

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

DONALD K. STEINBERG

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Steinberg.]

Q: Today is the 28th of April 2005. This is an interview with Donald K. Steinberg. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

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

STEINBERG: I was born in Los Angeles, California. March 25, 1953.

Q: Tell me a bit about the Steinberg side of the family. What do you know about them and what they were up to?

STEINBERG: My father was second generation immigrant. His father was from Russia and came over in the early 1900s. He was a restaurateur and was the head director of the Wilshire Country Club in Los Angeles. This is where many of the Jewish entertainers were members.

My father grew up on the last Groucho Marx, George Burns, and George Jessel and all of those great comedians. My father went into education and taught in inner city schools in Los Angeles for much of his life and then went into administration and became a high school principal in Los Angeles. He was also active in Human Relations. He had a doctorate writing about the response to the riots in Watts, in the early 1960s [Ed: August 11 to 17, 1965]. He was president of the Alumni for Human Relations for many years.

On my mother's side, a very similar background, her grandparents came over from Poland and Russia, as well. They passed away very early on. My mom was eventually raised by her older sister. Both my father and my mother went to UCLA (University of California Los Angeles), which is where they met. She was the editor of the school newspaper and my father was the sports editor of the newspaper. It was a marriage made on Fleet Street.

Q: In your family background, how Jewish was the family when you arrived?

STEINBERG: It was very culturally Jewish, but not so religiously Jewish. We didn't go to temple. We did celebrate the holidays, especially with our cousins, who were

somewhat more Jewish than we were in terms of practice. We were raised very strongly with what maybe considered very strong Jewish ethical values. The important thing was how much you did for other people. Not how much money you made or what kind of car you drove.

Q: Where did you live?

STEINBERG: We lived in West Los Angeles, right near UCLA, probably about three miles away from UCLA. I would say an upper middle class family dwelling.

Q: Did the Wilshire Club and that whole thing spill over at all or was that whole thing just a memory for you?

STEINBERG: For me it was just a memory. My grandfather was alive only for a few years after I was born, so that was sort of context for the family, but I didn't really experience much of it.

Q: Was that the place that Groucho Marx says, I don't want to be the member of a club that would accept me?

STEINBERG: Right, and it was also Groucho Marx having married a non-Jewish woman once said that he was restricted from going to the country club and said that his daughter who was only half Jewish should be allowed in half way up to her waist.

Q: Speaking of which, did you grow up, where there was a very sizable Jewish community in Los Angeles.

STEINBERG: We grew up in a very mixed neighborhood. My schools were always, once we got passed elementary school, where I was one of the only Jews in the entire school, we moved to another area that was only about five miles away. I would say one third of the students at my Junior High School and High School were Jewish. A large Hispanic and a large black community and a few Caucasians.

Q: That is an interesting area. A little about family home life. Brothers and sisters?

STEINBERG: I have two older brothers. One of them is now the leading sports agent in the country. His name is Lee Steinberg. He actually was the basis for the 1996 movie Jerry McGuire. The producer of that movie followed him around for two years in order to get the zeitgeist of his life for that movie. He represents a lot of football players, mostly quarterbacks. My other brother is actually a religious leader. He is in a group that follows an experienced leader, effective Buddhism. He translates a lot of the scriptures from the original Sanskrit in England. He has written many books and travels frequently to India and those parts.

Q: Just out of curiosity, what set him off on that course? It is an unusual one for an American.

STEINBERG: At the age of 22 he had been looking for what was his goal in life and tried an awful lot of things and met this religious leader and was taken by him. He basically used himself as a disciple of a great religious teacher.

Q: That's great. More power to him.

STEINBERG: Very fulfilling.

Q: At home, what were the politics at home or were there politics?

STEINBERG: There were. Both of my parents are very liberal. Actually, my father just passed away last year. They were Democrats, strongly. My father bragged that he never voted for Republican at any point in his life. They more importantly ethical values, I would say. My father was very early on a fighter for racial equality in our neighborhood. At one point, he circulated a petition that the neighborhood would welcome blacks into our neighborhood and was one of the leading advocates of bussing to equalize the racial make up of schools. We would occasionally get our car tires slashed because he was fairly well known in that regard. My mom was less active in politics, but shared those same values. They were really driven into us as children. I remember early on working for Elliot Roosevelt who was running for Mayor of Los Angeles. At the age of 8 typing up on a little typewriter what I thought were pamphlets that were urging people to vote for Roosevelt for Mayor. He lost as it were, but that was just a notion that an individual has a responsibility to the community to pursue his or her beliefs.

Q: How does this translate in class, in school? Do you find yourself being on the outs or the ins?

STEINBERG: It was a very liberal school. If you are looking at the high school days that coincides with the Vietnam Tet protests. It coincides with the opening of the school in terms dress codes and in terms free speech and all. I was very much involved in high school and what you might call the counter culture. And take over the administration building on occasion we organized student strikes on various issues. There was a real activist feeling among the student body at that time.

Q: Well, you went to elementary school, what were they called?

STEINBERG: I went to Stoner Elementary School in Culver City, which is a small city sort of inside of Los Angeles. That school I was one of a handful of Jews there. It was mostly a Hispanic school and a lower middle class white community. Then for one year I moved to, again just about 5 miles away, I went to Overland Elementary School for one year. Then to Palms Junior High and Hamilton High School.

Q: How did your find when you were in a Hispanic neighborhood, I mean, the attitude of the Hispanic students to schooling as a way of moving up.

STEINBERG: I was too young to feel that. My older brother had a lot of his consciousness defined by going to that school and then onto a Junior High School that was also very Hispanic. He would have felt that a lot more than I.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

STEINBERG: I started really only in Junior High School and High School. Then yes, I was, but not earlier. I was out playing sports. I played piano, which I very much enjoyed. This is Los Angeles. There is too much going on out there to stay in a room and read, only when it sort of coincided with school requirements. I do remember though in college all of sudden almost discovering reading for enjoyment. I read a lot these days. That really didn't kick in until college.

Q: How about movies and TV? You are in Culver City. This is the heart of the entertainment business.

STEINBERG: My mom was actually a film librarian. She would bring home feature films and documentaries. We had a 35 mm film projector and we would project it on the wall, so that was very much a part of our lives. I did watch a lot of television as child. I often wonder how much more I could have achieved in life if I had been reading or doing something else instead of watching TV shows like Leave It to Beaver and Father Knows Best. Movies were very much a part of our lives as well as feature films. Every Saturday we would go off to a movie.

Q: Did you ever have any contact with movie people at all?

STEINBERG: Yeah, we did. Two of my parent's friends were prominent in the movie industry. One was Stanley Roberts who was probably best known as the screenwriter for The Thin Man (1947) and The Caine Mutiny (1954). There was another one who was a chief publicist for I think MGM, so we had a passing involvement with that industry.

Q: In High School what subjects particularly interested you?

STEINBERG: Social Studies, whether that was history or economics the current events. Those were the issues that excited me at that point. Plus, I enjoyed math, calculus, algebra, or geometry.

Q: You say you were an activist in High School. What was the composition of the High School?

STEINBERG: It was about, I would say about one third Jewish, probably one third Hispanic and black, and one third white, but it was very liberal throughout. My views were constant with other people.

Q: You were going there in the 1960s. What was the situation; this was after the Watt's Riots [Ed: August 11 to 17, 1965], yes? How was black-white interaction working in those days?

STEINBERG: I had number of black friends, but I would say the communities at the school were fairly divided. Having the mixture it was prevented any sort of group dominating the community. I played sports as well, so there was a lot of interaction with African-Americans doing that. I was on our high school basketball team and I played baseball out of school in Junior Leagues. I have a lot of contact there. Racial issues were hot then, but they were consistent with where most of the activist whites were.

Q: Did the Hispanic group... How did they fit in?

STEINBERG: Not very much. They were a little less prominent at my high school than in previous schools I had gone to. They really weren't that much involved.

Q: And the Asian community?

STEINBERG: Small, small.

Q: I guess this was before the great wave hit.

STEINBERG: There was a small number, actually. The student body vice-president was Dennis Hiyachi, who was a close friend. We played basketball together. There wasn't a large Asian community.

Q: How do these protest work at a high school? Were you one of the instigators of figuring out issues and then going out?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. We had demonstrations on both local issues and big international issues. Everything from petitioning for a revision or actually an elimination of the dress code at the school. At one point the sports program was going to be cut, so we demonstrated against that. Then we also demonstrated for draft counseling on campus and demonstrated against the Vietnam War. I would I guess on three or four occasions, I traveled up to San Francisco for moratoriums. That was a big demonstration. That was a real conscious raising period because you would hop on a bus. They would bus you up to the place where Caesar Chavez was organizing farm workers against their exploitation. You would then go up to San Francisco and sit on the lawn with 300,000 other people listening to Crosby, Stills and Nash, and Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan protesting the war with their songs. It was really part of my consciousness.

Q: Great time. Also, great weather. You couldn't do that in New England, except during the spring and early fall, I think.

STEINBERG: But, I also really respect my parents for letting me do that. You know, I am a 16 year old kid (1969) and I am hopping on a bus and going to demonstrations in San Francisco. They accepted, in fact, encouraged it.

Q: Did you find, participating in these events opened your eyes to social analysis, who's manipulating whom and that sort of thing?

STEINBERG: Not really. I don't think I was politically aware enough. Again, I was in sort of the second wave, so that I was 17 and participating in demonstrations and things. I wasn't 22 and organizing things. I was really more of a fellow traveler, you might say. The one place that isn't true is that we had a major demonstration at my high school when the student body president and then student body treasurer, who was me and the editor of the school newspaper, were removed from their offices by the principal for minor violations of rules. We actually organized a student strike. We essentially shut down the school. The principal was required to hold a referendum which we won dramatically. This was a chance to thumb your nose at the administration. All of us were put back into office. That was probably the one exception where we did organize and think through a campaign to achieve our goals.

Q: How did your father as the principal go along with it?

STEINBERG: It was interesting. I have always respected him for the fact that when I was removed from office, he defended me. He came to school and tried to figure out ways to protect my rights. Subsequently, when we organized these demonstrations he was completely supportive. No criticism what so ever. That was a real bonding experience with him.

Q: You graduated from high school when?

STEINBERG: 1970

Q: What was the draft situation at that point?

STEINBERG: In those days you had a draft number, but there was still student deferment. I never had a case where I was vulnerable, because by the time I graduated from college, the draft was over. To be quite frank, I actually tried to become a conscientious objector, but it's very difficult to do that as a Jew. The real basis was always religion and the Jewish religion doesn't really have a tradition of conscientious objectors. I tried to argue that on the basis of different factors, but they never really considered that argument.

Q: Up through high school, did foreign affairs cross your radar very much?

STEINBERG: Not much. I would occasionally do papers on foreign issues. The Vietnam War really opened my eyes to international issues, but I really wasn't considering a career in foreign affairs at that point. I always assumed that I would be a lawyer and represent poor people and represent the down trodden. I was very influenced by two

things. One television shows, where the defenders or other lawyers were really the ones pushing for social justice. I also had an uncle who was a lawyer and very much involved in defending Hispanics and Blacks. He influenced me a lot, as well.

Q: What about Israel? In your family, up through high school, was it much of an issue?

STEINBERG: Not that much of an issue. You always felt a real kinship, obviously with Israel. At a later point in my life, my cousins moved to Israel, so you always felt a kinship there as well. And during the June 1967 Six Day War, that was when I was in junior high school. I remember sort of rooting for almost like a sports team, the Israelis during that conflict. But there wasn't anything sophisticated about my vision of that situation.

Q: And the family, your father and mother weren't particularly involved in various organizations?

STEINBERG: They were very much involved in Israel and the anti-deformation league in particular, a Jewish organization, which fights anti-Semitism, but also fights racial injustice of any kind. They were very much involved in that, but not in the traditional temple related Judaism.

Q: 1970 you are off to college. Where?

STEINBERG: Reed College in Portland, Oregon, which is perhaps the most radical school in the country. As a liberal democrat, I felt myself one of the most conservative people on campus. There is a story which I think is true that in 1972 in the campus newspaper's poll that was taken on campus, Richard Nixon came in third, George McGovern was second and Mao Zedong was the candidate of choice for the President of the United States. This was a very radical school.

Q: I interviewed someone who was rather prominent in the Foreign Service who graduated from there. Tell me, what did you know about the background of Reed. How did it get that way?

STEINBERG: It was started as a non-denominational school in the early 1900s. From the beginning it was a place of intellectual independence. They specifically said there would be no fraternities or sororities. There would be no formal collegiate athletics. There was an honor code that was instituted which basically said you could do whatever you want as long as it doesn't hurt other people and obeys basic rules. When I was there, there was system of giving grades, but not telling you what they were unless they were under a C, as a way of limiting consciousness of grades. It attracted the kind of students who would be interested in that kind of an education process. In the classroom itself, it was always a case of having small classes with professors who were not measured on the basis of publishing, but on the basis of teaching, so there was no contest of publish or perish at the school. It really mattered were you a good teacher. I think that pattern has continued up to today.

Q: How did you run across Reed and what attracted you to it?

STEINBERG: The freedom, the openness of the school, and the intellectual challenges. It had a good reputation for academics. It actually, when I was there, I think it is still true, had the highest percentage of people going on to PhD's of any school. It also teaches you how to think. The whole curriculum is geared towards independent analysis. I like to point out that I took a Shakespeare class and instead of reading eight plays by Shakespeare you actually read two the entire year. You really understood what was going on there. I would meet with a friend who went to University of California Los Angeles and took Shakespeare class and at that point he could spout out quotes from all these different plays and I felt very disadvantaged. Since then, I have read everything that Shakespeare has written. I was empowered to do that. It teaches you how to think. It teaches you how to reason. I actually gave the commencement address three years ago [Ed: May 15, 2000]. I pointed out that that was the great legacy that Reed left me, was that it hadn't been just to learn. I had been to think and a capacity to reason.

Q: It sounds like the St. John's approach.

STEINBERG: Yes

Q: The St. John's approach heavily weighed toward the classics, but getting really into it in depth.

STEINBERG: Yes, I would say there were three or four colleges like that. Antioch was very similar; Swarthmore perhaps.

Q: Was there a way of teaching you to think? A method of doing this? A Cartesian thing. Thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

STEINBERG: I guess the real emphasis was on being able to explain things. In the speech I gave at Reed, I said that one of the keys was that it taught you the difference between explaining and justifying. You can explain anything you want, but justification implies some sort of a moral criteria that you need to apply to how you view actions. I would say that would be the dominant focus. I can explain this better when I write a book.

Q: This is the period in social history where you don't trust anyone over 30. The government always lies to you and all this, which is all very well and good, but people do get passed 30 and the government is what runs things. At the time you were getting this education, were you having problems adjusting to reality.

STEINBERG: Probably. Reed was a little bubble where again being a liberal democrat was the equivalent being conservative. We had an administration, that when we tried to take over their offices essentially they handed us the keys and told us where the liquor was. It was a bubble of liberalism or radicalism that we always understood as such. I will say that even as we got towards my junior and senior year, I was looking more towards

government as a place where I wanted to serve. That is largely defined by my parents. They had always told us that government was a force for good. This notion of government as the enemy never penetrated my psyche. Richard Nixon might have been the enemy, but not government per se. Government was still the force that represented black people and racial equality. It was the court system where you could take grievances and have them resolved. It was social programs that lifted people up. It was education. No, I never had this government as enemy mentality.

Q: Did one major at Reed?

STEINBERG: You did. I majored in economic development and was basically focused on what was going on in lesser developed countries and how they can develop. You actually were required to write a thesis at Reed, your senior year. It was equally rigorous as most PhD's thesis. I wrote it on economic development in Japan and Mexico and how they managed to remove from extreme poverty to relative affluence.

Q: How did you find your teachers? I can see a problem of a place such as Reed by having teachers so well intentioned that they are moving away from reality.

STEINBERG: That was never the case. The classrooms were places where you really got to test your theories. The teachers were very qualified. They took teaching very seriously. As I said, there was no requirement to publish. Teaching is what mattered. I remember three or four professors, who to this day I think about contests that they presented to me. I think about papers that they required me to write, that to this day have relevance. I found the education itself to be just a remarkable experience. Again, it had to compensate for so much because Reed doesn't have beer bashes. Reed doesn't have football games. It doesn't have fraternities. The education in the classroom is what really mattered.

Q: Tell me a little bit about, were there a lot of bull sessions. Guys and girls, how did they mix? How did this thing work?

STEINBERG: To be very honest, there were a lot of drugs on campus. A lot of what happened related to the use of marijuana. There were never harder drugs. The typical day was you go to classes; I was actually involved in athletics there. It wasn't inner collegiate, but we organized games with other schools. I played a lot of basketball and baseball. I would basically go to class during the day. In the afternoon play sports, go off to dinner and then head the library. People studied a tremendous amount there. At midnight I would go off to the coffee shop and play pool or pinball or talk about Vietnam with friends. Then go off to bed. You develop small groups of friends there. I had my colleagues who were very important to me.

Q: I am showing a generational thing here. In my time, I graduated from college in 1950 and I went to a small school. Williams in Massachusetts. There really wasn't much talk about it. The guys went off and did their studies, and I guess you drank, and you were interested in girls, but they weren't around. I would think if marijuana was a big deal, you sit around smoking and thinking great thoughts. I am not sure much comes out of this.

STEINBERG: It was also a very free place about sexuality. This was before AIDS. There was a lot of sexuality on campus.

Q: That makes good sense to me. Again, did international affairs, the American involvement during this period, you had Kissinger. The Cold War was both big, but looked like things were happening. Opening to China and all that sort stuff.

STEINBERG: I became much more aware of the world during this period and much more convinced that that's where my future would lie. I did follow international relations a lot. I studied a lot of American History and American Diplomatic History during that time. I had a couple of professors including one diplomatic residence, whose name I don't remember.

Q: Yes, we have had diplomats and residents there quite often.

STEINBERG: That was very instructive because for the first time someone was giving me a paradigm to look at the current role of America. We went back and read Williams who sort of defined what America's role in the world ought to be. We did read Henry Kissinger. We did follow Mexico, China, and the Soviet Union. I would say the Vietnam War was still going during that period. We still protested against that. I also go very much involved in American development in developing countries and studied a lot about India in particular, but also I you said Mexico and Japan. I think it was about my junior year that I started to think hmm maybe this is where I want to spend my life.

Q: You graduated in 1974. What did you do?

STEINBERG: I had already taken the Foreign Service exam during my senior year and had passed it. I had passed the written and was waiting for the oral process to get underway. I decided to go off and get a Master's Degree, which I did from the University of Toronto. I went to Canada, not because I was waiving the draft. I got asked that a lot. Again, the draft never was relevant to me. It was because they had built a unique program as political autonomy. That is economics as a social issue, the distribution of power due to the marketplace. That was much more attractive to me than economics, which was increasingly mathematical and theoretical or political science, which I thought was just as boring. I did do a Master's program at University of Toronto in economic development, again, as part of a political autonomy.

Q: Did you take the Foreign Service exam oral at that point?

STEINBERG: Yeah, I had taken it during my senior year at Reed.

Q: How did you find the oral? A three person panel?

STEINBERG: Fascinating. Yes, three people. At that point it was just a one hour interview. To this day I remember a number of the questions.

Q: Yeah, what were they?

STEINBERG: If you could sneak into Henry Kissinger's office and see on his desk and a see a list that said things to consider about Latin America. What would be on that list? If you showed up at an Embassy and you are meeting with the Ambassador, this is your first tour, he says "There is a morale problem that this Embassy. I want you over the next 30 with your fresh eyes to look over what that morale problem might be." How would you go about that? You are at a cocktail party in Paris and a French official comes up to you and says, "You know I love America, but you don't really have much of a culture in the United States." How would you respond? To this day I remember those questions because I am not sure I could answer any better today than I did then.

Q: I was just thinking, all of those were ones, we would make up. Now it is very mechanical. We would look at somebody and say let's try him or her on this type of thing. Let's see how they handle it. Often playing both to what we considered we knew about their strengths and their weaknesses. It wasn't a bad way of doing it, but unfortunately with law suits and everything else, they have it very mechanized right now.

STEINBERG: I thought it was an excellent test. I found myself challenged.

Q: My other two colleagues and I were really pretty shocked at how obviously bright people weren't aware of what was happening. When we gave it say in Boston or Washington, DC or something everybody reads the Washington Post or New York Times in that area. In that area anyway, you can't help being pretty well up. All of a sudden you drop off the edge of the universe when you go across the Mississippi.

STEINBERG: That was me. That very was much me, during that period.

Q: Yeah. At Toronto, what did the courses consist of and what was the focus?

