

ARMENIA

COUNTRY READER TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mildred A. Patterson	1993-1994	Analyst, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
Harry Joseph Gilmore	1993-1995	Ambassador, Armenia
Louis F. Licht III	1996-1998	Deputy Chief of Mission, Yerevan
John M. Evans	2004-2006	Ambassador, Armenia

MILDRED A. PATTERSON **Analyst, Bureau of Intelligence and Research** **Washington, DC (1993-1994)**

Mildred A. Patterson was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and entered the Foreign Service in 1976. Her postings abroad included Copenhagen, Brussels and Ankara. Ms. Patterson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: Well, let's take Armenia first. What was going on when you were there?

PATTERSON: We watched Azerbaijan as well, but our main focus was on Armenia and Georgia. The Armenians were just getting on their feet in terms of being an independent country after the break up of the Soviet Union. We were watching the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh and what that meant domestically in Armenia. Another item was the status of Armenia's energy supply and its dependence on one of the old fashioned nuclear reactors of the type that had blown apart in Chernobyl. That reactor sits on a major earthquake fault line. Armenia's dire economic situation was another issue. The Armenians were poor as could be and cold most of the winter and we watched much of the Armenian population go to Moscow and stay with relatives in order to escape the winters.

In Georgia we were watching the civil war between the Abkhaz and the Georgians. We watched the attempts by the Russians to keep their thumbs on Shevardnadze and his efforts to deal with the Russians, the tremendous crime in his country and the bleak economic situation.

Q: Well the breakaway group there, how did we read them? I mean were they, was somebody else prompting them or was this an indigenous thing?

PATTERSON: We were reading them at the time as enjoying huge support from the Russians.

Q: What was the feeling, I mean what did the Russians want to do, retake Georgia essentially?

PATTERSON: Yes, they did not like the idea that it would slip away from its influence and that they wanted its ports.

Q: Were we doing anything in either of these places?

PATTERSON: At that point, no. Now some American troops are there as military trainers, I believe, but in the early '90s all we were doing was watching. We were giving Shevardnadze lots and lots of moral support, but we were giving him very little actual support.

Q: Was the American community in the United States a factor as you looked at what was going on, I mean the Armenian factor in America?

PATTERSON: Yes, they were a factor because Armenia was getting a tremendous amount of aid from us. Tremendous aid. The Armenian Americans made sure of that.

Q: At that time was the devastation of the earthquake from some years before still a factor?

PATTERSON: Yes. They were so poor they hadn't been able to rebuild, and the Embassy and any Washington visitors were still reporting seeing wrecked buildings.

Q: It sounds that what you're saying particularly at that time, but particularly Armenia, but also to a certain extent Georgia were you know, sort of ideals of wouldn't it be nice for the Armenians to have a country, but there wasn't anything to put a country together there.

PATTERSON: They were both basket cases economically. If it weren't for the Armenian Americans and Shevardnadze, the U.S. probably would have paid very little attention to them. But the Deputy Secretary, Strobe Talbot, was an admirer of Shevardnadze, although as I said there was very little that we actually did for them. That was '93 to '94. Then in 1994 my husband was nominated to be Ambassador to Turkey, so I left my job in August of '94 and went to Turkish language training for a semester.

HARRY JOSEPH GILMORE
Ambassador
Armenia (1993-1995)

Ambassador Harry Joseph Gilmore was born and raised in Clairton, Pennsylvania in 1937. He attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology (Carnegie Mellon University) for a year before transferring to Pittsburgh University, where he graduated in 1960. From there he went onto graduate school at Indiana University's school of Russian and Eastern European studies. While applying to a National Defense fellowship, Gilmore took and passed the

Foreign Service exam and was accepted into the Foreign Service soon after in 1962. He served in the United States and at posts abroad including Ankara, Turkey; Budapest, Hungary; Moscow, Soviet Union; Munich, Germany; Belgrade, Yugoslavia; Berlin, Germany; and Armenia, where he served as Ambassador. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in February 2003.

Q: Well, then, after... in '92, then, where'd you go?

GILMORE: I was nominated by President Bush to be the first U.S. ambassador to Armenia. [Editor's Note: The United States recognized Armenia Dec 26, 1991. Embassy Yerevan was opened Feb 3, 1992, with Steven Mann as Chargé d'Affaires ad interim.] So, without formally leaving the War College, in August 1992, about one year from the time I arrived in Carlisle, my wife and I moved back to Washington, D.C. to attend the ambassadorial seminar together with all the ambassadors - designate nominated to the newly-independent states and their spouses. Unfortunately, the White House was unable to move my papers through the Senate with the papers of the other nominees. I understand this may have been due to a glitch in the White House down at the working level. In any case, I was not scheduled for a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing with the other nominees to the newly independent states. I therefore was not able to go out to Yerevan, to Armenia, as quickly as had been foreseen. The other were confirmed and went out to the field. Meanwhile, I had to wait for a hearing by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Unfortunately, I did not get a hearing before the presidential election, that Fall. When President Bush was not re-elected, the whole question of hearings for the President's next round of appointees as ambassadors became a kind of political football. Some important voices in the Senate said that they didn't wish to consider any political appointees. They would look at career appointees, but they wouldn't give a hearing to political appointees. I think President Bush's position was pretty clear. It was, "I'm the President, I have the right to appoint ambassadors, I'm either going to appoint who I want to appoint, or we won't go ahead." The long and the short of my story is when President Bush left office, my appointment lapsed, and I was instructed by Secretary of State Eagleburger, who had been named Secretary of State at the end of the Bush administration, that I was basically a non-person and would have no status as an ambassador-designate, once the President left office. So, I redoubled my efforts to learn more Armenian and continued to read everything I could about Armenia and the Armenian-American community, which was large and very active politically. I was basically waiting in the wings. Not many weeks after the Clinton administration was in place, Strobe Talbott invited me to see him. He said that he had looked at my credentials and he had talked to the President about my situation. President Clinton said, "Make it happen. We're going to nominate him again." So, President Clinton re-nominated me. I was given a hearing in May 1993.

So, I didn't get to go to head up the embassy in the Fall of 1992. There was some talk about sending me to Yerevan as Chargé d' Affaires to lead the embassy through what was expected to be a horrible winter and then bringing me back and nominating me again in the Spring.. But Senator Thomas Dodd, among others, made it plain that he thought the Senate's constitutional role should not be circumvented by sending out as Chargé d' Affaires a person who is actually the administration's intended choice as ambassador. It just didn't seem right to him. He signaled that he would oppose such nominees if they occurred after the person came back from serving as

chargé. So, my wife spent the winter and early Spring in temporary quarters in the Washington, D.C. area.

I worked hard studying basic Eastern Armenian. There was a real problem here. There was no textbook available. At that time, the great majority of the Armenian speakers living in the in the U.S. spoke Western Armenian. And Western and Eastern Armenian, although mutually intelligible to native speakers, are significantly different from each other. But, we found an excellent teacher who was a fluent speaker of both Western and Eastern Armenian, and I studied spoken Eastern Armenian throughout the winter and early spring. Meanwhile, I read the State Department's files, on Armenia and the South Caucasus and the daily reports from our embassies in the region. I also got myself briefed on the issues of concern to the Armenian -American community and its major advocacy groups.

My wife, Carol, and I were fortunate to have another unique and indeed invaluable source of mentoring and counseling on Armenian history and culture, the Armenian - American community and the Armenian Apostolic Church; Edward and Roseann Alexander. Ed was a senior USIA Foreign Service Officer assigned to Budapest as Counselor for Press and Cultural Affairs and I a junior officer assigned to Budapest as Vice Consul when we met as fellow students of Hungarian at the Foreign Service Institute in 1964. I had just returned from my first post, Ankara. In the course of the 10 plus months of Hungarian Ed and I began a dialog - actually it was often more like a tutorial with Ed playing the role of tutor - on the mass deportation and massacre of the Ottoman Empire's Armenians in the 1915-22 period and its consequences. During the months I was waiting for word on my possible nomination by President - elect Clinton and my Senate hearing, my wife and I met often with the Alexanders who resided in the greater Washington, DC. area. When President Clinton did nominate me, the Alexanders arranged and accompanied me and my wife on a quick trip to New York City to meet the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, and leading members of the Armenian community in the New York City area.

When the Senate Foreign Relations Committee called me for a confirmation hearing in May, Senator Paul Sarbanes of Maryland made a very positive gesture by asking me to step out of the hearing room to meet with him. He indicated that he would not be able to stay for my hearing but wanted to compliment and thank me for my service in Berlin and to underline his support for a strong U.S. - Armenia relationship. Throughout my tour of duty in Yerevan, Senator Sarbanes was, indeed, a bastion of support for positive U.S. engagement in Armenia.

My hearing went well. I believe the goals I set at my hearing were goals that I largely fulfilled as ambassador. I would just note them briefly. In the statement I submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I said I had several basic goals. One was to spearhead the United States' effort to meet Armenia's emergency humanitarian needs in the face of blockades which stemmed from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The second was to encourage Armenia and its neighbor, Azerbaijan, to work for lasting peace and security for their peoples through good faith negotiations. And the third was to establish a strong U.S.-Armenian relationship based on democracy, human rights, and economic reform based on free market principles. I also had a fourth goal - I didn't announce it publicly then because it was a personal goal which grew out my analysis of the U.S.-Armenian relationship in the twentieth century. My fourth goal was to

engender among the people of Armenia confidence in the United States as a reliable long-term partner and friend. When the first Armenian Republic came into being in 1918, the U.S. never got around to sending an ambassador. While we recognized it, we didn't do much diplomatically to support it during its brief existence. We did do very well in mobilizing aid for the many orphans created by what Armenians call the 'Meds Yeghern,' the great Armenian catastrophe, the mass deportation and genocidal massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 - 23. The U.S. did very well in terms of providing humanitarian assistance to the orphans. But, as I set out for Armenia, I vowed to myself that the U.S. was going to be present diplomatically this time and was going to be supportive. I vowed and that I would do all I could to ensure that Armenia had a reliable friend and partner in the U.S.

Q: Well, now, Harry, I have to comment with the breakup of the Soviet Empire many ambassadorial appointments had a political slant. You had an awful lot of people of Estonian descent, or Ukrainian descent, or what have you, ending up as the first ambassadors. And Armenia is probably one of the most politically sensitive places in American political life, Armenians, for a small country, carry a lot of clout. How come they didn't pull out some American-Armenian?

GILMORE: It's a very good question. I think it was a conscious decision, in part, because to find somebody that the whole Armenian-American community could coalesce around, might not be easy. I mean there could be people, like former governor of California George Deukmejian. He, or someone like him might have been a choice. But, otherwise, there was a strong and conscious decision, I think, made by the Department of State to recommend that the President name a career person. The feeling was, in part, that the career person would be able to work with all shades of Armenian-American opinion. I personally think that was exactly right.

Q: But, that's our perspective, the Foreign Service perspective. Sometimes there is a completely different perspective from the White House.

GILMORE: Very often. It's interesting. I got to know the Armenian-American community fairly well by the time I had my hearing. In fact, in the run-up to my nomination by President Bush, I went around and called on a number of Armenian-American organizations. They were anxious to talk with me, and I found that they welcomed the idea there would be a career diplomat going to Armenia as our first ambassador. They wanted very much to have my ear, and they made it very plain that they were deeply committed to Armenia's survival and desired to see the U.S. launch a massive and effective humanitarian aid program. They also emphasized that they had close ties with the leaders of both parties in Congress and would continue to work closely with their friends in the Congress to support Armenia.. By and large, they welcomed my nomination. And, in fact, one of the reasons I believe that President Clinton decided quickly to nominate me again as was because as he took office, he found there was considerable pressure coming from the Armenian-American community to get an ambassador to Yerevan quickly.

GILMORE: So, I was among the early Clinton ambassadorial appointees. But, it's interesting. To date we have not had an Armenian-American nominated as a candidate for ambassador to Armenia. I think this is in part because the Armenian-American communities, especially its leaders, see it as advantageous to have an experienced career Foreign Service person leading the

embassy. Of course, they expect that the ambassador will be committed to Armenia's viability and success as an independent state.

Q: Okay, Harry, you served in Armenia from May 1993 to July 1995, right?

GILMORE: Yes. I received my appointment on May 12, 1993 and presented my credentials to President Ter-Petrossian in Yerevan on May 31, 1993. After spending twenty-six months in Yerevan, I requested curtailment when I got word that my widowed mother was critically ill. As her oldest child I saw it as my duty to return to the U.S. As it turned out, my mother was placed in a nursing home and remained alive a couple of years longer. But, I had asked to be curtailed and was reassigned to the Department of State.

Q: May, 1993, when you went out there, what was the situation that you were facing in Armenia at that time?

GILMORE: Grim, indeed. Armenia was in the throes of a deep and steadily worsening economic crisis. Many factors contributed to the crisis. Let me begin by outlining the ongoing impact of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan. As a result of the Karabakh conflict, Armenia's border with Azerbaijan had been closed since before Armenia declared its independence in 1991. On March 27, 1993, shortly before I arrived in Yerevan, Armenian armed forces, primarily Karabakh-Armenian forces, but with some support from the armed forces of the Armenian Republic, captured Azerbaijan's Kalbajar region. The Kalbajar region borders on Armenia but unlike Nagorno-Karabakh, which is an enclave inside Azerbaijan, Kalbajar is part of Azerbaijan proper. When Armenian forces captured Kalbajar, Turkey formally closed its border with Armenia, stating that it was acting in response to the Armenian forces' occupation of Kalbajar. In fact, Turkey had de facto closed its border with Armenia several years earlier. So, when I arrived in Armenia in May, 1993, the only borders that Armenia had open were its border with Iran in the South and its border with Georgia in the North.

