: Yeah. Did you have much dealing with the UN staff?

GRAY: We had some, but not a tremendous amount because we had a mission in New York which interacted with UN staff all the time. We turn interacted with our mission in New York constantly, so there wasn't really a need for us to seek out UN staff.

9/11 AND THE OFFICE OF ARABIAN PENINSULA AFFAIRS

Q: Well then so where did you go next?

GRAY: I went next to our office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs (ARP). But I wonder, Stu, if this is a good break point.

Q: I agree with you.

GRAY: Both in terms to my voice and also because I started in ARP fifteen days before 9/11.

Q: Oh yeah oh boy.

GRAY: Intellectually I think it's a good break point as well.

Q: Okay, this is an interview with Gordon Gray and today is April 7th, 2016. Gordon you had moved to the Arabian Peninsula desk and that is where we are picking it up.

GRAY: That's right. Do you want me to start with my recollections?

Q: It sounds like a really quiet job.

GRAY: Not much was going on, especially that year. First of all we had, if you count the Consulates General in Jeddah, Dhahran and Dubai, the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs covered ten of the Bureau's twenty posts. Even without the press of political, military, or economic events, there was a lot going on just in terms of supporting the posts. That was actually the good part of the job. Just because of the vagaries of the nomination and confirmation cycle, six of the seven Ambassadors in place were new; we had a Chargé in Muscat, Oman. And due to the way the personnel system assigns people, with the exception of one desk officer everyone in the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs was new, including myself. I was very fortunate to have a very strong team, including my deputy, Michael Corbin. We ended up serving together in Cairo and Baghdad, and he was our Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates until he retired in 2014.

I started in the office on Monday, August 27, 2001. My first meeting that morning was at the Pentagon, where there were supposed to be joint discussions between a Saudi military delegation and an interagency team including Pentagon officials from OSD/Policy, our uniformed colleagues, and of course State Department officers. The delegation did not appear, apparently because then-Crown Prince Abdullah wanted to signal his policy disagreements with the relatively new U.S. administration about the Palestinian issue. We went to the meeting not knowing that the Saudi delegation had not shown up. While we were waiting, there was the usual chatting among folks and it was a good opportunity for me to meet people I'd be working with. I recall very well a conversation with Bill Luti, who was a Defense Department official. He talked about a U.S. invasion of Iraq and said we would be welcomed with flowers if we were to invade.

As I said, that delegation never showed up, and it was an interesting way to start my first week. I ended my first week at the end of the month, August 31st which was a Friday, with news that Prince Turki who was the long-standing head of GID, the General Intelligence Directorate, had resigned; he subsequently served as the Saudi ambassador to the United States. He had been in the GID position for so long, and he worked so closely with the United States, that it was a very interesting development. We were of course trying to divine the reasons behind it. The hoped-for political analysis was overtaken by events because on Tuesday morning, September 11th, the first plane went into the Twin Towers, and then the second one did. Just like all other Americans, I remember very vividly where I was and what I was doing. We had a television in our office tuned to the news channel, and we saw the terrible events unfold. I remember one of my colleagues saying that he hoped it wasn't terrorism and that he hoped it wasn't bin Laden. I knew it was bin Laden and al-Qaeda because they liked to do operations in pairs, just as they had done in the East Africa bombings; there wasn't any question in my mind or the minds of many others as well.

We called out embassies to make sure they held the Emergency Action Committee meetings, which was pushing on an open door because I am sure they were all doing so. Then we were told to evacuate the building. There were lots of rumors going around partly, because the third plane hit the Pentagon, although we didn't know that immediately. We could see the smoke from our offices, which overlooked the Diplomatic Entrance on C Street. There was an erroneous report about a car bomb at the State

Department; I don't know where it came from, but it was widely reported. No one heard any loud noises at the State Department, so it wasn't a cause of concern for us, but it did illustrate the atmosphere.

Q: I'm told I happened to arrive on a shuttle bus from FSI right at that time and all these guards but I'm told the reason they didn't have anything to talk about planes coming planes coming in and that was the nearest thing they had so they announced that because apparently it at least prompted action.

GRAY: We were told to head home. Traffic was a mess, and it was hard to get cell phone reception. I remember giving Michael Corbin a ride home; he had just moved into a newly-purchased home at the beginning of September. Everything was chaotic but that was not unique to the State Department; that's an experience that Americans in New York and Washington, in particular, very unfortunately shared on that terrible day.

Q: I'm wondering you say you called your embassies but I would think there would be some sort of standby group that would be communicating with the field rather than everybody leaving.

GRAY: The Operations Center relocated to what I would call an alternate command center because that's what we call it at embassies. I don't know what the Ops Center called it, but they relocated to a secondary location that had been set up for contingencies like that. One of our desk officers had previously served on the Watch so he went there, for example, to help out.

Q: Ah ha. Was Bin Laden number one on our suspect list?

GRAY: I don't think there was any doubt about it. And you know it has since come out publicly in public documents, including the 9/11 Commission Report, that there was a lot of concern over the summer about bin Laden and al Qaeda preparing an attack against the United States. I think the Intelligence Community strongly believed that it was bin Laden from the get go.

Q: So then what did you do?

GRAY: To be honest with you it was a blur of activities. The timing was right before the General Assembly at the United Nations, so it was a busy time at the State Department preparing for all those meetings. I remember it was about ten times as busy as it would have been otherwise. People were working very long hours. I went to the office twice on the Sunday after 9/11, two different times because of various papers that needed to be done and various requests that needed to be answered. Lots of people in the Near East Bureau and other bureaus and other agencies were doing the exact same thing.

Q: In a way I think most of us in the Foreign Service are not as shocked by something like this compared to other groups only because we have these things in our careers; not as horrendous.

GRAY: I think you are exactly right, and especially for people in the Near East Bureau. As I mentioned in a previous interview, there was a bomb in my hotel my third day in country. I lost colleagues at my first post due to a brutal hijacking. When I was ARP office director, Ryan Crocker was the Deputy Assistant Secretary. He had been in Beirut at the time of the bombings of the embassy and the Marine barracks. As a matter of fact Ryan was flying into New York City when all this happened on 9/11 – he was literally in the air when it all happened. I think for people, especially those in the Near East Bureau, 9/11 wasn't unprecedented and didn't shatter the sense of invulnerability that maybe an average citizen would understandably have.

Q: Was there speculation at all among your colleagues that somewhere Saddam Hussein might have had a hand in this?

GRAY: The answer to that question is it depends how you define my colleagues. People believe what they want to believe, and sometimes they allow opinions to drive analysis, unfortunately. As we discussed in previous interviews I served three years in the counter-terrorism office. We looked for connections and saw that Saddam Hussein was a secularist Ba'athist and bin Laden was ideologically driven by his own warped interpretation of Islamic extremism. So the idea that there was some kind of natural bond between the two strained credulity, and there were no facts to support it. Again, that's all public knowledge. People have gone through this with a fine tooth comb and the facts are the facts. Anyone who knew anything about the politics of the Middle East would have examined that premise with great skepticism at the time.

Q: Yeah. Okay do you want to talk about events after that? In the first place what were your early occupations and then I suppose the analysis starts creeping in.

GRAY: As far as what we were doing on the desk?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: There was a lot of work preparing for meetings, which is not atypical of any desk, but it was on hyper-drive. Ali Abdullah Saleh, the president of Yemen, came to Washington. It was a tremendous amount of work to prepare for that visit. As I recall, we had three visits by heads of governments in six months. Vice President Cheney went to Saudi Arabia and perhaps elsewhere in the Gulf; I don't recall his exact itinerary. So there was a great deal of what I would say was just normal desk work, if you will, in terms of preparing principals for those meetings. Some of it was a lot of fun, to tell the truth. Writing briefing papers in the changed environment was interesting, and that's one of the reasons I joined the State Department.

There was a lot of travel that was postponed until after the new year began because of a combination of 9/11 and the timing of Ramadan. I accompanied the Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs, Linc Bloomfield, on a trip he took to the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries and to Egypt. There was a tremendous amount of work by

his bureau, and by the State Department in general, to get military cooperation from our Gulf partners for the war in Afghanistan. At the end of the day they came through, and the initial military campaign was very successfully prosecuted. Overflight permission and basing permission went well; it took a lot of diplomatic work but we came out in the right place.

Another element that took up a lot of our time on the desk was the level of concern within the interagency community about the stability of Saudi Arabia. I think it's always good to ask these questions and not to accept premises, but at the same time I suspect it reflected our concerns, the U.S. mood, and perhaps even the hopes of some people in our government. That was 2001 and it is now 2016, and since then King Fahd has passed away, then King Abdullah, and we have seen orderly successions over these fifteen years.

Q: Do you recall in these early days were there talk about going into Iraq or did that develop later?

GRAY: As I said, even fifteen days before 9/11, Doug Luti told me during a casual conversation that Iraqis would welcome us with flowers if we went in. So it was clearly on the agenda of some people, and there were many appointees in the new administration who were very strong proponents of the legislation calling for regime change in Iraq.

Q: Were proponents of that in your bureau that you know of?

GRAY: Not that I recall, looking at the leadership of our bureau. Bill Burns was then the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau and he sent forward Ryan Crocker's "perfect store" memo on the potential risks of invading. (Ryan was Deputy Assistant Secretary.) This is all in the public domain. I think people in the Near East Bureau were clear-eyed about what the potential risks were, and unfortunately they were right. I was Kuwait desk officer at the time Saddam invaded Kuwait, so I had no truck for Saddam Hussein. I don't think there was anyone in the Bureau with even a passing dealing with that country who did not know that Saddam Hussein was a vicious tyrant. But there is a large different from that fact and somehow extrapolating it to believe he was somehow tied to 9/11, or believing that, if we were to invade the country, we would be welcomed with flowers.

Q: The comment welcomed with flowers was that a held belief beyond say the Pentagon?

GRAY: I wouldn't say the Pentagon. I do not believe that one's bureaucratic affiliation colored one's views of the wisdom of an invasion. I would say that the division was more along the lines of people who had experience on the ground in the Middle East, and those who – as Deputy Secretary Armitage said - had never smelled cordite in their lives. People who had spent time in the Middle East - be they from the intelligence side of the house, be they from our military colleagues, or be they Foreign Service officers, were, I think, pretty skeptical. And then there were the true believers, who perhaps did not have much military or Middle Eastern experience, but were convinced they were right.

Q: Early on this wasn't even a matter of discussion within your bureau as to Saddam Hussein's complicity?

GRAY: Let me put it this way: it wasn't an issue of discussion outside the Northern Gulf Affairs office, which covered Iraq and Iran. It wasn't an issue because the focus was more on Afghanistan. The office of Northern Gulf Affairs, or NGA, had (even before 9/11) dealings with the so-called Iraqi opposition. I use the term "so-called" because many in the exile community had great support among some circles inside the Beltway and - not to put too fine of a point on it - less support inside of their own country. NGA dealt with it a great deal, but it wasn't a big issue for us because the focus was more on the relationships with the countries on the Arabian Peninsula and the support that we were seeking and received for the prosecution of combat operations in Afghanistan.

Q: What were you getting from the Gulf States and all? What were they concerned with in dealing with?

GRAY: From what?

Q: Within the Arabian Peninsula what were the concerns of your constituents?

GRAY: Our constituents were first and foremost our embassies, and the biggest concerns we all shared were making sure we got the security calibrations right. That took a tremendous amount of time. Every minute of it was worthwhile, but as I said the first thing we did after the two planes struck the World Trade Towers was to call our embassies and make sure they were having Emergency Action Committee meetings. In a way I almost felt badly about making those calls, because, of course, they were holding those meetings, but one must never assume. Security was a continued concern that doesn't make the headlines when there are no incidents, of course, but it takes a lot of coordination among the desk, the bureau of Diplomatic Security, and the posts themselves.

Q: Were any of your posts particularly vulnerable?

GRAY: Were any of the posts vulnerable?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: Absolutely, unfortunately. The Consulate General in Dubai was in an office building so it was very exposed. In some places, we had new embassies, so they were less exposed, but you see what happened in Saudi Arabia with the bombings in the mid-nineties about OPM-SANG (U.S. Army of the Program Manager – Saudi Arabian National Guard) and Khobar Towers. There was a sense of vulnerability. You can imagine the threat stream picked up pretty significantly, although a lot of threats turned out not to have any basis. But they all had to be run to ground and tracked.

Q: How did you find the various States within your area responding? Were they putting up guards or protection around our embassies?

GRAY: I don't remember specific cases of cooperation, but I do remember a general sense that they were all pretty cooperative in that regard.

Q: How about Dhahran - anything happen there?

GRAY: No. That was one of the posts we had concerns about because of its potential vulnerable, but I don't recall that there were any incidents there.

Q: Well then was the bureau gearing up for some action either in Afghanistan or in Iraq? Was this in the wings?

GRAY: The focus for the Bureau and - again with the exception of the Northern Gulf Affairs office - was really on Afghanistan, because that's where the attacks had been planned. Afghanistan was where our combat operations were initiated; that's where the focus was.

Q: In the ensuing weeks what were you all up to?

GRAY: You mean the weeks after the attacks?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: The ops tempo is always pretty high in the Near East Bureau, but it was higher not just there but all over the U.S. government; there was a blur of meetings and papers. That being said, people in the Department felt we were blessed with very strong leadership with Secretary Powell, Rich Armitage, and Undersecretary for Management Grant Green. Marc Grossman, a distinguished career officer, was Undersecretary for Political Affairs. We had a real dream team in the front office in the Near East Bureau, led by Bill Burns, Ryan Crocker, David Satterfield and others. Leadership makes a tremendous difference, and people were willing to put in the hours and make the personal sacrifices because there was such good leadership. That was certainly the case that I observed.

Q: Did things settle down later or the tempo keep up or what?

GRAY: I suppose theoretically that it must have settled down. I mentioned before how I went in twice on the Sunday after 9/11, and I'm sure I wasn't alone. I didn't go in every Sunday thereafter, much less twice every Sunday, so in one sense it settled down. I was only in ARP for nine or ten months, but I still feel as if I did a full tour there because of the amount of work.

Q: Talking about a working level Foreign Service people are used to responding to things. I mean stuff happens and you go to the office no matter what but the civil service often works at a different tempo. Did you sense this?

GRAY: No, perhaps because it was such a unifying experience for the country. Most of the desk officers in ARP were Foreign Service officers, but one was a civil servant, and he was certainly just as dedicated and just as hard working as the others. I didn't see any distinction whatsoever.

Q: Ah good. Well then moving on when did the drum beat start with what are we going to do about Iraq?

GRAY: From reading people's memoirs and journalistic accounts *ex post facto*, it sounds to me as if the drum beat started for some very soon after the planes struck the towers. But at the time I was an office director, so I think many of us were insulated, in a sense, from those views. We knew those views were out there, but it didn't affect us in an operational sense. As I said, the focus for us was so much on Afghanistan, and in the case of our office we made sure our military had the tools to do what it needed to do in terms of basing and overflights. For most of the offices in the bureau, Iraq wasn't the primary concern.

Q: What were we looking at in Afghanistan to do?

GRAY: What were we looking at?

Q: In other words, okay your focus is on Afghanistan but what per se?

GRAY: In the first instance, if I recall correctly, there were three countries that recognized the Taliban: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Pakistan. From the perspective of the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs, we wanted to make sure that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates cut off that support and did so quickly, which they did; that was the diplomatic focus of our effort. The military focus, as I said before, was getting support from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to provide military support. The Agency had its own liaison work and we didn't need to play there, but they were doing the same through their channels as well.

Q: Was there any doubt in your mind early on that we would go into Afghanistan?

GRAY: No, I think it was pretty clear we were going to do that.

Q: How about the Gulf States? You had the Gulf States didn't you?

GRAY: Yes.

Q: How about the Gulf States were they concerned or what were they up to?

GRAY: You mean about us going into Afghanistan?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: Let me put it this way: I certainly don't recall any concern on their part. Maybe they had it but I don't recall any particular angst.... I guess I'd contrast it with their concern about us going into Iraq. I don't recall expressions of concern about us going into Afghanistan; I think people recognized it was something we had to do. We were attacked; that was where the attacks were plotted; and we had to eliminate Taliban support for al Qaeda. Remember al Qaeda's focus wasn't only anti-United States. It was anti-Saudi monarchy as well, so al Qaeda was also a threat to Saudi Arabia and, I think, by extension, to the other Gulf States. At the end of the day if one judges these things by actions rather than words they did provide the support we asked for. I think there was understanding.

Q: Were you aware I'm not quite sure where this was located but there was a task force at some point looking at what needed to be done if we went into Iraq. There was one that was...

GRAY: Sure - it was the Future of Iraq project.

Q: Yeah. Where did that rest?

GRAY: As I recall it was an interagency group. I remember it more through discussions with Bureau participants in that effort, but it wasn't something that our office was involved in. I don't recall if I mentioned in our last interview, that when I was in the bureau of International Organizations doing UN peacekeeping, we were doing some contingency planning in case Saddam fell. It wasn't based on the assumption that we were going to invade, but we looked at what the refugee flow might be. So planning was going on in the previous administration. The Future of Iraq project very well may have started with a passage of the legislation in the second term of President Clinton's administration, so it may have predated 9/11, although it obviously it intensified.

Q: How did you feel about Colin Powell's presentation to the UN? This was a focal point later of concern.

GRAY: That was later in the game: February 2003?

Q: I think yeah.

GRAY: I was in Cairo by that time.

Q: Okay, let's continue with I'm not quite sure what questions to ask but I wanted to know how you were occupied in the early period after 9/11?

GRAY: As I said we had visits by three different heads of government during that timeframe. Vice President Cheney went to Saudi Arabia, and I accompanied the Assistant Secretary for Political Military affairs. So there was the regular work of getting principals ready for meetings in both directions, if you will.

The Saudi stability in interagency meetings thinking at greater lengths about that that took up a lot of time and as I said, the security and all those considerations and the Emergency Action Committee meetings. Right after 9/11 there was a big turnover of chiefs of mission and I'm not trying to be partisan here but this cuts both ways over the years, as we both know, but it was a new Republican administration and the Democratic Senate wasn't exactly moving with alacrity on nominations and then all a sudden 9/11 hit and they figured yeah maybe we should have ambassadors in some of these countries. There was a heck of a lot of work just getting our new chiefs of mission launched and out to the field. That took some time early on but the Senate after 9/11 acted pretty quickly on that. That took up a lot of time as well.

Q: With new ambassadors going out to your area I assume they were all career?

GRAY: All of the Ambassadors except for the one going to Saudi Arabia were career. Chas Freeman, a very distinguished career officer, was the ambassador to Saudi Arabia at the time of Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He was the last career officer to serve as our Ambassador to Riyadh. The previous time I was in that office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs he was going out as our ambassador, and I helped in the preparations for his confirmation. Bob Jordan, who had been President Bush's personal attorney, went to Saudi Arabia as Ambassador in the fall of 2001. He was a very decent man and did a good job there under very difficult circumstances. The rest of the folks were career officers. It's the rare campaign contributor who wants Yemen as his or her reward, with all due respect to both Yemen and campaign contributors. It was interesting for me to observe, because the seven Chiefs of Mission had very different levels of experience as well as different personalities. It was very constructive to see how different missions operated and the like.

Q: Again I'm a little hazy on the chronology so this getting people ready was this a major part of your work?

GRAY: It was a major part of my work. They were all confirmed and on their way I would think within weeks of the attack. Unfortunately, crisis makes a lot of things more efficient and that was certainly the case with the confirmation process.

Q: Yeah. There is no time to play around with this.

GRAY: Right.

Q: As we got a new team in there did you sense a shift from looking at Afghanistan to looking at Iraq?

GRAY: I certainly didn't, and I think the reason for that was I left the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs May of 2002. May 2002 would have been ten months before we went into Iraq, so that was not even the midway point between 9/11 and March 20, 2003.

Q: Did you sense at all a new surge maybe in the hallways or what a certain difference between the ideologues of the right and the left in this situation leading up to what are we going to do now?

GRAY: I don't know if I would say ideologues to the right and ideologues to the left, but there was definitely a division of perspective between career officials who either had a great deal of military experience - be they Secretary Powell or Deputy Secretary Armitage - and other people who were perhaps more ideologically driven and didn't have as much military experience, or between people with a lot of Middle Eastern experience such as Bill Burns and Ryan Crocker, and those people with strongly felt ideological convictions but less experience with the Middle East. As for the people in the latter category, of course, it wasn't just a question of the principals; they always bring staffers with them.

Q: Were you looking towards getting out into the field again?

GRAY: I'm sorry?

Q: Were you looking towards getting out in the field again?

GRAY: You mean at that point?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: Actually, from a personal level, no. It is in fact a family joke. When I was assigned to the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs, our eldest a son was in ninth grade. I figured that my two year assignment would take him through tenth and eleventh grades, and I wasn't about to make him changes schools for his senior year in high school as it would have been too disruptive. So the day I was assigned to ARP, I came home and said, "There is a 99 percent chance you are going to graduate from James Madison High School," and he was perfectly pleased with that. I'm glad I didn't say 100 percent. In December, Ryan Crocker asked me to come up to his office and asked me what I thought about going to Cairo as Deputy Chief of Mission. I thought that was an excellent idea for a number of reasons: getting back overseas, serving in Egypt, taking the next logical career step, and most importantly the opportunity to work again for David Welch, whom I had greatly enjoyed working for twice before. So once December rolled around I knew I was outbound, so to speak. Outbound with no regrets, which I think is what you were getting at with your question.

Q: Can you think of anything else that you should discuss about Arabian Peninsula Affairs before we move off to Egypt?

GRAY: I think we've pretty much covered the waterfront, and I wonder if this is a good break point.

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: In terms of my voice, but also because Cairo was a full tour and probably deserves an interview unto itself.

Q: Okay.

GRAY: I had a little detour during my Cairo assignment to Libya for a TDY, which might be of interest as well.

Q: Okay so we will talk about your detour to Libya and off to Egypt the next time.

GRAY: That sounds good.

Q: Okay, you are leaving the Arab Peninsula desk and you are off to Cairo but you wanted to talk about a side trip you did to Libya.

GRAY: I'm happy to.

Q: Okay we'll do that and you just put it in whenever you think.

GRAY: There is still one point to make about Washington which may be of interest. In the different jobs that I had in Washington between 1996 and 2002, in three different offices, one thing that was consistent was how many personnel gaps there were. In the counter-terrorism office, during my second year, we went almost twelve months without a Coordinator. When I was leaving the bureau of International Organization Affairs there was a long gap as the DAS who oversaw peacekeeping had been not a State Department career officer. The Assistant Secretary who succeeded David Welch in IO was not appointed for a long time. And even though I was only in the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs for nine months, for three of those months our DAS, Ryan Crocker, was in Kabul opening up the mission there. There was obviously a very pressing service need, but when you look at the whole picture it shows there were several long vacancies.

Q: Yeah, this really is important to know while we all know that terrorism is right on the top of the front burner of our concerns yet there have been a lot of complaints about the coordination between various agencies and all. Here is an example of we are not doing a good job.

GRAY: When I was in the office there was inadequate State Department staffing, especially compared to the other agencies working on the issue. That changed after 9/11, of course, but the Department should have been ahead of the curve.

Q: Did someone show up as a joint meeting and not really being that knowledgeable with the subject?

GRAY: I wouldn't say that because State Department personnel bring to the table overseas experience. But other agencies would note that they were increasing their staffing to meet this threat, and ask why the State Department wasn't. The premise behind the question was whether the Department took terrorism seriously. We certainly did in the counter-terrorism office, but we didn't have a good answer with which we could defend the Department, unfortunately.

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: We certainly weren't turning down extra positions.

CAIRO

Q: No, no I understand part of it ends up almost in the administrative realm of well we'll get back to that later or something like that. Okay well let's go on to you were in Cairo from when to when?

GRAY: I was in Cairo from July 1st, 2002 until the very end of June 2005.

Q: When you arrived what was the political situation in Egypt?

GRAY: I guess the best way to put it was that there was a great deal of concern just under the surface. There was a feeling that Mubarak had been in place for a long time, so there were questions about succession. There were constantly questions about whether he was grooming Gamal (his son) to be his successor. I guess there was a *fin de regime* air. We saw that change a bit in 2004 when Mubarak changed the prime minister and brought in Ahmed Nazif; his name in Arabic means "clean". He had spent a lot of time in Canada, and he brought into his Cabinet younger ministers and ministers from the business community. I think it was the first time there were any business people in the Egyptian cabinet. Many of these people were associated with Gamal Mubarak and some of them were subsequently charged with corruption, but that was well after I left and I don't know if those were politically motivated charges or whether they were accurate charges.