STEINBERG: With one or two exceptions, what you really focused on again was economics as a social institution. You were focusing on class struggles. I did a program, or a course on Mercantilism, so we focused on that. Not as a mathematical formula, but the social dynamics of moving towards a capitalism period. I studied Japan and studied the class struggles with the Meiji Restoration and its push for development. It was more economics as a struggle for power among classes than it was a formulaic macro-economics.

Q: Was the dominant model suggesting more government control, as opposed to the capitalist model?

STEINBERG: There is not question that government involvement in the economy was viewed as a positive thing. Most schools at that point were teaching developmental economics very strongly, so government did have a major role in the economy. The real question was it's applicability to developing countries. That is where I knew from the

word go that that's where I wanted to be. How do you use the government leavers in a developing country to encourage economic growth? Those were the issues. I wouldn't say it was a socialist model at all. That may have been more dominate at Reed, but it wasn't at the University of Toronto.

Q: During this period, had you had any chance to go overseas at all?

STEINBERG: Just to Europe. I took one trip in 1973 to France, and Belgium, Luxemburg, and London, England, and Switzerland. I really had never been in a developing country, with the exception of Mexico.

Q: Did the Peace Corp come across your radar?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. I often thought that if I had any skills at that point that I could have communicated, I would have joined the Peace Corp. It was a real option, but I sort of viewed the State Department maybe idealistically as a force for good around the world. I saw that as a viable equal option for helping encourage economic development and third world growth.

Q: At the University of Toronto, how was America viewed by the faculty and the student body?

STEINBERG: As the somewhat wavered big brother who is off doing some nasty things around the world, while it's somewhat purer younger brother was pursuing great thought and great deeds. I didn't feel any antagonism towards me as and American, but I did feel Antagonism towards America.

Q: You were there, how long?

STEINBERG: Just two summers and the regular term.

Q: You got out of there in 1975?

STEINBERG: 1975, and straight into the Foreign Service.

Q: I assume you went into the basic officer's course, A-100 course. How would you describe the composition in the outlook of the members of the course?

STEINBERG: It was very liberal. It was a good mix I would say. We had everything from civil rights lawyers and Indian rights advocates to former military. I felt there were a wide variety of people in the course. Ethnically it was almost pure white and pure middle class. There were maybe a quarter of the class were women. We were not a real good cross section of America. I gravitated towards the more liberal members of the class. My hair at that point was very long. I am paying the dues for it now. I go back and I look, I wore flowered shirts. I had a little neck ring. It was a much different period. I go back and look at those pictures with a little bit of embarrassment. It was a different period. [Ed:

Mr. Steinberg was a member of the 121st A-100 Class and was sworn in in the Benjamin Franklin Room on September 26. [Classmate Leslie Gerson has her oral history on the ADST website.]

Q: At that time was the cone system in place where you selected your career specialization?

STEINBERG: Yeah they did. Obviously, in my mind there was no question, I wanted economics. I was put into that cone.

Q: So, where did you want to go and what happened to you?

STEINBERG: It was funny story because the person who was in charge of matching up the posts and the people tells me, subsequently that he would go home and say to his wife, "I have got to fill this position in the Central African Republic and I don't know who's going to take it. There is this guy Steinberg who seems to want it and he seems to be a good decent guy and just don't know I can do this to him." No, I very much wanted to go to Africa. I very much wanted to be in a developing country. The Central African Republic was open, so it was just a nice mix.

Q: I mean this is the Central African Republic (CAR) at that time. It became an empire?

STEINBERG: It became an empire while I was there. I bragged that I went to the imperial ball the night before the inauguration and I danced with Emperor Bokassa? Who at that point, to be honest, we viewed not as molifiantly as we do now. At that point he was sort of a comical figure who was a minor violator of human rights. A dictator yes, but a little more comical, then what we later determined him to be.

Q: You were in the CAR/Empire from 1976 to 1978. Had you taken French at FSI in preparation?

STEINBERG: Yeah, I had taken French before that. Let me say, also about the A-100 class. I found that to be both an excellent introduction, but an attempt to really deflate the egos of the people involved in the class. You know, we all came in thinking we are these hot shot diplomats and I really felt that what they were trying to do in large part was to say for the next ten years you aren't going to be influencing anything. You are going to be stamping visas. You are going to be serving more senior people. So, it was an attempt to deflate those expectations.

Q: Looking on that class was there much attrition, or did it pretty well stay in the Foreign Service?

STEINBERG: There were two periods of departure. One was after about two to four years. You got a number of people, who I think just basically said this isn't for me and left. You had another exodus after about 10-12 years. I think those are people who said my career's going no where. I want to pursue something else before I am too old to try

another career. I would say probably half of the people, even 30 years later, are still in the Foreign Service.

Q: What was the embassy in Bangui like?

STEINBERG: It was a small, very small embassy. Everyone who was there was serving for the first time in the position that he or she was in. It was almost like a starter embassy. Tony Quainton, was the ambassador [Ed: February 20, 1976 to June 9, 1978. He has an interview on the ADST website]. This was his first ambassadorship and he went on to have a great diplomatic career.

Grant Smith, who was subsequently our ambassador in Tajikistan [Ed: July 1995 to August 1998. His interview is on the ADST website] and went on to have very nice career, was the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). When I first arrive, Bill Swing was the DCM, so I had at least 6 weeks with Bill. That really influenced me. He was a pretty remarkable individual.

As I said, the embassy was very small. Basically, one American per cone. I was doing the economics work. We also didn't have a USIS officer because USIS had been kicked out by President (Jean-Bédél) Bokassa previously. It is actually a funny story because Emperor Bokassa [Ed: which he named himself on 4 December 1976] was a space buff, so he really loved following these things about our space program. Once there was a problem, I think it was Apollo 13 actually [Ed: launched April 11, 1970], where, because of the onboard accident, we didn't know where the capsule was going to land. Consequently a memo was sent to all countries, will everyone please let us know that we can land in their territorial waters? Now, if you look at the map you know that CAR has no territorial waters, but President Bokassa sent a cable back to Washington, saying you may land in the Ubangi River, if you have to. And sent his canoes up and down the river to look for this space capsule that was going to come and land in the river. Apparently, Washington did not respond to this. Bokassa was so insulted by this that he canceled our cultural affairs program. He kicked out our USIS officer. The up shot of that is that I did both economics and all the cultural affairs program.

Q: When you were preparing to go there, what were you hearing about CAR?

STEINBERG: It's dirt poor. It's still very much a French backwater. The French ambassador, really pretty much ran a lot of what went on in the country. The French had military in the Bouar base, up in the northwest of the country. That was their base of operations. The CAR military had a very bad human rights record. There would be people disappearing in the night. It didn't reach the levels of some countries in Africa. It was more quick thought than it was evil, at that point, in terms of the government structure. We had very few interests. It was one of the countries that if you had to go without an embassy you probably could have. But, the U.S. was applying the universality principal there. It was mostly a French backwater.

Q: Was there any reflection of the problems of the Sudan? The Southern Sudan and that sort of thing? Or in Zaire?

STEINBERG: No. In a weird sort of way, it was a bastion of stability. I use that word advisably. In Central Africa you did have fighting going on in many of the countries around it, Chad, Sudan and the Congo, but it was a fairly stable country at that point.

Q: As Economic Officer you were reporting on a dirt poor place. What were you doing?

STEINBERG: I used to say it was a strange place for an economic officer since there was no local economy. In the area of economics we had very few interests. They had discovered uranium and it was a possibility the American investors might get involved in that area. There was concern about how the economy was producing in terms of cotton, timber, and they produced some coffee there. I would report on that, but nobody really knew what was going on. We used to get together, all of the economic officers from other embassies and make guesses at what the production of coffee was, timber, or whatever. I remember one time sending these statistics off to Washington, knowing that they were complete guesses and getting about two months later, a World Bank report. Going through the World Bank Report we said, "oh my gosh, we got that one right, and that we got that one right," until I saw a little asterisk saying that these numbers are a result of the American Embassy estimate. There was a circular reasoning that was applying here. They were complete guess and no one knew any better than I did.

Q: How were relations with the French Embassy?

STEINBERG: They were good. They didn't really view us as much of a competitor with them. They were really in charge. It was a good starter embassy, a good place to learn how an embassy operates. Ambassador Quainton was a superb ambassador. He was very activist. He wanted us out in the community and wanted us to travel around the country, which I did extensively. I had lots of Peace Corp friends. We had a very active Peace Corp program. I would go up country and stay with them, frequently. It was a great way to start.

Q: Talk about your view and what developed with Bokassa, because that's the way the big story there is.

STEINBERG: He became increasingly dictatorial as the process moved ahead. He went crazy with the declaration of the empire. He had a coronation that cost 40 million dollars. He had a scepter worth two millions dollars incrustated with diamonds. His robe was 80 thousand pearls strung together. The real story was him just losing it as it moved ahead. He was still in power when I left. It was only in 1979, just about a year after I had left, that he was deposed. The French finally said we've had it with this. That's when he went in and personally beat school children in a prison who had been sent there because they had protested against school uniforms. He went in with his cane and just beat kids left and right. The French finally said that's enough and deposed him.

Q: You were there during the coronation, and all that.

STEINBERG: Yes. Unfortunately, I had malaria the day of the coronation [Ed: 4 December 1977] and couldn't go to the coronation, itself.

Q: The French sort of supported all of this stuff. Were they indulging him overly much, do you think.

STEINBERG: Oh, absolutely. The French did a lot of business there. Virtually everything that was produced there was exported to France, including diamonds. Bokassa was a sense of stability, again, using that word advisably. They tolerated it. I don't think we tolerated it in anyway near that. We actually cut off aid in response to one human rights violation. Ambassador Quainton would frequently highlight the problems of human rights.

Q: Were you there during Libya's strongman Qadhafi's visit?

STEINBERG: I was there during Qadhafi's visit [Ed: October 17-20, 1976]. That was just another sign of his craziness. Bokassa converted to Islam in order to receive money from Qadhafi. When the money didn't come he converted back to Catholicism. It was a crazy period.

Q: Tony describes in his account about sitting there with Qadhafi when they had a performance put on by the ladies of the Central African Empire. They were bare breasted dancing away while Qadhafi and his Muslim followers were sitting there stony faced.

STEINBERG: I am sure that was the case. I wasn't at that.

Q: What did this do to your mental set on economic development and what could be done? Did you see any hope there?

STEINBERG: Yeah. I didn't really. What focused me on much more than I had ever done before was the social side of economics. The fact that you needed housing programs. You needed health programs. You needed education programs. It took me out of this mode that all you need is to get the macro-economics right and everything will take care of itself. It convinced me that you need activist governments in developing countries focused on these sorts of social programs. In part because of the absence in the Central African Republic.

Q: Did you get a feel for what a lousy government can do?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. Again, the other thing it convinced me is that foreign donors have a key role to play in all of these societies. The only real accountability you are going to get in a lot of these places is from foreigners.

Q: Were you able to report on the problems of the country at all?

STEINBERG: Sure. Again, Ambassador Quainton really encouraged us to focus on those issues. I will say that this was my first tour. Therefore, I was really getting my feet on the ground and trying to figure out what my role as a Foreign Service Officer was going to be. I was not a very good traditional officer. I didn't have dinner parties.

Q: You were unmarried, I take it.

STEINBERG: I was unmarried. I helped coach the national basketball team. At Reed, actually, my junior year we lost our basketball coach. I was put in charge of the basketball team and loved it. I often thought that if I didn't go into the Foreign Service I would have ended up coaching basketball. I learned a lot of skills at that point. I have coached the national basketball team or assisting coached in three of my tours and really enjoyed that.

Q: Getting your feet, you can't say wet in Central African, it was pretty dusty there, wasn't it? Did you feel, one: you wanted to continue in the economic field, and the other hand did you want to become an African hand?

STEINBERG: Both yes, but I also wanted experience in all the different areas of development. Actually in my next two tours, I pretty much had outlined in my mind that I wanted three different regions, three different languages, three different religions, and fairly calculatingly anticipated my next two tours.

Q: Well, let's take the next one coming up. It's nice to do that, but sitting off there in the Central African Empire how did you manage to get what you wanted?

STEINBERG: Because I was in the Central African Empire and there was a sense among the junior officer programmers that Don has paid his dues, now let's give him what he wants. What I wanted was something in Latin America and what came up was Rio de Janeiro. My next tour was economic commercial officer in Rio.

Q: Let's see your left CAR in 1978. Did you have language study before starting your next assignment?

STEINBERG: Yes, I studied Portuguese. I loved the language process. To move from zero to three/three in 20 weeks. To go from no knowledge of the language to being relatively fluent. I just thought that was an amazing opportunity I was being given.

Q: So, you got to Rio in 1980. By that time Brasilia was pretty well...

STEINBERG: Brasilia was well established. Part of what was dominate in my period there was the friction between the consulate and the embassy. The consulate still getting used to not being the embassy. A number of our senior people were having to cope with the decline in status and were having to deal with the normal constituent post problems that bedevil a post.

Q: What was your job in Rio?

STEINBERG: I was economic commercial officer, which meant that I was in charge of reporting on coffee, which was a huge issue for us. Reporting on civil aviation. I did labor reporting and I ran the foreign commercial service operation.

Q: Who was the consul general?

STEINBERG: When I first got there, it was John Dexter. When I finished it was John Dewitt.

Q: What was the political, economic situation in Brazil when you arrived in 1980?

STEINBERG: It was moving. This was during the period called *abertura* (the "opening" of the political system), which was moving from a military dictatorship to a political opening that would eventually lead to the restoration of democracy and so it was a hopeful period. You were seeing more organization of civil society than you had seen before. You saw political openness in terms of freedom of speech. People were looking back at what the military had done and were starting to judge whether they needed to insist on accountability for that period. It was a very exciting time to be there, a very hopeful time.

Q: In your commercial side, was there a problem with Brazilian economy? What did it look like to you?

STEINBERG: Well, it was protectionist economy.

Obviously, we had real problems with getting U.S. exports in. More than that, I focused on U.S. investment in Brazil. That was still desired because it was creating jobs and creating economic growth. I spent a lot of time working with American manufacturers. I did a lot of work in the Brazilian automotive industry, trying to get an expansion of U.S. investors into that area. It was more of a focus on investment than trade.

Q: I assume you learned an awful lot about the economics or politics of coffee?

STEINBERG: I did. I spent an awful lot of time getting into that. Frankly, the first big success of my Foreign Service career was when a new finance minister was in charge of coffee marketing policy, which was very important to the United States. I went back and I read his doctoral dissertation that he had written 25 years before. You know, this is something you can only do if you are unmarried and you don't have kids. I read his doctoral dissertation he anticipated in that doctoral dissertation a massive change in how Brazil would market his coffee. I wrote a memo to Washington telling Washington, "look out; this is coming down the road." If you want to get ahead of it, there is something you can do to protect Americans from this change in policy. To months later he changed the policy he had changed the policy exactly how he had planned in his doctoral dissertation.

Somebody back in Washington read the memo and said “hey this is amazing. How did somebody go back and read a doctoral dissertation and anticipate this change?” I received lots of kudos and lots of recognition. It was sort of like the first success.

Q: What were the forces in the United States that were concerned about coffee and did they impact on you?

STEINBERG: Not much. I was a little bit isolated from that. Basically, coffee manufacturers and roasters who needed imports from Brazil.

Q: I was just thinking of, there was a song that was popular in the 1940s or something. One line was that they got an awful lot of coffee in Brazil.

STEINBERG: They do. I spent more time out in the countryside looking at coffee production and trying to estimate what they production would be.

Q: Had they started growing of citrus? When you take orange juice today, depending on the season, you may end up with Brazilian orange juice.

STEINBERG: Right. Absolutely. Yeah. That was just getting started when I was there.

Q: How did you find the Brazilians?

STEINBERG: I loved Brazilians. Rio de Janeiro was tough place to live because I know that sounds disingenuous, but it was very crowded. There was traffic. It was usually polluted. It was very noisy, in the city. I lived in a building that was right opposite a samba school. From Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday they had dances going on all night and I never slept in my apartment during that time. The Brazilians or the Cariocas, from Rio, had an appreciation for the enjoyment of life that was pretty remarkable. I enjoyed that. I also enjoyed Carnival, a lot. It was just a fun place to be in a lot of ways.

Q: I was just wondering. This may be a different era, but I have heard people say that when they hit Rio they were struck that most Brazilians, particularly the males there would often have a mistress or something. This was part of the life. A significant number of the American officers established that type of life. It wasn't the greatest place for married people.

STEINBERG: I was single.

Q: I know. I was wondering if this was a problem at that time or not.

STEINBERG: If it was, I didn't know it.

Q: Well, it might not have. Were you looking at the problem of the slowness of Rio, which are world famous and trying to if nothing else observe what can you do about them?

STEINBERG: You know, really honestly with you not much. There were other officers in the Embassy who did that far more than I did. It was the most vitrified city I have ever seen. The beautiful copa cabana apartments were literally a mile away from some of the worst slums in the world. We did occasionally go into the slums to document what was going on, but I think there was the hope that if you got the macroed side right that somehow it would take care of that situation. I did travel a lot. I went up to the Amazon region and saw the poverty up there. Frequently, would be trying to encourage American investment in areas that would create jobs, but I would be disingenuous if I said that would end the massive social problems.

Q: It wasn't on your slate. You were there during the last part of the Carter Administration.

STEINBERG: Right.

Q: Did you feel the human right side, or any of the Carter initiatives? Were they having any impact there?

STEINBERG: Yeah. We were on the right side of the political opening that was occurring. Very frequently we would go in and make demarches regarding political prisoners or regarding openness of unions. I was the labor officer, so a lot of my work was trying to encourage the free labor movement in Brazil. There very definitely, we felt the effects of Patt Derian and her shop in that area.

Q: You say on the labor side, right now the President of Brazil was a labor leader. Lula [Ed: Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the 35th President of Brazil, January 2003 to January 2011]? How did you view the labor movement from the perspective of where you were in Rio?

STEINBERG: The labor movement was centered in Rio and Sao Paulo. A number of the federation headquarters were still in Rio. I guess, there were basically three types of unions. There was the general workers federation which was tied to communists around the world, so we were very discouraging of them. There were the in-house unions that were run either by the government or the industries. But then there were what you would consider to be free labor movement unions that we spent a lot of time working with. We provided a lot of grants for them. I worked with the AFL/CIO (American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organization) to try to encourage training programs. It was a very positive force, for not only worker rights, but for the political opening of the country.

Q: Was it your impression; were the soldiers back in the barracks at this point? Were they sort of coming out every once in a while saying don't do that?

STEINBERG: Less, than you might think. The economy was a disaster at that point. It was usually inflationary environment where literally they would hire people whose only

job was to go through stores and purchase goods because prices were moving so rapidly. They had indexed most of the major economic factors so that salaries were all indexed and rents were all indexed, which has its own internal inflationary impact. They devalued the currency basically two to three percent a month because of the inflationary pressures. The military was always watching out for social pressures that would spew out, but they were pretty much back in the barracks.

Q: How was living there with the dollar? Did that work pretty well?

STEINBERG: It was ok. They did pretty much deflate the currency appropriately along with inflation.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover, do you think? We leave Rio in 1980 and where did you go?

STEINBERG: I went to Malaysia. Following 30 weeks of language training in Bahasa Malaysia.

Q: You studied what I would say is Indonesian. What do they call it?

STEINBERG: They call it Bahasa Malaysia. Or just Bahasa. It is essentially Indonesian. It is probably no more different than English English and American English. It was a fascinating language because there was not grammatical structure whatsoever.

Q: Oh, what a delight.

STEINBERG: There were no tenses. To say I went, you say, I to go yesterday. To say he went, he will go; it's he to go tomorrow. It was all just memorization.

Q: What's the catch? There is always a catch in languages.

STEINBERG: The fact that there were almost no cognates, in English. Therefore, you really did have to learn every word as if it was a new word.

Q: I would suspect though as time is moving on that the cognates were creeping in as there was radio, TV.

STEINBERG: There was some.

Q: Internet, all that stuff?

STEINBERG: Anything that basically came in as of 1900. Any new word that was invented was a little cognated, but you also had this weird system in Malay where every word had a base and then it had a prefix and a suffix depending on who's benefit it was being used for or how many times you expected this situation to arise. It got very complex.

The real problem was that then when I got to Malaysia, I didn't use it almost at all. The myth is that Malaysia is a Malay country, but the cities are largely dominated by the Chinese or the Indians. All of them speak English. When you dealt with the government the vast the majority of your contact was in English. I think my Malay was better when I left the Foreign Service Institute then when I finished my tour there.

Q: 1981. What was your job in Kuala Lumpur?