Landlocked Armenia's most direct access to the sea is via Georgia's Black Sea ports of Batumi and Poti. Georgia declared its formal independence from the Soviet Union in April 1991, but Tbilisi's authority in Georgia didn't go far. In May 1993, Georgia was still in considerable disarray. With the overthrow of populist leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia in January 1992, the authority of the central government in Tbilisi virtually collapsed while that of regional potentates and private militias expanded to fill the power vacuum. Among these regional potentates was Aslan Abashidze, the authoritarian leader of Adjara whose capital was the key Black Sea port city Batumi. Georgia had disintegrated into what might be characterized as a series of fiefdoms, with no overriding central control from Tbilisi. And to get any kind of aid shipment from the U.S. to Batumi or Poti and thence onward to an intended destination in the interior of Georgia or Armenia, was an extraordinarily difficult process. Typically, humanitarian aid cargoes from the U.S. or Europe destined for Armenia and Georgia would be landed in the Georgian ports Batumi and Poti where they were to be transferred to trains for onward shipment to their destination. Often the ships carrying aid stood at anchor for weeks in Batumi and Poti before being unloaded. Once the trains departed the Black Sea coast area they ran a strong risk of being flagged down and stopped by armed men who would quickly climb aboard and examine the cargo. If it was, for example, wheat, they would seize and unload a portion of it as a tax in kind. Trains from the

Georgian ports were held up frequently in the 1993-4 period, and the criminal gangs who perpetrated the thefts were well-organized and efficient. So Armenia's basic life lines from the U.S. and the European community, both of which were anxious to provide assistance, ran through a very fragmented Georgia. Mr. Shevardnadze was working to consolidate Georgia's unity, but it was a difficult process and in my first year there the process was only beginning.

Meanwhile President Clinton and President Bush before him were determined to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to Armenia and Georgia. Accordingly, the State Department's Coordinator for Assistance to the Newly Independent States took the lead in developing Operation Winter Rescue, a coordinated concept of operations aimed at demonstrating the viability of surface shipments of containers of humanitarian assistance to Georgia and Armenia via Georgia's Black Sea ports Batumi and Poti. A key element of Operation Winter Rescue's ultimate success was the decision to employ two-person teams from the U.S. On Site Inspection Agency to work with shipping contractor Sealand and local officials in Georgia and Armenia to monitor the shipment of containers of emergency humanitarian assistance from their arrival in the Georgian ports, through their transfer to railroad cars and shipment by rail to Yerevan or Tbilisi and ultimately their delivery to consignees in Armenia and Georgia. We should remember that OSIA was established in 1988 to meet the on-site inspection requirements of our INF treaty with the USSR. In view of their experience working in the former USSR, OSIA personnel were also tasked with assisting with the distribution of Project Hope shipments.

As a further footnote on travel through Georgia in the 1993-4 period I should also note that whenever any personnel from Embassy Yerevan traveled overland by car or truck to our embassy in Tbilisi, which we did frequently in the 1993-4, period, we had to be on the lookout for armed bandits. We experienced a number of robberies several kilometers inside Georgia on the main road - I hesitate to call it a highway - from Armenia to Georgia. Typically, an Embassy Yerevan vehicle would basically just get a few kilometers into Georgia when a Soviet-era car carrying plainclothes Georgian males would drive up and force it off the road. Several fellows with carbines or pistols would jump out and order everybody out of the Embassy Yerevan vehicle. They would take the passengers' money and perhaps a personal item or two and quickly drive off. This went on throughout 1993 into 1994.

Armenia is energy poor. Its most important source of energy was the nuclear power plant in Metsamor which had been closed as a result of Armenian Green activity in the wake of the devastating earthquake of December 1988. So, with the border to Azerbaijan closed, the natural gas supply from Russia via Georgia threatened by pipeline closures, and "mazut," the heavy fuel oil widely used in district heating plants in the Former Soviet Union, in short supply, Armenia was desperate for energy. The winter was frigid and schools were closed for lack of heat. Also many of the countless blocks of apartments in Yerevan were frequently without water as the water pumps were powered by electricity.

So, our top priority was to expand our already extensive assistance program. The embassy was run, I think, quite ably for my year or more, by Thomas Price. When I got there, though, Armenia was in a humanitarian crisis. My key task, in the early part of my tenure, and in fact throughout my 26 months there was assistance. We did very well in the end. There was no lack

of funding on the U.S. side, in part because of the very active advocacy by the Armenian-American organizations. There was plenty of assistance money. The question was how to get the assistance there because of the fragmentation of Georgia. Of course, we would never try to get assistance in through Iran, because of our Iran policy.

But, in any case, the centerpiece of our humanitarian assistance program my first year in Armenia, and through my second as well was our Winter Warmth program. The idea was to distribute kerosene and kerosene heaters for home heating needs for the particularly vulnerable living in these huge apartment blocks, particularly in Yerevan. And, I add here that Armenia, like a number of smaller highly industrialized countries, is kind of like a tadpole. The head is bigger than the body. Yerevan had half Armenia's population and was the location of virtually all the important governmental and cultural institutions. In any case, in parallel with Charles Aznavour, the renowned French-Armenian crooner and composer, and also in parallel with the European Union, we focused initially on humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable elements of the population. We carefully designed a targeted kerosene home heating program for several categories of people deemed especially vulnerable. They were: nursing mothers, invalids, the elderly, and families with small children. We also put kerosene heaters in the schools.

We had a devil of a time delivering the kerosene to Armenia the winter of 1963-4, my first winter. In fact, much of the winter was over by the time we were able to get the first shipments up from Batumi and Poti delivered to Yerevan. By December 1993 the first ships carrying kerosene had arrived in Batumi where they stood unloaded. Meanwhile, in Yerevan pressure from the media and the public to explain the delay in delivery of the kerosene was growing steadily. When no kerosene had arrived in Armenia by January 29, 1994, we decided we owed a public explanation. Joined by our AID Representative, Suzanne Olds, I gave an interview to the Armenian news agency Noyan Tapan. A group of journalists, government officials and diplomats attended the interview. I explained that the U.S. Government had created the Fund for Democracy and Development to serve as a partner in mounting large-scale humanitarian assistance programs like the Winter Warmth kerosene program. The Fund had, in turn, concluded contracts with the Georgian State Railways and local shipping agencies. The fund had also purchased yet a further amount of kerosene in Rotterdam and Haifa for follow-on delivery. I indicated that I expected these contracts to be fulfilled. Noyan Tapan published a story under the headline "Kerosene for Armenia Will Be Supplied." The first shipment of kerosene arrived in Armenia later in February. Much suffering had already occurred, many schools were closed. But, when we did begin the delivery of kerosene, there came a kind of surge of renewed hope to many Armenians that they could make a go of it.

I remember personally spearheading the Winter Warmth program. When the first delivery of Winter Warmth kerosene arrived in Yerevan I went out to the tank farm where the kerosene was being transferred to storage tanks. The United States Agency for International Development had sent an expert from Petersburg, Virginia, who knew how to organize and run a tank farm. I welcomed him and met with some of the truck drivers. We began to run tank trucks all over greater Yerevan and its environs. Some of the trucks were pretty decrepit looking, but I remember assisting in loading the trucks to the applause of many Armenians.

Also, I visited schools where kerosene was the only source of heating. I remember vividly, a school just outside Yerevan, not too far from our tank farm. I took my interpreter from the embassy. Although I spoke a fair amount of Armenian, it was clearly foreign Armenian. So, through my interpreter, I spoke with a little girl who was sitting in the back with her coat on - they all had their coats on because you couldn't easily heat the classroom. Her hands were purple. I was very concerned about her. I remember asking her what it was like at home. It was cold, she said. When I asked her what she was eating, she said she was eating one meal a day, the meal at the school, which we were providing. The food at home was for the rest of the family, she indicated.

In addition to kerosene for home heating, we also provided funding for heavy fuel oil, mazut. We also provided massive quantities of wheat and wheat seed. In subsequent years we provided funding for natural gas. The natural gas supply was a very precarious thing, because the natural gas pipeline from Azerbaijan was closed because that border was closed. The other natural gas line which brought Turkmen and later Russian gas down through Georgia was frequently blown up as it came down through the part of Georgia inhabited by the Azerbaijani minority. So, these were precarious times.

I remember vividly the president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, a very distinguished scholar turned independence movement leader, telling me that he wouldn't know how to justify his continued role as president if the Armenian government could not provide enough bread to feed its people. We focused on humanitarian shipments of wheat, and by heavy persuasion and by a lot of work with Georgia, and making sure, by the way, that the Georgians had enough assistance that they weren't sorely tempted to take assistance destined for Armenia from the trains. We finally got an important, consistent aid pipeline working. On balance, I think it's fair to say that we saved people from malnutrition, and in some cases from near starvation. So that was the fundamental focus of my stay in Armenia.

A second important task was getting the embassy up and running. Tom Price, the Chargé d'Affaires in the months before my arrival, had laid much of the ground work. I saw my top priority as making a team of the embassy staff. This meant emphasizing the idea that the Foreign Service National employees are our co-workers and colleagues.. My previous experience working with gifted FSN s in Ankara, Budapest, Munich and Belgrade persuaded me of the very positive contribution an excellent FSN staff can make to the work of an embassy. I was also convinced that we would find especially well qualified candidates for these positions in Armenia. [I want to emphasize here that Tom Price as Chargé d'Affaires had done important groundwork in hiring a first - class FSN staff before my arrival.] I particularly emphasized the idea that the FSN s are our colleagues. They work for us and with us. They become the repository of much of the expertise a given embassy acquires on specific cases or issues. They may not be able to do everything, and in some few instances they can't be included in a specific aspect of a case or task because of its security classification, but that's a challenge for those of us who supervise them. With the assistance of my FSO colleagues, I pride myself on having forged a team of exceptionally capable people at Embassy Yerevan. Of course, the embassy was one of the more desirable employers in Armenia at the time. We paid our staff regularly and well by comparison with other embassies and the United Nations organizations which were the other desirable places to work. We forged an excellent team.

I had other important and pressing tasks as well. One of them was to oversee the renovation of the embassy building we acquired. It was a spacious, centrally located building at a very reasonable price. Situated opposite the Parliament and near the President's office, it put us in a desirable neighborhood. But it was, of course, a Soviet era building. It had been heated by a district heating plant and had no heating system its own. It did not have proper earthquake resistant walls. As attractive as it was by local standards, in many ways it fell short of our standards. As we set about opening embassies in the capitals of the former republics of the USSR, the State Department had done a pre-survey to locate appropriate facilities, and the site in Yerevan qualified. So the decision was made in the case of our embassy building and several others in the former Soviet Union, for example, our embassy in Tbilisi, Georgia; that we would renovate the building while we worked in it.

This is a very difficult proposition, and not one I would recommend unless there are no better alternatives. The overall renovation project was directed by the State Department's Office of Foreign Building Operations Regional Operations Headquarters in Ankara. We faced a number of challenges. In the first place, with the energy shortage in Armenia, the source of power for most of the time was our generator, which functioned much of the time, but not always. It had to be taken down every so often for maintenance. We often had no reliable source of water because the city water pumps weren't functioning for lack of electricity. We kept having to move offices and functions within the embassy as the reconstruction progressed. And we were at the very end of the U.S. pipeline for materials. Very often, we couldn't adhere to organized work schedules because materials didn't reach us in a timely manner, i.e. they couldn't be shipped to us in anything like the time they were expected. Two of the cleared American workers died while we were reconstructing the embassy. In one case, the worker's death was from a clearly reversible medical condition. There was no reliable energy supply in the local hospitals, and they had no electricity to power a defibrillator. We quickly decided to evacuate the worker, but by the time we got a medical evacuation plane into Yerevan from Switzerland, the doctor who came in on the plane joined the Armenian physician in pronouncing the fellow dead. This sent shock waves through the American embassy staff. The feeling was, "What happens if we get sick?" I have to say that the State Department medical system did not do well. They tried. The regional physician assigned to cover Yerevan was stationed in Athens, but he just couldn't cover all the new posts in the former USSR with the resources available to him.

Reconstruction was hard in other ways. You'd have to move from office to office as the reconstruction progressed. Many mornings when you arrived at the embassy there would be construction dust all over your desk. There would be incessant noise some of the time. And maintaining the security of the embassy through the various phases of the construction was especially challenging. Although I would not recommend 'reconstruct while you conduct business' as a general practice, it did have the advantage of keeping the embassy open throughout the period of humanitarian crisis. At the end of the process, we did have a much more livable embassy building. There's another issue that the State Department ought to consider as it contemplates 'reconstruct while you conduct business' in the future. It is a practical issue which is more important than outsiders might understand. I had to turn the AID mission out of the embassy building during the reconstruction period because there was no room for it. AID had plenty of money and picked up a pretty good rental building. An embassy's coordination with the

its AID mission is not an easy thing at best. The AID mission has its own funding and tends to follow its own drummer. This is even more the case when the AID mission is separated from the embassy. Luckily, our first AID Representative, Suzanne Olds, was a real can-do person, who wanted to work with me and with State to achieve goals. We made cooperation happen. But subsequently, when it was time for the AID mission to return to a refurbished embassy, there was immense foot-dragging on the part of AID. Granted, there were practical problems, for example, the issue of access to the airport. We had only a very limited number of passes the whole mission, and I had to make sure that the passes wouldn't stay with the AID mission. The AID mission needed the passes too, so I don't want to go into more detail than that. I just want to underline how administratively tricky it was.

Q: Armenia is bordered by what states?

GILMORE: Armenia is bordered by Turkey on the west, Georgia on the north, and Azerbaijan on the northeast and east. And on the south it has a 40 kilometer border with Iran. It's a tough neck of the woods.

Q: Could we do anything with Turkey?

GILMORE: Before the Karabakh conflict reached the phase where Armenian forces occupied the area between Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian border, the so-called Kalbajar region of Azerbaijan, we were able to get send some humanitarian assistance to Armenia through Turkey. At one point in 1992 Turkey ran a train loaded with wheat up to its border with Armenia where the cargo was transferred to the broader gauge Armenian railroad. Turkey and Armenia have different railroad gauges. Turkey has a European gauge railroad, and Armenia has the wider Soviet gauge. But after February of 1993 Turkey closed its border with Armenia and no more humanitarian assistance came through Turkey. Even before that, any U.S. cargo for Armenia that came via Turkey was subject to inspection. Armenian-Americans were up in arms about the inspection requirement, saying the Turks were unduly delaying the delivery of urgently needed assistance. But there was also another issue. After Turkey closed its border with Armenia, it also closed its air space to flights to and from Armenia for a lengthy period. So any flight to or from Armenia had to avoid Turkish airspace. This increased Armenia's isolation.