One of the events that precipitated this cabinet change was the Egyptian bid for the World Cup to be held in 2010; as you know, they bid well in advance. The three contenders, if you will, were South Africa, Morocco, and Egypt. South Africa had come within one vote of winning the bid for the 2006 World Cup. (If I may digress, I led a delegation to a conference on major event security we hosted when I was in the counter-terrorism office. During the conference, totally coincidentally, the winner of the World Cup bid for 2006. A police official from South Africa in attendance confessed to me that he was actually relieved his country didn't get it, because he didn't think they were ready to host the World Cup in 2006.) Anyway, the South Africans lost by one vote for 2006, and there was considerable controversy about whether, shall we say, goods and services had

been exchanged for votes. I think that it was therefore pretty much a foregone conclusion that South Africa was going to get the bid to host the 2010 World Cup. To make a long story short, Morocco actually did pretty well in the voting: South Africa got fourteen votes, Morocco got ten and Egypt got zero. There is a phrase in Arabic you may have heard, *Um al-Dunya*, in reference to Cairo being the center of the world. The fact that Egypt got no votes was a wake-up call that there was a gap between Egypt's self-perception and its actual stature. The minister of sports was fired very soon thereafter, then there was a change of cabinet and more dynamic leadership was brought in.

I arrived in July. Since summers are when folks take vacation (particularly if they have school age kids, as Ambassador Welch did), a week or ten days after arriving at post he left and I was Chargé. He told me to buckle up when I arrived, and it was excellent advice as it was a very active time and a very active job. He also did an excellent job if introducing me to key contacts – people like Osama El Baz, the Foreign Minister, and the de facto National Security Advisor – before he departed for leave.

One of the first events I got to deal with was the conviction of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, a prominent Egyptian human rights activist. Totally coincidentally, my first representational event at the DCMs residence was going to be hosting him and his family for coffee and to get to know him a little better. It was scheduled but unfortunately he was arrested the day before and brought back to prison. The meeting was a little more poignant because I only met with his wife and daughter, instead of the three of them. Our statement must have been well-calibrated because it was criticized by both the government of Egypt and the Washington Post editorial page. I figured we got it about right.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

GRAY: David Welch. I had had the good fortune to work for him a couple times before: once in Amman when he was the political counselor and I was a second tour officer, and then again when he was Assistant Secretary in the bureau of International Organization affairs.

Q: How stood American-Egyptian relations when you arrived?

GRAY: I would say that they were pretty good; there was a great deal of cooperation between the United States and Egyptian - more so then than now. The Egyptians were a very active participant on Israeli-Palestinian issues, on security issues, and on African issues, so there was a high degree of engagement. Obviously we had differences on human rights issues, and – to put it mildly - they weren't very keen on the prospect of an invasion of Iraq. There was absolutely no love lost for Saddam – a lot of Egyptians came home in coffins after he invaded Kuwait and Egypt joined the coalition to oust him - but they didn't think it was a good idea to go in. I don't want to over-dramatize it, but it was not popular at all with almost all Egyptians.

Q: Did you find that you might say the influence of the embassy was pretty much AID driven and in some places AID can overwhelm the regular representation because it is giving out money?

GRAY: No. I don't think that AID overwhelmed the relationship. I think U.S. assistance was a great tool to have, but I don't think it drove the relationship or overwhelmed it. Just to put it in perspective, our assistance levels to Egypt were basically static since the Camp David Accords. In other words, if you take into consideration inflation and the growth of the Egyptian economy each year, our assistance became less and less a significant part of the Egyptian economy. It was probably very, very important right after the Camp David Accords, in the eighties, but by the time I got there it was less important overall; It was still very important to the military.

Q: How stood the Muslim Brotherhood?

GRAY: It was popular and it was seen as efficient. Subsequent elections in Egypt - after Mubarak left - showed that that popularity remained. One thing that stuck in my mind was the earthquake in Egypt in the late nineties. The Muslim Brotherhood was very effective in getting assistance to people who needed it, and in some ways more effective than the government. I think people remember that and appreciated it.

Q: What were our major concerns in Egypt when you arrive?

GRAY: My major concern when I arrived was the security situation, because it was pretty clear that we were going to go into Iraq. After Vice President Cheney's speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in late August of that summer, one of two things was going to happen: either President Bush was going to get a new Vice President, or we were going into Iraq. None of us thought that Vice President Cheney was going anywhere, so it was fairly obvious we were going into Iraq. We had two sets of security concerns. One was making sure that the American community was safe in that eventuality. At that time, Cairo was either the largest U.S. mission or one of the largest; we had over 500 direct hire Americans, 1500 FSNs, lots of contractors, and lots of different agencies represented. It was a very large embassy. There were lots of people, lots of dependents, and a sizeable private American community in Egypt, and we needed to make sure they were all safe. So that was one set of security concerns.

The other set of security concerns was managing Washington to make sure that people there did not reflexively insist on withdrawing our dependents. We wanted to be the ones to make that decision. While we appreciated our Washington colleagues' concern, we didn't feel that that the proverbial 8,000 mile screw driver was something we particularly needed at that point. It was very interesting in the run up to the invasion. The biggest concern in the American community, and particularly the official community, was that we would go on ordered departure. Our goal was to make sure that that line was drawn to the east of the Suez Canal. Since we took security very seriously, and we also knew what Washington's concerns were, we worked hard to address those. We must have had an Emergency Action Committee meeting more frequently than once every other week. We

made sure Washington knew about each one. Fortunately for us, Ambassador Welch had great credibility in Washington. To make a long story short, the evacuation line was, in fact, drawn to the east of the Suez Canal; there were no security incidents; Washington was happy; the American community was happy; and – most importantly – everyone was safe. So it worked out all for the best at the end. A fair amount of work went into making sure that it did work out.

Q: Were there any mob considerations?

GRAY: There were what I would call controlled demonstrations. There was a demonstration right before we went in which was held at a large soccer stadium and which featured an address by the President's son, Gamal. The invasion started on a Thursday morning in Egypt, which was Wednesday night in the States. There were large demonstrations near the Embassy on Thursday and Friday. A few busses were burned, but the Egyptians have large security forces and their security practices were to "flood the zone," to borrow a sports metaphor. You never like to see a lot of angry people protesting your policies outside your gates, but we felt as if the authorities had things under control.

Q: How did you and the officers as a group did they discuss the rationale for going in or not overt disapproval?

GRAY: At the Embassy we did not give much credence to the theory that there was a connection between Saddam and Al Qaeda and the 9/11 hijackers, and the Egyptians did not give much (if any) credence to that theory either. The connection didn't exist, as the 9/11 Commission report showed. As for the WMD concerns, the Egyptians certainly did not feel threatened because they didn't think if Saddam was going to develop and use WMD against them. But, for those of us in the field, Secretary Powell had great credibility. More than that, there was a great deal of appreciation for his leadership, admiration for him and his kind of low key leadership - a manner that really endeared him, if that is the right word, to State Department folks. For many of us in the field, his speech at the UN about Iraqi development of WMD was very convincing.

The third rationale that was advanced to justify the invasion was that Saddam was a despot who needed to be deposed. That argument had a certain amount of appeal to the Egyptians. As I mentioned earlier, during the first Gulf War the Egyptians were a part of the international coalition. A lot of Egyptians were working in Iraq and a lot of them came back in coffins because they were killed, presumably by Saddam's security forces. So while the Egyptians were not keen on the invasion, they weren't keen on Saddam either.

Q: How about were there discussions in staff about this and the feasibility and all?

GRAY: There were informal discussions on a personal level. Cairo is a very busy embassy, and we had enough work on our hands taking care of work in our lane without straying into other lanes as well.

Q: Let's start at the beginning when you got there. Here you are DCM you are dealing with I guess the largest American embassy in the world wasn't it?

GRAY: I believe so, yes.

Q: Well the administration of that place must have been almost a nightmare how did you find it when you arrived?

GRAY: The administration was actually not a nightmare. First of all, it starts at the top, and as I said we had a really strong Ambassador. I also had the advantage of having worked for him before, so I knew what he wanted. After he had selected me to be his DCM, which was I guess in December of 2001, he came back for the Chiefs of Mission conference in February 2003 or so. We had lunch together and he gave me terrific marching orders. Since he was such an active ambassador and knew better than anyone that an ambassador needs to be active, he told me that "I'm out of the Mission between ten and four every day, and I need you to run the Mission while I am away." That kind of clear guidance goes a long way, so I knew what I had to do and I knew what he was looking for. One of the nice things about being DCM in a place like Egypt was that – because of its importance - other agencies tended to send talented people to head their agencies. We also had talented State Department heads-of-section. There were certainly lots of moving parts, but they were talented moving parts, which made it a lot easier.

Q: What was your impression of how the Egyptian government was accepting or dealing with this massive aid we were giving?

GRAY: The military assistance was pretty straight forward. Egyptians wanted more control over the Economic Support Funds and in particular they didn't like those funds going to NGOs, so there was definitely tension about that issue.

Q: What were you getting from your military attachés about their feelings about the effectiveness of the Egyptian military?

GRAY: When you talk about effectiveness it really comes down to who the adversary is. There was a peace treaty with Israel, and the Libyan or the Sudanese armies didn't pose any threat to Egypt as a country or to the Egyptian military. It was a very large military that was larger than perhaps necessary, but it was fairly well equipped and had a professional aspect to it.

Q: Was the Muslim Brotherhood raising hell out in the countryside or not at the time?

GRAY: No, it was operating behind the scenes.

Q: How about the students? The students in everyplace are always a problem.

GRAY: I don't recall anything notable as far as student strikes or anything like that.

Q: Did the Saudis have much influence?

GRAY: No, I wouldn't say they had influence per se. I think there was a certain shared perspective and shared world view, and the leaders of each country were from the same generation. To give you an example, the Egyptians saw themselves first and foremost as Egyptians; they saw Gulf Arabs as different. I got to Egypt in the summer, and I heard the Egyptians complain that "all the Arabs are here in the hotels." I was taken aback for a moment, since Egyptians are Arab. What they meant was the *Khaleejis* - the Gulf Arabs.

Q: As things progressed in our war with Iraq what were you getting from the government?

GRAY: The weekend before we went in, Bill Burns brought a small delegation to Cairo for talks. The delegation did not explicitly say the invasion is going to be later this week, but it was implicit that the invasion was going to be sooner than later. The discussions were more about post-invasion Iraq. One of the pieces of advice that the Egyptians gave was to be sure to keep the Iraqi army intact. This group was from the Near East Bureau and it was not in a position to have its views prevail, but I think if the Coalition Provisional Authority had not dissolved the Iraqi army our experience in Iraq would have been less difficult than it turned out to be.

Q: I must say I think there are a lot of lessons we were having to learn a little bit too late in that whole enterprise. Did you get any feel of the influence of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Cheney on whither the war and all that or not?

GRAY: No, because we weren't directly involved.

Q: But I was wondering whether from colleagues dropping by or writing or something?

GRAY: In that sense, certainly, but not as far as our day-to-day operations at Embassy Cairo.

Q: Did you see at that time a waning of the influence of Mubarak?

GRAY: Do you mean waning of influence vis-a-vis America or within Egypt?

Q: Within Egypt.

GRAY: I would say there was a *fin de regime* mood, especially during the first two years I was there. When he changed the government and brought in a new prime minister, there was a sense of more dynamism and that Mubarak realized that the economic issues really needed to be addressed.

Q: Were there any significant developments in Egypt good or bad?

GRAY: Right when I got there there was the arrest or the reconviction of Saad Eddin Ibrahim. That was, regrettably, more of a continued pattern. I would say the change in the government that led to more focus on the economic issues was a significant development, as it produced some good policies, even if the benefits were not distributed as widely as they should have been. One negative trend toward the end of my tour was the resumption of terrorist activity, particularly in the Sinai. In early October 2004 – naturally over a long weekend – a resort in Taba was bombed. It was right after the OIG team arrived, so it got to see us in action. There was a small attack in the Khan-el-Khalili in Cairo, which was not only a big tourist attraction, but also a place where a lot of Egyptians did their shopping. Shortly after I left Egypt at the conclusion of my tour - later on in July 2005 - there was a large bombing in Sharm el Sheikh. So one saw the uptick, and it was obviously of grave concern.

Q: Have we come to the point where we talk about your side trip to Libya?

GRAY: Certainly. Let me begin with a bit of context. One of the many nice things about living in Egypt was that there so many great things to see. My family and I felt we got a pretty good sense of what Egypt had to offer, but one of the places we had not been to was Siwa, an oasis in the western part of Egypt. It was perhaps sixty or seventy miles from the Libyan border.

Q: Alexander the Great didn't he have something to do there?

GRAY: Yes, he reportedly went there and consulted the oracle. When we were there, I gazed west and remarked to my family that Siwa was probably as close as I would ever get to Libya. Fast forward a month, and I got a call on the secure line from Bill Burns, who was then our Assistant Secretary, asking if I'd be willing to go to Tripoli. The reason was that a joint team of nonproliferation experts from the UK and the United States was going to Tripoli to finish the negotiations on removing the Libyan WMD program from the country. The Bureau wanted someone on the ground with the nonproliferation experts who had some regional experience. I also fit the bill because I was neither too senior - in which case I might be more visible than desired - and I wasn't too junior. I replied that "I'd love to do it because it sounds like a great opportunity," and added "I better check with my wife and with my Ambassador." It was a bit of a humbling experience to check with your wife and say I am going to disappear for a month and have her reply "that's fine" and you check with your boss and he says the same thing. My wife was, once again, a real trooper about it. We had scheduled a fairly large reception and couldn't really pull back the invitations; she went ahead and hosted it in my absence and what is more fun than having 125 complete strangers in your house when it is not even your formal job? I needed to get a visa to go to Libya and the Egyptian employee from our consular section, which went to the Libyan Embassy to get it, was astounded to think about a Libyan visa in an American passport.

I took a direct the flight from Cairo to Tripoli, arriving before the joint team did, and I had no idea what I was in for. While I had never been to Eastern Europe, I suppose I was expecting Tripoli to resemble whatever 1989 Romania looked like. But Tripoli wasn't

like I envisioned it would be. Libya may have been under sanctions, but in the nicest part of Tripoli there were several shops with Italian and other European imports.

When the teams arrived, we had some very spirited discussions with the Libyans. Qadhafi had made the decision to abandon his WMD programs, but he had not sold it to everyone in his inner circle, many of whom were not necessarily ready to relinquish the WMD. There was a lot of resistance, as you can imagine. I remember in particular his brother-in-law, Abdullah Senussi, who was the head of military intelligence, and was very much against it. Musa Kusa, who was the head of general intelligence and was a Michigan State graduate, was very much for it. There were testy negotiating sessions but we came to the right place.

As background, the U.S. military had captured Saddam – you remember him being pulled out of a sink hole – on December 13, 2003. Six days later, Qadhafi made the announcement that Libya would relinquish its WMD programs. It was very interesting talking to the European diplomats on the ground in Tripoli. They were not fans of the invasion, but they very much thought that the two events were connected, and specifically that Saddam’s capture spooked Qadhafi and pushed his decision. Obviously this had been in the works for a long time. As far as Washington was concerned, it was a win-win. All sides were pleased: the neo-cons thought it proved to that Iraq had changed everything, and others thought that it proved that diplomacy worked. It was a success no matter how you sliced it.

We did not have a diplomatic mission in Tripoli at the time, but somehow my cell phone number got out and when people needed information I would get a call. We were sending a C-17 to pick up the material, and at the last minute the Libyans insisted it had to be unmarked, which was silly because not many countries have C-17s. Somehow we were able to find one. I got a call from someone clearly just doing his job and going through his checklist. I think he was from Shaw Air Force Base. He had a number of questions about the condition of the tarmac at the airport, etc. Bear in mind that I went to a liberal arts college and that I majored in political science, not engineering. I finally had to tell him that we had constructed the tarmac, because it used to be Wheelus Air Force Base. At the time we built it, it was the largest Air Force Base that we had outside the continental United States. I remember saying that “We built it, good luck finding the plans in the files, but they are somewhere in the files.” The other question I got was whether the personnel on the plane should come armed or not. I replied “Your call but if they are going to do us harm there are a heck of a lot more Libyans than there are of us. I’m not sure that is necessary.” I have to admit one of the highlights of my career was standing on the tarmac at two in the morning. C-17s are pretty magnificent aircraft to begin with, and seeing all these crates of centrifuges and scientific equipment being taken away was a real triumph of diplomacy I think.

Q: Did you have any problems with the Libyans?

GRAY: No, none whatsoever. Obviously, I was there with their acquiescence. The only problems we had were during the negotiation sessions. I was able to build a bit of a

rapport with Musa Kusa and we didn't have any problems. Obviously we were under constant surveillance but that goes with the territory. I don't think they quite figured out what I was doing when I went for a run.

Q: How did you find our technical people - did they cause you problems or not?

GRAY: No, they really knew what they were doing. They were very serious, very mission-oriented. Some of their Libyan counterparts were more forthcoming than others, so there were different levels of frustration. Our folks and the British folks were just great.

Q: Oh boy. Did you have problems with so many Americans involved in Egypt? I would think that problems of drunkenness, family affairs...

GRAY: People who don't know much about the Foreign Service or about how embassies are run may not know that Deputy Chiefs of Mission are family advocacy officers. It is a very specific – and very important – responsibility clearly assigned to DCMs. To give you one specific example of what that means, the day before we went into Iraq we had a team from Diplomatic Security on the ground to investigate a very delicate family issue. We all knew when we were going in, real soon, although we did not know the exact date. But in the midst of all of our security planning, we had to support the DS team that came to investigate the family issue. I am not complaining; it is an important responsibility. While it is an ambassadorial prerogative to send people home for good, our Ambassador delegated that responsibility to me. We did so not for disciplinary reasons but when we did not have the support services available at post. I used one anecdote to illustrate the point when I spoke to the DCM courses at the Foreign Service Institute. We had a great regional psychiatrist, and we'd often meet to discuss these cases. At the end of one of our meetings I quipped that our jobs (in other words, the DCM's job and the psychiatrist's job) were pretty similar. I'll never forget her response: she laughed and shook her head, saying "No, I can prescribe medication, and you can't." I thought that was very telling. It was an important part of the job, but as I said before we had really good people at post. Not every post has a regional psychiatrist and such experienced management counselors and regional security officers. The only silver lining of having these cases come up more frequently than you'd like was that the team got used to working well together.

Q: What were some of the pressures on the Americans working for the embassy in Cairo at the time that would cause some psychiatric stress?

GRAY: I don't want to minimize the pressures on people because it was a very high activity post and there were lots of expectations from Washington. But I think that because we had such a large American community, there were more of these types of problems. In other words, I don't think Cairo was outside the norm on a per capita basis.

Q: Yeah. Well it gives you an idea of what a community can suffer.

GRAY: Another thing though to point out is that the State Department has a very rigorous screening process for not just medical clearances, but also for educational suitability for dependents. But not every agency does, at least not then. So there were some instances wherein a dependent who wouldn't have gotten a clearance from the State Department came to post, and if there was an issue we would have to ask the family to go home. It was absolutely not for punitive reasons, but if you have a dependent that needs help, and there are not those resources at post, then the only fair course of action is for that dependent to go back to the States where those resources are available.

Q: Did you have much problem with American tourists and that sort of thing?

GRAY: No, surprisingly not. Part of it was tourism was down the first year I was there because of the fear of the invasion and then after the invasion. There are always a few, and we had one very sad parental abduction case in which the American mother was convinced that her child was in Egypt. It turned out the child was in Cuba, not in Egypt.

Q: Because of the terrorism in some areas were you ever inclined to try to constrict tourism or to suggest to people that they not come to Egypt to visit say the...

GRAY: No, not at the time. Obviously we put out advisory after the Taba bombing and the Khan-el-Khalili bombing. It got worse, but there was no need to put out a general warning. We advised people to be careful of large crowds because demonstrations that could pop up quickly. Our eldest son graduated from the Cairo American School, which was the international school. He went all over Cairo using their subway system and he never had any problems. I know it's changed but when we were there it was a safe city.

Q: How about did you get involved in Egyptian-Israeli relations and were we the in-between?

GRAY: I wouldn't say that we were the go-between, because by that point they had established a pretty effective working relationship at the government-to-government. They had a common perceived enemy in Hamas, and they would talk directly about it.

Q: Were you getting oh Foreign Service officers who had been to Iraq and coming back on leave or something. Were they coming back with tales of situations there or not?

GRAY: At that point people were going for six month stints. We sent four junior officers for six months, to serve with the Coalition Provisional Authority. They brought back descriptions of it being a fairly unwieldy enterprise.

Q: Well then is there anything else we should be covering?

GRAY: On Cairo? Not really, but I'll end this segment with one nice anecdote, if I may. As I said, the Egyptian Foreign Service Nationals were really great, and we had a terrific motor pool supervisor, Tareq Noor. Each Ramadan he and the motorpool staff hosted an *iftar* in the motor pool parking lot. It was a big event for the entire Embassy community,

Americans and Egyptians alike. When I found out that Deputy Secretary Armitage was going to be visiting Cairo around that time, I gave Tareq a call. I said, "Listen, I don't want an answer right away, because if I ask for an answer right away you are just going to say 'yes'. I want you to think about this and give me an honest answer, as it will require changing plans. Deputy Secretary Armitage is going to be coming to Cairo and I bet he would love to go to the motor pool *iftar*."

Q: Can you explain what an iftar is?

GRAY: It literally means breaking the fast. It is the meal that Muslims have when they break the fast at the end of the day of fasting during Ramadan. After fasting all day, you can imagine an *iftar* becomes an elaborate meal, particularly in Egypt, where the people are so social.

Tareq called me back and said, "Sure: we will change the date. We would love to do it." Deputy Secretary Armitage came out and Tareq very proudly showed him around. We were sitting on plastic chairs, eating from make shift tables and the like. Have you met Deputy Secretary Armitage?

Q: No I haven't.

GRAY: Well, he loves to lift weights. He went to the Naval Academy, he was a football player, and he is well built. Tareq Noor was kind of the same; they were like two peas in a pod, walking around the motor pool. It was a very nice occasion, and it showed Tareq's graciousness as the host. It also showed Deputy Secretary Armitage's leadership qualities. When his staff put the invitation before him, he said, "Of course."

Q: Well that is great. You left there when?

GRAY: The end of June, 2005.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop don't you think?

GRAY: I think so. I came back to be a DAS in NEA, and we can relive those days. I know I'm not going to be able to cap it off with a vignette like the one about the motor pool *iftar*.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE

Q: Okay, so we will pick this up when? What year did you leave?

GRAY: 2005.

Q: I had you coming back to Washington and I'm not sure from where and what were you doing? Do you remember?

GRAY: I had been the DCM in Cairo and I came back to be Deputy Assistant Secretary in NEA. I started there at the end of July 2005.

Q: Let me just make the announcement here. Today is May 10, 2016, with Gordon Gray. Gordon what particular piece of the action did you have as the DAS?

GRAY: During all three years as DAS, I oversaw the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs and also the office of Maghreb (North African) Affairs. During the first year of my tour, the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs included the Iran desk, and the office was actually named the office of Arabian Peninsula and Iran Affairs. In other words, during my first year as DAS I had responsibility for Iran. One of the accomplishments during my first year as DAS was that we stood up an Iran office. That office ended up reporting to the PDAS, so during my second and third years as DAS I oversaw the office of Regional Affairs. In addition, we had a non-career PDAS during my first year, so I ended up doing a lot of the personnel work.

Q: Why did we have a non-career that is unusual isn't it?

GRAY: In my experience it's not the norm to have a non-career PDAS, and certainly not in regional bureaus.

Q: Was there any particular reason for this?

GRAY: I think the fact that the PDAS was Liz Cheney had something to do with it.

Q: Who was the PDAS?

GRAY: Liz Cheney.

Q: Oh yeah. I heard reports that it didn't work out too well things were scheduled to make sure that she wasn't around when things were jumping on certain matters and all.

GRAY: I'd rather not go there.

Q: I understand. As you started what did you find occupying you the most?

GRAY: First of all there was a tremendous amount of what I would call the nuts and bolts work of any regional bureau. Between the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs and the office of North Africa Affairs, we provided guidance to eleven Ambassadors and five Consuls General. There were a lot of moving parts in most of the countries that the Bureau covered. It was fun work, and one of the things I enjoyed at each step in my career in Washington - as desk officer or office director or DAS - was supporting our embassies in the field. One of the goals that I set for myself when I arrived in NEA at the end of July was to be sure that I visited each of the eleven countries I had responsibility for (that number does not include Iran, which I obviously could not visit) by the end of

the year. Fortunately, I was able to do that. There was a lot of travel, and I would say during the three years I probably took a trip every 4-6 weeks.

As far as the substantive issues, I spent a fair amount of time on Iran during my first year in the job. Iran-related work required a travel to Ottawa, to Brussels, to Ankara, as well as to the Gulf countries. Within the Bureau, we set up a separate Iran office in Dubai as the UAE in general - and Dubai in particular - had so much interaction with Iran. We also set up a program of Iran watchers in countries that had large Iranian expatriate communities. Success has a thousand parents, and I do not want to sound as if I am unduly claiming credit, as there were several people working very hard on it, particularly Nick Burns, who was the Undersecretary for Political Affairs. Establishing a cadre of Iran specialists with Farsi language capabilities was a very positive initiative. Don't ask me to predict when, but at some point the U.S. and Iran will reestablish diplomatic relations, and we will then have a presence in Tehran and need people who know the country and speak the language. The generation that had those capabilities has left the Foreign Service.