STEINBERG: Right. I was the economic officer. There were three of us in the section. I was the second of three. I also was responsible for labor unions, which were getting more and more restive.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

STEINBERG: It was Ron Palmer [Ed: Ambassador Palmer presented his credential on June 24 1981 and finished his tour in October 1983]. In terms of my assignment, I also was responsible for all of the reporting from the east coast of the country, which was a Malay area and for Sabah, and Sarawak, the two provinces on island of Borneo. That made for a much more interesting tour.

Q: Yes. It got you out and around.

STEINBERG: Absolutely.

Q: Well, we will come back to that. How did Ron Palmer operate?

STEINBERG: Ron was a very personal ambassador. He wanted to know all about you. What your likes were, what your dislikes were. He was as interested in the people in the motor pool as he was his economic and political counselors. It was a very hands-on, very human approach.

Q: Can you describe the situation in Malaysia when you got there in 1980 and the state of American and Malaysian relations?

STEINBERG: The key issue still at stake in Malaysia was the ethnic issue. The country is probably about 40% Malay, 40% Chinese, and about 20% Indian. There had just been several years before some very serious riots among the Malays because the Chinese were basically in control of the economy. There was real resentment amount the Malay community towards that. They had implemented what they called the new economic policy, which was more then just an economic policy it was really designed as an affirmative action program for ethnic Malays. It gave them key spots in the government. It reserved almost all the positions at the national university for Malays. It basically was a deal that the Chinese could continue to play a role in the economy, but they really had to sacrifice their political and social rights in order to do that. That was probably the issue that dominated when I was there. Relations between the Unites States and Malaysia were

fairly good. We were the major importer of palm oil, electronics products, and tin. They were being produced by Malaysia and increasingly petroleum, as well.

Q: This is five years after we left Vietnam. How was the whole military and power situation in that area reflected in Malaysia at the time?

STEINBERG: Malaysia was delaying its own internal problems far more than playing a regional role. They were a part of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), so they were focusing on much more regional integration. They were looking towards an improved relationship with Japan, as well, as a dominant economic power in the region. Malaysia was pretty independent at that point. The Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was a man of very strong beliefs and very dedicated to improvements for the Malay people. That was his principal priority.

Q: Relations with Singapore?

STEINBERG: Strained. This was soon enough after the break between Singapore and Malaysia. It was probably only a decade or so afterwards. Singapore was viewed as an extension of their own internal ethnic problems. Singapore being almost entirely Chinese.

Q: Looking at Singapore was it held up as being well run place?

STEINBERG: Not really. It was looked at as a place where the Chinese privilege was being manifest. Again, this was something that the Malays had to resist.

Q: As you're economic officer, how was the Malay economy at that time?

STEINBERG: It was booming. Malaysia was one of the, if not the, world's leading exporter of tin, palm oil, and rubber. They were getting into the electronics industry. We had all of Silicon Valley producing semi-conductors and other electronic products there. Plus, they were just starting to get into petroleum. They had huge deposits that ESSO, now EXON was producing off the coast of eastern Malaysia. They had large natural gas facilities, as well. In fact, they were having to face the problem of too much foreign exchange. They are actually one of the few countries which has effectively managed its resources because they used the generated revenue for industrial projects. That included liquefied natural gas. They produced what they called the Malaysia car, which was largely made up of imported components, but still was an effective use of resources. They weren't faced with the tremendous problem of inflation and the tulip like boom that too many resource rich countries face.

Q: How did you feel about how the school system was using these resources? Were they training these people to grab the Silicon ring?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. They did it both domestically, but they were also sending more and more students overseas for university level. There were about 40,000

Malaysian students in the United States alone, in addition to all the students who went to the UK, to Canada, to Japan, to study.

Q: Were the Chinese part of this group?

STEINBERG: Nope, because that was part of the bargain. Essentially, again you can control the economy. You can reap all the benefits of the private sector you want, but any resources from the State are going to the Malays.

Q: Well then, how are the Chinese coping with this?

STEINBERG: By keeping their heads down and continuing to make money.

Q: Were they training their kids?

STEINBERG: Yeah. They were sending their kids to the United States, equally. Actually, as a journalist, I subsequently wrote a story about a young Chinese woman who was at Columbia University who felt like she was betraying her country by departing and going off the United States but felt there was not alternative because she was excluded from going to school at the national university. She didn't see any possibility of a job to work with the government, so essentially she was forced to leave.

Q: Did she come back?

STEINBERG: That was her dream, but she kept saying that there really weren't opportunities for her back in Malaysia.

Q: You say you were reporting on labor. We'll move into that. One of the reasons why Silicon Valley and other places were so eager to get in there, you had essentially clever people who didn't cost a lot of money.

STEINBERG: Right.

Q: You throw labor unions into the equation and that begins to change things. During the time you were there, how did that work?

STEINBERG: Well, there wasn't unionization in the electronic sector itself. These were free trade areas. There was a basic law that said these are exempt from unionization. That said there was always the threat that the international community, the Texas Instruments of the world, didn't treat their employees fairly that the government could allow unionization. It served as more of a threat than it did an actual influence.

Q: Did you observe how American firms were using this? There was the time we got concerned about clothing and this sort of thing. Was this happening?

STEINBERG: Well, Malaysia wasn't a textile plant. It wasn't a place where 12 year olds are stitching up Nike shoes and making a dollar a day. This was relatively high labor quality that basically involved upper end production. The workers there were not in slave labor situations. They were treated generally fairly well.

Q: Was there a development of an educational system? Cal Tech or MIT or that equivalent at the time?

STEINBERG: Not too much. There is training for the people in the high tech industry, but most of the real high tech education took place overseas.

Q: How did you find political life there? It always impacts on the economy? Was there a free press?

STEINBERG: There was a moderately free press. There was a lot of self-censorship. Again, the dominate issue was the racial question. Everything that had a racial component, even the electoral processes, people voted by blocks. You had a Chinese political block that was associated with the prime ministers party. It was very tense in terms of ethnicity?

Q: How about the Indians? What sort of role did they play?

STEINBERG: Again, they were involved in the economy a lot. They provided security forces. They were 15-20% of the population. They were involved in a lot of different areas, but again they had their own political block that supported either the opposition or the government.

Q: How did the Indians and Chinese kids, these are two people with entrepreneurial skills, interact?

STEINBERG: Right. The groups were pretty distinct. You had Indian entrepreneurs and Chinese entrepreneurs, but there wasn't a lot of interplay between them.

Q: Did they divide themselves into cliques: Indian's ran the drugstores, and the Chinese ran their grocery stores? Something of that nature?

STEINBERG: No that was far more the Chinese running just about everything. Again, the Indian community was largely involved in the security sector, which was a big big sector at that point. They were involved in the military and the police force.

Q: Was there a crime problem?

STEINBERG: No. Kuala Lumpur was a very safe area. Again, this was during the huge economic boom fueled by petroleum. Fueled by electronics and the traditional tin, rubber, and palm oil. Everybody wanted a piece of the action.

Q: Transnational corporations, were they a problem or just seen as a beneficial?

STEINBERG: I think they were generally treated as contributors to the economy. They were large employers of labor. They brought in some capital. Again, the big area was the electronics area where they would basically just bring in all of the manufacturing facilities. There was very little interplay with the economy. They bought packaging and that sort of thing, but they did employ large amounts of labor.

Q: As an economic officer did you find yourself dealing with a lot of American business people coming from these electronic businesses asking what's the market, how do I set up, and that sort of thing?

STEINBERG: Yes and no. By that point the foreign commercial service had been established and we did have a foreign commercial service officer [Ed: Theodore Villenski is noted as the Commercial Officer in the 1982 Key Officers of the Foreign Service booklet.]. My time was spent more giving these business people the lay of the land. Talking about the economy and the overall development of the country. I did obviously get involved to some extent with advising companies how to operate locally, but we did have a foreign commercial service operation there as well.

Q: Let's move over to, I want to say Borneo, but actually what do you call it?

STEINBERG: Well, there are two states. One is Sabah and the other is Sarawak. These were really going back centuries in terms of the level of development. You still had long houses with communal places. Where an entire village would live up above the jungle. You had some very primitive societies still operating there. You had a couple of large cities there. Kota Kinabalu being the largest, but you had huge timber manufacturing facilities. Lots of natural gas. Development was starting to take off in both of those places. It was very far from the Chinese controlled economies of the mainland.

Q: Who was running things there? Were these Malaysians then?

STEINBERG: These were still Malaysians. Right. They had appointed governors who were in charge of the two areas.

Q: Were the Indonesians interfering on Borneo there had been this confrontation or whatever at one point. Was this no longer an issue?

STEINBERG: It really wasn't at this point. By this point Malaysia had basically put to rest its own internal rebellion. It had normalized relations with Indonesia. There basically were too busy making money and producing products to worry about the politics of the region.

Q: Were we making any noises or was the international community about the logging industry?

STEINBERG: No. There was actually some foreign investment in the sector. They were relatively respectful of the jungles. They looked at this as a long term resource and generally there wasn't strip logging or that sort of facility.

Q: Later, in Indonesia there was some concern of great fires that were burning, which I think were an off shoot of the logging industry.

STEINBERG: Yeah. That would occur occasionally, but that wasn't a huge interest at that point.

Q: Did you pick up anything about Brunei?

STEINBERG: No. I went there once. I just saw the massive investment and the use of billions, billions, and billions of dollars of resources by the Sultan. I was not involved in reporting on Brunei. Our Indonesian Ambassador took care of Brunei.

Q: The general feeling that the Malaysian government was getting from getting on governmental things fairly well investing.

STEINBERG: Absolutely. Again, this is one of the few cases globally where you can say that oil revenues have actually been a positive force for a country as opposed to simply distorting the economy.

Q: Of course, later on you were in Nigeria.

STEINBERG: Well, I never served in Nigeria. Angola would be the place where I did serve. Yeah, if you go around the world it is pretty well established now that oil is a very mixed blessing for countries. You have to be able to have a political structure that can resist corruption. A political structure that forces expenditures into long term investments as opposed to simply consumption as present. Malaysia is one of the few countries that did that, invested in infrastructure, invested in manufacturing facilities. And use this as a tool for capital expenditures.

Q: Well then, while you were there, 1981 to 1983, was Vietnam at all a factor in the area?

STEINBERG: Not really. There was a sense that Vietnam was soon to be a major regional power. They were in Cambodia at that point. That was politically something our administration was resisting. They had invaded to get rid of the Khmer Rouge and had a puppet government in Cambodia. We spent a lot of time working with the Malays to try to resist that, but not really anything beyond that.

Q: Were you seeing Vietnam as becoming one of the Asian Tigers? Or was this a ways?

STEINBERG: I think that was way off in the future still. I mean, this was three or four years after, five years after the take over of Saigon.

Q: How did we view ASEAN at the time?

STEINBERG: Very positively. This was equal work of mostly democratic states. States that were cooperating with us. We had good relations with most of the countries as part of ASEAN. I was actually in charge of a number of ASEAN development projects. Each of the countries within ASEAN was in charge of a different sector of the economy. In Malaysia it was the agricultural sector. We had to exchange programs and development programs in the agricultural sector.

Q: On the oil side were there any offshore islands that got into dispute between Indonesia...?

STEINBERG: No, the Spratly Islands were the ones that were always disputed, but Malaysia wasn't any part of that.

Q: What about Thailand? How were relations with Thailand?

STEINBERG: They were good. Again, Malaysia was cooperating with the other countries of ASEAN, for the most part. There was some concern in Southern Thailand that the Islamic community was being persecuted, so there were some statements by the government of Malaysia every now and again on that, but not of a serious nature.

Q: Where did Malaysia stand Islam-wise?

STEINBERG: Well, it was probably 50% Islamic. They were colonized years and years and years before, in the 14th and 15th century, so this was not a recent conversion to Islam. There were a number of very devout senior officials, but it was a relatively loose form of Islam, certainly compared to Indonesia or anything in the Middle East. This was people who would consider themselves good Moslems, but they would drink and not necessarily obey all the tenants.

Q: Where any of the other countries messing around there, like the Soviet Union or the Chinese?

STEINBERG: Not really. There had been an internal communist movement that had been defeated in the 1970s using pretty traditional kinds of counter insurgency techniques. Since then there have really been no problems.

Q: Was there any residue of people who had gone out into the jungle, these were mostly Chinese I guess, and come back and reintegrated into society?

STEINBERG: No. There was really no problem with that.

Q: So, you left in 1985 for where?

STEINBERG: Journalism school. Actually, it was a strange development because I had applied for a Council on Foreign Relations fellowship. I was selected by the State Department as their representative and therefore thought that I had it and put all my stock in doing that. Actually, I was turned down for the fellowship by CFR. I really felt like I wanted to take a year off and I had applied to Columbia Journalism School. I went off on leave without pay to New York, to go to journalism school.

Q: How did you find it?

STEINBERG: I loved it. After working for the State Department doing a graduate program on journalism was a breeze. I loved improving my writing and actually having to focus on trying to attract an audience as opposed to the State Department writing where you have a built in audience. I loved the reporting part of the picture. I loved the hands on nature of the journalism school and to be honest with you I loved to New York. It was a chance to enjoy all the cultural richness that that city has to offer. Really, it was a fabulous experience.

Q: Did you get a chance to have a life in practicum, throw you on the police precinct?

STEINBERG: Yes. That's exactly what they did. Despite being an Ivy League school and having such a good reputation, it is very much a trade school. They really want you to get your hands dirty. Absolutely, I was out in the precincts. I was in the schools. I remember one story I wrote on the public sanitation department and how clean was the city. Again, had a real good chance to really get to know the city and had some fabulous professors, as well.

Q: It was very good for your skills, but what was your goal? Was your goal to move over into journalism?

STEINBERG: That was always a thought. I have to say, what I always thought I was going to do was to serve basically my 20s in the Foreign Service and then go off and get a real job. The first three tours that I had were in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. I learned three foreign languages, French, Portuguese, and Malay Indonesian. I was exposed to three different ethnic groups. Three different religions, nativist, Catholic, and Islam. I felt like this was my preparation for going off and doing great things.

Q: In the newspaper world?

STEINBERG: I had thought about the newspaper.

Q: A foreign correspondent with a trench coat....

STEINBERG: Absolutely. What I discovered though was the journalism is a hard game. If you made a mistake in journalism you affected lives. If you make a mistake in the Foreign Service reporting you send back a note a couple weeks later and say oops I got this wrong and the world goes on. In journalism though, you are affecting lives. As part

of the journalism school process I wrote a number of articles that eventually ended up getting published in real papers and came so close on a couple of occasions really making some serious mistakes that would have affected people's well being if not their lives that I was a little intimidated to be quite frank.

Q: Was the State Department treating this leave without pay seriously? In other words, it was leave and you could come back?

STEINBERG: Yes and that's exactly what ended up happening. I did very well in journalism school. I actually won the prize at the end of the year called the Pulitzer Traveling Fellow, which was given to the top three graduates of the school. As I said, I published a number of things in the Nation Magazine, in the Asian Review, and a variety of other places. Again, I also realized how much I enjoyed being overseas and how much I enjoyed the State Department, the fact that you have a structure and you are basically paid to get to know a local culture and a local society and report back to Washington on it. Plus, I had very much wanted to be a Deputy Chief of Mission, to actually run something. At the conclusion of my time at journalism school, which was just the one year master's program, I was offered a number of DCM positions. I was only 30 at the time and it was just a really attractive option.

Q: One myth about the Foreign Service is that you get a lot of bright people that come in who try it for a while and then they leave. The point is once you get in, it's seductive. People don't leave.

STEINBERG: I have to say that being away from it for a year reinforced how special the position is and how fabulous the lifestyle is.

Q: I can't remember. Did you have a significant other at this time?

STEINBERG: No. I was single until I was 48.

Q: You are 30 years old and ready to go.

STEINBERG: Absolutely and ended up being in Mauritius.

Q: So, you went to Mauritius and you were there from when to when?

STEINBERG: I was there from 1985 to 1987.

Q: Mauritius of course is one of our oldest posts. People don't remember that, but it was a good wailing post. They had a Consulate there going way way back.

STEINBERG: Absolutely. Not quite back to the days of the Dodo bird, but quite a ways back.

Q: Where is Mauritius? What was the situation there?

STEINBERG: Mauritius, you go to South Africa, you then out to Madagascar and you keep on going. It is 500 miles off the coast of Madagascar. It is an island which is about 30 miles by 40 miles. It is God's most beautiful place. Mark Twain actually visited there on his trip around the world and said, "God invented Mauritius and then he modeled paradise after it." It is gorgeous in terms of the topography, beautiful mountains coming out of now where. There are 50 different micro climates on this island. The beaches are just lovely. You have reefs surrounding three quarters of the islands, so it is fabulous for snorkeling and scuba diving. It has a huge tourism industry, plus it has a million people. It is a real country with a real political system. Most of the population is Indian, who had originally come over as indentured servants to work the sugar cane fields. There is also a substantial Creole population. It is a democracy. They change governments like other people change their t-shirts. They love the political game. It is a very free press environment. It is fully respectful of human rights. It's really a fabulous little country.

Q: Who was our ambassador when you were there?

STEINBERG: George Andrews. [Ed: Ambassador Andrews served from November 7, 1983 to August 16, 1986.]

Q: What was his background?

STEINBERG: He was career Foreign Service. It was actually after him that people finally discovered what a fabulous place this was and you started to get a string of political appointees. He was career Foreign Service. Most of his work had been in Latin America. He had been DCM in El Salvador, I think at the time of the contras, and so he had paid his dues. He also traveled a lot, so it was a real chance for me to have some fun as charge.

Q: Did the island of Reunion play any role where you were?

STEINBERG: Not really. Its right next to Mauritius so I would go over there periodically just for a vacation to just get away, but no, it was French controlled and pretty much separate.

Q: What were we interested in on Mauritius.

STEINBERG: A variety of things. First of all, the truth is we weren't all that interested in the place. We had an embassy there in large part because we had an embassy everywhere. There was a little bit of a concern because the Mauritians continued to claim Diego Garcia. That did matter to us. It was an atoll in the middle of the Indian Ocean, claimed by the British, who made it available to us as a military base. The Mauritius still claimed it as well, so that was one issue. When I was there, Mauritius, with our support helped developed a large textile industry and would sell tremendous amounts of products to the United States so there was that. The Mauritians were so ingenious that they would take niches in the market and just run with it. They became the leading producer of sunglasses

and other glass frames. They had all of these educated young men and women who weren't doing anything, so many of the books published in Europe were actually type set with computer experts in Mauritius. They would just keep finding these niches in the market and developing them, even as they continued to produce their sugar cane and exploit tourism.

Q: Was there any connection either to India or to Madagascar or Africa at all?

STEINBERG: The connection to India was pretty strong. Again, this was mostly ethnic Indians who were there, so they all traveled frequently. I think politically India had a large sway. Madagascar far less.

Q: I can't remember the timing, but was the Indian pushing for sea of peace or something like that?

STEINBERG: Oh, the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace and Freedom. Yeah, they were and Mauritius sort of bought onto it. Mauritius had such a great relationship with everyone and they didn't want to blow that. They sort of signed onto that, but then at the same time really welcomed American ship visits to the country.

Q: We are talking about military visits?

STEINBERG: Right.

Q: Were they at all involved in our space coverage at all?

STEINBERG: No. That was space shuttles. They had a tracking station there, but not so much in Mauritius.

Q: Was there any American establishment there at all?

STEINBERG: No. Not really. No we didn't have a military base or anything else there.

Q: No scientific thing or something?

STEINBERG: Not really.

Q: I would think you would have zoologists of all types wandering around these different zones.

STEINBERG: You did. Again, this was a very special island. Again, I mean it was the only place where the dodo bird was going way back. You did have different micro-climates with different vegetation and bird life. It was interesting from that stand point.

Q: How about the Embassy? I think they would get somewhat involved in the care and treating of American tourists.

STEINBERG: Yeah, except it is really far away. I had at this point my family in Los Angeles and as you go straight through the middle of the earth from Los Angeles the furthest point of land away from Los Angeles is Mauritius. This is a long way to go.

Q: It was more European?

STEINBERG: It was European and South African. There were lots of French.

End of Tape 2 Side A (ends in Fall 1985)

Tape 2 Side B unintelligible (may cover fall 1985 until 1988)**

--1985-1987 DCM Mauritius

--1987-88 ??

--1988-1989, acting Chief Textile Negotiator at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

--1989, House Task Force on Trade and Competitiveness

Q: You are saying the task force ...?

STEINBERG: The House Task Force on Trade and Competitiveness was really more of a temporary organization that was designed to look into these issues then it was involved with legislation or anything like that.

Q: Where did the task force come out?