Q: What was the problem with Armenian Turkey?

GILMORE: The problem between Armenia and Turkey goes back to the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. Armenians were one of the minorities in the multi-national empire. There was a large Armenian community in Istanbul, the capital, and an estimated 1.8 to two million Armenians in the empire as a whole. Sources differ over the exact figure. Armenians also constituted significant minorities in five "vilayets," [provinces] in central and eastern Anatolia: Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, and Mamuretulaziz. Without getting into even more detail, I would underline the failure of the Young Turk movement to establish a credible Pan-Ottoman concept, which some of the empire's Armenians might have supported. The more radical Armenian political parties in the Ottoman Empire operated in secret and engaged in acts against the Turkish state, which the Turks saw as terrorism.

During WWI there was great suspicion on the part of the Young Turk leaders that the Armenians were a fifth column, eager to see Russia increase its influence in the Ottoman Empire. Armenians had settled in Anatolia well before any Seljuk or Ottoman Turks came to the region, and there had been a succession of Armenian states in Anatolia, up until 1375. But on the eve of WWI the Young Turk leaders increasingly viewed the empire's Armenians as a fifth column, while the empire's Armenians themselves sought protection from Russia, France and Britain in the face of increasing atrocities perpetrated by the Young Turk leaders. In fact, there were Armenian massacres in Ottoman Turkey on several occasions, beginning in the 1890's. But on April 24, the night from April 24 to April 25, 1915 more than two hundred of the leaders of the Armenian intellectual and cultural and religious communities in Constantinople/Istanbul were taken from their homes and arrested. Most of them, according to our ambassador to the Ottoman Empire at that time, Henry Morgenthau, were sent off into the interior. These arrests marked the beginning of a massive effort by the Committee of Union Progress, the Young Turk leadership, to eliminate or destroy the Ottoman Armenians. Armenians call these deportations and massacres the "Meds Yeghern", which translates as "The Great Calamity" or "Holocaust." Armenian males of military age were pulled en masse out of Ottoman army units where they had only in recent years become eligible to serve, and forced into labor battalions, or else shot outright. In many cases, the Ottoman authorities didn't even use bullets. They bayoneted the victims. Meanwhile, the Ottomans began deporting Armenian women, children and elderly male Armenians from the five vilayets, the five provinces in Anatolia where they were a significant minority, to Deir ez-Zor located in the Syrian desert, near Aleppo. The deportations were witnessed by American consular officials and American missionaries. American religious communities sent a number of missionaries to Ottoman Turkey in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A number of their converts were members of non-Turkish minorities including Armenians. Also, the U.S. had a number of consulates in the Ottoman Empire, staffed by consuls who reported on the Armenian massacres and deportations. In fact, some of the best first-hand information on the Armenian deportations and massacres comes from them. They reported all this to Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, who made representations to the Young Turk leadership, particularly to Talat Pasha, the minister of the interior. When WWI ended there were very few Armenians left in the new modern Turkish republic which emerged: a small community in Istanbul, and smaller minorities in some urban areas. The presence of the Western diplomatic missions in Constantinople/Istanbul is credited with holding down large-scale massacre activity there against Armenians and Assyrians and others. The earlier massacres of Ottoman Armenians in the 1890's had already produced smaller Armenian diasporas in the U.S. and France. The "Meds Yeghern" triggered waves of Armenian refugees who created or swelled Armenian Diaspora communities in France, the U.S. and around the world. They brought with them a deep hatred for the Turks who had massacred them and had driven them off their ancestral lands. So, without going into further detail, I think I've sketched the reason for the intense dislike Armenians and Turks have for each other. There's a widespread feeling among Armenians everywhere that the Turks owe the successors of the Armenians who were dispossessed of their property, deported and massacred appropriate recompense. Beginning in the 1970's Armenian terrorists began to assassinate Turkish diplomats in revenge for the "Meds Yereghn." So, there's all this baggage in Turkish-Armenian relationships. On top of this comes the Karabakh conflict. The Turks and the Azerbaijanis are ethnically and linguistically particularly close. The Azerbaijani-Turkish and the Turkish spoken in Turkey are cousin languages. There are numerous Azerbaijanis in Turkey, and the Azerbaijani national movement, which began in the 19th century and flourished about the

time of WWI, and the Young Turk and Ataturkist movements drew on each other for inspiration and support. So, that there is a tremendous affinity between these two countries. So, when the Karabakh conflict broke out, Turkey sided with Azerbaijan. In fact Turkey's policy is that it will not normalize relations with Armenia until the Azerbaijanis and Armenians reach a Karabakh settlement which is satisfactory to Azerbaijan. So, while Turkey recognizes Armenia, there has been no exchange of diplomats and all attempts at dialog have foundered on two issues: the Karabakh issue and the Turkish insistence that the Armenians withdraw or openly deny that they have any territorial claims on Turkey. In fact, the present Armenian Government makes no territorial claims on Turkey. Turkey and Armenia do have fundamentally different views on whether the deportation and massacres of the Ottoman Armenians from 1915 to 1922 constitute genocide, as defined by the UN Genocide Convention of 1948. The U.S. Government has taken the position that to have the terms of the Genocide Convention met, you have to have proof of intent and that there's no proof that it was the intent of the Ottoman authorities to commit what is defined in the convention as genocide. In all fairness, more legal scholars believe that it was a genocide than not. The U.S. Congress has been the scene of numerous genocide resolutions, one of which very nearly passed in the Clinton period. In fact, those in favor had the votes in the House to pass, very clearly. President Clinton wrote to Speaker Hastert and asked him to take the genocide resolution off the House floor, citing our interests in Turkey, and the danger to our American troops there. He did.

The point is Armenians and Turks have not been able to establish a positive relationship. There have been efforts to promote reconciliation. There was a Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission, which was sponsored in part by the State Department. They met. Some leaders of Turkey, some important personalities in Turkey, some important Armenians from the Republic, from the Russian-Armenian Diaspora, from the U.S.-Armenian Diaspora met. They ostensibly agreed to have an impartial body look at the question of whether the events of 1915-22 could constitute a genocide. The Commission came back and said they could. The Turks said, "This is not possible." The Commission ground to a halt. There were important elements in the Armenian world, particularly the Armenian Diaspora, and world that didn't like it anyhow. I mention this solely because it gives us some sense of how deep the divisions are and how heavy the historical burden is.

Q: Well, for some time that I was familiar with, a terrorist campaign against Turkish diplomats, such as the consuls general Mehmet Baydar and Bahadır Demir in Los Angeles.

GILMORE: And Orhan Gündüz in Boston, an honorary Turkish consul, I believe there. When I was deputy chief of mission in Belgrade, Ambassador Galip Balkar, the Turkish Ambassador, was assassinated. His driver as well. Those terrorist activities took place in the '70s and into the early '80s. There was also a bloody airline hijacking at Orly Airfield, Paris, as I remember. Basically, there were two Armenian organizations engaging in this terrorist activity against Turkish diplomats. One was ASALA, the Armenian Struggle for the Armed Liberation of Armenia. The second was the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide. ASALA was basically a left-wing, pseudo-Communist organization whose center of gravity was really the Armenian community in Lebanon. A few Armenian-Americans including Monte Melkonian from California joined with ASALA. Melkonian, by the way, was subsequently killed as a volunteer fighting with the Karabakh Armenian forces. The other organization, the Justice

Commandos of the Armenian Genocide, was, in fact, affiliated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, although I have seen no open acknowledgment of this by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation leadership. The Turkish Consul General that you mentioned was killed by an individual associated with the Justice Commandos.

That terrorism died out in the early 1980s. It is interesting, in my view, that the terrorists were in effect the grandchildren of the victims of the Armenian deportations and massacres. And secondly, these acts were regarded by the overwhelming majority of Armenians, particularly those in the Diaspora, as justified. The U.S. took great pains to protect Turkish diplomatic establishments in the U.S. and to try to root this terrorism out. We did not issue visas to enter the U.S. to certain Armenian Diaspora leaders thought to be responsible ultimately for these actions. This terrorist activity had in fact subsided in the mid-1980s, and hasn't reoccurred in the U.S. The Turks are very sensitive about it, and see it as something that was unjustified.

Q: In your narrative Nagorno-Karabakh keeps coming up.

GILMORE: Yes. Nagorno-Karabakh, which basically translates into English as Mountainous Karabakh. The Azerbaijanis call it the Mountainous Karabakh. For that matter, so do the Armenians. Nagorno is a Russian word for "mountain" or "mountainous." Karabakh means "black garden." It's a combination of Farsi and Turkish.

Kara means "black," and bocha, or bagh, means "garden." In any case, the area has been inhabited by both Armenians and Azerbaijanis, plus some smaller other elements, particularly Kurds. The last czarist Russian census, in 1896, showed more Armenians than Muslims in Karabakh. By the way, at that time of that census, the Azerbaijanis were not yet recognized as a national group. They were considered Turks. In any case, the Armenians, the Georgians, and the Russians just called them Turks. A majority of Karabakh's population was Armenian. The last Soviet census showed 120,000 Armenians, 50,000 Azerbaijanis, and the rest minorities, particularly Kurds. The Kurds were not all Muslim Kurds. Many of the Kurds were Yezidi Kurds, who are non-Moslem. It's important to recognize that the armed conflict in Nagorno Karabakh began before Armenia and Azerbaijan were independent. There had been fighting between Azerbaijanis and Armenians over the area during WWI as well. It was Stalin who awarded Karabakh to the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic. First it was the Azerbaijani component of the Soviet Federation. But, in any case, Stalin made it an autonomous area within the Republic of Azerbaijan with certain minority rights ostensibly guaranteed to Armenians. Armenians never accepted it. The first Armenian Republic was too weak to do anything about it, but didn't accept it. Fighting broke out in 1988. There were massive demonstrations in Stepanakert which is the Armenian name of the capital of Karabakh. The Azerbaijanis called it Khankendi. The demonstrations quickly produced a massive response in Yerevan, where there were huge demonstrations on the streets which generated the Armenian Pan-National Movement, the force that was the harbinger of and the engine that achieved Armenian independence. Meanwhile, in Baku the Azerbaijani People's Front, came into being and quickly metastasized in response to the demonstrations in Stepanakert and Yerevan. There was a pogrom against the substantial Armenian population in Sumgait, which is across the Absheron Peninsula across from Baku. As fighting erupted in Karabakh, the Armenian minority of Baku and Sumgait was pushed out, as was the Azeri minority in parts of Armenia.

Q: There was some pretty nasty stuff in there.

GILMORE: Oh, yes. Well the conflict itself was fierce and bloody. The number of people killed as a result of the Karabakh conflict is usually put at 25 to 30,000. It would have been much more a subject of concern to the U.S., had there been any live media coverage. There wasn't. There were no U.S. journalists visiting Karabakh on any kind of regular basis. Occasionally a stringer would report something on the conflict. The point is that the Karabakh conflict didn't make the headlines, didn't make the news on a regular basis. There's also a tradition in the Caucasus of taking hostages. So there were kidnappings. You kidnap an enemy, lock him in your basement, and give him bread and water. You captured him in case you needed a trade-in, because there had been hostage taking on the other side. The fighting in Karabakh was bloody. There was considerable mine-laying, so there were lots of injuries, particularly during and after the conflict as a result of mine explosions. Particularly of children. The long and the short of it is, the conflict ended with a cease-fire engineered by Russia in 1994. The then defense minister, Pavel Grachev, was the key person, supported by all the members of the so-called Minsk Group, which includes the United States, France, and other important countries. The Minsk Group, by the way, was so named because there was to be a conference in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, to end the conflict had the Minsk Group succeeded.

In any case, since 1994 there has been a cease-fire. The cease-fire left the Armenian forces in occupation of about 17% of Azerbaijan. Areas around Karabakh, including the entire region between Karabakh and the Armenian border, and from Karabakh down to the Iranian border are occupied by Armenian forces. The Armenians say that the reason they occupied those areas is to get Stepanakert out of artillery range. And there is some logic to that. In any case, the Azeris, pointing to the fact that the OSCE has recognized the borders as they existed when the Soviet Union collapsed, say that their territorial integrity must be restored. The Armenians say that Karabakh was never a part of a truly independent Azerbaijani state and note that there are negotiations on a compromise solution underway with the three co-chairs of the Minsk Group of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United States, Russia and France. There were times when there appeared to be progress toward a settlement. And the first presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Abulfaz Elchibey from Azerbaijan, and Levon Ter-Petrossian in Armenia, personally negotiated two times: once in Paris, under the auspices of the French president, and once in Key West, under U.S. auspices. Although the Minsk Group continues to pursue a compromise solution, the Karabakh dispute remains unresolved.

There is some increased sentiment in Azerbaijan for trying to retake Karabakh militarily, but the general assumption is that the Armenian forces are too strong, militarily for now. The most capable army in the Caucasus, pound for pound, is undoubtedly the Karabakh army. They fought well during the Karabakh conflict, demonstrating an ability to operate with combined arms unmatched by the Azeri forces. The Karabakh Armenians also had a long tradition of providing soldiers for the Red Army and the Czarist Army before it; mountain boys who were rough and tough and good shooters. The Armenian Army is probably the next most capable force in the Caucasus. The Azeris have shown themselves to be considerably less capable militarily. So, for the time being, it looks as if the Karabakh Armenians, backed by the armed forces of Armenia, hold the upper hand in Karabakh. Although, there is a concern that as oil pipelines are

built, as Azerbaijan's oil and gas wealth generates hard currency, Azerbaijan will be able to buy an army, so to speak, and improve their forces. Azerbaijan is acquiring military education assistance from its ally, Turkey, which is of course a very formidable place to learn soldiery. In any case, the conflict remains unresolved.

Q: Let's talk about the political system there. Also about the spirit of the Caucasus. One picks up what the Caucasus from Tolstoy and other... this is a pretty unstable...

