

YEMEN

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HERMAN FREDERICK EILTS
Principal Officer and Consul
Aden (1951-1954)

Ambassador
Saudi Arabia (1965-1970)

Ambassador Hermann Frederick Eilts was born in Germany in 1922. He received a bachelor's degree from Ursinus College and a master's degree from the John's Hopkin's School for Advanced International Studies. Ambassador Eilts was a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army from 1942-1945. He joined the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included positions in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, England, Libya, Egypt, and an ambassadorship to Egypt. Ambassador Eilts was interviewed by William Brewer in 1988.

Q: And then after that year, in the spring of 1951, you were assigned as Principal Officer and Consul in our Consulate in Aden. Am I not right that in that capacity you had particular responsibilities for the Kingdom of Yemen?

EILTS: Yes. I was initially assigned to the American Consulate in Aden, not as Principal Officer but as a supernumerary officer to handle Yemen affairs. We had no resident diplomatic mission in Yemen at the time. People from Aden went up to Yemen regularly. It was the view of the people in the Department of State that the handling of Yemen affairs from Aden was too much of a burden on the then Consul, so an additional officer was named to the American Consulate at Aden to handle Yemeni affairs. I was designated for that task. We would go up to Taiz - the Consul continued his interest in Yemen - the Consul and I would go up, say at the beginning of the month, whatever the month might be, spend ten days up there and then come back to Aden. I would then do the reports and send them from Aden because we had no communication facilities

out of Yemen. The same kind of pattern would be repeated each month.

Now when the Consul left after about seven months on transfer, I was named Principal Officer at Aden, but continued the system of shuttling back and forth between Aden and Yemen, specifically the city of Taiz where the Imam lived, and in that way conducted US business with Yemen.

Q: I see. Were there particular problems that arose in US-Yemeni relations that required a lot of attention in that period?

EILTS: Well, there were a number of problems that arose. I guess the principal problem that existed at the time, one in which we did not want to get involved because we had no direct interest, but invariably got involved, was the difficulties that the British and the Yemenis were having over border issues. The Yemenis kept asking us for our support and the British kept asking us for our support against the Yemenis. It was something we tried to stay out of. It really involved a greater degree of reporting than one would normally expect because both sides appealed to us. The main issues involving the United States itself had to do with the beginnings of an AID program. We had not yet really begun one when I left Aden, but it started soon afterward. We had had a number of talks with Yemeni officials right after President Truman had established Point Four, in which offers of Point Four assistance, what later became AID, were made to the Yemeni government. There was an initial reluctance on the part of the Imam to accept it for a number of reasons. He felt the amount wasn't enough. He also felt that the requirement that he had to report, or somebody had to report, on how the money was being used, was an encroachment on Yemeni sovereignty. At the same time it was clear that not only the Imam, but other Yemeni officials were most anxious to get some kind of American assistance. And eventually, as I say, we did mount a small AID program in Yemen, but that was one subject of recurrent discussion.

A third had to do with the famous or infamous, which ever you will, Wendell Philips expedition. Wendell Philips was an American archeologist, at least he called himself that, who obtained from the Yemeni government a concession to do an archeological dig in Marib, the site of the Queen of Sheba's palace, and sent a small group of people out there. Most of them were not archeologists, most were technicians, people of that sort. In due course the Imam became dissatisfied with the pace of things. There weren't enough legitimate archeologists there, so he canceled the concession. At that time Philips, who was not on the ground but spent most of his time in the United States collecting money, came back to Yemen and obtained the Imam's permission for the Philips group to remain in Marib for another ten days. It was the Imam's understanding that they would utilize that time to take out their equipment. Wendell Philips went to Marib but then one fine day, as I remember it was Lincoln's birthday in 1951, he and his party staged a dramatic escape from Marib across the desert into the Aden Protectorate, claiming publicly that the Imam's people were about to murder them all, that they had had to leave behind hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of archeological equipment and that they had barely managed to escape with their lives. Well, it took about a year before that was straightened out. As you might imagine, since some of Philip's backers were very prominent Americans, appeals were made by those prominent backers to the State Department in Washington, on the assumption that

Philips was in the right and the Yemenis were in the wrong. I, as the American Consul in Aden, also handling affairs in Yemen, had to find a way of getting this equipment out. Eventually it turned out that the Imam's argument was that the contract, Philips' contract, had been violated. He, Philips, had not fulfilled the terms of the contract, hence the Imam wanted him out. The suggestion that there had been any effort to kill members of the Philips party, the Imam indignantly denied. The Philips party, it developed, owed local tribes, that is people who had worked for the enterprise in Marib, something like 8,000 Maria Theresa dollars - those large German silver coins that they first started minting in Austria in 1792 and are still minting, and which were the unit of local currency in Yemen. The amount at that time, in terms of American dollars, would have been perhaps \$6,000, no more. Philips did not have the money to pay and the Imam said, "No money, no payment for those Yemeni laborers, no taking the things out. Pay, and he can come in and take them out." Eventually Philips got from the Scaif Foundation the dollars to enable him to buy the necessary number of Maria Theresa dollars.