STEINBERG: The task force didn't really come out anywhere. We did a series of reports on specific sectors. We talked about how trade policy influenced competitiveness. The truth is we didn't really produce a single report from the organization and it was cut short by the fact that Mr. Gephardt (Democrat – Third Congressional District, Missouri) moved from just a member of Congress to being the House Majority Leader shortly thereafter. When he made that transfer he gave up the task force.

Q: So, then what did you do?

STEINBERG: Well, in 1989 I went with Gephardt to the Majority Leader's office. This was when Jim Wright had his problems as speaker of the house and Tony Coelho had his problems as majority leader. Both of them moved on and you had Tom Foley becoming the speaker and Richard Gephardt becoming the majority leader and when he did that he asked me if I would stay of for an undisclosed period of time as his senior advisor for foreign policy and defense, and so I did. That began in the summer of 1989.

Q: You did that until when?

STEINBERG: I did that for a year, 1989 to 1990.

Q: Of course when you are talking about the summer of 1989 as the Foreign Policy Advisor you know what hit the fan in Europe. The Soviet Union collapsed.

STEINBERG: I went with Mr. Gephardt two weeks after the wall had fallen and we were in East Berlin with our pick axes taking our own souvenirs from the wall. We went to Hungary. We went to Czechoslovakia. We went to Poland. The excitement in each of those places was palpable. This was the most exciting period of time. Mr. Gephardt asked me to head up a task force that was designed to put together legislation to assist those countries. We put together the SEED Act, the Support for Eastern European Democracy Act that to this day is the principle mechanism to promote democratic and free market transitions in that region. It was exciting in 100 different ways. Mr. Gephardt was willing to speak out on all of these issues. He gave a speech to the Center on National Policy before the Soviet Union had fallen saying that we need to get in there and support democracy and to support a calm change, a measured movement from the communist period to post-communist. It was a gutsy speech, but Dick was willing to do it. There were a hundred other things going on at that time we went down to Panama in the wake of our military action there to review how well things had gone. We went to Mexico to look at the basis for the basis for the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) agreement that was still just a twinkle in people's eyes at that point. Dick Gephardt, in his position, was the head of the arms control caucus and we went to Europe to see how all the different agreements with the Soviets were working. It was just an incredibly exciting time to be there.

Q: It's interesting, as you know one doesn't think of the Majority Leader in the house as having a lot of power on international issues. Has that changed or was this Gephardt?

STEINBERG: I think a lot of it was Gephardt. I think he was very excited about these possibilities. I think part of it was the times. This was a time where everything was changing on the international front and he wanted to be a part of it. Part of it was that he had an incredibly dynamic staff. George Stephanopoulos was his floor assistant, at that time. Paul Begala was a speech writer and advisor on all different policies. A man by the name of David Gergen who subsequently became the head of communications for the White House was his communications director. It was just a lot of very talented people that I had a chance to work with who really wanted to put Dick forward on all of these issues.

Q: Right now, we are probably in the pits as far as relations within congress. What was the spirit in congress? You were there from 1989..?

STEINBERG: Basically 1989 to 1990. You were still in the situation at least in the House where the Democrats had been in power for so long and it was very clear that it was the Democrats who mattered. That said you had a very large, very conservative Democratic part, so you didn't have assured votes for liberal positions. You had to cobble together coalitions. I do remember all of these trips that we would take would be bipartisan. The trip to Panama for example was Gephardt and Gingrich who led it. They made sure that all the reports being issued by that trip were bipartisan reports. Part of this was Gephardt

himself. He was a natural negotiator. He cared about people. He wanted to people into the system. I think the partisanship was fairly limited, but I don't want to imply that if I was a Republican at that point that I would feel like I was getting a fair shake.

Q: Did you find yourself, as you were dealing with the re-creation of the world, more or less, were there any particular areas that you felt that you could push and shove and insulate, and insert, or do something?

STEINBERG: Well, one area was the Eastern European democracy programs, so that was exciting. This was also the time though, if you remember, when Nelson Mandela was being released from prison in South Africa. I spent a lot of time working on legislation designed to support the transition to democracy in South Africa, at that point.

Q: Was Gephardt and his staff concerned about portraying the Soviet Union imploding, but we don't want to crow too much. In other words, we are going to live with whatever comes...we are still thinking of the Soviet Union at that point...we are going to have live with this, and so were we being careful not to parade around?

STEINBERG: Gephardt was. Others weren't. Again, going back to the speech he gave at the Center for National Policy. He basically said a soft landing for Russia is in American national interest and we have got to everything we can to support that and he proposed a series of ten measures. Some of which we knew the administration was going to be taking anyway. Some of which were new ideas. By the time the year was gone, basically all of those ten measures were put into place.

Q: Were we fairly comfortable with the foreign policy of George H. W. Bush?

STEINBERG: Yes. Gephardt was very critical of George Bush throughout this whole period. There is a famous interview Bush gave where he was asked why does Gephardt get under your skin so much. He didn't have a response to it. Gephardt was for everything I have said, was very partisan Democrat. He believed that Bush was vulnerable. Remember this is the president who approval ratings are off the top of the charts during much of this time, but he believe he was vulnerable and wanted to criticize him on legitimate points, but was prepared to take him on on foreign affairs policy as well.

Q: Again, was the presidential bug at work?

STEINBERG: For him, yeah. I think everyone expected him to run in 1992 again. When he decided he wasn't going to run it was early in 1990 and a lot of his staff went elsewhere at that point.

Q: You mentioned you went down to Panama with a mixed group. What was your estimate of Newt Gingrich? I have heard various evaluations. What were you thinking then?

STEINBERG: At that point, again, very conservative, very feisty, very partisan, but an internationalist. You knew that he wasn't going to be isolationist in his views. You knew that if he had a legitimate point, again, I am just working for Mr. Gephardt at this point, so I am coming at it from a democratic, moderately liberal position. You knew that Gingrich was going to be a strong ally for internationalist positions.

Q: Did other embassies, acting as lobbyists in Washington, make contact with Congress? Did you get much from that?

STEINBERG: What we got was a lot of visitors. Whenever the president of a country would come to town, they wanted to meet with Mr. Gephardt. They wanted a congressional activity on their schedule. I had great fun being the organizer of Nelson Mandela's trip to the hill [Ed: June 26, 1990].

Q: He addressed the Congress and they all rose and applauded some incomprehensible statement....

STEINBERG: Absolutely. I wish I remembered exactly what it was, but it was this incredible philosophic existential point he was making and you get 535 members of Congress who have never had an existential thought in their lives applauding. It was an amazing dynamic. I also had the privilege of working on, I didn't direct, but working on Nelson Mandela's visit with Senate and House leaders and members of the Senate Foreign Relations and the House Foreign Affairs committees. I don't mean to imply that Vaclav Havel wasn't fabulous. It was as well.

Q: Yes, here is a man of great admiration, but the point being he was way over the heads of just about everybody.

STEINBERG: Including me.

Q: And me too. It sounded great.

STEINBERG: It did sound great. It was also interesting because Vaclav Havel's point in a lot of what he was saying was that we do not want government to exercise really strong power. We want civil society to be the dominating force and so essentially he was saying to Congress you should diminish your own power. He was getting applause left and right. It's amazing.

Q: This must have been kind of heady.

STEINBERG: It was heady.

Q: Did people genuflect when they came to your office?

STEINBERG: Not to my office because the trade off that we made was that the exchange for being in the actual capitol building you got a tiny little cubical. The truth was we were all staffers for Richard Gephardt. There is only so much reflective glory that you can get.

Q: What about your relations with the State Department at this point?

STEINBERG: They were better then they had been when I worked for Mr. Gephardt as a member of congress because people understood that the Majority Leader mattered, so I got my phone calls returned. When he traveled overseas he got very respectful treatment. I will always remember our trip to Mexico where John Negroponte was the Ambassador and Negroponte was at every single meeting that we did, no matter how big or small and really treated Mr. Gephardt with the respect that he deserved. The relationship was better. We also got a lot better briefing material from the State Department, so I think there was an understanding of his importance.

Q: Well then, in 1990 where did you go?

STEINBERG: Well, it was a really tough decision because Mr. Gephardt had asked me basically to leave the Foreign Service and to stay on his staff and I was very attracted by that. Actually, it's sort of funny because he asked Madeleine Albright, who was one of his close friends, to take me out to lunch to convince me to stay on staff with him. Again, you talk about heady stuff. That was pretty heady. Bill Swing, who had been my first DCM in the Foreign Service, was then ambassador in South Africa [Ed: September 1989 to July 1992]. Nelson Mandela had just been released. The excitement of what was going on there was just palpable. Bill Swing called and asked whether I wanted to come down and serve as officer in charge of the embassy and economic counselor. I had always been enamored with South Africa. I frankly was not comfortable with our policy towards constructive engagement and therefore didn't want to serve in South Africa as long as that was our policy, but now Mandela was released and it was the dawn of a new era there, and so I couldn't resist.

Q: On the constructive engagement, when you got to South Africa did you take a look at it again? How did you feel about it, in retrospect?

STEINBERG: In retrospect I still believe that it was a policy designed to curry favor with groups who we shouldn't be currying favor with. I really respect Chet Crocker as and individual as a political leader, as a thinker, but I believe that we were sending the wrong signal to the rest of the world when we were essentially dealing with racists and treating them respectfully. I know all of the arguments on the other side and in retrospect we probably would not have the transition in Namibia that we did had it not been for constructive engagement. It took us a decade to get to these points and I just think if you don't really know what the outcome of a policy is you should always be on the moral side.

Q: Where were you located, Pretoria?

STEINBERG: I was located in Pretoria. It was the strained South African situation where their government actually moves to Cape Town for half of the year. During that period the ambassador and the DCM would travel to Cape Town and they would leave me in charge of the embassy, which was a 350 person embassy, so it was a huge operation. I wasn't Chargé. I wasn't acting DCM. I was a position that they called officer-in-charge. I should say that Bill Swing called at the exact right time, because I had literally just been in my loft, watching Mandela's speech from Cape Town, upon his release and was feeling euphoric for that, and then Bill Swing called and said would you come to South Africa. It was the perfect moment. It was really exciting.

Q: You are there from 1990 to 1993. Had you been to South Africa before?

STEINBERG: I had visited South Africa, but I had not served there. I frankly had a lot of problems with our policy of constructive engagement and despite feeling that I was truly an African specialist, and South Africa was clearly the biggest issue at State, I didn't feel like I could serve there under an administration that was talking constructively to a racist regime that was responsible for a lot of human rights violations. As I say, I visited, but I never served there.

Q: When you got there, you say Mandela had been released.

STEINBERG: He was a private citizen at that point. People forget that the time between Mandela was released from prison and the time he became president of South Africa was four and half years. That was an essential period because it was the opportunity for the African National Congress to move from being what was essentially a revolutionary movement to a political party that could be the dominant party in South Africa and run the government. That was a really meaningful period. Mandela indeed was private citizen. He was the president of the African National Congress, but everyone suspected it was just a matter of time that free and fair elections would take place and he would assume control.

Q: You were there still during the Bush Administration?

STEINBERG: Right.

Q: Where stood the constructive engagement policy at that point?

STEINBERG: We had sort of moved beyond that because you had now a government that was committed to seeing a transition to apartheid to non-racial democracy. It all of a sudden became legitimate to deal with the South African government. George Shultz had met with Oliver Tambo who was the head of the ANC's international movement. That was a very big step because it in essence bestowed legitimacy on a movement that up until then we had been calling an illegal movement. The other thing about constructive engagement is that it was tied to a number of other developments in Africa, in particular to the independence of Namibia and the independence of Angola. Both of

those processes were starting to move in the right direction. In Namibia it had achieved the independence of that country. In Angola it was starting to put an end to the civil war.

Q: Can you describe where Pretoria fit into the equation? Pretoria was the heart of the homeland of Afrikaners, but at the time of 1990 when you went out there, what was the situation?

STEINBERG: Pretoria was still an Afrikaner stronghold. There was a black township that was associated with it, but the town itself was essentially a white's only city. It was a sleepy little town at that point. It did have the National government there six months out of the year, but six months out of the year it was down in Cape Town. You also had the big city of Johannesburg just about an hour away. In a sense it was like Washington used to be in comparison to New York or Chicago or Los Angeles.

Q: What was our mission like there?

STEINBERG: It was an embassy. It was a large embassy, about 350 people. It was very much a political post, in the sense of high level of interest from Washington, in what was going on. Part of the purpose during that period was to look at the movement of the government of South Africa to see whether they have taken enough steps to have the sanctions that were imposed upon them released. We spent a lot of time on that. My principal job as economic counselor was to help prepare the ANC for leadership. We did lots of programs. We had the first meeting of the African National Congress with the American business community in my living room. We had regular sessions. We called them the wise men. We had 12 to 15 people from the ANC, from the American business community, from the South African business community, from the government, from think tanks come together once a month, to basically talk about what the future of South Africa was going to look like. We also sent a number of South Africans to Harvard, to other American Universities, to think tanks in the United States, to help them again, prepare for leadership. It was a very exciting period because all bets were off. No one knew what the new regime was going to look like. We are talking about a regime that was essentially made up of people who had been pledging either Marxism or Socialism up until that point. We didn't know how the business community was going to survive. Again, South Africa had a tremendous business community, a very powerful community that had a lot of connections throughout all of Africa. The question was were these going to continue or was there going to be wholesale nationalization by an ANC government.

Q: In a way, correct me if I am wrong, it was fortunate, that the poison of collectivization, socialism if you will which had destroyed Ghana and Tanzania and some other states had pretty well, the bloom had gone off its rose by that time. Was the ANC seeing that?

STEINBERG: It took a while. Frankly the four and a half years between Mandela's release and the subsequent legalization of the ANC in South Africa and its coming to power in June of 1994 was a very important period. It did give the African National Congress time to go around Africa and look at what had happened elsewhere. It gave

them a chance to look at European economies, the American economy. It gave them the opportunity to put their preconceived notions of what ought to be in South Africa aside. Absolutely, it was fortunate. Also, the Cold War was over and they weren't caught up in any of the proxy war debates between socialism and capitalism and all of the rest. The other thing thought that is important to remember, is that this economy, despite how vibrant it was and how dominant it was in Africa, it had produced massive unemployment for blacks. It was failing to even provide adequate employment for the whites of South Africa. It was relatively small by European standards. It was very dependent upon cheap energy, mostly from coal. It was very dependent on gold and other natural materials. There was a lot of fragility there as well. I think the transformation of that economy was going to be the key thing.

Q: Were there strong advocates within the ANC or out who were pressing for the standard African Socialist economy?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. Those included not only elements within the ANC, but also the labor movement. COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), which wanted to see, I wouldn't say socialism, but they certainly wanted to see, for example, nationalization of the gold mines, nationalization of other key industries in the country. You also had pressure on the ANC from the Pan-African Congress. The PAC, which was another black African movement that was trying to push in a more radical direction. The ANC found itself flanked by COSATU, the Pan-African Congress, and there was indeed a South African Communist movement which was the third of the factions within the triumvirate: the ANC, COSATU, and the South African Communist Party.

Q: You mention you and embassy were sponsoring these meetings. Were the other people fighting for the sole of the ANC? Were they having meetings?

STEINBERG: I don't think so. I think by this point Mandela made it clear that he didn't want to inherit the wind. He wanted to inherit a country that was experiencing a vibrant economy that could produce the wealth needed for the housing and the education and the healthcare needs of the country. He had made it very clear that pragmatism was going to be the order of the day. He was unchallenged as a leader of South African, at this point.

Q: How about the Afrikaners particularly where you were? What were they doing?

STEINBERG: Well, with the exception of a small group, which was probably about 30% of them, they had seen the writing on the wall. They understood that in order to be a vibrant economy, in order to maintain their position in South African they were going to have to change. One of the key events that occurred when I was there was a referendum among the whites that F.W. De Klerk [Ed: South African President] declared to organize. This referendum essentially said are we going to change or are we going to try and hold onto our power? Seventy percent of the voters said we have got to change. That really consolidated the sense of movement in that society.

Q: The Afrikaners have the same system that one thinks of in Zimbabwe, large efficient farms, and all that. Is that where they were?

STEINBERG: They were there, but they were also in the business community throughout. The white community was divided between the Dutch and British or English origin people. Both of them though had an important role in the economy. They had important roles in the trade industries as well. Remember this was country that had basically institutionalized racism and had said only white can occupy key positions in government, in the business sector, in the trade industries, etc. Only whites could own land outside of the imposter homelands that had been created. The Afrikaners were in all different sectors.

Q: You say the embassy numbered 300 people. What was the job of such a large embassy?

STEINBERG: Well, this number includes the local South African staff, but remember this was very big site of American investment in Africa. We had more than 100 companies, so we were supporting that. We were working with the ANC and the government on constitutional issues. We had sanctions that we had to monitor on South African. Obviously, we had a high degree of political reporting that was going on by the mission. We had concerns about their no proliferation, so we had mission that were looking at that as well. This was by far our most important country in Africa or at least sub-Saharan African at that time. We also had a huge amount of American private interest, meaning non-government organizations. We had a huge aid program that was designed to assist the black South Africans. Congress cared a lot about what was going on. We had more congressional delegations visiting then just about any other post I have ever seen. We had a wide range of interests.

Q: You mention all the American firms there, had there been a decrease because of the sanctions, businesses selling out and getting out?

STEINBERG: Yeah. We had moved from 260 American countries, with about two and half billion dollars worth of investment down to about 100 U.S. companies with a billion dollars worth of investment. About 60% of American firms said they weren't going to play with the sanctions and they didn't want to have to report to their board meetings why they were continuing to operate. We did see a lot of disinvestment during that time.

Q: Were sanctions still in place while you were there?

STEINBERG: They were removed while I was there.

Q: Was there an effort on our part to get the companies back?

STEINBERG: Right. There was, a lot of the agreements that people signed when they left that had buy back provisions there. Unfortunately, it was very difficult to get U.S. companies back into Africa. Once they had left, it was a tough situation to try and get

them to be interested again. They would look at South Africa like any African country and we have difficulties elsewhere.

Q: You were there before Mandela and the ANC took over.

STEINBERG: Right.

Q: As we move towards this, how are you feeling? How is this going to work? What did you feel?

STEINBERG: You have to remember how the international community viewed Mandela. He was a godsend for that country. He was perceived as the George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson, and John F. Kennedy put together. There was a lot of confidence in him. We all understood though how tremendous the challenges were going to be. You had a population that was essentially 70% black, 70-85% black, that didn't have access to healthcare, didn't have good housing, had been shunted off to Soweto or the other townships. We all knew there was going to be a tremendous challenge ahead in that regard. The other thing to remember is the amount of violence that was occurring in South Africa at that time. There was a lot of black on black violence between the ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party. There were tens of thousands of deaths that occurred throughout the country, especially in the townships and in KwaZulu-Natal province.

Q: What was motivating most of this violence?

STEINBERG: Part of it was ethnic violence between the Zulu community and the other communities, whether it was Cosa or Swana or whatever. Part of it was encouraged by the extreme whites who were trying to get the South African blacks to fight amongst themselves, with perhaps the expectation that that would allow them to maintain power. Part of it was economically motivated. Part of it was politically the difference between the African National Congress and the Inkatha which had been perceived as having worked with the government.

Q: This is Buthelezi?

STEINBERG: This is Buthelezi.

Q: Basically Zulu, wasn't it.

STEINBERG: It was, but the Zulu community was divided between Inkatha and the ANC. There was a lot of violence in Natal because of that.

Q: What about the white diehards? Did we have contact with them? Did we understand what they were doing?

STEINBERG: Not really. We did have contact with them, at least the non-violent elements, because there was a group called the AWB (Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging)

which was essentially a terrorist organization that was neo-Nazi and they we didn't have contact with. There was obviously an extreme white community that was prepared to see apartheid continue and they were even prepared to see a white homeland in South African, increasingly as they saw they weren't going to be able to be in charge as it was. We did maintain contact with them. It was hard to deal with them though, in any rational way.

Q: What about other nations there? Germany, Britain, Israel, what was coming from other countries?

STEINBERG: Basically the same as the United States. We were all excited about the opportunity for change in South Africa. We were all trying to encourage good political dialogue amongst the parties and among the races. It was pretty common.

Q: Did you find that your office was sort of the catalyst between getting the blacks and whites in the same room? Had they reached that point where they were doing it themselves?

STEINBERG: We were helping. Catalyst is too strong a word. We were encouraging the process. We were providing what Bill Swing used to call facilitation of dialogue for the parties. The beauty of what went on in South Africa was made in South Africa. This was F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela having made a firm commitment to see a new South Africa develop working together. I would say Princeton Lyman has written a book on all the ways that the international community, in particular the United States, assisted the process. [Ed: Princeton Lyman, Partner to History: The U.S. Role in South Africa's Transition to Democracy. U.S. Institute for Peace, 2002.] It was involved in all different areas, including things like sending constitutional lawyers to South Africa to help them develop a new constitution, sending experts in affirmative action to see how the white businesses could bring blacks into the board room and onto the shop floor and those sorts of things.