GILMORE: The Caucasus is one of the most ethnically complex places on the planet. I've served in the Balkans and in the Caucasus. The Balkans are extremely complex, but if there's any place that I know is more complex ethnically, it's the Caucasus.

Q: Harry, back to Armenia. Did the United States involved in peace efforts there?

GILMORE: Very much so. Starting with Ambassador John "Jack" Maresca, the U.S. has had a series of very capable special envoys for Nagorno Karabakh and other disputes in the former Soviet Union like the disputes over Abkhazia and Moldova. Jack was the first and he was the special envoy for Nagorno-Karabakh during the first part of my tour of duty in Armenia.

Jack Maresca was a very capable Foreign Service professional. I believe he is now living in Europe. [Editor's Note: Following his Karabakh assignment, Mr. Maresca headed the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty-affiliated Open Media Research Institute in Prague.] Maresca was followed by Joseph Presel. The basic venue for negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute was not our embassies in Baku or Yerevan. Although our ambassadors in Armenia and Azerbaijan discussed issues related to Karabakh with their host governments all the time because they were central to both countries, the center of gravity for U.S. efforts to foster a compromise solution to the Karabakh conflict was the Minsk Group of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, the CSCE. We ambassadors worked closely with our special envoys and Jack Maresca, Joe Presel, and their successors were in Yerevan and Baku frequently. Strobe Talbott, who was then the senior U.S. official involved with the talks, also visited Yerevan for talks with President Ter-Petrossian. The Karabakh issue was of central importance to both Armenia and Azerbaijan. But it was the Minsk Group and the special envoys who took the lead on the issue.

Q: Who were our ambassadors in Georgia and Azerbaijan?

GILMORE: Richard Miles was our ambassador in Azerbaijan during the first part of my tour of duty in Armenia [Editor's Note: Ambassador Miles served from September 1992 to November 1993], and then he was succeeded by Richard Kauzlarich [Editor's Note: Ambassador Kauzlarich served from April 1994 to July 1997]. Kent Brown was our ambassador in Georgia during that period. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Brown served from September 1992 to August 1995.] Kent is now, I believe, working for RJR Nabisco, formerly RJ Reynolds. But, basically, we did get together several times.

I met bilaterally with Kent Brown when my wife and I were his guests in Tbilisi and then again when he visited us in Yerevan. We agreed in principle on the desirability of holding a trilateral

meetings of the three U.S. ambassadors in Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan. Meanwhile, when I first visited Ambassador Brown in Tbilisi he arranged for me to join him in a meeting with Shevardnadze who displayed his famed charm and wit. Ambassador and Mrs. Brown then escorted my wife and me on a motor trip to Georgia's main Black Sea port, Batumi. En route we made a quick visit to Stalin's birthplace, Gori, to see the memorabilia that is still there from the Stalin era. We also stopped briefly in Kutaisi. As our Embassy Tbilisi vehicle approached the internal border with the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, we were stopped by armed officials who identified themselves as Adjaran border guards and insisted on escorting us on the rest of our trip to Batumi. So Escorted by the Adjaran border guards, we proceeded to Batumi, the Black Sea port city which was the capital of Georgia's Autonomous Republic of Adjara and the stronghold of Aslan Abashidze. Abashidze was the scion of a family that had lived in Batumi for centuries. He was very much in charge of Batumi and Adjara at that time. Our visit to Batumi was very timely because Batumi at that point, together with its sister Black Sea port, Poti, was key to the delivery of U.S. aid shipments to Armenia and Georgia. With that in mind, we called on Abashidze and attended a concert in Batumi the next evening as his guests. Shevardnadze, who had traveled separately from Tbilisi, also attended. To our surprise, Abashidze did not cede pride of place to Shevardnadze as Georgia's president. He took the sovereign's seat in the royal box at the ornate Batumi opera hall himself and relegated Shevardnadze to what was clearly a secondary position. It seemed clear that Abashidze was signaling that he was in charge in Batumi, and that those who sought to ship aid via Batumi should understand this clearly.

Q: Was there any talk of oil lines or oil exploration while you were in Armenia ?

GILMORE: Yes, a lot. The "Contract of the Century," as the agreement between Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijan International Operating Company was called, was very much in the headlines. At that point the talks included U.S. companies Unocal and Amoco. Amoco and BP, when they combined, became the primary force in the consortium. The contract had been under negotiation before Heydar Aliyev came to power in Baku. He renegotiated it in 1994. The Contract of the Century was signed and of course the question of pipelines arose. That issue was very much alive, first came the issue of so-called "early oil" pipelines, the pipelines that would take the early production to the Black Sea. Then came the question of longer-term pipelines, with the U.S. government particularly advocating an oil pipeline from Baku to just south of Tbilisi, and around Armenia and down to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. That idea was very much alive during my tour of duty in Yerevan.

So there was a lot of talk about oil and transportation. Gas was just coming on the horizon. Since that time, the consortium has discovered that the Azerbaijani offshore area in the Caspian Sea is a major source of natural gas. So the topic of pipelines was very much alive. Armenia basically was the odd country out, for reasons that had primarily to do with the Karabakh conflict and the Azeri position that no pipelines could be routed via Armenia until that conflict was settled on terms acceptable to Azerbaijan. That kept Armenia out of the picture. Of course, this was a serious problem for Armenia because Armenia is energy poor, and the border from Azerbaijan to Armenia was already closed before Armenia proclaimed its independence.

Q: Going back to Nagorno-Karabakh. Sometimes there's a solution that everybody kind of understands, such what a Palestinian-Israeli settlement could be, but nobody can get to it. In the long run did you see such a settlement Azerbaijan and Armenia?

GILMORE: I would say the short answer to your question is no, although I do not want to imply there were and are no possible solutions. There is a fundamental problem on the Armenian side: many Armenians are convinced that there are some important forces in Azerbaijan, often led by the ruling authorities themselves, who want all Armenians out of Karabakh, who want Karabakh ethnically cleansed of Armenians. That's a widespread perception among Armenians. The Armenians view the Karabakh conflict against the background of the Armenians being driven off the Armenian Plateau and out of the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the 1915-1923 period. They see it as a question of Armenians surviving on their historic lands. The first Armenian president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, a distinguished scholar and historian, made the following points to me when I discussed the Karabakh dispute with him early in my tenure. Yerevan, he noted, was not really an Armenian city a century ago. It was city with a mixed population which probably had a Muslim plurality. The composition of Yerevan's population, of course, changed in the course of the twentieth century. But when one looks at Karabakh, he observed, there has been a continuity of Armenian presence and civilization there since much earlier times. So the Armenian perception, Ter Petrossian continued is that the first requirement for the Karabakh Armenians is for security and then self-determination on their historic lands. It means also a permanent linkage on the ground by road and rail to Armenia, so that Armenia can guarantee the Karabakh Armenians' security.

For the Azerbaijanis, Karabakh is also very important. It played a key role in Azerbaijan's national literary-cultural revival. The capital city of Karabakh, Stepanakert in Armenian, and Khankendi in Azerbaijani, is symbolically and culturally important to both nations. So the short answer is that neither side wants to give up what would be necessary to satisfy the other. That being said, there are theoretical possibilities for compromise. There were several ideas out there. One of them was to govern Nagorno-Karabakh as a special entity based on an understanding between Baku and Nagorno-Karabakh that Nagorno-Karabakh would not be under any direct hierarchical control or direction from Baku but would remain linked with Baku economically. Karabakh's own constabulary would be responsible for public safety.

There was also talk, more by people from afar than people in the region, of a possible territorial swap: the so-called Goble Plan. Paul Goble, an analyst in the in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, presented to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance the idea of a territorial swap: the Armenian 'panhandle,' the part of Armenia extending down to its border with Iran, would be ceded to Azerbaijan while Azerbaijan would cede Karabakh to Armenia. There was considerable opposition to the swap idea. Armenians in the Diaspora, particularly, but also important players in Armenia itself were opposed. They feared that a direct territorial linkage between Turkey and Azerbaijan would bode ill for Armenia. Armenians would be surrounded by people who didn't like them and didn't wish them well. And also Armenia would lose its geopolitical clout, what little it had. The fact that the Armenian panhandle, which in effect separates Turkey from Azerbaijan is seen by many Armenians as giving Armenia a bit of leverage in the region. There's no question that of all the states that emerged independent from

the former Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has the closest relationship with Turkey. And Azerbaijani Turkish has a particularly close linguistic affinity with the Osmanli Turkish spoken in Turkey.

There are possibilities for resolution of the Karabakh conflict based on compromise. The Minsk Group negotiators came close at times. They came close in Key West when Ambassador Terry Cavanaugh was the U.S. envoy. . In more recent years, there was regular contact between the presidents of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, and Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, and their special envoys engaged in extensive discussion. While a solution is possible, in principle, it would take immense political will on both sides.

That being said, without resolution of the dispute, it has not been possible to develop South Caucasus-wide – Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan – economic cooperation. The South Caucasus market is small in any case, but three small individual markets make for less attractive conditions for investors than one more sizeable regional market. Both countries rely on Georgia for access to the sea and location of oil and gas pipelines. The Georgians have tried to foster some kind of dialog. But basically what you have is bilateral relationships, important ones between Azerbaijan and Georgia, and Armenia and Georgia, but no South Caucasus-wide institutions. When I say Caucasus, I am careful to use the terms South Caucasus and North Caucasus, because the North Caucasus, of course, is part of the Russian Federation, and that's a very different kettle of fish.

The Karabakh conflict was extremely brutal. It wreaked great hardships on the civilian population of the region. There was hostage taking. Extensive minefields were laid, and there were numerous maimings of both combatants and non-combatants, including of children. The conflict also generated considerable pressure on Azerbaijan's Armenian minority in and around Baku and Sumgait, and the smaller but still significant Azeri minority in Armenia. The conflict has caused extreme hardship to the peoples of the region, generating large numbers internally-displaced persons and refugees. So, it's an important, unresolved matter.

Q: When you were there, were there any signs of...well I suppose it would be on the Muslim side, but was there recruitment of Muslim fanatics in other places? We're getting that in Chechnya...

GILMORE: Right. Azerbaijanis are secular like their linguistic cousins, the Turks from the Republic of Turkey. Secularism is ingrained. Unlike the Turks who are mostly Sunnis, most Azerbaijanis are Shia, although there is an important Sunni element as well. But although they are Shia like the Iranians, the Shiism practiced in Azerbaijan is more restrained and less emotional than that practiced in Iran. Moreover, the combination of the secular state and strong secular political leadership by President Heydar Aliyev has kept emotional religious manifestations under control.

The Russians have pressed the Azerbaijanis not to give succor or refuge to Chechen fighters who might come over the border through Dagestan. Dagestan borders directly on Azerbaijan and in Dagestan itself, there is an important minority, the Akin Chechens. But in any case, Azerbaijan was basically on the side of the allied coalition in the Iraq War. It offered over flight rights and refueling facilities, as needed. And President Aliyev was very careful in his dealings with Russia and others not to be perceived or suspected of aiding Chechen separatists. Armenia, of course, has virtually no Muslims left. There were a few Azerbaijanis in Armenia at the end of the Soviet

era. Basically, they were forced to leave just before or at independence as a result of the Karabakh conflict. This wasn't well-noted in the West. The plight of the Armenians in Baku and Sumgait, however, did attract some attention in the Western media.

Q: What about the Armenian-Americans while you were there? How did you find dealing with them?

GILMORE: I have to be very clear here. I know the Armenian-American community well, and I have made many friends there. But I don't know all of its leaders personally. It's a large community, nearly a million strong, and virtually all the members of the community care deeply about their ancestral homeland, Armenia, and Armenia's independence. They are very well-organized. As I indicated earlier, I wasn't able to get out to Armenia in the late summer or early fall of 1992 because of the foul up with my papers in the White House. I had more time to sit and read about the Armenian-American community and Armenia in general, and study Armenian before I went out to post. When I got there, of course, I was in frequent contact with representatives of the major Armenian-American organizations. I should say a word about them because they're not always well understood in the U.S.

Americans tend to think of the Armenian lobby, as they call it, as a kind of a single force that is close to being monolithic. That is not at all the case. There are two major advocacy organizations, and there's another important organization I should mention too. And there are numerous other organizations I won't get to. The two major advocacy organizations are the Armenian Assembly of America, and the Armenian National Committee of America. The "Assembly," was founded in 1972, as an umbrella organization over all the Armenian organizations in the United States. Subsequently, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaksutyun or Dashnaks opted out of the umbrella arrangement. They established their own advocacy arm called the Armenian National Committee of America. So there are two primary sources of the Armenian advocacy effort in the U.S. Congress: the Armenian Assembly of America, and the Armenian National Committee of America.

Although the Assembly and the ANCA often work in parallel; they do not have joint committees. The Assembly is not a political organization. It takes no part in Armenian politics as a party. It does not get directly involved in Armenian politics and supports whatever government is in power in Armenia. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation and its ANCA advocacy arm are quite different. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation is a party with a very long history. It was founded in czarist Russia in 1890. It's still a player in Armenian politics. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation has a party organization in Armenia; it has seats in the Parliament. The ARF also participates in Lebanese political life having on occasion had representation in the Lebanese Parliament. The ARF also sponsors the Armenian Relief Society, which operates not only in the U.S. and the Republic of Armenia, but also wherever there are Armenian communities around the world. Both the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation/ANCA have very close ties to a number of U.S. congressmen and senators. There's been an Armenian Issues Caucus in the House of Representatives since 1995. Depending on where we are in the cycle of elections for the House of Representatives, the caucus normally has 130-140 members. It's quite influential. When a bill which would provide assistance to Armenia is under consideration in the House of Representatives, there are, almost

automatically, 140 votes for it. The first co-chairs of the caucus were Representative Pallone, Democrat, N.J. and Representative Porter, Republican, Ill. In sum, there's a strong foundation of support for assistance to Armenia, not only in terms of the two Armenian American advocacy organizations, but also in terms of the Armenian Issues Caucus in the House.