I had responsibility for the Maghreb, so the Western Sahara was one of the issues that I followed closely throughout my tenure as DAS. If I remember correctly, I was the first U.S. government official to testify before Congress in five years or so on the Western Sahara. On my first trip as DAS, in August 2005, I accompanied Senator Lugar to Algeria and Morocco. Since he was such a prominent, respected expert in foreign affairs, he was selected to oversee the repatriation of 404 Moroccan prisoners of war from Algeria to Morocco. It was a very moving experience to see these 404 men being released from - in some cases - decades of captivity. They were stunned and I'm not sure they really believed until they landed in Agadir in Morocco that they were free. They had a very subdued reaction to being freed, perhaps because it happened so suddenly.

The Western Sahara took on an increasing amount of my time. There were not many U.S. government officials who had an interest in the issue, which gave me some latitude. It has been a long festering issue, but there were no real bureaucratic divisions within the government that I recall. Elliott Abrams, the Deputy National Security Advisor, was very involved and very supportive, and that helped as we moved forward. We worked closely with both the Moroccans and the Algerians, and we encouraged the Moroccans to table a robust plan for autonomy for the Western Sahara. They did so, and it was good enough to launch or resume of UN-sponsored talks; they were held on Long Island. It was a promising start, but here we are almost ten years later, and obviously the issue has not been resolved. It's been in the headlines recently because the Moroccans took offence to a comment by Ban Ki-moon in which he used the word "occupation." For a while we had a bit of an opening, and there was some prospect of success, but it has not been realized unfortunately.

My second trip to the region was in September 2005, with Karen Hughes. She was very close to the President, and had just started as Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy. I accompanied her on her first trip abroad, for her listening tour. We went to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and then on to Turkey; the latter wasn't in my area of responsibility but

was of course a very interesting stop. I enjoyed getting to know her, and found she had a great deal of common sense.

Another issue I dealt with not just in my first year as DAS, but throughout my entire tour, was Guantanamo repatriations to Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. The U.S. government had a complicated approach to this issue: we were simultaneously asking countries to make sure that the human rights of the detainees to be repatriated would be fully guaranteed, while at the same time asking for ironclad assurances that they would be under surveillance and would not return to terrorism. Both were entirely reasonable guarantees, but they were, perhaps, a bit confusing for those governments we were asking to receive the detainees. Some colleagues in our democracy, human rights, and labor bureau were not too keen on some of the repatriations, while recognizing that it was important to reduce the number of detainees in Guantanamo. That was obviously an effort that continued not just through President Bush 43's administration, but through President Obama's administration as well.

I began my tour as DAS about a month before Hurricane Katrina hit our Gulf coast. A number of countries worldwide, including the Persian Gulf countries, made donations to the relief effort. Tracking the donations was a bit of a challenge. The Executive Secretariat had responsibility for tracking them globally, but we tracked our countries. Some of the Gulf countries wanted them be completely anonymous, and Kuwait has an active parliament and had to account to it.

My interaction with the families of the victims of the Pan Am 103 bombing was another issue I spent a lot of time on. My colleagues in NEA and I were the point of contact at the State Department for the families. One of the issues we worked on in NEA, together with my old office, counter-terrorism, was the rescission of Libya's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism. It was a very deliberate - and I mean that in every sense of the word - and comprehensive approach. As the law requires, we received assurances that the state - Libya, in this case - would not resume terrorism. We monitored those assurances very closely. The post-9/11 cooperation between our intelligence services was quite good; that's a matter of public record. All that being said, it was not a very popular decision with the Pan Am 103 families. But it was the right decision to make, and it was one that the administration made, and we moved forward on it.

I also spent a fair amount of time on Saudi Arabia. We established a strategic dialogue between the United States and Saudi Arabia. As part of that, there were a number of different working groups on education and consular issues as well political and military issues. That was a large undertaking and took a lot of care and attention.

As part of a distinct effort we stepped up our cooperation with Saudi Arabia with the Minister of Interior, Muhammad bin Nayef, who is now the Crown Prince. He was very active on counter terrorism issues. He, of course, subsequently survived an assassination attempt. Our increased cooperation was a case in which there was very strong interagency cooperation among DHS, the Department of Energy, OSD, the intelligence community, and of course State.

Separate from the U.S.-Saudi Strategic Dialogue, State and the Pentagon established the Gulf Security Dialogue, which was a good collaboration among NEA, the bureau of Political and Military Affairs, and at the Pentagon OSD policy and our uniformed colleagues. The purpose of the dialogue was to engage in regular exchanges with our Gulf partners on security issues, and also to encourage them to cooperate among themselves to a greater degree. I think overall it was a fairly successful exchange. The fact that the delegations were received at such high levels showed there was a need for that kind of regular exchange of views; it included meetings at night during Ramadan. We met with the King of Bahrain. In another country, we were having a very good meeting at one of the residences of the Crown Prince, but all of us started to look at our watches as surreptitiously and unobtrusively as we could. One of the Crown Prince's advisors noticed, however, and said, "Don't worry - we've held that plane before." We finished our conversation and made our plane on time, which made us feel better about the other passengers.

One other platform we developed was a series of meetings between Secretary Rice and her counterparts in the Gulf Cooperation Council. They were effective meetings because of the multiplier effect, and because as more meetings took place, the discussions became franker and franker. Remember that the context was both the Iraq War and the election of Ahmadinejad as president of Iran. There were concerns from both our Arab and Israeli partners about the direction Iran was headed, so all of this outreach was very important as far as reassuring our partners and allies.

(As a parenthetical observation, I want to note that all of these endeavors were a team effort. I'm just describing the events that occurred. Many people senior and junior to me contributed significantly to them and I do not want to sound as if I am claiming undue credit.)

And in the summer of 2006, war broke out between Israel and Hezbollah. It was a very difficult time for American diplomacy as it tried to mediate successfully. Our Assistant Secretary was in the region virtually the whole time. Another Deputy Assistant Secretary had responsibility for that area, but it still affected the entire Bureau. People may say that nothing happens in the summer, but my experience - be it the invasion in Kuwait, be it the anti-Gorbachev coup, or be it the Israel-Hezbollah war - was that crises always happen in the summer.

Q: Let's go back. What was happening early on when you took over, what were you seeing, what was happening in Iran?

GRAY: I'm not sure that "see" is the right verb to use, since Iran is such an opaque environment to this day. It is particularly opaque for us since we don't have any representation on the ground. So there were questions about what kind of overtures they may or may not have been making. Remember we had very good cooperation with Iran right before and right after we went into Afghanistan. When he was Deputy Assistant Secretary, Ryan Crocker worked successfully with Iranians on some technical issues. I

don't want to overstate it – we were not steps away from transforming Iran into a Jeffersonian democracy – but at least there was some cooperation. When President Bush 43 used the term “axis of evil” in the State of the Union Address, the Iranians perceived a change in our policy and the cooperation dried up. Perhaps it would have anyway, but the speech was made and the phrase was included in the speech. Obviously we can't know what could have happened; in any event, it was prior to my time dealing with Iran, which was 2005-2006. A Swiss envoy reported a possible overture, but it is unclear to me in retrospect whether it was an actual Iranian overture or if, to paraphrase Alan Greenspan, ‘it was irrational exuberance on the part of the Swiss envoy.’

I do not speak Farsi and do not claim any special expertise in Iran, but I always remembered the words of someone who was a real expert on Iran: he spoke Farsi, studied there, and unfortunately was taken hostage there. This colleague told me that “When the Iranians want to talk to us, it will be clear that they want to talk to us; it's not going to be through some obscure half-baked channel.” I think we saw that when a very respectful channel was used (i.e., the Sultan of Oman) in the run-up to the discussions on the Iran nuclear deal. To reiterate, it was very difficult to see what was going on. We tried to get as good of a feel as we could through Dubai or through like-minded embassies. Obviously Ahmadinejad's election didn't augur well for U.S.-Iranian relations. A British diplomat who had been posted in Iran told me that the election reminded him of an election at home in the sense that Ahmadinejad was viewed as a non-corrupt person who lived a simple life and was running against Rafsanjani, who came from a very well established merchant family. The British diplomat's analysis was that “Basically anyone other than Rafsanjani would have won that election - it wasn't so much a vote for Ahmadinejad as it was a vote against the status quo.”

Q: Was there a feeling that Iran is essentially going to rejoin the Council of Nations or were we settling in for the long haul?

GRAY: I'm sorry?

Q: Were we settling in for the long haul of not really getting anywhere with Iran?

GRAY: In the administration there were real varieties of opinions. There was not a consensus, although given the difficulties we were encountering in Iraq the taste for further military action was limited. There certainly wasn't enthusiasm for it from the people who would be doing the fighting. We saw the second Bush 43 administration move toward sanctions and work the nuclear issue through the IAEA and through the UN Security Council; diplomacy really took center stage. So even though there may not have been consensus throughout the administration, the policies advocated by Secretary Rice carried the day. A lot of the credit goes to her, but I also a lot of credit goes to Nick Burns, the Undersecretary for Political Affairs; he was really the point person on Iran for the administration.

Q: How about Israel and what was happening there and in Palestine?

GRAY: There certainly wasn't much progress from a negotiations perspective. Following the Israel-Hezbollah War in 2006 there was an opening, if you will, that led to in November 2007 to the so-called Annapolis Conference. There were discussions on the Middle East in an attempt to move toward a resolution of Arab-Israeli issues, but there is always a difference between meetings and successful outcomes. It was worth the effort, but in the long run nothing came of it.

Q: Well it certainly was an active time.

GRAY: There are a few moving parts.

Q: This is the thing no matter what happens the Middle East remains, you might say, the testing ground of the Foreign Service.

GRAY: I've been told for years that roughly half the paper that the building produces for the Seventh Floor and for the Secretary is Middle East-related. I don't have the metric to confirm or refute that, but it certainly wouldn't surprise me. As we speak Secretary Kerry is in Paris, where he had a working lunch yesterday with the Saudi foreign minister and was meeting in the evening with counterparts, including from the Gulf.

Q: What about an area you mentioned that gets ignored to a certain extent but Maghreb and all the dispute between Morocco and Algeria particularly was there much happening there?

GRAY: There wasn't much happening on the ground, but there was some diplomatic movement that we were hoping would produce progress toward resolution; it didn't. As I had said earlier, in August 2005, 404 Moroccan prisoners of war were released by the Algerians. Subsequently, the Moroccans presented a serious autonomy plan. I think we publicly labeled it as "serious and credible" at the time. There were negotiations organized by the UN, among the Polisario, the Algerians, and the Moroccans – the negotiations were very carefully orchestrated. Once again, unfortunately, there is a difference between meetings, movement, prophecies on the one hand, and successful outcomes on the other hand. There were glimmers of hope and we pursued them, but they haven't come to fruition yet.

Q: You say the release how many Moroccans were released?

GRAY: There were 404.

Q: Did that clear out that prisoner business or not?

GRAY: Yes.

Q: Because that had been going on a long time. How long had these people been in jail?

GRAY: I wouldn't be surprised if some of them had been incarcerated for twenty years.

Q: God.

GRAY: I bet that a large number of them spent most of their adult lives in captivity - they were probably conscripts captured at a young age.

Q: At least if nothing else the fact in the State Department we kept the light burning on the issue.

GRAY: We did. Specifically on the prisoner of war issue, Senator McCain and others like him took it on as a humanitarian issue. I think the Algerians came to realize that they had nothing to gain by holding onto these men. More power to them for making the right decision.

Q: Yes. Did you see much movement in Palestine?

GRAY: No, the most hopeful prospect during my time as DAS was the Annapolis Conference, but at the end of the day it didn't produce any progress. There were different points at which it looked as if progress was possible. I don't mean to speak ill of the departed, but when Yasser Arafat died on Veterans Day in 2004 there was a change in Palestinian leadership. On the other hand, the elections in Gaza in 2005 led to an electoral victory for Hamas.

Q: Do you sense Jewish support of Israel was changing during this time?

GRAY: I'd be hard pressed to say as I wasn't directly following Israel. It was around this time that J Street was created. I would also draw a distinction between support for Israel and support for Likud policies. J Street, for example, certainly supports Israel, but it is not a supporter of Likud policies and that's an important distinction that needs to be made.

Q: Could you explain J Street?

GRAY: J Street is a relatively new lobbying group that is pro-Israel but seeks a negotiated path to a two-state solution. I think it is fair to say it is less reflexively pro-Likud in its policies.

Q: Of course, how about the Saudis? Were we looking at a sort of mixed support of Arabic schools but some of those schools were preaching a brand of Islam that is not friendly towards the United States.

GRAY: As part of the U.S.-Saudi strategic dialogue that I had mentioned, we made some progress working with the Saudis on their text books. If I remember correctly, it was the Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom, John Hanford, who led the effort. I remember that he struck me as a very judicious person who was very results-oriented, and I think he established a rapport with his Saudi interlocutors. Together they made

some progress on addressing our issues of concern about Saudi text books. It's not an issue that I have followed since, so I don't know where it stands, but some members of the Saudi government were very concerned about extremism. Bin Laden was just as vehemently anti-Royal family as he was anti-U.S.

Q: How did you feel about reactions with Saudi Arabia at the time?

GRAY: Since I had been office director of the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs from 2001-2002, during and right after 9/11, I would say it was a lot smoother of a relationship in 2005-2008 as opposed to 2001-2002. There was a lot more dialogue and a sense that we were working together on different issues. One factor was the terror attacks in Saudi Arabia in 2003 and 2004 - once those attacks happened, counter-terrorism cooperation between our two countries really ramped up. Some will argue that that was when Saudi Arabia fully grasped it had a terrorism problem. In short, it was a productive relationship, and certainly so on political-military and terrorism issues.

Q: With the rise of terrorism and all oil wasn't quite the issue that it used to be was it?

GRAY: No, not during that timeframe.

Q: Also, did you feel the fact that the United States was it obvious we were on our way of becoming an oil exporter again?

GRAY: I wouldn't say it was obvious at the time. There may have been people in private industry who thought so, but I don't think it was obvious at the time, no.

Q: How about what countries in the Islamic world were we particularly concerned about the exporters of terrorism?

GRAY: Which countries?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: I'd break it down into different components. We worried about terrorist financing because there was a great deal of private money that was probably going to support terrorism, so we wanted to work with governments in the Gulf who to put a handle on that and turn off the spigot. There were also concerns about foreign fighters. Our military was able to capture a real treasure trove of personnel files of what was then Al Qaeda in Iraq. They were captured in Sinjar. West Point's Combating Terrorism Center posted the documents, and it was very interesting to see where the foreign fighters were coming from. In some ways it mirrors what we are seeing today, although in different circumstances. I remember - well before Tunisia was in my future - that Tunisia was a very large exporter of foreign fighters on a per capita basis. Many if not most of the Libyan foreign fighters came from a town in the eastern part of Libya called Derna. I accompanied our Coordinator for Counter-terrorism, Dell Dailey, in February 2008 on a trip to Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. We talked about foreign fighters and what steps

they could take, and wanted to alert them to the problem. We also tried to work with the Arab Maghreb Union on deradicalization. We started the effort and in some cases countries were willing to discuss the issue in Washington, while some countries were less keen on developing the initiative in their own country. We tried to conduct the discussions between the U.S. and the Arab Maghreb Union.

Q: How did we see Algeria at the time because Algeria doesn't seem to come up much in talking about problems and all that? How did you view Algeria?

GRAY: Historically our relations with Algeria had not been that great. I think they improved after 9/11 due to shared views on counter-terrorism. I'd say certainly that I thought there was a steady improvement in the relationship. Robert Ford, when he was Ambassador to Algeria, told me about a visit to an Algerian university. He had previously served at our Embassy in Algiers, and on this visit he was expecting to meet with very many people. He ended up speaking to an auditorium full of students who were interested in learning English and learning more about the United States. I thought when I was DAS that there was a lot of opportunity for growth in our bilateral relationship. I still think that is the case.

Q: Were we doing much in the way of visitor programs and student exchanges and that sort of thing? Was that high on our agenda?

GRAY: We were trying to increase them with Algeria. I don't recall what the scope was, but my sense is that our educational exchanges were on the way up. I mean that in contrast to a country such as Tunisia, where exchanges were very restricted under Ben Ali.

Q: How about Tunisia? Ben Ali was considered to be very much in power or did we feel his rule was waning?

GRAY: No, at the time he had a pretty strong grasp on power. The real issues we had with Tunisia were human rights issues, and particularly freedom of expression issues.

Q: How stood he on terrorism?

GRAY: He was solid on terrorism. He came from the ministry of interior, so he was very solid on that score.

Q: What do you mean by solid?

GRAY: We had good cooperation.

Q: Yeah. You had been in Egypt how stood Egypt when you were back in Washington?

GRAY: We still had the same human rights concerns that we had during my tenure there. There were local elections in the fall of 2005, a little bit after I left. The Muslim

Brotherhood did well in the first round, and the second round was, shall we say, less democratically conducted. I'd say there was an intensification of the sense that we were seeing the *fin de regime*.

Q: Did Egypt fit in well with you might say the Islamic world and the Arab world and the Maghreb?

GRAY: It did.

Q: In other words Egyptians often said that they were Egyptians, a different breed of cat, they weren't Arab.

GRAY: Yes - the Egyptians first and foremost felt Egyptian. They are a quarter of the Arab world, and many Arabs from outside of Egypt understand Egyptian Arabic because they have seen Egyptian films or television programs. At the end of the day, though, all politics is local, so I don't think that Egypt played as prominent a role as it once did for people in the Maghreb or on the Arabian Peninsula, and certainly not in Iraq.

Q: You didn't have Iraq did you?

GRAY: No.

Q: So what was the view from your colleagues and all what were you thinking about Iraq? For one thing were we thinking in terms of maybe the place should be split up into various areas, Sunni, Shia, Kurd area or not?

GRAY: No. Partition was an idea advanced by then-Senator Biden but it never really took. It certainly didn't take hold in either the Bush 43 or the Obama administrations.

Q: Why not? Was it...

GRAY: Part of the reason was that the U.S. objective had been to get rid of Saddam Hussein, not to create three new countries. There were concerns about stability. It is one thing to say a country should be divided into three parts, and another thing to do it. As we know in the Middle East when you sit down and start drawing lines on the map as Sykes and Picot did - six days short of 100 years ago - complications ensue. Where would you draw the line between Kurdistan and the so-called Sunni triangle? Good luck with that one. But I do not believe anyone ever got to that level of detail. Our policy has been to unify Iraq.

Q: Well we have the same thing dealing with Africa in a way.

GRAY: Right.

Q: But it's a real problem.

GRAY: Absolutely.

Q: Were there any major areas that we haven't talked about or incidents during this time?

GRAY: I think we have covered all of the policy issues, but I would make one process comment. Secretary Gates is not the only one to comment on micromanagement from NSC staff, but perhaps he has the most experience. I saw a turning point in the Bush 43 administration when people on NSC staff started referring to themselves as desk officers. By and large, there were bright and very dedicated people in those jobs. Of course, nature abhors a vacuum and bureaucracy is no exception. If those bright and energetic people did not have enough to do, they were going to be sure to go out and make sure they had enough to do. That leads to micromanagement which probably does not correspond precisely to the coordinating role that was envisioned when the National Security Council was set up. As a result of this increase in the size of the staff, these bright and dedicated people did not always have real world experience. Let me give you one vignette to illustrate my point. There was great angst in certain quarters about Qatar, which was on the Security Council at the time. It had the so-called Arab seat. On one of the votes on Iran it didn't vote with the United States - I believe it abstained. We had fourteen votes in favor of the resolution. Don't get me wrong: I'd rather have a 15-0 vote with Qatar on our side. At the same time, having watched Secretary Baker's diplomacy with great admiration, I think he and the United States did okay with the number of 13-2 votes at the Security Council following Saddam's invasion. (Cuba and Yemen were on the Security Council at the time.) Moving past that perhaps theological point, there was so much concern that some people were advocating teaching Qatar a lesson by moving our air base from Al Udeid. These were obviously people who had clearly never been to Al Udeid and who did not know how significant a role Al Udeid played in our combat air operations in the skies over Iraq or Afghanistan, both of which we completely owned. The idea that you can just pick up a multi-billion dollar air field and drop it anywhere is... I'll just say fanciful and leave it at that. I was sent to Deputy Committee meetings on the general topic, probably because people more senior to me got bored of the same conversation over and over again. It was like Ground Hog Day. The lack of experience that generated the repetition of the same conversation wasn't serving the President well. It was just wasting a lot of time, frankly. Eight years later we are still at Al Udeid, and Qatar's two-year term on the Security Council is behind us.

Q: I want to just point out because of things in time references you referred to Ground Hog Day which is a movie in which time kept repeating itself the same day kept going on a big repetition.

GRAY: It was so bad that I remember on the walk back to the Department from one of these meetings and commenting to one of my colleagues, "You know I'm really looking forward to going to Baghdad."

Q: Oh God. Did you find yourself at odds with the National Security Council people?

GRAY: No, not at all. It was always cordial, and generally in the U.S. government genuinely stupid ideas sink of their own weight. I was just using this as an illustration. There was no way that General Abizaid, who was then the Commander of Central Command, was going to allow that to go forward. And there was no way the Office of Management and Budget would not have said, "Okay, that may be a great idea, but where are you going to build the new air base? And, by the way, how are you going to fund it?" I knew it wasn't going anywhere. I objected to the continual discussion of the issue more as a citizen than as a public servant.

Q: I think one of things we've lost sight of is but it comes out often in these oral histories is that an issue gets particularly important and an awful lot of people jump in often who they are bright and articulate but they really don't know the territory. They are full of ideas and it takes a lot of time to bat these ideas down.

GRAY: That's a good summary.

Q: There is another one too that we get you might say the arrogance of the lower level bureaucrats. I mean we've got to punish Qatar or something, Qatar is a small country but it's pretty important to us.

GRAY: Right.

Q: Sometimes this is lost sight of.

GRAY: Yes.

Q: Oh well. Anyway, the hours you must have spent on a daily basis were considerable weren't they?

GRAY: The hours were long.

Q: Did your family see you?

GRAY: In the front office, I generally got in around seven in the morning, but the silver lining was the commute was a breeze.

Q: Well think this is probably a good place to stop.

GRAY: Sure.

BAGHDAD

Q: Where did you go afterwards?

GRAY: To beautiful downtown Baghdad.

Q: Oh yes I've heard of it. Alright we will pick this up the next time when you are off to Baghdad and you were there from when to when?

GRAY: I was there from June 29, 2008 to May 30, 2009.

Q: A good year. Okay.

Q: Okay you are off to beautiful Baghdad.

GRAY: I'm off to beautiful Baghdad.

Q: So when did you go and what was your job?

GRAY: I arrived in Baghdad on June 29, 2008. I was in a newly-created job as Ryan Crocker's senior advisor on the South. Since I had no predecessor, I was able to develop it from scratch. Any job in Baghdad was interesting, but being able to define the job myself made it particularly interesting.

Q: When you say the South can you describe what the situation was there and what we were concerned about?

GRAY: The southern provinces were predominantly Shia. In comparison with, say, the western or northern provinces they weren't quite as turbulent. The Iraqi government had started an offensive against the Sadrist militias called Charge of the Knights in March 2008. It moved from Basra in the south towards Baghdad.

Q: Could you explain the militias and why we were concerned about that?

GRAY: We were concerned for a number of reasons. We were trying to bolster the central authority of the country, and the militias were obviously extra-governmental. Moqtada Sadr had very strong Iranian backing, both politically and in terms of materiel, and he had spent long periods of time in Iran. Many of the militias were targeting our personnel in Iraq. So we had a great number of concerns about the militias.

Q: What was the overall situation when you got there?

GRAY: I got there shortly after the surge had started. One could see from the 2006 mid-term elections and the 2008 Democratic primary results that the war was unpopular at home. That was the context at the time.

Q: What did you feel about the situation at that time?

GRAY: One has personal feelings and professional obligations. As we've discussed in previous interviews, there weren't too many people in the Near East Bureau who thought that going into Iraq was that great of an idea. I'd put Ryan Crocker at the top of the list as the co-author of the famous Perfect Storm memorandum. But, all that being said, there is

a sense of service discipline in the Foreign Service. That's why people felt that they needed to serve in Iraq, regardless of what they may have personally thought about the wisdom of the initial endeavor. At the NEA Chief of Mission conference in February 2008 – in other words, shortly after I had volunteered to go to Iraq for this new position - Ryan Crocker told his colleagues (COMs and non-COMs alike) that if we didn't serve in Iraq, we would regret it after our careers were over. I definitely feel that was the case for me. I don't think Iraq was anyone's favorite assignment, but I bet a lot of people probably share my view that they can't imagine not having served there.