Q: In the case of Russia and the former Soviet Union states an awful lot of do-gooders, academic types offered all sorts of ideas about how to do things. Did you have such types appear in South Africa?

STEINBERG: You had that phenomenon. I wouldn't go so far as to say it was a problem because the South African's needed help with just about everything. I'd like to say that they were going through their revolutionary war, their civil war, their depression, their civil rights movement all at that same time, so they needed assistance. Also, the fact that the ANC was going to be the dominant power and everybody knew that gave them the power to resist the more unwanted aspects of what you are describing. We frankly, help channel some of that. One of the things we did was to set up what we called exchanges. An academic institution would have one of these that was made up largely of ANC, but also the progressive white community and they would be investigating anti-trust policy or how to encourage affirmative action or other techniques regarding the economy. It became the think tank for the ANC.

Q: You are an economist and how did you view the economy? You say they have real problem of unemployment and it was a fragile economy.

STEINBERG: It was one of the most distorted economies that you could ever imagine, because they had taken 85% of the population and said we are not going to be drawing on your skills except as unskilled labor. From the stand point of an over dependence on gold and other minerals it was distorted by sanctions which raised the price of imported oil to the point where they were developing these very uneconomical policies of transforming natural gas into petroleum for example, which made no economic sense, except there were sanctions that prevent them from getting all oil imports. They were heavily involved in the military and defense spending was way too high from any rational sense except this was a besieged economy and a country that felt besieged. You had on the one hand all these huge corporations by African standards that were doing some very impressive things. You had ESKOM, which was the electrical industry, the largest by far in Africa, and was shipping electricity throughout the region. Yet, the economy itself was so distorted that it made no economic sense. We all knew that there was going to be a huge transformation that would be required.

Q: How about the military, was there a concern that this might turn on the situation and takeover? Was in the cards?

STEINBERG: I don't think anybody really suspected that you would have a military coup of right wing Afrikaners, but there was some nervousness. I will say, subsequently but at the inauguration of Nelson Mandela, which I had the pleasure to attend, at one point there was a fly over by the South African defense force and somewhere in the back of your mind there was fear that this wasn't just a ceremonial fly over, that something was going on here. As it turned out it was a beautiful fly over and they had colors coming from the back of the planes that were the new South African flag. It was in the back of people's minds. I would say the South African police force as well had to move from being a repressive organization designed to keep the blacks of South Africa down to a new democratic force that was designed to help with the human rights of all the citizens of South Africa. It was a tremendous transformation.

Q: How would you describe what you did in a typical day or week? What were you doing?

STEINBERG: In my role as economic counselor we were writing on the economy. At one point we did a very big research project that talked about what we called the post apartheid dividend, which was going to be all the different ways that the integral apartheid was going to help the economy develop, the release of sanctions, new investment, etc. We spent a lot of time researching that. We spent a lot of time as a match maker, working with exactly the groups that you were talking about before, who wanted to contribute to South Africa and making sure that they had reasonable counterparts to deal with. We did a lot of seminars. We did a lot of exchange programs. In addition, we had to monitor the sanctions while they were still in place, and to make sure companies weren't violating the sanctions. As the sanctions were released we then had to try to shift gears, as you were suggesting. We had to move from a period where we were saying,

“don’t invest in South Africa,” to a period where we are saying, “come on back.” We spent a lot of time with U.S. pension funds, for example, trying to get them to start putting money into the South African economy. Those were the types of things. The other part of my job, though, six months of the year I was actually in charge of our embassy in South Africa because it has that unique status where half of the year where the parliament and the government meets in Cape Town. About a dozen people from the embassy would go down there, including the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission and I would be left in charge of still what was a very large mission.

Q: What would you do?

STEINBERG: I would be in charge of all the political reporting, all the economic reporting, all the different agencies. I would oversee our AID program, which was about one hundred million dollars, at that point. Again, it’s an interesting position, because as I was saying before you are not a charge, you’re not an acting DCM, you are an officer-in-charge. You have all the responsibility, but none of the authority.

Q: What was left in Pretoria? Did the government really pick up and move?

STEINBERG: Yes.

Q: What about the ministries?

STEINBERG: The ministries would stay, but the ministers would go down. It was the same at our embassy. As I said out of 350 people you maybe had 15 who would go down. The ambassador, the deputy chief of mission, the political counselor, a few of the political officers. For example, the political section was eight people, two of who would go down and six of whom would stay up.

Q: There must be a lot of coordination. I would think this would be difficult. You’re supposed to present a demarché to the South African government and half the time you want to go down, it depends on where you want to put it.

STEINBERG: That’s exactly right. I would say it would have been a nightmare, had we not had three people who were right on the same wavelength and that is: the ambassador, the DCM, and myself.

Q: Who was the...the ambassador was Bill Swing.

STEINBERG: It was Bill Swing at the beginning and Princeton Lyman after him. The Deputy Chief of Mission the whole time was Marshall McCallie, who went on to be our Ambassador to Namibia [Ed: serving from July 7, 1993 to July 12, 1996] and has remained to this day one of my best friends.

Q: Is he still in the service?

STEINBERG: No he retired. He went up to the Army War College at Carlisle and was assigned as Deputy Commandant for International Affairs there for about three years and retired out of there. We really did have to be on the phone everyday. We did have to coordinate exactly the kinds of problems that you were just describing.

Q: The South Africans have had a pretty effective security service. One doesn't think quite of East Germany, but I mean it was of that hilt. Did you feel they were all over you or did it make any difference?

STEINBERG: They were pretty subtle. Occasionally, you would get an absurd situation like you are talking on the phone and you are hearing voices in the background and they are tapping your phone, but they've forgotten that they are not supposed to talk. You would get occasional situations like that. You would occasionally see people following you, but it wasn't oppressive, and as you say, it didn't really matter that much because you had to be on your best behavior anyway, in South Africa. The other thing is even the security forces understood that the writing was on the wall and they better adjust to the new South Africa, so I think no one went overboard.

Q: Did you have any problem with junior officers? You know there is often more zeal in the junior officer and they want change a lot faster, and all that. As the situation was evolving did you have to keep your hand on their heads?

STEINBERG: No, because we were the most zealous embassy that you can possibly imagine. Bill Swing and Princeton Lyman set the tone from the top and that was there is a new South Africa coming and the United States needs to be relevant to it and we want you out there being relevant to this community. I would say our AID program we had a little bit of problems with because it went so far overboard that it was working exclusively with communities that were disadvantages and in a sense we could have done more if had been able to work with all the different communities. There was a little bit of concern there, but I would say for the most part, beginning frankly with Ed Perkins, who was Ambassador before I got there and running through Bill Swing and Princeton Lyman this was a very committed, very zealous embassy, top to bottom.

Q: How did you find the other embassies? Were they a little more conservative or not?

STEINBERG: A little more conservative, but frankly a lot less relevant. For some reason I think the parties with both the whites and the blacks saw the United States as being the real power. Frequently I would have other embassies come to me to ask me you know, "what is the ANC policy on nationalization or what are they doing about the labor unions, or whatever." I think they just sort of felt a little bit out of it.

Q: What about the demise of the Soviet Union, which is happening while you were there? Did that make any difference, or had the Soviets pretty well cut their losses?

STEINBERG: Oh yeah. The Soviets had not been a relevant player in South African for quite some time. I do think it had two effects. One was to reinforce the notion that the

United States mattered and we were the only superpower left. Secondly, it did as you were suggesting before discredit a lot of the eastern block ideology. You have to remember that a lot of the ANC had gotten their degrees at University of Moscow because the Soviets made a particular effort to cultivate them. There were years and years where the United States wouldn't even talk to the ANC. A lot of the financial support did come from eastern countries. It was essential to break that connection and that occurred throughout the 1980s, but then with the fall of the Soviet Union it really reinforced it.

Q: How about Libya? I take it then, Libya was a supporter? Oh no, it was Cuba.

STEINBERG: Well, it was all of the above. Nelson Mandela had to understand that the friends that you had when you are young, in effect, are not going to be the friends that help you thick and thin, later. The relationship with Cuba, the relationship with Libya, the relationship with other countries in the Middle East who were at that point radical states, he had to tone down those relationships. It was very difficult for him because as you say, these were the countries that were providing financial support, moral support, when the United States wouldn't even meet with the ANC as a political movement. We were still calling them terrorists at that time. It was a difficult transformation for him to make, as you suggest.

Q: Speaking of transformations, were those in the ANC, and were you observing it, who couldn't make the transformation from essentially being a terrorist type organization to coming into a transitional democracy type thing and how were they being treat?

STEINBERG: They did pretty well. You had an external wing and an internal wing and the new leadership came from both. I would say that some of the people that you are describing probably went by the way side, but we didn't see them. We were with the ones who were trying to make the transition to a new South Africa. The other thing that helped that was the truth in reconciliation commission because this was a way of dealing with South Africa's past that didn't represent an amnesty. It didn't undercut rule of law, but it did establish a new paradigm of forgiveness, or reconciliation of coming together and that was just getting going when I was there.

Q: Can you explain what that was?

STEINBERG: Well, it was basically a commission where if you had committed crimes during the revolutionary movement, either if you were with the government or with the ANC and these were politically motivated, you were called to come before the commission, you essentially said what you did and asked for forgiveness. There was a very frankly complex process to determine whether this was a legitimate crime, whether you were to be forgiven, you would face your victims if you could. It was a way of coming to peace with the past that didn't create new divisions for the future. It was very successful.

Q: Where did the idea of that come from?

STEINBERG: It came for jurists. There have been similar phenomenons throughout history. In fact there is a U.S. Institute of Peace study that analyzes 50 some odd cases of post World War II coming to grips with these sorts of things. It came out of the minds, largely of South Africans. I would give Desmond Tutu a lot of credit. He was the head of the commission for quite some time. I would give Justice Richard Goldstone a lot of the credit, a South African jurist, as well.

Q: How about our American visitor or exchange program, was this in full flower?

STEINBERG: Full flower. We were crisscrossing the Atlantic with South Africans going to the United States to study everything under the sun, both for six-week programs and for two-year programs. We had Americans coming to South Africa and sharing their experience with the affirmative action, or voter registration, or women's rights. Absolutely. These were two societies that had long been interested in each other. You do remember how important the anti-apartheid movement was in the United States and it made a fairly smooth transition from being anti-apartheid to pro-democracy and pro-development in the post apartheid movement. The same people who were protesting outside of the South African Embassy when it was a white controlled embassy were going there to get visas to come to South Africa to contribute the future of that country.

Q: When you were there Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and we delivered him a rather sound defeat. There was big news at the time, how did that play or was that something people were looking at?

STEINBERG: There more radical or leftist groups in South Africa were very upset by this. I think Nelson Mandela sort of kept quiet on this and made sure that everyone understood that this was issue that was taking place far away and he didn't want it to be a disturbance in terms of South Africa. I guess the most personal effect on me was that I had organized a big concert with one of my favorite South African musicians to come for my 40th birthday party, and he sent me an email or fax saying that he could no longer perform at my house because he didn't like what we were doing in Iraq, so there was some of that amongst some of the movements there.

Q: In the south Indian Ocean there had been a, a big explosion, which some people thought it was maybe the Israelis or South Africans testing a nuclear weapon. Was that an issue when you were there?

STEINBERG: Yes. Absolutely. The question of nonproliferation of South Africa, it was clear that they were developing nuclear technology. Subsequently, they acknowledged it publicly and abandoned it. We were watching this very very closely. The military relationship between South African and Israel was one we were watching as well.

Q: What was life like there for you all?

STEINBERG: Perhaps embarrassingly it was very comfortable. As a foreigner you were able to take part in all of the good things of life that the white South Africans had built up.

Again, it was embarrassing to say this, but there were beautiful game parks to visit. There were lodges around the country. It is God's country just in terms of the beauty of the place, with beautiful mountains and rolling rivers. There were modern films, electricity and water that was completely safe. You essentially as a diplomat rode on the backs of the apartheid movement, so it was a very comfortable life and a very good life.

Q: What about something, maybe it was a later phenomenon, essentially unemployed blacks engaging in various crimes. Was that going on when you were there or not?

STEINBERG: Crime was getting worse, but not really in Pretoria. Pretoria was sort of the bastion of stability and security. Problems were starting to emerge in Johannesburg. There was a downtown area that almost became a no go area and it was crime from right across the ethnic division, but yes, it got more and more serious. You started to see white flight. White South Africans who had had enough of that. Also, who were concerned about having built up a financial nest egg throughout their lives and not wanting to see it destroyed, so you did see a lot of white flight during this period.

Q: What about the coloreds, the Indians weren't they classified as coloreds?

STEINBERG: Yeah. We called them so-called coloreds.

Q: Anyway, it was almost a distinct class.

STEINBERG: It was a distinct class, legally in South Africa. They had some additional rights that the black community didn't have, but it was a small community. It was a very sad community, as well. In some senses they felt like they were really Afrikaners, in a lot of ways. They spoke African, many of them. They had slightly privileged positions in the economy and in the trade industries, etc., but they weren't really welcome at the table. It was a sad community.

Q: Was there much development of expanding business opportunities for the blacks, getting out, setting up small business?

STEINBERG: Yeah, and we were helping with that. There were two phenomenons. One was that and you started to see more development of indigenous industries in Soweto and in the other townships, but you also saw selected blacks being put on the boards of major corporations. There was an attempt by some of the big companies to join the movement to a new South Africa. Everyone would be talking about the New South Africa, both in industry and in the political area.

Q: Really we are in 1993, I guess. If there is anything else you can think of, next time we will give you a chance to put it in. Well Don, 1993 wither from here?

STEINBERG: I had back in my days when I was working on the hill, gotten to know George Stephanopoulos and Nancy Soderberg and a variety of other people who were part of the Clinton team. I actually got a phone call from Nancy Soderberg asking me if I

would come back and be the Deputy White House Press Secretary, which was also the Senior Director at the National Security Council for public affairs. I had a journalism background and so accepted the offer.

Q: Well, you did that from when to when?

STEINBERG: For one year from May of 1993 till April of 1994.

Q: Every administration when they take power have a problem, a bunch of seemingly kids taking over and it takes a while to learn the playground rules. Getting into this, the Clinton Administration had more trouble than many.

STEINBERG: I think people forget that at that point it had been since 1969 with the one exception of the Ford/Carter years that we had had a Democratic administration. Essentially, back 24 years with just four years of Democratic administration, so indeed you had a lot of people who were having to learn skills. Whether it was the National Security Council, or the State Department, or the Pentagon you had people who knew each other and worked together in the past, but had really not run things. It was a difficult transition and I put myself as part of that. I was learning how to be spokesperson for the National Security Council, sort of on the job training. There were some difficulties. I would say that my one year in that position coincided with an awful lot of problems in the international community as well. I would refer to one two-week period, October 1st through October 15th of 1993, which I will always remember, it began with us having people killed in Mogadishu and dragged through the streets.

Q: Black Hawk Down

STEINBERG: That was the Black Hawk Down experience. We had mortars going on in the market place of Sarajevo. We had the white house in Russia burning with the attempted coup there. We had the Harland County, the ship in Haiti, that we pulled back [Ed: On 11 October 1993, the USS Harlan County was sent to Port-au-Prince, Haiti to pave the way for an agreed-upon UN intervention. However, she was ordered back to sea a day later in the face of local protests.] and we had North Korea declaring that they were pulling out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. All that occurred in a two week period, so this was a test for a new administration.

Q: As a spokesperson, for the National Security Council, there was a White House spokesperson, I think it was....

STEINBERG: Dee Dee Myers.

Q: What was your role?

STEINBERG: Well, it was two fold. One, I was Dee Dee Myer's deputy. Part of my responsibility in that role was to make sure she knew what was going on on international affairs and to feed information to her. She was a remarkable woman, very bright, very

gifted. She didn't need that much support, but part of my work, was to ferret out information from the State Department, from our mission to the United Nations, from the Pentagon, and to make sure she was up to speed on developments, so that she could interact with the White House press corps effectively. The other part of the job was to try to explain, basically on background, American foreign policy to the American people and to do this through the medium of the press. Part of the responsibility was to talk with other senior directors at the NSC and to find out what was going on with our relationship with Russia, or our relationship with China, and then interpret that for the press corps. I did an awful lot of background interviews. I would say, a third role was as the press secretary for Tony Lake, who was the National Security Advisor at the time and Sandy Berger, who was the Deputy National Security Advisor and Nancy Soderberg, who was basically the chief of staff. I was arranging their interviews and making sure they were up to speed in these settings.

Q: Did you find a reluctance or lack of interest in international affairs in the early Clinton Administration. Previously George Bush, looking in retrospect, was probably one of our finest presidents as far as foreign affairs. I mean he was really well versed, and he knew everybody, but the election revolved around economic issues and he lost. Did you find you had to drag the Clinton staff kicking and screaming into foreign affairs, at that time?

STEINBERG: Not really. I think there was a learning curve that we were all going through on foreign affairs, but I think it was well understood by Tony Lake, by Madeleine Albright, by Warren Christopher, but then also by George Stephanopoulos, and Dee Dee Myers, that the presidency means a predominate role in foreign affairs. I think the example that I sighted, that two week period, there was understanding that we couldn't as an Administration just focus on the economy. You had to focus on all the different aspects of foreign affairs.

Q: Well, that was a tough week, but the Harland County pulling out because of the mob of demonstrators. Was the Black Hawk Down a matter of over commitment that they shouldn't have gotten into, or something like that? Was this just a matter of poor coordination with the military or how were we seeing this?

STEINBERG: Well, you could explain it, and part of my job was to explain it. The Black Hawk Down was really one of trying to over extend ourselves, to change the nature of the mission that we were involved in from a humanitarian mission, to a security mission.

Q: And change the government.

STEINBERG: Absolutely. I will always remember being with President Clinton at Fort Drum, in February of 2004, where he essentially apologized to the American troops because that was where the 10th Mountain division came from and essentially apologizing for failures of leadership during that period, and essentially saying that we would not get involved in a similar situation elsewhere. In the case of the Harland County, that was supposed to be an intervention that wouldn't face opposition. We were sending

essentially very lightly armed police force to the ground to implement an agreement and then we found a non-permissive environment and the concern was that you were going to get someone killed or you were going to have some sort of a problem and then that would destroy the possibility for this agreement to be implemented. So, I could explain it, but the bottom line is that you had five incidents, or five developments, all of which were coming at the same time that essentially were challenges to how we were going to operated.

Q: Was there a feeling of great aversion to getting involved in Bosnia?

STEINBERG: To getting involved in a military way, in Bosnia, yes. When I was there, this was when we were moving our policy from one of basically just backing up the Europeans to this notion of lift and strike, which was to lift the arms embargo, to allow the Bosnians to defend themselves, and then order military strikes of necessary to reinforce what both the United Nations and the Europeans were doing. Our policy was shifting, but clearly at this point we were not prepared to see large scale U.S. military engagement on the ground.

Q: Were you watching how the press was handled and what was the attitude of the press, too?

STEINBERG: Well, the press was, I think, hypercritical during this period. I think they saw a new administration that was just getting its feet on the ground. This was everything from the travel gate scandal, which wasn't really a scandal, but to the president getting a haircut on a runway, while planes were being held up around him. It was a fairly childish period, in terms of the press relationship. Dee Dee, I think was incredibly talented and very bright, but caught up in this general attack on the administration that eventually, frankly led to Les Aspen leaving, as defense secretary. There was a sense that this was an administration that was having some serious problems.

Q: What about George Stephanopoulos? How did he operate at that time?

STEINBERG: George right at the beginning of my time there, was Director of Communications and then the president had decided that he was just too valuable to spending half or three quarters of his time doing what Dee Dee Myers could do, so moved him to his top domestic aid. George was remarkable. I have rarely met a man who can get to the essence of a situation as quickly as he can, see all the different angles of it, know exactly who to call to work out an issue. He served the president extremely well in that role, but that was not surprised because he had served Dick Gephardt in that exact same way when I was there on majority leader's staff.

Q: Did you get any feel for President Clinton and his way of operating?