While there's no Armenian issues caucus, *per se*, in the Senate, there have been a number of senators over time who have cared deeply about Armenia and worked to support it. Some of them are now retired. Senator Bob Dole and Senator Paul Simon are perhaps the two best examples. Both were very consistent supporters of assistance to Armenia. Senator Paul Sarbanes also comes to mind. There are more. During my time in Yerevan Senator Harry Reid and Senator Phil Graham visited Armenia. Harry Reid was then the Democratic Whip in the Senate. Phil Graham is now retired. But the foregoing list gives one an idea of what kind of oomph Armenian advocacy has had in the Senate. Harry Reid visited in the winter of 1993-94 when Armenia was in economic crisis and the hardships it created were palpable. Mrs. Reid accompanied him. They stayed in what had been a luxury hotel. It had no hot water, and guests were advised to fill their bathtubs with cold water if they desired to bathe. But this was the kind of support Armenia attracted in the Congress.

There is another very important Armenian organization, which is not an advocacy organization in the classic sense, but has provided assistance to Armenian communities around the world for more than 100 years. It is the Armenian General Benevolent Union. A non-profit organization, the AGBU was founded in Cairo, Egypt in 1906 to promote Armenian identity and heritage. There was an important Armenian community in Egypt during the Ottoman period. The AGBU was founded there in response to the 1905 Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire. I mention it particularly because it has a sterling reputation in the Armenian world and has been highly successful advocating for funds for the American University of Armenia.

Q: You mean like the American University of Beirut, and the American University of Cairo; both highly successful institutions?

GILMORE: The American University of Armenia was in the process of seeking accreditation in the U.S. when I gave this interview. It has since gained full accreditation. It's partnered with the University of California, whose Board of Regulators serves as the nucleus of the Board for the American University of Armenia. Like AUB, the American University of Armenia has been immensely successful. As Louise Manoogian Simone, Chair of the Armenian General Benevolent Union has pointed out, AUA alumni are the most desirable recruits in Armenia for government service and private industry. The AUA has already shown itself to be a remarkable success.

In closing, let me say that Armenians still care deeply about the issue that really brought them together before Armenia was independent: genocide recognition. There's a strong conviction among Armenian-Americans and, indeed, Armenians everywhere that the deportation and massacre of 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians living in Istanbul and five eastern provinces of Turkey from 1915 to 1922 constitutes genocide as it is defined in the UN Genocide Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. The Armenian-American community strongly supports action by the Congress and President affirming U.S. recognition of the Armenian

Genocide. There have been a number of efforts in that direction, and more should be expected. The Armenian-American advocacy groups also advocate for economic assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh which is not recognized by any government. Congress has approved the provision of some humanitarian assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenian-American advocacy groups also care deeply about Armenia's security. Specifically, they want to see continuing efforts by the U.S., together with France and Russia, the co-chairs of the Minsk Group of the CSCE, to bring the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to a negotiated settlement.

Q: Did you notice the cultural clash between Armenian-Americans when they get up into the mountains of Armenia and all of a sudden they come across their counterparts that they've been hearing their grandmother talk about? They go back to the homeland and they say, "Oh, my God."

GILMORE: Not so much. Armenians are a "diaspora" people, a people who have been dispersed across several continents by deportations and genocidal massacres. Armenian-Americans who haven't yet visited the Republic of Armenia or its predecessor state, the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia, are often shocked by the hardships the Armenian people face and how difficult life is. At the same time, they are proud that Armenia has survived as a state, and they are particularly proud of Armenia's rich cultural life. Armenians from the U.S. who visit Armenia may find their first opportunity to meet some distant member of the family. This is very important to Armenians, because so many perished and found their families decimated as the result of the deportations and genocidal massacres in the 1915 to 1922 period. Whole families, if not wiped out entirely, were left without grandparents or aunts, and uncles. So finding a cousin in Armenia may have a very special meaning to an Armenian American or an Armenian from France.

Q: One thinks of the author William Saroyan, and I'm sure there are others. Did they have an echo in Armenia?

GILMORE: Oh, yes. Saroyan is a national hero in Armenia. The Armenians were stateless from 1375, when the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia fell, until 1918 when in the aftermath of WWI and the Russian Revolution, a small Armenian state was born, struggled for survival, and ultimately was incorporated into the USSR. During the centuries of statelessness, Armenians were a people with an historic church and liturgy and a language spoken by Armenians scattered across several continents. In his poem "We" the great contemporary Armenian poet Gevorg Emin described Armenia as "a powerful soul with no body." For Armenians, cultural and religious relationships are very important, and in many ways their cultural heroes and religious leaders tower historically over their political leaders. Figures like Aram Khatchaturian in music and Saroyan in literature are widely beloved throughout the Armenian world. The liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Church is very beautiful, especially as set to music by several outstanding Armenian composers. The Armenian Apostolic Church is headed by a universal bishop called a Catholicos. When one looks back at earlier periods of Armenian history, one does find political and clerical heroes: kings, princes and Catholicoses.

Q: The French singer, Charles Aznavour, has always kept sort of Armenia in the focus of his work in France.

GILMORE: Yes, he's widely respected in Armenia. He visited a couple of times when I was there, and the Aznavour Foundation was one of our partners in bringing kerosene heating to Armenian schools. Aznavour, of course speaks fluent western Armenian. As I mentioned earlier, the two dialects of Armenian, when spoken fluently, are largely mutually intelligible. But not in every instance. Aznavour is a hero in Armenia. And the American actress, Cher, who's partly of Armenian origin, was a sensation when she visited Armenia. And there are political figures like former California Governor Deukmejian and California Representative Anna Eshoo who are of Armenian heritage. The Armenians are well aware of that.

When they look back, the Armenians see a huge, long history. An Armenian-American newspaper editor was asked to name the most important events in Armenian history. When he did, he started with 1064, when the Seljuk Turks took Ani, the capital of a medieval Armenian empire. The ruins of Ani stands just inside the present Turkish-Armenian border. It's as if it were yesterday.

Q: How did the Armenians look upon the Russians?

GILMORE: By and large, the Armenians see the Russians as pretty positive, in terms of Armenian history. If you talk to individual Armenians and you know them well, and I'm speaking now of Armenians in the Republic, that the Russians can be overbearing and insensitive. But by and large, as a people and as a culture, they respect the Russians. They know Russian well, they know Russian literature. And anyone who knows Russian literature sees a side of Russians which I think can only be described as attractive and impressive. We know the great Russian novels. But Russian poetry, rivals English poetry in terms of its scope and depth.

Politically, the Armenians see the Russians not always consistently but at least in principle, from the 19th Century on, as trying to help Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Trying to provide a haven in czarist Russia for persecuted Ottoman Armenians. The Armenians are not uncritical. They will say that the czarist Russians looked after czarist Russia's interests first. And they will acknowledge that the Armenian political parties that sought to get organized in Czarist Russia at the end of the 19th Century were subjected to oppression. But by and large, Russians are seen as positive. Historically they're seen as defenders of their fellow Christians. They're also seen as having provided a haven for Armenians. They're seen as the enemy of the great oppressor of the Armenians, which in the Armenian view was Ottoman Turkey. There's a fair amount of intermarriage. An Armenian living in the Republic with a Russian spouse is not an unusual occurrence.

Q: Well, Harry, maybe it's time to turn to... You left Armenia, when?

GILMORE: I left Armenia in the summer, August of 1995, right after the first Parliamentary elections, and the referendum on the Constitution. Elections which were not without flaw. I returned to Washington to become the Dean of Area Studies at FSI.

LOUIS F. LICHT III
Deputy Chief of Mission
Yerevan (1996-1998)

Mr. Licht was born in Maine and raised in New York. Educated at Yale University and the Fletcher School, he served in the US Army in Vietnam and joined the State Department in 1974. Mr. Licht served in Washington, dealing with Latin American Affairs as well as Arms Control and Nuclear matters. His foreign posts were Santo Domingo, Lima, Canberra, Yerevan and Chisinau (Moldova). Mr. Licht was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

LICHT: Wither? To Armenia to work for Ambassador Peter Tomsen from 1996 to 1998.
[Editor's Note: Ambassador Tomsen served from September 1995 to September 1998.]

Q: *What was Armenia like at this point?*

LICHT: Armenia compared to Chisinau wasn't exactly Paris to Peoria, but Peoria was Podunk. Armenia is a place where, unlike Moldova, where people don't have a very clear idea of who they are, the Armenians have a very firm idea of who they are. It was a place where there was more available than Chisinau in terms of goods. There are more automobiles, probably. They have a maybe slightly higher standard of living and a firm feeling that this really was a country that existed before the Soviet Union. It was a tougher place to work. They also, of course, had territorial issues regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, which remains a very thorny issue. There, like in Moldova, there were various aid organizations all over, many I was now familiar with when I got there. It was a slightly easier place to live than some places. It was more difficult, but somewhat more interesting, political atmosphere. We had a larger embassy and a DCM to help run it. I guess I had more affection toward Moldova, but overall, Armenia was the more interesting place to be.

Q: *Well, you must have felt the heavy hand of the Armenian community in the United States there, didn't you?*

LICHT: We did in various ways. They were always on your neck, and when they came to speak to us... There was one time when a group of Armenian Americans came to speak to us, when one of our officers said something that he wouldn't have said if the government official were there. No sooner had the group left than the government was calling us in (I happened to be chargé at the moment) to object to this particular statement. So, you had to be pretty careful about that. There were important, well connected, wealthy Armenians from the United States who were well connected in the Armenia world. There was quite a bit of good work being done in the embassy. But, yes, you always had to be concerned about how the Armenian Assembly was going to view what you were doing.

Q: *The Armenian Assembly being an American...?*

LICHT: Yes, the Armenian Assembly is an American organization. They would come down out on particular officers, as not being sympathetic to Armenians.

Q: *In a way, it duplicates the atmospherics which our embassy in Tel Aviv experiences didn't it?*

LICHT: The situation is somewhat similar, yes. The Armenians now have either the third or the fourth highest per capita assistance of any country. They have a very good organization to solicit aid.

Q: *What was our interest in Armenia at the time?*

LICHT: We were interested in preventing an all out war in the Caucasus.

Q: *In particular, Azerbaijan?*

LICHT: Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh. We were interested in seeing that democracy was established and seeing they were generally better off as a democracy. We were interested in...(tape ends)

Q: *Did any issues come up with Iran?*

LICHT: We often talked to them about Iran because we wanted to warn them to make sure they were not cooperating with Iran in a way that was bad for our interest, particularly in being a potential transit point of nuclear weapons or other weapons from Russia. The other factor here is that there are still Russian troops in Armenia, and Armenia continues to feel close to Russia, closer than Georgia and Azerbaijan. People who came through were continually bringing up the Iran issue. And the Armenians were continually saying, "Look, we have no other options than to deal with Iran, because, look, we are blockaded by Turkey on one side and by Azerbaijan on the other side. The only way to get things into here is through Iran," which was right. There is a lot of transport across the border. The Iranians were buying things from Armenia. They were buying things like scrap metal from Armenia, and taking it across. So, the corner was Iran, Armenia and Georgia. That was the way they could get things in and out, to block it off would not have made sense.

Q: *How was the government of Armenia, at this point?*

LICHT: It was a democratic government, but the elections, of which there were three when I was there, were not fairly conducted. The OSCE...

Q: *One of our colleagues was an OSCE observer there. I had been with him in Bosnia, and I asked him how it went. He said, "Well, they're a bunch of thugs, and it wasn't very helpful."*

LICHT: The first year I was there, when they had a presidential election, it was later acknowledged by them, that it was stolen. Baaz Manukian, who was the opposition to the Ter-Petrossian, who was the president, shortly after the election, when it was clear that it wasn't being fairly counted, there was a huge demonstration. The embassy was just a little bit down the street from the parliament. The crowd assembled in front of the parliament gate and therefore in front of the embassy, too, as they marched. They weren't angry at us. They broke down the gates

of parliament, went in and attacked the speaker, who was upstairs, and three other people, who landed in the hospital.

We were in the embassy and as all of this is occurring, all of a sudden, shots were fired. So, we did the normal thing. We were buttoning up the embassy, and all these people were out front. It was a reasonably exciting night. As this was happening, we were getting calls from the government, saying, "They are at the gate. It looks like they are breaking down the gate." At that time, the U.S. had not made a statement about the election, not even welcoming the results. One of the things government wanted us to do was to make such a statement. Eventually, we made a statement that didn't congratulate Levon Ter-Petrossian that we would work with him, and was satisfactory enough, but we did deplore the violence that occurred. So, that was reason then.

We had observers out, during the election, of course, and that was pretty exciting. We had an excellent political officer named Susan Thornton, who was in one of the elections, in the district, watching the elections when at something like 1:00, the lights went out and a bunch of thugs came in and stole the ballot box. Someone said later they could not have picked a worse place, because one of the most respected observers was right there to see it happen. At that point, the Petrossian government was never very close to the American embassy. When he wanted help, he called us, but otherwise, he pretty much ignored us. Our enthusiasm for him was not terribly high either, after all this occurred, but we did try to work with him.

Q: Well, what happened when Armenian-Americans would come and ask you about election, what would you say?

LICHT: The fellow I mentioned to you before, where the Americans heard something said about the government that wasn't quite favorable, it would get back to the government. It was instant. You could put your finger on it. It was an instant in which an officer said, "Well, maybe we will never know if Ter-Petrossian was legitimately elected. That's the phrase that got back to the government, and apparently to the president. Quickly, the chargé was called in, and we had to quickly say something. Our answer was that we do not doubt that Ter Petrossian shoulders the responsibility of the president.

Q: So, our basic policy was, I guess, to try to foster development there, and to keep them from getting too close to the Iranians?

LICHT: And also to try to make sure they don't fall completely into becoming pawn to Russian politics. The importance of keeping the area peaceful had a lot to do with the Caspian oil we had an interest in accessing.

Q: Was our embassy trying to do anything with the whole Azerbaijan conflict?