Q: I know I felt the same way about Viet Nam. I served in Viet Nam and I felt I really should see the elephants more or less. How did you operate I mean what were you doing?

GRAY: What did I do? As I said, it was a new job, so there was a fair amount of flexibility. I had worked for Ryan before, and - while no one will say he is a man of too many words - I think I had a sense of what he wanted. The primary focus of the job was to try and engage with leaders in the South and to represent Ryan to project U.S. influence as well as to get a better understanding of the trends there. I tried to focus on tribes; minorities, who were unfortunately diminishing communities in the South; and regionalism, as there was great interest in Basra in trying to become more autonomous. I worked closely with our Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and one of the advantages of the job was that I was able to travel. I was not cooped up in the Green Zone. I tried to travel each week to a different province in the South and to visit a different PRT. I use the phrase "tried to" deliberately, because one's ability to travel in Iraq was always subject to dust storms since we traveled by helicopter. There was no guarantee that you could get out on a helicopter and get back on a helicopter. I was also charged with working to improve relations between Kuwait and Iraq, which was not directly related to the South, but drew on my previous assignments.

Q: Can you talk about maybe a particular trip you'd made to a tribal chief? How did this work and what would you do?

GRAY: Certainly. About a month after I arrived in Iraq I met with around 250 sheikhs at a meeting organized by our Provincial Reconstruction Team in the province of Muthanna. It was an opportunity for me to talk about the upcoming parliamentary elections, which were eventually held in January 2009. I was able to draw comparisons with our presidential race. There was a great deal of interest in then-Senator Obama's candidacy. A lot of the interest may have been because his middle name is Hussein, Hussein being revered by the Shia. Being African-American was another reason. There was an African-Iraqi community in Basra which was especially fascinated; their ancestors had been slaves from the east coast of Africa. (There was a rebellion of African slaves in the late ninth century, called the Zanj rebellion, and their descendants lived in Basra.) I engaged in as much outreach as I could, working with the PRTs, for example to the aforementioned African-Iraqi community and to the Christian community in Basra.

Q: What would you do? Would you go into a majlis and sit around and talk or how would this work?

GRAY: It depended on the security situation. The security situation in Basra, for example, was pretty dicey, so we would meet people at the offices of the Provincial Reconstruction Team. That meant, unfortunately, that we were only meeting with people who were willing to meet with Americans and willing to do so at a PRT. In other provinces, the security situation was more permissive, so one was able to meet with people in their homes. Meetings that stick out in my mind were those held in *mudhifs*, the reed houses or buildings in the South. I believe that they are unique to Iraq, and I have certainly never seen them anywhere else.

Q: Basra and that area had been under the British zone of interest. Had that given a different cast to things?

GRAY: Right. There was a larger British military presence there than there was elsewhere in the country. In fact, shortly after I finished my tour in Iraq our PRT relocated to the British military compound in Iraq.

Q: Did the British military have a different outlook, a different method of operation?

GRAY: I wouldn't say a different outlook, necessarily, but they had a different historical perspective. I remember a fascinating conversation with a British colonel about Basra; I am not sure how much of what he told me was his personal view and how much was him speaking officially. He said that the original British approach to Basra was informed by their experience in Northern Ireland. He felt instead that the British should approach the militias more as if they were criminal gangs – in other words, rather than paramilitary units like the IRA. I thought it was a very interesting observation on his part.

Q: I know that maybe the British military doctrine or something but I was part of an observer team back in the '80s when we were sending teams under OSCE to monitor elections in Bosnia. The American troops would be all buttoned up, went everywhere with bulletproof clothing and helmet on and all and the British were really quite reversed. I mean they got out there and were much more...

GRAY: You bring up an interesting point: different countries had different rules of engagement. For instance, one of the PRTs in the South was led by the Italians, and it was a lot more permissive. Their civilians had fewer security restrictions, so the U.S. members of that Provincial Reconstruction Team couldn't always participate fully in those engagements, which was a source of frustration. It wasn't a source of friction, but it was a source of frustration as the Americans wanted to be more engaged.

Q: I think part of it stems from the fact that we were bound and determined we were not going to have casualties.

GRAY: Finding that right line is always difficult. How do you calibrate it? It is always an issue, and certainly was even more so in Iraq.

Q: Yeah. Well did you find what tools did we have to deal when you made contact with a tribal sheik or one of the leaders? What could we offer them?

GRAY: One of the programs that the U.S. military could offer was something called CERP funding, which stood for Commander's Emergency Response Program. It was a very attractive option for the sheikhs and for those dealing with them. There were advantages to the program, such as the flexibility it offered. The disadvantage is that it was more tactical in nature than strategic, as it didn't always meet long term developmental goals. I remember a Provincial Reconstruction Team colleague observing that there was a tendency among Americans, be they civilian or military, to want to deal with sheikhs. Part of the reason, to put it into a Foreign Service context, is that you join the Foreign Service to meet a sheikh, not to meet a bureaucrat wearing an ill-fitting polyester suit in a run-down provincial town hall. In reality, you have to deal with sheikhs and bureaucrats.

Maliki was the prime minister at the time. He tried to create an extra-legal entity called Tribal Councils. The population in the South was predominantly Shia, so the sheikhs I was talking about were predominantly Shia. In other words, they weren't the Sunni tribes that were enlisted for the Anbar Awakening.

Q: The Sunni-Shia animosity was it so deep you really felt you were not getting anywhere?

GRAY: It wasn't a factor for me because there were so few Sunnis in the South, but on the national level there was an intense level of distrust. There was great suspicion about Maliki by the Sunni community. Some of his subsequent actions validated those suspicions of the Sunni minority.

Q: We in a way had a dual policy of being nice to the Sunnis and being nice to the Shias but in different areas. Did that seem to work?

GRAY: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Q: We seem to have a dual policy of trying to promote or being nice to the Shias and also being nice to the Sunnis depending on which area we were in.

GRAY: I never felt that the year I was in Iraq. We had a number of core principles, recognizing that Iraq is a pluralist or heterogeneous country. With both communities, we tried to promote as much tolerance and respect for minority rights as we could.

Q: The year you were there did you see any progress?

GRAY: I don't want to use the word "progress" because there have been so many bumps in the road since I left. I saw some positive signs during my tour, one of which was the parliamentary elections, which were held at the end of January 2009. They were good elections. I am not saying they met the Swedish standard, but by and large they were

good elections. We conducted an extensive election monitoring operation and observed a number of polling stations, which is always fun to do. Having undertaken the Charge of the Knights campaign against the Sadist militias, Maliki was campaigning more as a nationalist figure - in other words, he was portraying himself as an Iraqi, rather than just a Shia partisan. That was a positive sign, but I don't want to call it progress in light of everything that happened thereafter. I'd also say the year I was there the violence level was somewhat reduced. That being said, the last thing I did in Baghdad before leaving the Green Zone for Baghdad International Airport was to attend a memorial service for some of our personnel who were killed by an IED in a convoy. So while the violence may have been reduced somewhat, it was still very real.

Q: Did the proponents of Imam or a sheik Sadr...?

GRAY: Of whom?

Q: I've not served there so the sheik who had a whole area just outside of Baghdad or in Baghdad he pretty much called the shots.

GRAY: Many militias followed Muqtada Sadr's lead. Part of the reason was his lineage. He came from a very respected family, and his father was murdered by Saddam Hussein's security forces, I believe in the late nineties. His father-in-law was executed in 1980 or so. There was a Shia neighborhood in Baghdad called Sadr City, which is what I think you are referring to.

Q: Did he have a following in the South?

GRAY: Absolutely. Some of his followers were elected in the local elections I described. The Charge of the Knights campaign, which started in March 2008, diminished his influence at the time, although he is back in the news now. His level of political activism has oscillated over the years. At one point he was called Atari Sadr due to his love of video games.

Q: How did you find the situation? There have been many complaints on that, I'm talking about Americans, that early on that many of these were rather naïve right-wing Republican supporters. I would image by the time you got there that sort of thing had diminished considerably.

GRAY: When I was assigned to Baghdad the Embassy was staffed by professionals. Everyone has read the accounts of the lack of coordination and cooperation between the U.S. military and the CPA, but Ryan Crocker and General Petraeus - and then General Odierno - realized to succeed they needed to be on the same page. They cooperated well and it made for a very successful relationship.

Q: How did you find your relations with the embassy? Were they pushing you to do more?

GRAY: What do you mean?

Q: Well in other words did they feel you were doing the right things as regards our mission down there or were they wanting more results?

GRAY: Everyone in Iraq was working hard. There wasn't a lot to do there apart from work anyway, apart from sleeping and working out. So everyone was working long days. When I was in Iraq the only day I took off was Thanksgiving Day, and there were a lot of people who worked on Thanksgiving Day.

Q: Oh God. Well tell me to give a feel what living conditions did you have?

GRAY: When I got there I moved right into the new Embassy compound, which had apartments. I used to joke that if my Baghdad apartment was in New York instead it would go for millions of dollars. It overlooked the river, there was an Olympic-sized pool right across the street, there was free gym membership, free dry cleaning, 24/7 security, etc. The actual living conditions were fine, but in New York City you don't have incoming rockets at night. Conditions were much more rugged for our colleagues on the Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

The chancery wasn't open; it opened in late December 2008/early January 2009. So for the first half of my tour, I worked in a building that had formerly been one of Saddam's places – the Americans simply called it the Palace. I shared a closet with the Senior Advisor for the North, Tom Krajewski. Despite the cramped quarters and the fact that he was a diehard Red Sox fan and I grew up a Yankees fan, we got along great and I enjoyed working with him. Ryan Crocker was keen to move out of the Palace by the end of the year, because he understood (and did not want to perpetuate) the symbolism of the United States working in a former Saddam Palace. The conditions in the new Embassy were much better, even if it lacked the history of the Palace.

Q: Were you working basically out of the embassy or were you down in the Basra area?

GRAY: I tried to travel each week, so I spent part of my week on the road, and used Baghdad as my home base.

Q: When you traveled did you go on convoy?

GRAY: No, we'd go by helicopter.

Q: Did you spend a lot of your time on reports and how were these treated?

GRAY: Did I spend a lot of my time on reports? Yes, but not unduly so.

Q: How would you describe the attitude of the local population down in the South towards the United States?

GRAY: There are two aspects to it. One was gratitude that Saddam Hussein had been overthrown; he was of course brutally repressive in general, but he particularly targeted the Shia. He drained the marshes in the South, for example. While there was gratitude, there was also great disappointment that the U.S. was unable to do more to improve infrastructure. The mood was that the United States is a super power, but the people only had four hours of electricity every day. That baffled them.

Q: Were you making progress on say electricity?

GRAY: Not that I saw in my year there. My sense was power generation and distribution remained spotty. But even if the time that electricity was available doubled from four hours to eight hours a day – and I am making up these numbers to illustrate a point – that still leaves you without electricity sixteen hours a day. That may sound like a good talking point to someone in an air-conditioned office, but it's not going to get you re-elected as mayor of a town in the South.

Q: I lived for two and a half years in Dhahran and August is not a pleasant time.

GRAY: Exactly.

Q: Was there much military activity when you were there?

GRAY: Not as much in the South. As I said, the Charge of the Knights operation had begun in March; it was an Iraqi operation in the first instance. But the year I was there it was not as militarily active in the South, although there were Special Forces operations. And I do not mean to slight the sacrifices our military made.

Q: By the way what were happening with the marshes? They'd been drained by Saddam and were we working to restore them?

GRAY: There were long-term projects looking at restoration but I do not know what came of them. The move from the Palace to the new Embassy, and all that that entailed logistically, provided Ryan Crocker with a good window to travel outside of Baghdad and visit the South. A number of us accompanied him, including on a memorable boat ride in the marshes. The Zodiac carrying our U.S. military escorts, who were each wearing about 50 pounds of PPE (personal protective gear – the armor plated vests we wore a great deal of the time we were outside the Green Zone), started to sink very slowly while the older Iraqi canoe-like boats did just fine. I thought it was an unfortunately appropriate but apt metaphor for the U.S. experience in Iraq.

Q: I can see what you mean. When you left there where did you go?

GRAY: I left there at the very end of May 2009 – May 30, to be exact.

Q: How did you feel when you left about whither in Iraq?

GRAY: Let me put it this way: I was more optimistic when I left than I had been when I arrived, but I was still not very optimistic. I always bore in mind what Ryan said, “Everything about Iraq is hard and it’s hard all the time.” But looking at a number of trends – the Charge of the Knights and the government’s willingness to go after the Sadrist militias; looking at the successful local elections in the January 2009 provincial elections; and the Strategic Framework Agreement worked out with the Iraqis, which provided a plan for the way ahead – all of these were promising signs. The Kuwaitis sent an Ambassador to Baghdad, so there was even a glimmer of hope that relations with the Sunni Arab countries might improve. In other words, there were a number of necessary steps forward, but it does not yet look as if they were sufficient. I don’t think anyone who had been in Iraq for a year would say that he or she was optimistic.

Q: Yeah. Well how about relations with Kuwait? Was there any progress made with that?

GRAY: The bottom line is no. The Kuwaitis were admirably restrained and willing to take the extra step – for example, they sent an ambassador. One case I worked on illustrates the point. Some Iraqi farmers were living on the Kuwaiti side of the border, and the Kuwaitis offered to pay for housing for them so they could be relocated. There were a number of concrete steps envisioned – confidence building measures, if you will – and the Iraqis just wouldn’t move forward, even though it was in their best interests to do so. A lot of the reluctance was due to political jockeying; there was no political will to move forward. The Foreign Ministry was not the problem. The deputy foreign minister, whom I dealt with extensively, was very reasonable and Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, who was Kurdish, was reasonable as well. While the Foreign Ministry was flexible and pragmatic, it stood alone.

Q: What about the missing Kuwaitis?

GRAY: That issue was a continuing concern, of course, for the Kuwaitis. It was another issue in which the Iraqis could have been more forthcoming – for example, by allowing forensic teams in the country.

Q: What do you think happened?

GRAY: I think they were murdered. I don’t think there is any doubt about that. Saddam had no compunction about murdering Iraqis so I’m sure he had even less about murdering Kuwaitis.

TUNISIA

Q: Well then where did you go after you left Baghdad?

GRAY: Right after I left Baghdad I returned to Washington and took the Ambassadorial Seminar. I was announced on June 11 and started the course on June 15.

Q: And you were going to go to where?

GRAY: To Tunisia.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the Ambassadorial Seminar. How did you find that?

GRAY: I returned from Iraq, had two weeks of leave, and then started the seminar. My wife took it with me, so it was like being on a date every day. We had seventeen in our seminar, which was larger than most seminars; of those seventeen, thirteen were non-career appointees. Of the career nominees, I had been DCM in Cairo, one had been DCM in London, and another had been Deputy Executive Secretary. So I think we served more as a resource for our colleagues who were new to the State Department. I always found it curious that the Deputy Chief of Mission course was a three-week course, and – at least at the time – the Chief of Mission course was only a two-week course. Everyone in the DCM course is career, of course, and therefore knows all the acronyms, the wiring diagrams, etc., whereas a lot of people in the Chief of Mission course were not just new to the State Department, but new to the federal government. But I understand that the Ambassadorial Seminar is now a three-week course.

Q: Was there a built in suspicion with the political appointees of the Foreign Service?

GRAY: No, I can't say I sensed that at all. I think the biggest gripe was the lengthy vetting process. First of all, the vetting process is opaque to begin with. Second, if you are a senior Foreign Service officer you have become accustomed to filling out security questionnaires your entire career, and eventually to filling out financial disclosure forms. In addition, my guess is that the assets of the average career State Department employee are probably a bit less complicated than the assets of the average non-career appointee. I never sensed any kind of suspicion of the Foreign Service in the seminar; what it was like at post, I can't speak to. In general, the non-career people wanted to pick our brains to see what it was really like to lead a mission.

Q: I think one of the big traps of the Foreign Service officers is that they tend to try and take the work away from the non-career officers and say, "Oh let me do that," or something.

GRAY: Could be. The only time I served under a non-career ambassador was when I was a mid-level officer, so there was no way I was going to tell the Ambassador "let me do that."

Q: Okay let's talk about Tunisia. You were going to Tunisia and you served there from when to when?

GRAY: I served there from 2009 to 2012. But before we proceed, I think this is a good break point.

Q: Yeah and we will pick it up the next time in Tunisia when you've just arrived there and I want to talk about what the situation was and all, okay?

Q: Okay that sounds good.

GRAY: We solved Iraq.

Q: Yeah.

Q: Okay, let me make my announcement. Today is the 9th of June 2016 with Gordon Gray. Gordon, you are off to Tunisia.

GRAY: That's right.

Q: I don't know if I asked before but how are did the job come up?

GRAY: The usual way. Having served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Cairo and having served as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Near East Bureau, I was in the zone, so to speak. It was the logical next assignment, I was interested, and it all came together.

Q: Okay, you served there from when to when?

GRAY: I got there September 2009 and I left July 2012.

Q: What was the situation there just before you went out?

GRAY: In the summer of 2008 – about a year before I arrived in Tunisia – there were labor strikes in Gafsa, a mining town in the center of the country. There were some manifestations of discontent with the Ben Ali regime and with the economic situation; the government was able to step in and put it down. Then, moving forward to 2009, there was an election coming up in October 2009, and everyone knew the result. Credible opposition candidates were barred from running. There was discontent and resignation about the political situation.

Q: Could you explain and set the scene what was the government like there and what was the economic international reputation at that point before we move on?

GRAY: Tunisia had been a French protectorate since 1881, and it gained independence in 1956. Habib Bourguiba was the first president; he had been the leader of the independence movement. He was very much secular in his outlook. Women had more rights in Tunisia than elsewhere in the Arab world. Sixty year have passed since independence, and Tunisia is still the only Arab country in which polygamy was outlawed. Tunisian women got the vote before Swiss women did. Bourguiba devoted more money to education than to the defense budget; a considerable amount of government money was spent on education. Tunisia was not dependent on a single commodity, i.e., oil, the way Algeria (to the west) and Libya (to the south and east) were, so it had to diversify its economy. The result of all of these factors was, by regional

standards, a tolerant, well-educated society, which had a high home ownership rate, a significant middle class, and the like.

Bourguiba was president from independence until November 7, 1987, when Ben Ali took over in what was sometimes called the medical coup. Bourguiba was suffering from senility; sometimes he was lucid and sometimes less so. In accordance with the constitution, then-Prime Minister Ben Ali took over as President. His move was well-received at the time. As a parenthetical, I would note that I remember the day of the coup very well because I was a staff assistant in NEA. November 7 was a Saturday and I was driving into work day early that morning. (There were two of us, and we alternated working each weekend.) I heard the news on the radio and thought, “Oh great, there goes my whole weekend.” But we had a very good office director in the office of North African Affairs, Mary Ann Casey, who later served as Ambassador to Tunisia herself. As a result all the paper moved quickly and the weekend was not as long as I had feared from the work perspective.

Ben Ali set himself up as, in effect, president for life. He kept being elected president with 99 percent margins and the like, although it was dialed back to 94 percent in 2004 and 89 percent in 2009. There was less and less political discourse in the country. As in many countries, there was an unspoken social contract, with the government in effect saying that we may not give you all of the rights that you would want, such as freedom of expression or other political rights, but we will take care of you economically. That worked for quite a while; Tunisia’s economic growth rates were decent. One part of the equation that changed, though, was that Ben Ali’s family started to take a larger and larger percentage of business opportunities. The economic pie, so to speak, was no longer growing. That is one reason that Tunisia had such a low rate of domestic investment. To sum up, there was calm on the surface but discontent below the surface.

Q: What were our interests in Tunisia when you went out there?

GRAY: We had two categories of primary interests. The first category was cooperation on security issues, and particularly on terrorism issues. The second category was encouraging Tunisia to open up its political sphere. We have economic interests in virtually every country, but with a population of just over ten million people, Tunisia is not a major market for the United States. Seventy five to eighty percent of its trade is with Europe, which is understandable for economic and historical reasons.

Q: Did we see Tunisia as a buffer regarding Libya?

GRAY: I think we probably had viewed it that way in the past, but not when I served there. The Tunisians were keenly aware of how erratic Qadhafi was; they had to live with him. So we had pretty good cooperation with the Tunisians in the seventies, eighties, and nineties vis-à-vis Libya. But when our own relationship with Libya started to change, due to some of the events that I described in earlier interviews, it was less of a pressing shared interest.

Q: When you went out there were we looking for regime change or was it something we could relax and live with?

GRAY: Regime change was not our policy, but our policy was definitely to encourage the regime to relax its restrictions on political expression and the like.

Q: When you arrived how were you received? Did they see you as a menace or a friend?

GRAY: The Tunisians placed a fair amount of importance on ambassadors, and I think particularly the U.S. ambassador and the French ambassador. It was especially so under the Ben Ali regime as the regime was very protocol conscious.

Q: What was your embassy like the officers and all?

GRAY: When I arrived we had about just north of 90 U.S. direct hire employees at post; that number includes the Foreign Service Institute field school. We had just over 240 locally engaged staff. I would describe it as a medium-sized embassy. We had a combined political/economic section, and for both officers in that section and for the military officers there was a great deal of frustration because the Ben Ali government was exceedingly difficult to work. The regime was very standoffish and very suspicious of foreigners, albeit very polite on the surface. I think Ben Ali was particularly suspicious of some of the larger embassies, including ours.

Q: How were relations with the French?

GRAY: Tunisia's relations or embassy's?

Q: Yes, Tunisia.

GRAY: Tunisia had very close relations with the French, particularly during the Ben Ali regime. French is the second language in Tunisia, and many members of the Tunisian elite and the Tunisian middle class have been educated in French. After the revolution, Sarkozy replaced his Foreign Minister, who had been very pro-Ben Ali in her public and private statements. The French also recalled their ambassador at the time. Sarkozy and Ben Ali had had a good relationship.

Q: Before all hell broke loose did you have much of a problem at all with the tourist business?

GRAY: No. Before the revolution there weren't a tremendous number of American tourists. I attribute that in part to the absence of direct flights. My predecessor and I – and I am sure others as well – pushed the Tunisians hard for an Open Skies agreement, but we still don't have one. A second reason for the relative dearth of American tourists was that Tunisia was not as well known before the revolution, particularly in comparison to, say, Morocco. But tourism was an important part of the Tunisian economy. It probably

contributed directly to seven or eight percent of the GDP, and indirectly another seven or eight percent.

Q: Were any countries meddling around there, Iran or Egypt?

GRAY: No. The Iranians had a larger mission than one might have expected, but my sense was that their activities were circumscribed. The Egyptians have a good diplomatic corps and were well represented, but they were not meddling, and I don't think the Tunisians believed they were.

Q: While you were there now what happened?

GRAY: Can I back up a little?

Q: Yes.

GRAY: As I said, there were presidential elections in October of 2009. Not everyone was free to run; they were very tightly controlled elections. According to the government figures, Ben Ali got 89 percent of the vote. The elections were held each five years and in the 1999 elections, he got 99 percent; in the 2004 elections, 94 percent; and I guess they decided to dial it back to 89 percent for the 2009 elections. I actually find the 89 percent figure somewhat credible, in the sense that the only people who would have bothered to vote were pro-government party members. What I find totally unbelievable was the government assertion that there was a 90 percent turnout. There is never going to be a 90 percent turnout when the result is a foregone conclusion. I was out and about on election day, and the Embassy had a very robust election observation mission operation. There was simply no way the turnout was 90 percent. You heard that again and again after the 2011 revolution, when the first free and fair elections were held on October 23, 2011. So many people said that this was the first time they had ever voted in an election.

The Embassy therefore very strongly recommended (and Washington followed our recommendation) against any kind of routine congratulatory message from President Obama to President Ben Ali. For the State Department, these are fairly routine messages. Our argument, though, was that no matter how finely crafted the letter of congratulations was, and no matter how much it talked about the need for opening up the political sphere, etc., no one would read the fine print. All the Tunisians would see in the government controlled press would be a picture of Ben Ali, a picture of President Obama, and the headline, "President Obama Congratulates President Ben Ali." So we made sure there was no such message, and there wasn't. As I noted earlier, the Tunisian government under the Ben Ali regime was very protocol conscious, and it became a large issue in the bilateral relationship. The Tunisians ended up recalling their ambassador from Washington. When I say they recalled him, I don't mean for consultations - I mean they recalled him for good. They blamed him for not being able to secure a congratulatory message. Shortly thereafter - January 14, 2010 - the Palace changed foreign ministers, which I found very interesting. I am not attributing the change to the lack of a congratulatory message, as there very well may have been a change anyway after the

election. The outgoing Foreign Minister, Abdelwahab Abdallah, was very close to the Palace and was also perceived as tilting toward the French, whereas the new Foreign Minister, Kamel Morjane, had a reputation for being more open to the United States. Regardless of the reason, I found the timing interesting. The whole episode taught me an important lesson: sometimes what you don't say is just as important as what you do say. Most important was not the government's reaction, but the reaction of Tunisian civil society. Civil society knew that we didn't send a congratulatory message; they derived some satisfaction and some sense of encouragement and support.