STEINBERG: Absolutely and I had great respect for the president. I had the opportunity to travel with him on most or probably about half of his domestic trips; because Tony Lake who was the National Security Advisor generally thought it made a lot more sense

for him to stay at the White House when the president would do his day trips. I traveled with the president not as the press person, but as the NSC person, so had a lot of contact with him in that regard. I found him to be one of the most human, one of the most decent men. I know the scandals that emerged later, I had no insight into that, but I saw a person who dealt with people very very frankly and openly. I will always remember one particular scene where we were at a graduation ceremony that he was speaking at and he left the graduation ceremony and was walking through a hallway and in front of him was a woman and a child in a wheelchair. You could tell right away that this was a down syndrome child and that the mother probably was an upwardly mobile woman who had sacrificed her life for this son and the president talked to the mother for a little bit and then got down on his knees, stroked the head of this down syndrome kid, talked with him for a little bit, spoke to the mother again, and walked away. You knew that he had by this two minute exchange, validated that woman's life and validated the child's suffering. He had that intuitive feel. I saw dozens of cases like that; I will always be respectful of him for.

Q: What about Hilary Clinton? Did you get any feel for her role at that time?

STEINBERG: Very very little to be honest with. I worked with her on a few press activities. Again, I had great respect for her and her staff which was really substantive. There was a lot of talk about whether she would have a West Wing office and all of this. It didn't matter where she was. She was really involved in all the aspects of the administration. I didn't deal with her on healthcare, which was her big issue at that point, but I had great respect for her as well.

Q: What about the NSC at the time? There were times when Henry Kissinger was there, where the NSC seemed to be running the government practically. Was there a deliberate attempt to keep the NSC from being too prominent?

STEINBERG: Well, it was very prominent in terms of the policy side, but less in terms of the public explanation of it. I think there was an understanding that you wanted Warren Christopher to be the chief diplomat for the country. There was an understanding of how effective Madeleine Albright was as our UN ambassador in articulating policy. Tony Lake had a key role both in terms of coordinating policy, but also being the President's advisor. There was a good personal relationship there. Tony was basically the first person he saw in the morning and the last person the President saw at night. He understood the power of that role.

Q: What was your impression of the ability of the State Department to produce whatever needed to be produced for the White House and the NSC? You are a Foreign Service officer, but here you are over in the center of power of a new administration. What was your impression?

STEINBERG: Extremely good when you got it. It was a slow moving bureaucracy. It was difficult to task. There were so many clearances that you had to get on anything you would ask for. That said, I will say, in the area where I was working on, which was the

press, the State Department, you had Mike McCurry, as the spokesperson at that point. You had Tom Donilon as the senior advisor in that role, both of whom were dynamite and went on to what were very impressive roles.

In my role as the press person at the NSC, I had a great relationship with Tom Donilon and Mike McCurry, at the State Department, who were very talented people. Whenever I needed information it would be forthcoming quickly and professionally. What I was saying though is that other parts of the State Department tended to be a little slow moving and it would take you a long time to get the information you needed from them.

Q: Did you get any impression of what was coming out of the State Department, or was coming out of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) or the Department of Defense?

STEINBERG: No. Not really.

Q: I was just wondering if there were any conflicting guidance coming out or not or were these being played out so you could see them.

STEINBERG: Not really. I think all of the agencies were in a state of flux during this period. James Woolsey was at the CIA. Les Aspen was at the Pentagon, Warren Christopher. There was, as I said before, a learning curve everywhere that was going on. The divisions, I didn't see as clearly as others might have.

Q: You were on this learning curve, but by the time you reached the end of the curve, you had learned and then you were gone.

STEINBERG: I was and it was a very difficult job. It was being in at the office at basically 6:30 every morning and I would never leave before 10:00. You have to follow all the world events. You do that for the first hour and a half everyday. Then you go participate in senior staff meetings, brief people on what was going on. Then you would have press events that you had to participate in. You'd have to prepare Dee Dee Myers for the White House press briefing. The afternoon would be spent trying to work with the senior directors at the NSC, with the UN, with the State Department, putting on programs, activities, and then you'd finish up from eight to ten reading all of the intelligence from around the world that had come in during the day so that you could be prepared the next morning to start it over again. It was a seven day a week job and one of the tougher things I had ever done. After a year I don't want to say I was burned out, but I was close.

Q: Give me a feel for your personal circumstances. Do you have a family, or do they just disappear?

STEINBERG: No, I was single and that's the only way I could have done it. I was involved in a relationship that basically died under the pressure.

Q: I was going to say that's all very nice, but maybe a short telephone relationship.

STEINBERG: I remember one morning, going out to breakfast with the person I was seeing at the time on a Sunday morning and spending the whole time on the telephone with the White House. She essentially said, if I can't even have a breakfast with you, this is not going to work.

Q: Was it 1994. Where did you go?

STEINBERG: From the pan into the fire, I stayed at the NSC, but I became the senior director for African affairs and I took that role over in April of 1994. I say that specifically for two reasons. One, on April 6 of 1994 a plane went down in Rwanda that was carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi. The crash began the Tutsi-Hutu genocide there and two, it was also the period when South Africa was going to have its elections. Those two events dominated my life for the next year.

Q: So, you did that for a year. First of all, who had had the job before you?

STEINBERG: Before me, Jennifer Ward had been in the job, but she had really only been in there for four to six months. It apparently, wasn't a good fit for her. It had been basically vacant for about three or four months, and MacArthur DeShazer a military officer was filling in during that period.

Q: So, you came in when two presidents were on the plane? This turned into one of the most horrific situations that we had seen. How was this viewed at the beginning? How did the news go because we later remember the president apologized for it, but a lot of people didn't focus on it? Nothing was done.

STEINBERG: Well, for the first three to four weeks I don't think we truly understood the scope of what was going on. We had spent much of the initial period getting our personnel out of Rwanda, so that evacuation process was the emphasis in the very early period. Subsequently, it became clearer and clearer that this was not just random warfare going on, but a genocide that had been well planned and was sweeping through the country. Within three months some 800,000 people were killed. We, I believe, made some serious mistakes in this process. I think we made our first mistake in drawing down the UN peace keeping force, from some 2500 to about 500.

Q: Why was that done?

STEINBERG: That was done at the behest of the Belgians, who basically had had ten of their peace keepers killed and decided to pull out their force. Their force was really the bulk of the peace keepers, at least the military side of it. The sense was the mission without them would be a very different kind of a mission. It would not have the capability to preserve the peace. You also have to remember that this was in the wake of Somalia where the United States had had troops on the ground that had suffered similar fate. As I said before, the president said before that we are not going to be getting involved in a similar situation for humanitarian purposes elsewhere. It was set against that back drop. It was also set against the back drop of the failure in a number of

situations with peace keeping measures. The sense that some people had was that we could not afford another peace keeping debacle. The decision was taken and again one that I think was a mistake and one that Madeleine Albright has subsequently called her biggest mistake to drop down the peace keeping mission.

Q: While you were there, how was this played out with respect to the NSC? Did you have the Department of Defense saying we can't do this? The State Department taking a non-committal... What was happening within our own apparatus?

STEINBERG: There were a wide variety of actions that we were trying to take. The impression is that United States just sat on its hands during this period. That actually wasn't accurate. We didn't send military forces and frankly that's something that I regret. I also regret, as I said, drawing down the peace keepers and leaving the Force Commander Canadian Brigadier-General Roméo Dallaire with a force that was not adequate to the challenge that he had. One of the things that we tried to was to get 50 armored personnel carriers to his forces. We tried to jam the radio station that was broadcasting hate messages around the country. We tried to get a lot of humanitarian assistance into the country. I will say that the U.S. military was very concerned about over extending itself. They would frequently say to us, the President has not declared that this is a national security issue and until we get that declaration we are not prepared to sacrifice American readiness elsewhere around the world for a mission in the center of Africa. Again, where it wasn't clear what the American national security stake was. You did have some resistance from the military going up and down the line. Within the State Department you had some very strong advocates for more forceful action, but again we were up against the question what is American's national security interest. I would say this was before certainly 9/11 [Ed: the September 11, 2001 attack on the Twin Towers in New York] where I think we learned that chaos anywhere in the world, international crime, trafficking of persons, even proliferations of weapons of mass destruction, is a threat to order, but that was not the mindset at the time.

Q: Did we see this as genocide, or were we seeing this as oh God the Hutus and Tutsis have been doing this all the time and it's just another one?

STEINBERG: I think it changed after about the first three weeks. After the first three weeks we understood that this was genocide. It was planned, but it took that amount of time for us to come to that conclusion, three to four weeks. By that point it became very difficult to mobilize forces to intervene. We had already pulled down the peace keeping mission. We did spend time, especially at the inauguration of Nelson Mandela, trying to organize African forces to intervene, but that was ultimately unsuccessful. I remember being at a meeting with Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Salim Salim, (Secretary General) of the OAU (Organization of African Unity), the Vice President Al Gore where we basically put on the table a proposal for an intervention force by Africans, but by that point the process had moved along to far.

Q: Did we see the Tutsi force that was coming out of; was it Uganda, as being one of benefit to the situation?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. We viewed that as the solution and frankly it was, ultimately the victory of the Rwandan patriotic force. In what then became a civil war was the only thing that ended the genocide.

Q: By the time this was over had the enormity of what had happened and our lack of a positive response, had this sunk in or did this take longer?

STEINBERG: It sunk in with me immediately. I had been debating whether to resign the position because of our inability to act. Again, no one can say that we didn't know what was going on. You had CNN showing pictures of bodies going down the river into Lake Victoria. It was pretty clear. What then happened was a million people streamed across the boarder going to Goma in Eastern Congo and all of a sudden moving from frustrated over not being able to act we had immediately a million peoples lives to save. We changed gears overnight. The U.S. military changed gears and now it was full speed ahead. I spent most of my time then as essentially a humanitarian relief worker, trying to get food, and water, and medical supplies into Eastern Congo.

Q: Did it become apparent early on that our normal way of getting food is taking meals ready to eat, but this is considered to be at least the NGO's are saying, "look you are just helping the Hutu forces because they can use it and it's best to have central feeding points." I mean, this became an issue, I believe.

STEINBERG: It did. I will say though that perhaps to our shame we didn't focus on this early enough, on the need to demilitarize the camps, on the need to challenge the authority of the genocidaires in those camp facilities. We had a million people who were without food. They were in an area where it was impossible to grow crops. They were without water. They were without medical supply and so in the first instance, basically what we did was to build an airport to fly in food, to fly in water in the initial stages and water purification equipment after that, to fly in medical supplies. Yes, what you're suggesting was a problem that we were aware of, but our notion was we've got to save lives.

Q: Were we acting more or less alone, or what was happening? Was there international response?

STEINBERG: There was an international response. I would say we took the lead, in part because our military was prepared now to fly C-130s in and perform those responsibilities. I would also say the French had sent a military force into southwest Rwanda to set up what they call Operation Turquoise, which was basically a no fire zone in that part of the country, just to end the violence and to separate the parties. They were involved militarily along with some African Union countries.

Q: Were you able to establish contact with authorities from Rwanda in one way or another or was it just a matter of getting out there and feeding a very dispersed populace.

STEINBERG: Really more of the latter. We did develop a relationship very quickly with Paul Kagame who became president [Ed: 2000] and was the head of the Rwanda patriotic force, later the patriotic army. This was not a situation where we were going to just sit back and wait.

Q: How was Clinton responding? Did you get any feel for his response to this, as it was happening?

STEINBERG: Very little. He did issue some press statements. He did do a public radio broadcast to the Rwandans, but he really was not that involved in the situation.

Q: Turning to your second challenge, did the joy of seeing Mandela come into power in a way subtract the energy that could have gone into focusing on Africa?

STEINBERG: Not really. When you say “the joy,” you have to remember that this was a tough period in South Africa, as well. We had problems getting to the elections. I was with Madeleine Albright at a hotel in Johannesburg on the eve of the election when the Inkatha Freedom Party marched on the ANC headquarters and were shooting up their headquarters. There was a lot of difficulty getting Inkatha into the electoral process and the elections themselves were difficult. We remember those pictures of people waiting in line for hours and hours to vote and we remember that from a positive stand point, but the bottom line was that we had to register and get people to the poles, so it was a difficult process. That took up a lot of attention. Yes.

Q: Were there any other issues while you were there that you were dealing with, Ethiopia or anything like that?

STEINBERG: More than specific countries, I had three things that I was spending a lot of time on. One was trying to put together a program to demobilize oversized African armies. A number of armies in Africa were just far larger than they had any need to be, so we had demobilization programs going.

Q: Where were these armies?

STEINBERG: Well, you mentioned one. Ethiopia. This was a period of Mozambique moving to a peace process. Angola was moving to a peace process. Some of the West African countries as well, so that was one thing. I spent a lot of time on debt relief. We were trying to relieve the most highly indebted African countries, so I spent time on that. Then finally, humanitarian demining. An awful lot of countries were impacted by landmines, so we put new funding and activities into demining programs.

Q: What about AIDS while you were there? Was this much of an issue?

STEINBERG: It was very early on. I think we all knew how bad it was going to get and we started to put money into programs, but we didn't have the true sense of the tragedy of

30% HIV positive rates in Botswana or somewhat less in South Africa. That was off in the future at that point.

Q: With demining, what were we doing for it?

STEINBERG: We were putting money into development of demining technologies and capabilities in Africa themselves. Countries were putting together their own demining centers and we were helping train them. We were putting money into survivors' assistance and the victims of landmine accidents and helping them with prosthetic devices and training. We were doing mine awareness programs to teach children in particular and also adults how to identify landmines and stay away from them. We had a half dozen countries in Africa we were working with in that regard. The other thing we did when I was at the NSC, is we held the first White House conference on Africa, which was trying to gather 200 American leaders on Africa and debating what America's role and the continent should be. Everyone from Kweisi Mfume to Jesse Jackson. We had Wangari Muta Maathai (Kenya) who was the winner of the Noble Peace prize last year, came to address out conference. Al Gore played a big role in, so it was a three day colloquium on Africa.

Q: What was the result of this?

STEINBERG: More attention to a variety of African issues. Some very influential policy papers that helped shape how we were dealing with certain issues on the continent and a sense of community, a sense that Africa really did matter.

Q: Was this mainly an African-American type thing?

STEINBERG: It was largely African-American participants, but one of the points we were making is that the constituency has to be broader. It has to include non African-Americans. It has to include the business community. It has to include the religious communities. That African mattered to the United States for a variety of reasons. We actually had one problem and that was that we had inadequately consulted with Congress, so we got a number of members of the black caucus who were upset about the conference and didn't participate.

Q: I am surprised because that would have seemed to be on the first places you'd start.

STEINBERG: We consulted, but we consulted with the wrong people and got some noses out of joint.

Q: Well, this of course if part of the business. What was your impression of the African-American political establishment?

STEINBERG: I found that there were members of the African-American community who were very savvy, very aware of African issues. Nigeria was a big issue at the time and you had people traveling there constantly. There was an excitement over South Africa

and this being a real possibility for a new paradigm for the continent. We had people like Don Paine who was as knowledgeable as you can get and willing to travel and really see what was going on on the continent. I will say I was surprised at times that there wasn't more interest from the African-American community in what was going on on the continent. There were a number of occasions where we tried to stimulate interest and it wasn't as successful as we had hoped.

Q: This is what we see from the African-American community in recruitment from the Foreign Service. There isn't as much interest in international affairs. It's a community on its way up and has a variety of options. Did you find at the NSC a competition among world problems for the attention of the president?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. You had as you were suggesting before, a certain amount of interest in foreign affairs that was almost finite. You had to divide up the pie. Africa, it was tougher to make the case. America's National Security interests were at stake in things that were going on on the continent. Certainly in comparison to what was going on in the Balkans or as I said North Korea pulling out of the NPT. We had our relationship with Russia that was just being developed at this point. There were a lot of things on the radar screen and Africa often was perceived at not being at the top of the agenda.

Q: How did you find your relations with the African bureau at the time?

STEINBERG: Pretty good. George Moose was the assistant secretary [Ed: April 1993 to August 1997]. We had a pretty good partnership. I would attend some of their staff meetings. He opened up his staff so that I could call on desk officers for information that I needed. The relationship has been a difficult one at times for Africa, but I think I perhaps being a Foreign Service officer understood that George Moose really was Mr. Africa within our government and I tried to insure that my people understood that.

Q: You left the NSC in 1995. Where did you go?

STEINBERG: I went to Angola as ambassador.

Q: Don, you're off to Angola in 1995. You were there from when to when?

STEINBERG: I was there from September 1995 to November 1998.

Q: How did this assignment come about?

STEINBERG: Right at the end of my time at the National Security Council I had organized a trip for Tony Lake to Africa. We sort of crisis-crossed the continent. We went to Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, Zambia, Angola, Benin, and Ghana, and Senegal. Perhaps, the most meaningful or memorable place was Angola. It had just signed a peace agreement about a month earlier that had the prospects of ending decades of civil war, which had cost a half a million lives. We went to a number of sites around the country of the devastation the war had brought on that country. At the same time, the

great hope that people had that it would finally be over. The Lusaka protocol, which was the agreement that was signed, was a very complex document involving the immobilization, reintegration, power sharing, new elections and it was really a chance to end decades of civil war. [Ed: This protocol was signed October 31, 1994, and attempted to end the Angolan Civil War by integrating and disarming UNITA and starting national reconciliation. Both sides signed a separate ceasefire as part of the protocol on November 20.] I was so moved by that, that we had been talking even before that about possibly going out to Angola, but that solidified it in my mind. I made the decision. This was in December of 1994, I made the decision that I would leave the National Security Council and go to Angola at that point.

Q: Did you have any problem with confirmation?

STEINBERG: No. I had a fun process really. We had the peace agreement in place. There was a lot of interest and a lot of excitement about the possibility, again of ending civil war. I had interest from Senator Helms on one side. I had interest from John Kerry on the other. No, I didn't have a difficult confirmation. Actually, one funny story, I was friends with one of Senator Helms's staffers. At that point I had a beard and I look a lot like Vladimir Lenin with a beard. The staffer came up to me, right before the hearing, handed me a note that said, I've told Senator Helms to ask the following question, is it true that you have purposely grown a beard to look like Lenin, so that you can curry favor with the Marxists in power in Lawanda? Fortunately, he didn't ask that question and frankly that staffer ended up working for me later. No, I didn't have a difficult process of confirmation.

Q: What was the situation in Luanda and on the ground when you got there?

STEINBERG: It was one of real devastation. Again, there had been a civil war that broken out again in 1992 and a quarter of a million people had been killed from 1992 to 1994. Cities around the country had been devastated by mortar fire and by other conflict. We had about three million people who had been driven from their homes and that in a country that only has a population of about 10 or 11 million. Almost a third of the population was displaced. There were millions of landmines throughout the country that prevented people from returning to their homes. There was, I said, some excitement because we had the prospects for consolidating peace. Just as I arrived the United Nations had decided to deploy a peace keeping force, which was the largest in the world. We had some 11-12,000 peace keepers arriving as I got there. That said, the capital Luanda, was devastated by neglect. The government had spent so much money on the war effort that the city was absolutely destroyed. It had moved from a city of several hundred thousand a couple decades previously to two to three million and just could not handle the infrastructure needs. There was very little public water and certainly none that was potable. Electricity was really just generators that the embassies or the hotels, or the wealthy Angolans could afford. The health facilities were virtually nil. If you got sick you really did have to medevaced out of the country. There was gunfire outside of our houses all through the night. This was mostly police who were extorting money from the population.

Q: Can you just briefly say who was fighting whom and how things turn out at the end?

STEINBERG: It was a legacy of the Portuguese departure suddenly in the 1970s. They had not prepared the country for decolonization. There were two major forces. One was the MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola), which was in the early going a Marxist movement, made up largely of coastal people and the Kimbundu people versus, National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which was a rebel movement made up largely of people from the central part of the country that professed capitalism and western support. Angola got caught up in the cold war and ended up as a proxy war where the United States and South Africa support UNITA. The MPLA, which took over the government in Luanda, was supported by the Russians and the Cubans. The logic of the conflict continued throughout the 1980s. Finally, when the cold war ended, the United States, Russia and the former colonial power of Portugal all got together and essentially agreed that they would stop supporting their proxies and insist on a peace process. That peace process got going in the early 1990s leading to an election in 1992 where José Eduardo dos Santos of the MPLA won. The rebel leader Jonas Savimbi decided that he wasn't happy with the result and plunged the country back into civil war from 1992 to 1994. A very brutal civil war that again killed about a quarter of a million people.

Q: What happened to the two leaders, dos Santos and Savimbi?

STEINBERG: In 1994 the fighting in the civil war basically reached a situation where the government had seized the upper hand. The MPLA and UNITA agreed to enter a peace process and again, this agreement call Lusaka protocol was signed in November of 1994. The basic agreement was that the government of dos Santos would remain in power, that Savimbi and his supporters would get key positions in the government and key governorships of some states. There would be a demobilization process of the troops, especially UNITA where they would be incorporated into the existing army or they would be demobilized and given support to reintegrate into local society.