LICHT: We worked with the OSCE in something called the Minsk Group to help the mediation process. The Minsk Group had three mediators, one from France, one from Russia, and one from the United States. There is still an office in the Department which is involved in this process, run by a fellow who was so important in Cyprus. But, we still have a negotiator of ambassadorial rank. So, the Minsk Group would check in with the OSCE. The members, the negotiators in the

three countries would come through Armenia, go to Azerbaijan, go to Russia, and go other places, to try to come up with a solution. They would come to town, and it was pretty interesting, because we had to read them in, we would deal with the Russian embassies, the French embassy, and we would make the arrangements for these people to come. We would cooperate on how they would meet, and we would exchange information, to the extent we could, and work with them to help them fix things. That's one of the nice things, sometimes it happens in diplomacy. But, it was very hard to make progress. The people in Nagorno-Karabakh had their own government, and they had to be involved as well. Our negotiators would go up to the Nagorno-Karabakh, but, we who were accredited to Armenia would not go up to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Q: At this point, Nagorno-Karabakh was basically under Armenia control?

LICHT: That's right.

Q: Did you find that you all, at your embassy, were cooperating with our embassy in Baku, or not?

LICHT: Yes, we were. I personally never got to Baku. That is one of the things I'm sorry about. Where you sit and where you stand has something to do with your outlook, of course, but I thought the cooperation between the embassies was pretty good. We also cooperated with the embassy in Georgia. When the negotiators would go from here to there, or from there to here, depending on the schedule at that time, so we maintained contact and we exchanged information, as you would expect. I think they knew the relationships with the ambassadors was good, and the rest of us seemed to work pretty well with them. We might have had clientitis somewhere along the line, but I think it overshadowed the U.S. effort to play a fair mediation role.

Q: Well, now, was official Armenia at that time, nurturing the narrative about the World War I massacre of Armenians, in Turkey, or not? Do they have other fish to fry, at this point?

LICHT: No. It's still on the agenda. Armenia is still awaiting an apology, and still awaiting recognition of the historical facts, that it was a genocide. It will be a long time before it goes away. It's part of national lore now. It is hard to deal with. But they would establish relations with Turkey, if Turkey would establish relations with them despite this. Nevertheless, it is definitely alive.

Q: How about with Georgia? Georgia had this almost subliminal civil war going on. Was that still going on?

LICHT: Yes, it was still going on. It didn't spill over into Armenia so much, but yes. The relationship with Georgia was pretty good. There were Armenians on the southern part of Georgia, which was a potentially area of difficulty. It flared up. They had good reason to maintain good relations with Georgia.

One of the things Ambassador (Michael) Lemon [Ambassador from September 1998 to October 2001] was working on and Ambassador Tomsen started working on was establishing better routes between Georgia and Armenia with the notion that eventually Azerbaijan could also be

tied in. It could be a region, and as a region, it could be reasonably powerful, economically. Now, as a fragmented region, it's not economically integrated.

Q: *There must still be troops in Armenia.*

LICHT: There are Soviet troops in Armenia.

Q: *What are they doing?*

LICHT: They are guarding the border. In fact, many of the Soviet troops are Armenians who are in the Russian army. The Russian army is not necessarily well paid or well maintained, but they are there.

Q: *Was there any feeling of threat from Turkey, from our perspective?*

LICHT: From our perspective, there wasn't. From their perspective, there always will be, I guess.

Q: *Were there cross-border raids, or anything?*

LICHT: There was a threat. If you were Armenian, you would feel a threat, because the Turk and the Azer-Arabs cooperated closely, so if there were a conflict again in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenians would have to be looking toward their back. I think, probably, it is fair to say that if you were an Armenian diplomat, you would say, "We just have to do it."

Q: *At one point, we had this Armenian liberation army, which was sort of a terrorist group, going around killing Turks. Where were any assassinations during the time you were there*

LICHT: The sting seems to have been taken out of that liberation army group. The good Dashnak versus the bad Dashnak. The Turks are still mad about that. The Armenians are still not apologetic about it, but it wasn't as important an issue...No assassinations of Turks, no. A couple Armenians bumped each other off.

Q: *In '98, how did you feel for Armenia? Did it seem to be developing along positive lines?*

LICHT: Well, eventually Ter-Petrosian was forced to resign before the next election [March 1998]. Robert Kocharyan, who had been made prime minister [1997-98] by Ter-Petrosian ran for election. Kocharyan had been the president of Nagorno-Karabakh, so when he was appointed prime minister, it was quite a spectacular event, and when he finally became president, it was almost like the war party had taken over. Yet, from what I could tell, he made an effort to push the negotiations along, but of course, he was replaced by somebody who was just as adamant as he was when he was in Nagorno-Karabakh. Do you remember the massacre in the parliament just recently [October 1999]?

Q: *Yes.*

LICHT: The way this played out, I think you had to kind of backtrack, as far as peace negotiations were concerned. When I left, I wished Armenia well, but thinking that it had an immense number of very talented people, and that Armenia will probably always take care of itself. It was moving slowly, slowly toward a market economy, slowly perhaps toward democratic government, but real democracy had quite a ways to go there. It would always have, in some way, to look to outside itself. A number of people who had traveled to California and back was immense, and that money had come to be very helpful. I guess the collapse of the Russian rule dealt Armenia a blow, too. They were getting remittances from us, from them. Slowly, slowly, Armenia, I hope, will get there.

Q: How about the earthquake? When was it?

LICHT: 1988. Years later, they have made minimal process in cleaning up. There were certain things they were good. There were some schools established by foreign donations. There was a certain amount of clean up. It seems like it is taking them forever, despite the amount of money that has been put in. Maybe that is unfair. If it had happened in Germany, it would have been cleaned up by now.

Q: Well, let me tell you, I was consul general in 1980 in Naples, when they had a very bad earthquake there. My understanding is that it still hasn't been cleaned up. The local bosses get in the corruption seat then, central government doesn't deliver very well, and the money gets pitted away.

LICHT: Well, I certainly think that happened in Armenia.

JOHN M. EVANS
Ambassador
Armenia (2004-2006)

Ambassador Evans was born and raised in Virginia and educated at Yale University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1971 and became a specialist in Soviet and Eastern European Affairs. His foreign posts were Teheran, Prague, Moscow, Brussels, St. Petersburg, Chisinau (Moldova) and Yerevan, Armenia, where he served as Ambassador from 2004 to 2006. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington, the Ambassador dealt primarily with Russian and former Soviet states' affairs. Ambassador Evans was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: Two thousand and four. We're going to be talking about Armenia but how did this come about?

EVANS: I was working at that time in the European Bureau, Europe and Eurasia as it now is styled, as director of the office of Russian affairs. But the time was coming up for my rotation to something else and the assistant secretary at the time, Elizabeth Jones, worked very hard to see if

she could get me an appointment to one or the other ambassadorship in the former Soviet Union. And as it turned out the best fit turned out to be Yerevan. So in the winter/early spring of 2004 I got private word that I was going to be nominated for that post and I was actually nominated in May of 2004.

Q: Well now, was Yerevan one of these posts that- I would think like some of the Baltic countries where all of a sudden there's a politician who's got, you know, always wanted to go back to the Motherland; was Yerevan one of these? I mean, did the Armenians of San Gabriel want to go back?

EVANS: It has never...I was the fifth ambassador and none of the five, Harry Gilmore being the first, none of the five were political appointees, they were all career people, and in general most of the posts in the former Soviet Union have been occupied by career professionals rather than by political appointees or ethnic political appointees.

Q: I would think though, I mean because Armenians, as we will get to, take their- the Armenian Americans take their country of either birth or of origin very seriously.

EVANS: Well, they do and there's no law against naming somebody of an ethnic background. As we know, there have been Jews who have served in Tel Aviv and there have been Italians who have served in Rome. So it is not unheard of. I think the conventional wisdom among professionals is that it's better not to name someone who might have ethnic ties that would sway his judgment in one way or another at his post of assignment.

Q: Well I, you know, when we've had so many Italian Americans who have gone to Italy usually, at least in the view of the professional, not with- it has not been a very happy occasion. Often what they're doing is they're not speaking Italian, they're speaking a dialect, you know, some patois, you know, and they're not really considered of sufficient caliber by the natives.

EVANS: Well, there certainly are complications and baggage that can accompany a person with a heritage connected to the post of assignment.

Q: Well anyway-

EVANS: I had no, absolutely no, Armenian connections whatsoever; I'd actually never been there. I did have one great advantage which was that my Russian at that time was in pretty good shape and certainly the political class in all those ex-Soviet republics still speak Russian and mostly work in Russian.

Q: Alright, you're named, you're one on the list but since, as you say, this is not a place where the political appointees are trying to get the job so it's fairly sure- What were you hearing about Armenia? You know, because the Armenians play a larger than life role in American politics and all.

EVANS: The Armenians are well organized and they are passionate about Armenian issues but if you're not really looking to see them they're almost invisible to most observers except on

occasions when they have street protests about the recognition of the Armenian genocide. Now, I have run across Armenia once before and that was in December of 1988 at the time of the big earthquake when Gorbachev had to rush back from New York to tend to the devastation there, so I had some knowledge of the Armenian community from that time. I had -- memorably for me -- I had gone to New York to brief all the Armenian church and community representatives on what the U.S. Government was doing to help the victims of the earthquake and I remember, I may have said before, that I never felt so underdressed in my life, faced with all the different bishops of the different denominations in their various robes and headdresses.

Q: Oh yes. Well, was anybody telling you, you know, okay John, you're off to Armenia; watch it?

EVANS: At that point no, although Ed Djerejian, who of course had been in the Foreign Service for years, by this time he was retired, he did say be very careful out there, but I think he was referring more to the local political scene, which he had some disparaging remarks for, than anything else. Now, Beth Jones did say to me, "it's not a very pretty post but it's getting better," or something like that. One of the reasons was that it was known that the ambassador's residence was a shambles and that the embassy, which was in an old Communist Party building, was a kind of a wreck and that we were building a new chancery. So that's what she meant.

Q: Was this all because of the earthquake or was it just general decrepitude?

EVANS: You know, most of those, what became republic capitals, had been provincial cities in the Soviet Union and so they weren't set up to be capital cities, with the possible exception, oddly enough, of St. Petersburg, which was a capital but not a capital.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: It was the northern capital of Russia. It had had embassies and so it had a great fund of wonderful buildings. But the other cities, even Kiev, had a terrible shortage of hotels, so none of these places were really well set up to receive foreign diplomats.

Q: What did you do to prepare yourself?

EVANS: Since I knew very little about Armenia I started reading as much as I could as fast as I could. And I went through such classics of Armenian history as Richard Hovannisian's two volume History of the Armenian People and several other standard histories, and then my predecessor but one, Michael Lemmon, lent me his copy of Ambassador Morgenthau's Story, which is his personal account of being U.S. ambassador to Constantinople during the First World War.

Q: As the- as you get, what is it, Franz Werfel's- "The Forty Days of Musa Dagh" or however you pronounce it?

EVANS: You pronounced it just right. I did not read that at the time. And one of my big frustrations was that because of the State Department's concern about the confirmation process it wasn't possible to get language training until after I was confirmed. The State Department's

concern, of course, was not to imply to the Foreign Relations Committee that we were taking for granted my confirmation and to come here to FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and sign up for Armenian lessons would be taking for granted a positive outcome. So I wasn't able to study Armenian and in fact I was advised, "Oh John, you'll never learn Armenian well enough to use it; just go out there and speak Russian." That's a direct quote from Lynn Pascoe, who was the deputy assistant secretary.

Q: What about in preparation before even the hearings, were you talking to either the Armenian communities? I was making reference to San Gabriel because a large- is it San Gabriel-?

EVANS: The biggest center is Glendale.

Q: Pasadena.

EVANS: But there are a couple other places out there, you know. Right, Pasadena.

Q: And also, but also to any particular congressmen or -women who were particularly Armenian-oriented?

EVANS: I stayed very much away from anything Armenian before my confirmation hearing, which was in July. I even went so far as to avoid a talk at the Center for Strategic International Studies given by the Armenian foreign minister, at that time Vartan Oskanian; instead I sent my wife to hear what he had to say. I didn't want to be accused of getting involved before I was confirmed.

Q: Well this is a little bit unusual, isn't it? I mean, with somebody who's sort of on the track to go to, I don't know, Tanzania, to have to play games like this?

EVANS: Well, perhaps I was being ultra-prudent or ultra-careful here but I simply didn't think it was appropriate to be in touch with Armenian Americans at that stage.

Q: Alright then, how did the hearings go?

EVANS: Well, you asked whether I was in touch with anyone on the Hill and I did call on one prominent senator, Senator Sarbanes -- a former senator, he's now out of office, now retired. He was known to be interested in Armenia; he had an Armenian on his staff and it was he who, actually during my hearing, said "Mr. Evans, I think you should learn the Armenian language. Please ask the State Department to give you training." And so, armed with that command from Senator Sarbanes, I did come back to the State Department, having been confirmed, and I was given eight half-day sessions at the Foreign Service Institute so I could read the alphabet and say a few short sentences.

Q: Did you, while you were getting ready, did you touch into the Turkish desk?

EVANS: No, I did not. I had, during my Cox Fellowship, done a lot of reading on Ottoman history. I knew people who had been involved in Turkish affairs, of course; I'd known people all along but at that point I did not make a formal appointment at the Turkish desk.

Q: Well then, did-

EVANS: I should add to that, though, that my old friend Eric Edelman, who had succeeded me as DCM in Prague, was then ambassador in Turkey, and in a very casual encounter we had in the lobby of the State Department he said "John, don't forget our position on the Genocide is that it was the chaos and fog of war."

Q: So- Because the genocide or the "g" word was a huge landmine; anybody dealing-

EVANS: It was, first of all, taboo. It was not something we were to discuss. We just learned that; we weren't told it precisely. I knew from my previous study of Ottoman history that there was a problem around this question. I didn't know much about the facts of it and I didn't know much about the definition of genocide, either. But I did start reading about it in the weeks leading up to my departure for Yerevan and I read more about it when I got to Yerevan. I also, before leaving, made a point of calling on the expert in our legal advisor's office who has the unenviable job of thinking about genocide full time, and I asked him point blank, I said "had it been the case that the Genocide Convention of 1948 was in effect in 1915 would not the events of 1915 have been characterized as genocide?" And he said, "yes, of course. It's a matter of policy, not fact; it's a matter of policy that we do not refer to it as genocide."