Q: What did the French and British embassies do?

GRAY: It was quite interesting to observe the difference stances of the European Union countries, notwithstanding the allegedly common foreign and security policy they share. The southern Europeans had a very strong interest in maintaining good relations with Tunisia for commercial and migration reasons. These calculations of the short term interest of their countries were rationale, so I'm not criticizing them. But the further north one went in Europe, the more willing the government and the Embassy were to express their concerns about the lack of human rights in Tunisia. I recall that the French reaction was effusive and the British reaction was more nuanced. I don't think anyone in Tunisia outside the British Embassy read fine print in their nuanced congratulatory letter, though.

Q: Did you get any pat on the back or annoyance from your diplomatic colleagues from other embassies?

GRAY: No, I think our Embassy worked very effectively with other like-minded embassies at the DCM level and at the working level, not only at the ambassadorial level. With my British, Canadian, Dutch, and German colleagues – and others, but particularly with those – we had very open discussions about what we thought the wisest course of action would be. So there was no angst expressed about our action – or lack thereof - because the lines of communication were open. They understood clearly where we were coming from and what we were advocating.

Just a little bit more than a year after the election in Tunisia, the WikiLeaks cables were published. I understand that French diplomats, and not just those in Tunisia, were a bit chagrined because the leaked cables showed the extent to which U.S. diplomats report honestly. Their complaint was that they were also reporting and making human rights representations as well. I think there was a fair amount of sympathy for our approach at the working-level of the French Embassy in Tunis.

Q: Well, did you find that after the elections and our lack of positive response that relations cooled even more?

GRAY: Even more. Relations were “correct” to begin with, but even with that low standard we received an even colder shoulder from the Tunisian government. Without going into details in an unclassified conversation, the Tunisians put our security cooperation on the shelf or in the freezer - whichever metaphor you prefer. It was cutting

off their nose to spite their face. But the Minister of Interior was not just responsible for security; he was also a member of the ruling party (the RCD) and the ruling party's politburo. He was wearing two hats. While he did not exercise very good judgment wearing his security hat, I suppose he did what he felt he needed to do wearing his RCD hat.

Q: Did you get any friends of the embassy in the general population? Did they bring up the subject?

GRAY: On what subject?

Q: Sort of the lack of positive response to the election.

GRAY: Civil society? They knew. There were positive reactions from civil society.

Q: Okay well we'll move on to what was happening after the elections?

GRAY: As I said, relations were correct at best. From the Embassy's perspective, we were trying to find traction to build a bit closer of a relationship with the government and, at the same time, with the Tunisian people and their civil society groups. One way we were able to bridge the gap somewhat was humanitarian assistance program. It was a wonderful program funded by U.S. Africa Command, which would fund relatively small scale projects: up to \$500,000. That may be a lot of money for you and me, but it isn't for the U.S. budget. We worked with non-governmental organizations on projects such as drug prevention clinics and the like. It was one way we could work with civil society without getting anyone in civil society in trouble with the government. The government saw the benefits of these projects.

I'll give you two vignettes, if I may, about 2010, which I think illustrate how difficult it was to gain any traction. As a former Peace Corps volunteer, I was very interested in trying to re-establish a Peace Corps program in Tunisia. There had been one in the country for over thirty years, until the mid-nineties. We were trying to build people-to-people relationships, especially with young people, so it was a natural fit. I was able to sell it to Sakher El Materi, the president's son-in-law who had been "elected" to Parliament and who was widely believed to have greater political aspirations. He expressed his interest, but it was shot down by the Palace. Foreign Minister Morjane took me aside at the French National Day reception in 2010 and with some ire told me "Do not ever raise this subject again." The irony was that his first English teacher had been a Peace Corps volunteer, and I think if it had been up to him he would have supported the program's return. But the Palace didn't want anything to do with it. Part of the reason is that they did not want to have a lot of young Americans spread throughout the country because – in the Palace's mind - who know what subversive things they would be up to? And I strongly suspect that another part of the reason was, again, the hyper-sensitivity to image, and the feeling that Tunisia did not need the Peace Corps any more.

The other illustration about how difficult it was for American diplomats to work in Tunisia was a trip I took to Sfax, which is on the coast about three hours south of Tunisia. It is the second largest city in Tunisia. I went there with a first tour officer on what I would describe as a typical ambassadorial visit. I called on the governor and we had also set up a luncheon at a hotel so that I could meet some very main stream people: a Member of Parliament, the President of the university, etc. In other words, I was not meeting with activists or any one controversial. Only one person showed up for the luncheon. No one else attended because they had all gotten a call about an hour before the lunch was scheduled to begin warning them against going to the lunch. The sole attendee was the university president's representative, who had not been warned off. After the revolution, the Member of Parliament and at least one other invitee apologized, saying how embarrassed they were, but explaining that they had gotten a call from the governor an hour before lunch telling them not to go.

That night I went to a dinner hosted by a Tunisian businessman who was well disposed to the United States. He had gotten some pressure to cancel the dinner, but he was independent enough that he wasn't about to do so. I was chatting to a couple at the dinner; he was the director of ports and she ran an English language institute. When I mentioned that I had taught English in the Peace Corps, she asked me if I wanted to stop by her institute the next day. Since another meeting had been cancelled, and since I was interested in the first place, I readily agreed. So I visited the next day, saw the kids learning English, and went on my merry way. She was called into the Ministry of Interior twice to be interrogated about what actually went on during that visit. That sense of paranoia by the Ministry of Interior, who wanted complete control, made it a very difficult to work.

But it also meant there were signals you could send. Tunisia has a long-standing human rights NGO. When it had its anniversary reception, we sent our human rights officer, who was prevented by a plainclothes policeman from entering the building. But again, Tunisian civil society knew that we were the only Embassy that had sent someone. In other words, it was possible to leverage the government's restrictions against itself.

In short, before the revolution it was not an easy place to work. It is a beautiful country, and I'm not talking about power outages or deprivations of any sort, but it was difficult with the government.

Q: Did you get any high-level visitors?

GRAY: Not particularly high level. The American Battlefield Monuments Commission looks after military cemeteries such as Normandy. Its only one in Africa is in Tunisia, due to the 1942-1943 campaign, so we would get flag officers, including the Commander of U.S. Africa Command, for Veterans Day and Memorial Day. Our Assistant Secretary at the time, Jeff Feltman, had headed the political/economic section in Tunis from 1998-2000, visited. During his meeting with Ben Ali, which I attended, Jeff raised human rights issues. In reply, Ben Ali told Jeff that he was being misinformed by his Embassy. Having served in Tunis, Jeff knew we were just calling it like it was. He was the wrong

person to try that line on. When Jeff came to the Embassy and met with the Country Team, he thanked us for not allowing any clientism to creep into our reporting. I replied that “This was really no place to have any clientism, given the nature of the government.”

Q: Well I take it that in a way although everything is idealistic in one sense it wasn't really a very fun place to be?

GRAY: I had been in Iraq the year before. Tunisia is green, there weren't any incoming rockets, there were lots of things to see, and if you didn't want to see the things in Tunisia you could easily travel to Europe. The food was great, with lots of fresh fish and vegetables. The infrastructure was good. But work-wise it was challenging. Frustrating is probably the best word more than challenging. It was still a very nice assignment.

Q: While you were there what were the major developments? What happened?

GRAY: Let me talk about WikiLeaks for just a moment, if I may.

Q: Yes, explain what they are.

GRAY: That would have been November of 2010, so most of the cables that were leaked – I should say stolen – had been written by the previous team. I remember reading many of them when I was Deputy Assistant Secretary. Among other things, they chronicled meetings with human rights activists and also the level of corruption that I had alluded to. In particular, they discussed Ben Ali's family taking control of assets and businesses, and always pressing to increase its role. So they created a bit of sensation, as you can imagine, in Tunisia and elsewhere, of course. Some embassy contacts were burned, unfortunately, and we had prominent people saying, “Listen, I'm not going to talk to you for a while because of what I saw.” After the revolution, they made themselves available again, but their reluctance after being burned was totally understandable.

The Department gave us a heads up that the cables were going to be released, but we didn't know which cables would be or exactly when they would come out. I wanted to get the advice of my Deputy Chief of Mission, Natalie Brown, and my political/economic counselor, Ian McCary, on how to proceed with the Tunisian government. Natalie and I had served together in IO, and Ian and I had served together in both Cairo and Baghdad. I had kept in touch with both of them when we weren't serving together. I trusted their judgment implicitly. I wasn't sure whether I should give the foreign minister a heads up or not. I didn't see how that conversation was going to have a happy conclusion. That wasn't necessarily a problem, because you get paid the big bucks to have unhappy conversations, but I wasn't sure how it would protect U.S. interests. Natalie and Ian rightly advised me to speak with him. I spoke with him one-to-one and told him “I have no idea what is going to be in these cables, but they are confidential cables and are therefore very likely to be embarrassing.” The cables came out, and since some of them discussed the Ben Ali family's corruption, the natural question was how would the Palace respond. The Tunisian government was in a bit of a quandary. Some people in

Washington thought I was going to get kicked out not – not because of anything I had written or done, but simply because I was the U.S. ambassador at the time. The Tunisian government basically decided to take the high road, which was probably the right tactical decision. Asking me to leave would have brought even more attention to the issue of corruption. I was convoked, tellingly not by the foreign minister but by Ben Dhia, who was an advisor at the Palace and who was very close to the president. He confirmed that they were not going to make it an issue and I am not sure that they had much choice. If they pursued some sort of retribution, it would only serve to validate the criticism.

That being said our Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs came for a visit a couple weeks later. We met with the Foreign Minister, who just chewed him out over this issue. After the revolution, the Foreign Minister apologized to me for the times he chewed me out, saying “I got instructions from the Palace to do so.” He added, and I’ll always remember the phrase, “with fire in my eyes.” I was glad to hear it, not because I wanted an apology, but because Ian and I never felt his heart was in it. I did the WikiLeaks meeting one-on-one, but otherwise I always took Ian as my note taker because he wrote very well, he had very good judgment, and I trusted him totally.

One other aspect of pre-revolution cooperation (or lack thereof) was that the defense relationship was not what it could have been. We provided around \$6 million in assistance to the military. I should note that the Tunisians had not made a mistake of buying the latest toys to keep up with their neighbors, and they did not over-invest in defense. While we had a good relationship with the military, as with so much in Tunisia it was constrained by the Palace, which did not trust its own military in the first place. We had a good relationship at the personal level; we always sensed they wanted to do more than they were allowed to.

We held our annual Joint Military Commission meeting with the Tunisians in the late spring of 2010. Robert Gates was the Secretary of Defense at the time, and to his credit he really chewed out the Tunisian Defense Minister for the lack of military-to-military cooperation. It was the only time I had been in a meeting with Secretary Gates; while he didn’t raise his voice at all, he was so clear that the Tunisian interpreter was really, really sweating. In the first place, he was not a professional interpreter. I don’t know why the Tunisian side insisted on using him rather than our interpreter, who was a real pro. Second of all, he was being called upon to translate the rather harsh message. But Secretary Gates was very clear, and his message was helpful for us. I would observe that it is too often the case that people in Washington pound their chests and say, “We need to deliver a hard message,” and then melt when a foreign visitor comes to town. Secretary Gates was certainly not impolite, but he was crystal clear, and that was very much appreciated by those of us who worked in Tunisia.

Q: I want to go back just a bit for somebody who is reading this is from a different generation. Could you just briefly just explain what WikiLeaks were?

GRAY: Sure – let me really back up. One of the findings of the 9/11 Commission was that there was too little information being shared among U.S. Government agencies. The

phrase that entered the lexicon was that there had been a failure to connect the dots. As the laws of physics show us, for every action there is an equal reaction. As a result, for reason almost all State Department cables were made available to U.S. military websites and in the case of WikiLeaks. A Private First Class (PFC) at a Foreign Operating Base was able to download perhaps hundreds of thousands of State Department cables. Some of the cables were routine unclassified messages, but others reported on sensitive political issues and/or named sources. The PFC gave the cables to an organization called WikiLeaks, which is headed by Julian Assange, and they were published.

Q: Yeah and obviously they caused quite a sensation in foreign ministries and our department of Defense.

GRAY: They absolutely did, as very candid observations were shared. My good friend Gene Cretz was our ambassador in Libya at the time. We had served together in Pakistan on our first tour and we had served together in Cairo. He was threatened by the Libyans following the publication of some of Embassy Tripoli's cables, and the U.S. Government decided to withdraw him from Tripoli for his own safety. If people think WikiLeaks was only a matter of some cables being released, they are not looking at the complete picture. There was a serious effect on how we do business, and it affected the lives of our contacts and the lives of some of our colleagues.

Q: How were you informed about these? Were you given a heads up before or was it in the press and then you braced yourself?

GRAY: We got a heads up from the Department, to the extent that the Department was able to. When I say to the extent that it was able to, I mean that our colleagues in Washington didn't know exactly what was going to be released. We felt well served by the State Department, and it is important to note that these were not leaks from the State Department system.

To provide a bit of context, I want to note that in June of 2010 or so – in other words, before WikiLeaks – a little-noticed Executive order was issued. It greatly expanded the number of recipients of classified material within the U.S. Government. I am not at all suggesting that there was any correlation between this Executive order and WikiLeaks, because there was not. But it relaxed the restrictions and guidelines on the dissemination of classified documents, and gave less leeway to the originator of the cable. As a result, at our Embassy we started to restrict the dissemination of our cables (again, this was before WikiLeaks) based upon our reading of that Executive order and the clarifications we had sought. In many ways it was a typical Washington decision, as it was presumably made by people who apparently did not have a full understanding of how classified information is collected, disseminated, and used by consumers in Washington.

Q: Did you find that the WikiLeaks episode had a significant impact on your reporting and your fellow officers reporting?

GRAY: No, because it was followed so shortly thereafter by the revolution and there was a completely changed domestic environment. As a matter of fact, there was a narrative that WikiLeaks somehow led to the Arab Spring because it confirmed what people thought about the Ben Ali regime. I find that interpretation to be a little too America-centric to be convincing. Tunisians didn't need foreigners to tell them that Ben Ali and Leila Trabelsi and their family were corrupt; they knew that already without us telling them.

Q: Shall we turn to the Arab Spring or do you want to try another time?

GRAY: I think this is probably a good breaking point.

Q: Okay, then I'll put here at the end as I usually do we will talk about this major thing what lead up to the Arab Spring and what your experiences were during that the next time.

GRAY: Okay.

Q: Today is the 21st of July 2016 with Gordon Gray. Gordon, we've reached the so-called Arab Spring and it started in your backyard.

GRAY: That's right.

Q: Do you want to talk about how things were just before the bloom came on the rose or whatever it is and then...

GRAY: Certainly. We left off with WikiLeaks, which occurred toward the end of November 2010. As I had said, I was skeptical of the narrative that the release of the cables somehow led to the Arab Spring. The revelations of corruption by the Ben Ali family were no surprise to the Tunisians. The events that did precipitate Ben Ali's ouster started on Friday, December 17, 2010. Mohamed Bouazizi was an underemployed university graduate in Sidi Bouzid, which was in the center of the country and therefore less economically developed. He had a confrontation with a policewoman who apparently slapped him; he was selling fruits and vegetables from his cart and didn't have a permit. From his perspective, he was being hassled by the authorities. The bigger grievance that I think he had was the lack of respect from the authorities. He went to the municipal authorities to complain, but no one would see him. Out of desperation he set himself on fire. In Islam, as in many religions, suicide is considered a sin. It was obviously an extreme measure in any society, and certainly in Tunisia was not an exception. He did not die immediately, and I'll get to that in a minute.

Demonstrations then began to build, first in Sidi Bouzid. News of the demonstrations spread due to more capable cell phones, which enabled people to take videos. *Al Jazeera* used cell phone video footage of the demonstrations, and the videos were also spread on Facebook, which was not blocked. Cell phone footage and *Al Jazeera* coverage were the two biggest mechanisms that spread word of the demonstrations – remember that the

regime tightly controlled the Tunisian media. On December 28, 2010, Ben Ali visited Bouazizi in his hospital room. Bouazizi was wrapped in bandages and the fact that such a remote authoritarian figure as Ben Ali actually visited one of his “subjects” was quite surprising to me. Of course, it was all over the media, because anything Ben Ali did was covered extensively in the government controlled media. The visit, illustrated by the widely publicized photograph, was when we at the Embassy felt that the regime was truly in trouble. The gallows humor was who was really dying: the Ben Ali regime or Bouazizi? (He eventually succumbed to his burns on January 4, 2011, ten days before Ben Ali fled the country.)

In terms of our analyzing the situation, I was struck that my Eastern Europeans counterparts in the diplomatic corps felt right away that Ben Ali was on his way out. From their perspective, they had seen this movie already in their own countries. I am sure that the Romanians, for example, saw a number of lot of similarities between the Ben Ali family and the Ceausescu family.

The demonstrations continued and intensified, getting to the point that the security forces were starting to overreact, and people were being killed. We called on the government to exercise restraint but unfortunately it did not. We did that publicly and privately, and the point of no return was the weekend of the 8th and the 9th of January, 2011. Security forces fired on demonstrators and credible estimates were that two dozen people were killed. After those killings the demonstrations spread very quickly.

I would note two events that took place on Thursday, January 13. One was Secretary Clinton’s speech at the Forum for the Future in Doha, in which she highlighted the need for Arab autocrats to reform and be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of their people. As she put it, “In too many places, in too many ways, the region’s foundations are sinking into the sand.” I think that that part of her speech stuck in everyone’s mind the next day and in the months thereafter. The second event that day was that Ben Ali gave his third and final speech. One of the interesting things about it was that he gave the speech in the Tunisian dialogue of Arabic; a lot of Tunisians remarked that they had never heard him speak in dialect before. He also pledged to remove the censorship of the media, and, sure enough, as soon as the speech concluded YouTube, which had been blocked, was opened. The Tunisians rushed to YouTube and other social media and to websites to see if they were available, and they were. There was also, as I recall, a televised discussion of the speech afterwards; that was unprecedented. Many people told me afterwards that if he had given that speech three months earlier he wouldn’t have had to leave office. But the speech was too little, too late.

The next day was Friday the 14th, exactly four weeks after Bouazizi had set himself on fire. There were very large demonstrations in downtown Tunis, on Avenue Habib Bourguiba, which is akin to Fifth Avenue in New York City; it’s one of the main thoroughfares in downtown Tunis. There were also very big demonstrations in other cities along the coast. It is important to note that the demonstrations had spread from the impoverished interior of the country to the more affluent coastal cities. Demonstrators were not only people without work or the underemployed; the middle class was

demonstrating as well. Toward the end of the day, Ben Ali and his family got in an airplane, took off, and landed in Saudi Arabia. The first reports were that he was headed to France but that the French denied him permission to land. So he headed to Jeddah, where he remains to this day.

I'll offer perspectives from two different people on his departure. One was that of a very senior minister who was also a member of the ruling party Politburo. He told me about a month after Ben Ali left that he had spoken with Ben Ali twice that day (January 14). The first time was early in the morning; he related that Ben Ali chewed him out about an interview he'd given. The second conversation was around 2 p.m. on routine government business. He said in neither case did Ben Ali give him the impression that he was going to leave. Subsequently there was a *Le Monde* interview with the pilot of Ben Ali's plane, whose account was that he did not think that Ben Ali had intended to leave the country for good. The pilot speculated that perhaps he only intended to take his family out of the country for security purposes (i.e., for their safety). These two perspectives lead me to believe that, when he woke up on January 14, Ben Ali did not intend to depart the country.

Q: During this time of unrest what was the embassy doing?

GRAY: The Tunisian-American school is right across the highway from the Embassy, and it was closed on that Friday. We issued an alert to American citizens and made sure that everyone had their radios and participated in the weekly radio check. We asked for additional security for the school and for the embassy. Also on that day (the 14th) I held a town hall meeting for the Embassy community. My real audience was the Tunisian national employees because it was obvious that changes were coming even though at the time the town hall meeting took place Ben Ali had not yet departed. There was a very spirited discussion during the town hall meeting, and I remember saying in the town hall meeting that when I stepped into the atrium I was proud to lead the mission, and when I left I was even more proud. I was very impressed with the caliber of people who worked at the mission.

The embassy itself was not in peril because the demonstrations against Ben Ali did not have an anti-American component to them. Perhaps we were in the eye of the storm. As a matter of fact, some people had signs saying, "Yes, we can." At that point I had served on and off in the Middle East and North Africa for over thirty years, and if you had told me that there would be a large demonstration in the region in which people chanted the campaign slogan of the sitting American president, I would not have believed. There were no demonstrations directed at or even near the embassy, and the embassy was not downtown. We of course had to be prudent, there wasn't anger directed at the United States.

Q: What were the people shouting, what were the demonstrations asking for?

GRAY: To sum it up in one word, demonstrators chanted a French word: *dégage*. It means, in essence, scam, get out, resign, but scam captures the spirit of the word the

best. One of the aspects of the Tunisian revolution that makes it different from many other revolutions is that there was no real leadership. It was a spontaneous, grassroots movement. The unifying principle was to get rid of the ruler and the ruling family. That meant that after the revolution there was no single group that could claim ownership and therefore claim legitimacy: not the Islamists, not the labor union, not the Left, not the Right, etc. I think that is important to keep in mind, because it made political consensus possible later on. I should add as a parenthetical comment that three weeks later the crowds in Tahrir Square in Cairo were also chanting two Tunisian slogans: *dégage* and “the people demand the end of the regime,” which sounds much catchier in Arabic than it does in English. I later heard a report that the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators also chanted “the people demand the end of the regime.”

Q: Where people coming to you in Tunisia saying, “You Americans do something?”

GRAY: Were the Americans what?

Q: We weren't a player in a way?

GRAY: I would say that even though it was very difficult for Tunisians to meet with foreign officials, civil society and particularly human rights groups and the like knew that we were making the effort to meet with them. Let me give you a few concrete examples. In the last interview I mentioned that the United States was the only leading country that did not send a congratulatory message to Ben Ali to plaster on the front page of the government newspapers; that was noticed. The French Foreign Minister spent New Year's weekend, in other words after the demonstrations had started, in Tunisia with a leading Tunisian businessman who was close to the ruling family. She reportedly gave a toast to the health of Ben Ali, etc. I wasn't there, so I don't know if she gave the toast or not, but it is important that the Tunisian popular perception was that she did. The perception was that Sarkozy and Ben Ali were close. The day before Ben Ali left, in other words on January 13, the French Foreign Minister was quoted as saying that France would be willing to send teargas to help with crowd control during the demonstrations. So there was a pretty obvious distinction between which way the French were leaning, and which way the United States was leading. Everything the French said was, of course, magnified because of the prevalence of the French media and the fact that French is the second language for most Tunisians. I am not pointing this out to bash the French. As I said earlier, they made a calculation that they felt advanced their short-term and, you could argue, even medium-term interests. Instead, I am making these observations to show how the United States was well-positioned. In fact, after Ben Ali fled, Paris fired the French Foreign Minister and replaced my counterpart. All things being equal, we were about as well-positioned as we could have been.

Q: During this time was there any coordination or anything between the various embassies or were you all more or less in the same hunker down position?

GRAY: I would say there was a pretty good exchange of information among NATO embassies and like-minded friendly embassies. It was not necessarily coordination, but

there was very definitely an exchange of information. People were very interested in seeing what the United States was going to, including in terms of staying or pulling people out.

Q: How was Washington acting from your perspective during you time?

GRAY: There wasn't a great deal of focus on North Africa before the Arab Spring. It was not a crisis zone, and Washington tends to focus on crises whether it wants to or not. I did a conference call the evening of January 14 with State and NSC staff; others may have been on the line or in the room. I do not recall anything particularly surprising from that call. This might be a good time to go into the security aspects, if I may.

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: Weekend timing helped us to manage the security aspects. Ben Ali left the country Friday evening, January 14; in addition to the weekend falling on January 15-16, the embassy was already scheduled to be closed on Monday, January 17 in observance of Dr. King's birthday. In other words, we didn't have to tell people not to come to work for the next three days, because there were no scheduled work days. While there was not violence targeted against the United States, there was some violence, including some very unfortunate collateral damage inflicted on the property of a few of our personnel. No one was hurt, thank goodness. Here's what I mean: the Tunisians knew which properties were owned by Ben Ali's relatives, and some, perhaps even many, of those properties were looted and burned. After everything had died down, when driving down a street you'd see nine of the ten houses on a street in fine condition, but the tenth one would have been burned out. The looting and burning was very targeted, but in one case a house that we rented suffered a great deal of damage. I don't know if it was rented from a Ben Ali family member, or if there was a misperception that it belonged to a family member, or if it was mistakenly burned, but the result was the same. Three Embassy folks, a tandem couple on one floor of the house and a single woman on the other floor, lost a lot of their belongings from smoke damage. There was also a great deal of uncertainty. The police and Ministry of Interior personnel realized it was not very smart for them to be seen on the streets, so the normal security forces disappeared and roadblocks were set up on an *ad hoc* basis. The Army came in to provide security. Harkening back to my previous comment about more than three decades living on and off in the region, you usually don't want to hear that the Army is coming to restore order, but that's exactly what they did. The Tunisian military was historically small and apolitical, and Ben Ali kept underfunded as he did not want to create a rival power center. As a result, the military was untarnished and actually was a source of national pride. So the Army was able to restore order. During this transition there was some violence. The UN estimated that 200-300 people were killed, all told, from the beginning of the revolution to Ben Ali's departure. I don't want to minimize that loss of life or sound disrespectful, but when you compare those numbers to the carnage we see in Syria, for example, in relative terms it was not a particularly violent revolution.