Q: When you got there, what did you see has your priority jobs?

STEINBERG: The key was peace and to consolidate that process, to get the peace keepers from the United Nations on the ground, to demobilize the soldiers of UNITA, to put together assistance packages for the three million displaced people and to help them return to their homes. I saw demining as a very important aspect since you had literally millions of landmines that had been planted that kept people from returning to their normal lives. In addition, Angola is a major supplier of oil. We had a number of American companies that were active there. In the 1980s they were about the only international oil company that was active. You had, actually in the cold war, one of these bizarre situations where an American oil company was producing revenue for a Marxist government that was fighting rebel movements encouraged by the United States and Cubans were guarding the American oil company, American proxy forces. It was one of the truly bizarre situations. One of my goals was to encourage as much US investment in

the oil sector as possible and to try at the same time to encourage transparency so that oil revenues would go towards national development and not into senior government pockets. At the same time that the war was diverting resources from social and economic purposes this was an extremely corrupt country. Oil revenues would go straight into Swiss bank accounts.

Q: It sounds like Nigeria.

STEINBERG: Very similar in terms of the oil revenue and the corruption there.

Q: What was the role of some of the neighboring countries, particularly South Africa, but the other neighboring countries at that time?

STEINBERG: Zambia had been extremely helpful in terms of trying to negotiate the peace agreement. The various countries in the region were providing peace keepers, including Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe for the peace process. The South Africans were looked to for advice and including in how to reconstruct a society. Savimbi on occasion would consult with Thabo Mbeki or Nelson Mandela to get advice as to how he should proceed. There was a productive relationship there. The whole question was peace going to last. Everybody was focused on that issue.

Q: Again, were we seen as the final supporters of the peace effort, helping with development. What was our role?

STEINBERG: Our role, yeah, as the only super power left and providing much of the humanitarian assistance, providing much of the support for the UN peace keeping operation, we were seen as a very powerful force. This was reinforced by visits of senior officials. Secretary Christopher came out. (Ambassador to the UN) Madeleine Albright came out. Other senior officials including from EUCOM (European Command) would come to visit and would reaffirm the interest of the United States in the peace process. I, in my role as Ambassador, went to see the president 35 times or more to counsel peace and reconciliation.

Q: The Cubans had left by then?

STEINBERG: Yes, the Cubans had left two or three years before under the agreement that was brokered by (African Bureau Assistant Secretary) Chet Crocker for peace and freedom in Namibia, South Africa, and all.

Q: How did you evaluate President Dos Santos?

STEINBERG: President Dos Santos was more committed to the peace process than Savimbi. He did see that one of his legacies would be lasting peace in the country. He was willing to sacrifice more to give more away. He was very much involved in the oil sector, so he didn't have particularly clean hands regarding transparency issues. He was

someone you could deal with. I would meet with him about once a month and we would discuss the peace process. Frequently, we would get flexibility on his side.

Q: What sort of things came up in the peace process while you were there?

STEINBERG: Well, the key question was demobilization of UNITA forces. There were about 70,000 to 100,000 UNITA fighters. They needed to be demobilized. One of the key issues was getting them into cantonment camps, getting them training to start a new life, getting their weapons away from them. The whole quartering process of UNITA forces was a very big exercise. That involved obviously a lot of supplies and humanitarian assistance and medical assistance. That was a major effort that we were involved in. Another effort was to extend the governments control throughout the national territory and to do that on the backs of the UN peace keepers. Again, there were 11 to 12,000 of them scattered around the country. They were the basis for building peace and stability that would allow the government to regain control over what had been UNITA controlled territory prior to that. That was a major effort that we engaged in. As I mentioned demining was another major effort.

Q: How does that go about?

STEINBERG: We would train non-governmental organizations and fund them to demine areas. We had contracts with South African firms to come in and demine the major roads of Angola. There was a government demining center called Inter-Roy that we were supporting. It was a combination of military demining and demining of fields and schools and towns. We also had substantial mine awareness programs so that children in particular could identify and avoid landmines. We also had survivors' assistance programs where we would assist. There were some 70,000 supposed victims of landmine accidents in Angola. We had prosthetic devices and rehabilitation programs for them. It was a major effort.

Q: Where did these mines come from?

STEINBERG: Some of them came from the United States. Most of them came from Eastern Europe. They were used by a dozen separate armies who at various times had activities in Angola, whether it was the government, or UNITA, supposedly the ANC when they were in Angola in camps there, planted landmines. Some oil companies supposedly planted landmines to protect their facilities. I would say the vast majority were planted by the government or UNITA.

Q: Was the Angolan military a factor? Was there a residue that would serve as a professional military?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. The government had about 120,000 troops and they needed to demobilize a lot of those forces as well. Part of the exercise was to demobilize government troops as well and to create a modern military, one that would focus on nation building as opposed to fighting a civil war. We also were involved programs to

train the Angola national police to build a force that respected human life as opposed to the traditional Angolan police forces, which were major human rights violators. Neither the government nor UNITA had a very good record on human rights issues. Indeed, they would abuse the population in their controlled territory. We had a situation where the government and UNITA organized amnesties for each other. You got to the point where there were 13 separate amnesties forgiving anything that anybody had ever done. There was even one amnesty that forgave actions that would occur in the future, which is just like a *carte blanche* for any human rights violations that you might feel compelled to commit.

Q: What was your impression of the UN peace keeping force?

STEINBERG: I was very impressed with the special representative of the secretary general, Alioune Blondin Beye, [Ed: who succeeded to this position on 28 June 1993]. He was the former Malian Foreign Minister. He was an active energetic, imaginative leader. He was probably the most beloved figure in the country because he was a cheerleader for the peace process. He would organize missions around the country to bring peace to areas. He was perceived as being sympathetic to both sides, very powerful. He was a very impressive individual. The peace keepers, I will say that we were fortunate for most of the time that there wasn't an armed opposition to them. They were of mixed quality. In some cases they were very good. The Indian forces, for example, were very good. The force commander, Major-General Phillip Valerio Sibanda was from Zimbabwe and he was a very talented officer as well. The key to the peace process and the key to the UN mission was the commitment of the parties. This was not a mission that was going to force the parties to make peace. It was a mission that was going to oversee a voluntary peace process. That's frankly what destroyed it in the final analysis.

Q: Was there a breakdown into warlordism at all?

STEINBERG: No, not really because you really had the government and UNITA as the two opposing forces. Jonas Savimbi ran UNITA with an iron fist. I can say without doubt that he is the single most charismatic, intelligent, and dynamic homicidal maniac that I have ever met. He was personally responsible for deaths, including the UNITA representatives in Washington, Tito Chingunji, and the UNITA representative in the UK, Wilson dos Santos, who he feared were getting too much individual power, brought them back to Angola and had them killed. He was ruthless and you didn't really challenge him.

Q: What about transparency of revenues, particularly oil revenues? How was that going while you were there?

STEINBERG: There was none. The government would get revenues from the oil companies, put them into special funds, it didn't go into the regular government budget process. It got to the point where the education minister would want money for schools, would have to go to the oil minister and say, give me some resources here. A lot of the revenues went into military expenditure, which was a complete black box. A lot of it went into the personal hands of senior officials in the government or military officials.

You also had major diamond production in the northeast of the country, in Lunda province, for example. That was produced, again, completely untransparently. That also provided revenue for UNITA and there are estimates that over the course of basically 1994 to 1998 UNITA produced a billion dollars worth of diamonds that was used for military weaponry.

Q: As this went, what did you...it sounds like it was a losing situation.

STEINBERG: It was very difficult. You had a leadership in Luanda that was willing to make some sacrifices for peace and stability, but not that many and you had a UNITA leadership, which was very suspicious of the government, suspicious of the international community and not particularly committed to anything, but gaining power in the country. As I said, both the government and UNITA had revenue that they could use to import weaponry.

Q: Where were they getting their weaponry?

STEINBERG: In the black or grey markets, mostly from Eastern Europe. A lot of this weaponry is really just AK-47s, which were easily purchasable on the local markets or in the region. The bottom line is that we implemented a lot of the peace process. We brought a lot of UNITA soldiers and demobilized them. We had a lot of UNITA leaders come to Luanda and start participating in a government of national unity. In the parliament we had the government expand its administration through a lot of places through in the country. We returned probably a million and half people to their homes and so there was a lot of progress. Ultimately, Savimbi decided this was not going to be a process that would bring him to leadership in the country and was slowly but surely was pulling out of the peace process. By early 1998 it was clear that the peace process was really having some serious problems.

Q: How was this manifesting itself?

STEINBERG: You would see UNITA refusing to allow the government to take control of certain areas of the country. You would have an occasional attack either on UN peace keepers or government forces. You would see intransigents in any of the negotiating process. Quietly we would hear of arms imports that were occurring.

Q: I imagine you were running a very busy embassy with economic officers worried about oil revenues, the military attaché is wondering what the hell is happening military wise, your station chief trying to figure out who's doing what to whom, your political section was looking...in other words.

STEINBERG: It was a nonstop embassy. It was one of the most active. It was very small. We only had a total of about 30 Americans for all of the different sections, including 100 million dollar AID (Agency for International Development) program a year, so a very big AID mission. It was an embassy that was very young. It was an embassy that was filled with people who saw this not just as a job, but as a mission to bring peace to and national

security, and an end of decades of civil war to the country. It was an embassy that was going full speed constantly and it was very important for people to get a couple of weeks in South Africa or get some R&R in Europe. We didn't have an embassy compound. We had trailers. The embassy was very insecure. It was so insecure that diplomatic security refused to give us waivers to be there and basically said you are on your own. You talk about setbacks from the embassy; our setback from a major street was 10 feet. We lived frankly in fear that somebody would realize that was a very vulnerable embassy and take a target of opportunity. Additionally, there were carjackings that went on frequently. Crime was rampant in the city. As I said the conditions of health and water and education were awful. You were not allowed to have children at the post. In addition to all of this most people when I first go there or many of them lived on the compound itself, in trailers. This was a dedicated group of people who really wanted to be there.

Q: When you are talking to Savimbi, 36 times you went there, did he respond? Was there a dialogue?

STEINBERG: There was a dialogue. He was brilliant in the sense of knowing exactly what it is you wanted to hear from him. He would always say, I'm committed to the peace process, I'm prepared to make sacrifices, I'm prepared to commit to demobilizing my troops, etc, etc. Always in the back of your mind was this guy is not committed to any of this. He is a pathological liar. He is a homicidal maniac. You really had to pay attention to what he did and not what he said. The other thing was that he was occasionally extremely bizarre. One time I met with him he regaled me with a story of a dream he had the night before where he was being eaten alive by the government and his own supporters in martyrdom for the peace process. He went into great detail about this experience. You are sitting there trying to think to yourself why is he saying this to me and what's the motivation and is he sane? I will tell you at one point I went back to Washington and sat down with some CIA psychiatrists and I recounted some of the activities and some of the conversations with Savimbi. I was expecting this formal analysis of who he was and what his motivations were and everything. After about 10 minutes said I can tell you right now the guy is fricking crazy. It was difficult dealing with Savimbi.

Q: Dos Santos how did you find dealing with him?

STEINBERG: He was savvy. As I said, more flexible. He had a sense of what his role in history was going to be. He cared about both the economic and the political relationship of the United States. Very early in my tour he went to meet with President Clinton and that was very important to him. It was a symbol of acceptance. You have to remember that for 15 years the United States refused to recognize his government, basically from 1975 all the way until the early 1990s. He bristled under that. To be invited to the White House to meet with President Clinton was really special for him. It was an easier relationship.

Q: How did Clinton handle this?

STEINBERG: Very well. It was basically the message was we are committed to peace and national reconciliation in Angola. Our relationship will be based upon how well this process moves ahead. There will be benefits in terms of new investment, debt relief, assistance programs, if the peace process pushes ahead and if the United States continues to have access to Angolan oil supplies. There was a real understanding there.

Q: Was the government carrying on a weapons acquisitions program? In other words, did UNITA have to do something too?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. They were importing weapons from Russia. They were importing weapons from everywhere. I have to say, our view in part was this is the government. The government has the right to import weaponry as long as it is not destabilizing to support its leadership. That said, the amount of weaponry that was imported at times way overboard and the types of equipment were often way too sophisticated for the challenges in the country. We suspected a lot of it was imported under sweetheart deals where the importing generals or defense ministry officials were getting kickbacks.

Q: Did you have the problem of children soldiers.

STEINBERG: Absolutely. There were child soldiers in both the government and UNITA forces. Again, they were demobilized pretty effectively, actually. But yes, there were thousands of child soldiers on both sides.

Q: Were there essentially still, while you were there, no-go areas? In particular, UNITA strongholds?

STEINBERG: Absolutely. I would say about a quarter of the country was still UNITA controlled territory. The health and food situation in those areas was atrocious. You had incredible death rates, incredible humanitarian disasters in those areas and we never could fully penetrate them.

Q: In the long run...how did it come up when you left? How did you see things?

STEINBERG: One of the key things that happened was the UN special representative was killed in a plane crash. He was traveling to western Africa to help get support from a variety of governments. His plane crashed [Ed: June 26, 1998] landing outside of Abidjan and everyone on board was killed. That really hurt the process because it took out one of the truly respected parties in the process. By that time however it was clear that UNITA was pulling out of the peace process. By about June or July of 1998 you started to see skirmishes reoccurring. Again, we had demobilized a lot of the UNITA forces. Deputies were in Luanda as part of the government. The government had taken control of a lot of the country, so by the time I left, which was November of 1998, it was clear that we were going to move to a new period of conflict, but it wasn't going to be an all out civil war as it was in the past. It was going to be more of a terrorist activity, where UNITA would return to the bush and would cease opportunities to disrupt life in the country. You

weren't going to plunge the country back into the same kind of civil war as before. Indeed that is what happened.

Q: How tribal was the conflict?

STEINBERG: Savimbi tried to make it tribal. He tried to convince his supporters in the Ovimbundu territories that the government were like the Hutus in Rwanda, that they would come and kill them in a genocidal attack if they had the opportunity. He tried to convince his supporters that the government was made up largely of Mestizos, San Tomeans, Cape Verdeans who weren't real Angolans, weren't real Africans even. That said, it wasn't a traditional one tribe or one ethnic group against another ethnic group. For example, the government military forces was largely Ovimbundu itself. It wasn't a strictly an ethnic division.

Q: When you left, what were you recommending?

STEINBERG: Basically I had said that Savimbi had, using the soccer term, he had given himself a red card. He had disqualified himself from the peace process. That it was important to reach out to the UNITA forces that were prepared to remain a part of the peace of a process. It was important to support the government as long as they didn't violate human rights and as long as they moved towards transparency, but essentially the peace process was over. It was time to say that the government was indeed the government and they were our principal interlocutor.

Q: How about were the Portuguese or the British playing any role in this?

STEINBERG: The British a very minor role. The Portuguese, yes, as the former colonial power, they enjoyed a very close relationship. A very large percentage of Portuguese have some relationship to Angola. They served there in the military. They owned property there. They sent their kids there for summer camps. It was a very important colony in the minds of the Portuguese, which is one of the reasons why they didn't give up power until 1975, long after the French and the British had left other places. Yeah, there were very important relationships that existed. Frankly the language as well was important.

Q: Well then in 1998 where were you off to?

STEINBERG: I had been offered a chance to serve as ambassador in a couple of other countries, but decided that I preferred to come back to Washington. I mentioned before my interest in humanitarian demining and Madeleine Albright and President Clinton had put together a demining initiative around the world, which was about 50 million dollars designed to assist countries to get rid of landmines and there was a special representative of the president for that purpose, Karl "Rick" Inderfurth, who was also the assistant secretary for south Asia. I was asked by Secretary Albright to take over that position, which I did. I became the special representative of the president and the secretary of state for global humanitarian demining.

Q: Can you talk about the demining issue and the evolution of U.S. policy?

STEINBERG: In 1994, President Clinton had gone to the UN and basically said we need to eliminate the threat of landmines to civilians around the world and launched a big initiative. That said, the rest of the world picked that up and ran with it. A lot of private citizens, a lot foreign governments came together and took it a step further and said, let's get an international treaty to ban landmines. Jody Williams eventually one the Nobel Prize for the movement along with Bobby Muller, the head of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation and a variety of others worked with the Canadians primarily, Lloyd Axworthy, to put together an international treaty to do just that. In 1997, the treaty was being cobbled together and the United States had decided because we needed landmines in Korea and because we have something called an anti-tank weapon that uses personal landmines as protection we decided we didn't want to be a part of it. The rest of the world proceeded to negotiate a treaty and the United States was on the outside looking in. I say the rest of the world, there are a number of countries, in it.

Q: So, China and the Soviet Union.

STEINBERG: China, Russia, Egypt, Israel a variety of countries. Today there are about 140 countries that have indeed signed onto this treaty.

Q: I've heard some colleagues I've interviewed say the anti-mining convention; we could have signed it had there been some adjustments, but it had been so constructed, perhaps specifically sticking it to the United States. Is that a fair observation?

STEINBERG: I think that's over stated. Basically said we are not going to engage in this conversation for so long that by the time you get to the 11th hour and the United States says we need two or three major changes in this in order for us to sign onto it the rest of the world community basically said, no, it's too late. It's a shame because the United States is a leader in the demining effort. The United States today does not produce landmines. The United States has signed onto a number of treaties through the convention on conventional weapons that limit the use of landmines and the United States is moving away from conventional landmines that stay in the ground and are persistent and remain there and has moved instead towards self destructing landmines that you put in the ground and either blow themselves up or deactivate after a certain amount of time, so they are not left in ground after the conflict goes on. The United States has a lot to be proud of in the landmine area, in addition to being by far the largest contributor to demining efforts around the world. Indeed because of our policy on the Ottawa Treaty, we do get a black eye.

Q: Did domestic politics enter into this?

STEINBERG: I don't think domestic politics were that important. I think the key question was the U.S. military insisting that these weapons were still needed for the Korean Peninsula and to protect the anti-tank weapons.

Q: You were doing this demining effort from when to when?

STEINBERG: I did it, along with other assignments, from 1998 to the mid 2001. Again, the demining, we've talked a lot of about the treaty, the effort was really to get the American people through public/private partnerships involved in demining efforts around the world, survivor's assistance programs, mine awareness programs. We put together programs like one called The Adopt a Mine Field, where we identified the worst mine fields around the world and then went to schools, went to corporations, went to foundations and had them actually put up \$20,000 to demine that mine field. You could say that you were responsible for allowing 10,000 Mozambicans to return to their homes because this awful mine field had been demobilized. We had programs where people would sponsor mine detecting dogs to go around the world to help the demining effort. We had programs for pure counseling where American victims of landmine accidents would work with their counter parts in foreign countries on both pure counseling, but also prosthetic devices, vocational and technical training. We had literally dozens of these public/private partnerships that got the American people very much involved in the demining effort around the world.

Q: How did you find operating this public/private sector nexus?

STEINBERG: It as exciting. It was sort of new age activities. I was one of the few people within the U.S. government who actually had a mandate that allowed me to raise private funds for this purpose. That fundraising capability is not something that's common in the U.S. government. I was out talking to American corporations and foundations and private individuals, getting them to contribute hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars. There are lots of exciting stories. We went to DC Comics and they agreed to sponsor a comic book in Croatian where Superman and Wonder Woman taught the children of Serbia and Bosnia and all the rest how to identify and avoid landmines. We did the same thing for Central American in Spanish. We produced a Bugs Bunny video for Cambodia where Bugs Bunny, speaking in Khmer, was teaching the children of Cambodia how to avoid landmines. This was exciting stuff. We engaged a variety of international actors. I spent a fair amount of time with Paul McCartney and Heather Mills who was very much involved in this area. We did a fundraiser in Los Angeles where Paul Simon, and Paul McCartney, and later Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys and all were involved in the area. It was exciting stuff. You always felt like you were really having an impact.

Q: Did you find yourself going across purposes, or having some of the private organizations that deal with demining sort of sulking because of your activities?

STEINBERG: No. They loved it because what we were doing was raising funds for them. We worked with a Canadian group to do what we called The Night of a Thousand Dinners, which was right around Thanksgiving time, to have a thousand private dinners around the country where people would come and contribute to fighting landmines. Those resources that were generated went to nongovernmental organizations that were

doing demining, mine awareness, survivor's assistance, new demining technologies, so, no, we were their allies. There wasn't a lot of commercial demining going on at this point.

Q: One hears about the Russians selling off their stock pile, and the Chinese too. Was there another waive of mines coming out or were we talking about mines in a war that had sort of run it's course and we are just trying to sweep up the residue?