Q: Okay, why don't we take it why? I mean, at the time, we're talking about 2004, was it? Why was this, I mean, what was the rationale for having a policy not to call it genocide?

EVANS: I was never given a point-by-point rationale for why we did not refer to it as genocide. What I clearly understood, and I think most other people understood, was that it was Turkish official policy to deny that there had been a genocide. Turkey was our good ally, our faithful ally in NATO, had fought with us side by side in the Korean War and so on and so forth. We had big -- enormous -- strategic interests in Turkey and therefore in deference to Turkish policy we simply did not talk about those times or events.

Q: Did you- still talking about the early days when you were getting ready to go out there- did you chat with anybody else of your colleagues in various positions; did they bring this up or was this sort of-? You know, when you say "Armenia" it sort of- it's hard almost not to think about the...

EVANS: Well, I did not discuss it with very many people but I did discuss the question with a couple. One was a State Department employee of the Historian's Office, a man of Armenian background. We had a furtive lunch one day in which he told me what he knew about the question. He told me about Rafael Lemkin, the Polish legal scholar who lost 49 members of his own family in World War II in the Holocaust but who had been led to the study of atrocities and mass crimes by his hearing of the Armenian massacres in his law school days in Krakow and who had asked his professor at that time why was it that if a man commits murder and he is sent

to jail whereas if a government murders a million men, women and children there's no retribution? And his law professor had no answer and so Rafael Lemkin went out to try to find a way to make a crime of these things.

The other person I spoke to before going was, of course, Elizabeth Jones, the assistant secretary. I called on her along with the Armenia desk officer, Eugenia Sidereas. I had noticed that the Background Notes that the State Department furnishes for the use of mostly schools about each country that we have diplomatic relations with said nothing whatsoever about the events of 1915 or massacres of Armenians or anything of the sort, not to mention using the "g" word, but there was absolutely no mention of that period of history, no mention of the fact that millions of Armenians had -- or at least some number of Armenians had -- fled Ottoman territory and ended up in what was then Russian Armenia. There was no mention of it, whereas our President, several presidents, had made veiled and euphemistic mentions that went quite far. President Bush had talked about "massacres," "forced deportations" and used quite...and there was even... the word "murder" had been used in a presidential statement. But the State Department's Background Notes glossed over it entirely. And I pointed this out to Beth Jones, who's a very smart and sensible person, and I said "don't you think that we ought to revise the Background Notes so they at least convey as much knowledge and sympathy as the White House statements that have been made do?" And she said, "yes, I think any issue that's of interest to our clients," -- meaning the people who read the Background Notes -- "ought to be addressed." At that point the telephone rang and we weren't able to continue our discussion and we had worked so much together that I felt I had a very good understanding of what she wanted and how she expected her ambassadors to conduct themselves.

Q: Well did you submit, do a draft, or would that have been in your province?

EVANS: First of all, going out as a new ambassador one is terribly busy with all sorts of concerns and indeed in the days after my confirmation I was busy more than...well probably ten to twelve hours a day meeting with people in different departments, getting briefings. INR very kindly scheduled a daylong meeting with scholars from around the country who came to brief me on the politics, the economics, and, to some extent, the history. And so I was very busy right up until my departure on August 23, at which point then all the focus was on getting a grasp of the embassy, staff, of who was in charge of what, what the main problems were, and of course I had to present my credentials to President Kocharian.

So the issue of the genocide was not at the top of my list by any means when I arrived and in fact I did not go out there with any intention of addressing it in any special way. What I did do somewhere in the middle of the fall was to refer to the conversation with Beth Jones in a telephone call to the desk officer and I said, "isn't it about time we see if we can revise the Background Notes so that they reflect some sense of our understanding that something happened back in 1915?" Now, I should say that up until that time the director of the office for Caucasus in Central Asia had been answering inquiries about this issue from Armenian-Americans by saying that there was "no space on the internet to address every issue." Armenian-Americans had shot back by saying "in your background notes on Fiji there's room to talk about the marshland grasses that grow in the shallow water," or something like that. But we were saying that there

was no...our explanation of why we didn't mention 1915 was that there was no room or no space on our website.

So I did suggest that we make a careful revision of the Background Notes. The answer came back that "now was not the time" because Turkey had...was in negotiations with the European Union over setting a date for the accession talks and that was to happen in December of 2004 so this was no time to monkey with the Armenia Background Notes.

So, in short, I did try to get the Background Notes amended but I was told "this is not the time" because Turkey is in sensitive talks with the European Union on setting a date for accession.

Q: Yes, well and it still is, I guess.

EVANS: Well, the date came and went and the date for starting accession talks was fixed and after a decent interval I reverted to the question again and I was told "oh, it's too soon after the fixing of the accession talks" and so the clear impression I got, this was... by this time it was January or so...the clear impression I got was that no time was a good time to bring up this issue.

Q: Well in a way, when you're looking at it, you're trying to have relations with an important country and what's the point in pulling the scab off, you know? Now, there are reasons for it but you know, we kind of let the Japanese get almost a free ride on World War II, on the rape of Nanking and its behavior in China.

EVANS: Yes. No, I am fully aware of the dilemma that this issue poses and you've put your finger on it; it is a dilemma. The dilemma is between the truth of the issue, which is now virtually unassailable when you look at what has been done in the last 20 years by historians and not all of them Armenian-American or Armenian. There are some very distinguished historians, such as Donald Bloxham in the UK (United Kingdom) and others who have made it clear that yes, what happened in 1915 did fit the definition of genocide, whatever the...I mean, it was done against the background of World War I, yes, there had been rebellions by some Armenian armed groups, yes, but if you look at that definition, the shoe fits. The dilemma for us is precisely as you said; we have a loyal NATO ally, a good ally, although in 2003 Turkey's parliament did vote against our troops going into Iraq through Turkey and that enraged a lot of people on Capital Hill as well as in the Executive Branch. But still, the dilemma here is between historical truth, which is still disputed by Turkey but by no one else, and our diplomatic equities.

Q: Yes. Well anyway, this will crop up again but let's go on to- What was the, sort of the situation in Armenia when you went there?

EVANS: The most salient fact about Armenia then and now is that it is a very poor country in a very difficult neighborhood with few natural resources and many, many economic and social problems. And so the largest ingredient of our policy there really was our assistance program, which in per capita terms was the biggest in the former Soviet Union and in fact in per capita terms it was exceeded at that time only by our assistance to Israel. Now, Armenia has only about three million people; by the time I got there the cumulative value of our assistance program was

about a billion and a half. So it was not huge in dollar terms but in per capita terms it was rather big.

The other concerns we had, of course, besides economic development were stability in the region and the development of democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Q: First place, with Armenia, how close is- is Armenia really the- sort of the center of Armenians or is this sort of an offshoot or what? Because you've got Armenians in Lebanon and Syria and other parts of Turkey and all.

EVANS: Of course the Armenians as a group go way back for thousands of years, probably 3,000 or more years. They're mentioned in the Bible, they consider themselves to be descendants of Noah's -- one of Noah's sons -- and the real...they were all over the Middle East; in various times they had had their own kingdoms but by the 19th and early 20th century the largest number of Armenians were in the Ottoman realms. The historic dividing line was between those who were in the Persian world, and that included most of the Caucasus and those that were in the Ottoman domains. So when one talks about today's Armenia it is really on the land that way back in the 18th century was under the Persian shah, but then when the Russians moved into the Caucasus it became Russian Armenia. The genocide struck at the community of the Ottoman Empire but about 60 percent of today's population of Armenia is descended from, or related to, those Ottoman Armenians who either fell victim to the genocide or escaped it. So in today's worldwide Armenian community, which is about 10 million, most of those people are descendants of the Ottoman community that was so decimated: they fled to France and the United States and other places.

Q: So they, in many ways they didn't have particular ties to Armenia as it stands today?

EVANS: That's right. In fact, there's an old linguistic division which points up that fact. The Armenian spoken in today's Republic of Armenia is that spoken also by Armenians in Iran and Azerbaijan and places like that, not the...that is, it's Eastern Armenian, whereas the Western dialect is what's used by the Armenians in Turkey and their descendants.

Q: All right. Let's see; you got- you arrived in Armenia when?

EVANS: In August of 2004, and I presented my credentials just before...on the Saturday before Labor Day of that year and had already in effect started working at the embassy and then I began my official diplomatic time there.

Q: What was the embassy like?

EVANS: In terms of people the embassy was great. We had some of the best -- I was told, in fact, by Beth Jones -- that probably the local staff of our embassy was the best educated in the former Soviet Union. We had people working on assistance who had advanced degrees in economics and so on; we had a very good American staff with the possible exception of one fellow in the Fascell Program who turned out to be selling visas along with a Ukrainian confederate of his. We caught that guy. But by and large it was a very good staff and I was very proud of them.

The physical accommodations of the embassy were atrocious but we were in the process of building a new chancery which was built really to be a fine example of the new generation of chancery complexes.

Q: In the building, I suppose you had obviously security and earthquakes in mind.

EVANS: The building we occupied when I arrived was the former Komsomol headquarters.

Q: Youth group.

EVANS: The communist youth organization. And we owned it. When we took possession of it we found that it was full of scorpions so we had a lot of work to do on it and had shored it up but indeed there was a serious vulnerability to earthquakes and that was one of the reasons we had to build our own chancery.

Q: What activities was the, you know, you mentioned relief and all but what sort of activities was the embassy involved in?

EVANS: Well, right after I arrived, of course, there was, to the north of us, in North Ossetia, there was a terrible terrorist attack on a school at a place called Beslan.

Q: Oh yes.

EVANS: And the Dean of the Corps in Yerevan happened to be the Russian ambassador. And I called... When I started my calls of course I started with the Dean and the event in Beslan had just taken place, and this was in early September. Because the attack as I remember was on the first day of the academic year, which is considered September 1.

Q: Yes. All the children were dressed in their-

EVANS: In their finest.

Q: -in their finest.

EVANS: Exactly. And we were approaching the, let's see, it would be the third anniversary of 9/11. And we had commissioned a group of deaf and dumb actors, and I don't know if that's the political correct terminology but...

Q: Hearing difficulties and-

EVANS: Yes. Challenged.

Q: Challenged.

EVANS: People. We had hired a theater and hired this troupe of actors to do a very evocative kind of a play about... basically about international understanding and the need to avoid violence between ethnic groups and so on. Without instruction but convinced it was the right thing to do, I invited the Russian ambassador to come and share our holiday of 9/11 or our commemoration of 9/11 with us. Now, some members of our staff who had Russophobia in their blood thought this was a terrible idea and wanted to ask the State Department what they thought but I was convinced that this was the right thing to do and Ambassador Dryukov vindicated my confidence by making a very moving address at our commemoration and joining with us in the face of these terrorist acts.

Q: Did you have- You say you had sort of aid programs but what sort of things were we doing?

EVANS: Well, we had a very broad program of assistance. It was not only AID but we had a big Peace Corps program. In fact the first thing I did on arriving in Yerevan in August, even before presenting my credentials, was to swear in the latest class of Peace Corps volunteers who had just gone through their initial training in country. Unlike some other post-Soviet states the Armenians were delighted to have the U.S. Peace Corps there; they worked in public health, in education, in business development, environment, and they were all over the country and a magnificent group of people of all ages.

We also had one of the most successful programs of the Department of Agriculture in Armenia; the Department of Agriculture's longest lasting and largest program overseas, in fact, which was helping farmers develop their crops, find markets for their produce and so on. That was an excellent program. And we had other programs of technical assistance to the police and the border guards and we had, under the NATO umbrella, programs in the Partnership for Peace, so there were NATO exercises in which Armenia took part. And, I must say, that just as I arrived Armenia deployed a unit of 42 military men, unarmed, to Iraq. They were primarily sappers to deal with these IEDs (improvised explosive devices), and there were a few, if I'm not mistaken, a couple of medical people as well. So we had a good bit of cooperation and a lot of assistance going on.

Q: How did the Peace Corps volunteers, what was your evaluation of their effectiveness?

EVANS: I think they were quite effective largely because they really were welcomed by the communities in which they served. Some of them ended up doing many things that were not originally imagined. Most of them were teaching English, whether they were there to teach English or just ended up teaching English. Many of them taught civil society skills. Some of them helped set up Internet cafés and things like that. Because it was a very personal interaction and they were out, almost all of them, were out in the provinces where it's a kind of a village atmosphere where personalities count and individual contact is important, I think they made a lot of friends, they did a lot for the image of the United States, and to quote Teresa Heinz Kerry, "the best face of America is the face of a Peace Corps volunteer." That's a little bit of a cliché perhaps but I think the Peace Corps did a wonderful job, still does.

Q: What was your impression of the government?

EVANS: I had been warned by Ed Djerejian already that there was a kind of an old Middle Eastern/Oriental/Semi-Despotism that was still gripping Armenia and I think that was true and to some extent is still true. Armenia has been ruled one way or another for centuries by small groups with anti-democratic inclinations and indeed President Robert Kocharian, who was a war hero from the struggle with Azerbaijan over Karabakh, was a rather fearsome, tough character, though perfectly decent to deal with and intelligent. I dealt with him almost exclusively in Russian. But he was a kind of a tough guy, a sort of a...almost to the extent of being a bully as President of Armenia. People did not cross him lightly.

Q: Yes. I remember at one point I'd been- in the mid '90s I'd been twice an election observer in Bosnia and I talked to somebody who went to Armenia and I said how was that? He said a bunch of guys with big mustaches and leather coats and it reminded you of, you know, you feel like you're amidst gangsters.

EVANS: Yes. No, there definitely was a certain amount of that. Now, some of it, I mean, there are some fashion differences that are immediately obvious; the young men tend to wear leather jackets and pointy shoes and it's...you might see something similar in the very south of Italy, so there was kind of a sleaze factor there, which strikes many Armenian-Americans who aren't used to that also as it strikes us. And the economic structures of the Republic of Armenia are very, are too closely, intertwined with the political structures. So what you really had was a kind of a tight oligarchy with a parliament that was not more than really a rubber stamp, largely.