We focused on security, obviously, because it was important and because of the uncertainty. When I say ‘security’, I mean not just of the mission and its personnel, but of the American community in general. So the next morning (Saturday, January 15), we had a long Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meeting. For those who are unfamiliar with the State Department, each embassy has an Emergency Action Committee. Its responsibility is to review, discuss, and take necessary steps on security related issues. We reviewed the state of play, which included dusk to dawn curfew and unclear rules of engagement by the security forces.

We found that sheltering in place worked, and we discussed obvious aspects such as whether the airport was going to be open or not; if not, it would obviously be that much more difficult to evacuate personnel if we had to. Each embassy draws up planning trip wires, so, for example, a revolution is a strong signal (as if one would be needed) to reevaluate your security posture. We reviewed our trip wires. We made sure we were alerting the American community through the warden system, and we wanted to be certain that we were reaching out to the broader American community, so we set up town hall meetings.

I was lucky to have a strong country team, many of whom I had worked with before. I’ve already mentioned how fortunate I was to have Natalie Brown as my DCM and Ian McCary as political/economic counselor. I had worked with my OMS, Sue Swanson, in Cairo and then picked her to be my OMS when I was DAS. I had also worked with her husband, Wayne Salisbury, in Cairo; he joined us as the WAE management counselor on January 5. Both had sound judgment, as did our station chief, whose name I won’t mention. COL John Chere was the Senior Defense Official at post and LTC Bob Paddock was the head of our Office of Security Cooperation. Both were very level-headed, both had deep community ties – John was on the school board and Bob’s wife, Jane, had been the Community Liaison Officer, and both had a great deal of regional experience. In other words, people got down to the task at hand rather than flapping about or wringing their hands.

When Ben Ali left the country, in accordance with the constitution the Prime Minister (Mohamed Ghannouchi, not to be confused with Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda, the moderate Islamist party) assumed the temporary role as the head of government. Prime Minister Ghannouchi had been prime minister for close to eleven years. He was a technocrat and his primary responsibility was the economy, not security. While we were in our EAC meeting that morning, Ghannouchi announced that since Ben Ali had departed permanently a different article of the constitution would apply, and the speaker of parliament, Fouad Mebazaa, would become the head of government. I mention this because it showed how very careful the Tunisians were to follow the constitution. When we were in this EAC meeting that Saturday morning, Prime Minister Ghannouchi also announced, “We are going to have free and fair elections and we are going to have them with the presence of international observers.” I mention that because that was obviously very important to the Tunisians. It was an aspiration of theirs, and it also contrasts with the way the Egyptian elections were conducted after their revolution – the Egyptians did not want to have foreign observers.

At this Emergency Action Committee meeting, one of the questions on the table was whether we needed to withdraw personnel, and/or whether we needed to withdraw families. We were not sure what the future would look like and, as I said, the airport was a complete mess as it was closed down. We decided to defer our decision for 24 hours to see how things would play out – and, since the airport closed, we couldn't have flown people out. I spoke with Washington that evening, and said I wanted another 24 hours to see which direction things were going. Washington was amenable to waiting to see how events unfolded during the course of the day on Sunday, both in terms of our EAC meeting and on the ground. We agreed we would speak again Sunday morning Washington time, which was Sunday afternoon in Tunis as we were six hours ahead of Washington.

The next day was Sunday, January 16. We held another Emergency Action Committee meeting in the morning, and the EAC voted by a hefty majority against requesting Washington to permit authorized departure. On their way home from the meeting, however, one or two people encountered roadblocks, which were not operated or conducted by members of the military. It was unclear exactly who was running the roadblocks, and our personnel were not threatened, but no one likes to be stopped by armed young men who are not members of the police or military. Consequently, when I spoke with Washington that afternoon I said, "I'm doing something I never thought I'd ever do in my career, which is overrule an EAC, but I think we need to go on some sort of authorized departure." Fortunately, I had worked at different points in my career with the Under Secretary for Management, Pat Kennedy, who is in the same job as we conduct this interview. I had also worked with the Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security, Eric Boswell. He had held that job in the late nineties, and I worked with him then when I was in the Counter Terrorism office. We had also served together in Amman, Jordan when he was the management counselor and I was a second tour officer. I mention this because wiring diagrams may be nice, but far more important was the fact that I trusted their judgment, and I liked to think that they trusted mine. This trust really went a long way.

To his credit, Under Secretary Kennedy had a terrific solution: rather than pulling people all the way back to the States, he was able to send them to Rabat for a ten-day respite or safe haven. This provided a great option for our community. When all was said and done, only nine families that took advantage of it (actually, some were single people and others were family members). More people had signed up to leave, but at the last minute decided, "Well, things aren't all that bad." They went to Rabat for ten days to see how things would play out. The embassy in Morocco was just marvelously welcoming to the folks. The Department chartered a plane from Milan; the Consul General in Milan, Carol Perez, very nicely asked if there was anything we needed that she could put on the plane. It was a very kind offer. The flight took the nine families to Rabat on Tuesday, January 18. We of course gave the private American community the option to participate, if they wanted to, but only a few people did. By that Tuesday it was a lot quieter, and the airport had reopened, and so it was possible to get out. I suppose that one could argue in hindsight that perhaps chartering a plane for the ten-day safe haven was not absolutely

necessary, but I still think it was the right decision to make. The biggest issue we were grappling with was it was not an earthquake or violence targeting the American community; it was the uncertainty. The safe haven option gave each individual and each family the opportunity to have some control over their future. So as a management tool it worked out exceedingly well.

Washington was greatly interested in the security situation and was also very helpful, not only in terms of the safe haven option but also terms of offering additional security personnel. As luck would have it, we didn't have our assistant regional security officer on board yet as he was between assignments, so we needed the extra help.

Q: One thing you haven't mentioned here what about the religious connection? Were we getting reports from mosques I mean where did they stand?

GRAY: The Ben Ali regime monitored the mosques extremely closely. It reviewed the sermons and appointed the Imams. Much of Ennahda's leadership was in exile outside the country. And as I said earlier, there was no single group that can claim leadership of the revolution. It was truly a grassroots revolution.

Q: How about were government officials coming to you or to your various members of the staff to say give us shelter?

GRAY: To give us what?

Q: To give us shelter, in other words Ben Ali's government were some of the higher members asking for help?

GRAY: On the morning of January 14 a Tunisian who was not a member of the government came on Ben Ali's behalf to ask for U.S. support to calm things down, to help with a democratic process, and also to help with job creation. But, we didn't get any asylum requests or anything like that. The demonstrators really targeted Ben Ali and his family because of its corruption. That is one reason that to a degree – and I emphasize the phrase 'to a degree' – the transition to a so-called unity government was accepted in the initial days. It became clear before too long that a unity government was not going to meet popular aspirations, but it was not rejected out of hand. Getting back to events on January 14, I should add that I saw (after I returned to the States) a published account that I picked up the phone and told Ben Ali to leave. That was not the case; I did not do so. I got a chuckle out of it when I read it, though.

Q: What was happening were there attacks on not only the Ben Ali property but how about on government buildings?

GRAY: I only recall attacks against property associated with the family or the ruling party. In fact, there was a great concern that Ben Ali was going to come back. That concern was exacerbated by a speech by Qadhafi who said something to the effect of, "Why did the Tunisians have to get rid of Ben Ali? He is a good leader; they are going to

have elections in another four years anyway; they could have waited till then.” There were other Tunisians who pointed to the fact that the president’s wife’s maiden name was Trabelsi. It is a very common family name in Tunisia, and basically means someone coming from Tripoli. People imagined a Libyan connection. It’s quite possible Ben Ali was thinking of going back to Libya as a sort of a staging ground, but events in Tunisia and particularly events in Libya would have overtaken that plan, if there was such a plan in the first place.

Q: Were the Moroccans doing anything?

GRAY: The Moroccan ambassador had been Minister of Health. He was a very senior official and was very well plugged in, but I was not aware of any particularly active role behind the scenes by Morocco or any other countries.

Q: Other than the statement you mentioned, did Qadhafi play any role?

GRAY: No. That speech put everyone on edge, but otherwise there were no discernible efforts or interference, and before too long Qadhafi had his own revolution to deal with.

Q: So then what happened - I take it things settled down?

GRAY: Things did start to settle down, at least in relative terms. I met with the Foreign Minister. The National Unity Government was set up. We held a town hall meeting on January 18, when we were back to work, to explain what the situation was and to answer any questions. That day we had nine families depart on the flight to Rabat, a total of 29 from the embassy community. From the broader American community, there were 16 private Americans. In other words, there were plenty of empty seats, but that is better than the alternative.

That week was very busy, but it was not chaotically so. One of my big concerns had been whether supply chains were going to be disrupted. Would the power grids still work? Would the water keep running? Would bakeries be able to bake bread, and would food get to the grocery stores? Fortunately, they did.

In addition to addressing the needs of the American community and making sure everyone was safe and secure, we were also dealing with the new Tunisian government and trying to assess which way it was going. We also wanted to make sure we reached out to Tunisian civil society and to the Tunisian people in general. We made sure to do an op-ed piece congratulating the Tunisian people on the revolution and quoting President Obama’s words on democracy. It was published on January 20; the date sticks in my mind because it was the anniversary of the inauguration. It was important that Tunisians knew that we supported their transition to democracy. A lot of Tunisians said they noticed and appreciated that we did not close down operations or leave town, but instead kept working.

Q: Was the new government forming rather quickly?

GRAY: Yes, the new Unity government was put together very quickly. Some of the people were hold-overs, by which I mean technocrats. In other words, they were people who had served in economic ministries, not in security-related ones. The Foreign Minister stayed on for a bit. The new government also included people from civil society. Najib Chebbi joined the cabinet; he was a very prominent opposition leader who had been barred from running for president in the 2009 elections. The initial report we heard was that he was going to be the Minister of Interior, which just astounded us. We could not believe it was true as it would have been such a turn-around. It turned out that it was a bad translation and he was appointed Minister of Local Development, which made a lot more sense.

Q: What happens in the diplomatic protocol? The new government comes in and we wait for Washington to recognize it or what did you do?

GRAY: Their transition was very much in accordance with their constitution so there was no legal or constitutional issue about who the rightful authorities were. It was all handled legally and scrupulously handled: the president left the country; when it became clear that that he wasn't coming back and that he had relinquished his powers, the presidency went to the next person in line. In some ways it wasn't any different if he had died in office, for example. On the legal side, we didn't have to do anything. On the political side, I would point out that the then-Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Jeff Feltman came to Tunis on January 24. He was the first senior official from any government to visit, and again, that was something that the Tunisians noticed. In addition, one Arab Foreign Minister said he was going to come, then backed out, and the Tunisian perception was that he chickened out. I am not going to name the individual or the country. In addition to being the first official to visit after the revolution, Jeff had served in Tunis from 1998 until 2000 as head of the political/economic section, so he knew many of the people who had been in opposition to the government then, and now were part of the National Unity Government. His visit therefore sent a powerful signal on several levels.

The second night that Jeff was in Tunis, January 25, happened to coincide with the State of the Union address. In the address, President Obama said that the American people stand with the democratic aspirations of the Tunisian people. It was a non-partisan line and as a result Senators and members of the House of Representatives – Democrats and Republicans alike – rose to give a standing ovation. They were really applauding, I think, the Tunisian people. The Tunisians saw this, and you better believe we made sure to disseminate the video clip and the words as much as possible. For weeks thereafter I had Tunisians of all walks of life, up to and including ministers, tell me in almost identical words that hearing those words, and seeing the standing ovation, brought tears to their eyes. Public diplomacy does not easily lend itself to metrics about effectiveness, but I have to note how many Tunisians told me and my colleagues that the American approach after the revolution was important because it gave the Tunisian people confidence to continue on their course.

Q: What was happening just to get the picture the Tunisian Spring had not spread at this point to the rest of the Arab world had it?

GRAY: Can I suggest we break here? We have covered events in Tunisia through January 25, but there is also an important Egyptian story that starts on that date.

Q: Today is the 28th of July 2016 with Gordon Gray. Gordon, we are just talking now about the spread of the Arab Spring and Tunisia's role in this.

GRAY: Before we head in that direction, I'd like to talk a little bit more about Jeff Feltman's visit...

Q: Absolutely.

GRAY: ...which was right before things happened in Egypt, which gets on to your question. As I said in the previous interview, he was the first foreign visitor to visit, or certainly the first senior visitor to do so after the revolution. Also as I had mentioned, he had served as political/economic counselor in Tunis so he knew many of these civil society figures very well. One of the people with whom he met during Jeff's visit was a minister in the National Unity Government and then again in a more recent government. He made a point, which I thought was very interesting, in framing the Arab Spring. It was certainly relevant for Tunisia, but it also explains what happened shortly thereafter in some other Arab countries. He told Jeff and me that the causes of the demonstrations and unrest in Tunisia were not just unemployment and poverty, which, he said, exist everywhere. Rather, "It was the loss of dignity and the lack of dialogue." That phrase really stuck in my mind as the best and most succinct explanation of what happened. He went on to tell Jeff, "There is a certain respect for the U.S. position, in contrast with the French position," which he called unacceptable, and he noted the absence of any U.S. congratulatory letter from President Obama to Ben Ali following the 2009 elections, which we talked about in a previous interview.

Another telling comment came at a lunch I hosted for Jeff: "In Tunisia we are neither Lebanon nor Iraq." That's a direct quotation. The guest went on to say, "We are the most homogenous society in the region." These related points are important for understanding why things have gone more smoothly in Tunisia than in the other Arab Spring countries, even though Tunisia has had challenges and setbacks along the way.

Immediately following Ben Ali's departure, an apolitical commission was established with a rather loose mandate to help guide the elections for the Constituent Assembly, which was to draw up the constitution. The head of the commission was a very respected jurist named Yadh Ben Achour. He had impeccable lineage, as both his father and his grandfather were influential Muslim clerics. He was a French-trained jurist who was tainted by any association with the Ben Ali regime. He was also a man of sound judgment and integrity. In other words, he was the perfect choice to head this commission. When Jeff and I went to visit him, he was working out of his house and he was a staff of one. The commission's membership grew over the coming months to, I

want to say, 172 people from all different walks of life: civil society, labor unions, NGOs, etc. The name grew almost as much, and the official name was something like “The Supreme Commission to Realize the Objectives of the Revolution.” It was such a mouthful that the Tunisians just referred to it as the Ben Achour Commission. Not only did he come from impeccable lineage but his entire family was very accomplished. One of his brothers was the secretary general of the Arab League equivalent of UNESCO, and one of his sisters was a leader of a woman’s rights NGO; she was a very prominent member of Civil Society. Given his legal background, he helped frame some of the constitutional issues, and helped guide the process once people started to work on the constitution. It shows the depth and breadth of Tunisia’s civil society and also the society’s willingness to compromise.

Q: Did the younger people pay attention to what was happening or where were they?

GRAY: Very much so. Younger people were very active in the demonstrations, but later on concern grew that they had lost interest in politics. They did not vote in large percentages, although that it is not a phenomenon limited to Tunisia.

Q: It’s true in our country certainly.

GRAY: Exactly. But jumping ahead just a bit, demonstrations continued against the caretaker Prime Minister (Mohamed Ghannouchi), since he was a hold over. Even though he was not personally tainted, given his long tenure in the Ben Ali government his continuation in office became untenable. He came to the realization that he could no longer serve as prime minister, and he stepped aside for Beji Caid Essebsi, who was subsequently elected as president - he is the current president of Tunisia. The reason I mention this is that a week or ten days before the switch was made, a Tunisian I knew came to see me. He was very well-informed about not only the political situation, but also the media scene. He told me “You really need to watch this guy Beji Caid Essebsi. Even though he is older - he is in his eighties - his message really resonates with the young people.” To make a long story short, he resonated enough to have a successful stint as prime minister in the transition and then to be elected President.

Q: This must have been a very active time for your officers wasn’t it?

GRAY: Very much so, absolutely.

Q: Were the Tunisians pretty open in discussing...

GRAY: It was night and day. Under Ben Ali, government officials were not allowed to give out their cell phone numbers or anything like that. It was especially sad to see at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, because the diplomats there had served overseas and knew how diplomacy needed to be conducted. They chafed at the restrictions but didn’t want to risk their jobs. Ben Ali’s departure allowed them to interact with us and do their jobs. There was a great deal of openness.

Q: Did you see a government forming? Were they able to take over a functioning government and keep going or was it a period of transition?

GRAY: It was a period of transition. The aim of the revolution was straightforward: it was to get rid of Ben Ali's regime. Once that was done, the question became how would the government continue to operate. That is why the National Unity Government was established. It was a combination of continuity, particularly in the economic ministries, and also new people, many of whom had been in civil society and/or were opponents of the Ben Ali regime. Protests continued, although not on the same scale, because many people felt that the revolution had not been realized and that there was too much continuation of the status quo. So the National Unity Government only stayed in place through the end of February, when Beji Caid Essebsi became the prime minister.

One of the first things Caid Essebsi did was to reform the cabinet. He got rid of all the holdovers, and also asked anyone with political aspirations to leave the cabinet. His mandate, as he saw it, was to prepare the country for elections for the Constituent Assembly. He made that very clear, and in doing so he successfully changed the focus of the Tunisian political discussion so that it was no longer looking at the past. I am not saying the abuses of the past were forgotten, but political discourse shifted from looking in the rear view mirror to looking at the road ahead. And that road was to elections for a Constituent Assembly. He rightly realized that until there were free and fair elections in Tunisia, no government would have the legitimacy that elections bestow.

Q: When a government collapses were people coming to you and asking for advice or were you giving advice? What was happening?

GRAY: I wouldn't say that the government collapsed. Rather, if you'll pardon the violence of the metaphor, it was decapitated in the sense that the very top level was removed. The Tunisians had functioning institutions in place, so it was not as if there were no civil servants left to make the government function. They continued to do their jobs. The advice we offered was along the lines of the need for compromise and the need to stay on course for the transition to elections and a more democratic system of government.

Q: Were people coming from the States? We have various institutions; certainly when the Soviet Union fell apart they were all over.

GRAY: People coming from where?

Q: Well from various non-governmental organizations.

GRAY: To their credit NDI, the National Democratic Institute, and IRI, the International Republican Institute, set up operations in Tunisia very quickly so that they could provide technical advice on the elections. They had great expertise and were very helpful, and they continue to play a constructive role in Tunisia. Some foreigners in the NGO community had great expertise about the conduct of elections but less experience as far as

Tunisia was concerned. As a result, there was a desire to have elections that met Swiss standards. While we should always strive for perfection, the goal of elections is not the election itself. Instead, the goal – and particularly during this transition – was for the Tunisian people to express their will democratically and to give the members of the Constituent Assembly the legitimacy that flows from that. Another way of putting it was that too many of the election experts saw the trees, but missed the forest. Some of that hand-wringing reached Washington (and particularly non-career appointees), and - to use a military phrase – some in Washington had their hair on fire. (After the elections, when I was still in Tunis, I re-read the trip report of one of the non-career appointees who had visited Tunisia and was reminded of Chicken Little.) When all was said and done, the elections were credible and the NGO representatives who observed the elections were pleased with way they were conducted. They were not perfect, but they were very good, and the most important thing was the Tunisians accepted the outcome.

I was struck by the quality of the election observers. Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter and former Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty were typical of the bipartisan group who came from the United States, and there were of course many, many others as well.

Let me talk about another segment of the NGO community, which gets your question. Moving into February demonstrations started in Libya, which led to violence and chaos. As a result, a great number of Libyans came to Tunisia, particularly from Tripoli, which isn't terribly far from the border with Tunisia. In addition to the Libyan refugees who came, there were third country nationals who fled Libya and wanted to be repatriated. Many of the Libyans were welcomed into Tunisian homes and their kids were educated in Tunisian schools, which went to split or double sessions. The displaced third country nationals were mostly young male workers. They were housed in tents along the border in camps, and there was a very robust NGO mobilization effort. The NGOs did excellent work, the Tunisian military did excellent work, and so did our military. We airlifted hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Egyptians from the south of Tunisia back to Egypt. This influx was another strain on the Tunisian system right after the revolution, and it was also another example of international NGO mobilization.

Getting back to your question about visitors, one of the things that struck me in the immediate aftermath of the revolution was that some people realized right away that what was going on in Tunisia was momentous. That group obviously included the NGOs I mentioned, such as NDI and IRI. I described how Jeff Feltman came to Tunisia just ten days after Ben Ali fled. Bill Burns, who was then Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, came to Tunis in February. Senator McCain was the first member of Congress to visit after the revolution; he also came in February and I am fairly certain that Senator Lieberman was with him. Senator McCain made a very apt comment which was, "If it can't succeed here," and by 'it' he meant transition from autocracy to democracy, "it can't succeed anywhere." His view was similar to the comment I mentioned a few minutes ago from a Tunisian, who said in essence that the prospects for success were good because of the society's homogeneity. The list was longer than those I've mentioned, but it was very interesting to me to see who "got" it right away. Not everyone did.

We also had a great number of State Department officials who wanted to come to Tunisia but could not articulate why. We called them diplomatic tourists, and found that we were able to turn off many of the visits simply by asking what the objective was. It used to be that the regional bureaus – and particularly the desks – could regulate the number of such peripheral visits, but over the years a certain lack of discipline and direction set in.

Q: Well you know in your talk about various groups getting involved and helping you didn't mention the French; after all the French had a democracy and a big stake in Tunisia. Where were they?

GRAY: The French were closely tied to the Ben Ali regime. As I said, they fired their Foreign Minister and they replaced their ambassador right away. Plus, they had 75 years of colonial rule, so they started out with one hand behind their back. It is also important to remember that the revolution took place right after the Eurozone crisis had started. Those elements certainly hindered their response, but they had – and continue to have – a large assistance program for Tunisia. France in particular, and Europe in general, worked to provide assistance.

Q: The French had this program sort of like the Peace Corps didn't they of young people in Tunisia going out speaking French and various things like that? If they did what were they up to?

GRAY: Do you mean French in Tunisia?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: I'm not sure they still had that program when I was in Tunisia. When I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco, there were a number of French teachers who were fulfilling their military service by teaching in Morocco, and I assume one could have done that in Tunisia and elsewhere. But I don't recall that being the case in Tunisia when I was there.

Q: Okay. How about the British, the Germans and the Scandinavians?

GRAY: They were all active in providing assistance both at the governmental level and by NGOs, although not all the Scandinavian countries were represented in Tunisia.

Q: I would think after all the Middle East was such a terrible problem for all of us that this would have meant everybody flocking there trying to do something to make it work?

GRAY: That was true to an extent, but at the same time there were the demonstrations in Tahrir Square, there was the violence in Libya, there were demonstrations in Bahrain, unrest spread to Syria, and the same ferment spread to Yemen. While there was certainly an opportunity to assist, at the same time there were very real bandwidth issues, including in our own government. Time and time again, U.S. Government visitors would fly from

Washington to Cairo to Tunis. Many of them described the series of interagency meetings on Egypt and Tunisia, which would consist of 58 minutes of discussion of Egypt, and then two minutes in which people would say, “You know, we need to talk about Tunisia at the next meeting – it’s really important.” As they told it, the same thing would happen at the next meeting and at the next one after that. I served in Cairo for three years, so I understood Egypt’s strategic importance; it is a larger and more influential country.

I also sensed an inclination or hope that Europe would “take care of” North Africa, where it had traditionally been more engaged. Remember that President Sarkozy was very forward-leaning on Libya, and the Italians were as well. Under Washington’s preferred division of labor, we would then deal with those countries we had been traditionally allied with, such as Egypt and the Gulf states.

It seemed to me that at some point over the summer people in Washington began to fully appreciate how complicated Egyptian society is. My sense was that right around Labor Day (2011) the light clicked on – you could almost hear the chain on the light bulb being pulled from across the Atlantic as Washington realized two things. First, Egypt is complicated. Second, Tunisia is less complicated, and we needed victory, which we are more likely to get if we focus a little bit more on Tunisia than we have. One of the most helpful bureaucratic developments was the appointment of Bill Taylor as the point person within U.S. Government to coordinate and oversee assistance to the Arab Spring countries in transition. I had never met Bill before he took this job, but I knew he was very well respected and had a great deal of experience in assistance for Eastern Europe, and that he had also coordinated assistance in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was really able to pull the interagency community together, to find resources, and prioritize and translate some of U.S. rhetoric into actual support for the programs. Plus, he was very collegial and very easy to work with.