STEINBERG: Unfortunately, there are new conflicts where mines are being used. In Sudan, frankly in Angola, in Rwanda, there were new landmines being planted. Yes, that was a problem. Indeed, as you say, there were a couple hundred million landmines around the world sitting in stock piles, so one of our efforts was to encourage stock piles destruction. When I was frankly in Angola, before I took this job we arranged for Warren Christopher to come and actually press the plunger on a dynamite explosion that destroyed 10,000 landmines in Angola. We had similar efforts around the country or around the world.

Q: Did you get any response from China and Russia?

STEINBERG: Not really. They were pretty noncommittal on these issues with us.

Q: How did you feel by 2001 when you left the job?

STEINBERG: I felt like we had accomplished a lot. Frankly, since that time the program has even blossomed more. Link Bloomfield, the Assistant Secretary for Political Military Affairs [Ed: May 2001-January 2005] took over the position. The office expanded. If there were some two dozens partnerships at that time, I think now there are four dozen partnerships. There's a real sense of satisfaction. At the same time, to be frank, American foreign policy was shifting on the landmine issue. Under the Clinton Administration there was a commitment to try to find alternatives to landmines and to invest heavily in that alternative search. We had made a commitment that we would sign the global treaty by 2006 if we could find those alternatives. By the time I left, it was clear that that position was changing and that the position was going to be a much different one. It's a very complicated technical position right now, but it essentially says that there are non self-destructing landmines that we are going to do everything we can to eliminate, but the self-destructing landmines we will continue to use if we have to. I was not comfortable with that position, so it was time for me to move on.

Q: My one brush with mine safety, as a retiree, I was an election observer in Bosnia and we were told by a deminer, if you got to take a pee do it in the middle of the road.

STEINBERG: My first trip in Angola, we had a Romanian driver in a convoy I was part of who whenever he would see a pothole in the road would pull to the side of the road to avoid it. I remember every time he would do that, holding my breath because a frequent technique is to indeed, dig up a whole in the middle of the road, to plant a landmine on the side of the road. I remember trying to communicate desperately in Romanian and not succeeding to tell him to stay in the middle of the road.

Q: 2001 what did you do?

STEINBERG: It's more complicated than a normal assignment shift. In mid-1999 Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott asked me if, at the same time that I was doing the landmine job, would I be prepared to take over as Special Haiti Coordinator, to be essentially the person who helped run Haiti policy in Washington. As of September of 1999, I took over that position. I was doing it concurrently with the landmine job.

Q: Let's talk about that. In 1999 what was our status with Haiti?

STEINBERG: Haiti, at this point, was under President René Préval, who was more or less a caretaker president with Jean Bertrand Aristide, the great charismatic leader of the poor people in Haiti, waiting in the wings to come back. We had a peace keeping mission that was still on the ground, although it had been drawn down dramatically. We had just a few American troops. I think about a thousand at that point on the ground. Our concerns were building the infrastructure, police, justice, education system in Haiti. We had major problems with drug trafficking that was going through Haiti, cocaine mostly, that was coming up from Columbia, through Haiti and being transited to the United States. We still had concerns about boat people who would take to the Caribbean and find their way up to Miami and we had deep concerns about human rights violations, which were continuing to go on in the country. We had a wide variety of interests that we were pursuing there, in addition to humanitarian assistance to try to improve the situation.

Q: You were doing this until when?

STEINBERG: I did this until January of 2001.

Q: What would you say were the main things you were dealing with?

STEINBERG: The key development was that in May of 2000 we had a major legislative election. That was what was going to essentially create a government that was credible, a government that had the support of the people. These elections were a key to the whole process of restoring credible government. We spent a lot of time organizing those elections. Regrettably, although the elections themselves worked well, the government essentially cheated in how they calculated who was the winner and who was the loser. Put together an election result that had essentially the government's party winning everything and that was not a credible process. The opposition pulled out of the process, paralyzed the country. This was very much tied into American politics with a number of the Democrats supporting the government and a number of the Republicans supporting the opposition. It got highly polarized.

Q: Was it involved around race politics? In other words, was the black caucus the prime supporter, would you say?

STEINBERG: The black caucus was supportive, I would say or at least a number of the elements of the black caucus were supportive of Aristide. Again, he was the power behind the throne at this point. There were elections that were going to take place at the end of 2000 that would almost certainly restore him to the presidency. Again, we negotiated a lot with Aristide during this period. Again, this was all against the backdrop of a terribly poor, terribly divided, terribly abusive country, very corrupt, lots of crime, very little social services, desperately poor and not a lot of political compromise.

Q: Did you make any progress?

STEINBERG: Very little. To be frank we did continue to do reasonable programs of humanitarian assistance, so I think Americans can be proud of saving a lot of lives, doing education programs, health programs, food programs, housing programs. In the basic political context we could achieve very little.

Q: Well, then in 2001 wither?

STEINBERG: Briefly, I did three jobs, actually. The Haiti coordinator, the position of the special representative for global demining and I was the Deputy Assistance Secretary for Populations, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). I took over that position basically in around September of 2000.

Q: How long did you keep that?

STEINBERG: I only kept that for about eight months.

Q: Was the political calendar taking it away?

STEINBERG: There was a little bit of that, but really it was more of a question of what came after that, where I was offered a chance to be the Principal Deputy in Policy Planning (S/P) and had wanted that position.

Q: So, you were doing policy planning from when to when?

STEINBERG: From 2001 April, until basically April of 2003.

Q: Then did you retire at that point?

STEINBERG: No. I had one more year after that where I was the director of the Joint State–AID Policy Council.

Q: Policy planning covers a multitude of issues. It is whatever the Secretary wants it. When you arrived there Colin Powell had become Secretary of State. What was S/P doing?

STEINBERG: It had four or five major roles. It had the traditional role of being the in house think tank. We were producing thoughts on where American foreign policy should

be going in the Bush Administration, addressing regions of the world, addressing functional issues. This was a period where the United States was trying to decide were we going to multilateral were we going to be unilateral. It was a period where the United States was trying to adjust to its super power role. We had said, or at least President Bush had said, we weren't going to nation building, but very soon, a lot of nation building assignments came up. I will say that our role changed dramatically with September 11, 2001, because up until that point we were addressing issues, but the sense of urgency after September 11th shifted.

Q: Let's just talk briefly about before 9/11. Was there a major change and outlook in what you all were approaching the world? Perhaps, what was the view of the world in the early days of the Bush Administration?

STEINBERG: Well, you had a very talented group of people who had a lot of experience in international affairs, whether it's Don Rumsfeld or Dick Cheney...

Q: Well, I know they've all been around but...

STEINBERG: They've all been around. I think every administration has a settling process and this was part of the settling in process. The president was trying to bring together his team. I mentioned before how at the National Security Council under Clinton there was this settling in period. I think every administration as a settling in period. It was again, it was cut short by September 11th.

Q: Well, then what happened? September 11th we're attacked by a terrorist, the world change. Where did your S/P role focus?

STEINBERG: Well, it was immediate, the impact. On September 11th the Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage asked me and a variety of policy planning officials to stay at the State Department and basically stay there all night to put together a bit of a game plan. Regrettably, the Director of Policy Planning, Richard Haass, was in London at the time. He wasn't part of this, in sense of being there. He did send us lots of instructions as to how he wanted this worded. We produced basically a game plan for building an international coalition to fight terrorism and to restructure our relationships with NATO, with the United Nations, with the OAS and other parties, to adjust to this new era. Rich Armitage reached out to policy planning and asked us to do a lot of the basic drafting of the documents that Secretary Powell used in inter-agency meetings on these issues.

Q: The afternoon and evening of September 11th, where did you all see, where does one go after terrorism? I mean this is a pretty amorphous thing...

STEINBERG: What we basically did was to say, here are the mechanisms that we should be using. Here are the international treaties that we can base our action on. Here's what we need the international organization to authorize us to do. Here are the international actors in terms of countries in particular that we need to reach out to. How do we deal with the Islamic world? That was already a question at that point. There was a pretty

clear understanding, even at that point that this was Osama Bin Laden that was responsible. I think that was on everybody's lips immediately. Additionally, we spent a lot of time in that early going, talking about Afghanistan and what we needed from the Taliban regime in terms of giving him up or accepting the consequences.

Q: Was Iraq on your radar?

STEINBERG: No.

Q: Iran?

STEINBERG: No. Not in any major way, at that point. No. It certainly was on other people's radar screens.

Q: Yeah, but when you are looking at that. In fact, even prior to that, had Iraq or Iran shown up on your policy planning schedule?

STEINBERG: Not that much. I have to confess to you, though that I spent most of my time working on issues that were not related to those sort of hard issues. I spent a lot of my time working on developing countries, on peace keeping issues, on post conflict reconstruction issues, working on environmental issues.

Q: This is prior to...?

STEINBERG: Prior to and later.

Q: In many ways when you look at fighting terrorism one thing is obviously Afghanistan and getting the Taliban and a base for the Osama Bin Laden and trying to eliminate them, but after that it really turns into intelligence and police work.

STEINBERG: Well, a lot of it was. Again, a lot of what we did during the six months following September 11th, was Afghanistan related. Richard Haass the S/P director was asked to be the coordinator for Afghanistan. My role as deputy to him, we would draw together everyday the 30 some odd officers in the State Department and other agencies who were involved in all the security, political, military, economic reconstruction issues related to Afghanistan and spent a lot of time working on strategies for building a future dispensation there, supporting the work of Jim Dobbins as our special representative for the BAN [Ed: ??] peace process, putting together various strategies to draw together all of the elements in Afghanistan, including for the northern alliance. So, that was a lot of our effort during that time.

Q: During that time as your working on this did you get a feeling that sights were beginning to fix on Iraq? Did that come across your pen?

STEINBERG: No, it didn't. There were disagreements between agencies on various issues, but you never sensed anything other than full engagement by the Pentagon, on the issue of Afghanistan.

Q: Did you get that much contact with Richard Clark, who I guess was still at the NSC at that time?

STEINBERG: Yeah, not in this role. No. I had had previous contact with him.

Q: How long did your focus remain on Afghanistan?

STEINBERG: For about six to eight months. I think basically through the spring of 2002 we continued to play this role of coordinator and then the sense was that this had returned to a normal development where the South Asian Bureau and its counterpart at the National Security Council basically took it over.

Q: Was there concern during the time you were dealing with this about we might be destabilizing Pakistan?

STEINBERG: There was deep concern about Pakistan, but it wasn't a question of destabilizing. It was question of trying to draw them in as a partner, in the process. We did spend a lot of time talking not only with Pakistan, but with all of the countries in the region, including Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and the other countries to draw them into a process.

Q: What about the Islamic world? Were we concerned we are doing this, but we may be stirring up the Islamics?

STEINBERG: No, I think there was a sense of reaching out to the Islamic world at this point. In policy planning we did put together an initiative to reach out, in political terms, in economic terms, in philosophic terms to the Islamic world. We had a conference that we hosted in Egypt where we had officers throughout our embassies from the Islamic world come together and make some proposal as to how we could reach out.

Q: How about, did we see at this time maybe a window of opportunity of making an approach to Iran?

STEINBERG: I wasn't involved in it, but there was dialogue as a major influence in Afghanistan and especially western Afghanistan. We did engage in some dialogue with Iran. Yes.

Q: Well, then what happened after this first six months? We are moving into 2002.

STEINBERG: Then in essence we reverted to the normal policy planning role. Again, in its think tank capacity. We were also the secretary's speech writer, so we spent a lot of time preparing all of his speeches. We spent a lot of time; we have a role in policy

planning of being a clearer on all policy documents that are going to the secretary, so basically we had kibitzing rights, which we exercised during that time, to help push things in different directions. I spent a lot of my time working on the UN human rights commission. We had just decided we were going to try to get back on the human rights commission after being off for a year. I spent a lot of time preparing for a productive role for the United States when we returned. I also spent a lot of time working on the world summit on sustainable development, which was a huge conference that took place in Johannesburg. We had just had a very bad experience with the World Conference Against Racism, which turned out to be more racist than it was fighting. I was asked by the secretary to help insure that this new conference on sustainable development didn't end up with a similar situation.

Q: What drove this conference on racism into this extreme position?

STEINBERG: Two things. The Middle East and getting back to this old Zionism-is-Racism debate and then African countries who were insisting on reparations for slavery. In both cases vitriol just flowed and it got to the point where the Secretary, who very much wanted to go to this conference in Durban, in South Africa, eventually had to decide not to go because it had just gotten to the point where the United States was forced to essentially walk out of the conference. Again, we didn't want a repeat of this at the Conference on Sustainable Development.

Q: How did that come out?

STEINBERG: That came out well. Part of our role in Policy Planning in support of Paula Dobriansky as the Under Secretary for Global Affairs [Ed: Ms. Dobriansky served from May 2001 to January 2009. The title of this office was changed from "Global Affairs" to "Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights" on Jan. 17, 2012.] and James Connaughton, Chairman, White House Council on Environmental Quality, as the White House advisor on these issues, our role was to serve as what we called a red team. We would analyze all the weaknesses in the U.S. positions. We would pretend to be developing countries. We would pretend to be human rights activists. We would pretend to be environmental groups. We would pretend to be the European Union and identify all of the holes in our positions. We participated in a preparatory conference in Bali, a meeting in New York, and then the actual conference in Johannesburg, South Africa [26 August-4 September 2002], which by all accounts should have been a disaster for the United States, but it turned out to be a relative success.

Q: Did you get involved at all in the move to attacking Iraq? Did Policy Planning have a role?

STEINBERG: The key thing that I personally did, working with Drew Erdmann on our staff was to focus on post conflict reconstruction in Iraq. What we did was to basically analyze a dozen cases of post-conflict reconstruction since World War II and identify what were the major challenges. What would we need to have on the ground? Where should we focus our attention in the immediate post-conflict period? How do we get

security forces up and going? How do we get education, health, and housing moving again? What kinds of political dispensations would be necessary and produced a document that frankly has turned out to be prescient on how difficult these challenges were going to be?

Q: We have to understand at the time the predominate Pentagon narrative about Iraq was quick in, knock off Saddam Hussein, turn it over to Chalabi and other Iraqi refugees who had done well in the UK and U.S.. A minority narrative from my colleagues who had served in the Middle East was “you don’t know what you are getting into.” What were you all seeing?

STEINBERG: We were aware that this was going to be a real challenge. That the question of security forces was going to be difficult to arrange. That the whole debathification process was going to be essential, but we also saw ethnic disputes between the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites. We saw this as a major challenge and just something that we had to get our hands around early, even as the military process was proceeding.

Q: Did you have reverberations of a major difference of opinion say between the White House, and you’re an NSC veteran, and the White House and the Pentagon state over Iraq?

STEINBERG: I didn’t feel it as much as others probably did. I do know, we all bought into the notion that there were weapons of mass destruction there. The Secretary when he went to the United Nations had relied upon intelligence and frankly S/P played role in assisting him to evaluate that intelligence. We bear some of the blame for not scrubbing that as well as we might have. I didn’t feel it as much as other would have.

Q: Where did INR fit into S/P’s work on Iraq?

STEINBERG: They were sort of a partner. We made sure that we were focused on policy, policy options, implications for long term policies. INR really was focused more on intelligence.

Q: You were in S/P until when?

STEINBERG: Until April of 2003.

Q: Colin Powell is extremely popular with the Foreign Service, being probably the first secretary of state since maybe George Marshall, who had a military background and took care of his troops, rather than turning the care and feeding of the troops over to someone else. I’m not saying that we have had a series of effective and ineffective secretaries of state but most couldn’t care less about administrative details. All of a sudden we had Colin Powell who did and that made him very popular.

STEINBERG: Well, let me go back and say if I didn't say it, I am a very big fan both of Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright.

Q: I'm a great fan of James Baker, only because I think he was a very effective person at a very critical time, but not a very warm and cozy person.

STEINBERG: Well, let me just talk about Colin Powell, just to say that that your impression of the building's reaction is completely accurate. Colin Powell played huge attention to the care and moral and well being of Foreign Service officers. I think he did understand that you take care of your troops. The symbolism, for example, of him, whenever he was in Washington, participating in the 8:30 am staff meeting with 40 senior members, assistant secretaries, and others, can't be overstated. Essentially, what it said was if, no matter where you were in the State Department if you could convince your assistant secretary to raise something with the secretary at that 8:30 meeting, within 24 hours you could get a response from the secretary of state to your concern. That sent reverberations throughout the department. His efforts in the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative to get more funding for personnel, for training, for longer leaves for individuals, he cared about his people and you really felt that. I remember him coming to the retirement ceremony for a secretary who was one of the longest serving secretaries and one of the most talented as well, but the symbol of him coming to that ceremony and staying there for 40 minutes can't be overstated. To go back to the larger question though, yes you did feel that a lot of the battles that we were fighting, we were losing during that period. That said, there was no place in Washington that I wanted to serve besides for someone who I considered to be intelligent, moral, ethical, and addressing foreign policy issues in a rational way.

Q: You left S/P in 2003. What happened then?

STEINBERG: Well, I had a misstep. I was asked to go to Nigeria as our ambassador and went through the confirmation process, actually got confirmed, got attested to by the White House, and then had a medical problem kick in. Unfortunately, although that medical problem was resolved within the space of a few months, by that point the system had begun to identify someone else. [Ed: There was a gap between the departure of Ambassador Howard Jeter in July 2003 and the arrival of Ambassador John Campbell in June 2004.]

I spoke with Marc Grossman, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, who had just been asked to put together something called the Joint State-AID Policy Council. He asked me to be the director of that. What the Joint Policy Council was, and this was actually going back to my time at S/P, I had worked with our PRM (Population, Refugees, and Migration) Bureau to put together the strategic plan for the State Department and one of the things that we identified as a real failing of the State Department at that point, was our relationship with AID. You had State Department policy towards regions. You had AID projects towards those regions and never the twain was meeting. You would get us working at cross purposes. What we recommended was to put together a council that would draw together senior AID and State people to coordinate our policies towards

regions and towards functions. Marc Grossman was made the coordinator of that process and he asked me to be the State Department director of it. Over the course of the next year we put together the council itself, which was chaired by (Deputy Secretary) Rich Armitage from the State Department, and Andrew Natsios, who was the Administrator for AID; they were the co-chairs of the council. [Ed: State cable 03 State 335585 dated December 5, 2003, announced the formation of the State-USAID Joint Policy Council and provided background on its genesis and organization.]

We had a dozen working groups we set up. All six of the major regions of the world were covered. Six functions ranging from democracy promotion to economic and development issues, to environmental issues, to post conflict reconstruction and we had working groups that were made up of deputy assistant secretaries from State and deputy assistant administrators from AID who would address the major issues of coordination in their areas.

Q: It sounds like at the top level, everyone would agree that all the points were great, but the devil is in the details. What do you do environmentally wise? What did you find were the prime disconnects between AID and State.

STEINBERG: The key disconnect was a question of timing and time horizon. AID was looking to the next decade. State was saying, what can we do now? There was a sense of the State Department being over anxious, focusing on the quarterly profit, in effect, and AID thinking in great global terms about long term development for one. On a lot of the issues that we dealt with there were turf battles, where State and AID would simply each claim control over the issue and wouldn't want to cooperate because of that. A lot of it was just people being too busy and just not having the time to consult with each other. That was part of what our effort was.

Q: Obviously, you were only able to get it started, but did the process seem to be getting people together in the same room, and were they singing from the same hymn book towards the end?

STEINBERG: Half of our working groups, I would say, yes. Half of them, no; so it's 50%.

Q: The 50% was that just part of growing pains or did you feel it was going to be endemic?

STEINBERG: I think it's endemic. It was very personalized, so if you got the deputy assistant secretary and the deputy assistant administrator personally committed to working together, to address the issues in their area, then you could make progress. If they basically saw their domain as being unique and didn't want to cooperate, then you couldn't achieve much of anything.

Q: Were you also attacking the State and AID cultures, how they operated, lived and all that?

STEINBERG: We tried not to. We tried to accept the fact that they spoke different languages and we were the interpreters. There was clearly culture shock between the two organizations, but we weren't going to change the institutions we were just going to get them working better together.

Q: You left that job in 2004.

STEINBERG: I left that job when I retired.

Q: Did you feel, was this one of these short term exercises or is this...I mean when you left did you feel it was gaining roots?

STEINBERG: It was gaining roots, but they were still shallow. As of today it is still unclear whether the new deputy secretary and whether the new political under secretary are going to make this a priority.

End of interview

[Ed: After this interview was completed Ambassador Steinberg continued an active role in international affairs serving as Deputy Administrator of AID and becoming president and CEO of World Learning on July 1, 2013. See: <http://csis.org/event/exit-interview-donald-steinberg> and <http://www.worldlearning.org/about-us/senior-staff/donald-steinberg/>]