Q: Was the Church much of a factor?

EVANS: The Armenian Apostolic Church is not a state church; it is a national church, though, and it considers itself to be the canonical representative of the Armenian people. And it does have an influence, a growing influence I would say, in Armenia because it represented the only alternative belief system once communism collapsed. I mean, there is an articulated system of beliefs and how one should live, how one conducts one's life and...although many, many, Armenians in the post-Soviet period are only nominal Christians...the fact that the Armenians took Christianity as their national religion in 301 AD is an important factor. Armenians look at...they see the Church somewhat as the Poles see the Roman Church. The Armenians see their Church as the glue that has kept their community together over the millennia.

Q: The army, the armed forces?

EVANS: Armenia had really the only serious army in the Caucasus in the 15 or 20 years after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Armenians had always done well in the Soviet army, some of them reaching the flag ranks; there were even several marshals of the Soviet Union who had been Armenians. But the more compelling reason that the army as an institution was so respected was that the army had protected Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave high in the mountains of Azerbaijan in the terrible war that broke out, mainly 1992 to '94, between Armenia and Azerbaijan over that territory. I don't propose to get into the history of how this all came about but basically the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was approximately 90 percent Armenian and they wanted to join Armenia rather than be ruled by...from Baku and this came to a terrible conflict in the early '90s with the loss of something like 25,000 victims; nobody knows exactly.

And it's still a very serious unsolved conflict in the area, where young men die every year from sniper fire that continues and the mediation effort has not as yet borne fruit.

Q: Did you have any contact with our people in Azerbaijan and were you all trying to sort out this age old problem or-?

EVANS: Well you know, when I had just arrived in Yerevan my counterpart in Baku was Reno Harnish and I thought, of course, that the three American ambassadors in the Caucasus ought to be part of one team. And shortly after I arrived, in probably early October, we were all summoned to a meeting in Tbilisi.

Q: You say "you all."

EVANS: I mean the three ambassadors and accompanying staff. We had a conference about the Caucasus in Tbilisi, and it was very good to meet my opposite numbers, the ambassadors in the other two capitals; Dick Miles at the time was ambassador in Tbilisi, Reno Harnish in Baku. But then I discovered that the attitude of the embassy in Baku was starting very much to resemble the attitude of the Azerbaijan government. The government of Azerbaijan was trying to isolate Armenia in terms of trade and other kinds of contacts. So whenever a NATO exercise was scheduled to take place in Armenia the Azerbaijanis would boycott it. I had an army major on my staff who was doing a program at Garmisch, an area familiarization, program. He requested permission to go to Baku to broaden his knowledge of the Caucasus and the embassy at Baku turned him down, saying "we don't want anybody from Armenia to come to Baku." And it struck me that this was an American, an American Army officer and why should an American Army officer, not in uniform, not be given country clearance to visit our sister embassy in Baku? And my defense attaché called to question this decision and was turned down again, saying "we don't want to talk to anybody from Armenia." So there was a bad case of localitis in Baku. They were applying the standards of the Armenian government to our embassy.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: I mean the Azerbaijani government. So there was a problem there. I tried very hard to be absolutely neutral on the Karabakh issue. We, of course, never thought of visiting Karabakh, which can only be done through Armenian territory, but our legal position is that Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan and it's...the United States along with France and Russia has been trying to mediate the conflict. But this sense of impartiality apparently didn't apply, so far as I could tell, to our sister embassy in Baku.

I should add, probably, that the mediation effort was carried out totally independently of our embassy. Steve Mann at the time was the United States co-chairman of the so-called Minsk Group, and would fly into Yerevan from time to time, along with his Russian and French colleagues, to conduct talks with the Armenians, but we were scrupulous about not inserting ourselves into his business. His was a separate operation; we simply supported his visits.

Q: Well I was wondering, with this- I have trouble pronouncing Kara-

EVANS: Karabakh.

Q: Karabakh?

EVANS: Yes.

Q: How long had this thing been going on?

EVANS: Well, if you look back it goes back in its modern form to the Bolshevik Revolution. All of the Caucasus, of course, was part of the Russian Empire, the North and South Caucasus, Azeri, Turks and Armenians and others lived side by side but after the Bolshevik Revolution there was a short-lived attempt to create a Caucasian republic. That was effectively squelched by the Bolsheviks and ultimately the three largest groups each got a republic, the Georgians, the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians. Stalin was the commissioner for nationalities and it was he who eventually decreed that this Armenian majority enclave in the mountains would be awarded to Azerbaijan, although it was given the status of an autonomous region of Azerbaijan. So there was even, in the '20s, when that decision was made in communist times, there was a recognition that ethnically Karabakh was not the same as the surrounding territory of Azerbaijan.

But then in modern times the issue came up again in...already in 1988 in the perestroika period, when Armenian nationalists in Karabakh agitated very strongly to be...they petitioned Moscow for the right to be reassigned, as it were, to be with their Armenian cousins in the Republic of Armenia rather than in Azerbaijan. This resulted in counteractions by Baku and there were some pogroms in Baku and in Sumgait directed against the Armenians in retaliation and that set off a whole series of attacks and counterattacks and then it eventually degenerated into all-out war.

Q: Well did this have ties to the Chechnya and other problems in that area or is that too much of a remove?

EVANS: Well, I would say that basically, yes, because what was happening was, in the early '90s, a large multinational, multiethnic, and, to the extent that anyone was religious, multi-confessional empire was collapsing and the new organizing principle of the new states was going to be the national principle. And so whereas everybody could live together in the Soviet Union because the principle was workers' solidarity, solidarity of workers and peasants across national lines, suddenly that whole system was thrown out and what was left was the principle of a national state with a titular nationality, that is Georgia for the Georgians, Azerbaijan for the Azerbaijanis and Armenia for the Armenians, and of course the terrible tragedy is that the Caucasus is a mosaic of nationalities; there are some 50-odd national and linguistic groups in the Caucasus and so if the principle of state organization is nationality there is always going to be somebody whose idea of the state is different. And so Georgia is now wrestling with these terrible problems in Abkhazia; the Abkhaz do not want to be Georgians. They are, first of all, Muslims and they speak a different language. You mentioned the Chechens; they are the biggest nationality in the North Caucasus and they wanted their own state, they are Muslim also and have a long history of resistance to Russian rule. In Georgia you also have the Ossetians. In the summer of 2008 we saw that South Ossetia became a...it was already an issue, whether South

Ossetia was going to belong to Georgia or not; our legal position is that it does but the reality on the ground was that they were not acceding to Georgian rule. So there are all these contradictions that were brought to the surface when the old empire collapsed and new states were formed.

I should perhaps add that there are now, after the war over Karabakh, Armenia is probably the most homogeneous of the post-Soviet states because the Azeris, almost all the Azeris, left Armenia. There are a few Kurds and some Zoroastrians a few other odds and ends but Armenia is about 97 percent Armenian at this point and Azerbaijan is also much more homogeneous than it had been before the war caused displacement of populations.

Q: Well did- Was there sort of a meeting of the minds or a sympathy between Armenia and Georgia or between our embassies?

EVANS: Well, I'd say that Georgia as a country and our U.S. embassy in Tbilisi were definitely the most neutral of the three. The Georgians found it useful to have good relations with both Azerbaijan and Armenia and so the usual location of choice for any meeting that involved all three nationalities was Tbilisi because the Azeris wouldn't come to Armenia, Armenians wouldn't get visas to Azerbaijan and so Tbilisi ended up being the place where lots of meetings took place. I hope that our embassies...certainly I tried to make sure that our embassy was simply an American embassy carrying out American policy and we avoided any...we certainly fought against any localitis that might be breaking out. We did have one Armenian-American among the expatriate staff of the embassy, from Pasadena, but otherwise our Foreign Service contingent was pretty much just standard Americans with no hyphenation.

Q: Did you have a city full of visitors from Armenian communities in the States or elsewhere, like, you know, in France there's a big Armenian community.

EVANS: We did have visitors from America, not from France, but we...I remember one of the big Armenian community groups, the Armenian Assembly, sent a large contingent through Armenia, through Yerevan, in the fall, it would have been in October or November of 2004, and I addressed them. And I might mention that that was the only time, in all the time I was in Armenia, that the question of the Armenian genocide arose. It never...I was never asked by an Armenian journalist about the genocide but I was asked a question by a member of this traveling group from the Armenian-American Assembly. The man got up and said, "I know what the State Department position is, that there was no genocide, but then how can you explain to me that I had no aunts, no uncles and never knew any grandparents?" And I explained to him that the United States Government had never denied the facts of what had happened in 1915, and to my knowledge we have not denied the facts, but what is at issue is the characterization of those events. And I probably at that time said that there was a question of whether there was "intent" on the part of the Ottoman officials.

Now, I should say a word about the Genocide Convention, if I may, because it was during this time that I became better educated on what the Genocide Convention really says. And what I discovered is that most of us Foreign Service officers are woefully ignorant about what the Genocide Convention says is genocide. There are basically four conditions that have to be met. First of all, "one or more persons" needs to have been killed. Now, that's not very many: "one or

more.” The group must be a “national, ethnic, racial or religious group.” It says nothing about political groups. There must be “intent” on the part of the perpetrators to do away with the group “as such,” to eliminate the group “in whole or in part”; that’s the terminology: “in whole or in part.” And the fourth condition is that these actions must take place in the context of a “manifest pattern of such actions in the past,” of discrimination against the group in the past. So all those conditions need to be met for it to be considered genocide and what had seemed to be missing was the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part” members of the group.

Now, we have never found and probably nobody ever will find, a firman signed by the sultan or orders in cabinet saying, “destroy the Armenians.” In the case of the Holocaust we still have no written order by Hitler to destroy the Jews and we probably never will find that, although we do have Hitler’s signature on the Nuremberg Laws. That’s not the way these things happen. The word gets out there what’s to be done but it’s not...there’s no good paper trail because in the case of such a crime one would be a fool to leave such a paper trail.

But in 2003 and 2004, under the leadership of Marc Grossman, who had been Under Secretary of state for political affairs, there was organized something called the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission, and that group was an independent, track-two kind of group composed of some well-known Turks and Armenians and it was called the TARC. David Phillips was the executive director of it and this Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission looked at the events of 1915, looked at the Genocide Convention, and came to the conclusion that at least some of the perpetrators of those events did know that their actions would lead to the destruction of the Armenians of Anatolia and therefore to refer to those events as genocide was fully justified, and that journalists and historians and others would be fully justified to continue to use that term. But, at the same time, the Genocide Convention could not be invoked ex post facto to -- in a legal sense -- bring anyone to justice. So, in short, what this commission basically decided was that historically it was a genocide but in legal terms to press that claim against the government of Turkey would be unsuccessful. And I think that was a fairly wise way of splitting the difference. All the perpetrators of those events are now, by definition, gone, most of the victims are gone. There are only...there are fewer than a hundred very old people now who were small children in 1915 and so it seems to me that’s a fair way of splitting the difference, to let the Armenians call it genocide in a historical sense but not to try to pin that crime on the Turkish state or the Turkish people today. And I was...I made myself familiar with those findings, they were brought to my attention; I met with one of the people who had worked on that and I must say I thought this was a very reasonable way forward.

Q: Well then, was sort of the bureau pushing on all this or was this something that you all thought should be done?

EVANS: Well, neither. I mean, the EUR Bureau was just carrying on its daily business as it does every day, driven by the news on the front page primarily. There was no desire to unearth old history. But it was around this time that I was asked to make a speaking tour through the United States, particularly to communities where there was a dense population of Armenian-Americans. So I was scheduled to make a tour, a speaking tour, in February 2005, starting in New York, moving up to Boston and then going to the West Coast to Los Angeles, which is the biggest concentration of Armenians in the United States, and then to San Francisco. And it was right

about this time in the beginning of late January of 2005 that my wife flew back to the United States to be with our daughter, who had discovered that she needed to get a divorce from her then-husband and she was emotionally a wreck. So my wife came back to the United States, leaving me in Yerevan with a lot of books to read, and one of those books was the very fine Pulitzer Prize winning book called “Genocide: A Problem from”-- no, it’s called “A Problem from Hell: America and Genocide” by Samantha Power. And so I had time to read that. And I also read a compendium of essays edited by Jay Winter of Yale University; I think it’s called “America in the Age of Genocide.” In the same period I read Peter Balakian’s prize winning book called “The Burning Tigris,” which was also about America’s response to the Armenian genocide. So whereas most ambassadors don’t have much time to read, the absence of my wife and a fairly quiet winter social season left me in my library consuming these books and becoming more and more disturbed about the dissonance between established historical fact about what happened in 1915 and U.S. policy, which seemed to me to be very much propping up the Turkish official denial of what had happened in 1915. So I became more and more, as the date for beginning my speaking tour in America came closer and closer, I realized that I was facing a huge dilemma here. I knew that I was expected to repeat the tired old message that we didn’t take a position on the genocide, that we questioned whether there had been “intent” and so on, and yet I had read enough by this time to realize that the great preponderance of historical opinion was that indeed, there was no question about it, yes, there was a genocide of the Armenians that took place 1915 through ’18. So I set off for the United States not knowing how I was in the end going to respond to questions about the Armenian Genocide.

There’s something else I ought to add at this point, Stu, about the period we were living in, and that is that our Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who I had huge admiration for, had in September of 2004, after a State Department study of the matter, Colin Powell had come out and said that he thought that what was happening in Darfur in the Sudan did constitute genocide. That was a very brave thing for him to have done. I agreed with him from what I knew of that situation and his action emboldened me to endeavor not simply to be a bystander on a question of genocide but to stand up and say something about it. Even though it was 90 years in the past I felt that someone needed to take a stand on this issue and call it what it was. I knew that this would cause difficulty for me, I knew that it was contrary to the policy of the State Department and yet I felt that I was caught in a terrible dilemma between knowingly distorting the facts of history or coming clean and trying to deal with the facts while explaining the reasons for our policy, and that was the trap that I -- or those were the horns of the dilemma -- that I faced. And I must say that I really didn’t know when I set out on that speaking trip which course I would take.

End of Reader