Q: Maybe this is the time to talk about how you saw developments in Egypt and in Libya?

GRAY: If you had asked me before the Arab Spring began whether anything that happened in Tunisia would have an effect on Egypt in a political sense, I probably would have laughed at the idea. A phrase Egyptians like when describing their country is *Um ad-Dunya*, or the Mother of the World. It is understandable, given that Egypt is the most populous Arabic speaking country and has thousands of years of civilization. When Caesar visited the pyramids he was chronologically closer to 2016 than he was to the date when the pyramids were constructed. So I would not have guessed that the demonstrations in Tunisia would have had the effect they did in Egypt, but they clearly did. Those of us at the embassy in Tunisia would not have predicted what happened in Tahrir Square, but we were not surprised either. I want to be very clear here that I am not saying we predicted it, and I am not saying we were smarter than anyone else, but what I mean to say is that we had just seen this movie in Tunisia.

For all the differences between Tunisia and Egypt there were a number of similarities between Ben Ali and Mubarak. Each had a military background, each ruled in an increasingly autocratic fashion, and each had popular issues with family corruption. Some of the similarities were almost eerie. Ben Ali gave three speeches before he left;

Mubarak gave three speeches before he left. Ben Ali said I am going to make a minor cabinet shuffle, Mubarak did the same thing. Ben Ali's last speech was on a Thursday; he said, "I am not going anywhere;" and he left the capital the next day, a Friday. Mubarak's last speech was on a Thursday; he said, "I'm not going anywhere;" and he left Cairo for Sharm el Sheikh the next day, a Friday. The joke in Tunisia and Libya right afterwards was that "Qadhafi is going to outlaw Fridays because that's the day long-serving authoritarian rulers leave." In short, there was a sense of *déjà vu* as we saw events unfold in Egypt.

As far as Libya was concerned, Qadhafi was less predictable. But I certainly never felt that Qadhafi was going to leave Libya; in his mind, he was Libya, and it was inconceivable to him that he would live anywhere else. So his fight to the end was not overly surprising. For us it was a question of dealing with the effects. In the short term, these included the statements he made that alarmed the Tunisians, and the influx of Libyans and third country nationals. In the longer term, they included the new reality that there was a new flow of weapons into Tunisia and that borders were no longer secure.

Q: Libya was just awash with weapons wasn't it?

GRAY: Certainly, and many of them crossed into Tunisia, unfortunately.

Q: What were all you Americans representing in the embassies in the Muslim world? Were you all consulting or was it each on your own?

GRAY: We were all friends, and we were in touch with one another, but I think that the situations in each country were sufficiently different. In addition, there was the ambassadorial view that you want to stay in your own lane. As I mentioned earlier, Gene Cretz and I served in Pakistan together for our first tours, and we later served together in Egypt, but I would never consider giving him advice on Libya. There was a certain amount of consultation and encouragement, but that was more on an unofficial level. I was awakened by a call the night before I was supposed to fly back for the NEA Chief of Mission Conference in 2011 to be told, "We are going to ask you and a few of your colleagues to not attend the conference this year, but to stay home." That was fine, as I had a lot of work to do in Tunisia, so I didn't mind. We had occasional regional meetings in Stuttgart with Africa Command, which provided an opportunity for the ambassador to North African countries to trade notes in person.

Q: What was happening in Egypt that you were seeing? The Tunisians were looking at Egypt and saying well we can carry things on farther or something?

GRAY: There was enough going on within Tunisia that I don't think that the Tunisians had the time to make comparisons. They may have been fascinated by what was going on in Egypt, but I was not aware of any meaningful engagement. After I left Tunisia there were reports that Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda, the moderate Islamist party in Tunisia, went to Egypt to speak with then-president Morsi, who was from the Muslim

Brotherhood. He advised Morsi to be more amenable to compromising. But that was later on in the game.

Q: Was there any equivalent to the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia?

GRAY: It depends on how you define Muslim Brotherhood. It's not a centralized international organization with branches in different countries. Some people classify Ennahda as part of the Muslim Brotherhood, but I don't think the label is as important as much as the tendencies or the sympathies, if you will. Certainly Erdogan is in that camp as well.

Q: Well were you getting any feeling about concerns back in Washington not necessarily the State Department but in Congress or elsewhere that things are going to hell in a hand basket and you've got to do something?

GRAY: That is a very good question, because it was pretty obvious that Ennahda was going to win a plurality in the elections for the Constituent Assembly. There were 120 parties registered, which I learned is not atypical in countries in transition from authoritarian rule. I understand that in post-Franco Spain there were scores of parties registered. People had no idea of what most of the 120 parties represented or who the candidates were. Some of them were well-established, but my guess is that others were probably formed by people sitting in a café one night and saying, "What the heck, I'm going to run for office," then hearing other people saying, "That's great, I'll support you." One Tunisian friend of mine ran for the Constituent Assembly. He was a good enough friend that I felt I could ask him why he was running given that he probably wasn't going to be elected. He freely acknowledged that he wasn't very optimistic about being elected. He added, though, that it was a new opportunity, a liberty Tunisians never had had before, and he wanted to take advantage of it.

There was one party that everyone knew, however, and that was Ennahda. Since it was outlawed by the Ben Ali regime, it represented a clear change from the past, which is what people wanted. So the election results were not a surprise to us. We were confident of our analysis that Ennahda was going to win a plurality of the vote in the Constituent Assembly; there was no question in our minds about it. We didn't know what the exact numbers would be, but we thought it would be a pretty sizeable amount. We didn't think Ennahda would get a majority of the votes, but we thought it would do well. So we wanted to be very sure that Washington had our analysis well in advance. We wanted to socialize the idea in Washington, because what we did not want was Washington policymakers to wake up on October 24 – in other words, the day after the elections – to screaming headlines that said, "Islamists win Tunisian elections." In other words, we wanted them to expect that result rather than be surprised by it. Fortunately, we had enough visitors from Washington that we had the opportunity to explain to them the likely results, and we were able to focus the discussion not on the outcome, but on the process. In other words, is this going to be a fair and credible process? As I mentioned before, several election observers came, including Rosalynn Carter; Tim Pawlenty, the former governor of Minnesota; Congresswoman McCollum; and NGO representatives. In

addition, there were a large number of Tunisian observers. The elections were held credibly and without violence, and as we predicted, Ennahda did win a plurality of the vote: 37 per cent of the vote, which translated into 41 per cent of the seats in the Constituent Assembly.

Q: Were you concerned that warlordism might breakout with all of these arms coming in from...

GRAY: No. The arms were coming in, but we were not concerned about warlordism. Tunisia doesn't have those kinds of sectarian splits and tribalism is not an issue. My French counterpart – the new ambassador came to Tunis after the revolution on a direct transfer from ambassador to Iraq – used to say “Tunisians are not warriors.” Warlordism was not a concern.

Q: What were you getting from your contacts in Tunisia about developments in Egypt?

GRAY: Again, the focus was so much on Tunisia, that I don't remember too much discussion of Egypt. There were far more concerns about what was going on in Libya, since that was right next door and since they had a rather difficult relationship with Qadhafi. Between the threats he had made, and the influx of refugees and displaced people, Libya was far more of a focus than Egypt.

Q: Okay then let's talk about Libya how is that impacting?

GRAY: You mentioned arms coming into the country, and I noted the refugees and displaced people. Both were destabilizing factors, as was the uncertainty that any country would have when its neighbor was about to descend into civil war.

Q: Well what about the religious leaders in Tunisia?

GRAY: At the local level, many of the religious leaders were discredited because they had been appointed by the Ben Ali regime, and because they were very carefully monitored. We had little interaction with religious leaders, but our interaction with Islamists was with people from Ennahda. We had excellent access; that was not an issue. They welcomed our interaction because it was, in their eyes, recognition of their acceptance. Our view was that you talk to everyone, and the United States would not determine the outcome of elections. We would judge them – the elections – by the process, not by the outcome.

Q: Did you get out to observe?

GRAY: I certainly did. Since I retired from government, some people have asked what were the most memorable days in my career. I usually answer January 14, 2011, when Ben Ali fled, and also October 23, 2011, when the elections for the Constituent Assembly were held. The elections were very orderly, with people were queuing patiently in long lines. Some of them brought Tunisian flags, and others brought their children because

they wanted their children to experience a moment that had been denied to them for so long. It particularly contrasted with the 2009 elections, when the turnout was virtually non-existent. October 23, 2011 was a very inspiring day.

Q: As this new government was forming what were the main items that they had to deal with?

GRAY: The Constituent Assembly had two core tasks. One was to write a new constitution for the country, and the second one was to form a government. Ennahda won a plurality of the seats but ruled in a coalition. Since it got the highest number of votes and the most number of seats, it was represented by the Prime Minister in the government. The second leading party was the Congress for the Republic, or CPR as it was known by its French acronym. Its leader was Moncef Marzouki, who became President. The fourth leading party, FDTL (Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties), was led by Dr. Mustapha Ben Jafar, who became Speaker of Parliament. Both the individuals and the three parties were referred to as the troika. The government knew that its primary responsibility was twofold: to ensure the continued transition away from authoritarian rule, and to try to create jobs. There was no question that both were very high priorities.

Q: Was Ben Ali messing around?

GRAY: No. My strong guess is the Saudis made it clear to him he could stay in Jeddah as long as he was not involved in politics.

Q: Were any of Ben Ali's followers trying to do something while you were there or were they pretty well discredited?

GRAY: They were pretty well discredited, but there were fears that continue to this day that the *ancient regime* would return. In reality, they were discredited and the ruling party was dismantled.

Q: Did your embassy how about on the consular side. Were you getting people wanting to get the hell out of there?

GRAY: No, not really. We didn't have that many takers when the chartered plane came on January 18, and shortly afterwards the airports were operating smoothly, so if you decided you wanted to leave you could easily buy an airline ticket. Also, there isn't that large of an American community in Tunisia to begin with.

Q: What about tourism?

GRAY: Tourism took a hit partly because of the instability. In 2011 it wasn't necessarily Tunisia-specific, but in many cases people turn on the television or read a newspaper and see Libya in flames and demonstrations and protests in Egypt, and lump together all of North Africa. Later on, unfortunately, there were ISIS or ISIS-affiliated groups that

attacked the Bardo Museum in Tunis and then, in a separate attack, a beach resort in Sousse. Those attacks had a significant impact on the tourism industry, which was the target.

Q: At a certain point did you feel you were I won't say relaxed but were you settling down running an embassy if not a tranquil place certainly a place that well people weren't shooting or be nasty to each other?

GRAY: We never felt like we were the target, which I think helped. Some of the Embassy staff who came to Tunisia did not come for a revolution; they were expecting a different type of tour. So I think for some it may have been a difficult adjustment. By and large, it was a great deal more work. We were staffed adequately for the pre-revolutionary relationship we had with the Ben Ali government, but we needed more people to meet Washington's needs and expectations after the revolution. Assignment cycles being what they were, Washington wasn't very nimble in terms of getting people out to the field. There were notable exceptions. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives was terrific: they sent really good people to us very quickly, and they backed them up with programmatic funds. At the time of the influx of refugees and displaced people from Libya, USAID sent a Disaster Assistance Relief Team, which did a great work in the south. Washington provided some great assistance, but was also could have done more. But our personnel system is not quite that nimble and the State Department is not that well-resourced.

Q: So then what were you up to to continue this on?

GRAY: You mean what were we doing?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: We were trying to design, implement, and oversee assistance programs. We were observing elections. We were answering Washington's analytical requirements, just like any embassy, but we were doing it with a greater degree of attention and therefore a greater operations tempo. We had a good staff and I like to think we stepped up to the plate.

Q: Well it certainly sounds like you...every ambassador and certain political officers like basically a piece of revolution.

GRAY: You're right. Again, credible UN reports indicated that 200-300 people lost their lives in the revolution so I don't want to minimize their sacrifice. But certainly compared to the carnage we've seen elsewhere it was a much smoother transition.

Q: Were there any developments in this as the new government was settling in?

GRAY: This is a good place to place to break, Stu. Beji Caid Essebsi, the prime minister, came to Washington in October 2011 for a meeting with President Obama. In our next discussion, I can talk about some events leading up to that.

Q: Okay, that's great then we will pick this up on your trip back to Washington with the new government?

GRAY: Not just that trip but also the run up to it as well because we had to orchestrate it.

Q: Okay, I'll make my announcement here. Today is the 2nd of August 2016, with Gordon Gray and Gordon you were talking before the prime minister went to the States I guess.

GRAY: Yes, that's right. I would like to back up just a little bit to the summer and talk about the steps leading up to it, if I could.

Q: Please do.

GRAY: Before I start, I want to mention one unrelated item. I had mentioned that the government of Tunisia, before the revolution, prohibited its officials from going to foreigners' houses for representational events, and even closely restricted attendance at national day receptions. In contrast, after the revolution I hosted an *iftar* in the summer of 2011, just as I had in 2010, but this time with all of the leaders of the major political parties in attendance. The people who, after the elections, became the President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament, and the leaders of two other political parties all attended. It was a refreshing change, and it shows how eager Tunisian civil society was to reach out once the strictures were removed.

Let me move to your question about the Prime Minister's visit to Washington and set the stage of what we were trying to do from Embassy Tunis. In mid-February of 2011, just a month after Ben Ali fled, we sent a cable outlining different possibilities for U.S. government assistance to Tunisia.

It was drafted by a very capable first tour officer named Pete Davis. Although he was on his first Foreign Service tour, he had worked in the Department as a civil servant in a number of jobs, including as desk officer for Liberia. He was certainly far more knowledgeable than I was when I was a first tour officer, and particularly so about different assistance programs. Inside the Embassy we came to refer to it as the Pete Davis cable. A number of weeks later – perhaps six weeks or so – we sent in a follow-up cable on assistance, which we referred to within the embassy as the “low hanging fruit” cable. That cable outlined actions the U.S. government could take, or programs it could implement, with virtually no cost. The goal was to show our support for the transition.

At the end of May in 2011, France hosted the G-7 Summit in Deauville. Unfortunately, President Sarkozy was a bit over-enthusiastic in his predictions of assistance for the Arab Spring countries, and announced a figure of over \$30 billion. There was just no way that this money was going to be forthcoming, so I have no idea where the figure came from. I

am not sure that many other people did either. I don't mean to be disrespectful, but it was an astonishing figure. The problem was that, as I mentioned in a previous interviews, the Tunisians followed the French media very closely. They saw the leaders of the leading democracies coming together and announcing a \$30 billion assistance figure. The problem was that \$30 billion in assistance was not forthcoming, which led the Tunisian people to distrust the transitional government. The Tunisian people were asking, in effect, "Well, what has changed since the revolution? All of these democratically elected officials said we are getting \$30 billion in assistance, but we don't see it – what is going on?" I think that inside the Beltway we are a bit more sophisticated in how we parse statements that are issued at G-7 Summits, but this was probably the first one the Tunisians paid attention to.

So our challenge at Embassy Tunis was how to build the foundation so that we can focus Washington's attention on assistance to Tunisia in the midst of all the tremendous change happening throughout the region. I am not complaining about the lack of attention; that was not the issue. The issue was a simple lack of bandwidth in Washington.

I had mentioned before that there was a very understandable focus on Egypt. We therefore looked for ways to establish what I would call forcing mechanisms to focus attention on making decisions on assistance for Tunisia. The first thing we did was to hold a scaled-down version of the Joint Military Commission, which was an annual meeting between the U.S. and the Tunisians. We wanted to have it below the radar because the Tunisian government was a little nervous that any public or any very obvious cooperation with the U.S. military right before elections could be misperceived by the Tunisian public.

Q: Excuse me - I wonder could you explain for the reader here I know but what you mean but could you explain beneath the radar?

GRAY: When I say beneath the radar I mean without very much publicity. Usually the Joint Military Commission meetings would alternate between Tunis and Washington, and a fair number of officials from Defense and State would participate. The meetings would not be reported front pages of the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, but they were in the public eye. Rather than have a full-scale, very public Joint Military Commission meeting in one of the capitals, we held it in Stuttgart, which was the headquarters for U.S. Africa Command. General Ham very graciously provided the venue. We had a little bit of difficulty persuading OSD Policy about the wisdom of the meeting because OSD Policy thought that the fact that a one star general was heading the Tunisian delegation meant that the Tunisians were not taking the meeting very seriously. We had to explain to OSD Policy that the entire Tunisian military had only five or six flag rank officers, and that the Tunisian military was a little busy with everything going on inside the country and along its border. We also pointed out that the one star who was the head of the delegation was the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Reason prevailed, however, and the meeting took place in mid-July in Stuttgart. During the meeting we looked at ways that we could provide both military and development assistance. It wasn't a decision-making meeting,

but the Tunisians from both the military and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did a good job of explaining the situation and what their needs were in the upcoming months.

The positive atmosphere that the Stuttgart meeting gave us a good platform from which we could advocate for a meeting in September at the General Assembly between then-Secretary Clinton and then-Tunisian Foreign Minister Kefi, a former diplomat. Backing up, I should say that Secretary Clinton had come to Tunisia not long after the revolution; it was March 17, 2011, the day that the UN Security Council resolution on Libya was approved. In other words, she came just two months after the revolution. In a previous interview I listed some people – including Bill Burns, Jeff Feltman, and Senators McCain and Lieberman – who immediately understood that this was a very pivotal point. Secretary Clinton was one of those people as well. When we and the Near East Bureau were proposing a meeting between her and Foreign Minister Kefi, I am sure we were pushing on an open door; I think that meeting would have taken place regardless. Her meeting in New York set the stage for an invitation by President Obama to then-Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi, who was subsequently elected president.

That meeting took place in the Oval Office on October 7, 2011. There were a number of activities beforehand. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce hosted a dinner in his honor on Wednesday night, October 5, before his arrival; the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, Bob Hormats, was the senior U.S. government representative there. Bob was another person who was very supportive of the transition, not just in his words but also in his actions. The Prime Minister met with Secretary Clinton the day before the meeting in the Oval Office – in other words, on October 6.

The Oval Office meeting on October 7 went well. I was sitting next to a senior member of the NSC staff who passed me a note in the middle of the meeting saying, “It looks like you have a great job.” The purpose of the meeting was to demonstrate U.S. support for the transition. Since it took place on October 7, and the elections were to be held on October 23, the timing also served to signal our support for those elections.

Embassy Tunis’s hope and expectation for the Oval Office meeting was that it would serve as a forcing mechanism for Washington. In the run up to any such meeting, there is a search – some might even label it a frantic search – for that prized Washington commodity, “deliverables.” (That is not my word, I hasten to add.) Fortunately we had already given Washington a menu of options in the cables that I had mentioned: the Pete Davis cable and “low hanging fruit: cable.

Four major initiatives were announced. One was to bring back the Peace Corps program, which I had mentioned earlier was something that the Ben Ali regime had been vehemently opposed to due to its hyper-sensitivity about image. The Peace Corps staff did return to Tunisia to set up a program, and Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams came to launch it. The staff was on the ground in June 2012 laying the groundwork. I left post in July of 2012, and in September 2012 – before any volunteers arrived – the attack against our Embassy took place; as a result, that program is on hold.

The second was the announcement of Tunisia's eligibility for the Millennium Challenge Cooperation Threshold Program. Our proposal was a bit of a reach, because Tunisia's income was just above the ceiling for participation. Washington was originally very skeptical about our proposal initially, but the thirst for deliverables seemed to overcome their skepticism.

The Treasury Department deserves all of the credit for the third program which was announced, which was a sovereign loan guarantee program. It is a mechanism by which the U.S. Government guarantees a loan so that a country with a higher risk, such as Tunisia, can float loans on international markets without paying a higher interest rate due to this U.S. backing. As long as the government in question, Tunisia in this case, repays the debt on the bond, the cost to the United States taxpayer is zero, because we get our money back. Throughout its history Tunisia has been very good about repaying its debt. Any foreign assistance program that does a lot of good for the host country while costing the U.S. taxpayer zero is one that I support. I don't think anyone can be against it. The United States has done it a few more times for Tunisia since. It is scored in inside the Beltway budget terms as having a cost, but unless there is a default there is no actual cost to the taxpayer.

The fourth initiative announced by the President announced was, pending authorization from Congress, of course, the creation of an enterprise fund to provide seed money to support private sector growth. These had been established in some of the former countries of the Soviet Union and some former Eastern European countries; some were very successful and others had mixed success. The Tunisian American Enterprise Fund was initially funded with \$20 million, which has since increased; I believe it is now capitalized at \$80 million. The fund is up and running.

Those were the four main initiatives that were announced, but there were also other programs that were in the works. The Oval Office was a good forcing mechanism to reinvigorate the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. The Overseas Private Investment Corporation, OPIC, supported private sector investment in the Middle East and North Africa in general, and specifically in Tunisia, with a focus on franchising and on other similar programs.

From our perspective at the Embassy it was a successful visit for two reasons. First, the United States sent a clear signal of support in the run up to the election. Second, we were able to move our assistance agenda forward.

Q: Were there any forces within Tunisia that were unhappy about the ripening relations between our country and their country?

GRAY: I hesitate to say 'no' only because there must have been some unhappiness, but if there was it did not manifest itself. We did not hear any complaints from Tunisian NGOs or political parties or the like. There were certainly individuals who were not pleased with, for example, our intervention in Iraq, but people were pleased with our support for the Tunisian revolution and transition.

Q: What about during this time France obviously had been the colonial ruler and the big brother or whatever you want to call it. Were they playing a secondary role or were they right up there in front doing what we were doing?

GRAY: In between. I wouldn't say they were playing a secondary role, but the United States had a comparative advantage of not having the colonial baggage that you referred to. Moreover, we were seen as having supported Tunisian civil society before the revolution; we weren't perceived as a Johnny-come-lately. But Franco-Tunisian cultural, commercial, and educational ties are so strong that it wouldn't be accurate to say that the French were playing a secondary role.

Q: Alright, then, where do we go from here?

GRAY: I guess we move forward to the elections, which were held on October 23, 2011. They were conducted with the observation of many Tunisian, U.S., and international observers, and the important thing was that the Tunisians accepted the result. Even people who were not particularly pleased that Ennahda, the moderate Islamist party, won the plurality of votes they respected the process, and accepted the results. So from then, for the next few months, the focus was on government formation. As I had mentioned earlier, Ennahda made the decision to rule in coalition with two secular parties, so the delineation of who was going to lead which part of the government was clear. All things considered, it was a smooth transition, and it was a peaceful transition. Our transition is from the early November elections until January 20. While we have a larger and more complicated government, their transition took a roughly comparable period of time. Again, there were educated and competent civil servants to continue the work of the government on.

Q: Again I come back to the French and Western European connection as well as ours they were probably more indoctrinated in how this should be done than some of the other places which have such a difficult history in a difficult part of the world.

GRAY: I think that is a very good point. There was that exposure; many of the leaders of Ennahda had been in exile in Europe, as was Moncef Marzouki of the Congress for the Republic. He had been in exile in Paris for over a decade. You are right that there was a great deal of exposure to not just elections, but to democracy, and I think that the Tunisians benefitted.

Q: So during this period that they are putting this government together I would have thought that you and your officers would have been involved in advice on the side or at least saying this is how we do it or something like that?

GRAY: We were not prescriptive in any sense. One of the points we emphasized, though, was the need for consensus. We also emphasized the need for not just politicking, but for implementing good programs that would meet the needs of the Tunisian people. Those were then – just as they are now, five years later – jobs and security. We were very

careful not to appear to favor any one group over another. Even though I like to think we were as careful as possible, there were many people who voiced the opinion that we were somehow behind Ennahda. The only rationale that I can see for that view is the misguided but persistent belief that nothing happens in the Middle East and North Africa without the U.S. orchestrating it. Over and above the predisposition to believe conspiracy theories, the fact that we were clear that the election was credible and accepted it as the will of the Tunisian people may have fueled that thinking. At the press conference I held right after the elections, Tunisian journalists were trying to suggest that the United States would not accept the election results because Ennahda was an Islamist party. I said, "Ennahda is not Hamas; it is not a terrorist organization." That sound bite probably got the most attention, and it had the added virtue of being true. It was a good election and we respected the outcome. So did the Tunisian people, which is even more important.

Q: Well then as this is being put together did you have any concerns?

GRAY: As the government was being put together?

Q: Yeah, after the election.

GRAY: Certainly not with the composition of the government. We had two concerns, though. One was capacity. Tunisia was new to democracy, and at the same time there was a growing threat from Libya because of the influx of arms, refugees, and displaced people. As if the Tunisians did not have enough on their hands, it was winter and there was major flooding. In each case, whenever someone asked who is going to transport the ballot boxes or who is going to deal with the flooding, the answer was the military. It was a small military and it was overstretched, which is why we worried about its capacity and the capacity of the government.

Another concern we had was about the writing of the constitution. The existing constitution was not a bad document to begin with it, but it had been either misapplied or warped by too many years of authoritarian rule.

The third concern, which arose a few months after the government took power, was the rise of violent Salafis. It was unclear how the government was going to react and whether it would be tough enough. Like most departing Chiefs of Missions, I wrote a farewell cable summing up my views, and I really wondered if I was hitting the theme of the rise of Salafis too strongly. In retrospect, unfortunately, I'm glad I kept it as I first wrote it, because it was a threat that the government did not deal with as strongly and firmly as it should have.

Q: Were you about ready to leave about this time or not?

GRAY: The new government was put in place at the very end of December, so I still had through the next summer, and there was still a lot of work to be done, both by the Embassy and by the Tunisians. They were working on their constitution, and as context I would note that there was a great deal of concern about how the constitution would deal

with the role of Islam. Secularists were concerned that Ennahda would seek a stronger affirmation of the role of Islam. Article I in the now previous constitution, written after Tunisia gained independence from France, read “Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign state; its religion is Islam, its language Arabic, and its system is republican.” It listed three facts without being prescriptive, that is, without saying what the role of the language or the religion would be. It is factually accurate, so you can’t contest it, and at the same time it is vague because it does not say what you should do with the facts. On or about March 7, 2012, Ennahda’s spokesman announced that his party had decided to keep Article One in the new constitution untouched. It was another example of the Tunisians’ ability to find compromise.

Q: During this time what were you doing?

GRAY: To the extent that I could do so responsibly, I tried to travel outside of Tunis as much as I could. The elections were behind us, there wasn’t the need to be in the capital as much, and some of our assistance programs were beginning to come on line. I felt that it was important for the Tunisian people to see that the American people really did support the transition, and I thought that the best way to do that was to get outside the capital as much as possible. I often visited our assistance projects, which were beginning to come on line. U.S. Africa Command had a humanitarian assistance program, and since Tunisia had the infrastructure to implement projects, the Embassy was allocated \$5 million each year, even during the Ben Ali years. The program was for smaller scale projects, with a cap of \$500,000. It funded projects such as drug rehabilitation centers, a center in which an NGO could help rural women sell handicrafts, a center for autistic kids, etc. There was a range of projects, and they were spread around the country. It was great to be able to back up our words of support by being able to point to something tangible. When Secretary Clinton visited in March of 2011, she donated an ambulance to the Red Crescent. The ambulance was funded by Africa Command’s humanitarian assistance program. The rest of the ambulances that were in the pipeline came later, and we were able to donate those to health clinics in the south of the country, where there was certainly the need for them. Secretary Clinton came for her second visit as Secretary in February 2012, and was extremely helpful in terms of moving forward some of our assistance proposals that had been stuck in Washington. The Tunisians were on message as far as what they needed – I confess to some coaching – including budget support, and Secretary Clinton was able to get the \$100 million transfer through very quickly.

Q: You’ve mentioned these various visits by Secretary Clinton. Since she is now a candidate for president how did you find her in dealing with her and knowledge of the facts and all that?

GRAY: I found her to be very approachable, very down to earth, very easy to talk with, and also quite unflappable. I’ll give you two specific examples. The first time she came to Tunisia as Secretary was just two months after the revolution. She met with Fouad Mebazaa, who was the acting president, in a relatively small room. It was not cramped, but it was not too big. When the photographers came into the room they were so eager to get the picture they came too close to the Secretary and the acting president – I felt I

needed to stand up to block them, and I did, but they did not bother her a bit. The second example was when she came to Tunis in 2012. We were driving to her hotel after her arrival, and there was a demonstration. I don't even recall that it was an anti-American demonstration, but it doesn't matter; it was just a demonstration. The delay didn't bother her at all; I found her very flexible in that sense. As far as my interactions with her went, I felt they were very comfortable. Both times she visited she had town hall meetings, not just with the American community but also, separately, with Tunisian civil society. Both groups responded very positively to her. She was recently quoted as saying something to the effect of, "I've been a public servant a long time, and many of you know that the service part comes more easily to me than the public part." Based on what I saw in Tunisia, the public part also came easily.

The first time she came was the day the resolution on Libya was being debated in the Security Council. We were six hours ahead of New York at that point. The initial reports from New York were not promising, but I recall her saying "Let's go ahead and hold the vote. If people vote against it or veto it, then the whole world will know where they stand on this issue." I thought that was a very refreshing approach. Only ten countries voted in favor, but not one voted against the resolution. The second time she came was not just for bilateral meetings, but also to represent the United States at the Friends of Syria conference. It was very interesting that Tunisia hosted the event. I am virtually certain that President Marzouki was the first Arab head of state to meet with Syrian opposition leaders.

Q: Did Tunisia play any role in the events in Syria and elsewhere in the Arab Spring?

GRAY: I think the real role it played was as an example – in other words, a more aspirational role. Tunisia was not sending NGOs abroad to foment revolution. It was, understandably, too preoccupied with what was going on in Tunisia.

Q: Well then your last year, the time in Tunisia, things were, I guess, by this time things have settled down. What were your main concerns?

GRAY: Main concerns about the future of Tunisia?

Q: No, as an ambassador.

GRAY: One of the issues we were dealing with was closing the Foreign Service Institute's Arabic language school in Tunis. The academic year 2011-2012 was the last year in operation, so we wanted to focus on finding a soft landing for the teachers who had worked for the U.S. government for a long time. I think we did a pretty good job. Some of the teachers ended up with jobs in other sections of the Embassy, and we were able to get other teachers some assistance with job hunting. It may not seem like a high priority issue if you didn't work at the mission, but for us it was important. We were also working to augment the number of positions that we had at the Embassy to meet the increased workload and increased expectations from Washington.

Q: You mentioned before about the cultural outreach. With this turmoil in the political life were we doing anything cultural that...

GRAY: It definitely continued. We had new opportunities with the international visitor leadership program, a lot of youth exchanges. We also were able to expand the number of university linkages. Those programs continued, and since they were great programs I was glad that they did.

Q: Well then I guess we are winding down this Tunisian period any last thoughts about getting ready to go?

GRAY: One last incident during my time in Tunisia centered on a Franco-Iranian animated film named Persepolis.

Q: Oh yes, I saw that.

GRAY: It was very well done animated film about a young Iranian girl who grew up during the revolution and the years that followed. It aired on a satellite channel in Tunisia in October 2011, a little bit before the elections. The home of the CEO (Nabil Karoui) of that satellite television channel was attacked. Fortunately neither he nor his family was injured, but there was a great deal of property damage. It was followed by a court case in which he was charged for defamation of Islam, because there was one scene in the movie in which the protagonist – the young girl – was either praying or talking with God. There was a depiction in the movie of Allah, which was the alleged insult. In incredibly poor timing, Nabil Karoui was convicted on May 3, 2012, which was World Press Freedom Day. The Embassy issued a statement over my name saying that his conviction was inconsistent with the goals of the revolution and infringed on freedom of speech, not to mention Tunisian norms of tolerance. The film had aired in Tunisia before, during the Ben Ali regime. The statement did not win me popularity points with the government – the Foreign Ministry issued a statement decrying my alleged interference – but it was something that needed to be said. Unfortunately, it was another reflection of the ambivalence the government had vis-à-vis with violent Salafis.

Q: When you left Tunisia how did you feel about wither Tunisia?

GRAY: When I left the country at the end of my tour?

Q: Yeah.

GRAY: We were cautiously optimistic. If one is irrationally exuberant, to borrow a phrase, one shouldn't stay in this business very long. There was reason for optimism about Tunisia's prospects for many of the reasons we've discussed in the course of these interviews. People are, by and large, tolerant. The society is well-educated, it has had a great deal of exposure to democracy, and it protected women's rights – for example, it is the only Arab country in which polygamy is outlawed. I liked to point out to audiences that Tunisian women got the vote before Swiss women did. The way I put it, when I was

asked for my assessment, was that Tunisia has the necessary building blocks for a successful transition; the question is whether they are sufficient or not.

Now it's been four years since I left, and the Tunisians have had plenty of setbacks. But they have also had good elections, two peaceful transitions of power, and just the other day there was a vote of no confidence in parliament: the prime minister is resigning. Tunisians respect the will of parliament, so there is going to be a new prime minister selected by parliament. As long as each step backwards is matched by two steps forward, the country will continue to move in the right direction.

Q: When you got back I'm curious how the State Department deals with this in recent years. Did you get together with people and be pumped for what was happening? In a sense talking about what we are talking about now but in an official way of passing on your experiences to those who are dealing with Tunisia now so thinking of a time of flux that we are all dealing with.

GRAY: I did an hour-long oral history interview with the Office of the Historian in March 2012 when I was back for the Chief of Mission Conference, but I do not recall any debriefings. Well before I was an Ambassador, and particularly when I was DCM, I have believed that "one Ambassador per country" made a lot of sense. I had an experienced successor, and I wanted to stay firmly in my lane, so I did not seek out opportunities to go into the Department and tell them what they already knew.

THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

Q: Well then what did you do when you came back? You came back when?

GRAY: I came back in July 2012 and I taught at the War College. It was the only job I sought, and Nancy Powell, who was the Director General, was kind enough to give it to me. I spent three wonderful years teaching there, and in my third year I also served as the Deputy Commandant.

Q: Okay, well let's stop here and we can talk about it the next time. I do want to talk about the experience and also impressions with the military and all so I think it would be worth devoting some time to it.

GRAY: It was a great experience, so I'm more than happy to.

Q: Today is the 11th of August 2016 with Gordon Gray, and Gordon, we've got you coming back to the United States to go to teach at the War College. What were the years you were there?

GRAY: I was there from 2012 until 2015. I had a good time in Tunisia, as we've discussed in previous interviews, and I was looking forward to doing something a little bit different from what I had done in previous assignments. I also wanted to do something that continued to involve me to some degree with the military, so the National War

College seemed like a great fit. I was fortunate enough to be selected for a teaching position there and I taught all three years that I was there. The first two years I was a faculty advisor and then during my third and final year I was the Deputy Commandant.

Q: Let's talk about what you were teaching.

GRAY: There was a core curriculum at the National War College, which consists of different courses on strategy. The courses in the core curriculum were taught sequentially. The first course was of an introduction to strategy; the second course was the military instrument of power; and the third course in the sequence was a course called non-military instruments of power. That third course was the one that State Department personnel were asked to teach, due to the value of having served at embassies overseas. The State Department brings a certain amount of good experience, not just concerning the non-military instruments of power themselves, but also with how one synchronizes those instruments of power. The student body was roughly 70 percent U.S. military officers, usually at either the senior lieutenant colonel or at the colonel level. It was roughly 15 percent international fellows, in other words, military officers from partner nations, and roughly another 15 percent civilians from other agencies. Overall, the State Department students were 10 percent of the class, and another five percent were civilians from Defense, the intelligence community, etc. Many of military officers had not worked in an Embassy and were understandably not familiar with how an Embassy works; many did not have any interaction with the State Department or its personnel. So it was a course the students were quite interested in.

The other core curriculum course that I taught, along with my State Department colleagues and others, was called Global Context. The objective was to have the students think about the drivers that led foreign countries to act the way they did. Some of the drivers we looked at, for example, were geography, resources, demographics, civil society, and communication. It was a fun course to teach, and I liked it so much that I served as the deputy course director during my second year at the War College.

Over and above the core courses, there were also electives. Faculty had the flexibility to design and teach an elective or two. I taught an elective on the Arab Spring, not only drawing on my experience in Tunisia, but also looking at other countries involved in the Arab Spring. To give balance I also taught a separate elective on the Arab monarchies. In some cases the courses were tied to field studies travel. The field studies travel was a separate part of the curriculum, for which the electives provided the academic foundation. My second year at the War College, for example, I not only taught a course on Arab monarchies but also led a group of students to Kuwait so that they could move from the classroom to actually speaking with Kuwaitis. The field studies travel focused on energy and the protection of infrastructure, and we were able to visit different relevant sites.

Travel had been planned for the spring of 2013, but due to sequestration it did not take place. During my third year I was fortunate enough to fill in for the Commandant on a trip he was unable to take in conjunction with a student trip to visit the French equivalent

of the National War College, the *College des Hautes Études Militaires*; that was the second field studies trip that I took.

The curriculum was good, the students were very eager, and there was a good mix of lectures and seminars. Even when there was a lecture, it would be followed by a seminar discussion to build on what the lecturer had said. It was a great three years, and I really enjoyed the assignment.

Q: Did you find as you were giving a tour of the horizon a particular interest in I mean there are two quite opposite things. One would be China and the other would be irregular warfare.

GRAY: Yes to both. There was a great deal of interest in China, particularly from the officers in the Navy. There was also great interest in the spectrum of irregular warfare, from cyber to militias to terrorist groups.

Q: I would think particularly when you were talking about irregular warfare your student body would have a lot to say, "Well when I was in..."

GRAY: Absolutely. I would be hard pressed to think of a student from the Army or Marine Corps who had not served in Iraq or Afghanistan, and many of the Air Force and Navy officers had as well.

Q: Did you find yourself coming up with things well maybe not that you hadn't thought about but elements that surprised you?

GRAY: I always felt I learned a great deal in each seminar discussion and, for that matter, from the lecturers. I can't say I was surprised, though; that was my expectation

Q: What about the foreign students - what was your impression of how they responded?

GRAY: They were all enthusiastic about being there. At the end of the day, their ability to contribute successfully depended on their level of English. As I said all the students were very enthusiastic. Of all the war colleges, the National War College is the most selective, and it is viewed in the military as the most career enhancing. There were a lot of type A students, so discussions were fairly rapid fire. There were many times when I would have to interrupt a discussion when someone used a cultural reference or acronym that no foreigner could be expected to understand. In one case, a student made a very appropriate reference to the SEC. It came during college football season, so the reference was to the Southeastern Conference. But there is no way one could reasonably expect a foreign student to fully grasp what SEC meant.

Q: What about the American political environment I mean first on the native born Americans the military did you get any feel for how they viewed our political leadership or were they pretty subdued on this one?

GRAY: There was also a core course class on the domestic context, during which students would examine domestic political issues. From speaking to both students and other faculty members I think that the issues to which you may be referring came up most in that course, as opposed to the course I taught.

Q: Did local disputes like India-Pakistan, Israel-Palestine, etc. break out?

GRAY: Not that I saw. You used the example of India and Pakistan. Those two countries have historically been rivals, but in my experience when diplomats or military officers from those countries get together in an international environment, they tend to gravitate toward one another and even bond because of the cultural and linguistic similarities. I didn't see any tensions between Indian and Pakistani military officers, for example. What did happen on occasion was that a foreign military officer would feel obligated to defend his country's position. So, for example, if there was a lecture on country X, the military officer from country X might ask a question or make a comment after the lecture to express disagreement with the lecturer's point of view. By and large, people did so respectfully.

Q: I was wondering whether you found foreign officers from Latin America somewhat removed since many of the issues are not on their front plate as they are if you are in Europe, the Middle East or Asia?

GRAY: There weren't as many foreign military officers from Latin America at the National War College as there were from Europe, the Middle East, or Asia. I don't have a large sample size, but I did have a Colombian student in one of my seminars, and I met with a different military officer from Colombia for his oral examination at the end of the year. They were both very astute officers. My State Department and military colleagues with experience in Colombia spoke highly of their militaries. Since I did not meet many Latin American military officers, I am hesitant to extrapolate, but I certainly found the Colombian officers to be engaged.

Q: Certainly in Colombia more than anywhere else in Latin America they've been engaged.

GRAY: Right.

Q: And long term very difficult guerilla warfare.

GRAY: Yes, and in close partnership with the United States.

Q: I take it at this point did we have any students from Russia or from mainland China?

GRAY: No. We had students from Taiwan, Japan, Viet Nam, and I'm sure there was a Korean student but no, certainly not from Russia or China.

Q: By the time you were Deputy Commandant what were the concerns at that level about the program and where you were going and all?

GRAY: During the second of my three years, there was a bit of churn with the curriculum, imposed from the umbrella organization, which is the National Defense University. In a place that prides itself on teaching leadership, it was ironic that it was done without collaboration or consultation, and on very short notice. So during my third year, as Deputy Commandant, we were working through the new curriculum at the beginning of the year, and then at the end of the year we were drawing on lessons learned to revamp it. All of this was juxtaposed with some leadership changes both at the National Defense University (where the president who had been leading the change, a two-star military officer, he resigned unexpectedly) and at the National War College (where we had an unexpected change in the Dean of Faculty). The curriculum that I saw during my first two years has since been restored, which is good as it was a sensible curriculum. I found that the National War College faculty was very interested in trying to keep the change curriculum fresh. I found almost all of the faculty members be very open minded.

I was struck by comments by a visiting faculty member from George Washington. She praised the amount of feedback faculty members received. The National War College (and probably all the war colleges) place great emphasis on teaching; students are the number one customers. So there was a big emphasis on feedback and teaching. Second, this colleague was surprised and impressed by the degree of collaboration among faculty. Part of the reason is the nature of the faculty at the National War College. About a third of the faculty members are Title X academics; they had renewable three year contracts. They were academics with PhDs, and some of them taught as adjunct professors elsewhere around town. A third were military officers on detail. And then another third – and this break-down is an approximation – were people like me, detailees from civilian agencies. I used to joke that my State Department colleagues and I were the tuition, because State had an obligation to provide faculty members in lieu of paying tuition for students attending the National War College.

Q: On this trip you made to France what was your impression of the French military college?

GRAY: It was a smaller program, and it had fewer international students. They gave us a very interesting and very topical briefing on the French intervention in Mali. The French students there are a little more senior than the U.S. students at the National War College, and I learned that almost all of the French military officers in the program become Flag Officers. It was a short stay, so I can't make deep observations about it, but it seemed like a good program to me. Certainly the events I participated in were interesting and educational.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Q: This is you rather than your time at the War College what was your impression here you were in Washington reading the press and all. What was your impression of the American press and the whole foreign affairs establishment?

GRAY: In what regard?

Q: Well in regard to what the press was reporting, how you felt people were understanding what was happening particularly in your field, which is their world which is certainly in turmoil. And maybe even the politics of this what were you getting as an observer and practically a foreign culture for most of us.

GRAY: You mean just over the past few years?

Q: Yeah, particularly when you were in Washington at the National War College...

GRAY: As someone from the dinosaur generation who actually looks forward to picking up the newspaper in my driveway each morning, I find it a real shame that newspapers have cut back on their foreign bureaus, and that there is less and less coverage of foreign developments. That being said, there are some excellent people who cover the Middle East and have a good understanding. Not all write for newspapers; some are bloggers. But my general sense is there is not as much in-depth reporting on foreign affairs as there once was.

Q: From afar how did you view developments in Tunisia?

GRAY: It depended on the date. Shortly after I left Tunisia (July 5, 2012), there was the September 14, 2012 attack against our Embassy. We have discussed in previous interview the concerns we had not just the violent Salafist movement in Tunisia, but also about the government's reluctance to confront it. In 2013, two secular political leaders were assassinated, one in February 2013 and one in July 2013. So that period – from September 2012 to July 2013 – was a dangerous one. Without trying to sound melodramatic, I think that Tunisian society was close to the cliff, looked into the abyss, and decided that it would not use violence to resolve political issues. Tunisian society opted instead for political compromise; the government resigned and was replaced by a technocratic one. My take at the time was that the challenges were significant, but that they were working through these challenges.

Then there was the external threat, which we saw in 2015 with two large-scale terrorist attacks. The first one was in March, at the Bardo Museum in Tunis. It has a world-class collection of mosaics dating back to Roman times, and is a very large tourist attraction for understandable reasons. That is why it was targeted. The July 2015 attack in Sousse again targeted tourists, this time those staying at a beach resort. While these were dangerous times, the Tunisians responded with dialogue and consensus rather than with further violence. My sense was that as long as that trend continued, the Tunisians would end up in the right place.

Q: Well this is a broad question but looking back on it how did you view the Obama administration I mean the whole apparatus dealing with the Middle East?

GRAY: I think that it was similar in many ways to preceding administrations. In the first place, it came in hoping not to spend as much time on the Middle East as it ended up spending. Second, there was a great deal of understandable attention being paid to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the result of which was that not as much attention was paid to either economic issues in the region, or to North Africa. When I was consulting U.S. government officials before departing for Tunisia, I was surprised and chagrined during one meeting with a senior policy maker in the new Administration (not at the State Department) when he confessed to me that he did not know what the policy would be toward trade with the Middle East and North Africa. And as I had mentioned earlier, once the Arab Spring began and there were crises in so many different countries there were just band width issues in Washington.

Q: Well then you left the War College and you are now working for another organization?

GRAY: That's right. I had had three busy, hectic, but ultimately enjoyable years as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs working for David Welch, a great Assistant Secretary. I had three great years in Tunisia at a historic time, and we had a great team at the Embassy. And I truly enjoyed my years at the War College, which was just a great deal of fun. So I didn't feel like as if there could be a more enjoyable set of assignments than I had had. I had also observed a couple of my friends in the Foreign Service who had wonderful careers, marked by great achievements, but they stayed in for one assignment too long and left with a bit of a sour taste in their mouths. I thought the Foreign Service was a wonderful career; I really enjoyed it; and I wanted to leave on top, if you will, while I was still enjoying it.

I wanted to stay in Washington, and I wanted to stay involved with the Middle East, so at the conclusion of the academic year I retired. My flag ceremony was on June 26, 2015 and my official retirement date was two days later. Three weeks after that, I started working at the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce as its Executive Vice President, which is where I am today. I am still involved with the Middle East, but it is now from a slightly different angle. I still see several current and former colleagues from the State Department, from the Foreign Service, and particularly from the Near East Bureau; that makes it enjoyable as well.

Q: What's the purpose of the organization?

GRAY: We have a straightforward mission statement, which is to promote business, economic, and commercial ties between the United States on one hand, and North Africa and the Middle East on the other hand. The work includes organizing trade missions to go overseas, bringing trade missions from Arab world here, conferences, round tables, and giving business advice.

Q: It strikes me that we are looking at the world of Islam there really doesn't seem to be much in the way of outside of oil that is sellable here in the States.

GRAY: I think that the Middle East and North Africa is a good destination for U.S. exports. Infrastructure is one area where U.S. firms have a competitive advantage. We have always done well in defense and aeronautic sales to the region. U.S. products, by and large, are the best in the world, and have that reputation, so there is a good market, particularly in those countries that can afford to pay.

Q: Do you see any emerging specialty of commercial development in any Arab country like in Asia you've got computer technology and all that. Do you see anything like that developing?

GRAY: I'll give you two specific examples, based on my time in Tunisia. One is a company led by an American, who did his research and decided that he wanted to establish a manufacturing plant in Tunisia to manufacture a flange that is used in every Boeing aircraft but every Boeing aircraft of its type. It may have been the Boeing 777. They are manufactured there, and when I left Tunisia the company was doing very well. One of the reasons that attracted him to Tunisia was a ready supply of qualified engineers and so that was just one example. The second example I'd use is a U.S. company named Vista print. It is a company that aggregates several small orders, such as business cards; you can do the design yourself. One of the reasons it set up shop in Tunisia was that there was not only a bilingual (French and Arabic) workforce, but many people know a third language as well. They were setting up a call center with people who had design and engineering backgrounds. For countries that have relatively well-educated work forces, there are plenty of opportunities. The issue, in my opinion, is making sure that each country has a workforce that is prepared for the 21st century commercial marketplace. While we in the States can assist with that task, it is really up to each country and each society to educate its young people to prepare them for the workforce.

Q: I've run out of questions now. What are you up to do you see yourself continuing here or going back to academia or what?

GRAY: I am enjoying my current job. I also really enjoyed teaching, and when I am asked to give a guest lecture I always jump at the opportunity.

Q: Okay, if you do me a favor and keep some of your colleagues in mind when you meet with them ask if they've been interviewed and if they haven't pass their names on to me. They don't have to have been ambassadors but been in interesting places or done interesting things.

GRAY: I'd be happy to.

Q: You mentioned David Welch where is he?

GRAY: He is with Bechtel and was living in Dubai.

Q: Okay, after you finish checking your transcript we will put it on our website and we will give it to the Library of Congress too. You might point out to people about our ADST.org, our website, because it's got a lot to it including a country readers so if someone is interested country readers can go to our website and everybody who served in Tunisia or dealt with it can take that excerpt out of their transcript and put it into the Tunisian Country Reader.

GRAY: I remember you mentioning that.

Q: Well Gordon I really appreciated this and I want to thank you for this.

GRAY: It's been a lot of fun getting to know you. I wish you the best of luck with all of your future interviews, and I hope we stay in touch.

Q: Absolutely, take care.

GRAY: You too, Stu - thanks.

End of interview