Then we had a further period during which Philips and others contended that the money had been paid but still the Imam wouldn't allow the equipment to be removed. In fact, I had never received the money. It took time to straighten that out. I pointed out to Washington that I had never received any money from Philips or from the Scaif people or from anybody else. I'd been awaiting it, but hadn't received it. Apparently Philips had spent the money on something else. In due course he got some more money from Scaif but this time they sent it to me, as Consul in Aden, directly. I remember converting it into Maria Theresa dollars, loading them on a jeep, driving up to Taiz and paying the Yemeni government the Maria Theresa dollars. With that the Imam said Philips' people could take the stuff out. When I passed that on to the one remaining Philips representative in Aden - a mechanic, a very nice fellow - he said, "I won't go in there alone because they'll kill me." So I got permission from the Imam to go to Marib with him as a kind of protection. We went to Marib, by road through the West Aden Protectorate. When we got to Marib, to my horror this "hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of valuable archeological equipment" turned out to be a couple of tires, a couple of shovels, a huge Coca Cola vending machine, which couldn't operate in Yemen under any circumstances, numerous cases of Coca Cola syrup, and numerous cases of paper cups for Coca Cola. That was the hundreds of thousands of dollars which Philips had claimed he had had to leave behind. Eventually we either sold the equipment that was left there, including the Coca Cola machine which the Amil of Marib bought for reasons that have never been clear to me, or took out the unsold stuff. That, however, was an issue - the Wendell Philips case - which, I think, was the major part of US-Yemeni relations for the better part of a year and a half.

Q: After your period in the Department, which ended I guess in 1961, you had a year at the National War College and then you were assigned to London and I think you told me that in the first part of your assignment, which was to the Near Eastern desk in London, you spent a lot of time working on Yemen again. How did that happen?

EILTS: About a month after I arrived in London (I arrived in London in August of '62), i.e. in September of '62 the Imam Ahmad died. His son, Muhammad al-Badr, took over. About three

weeks later there was a revolution conducted by Yemen military officers against him. The palace in Sanaa, where he was staying, was shot up, and it was believed he was dead. It turned out that he managed to escape into northern Yemen, and he reappeared with the Zaidi tribes of that area. Very quickly, out of this developed a Yemeni civil war between Yemeni republicans and royalists. The royalists were those who continued to support the Imam Badr, the republicans were the army officers who conducted the coup.

The Egyptians supported the republicans, the Saudis supported the royalists. It was a period when Nasser was still describing Arab monarchs generally as reactionaries. So the Saudis took very seriously, not only the revolution that overthrew the monarchy in Yemen, but the fact that it should be supported by Nasser. Within six months after the civil war began, the United States recognized the Yemeni Arab Republic. The British government continued to recognize the royalists. So in my job, as a Middle East officer in London, I was caught in the middle with the British acting to support the royalists, perhaps not so much officially, although certain members of Parliament were very active in urging support for the royalists and pressing us not to go too far with the republicans because they didn't occupy most of the country. If the Egyptians pulled out, the British contended, the whole thing would collapse. And we taking the position that the Imam Badr was something archaic who should have been gotten rid of, and that there was indeed much more support for a Republic. The British and we were on different wickets and it affected our and their views on Egypt. They, of course, had had problems with Nasser before, and it affected their and our views on Saudi Arabia. So we had the question of being on opposite sides at a time when we were in general trying to get some kind of harmonization of British policy and American policy toward the Middle East, something that had already been disrupted in the '56 war, the Arab-Israeli war, and had then improved somewhat. Now again, e.g. this issue of the role of the Egyptians in Yemen and the Yemeni civil war that harmony had been disrupted. That was the principal issue.

Now I must say this. The British were much smarter than we were, not on the issue I'm talking about but on their operational method. The British would always involve their man in Washington, my opposite number, and first give him whatever information, whatever they wanted him to say to the Department of State. They knew that in order to get information you have to give information. And only afterwards when I, from the American Embassy, came would they speak to me about it. They always used their man first. This was not a question of lack of confidence in me because they asked me all kinds of things. I knew more about Yemen and more about Saudi Arabia than most of them. Factual questions of all sorts were constantly put to me by the British, but the method of using their officers was always using their man in Washington first and only then confiding in me. And we, we never did it that way. We never did put our man out in front, we somehow didn't seem to realize, or at least place that much weight on the idea, that to get information you have to give it.

Q: That's a very good point and I certainly agree. Then after the Yemen thing subsided I believe you said that your second preoccupation turned out to be Cyprus. How did that...

EILTS: The Yemeni thing never really subsided. When I went subsequently as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, the Yemen problem was still underway. But by that time the British had become

accustomed to our views and we had become accustomed to theirs.

Q: Ambassador Eilts, in your mission to Saudi Arabia what was your primary aim?

EILTS: Well, I suppose the primary aim was to continue the close relationships that the United States and Saudi Arabia had enjoyed for a long period of time. The issue had become a bit complicated because of differences between the United States Government, the Kennedy administration and subsequently the Johnson administration, and the Saudi Arabian government, and particularly King Faisal, over the issue of Yemen. As we discussed earlier, the United States had recognized the Yemen Arab Republic. The Saudi government strongly supported the Yemeni royalists, and we were trying to persuade the Saudis to cool it a bit in order to help negotiate a settlement of the kind that we felt was desirable; i.e., some kind of acceptance by the Saudis of the Yemen Arab Republic. The Saudis would have none of it for reasons of their own. We clearly had a divergence of interests on this whole issue of Yemen.

The problem was, given the very deep Saudi feelings on the Yemeni issue, which were far deeper than anything we had in the United States, and the fact that we had these divergent outlooks, keeping our relationship sufficiently close so that a dialogue could continue on trying to find some mutual accommodation on the Yemen issue. That was the primary mission in that early period.

When I arrived in Jeddah - I remember arriving on a Thursday, the following day was Friday, the Muslim Sabbath - I had assumed that since it was also the month of Ramadan at the time, that I would not have to present my credentials to the King for a week or ten days. Well, as it turned out, I received word on Friday that the King wanted me to come the following day and present credentials, which I then did. But the credentials presentation ceremony was very, very short indeed because the King wanted to sit and talk about Yemen. He pulled me aside right afterward, took me into his office, and for two hours talked about Yemen and what he felt was the shortsightedness of the American position on Yemen. He obviously had some of the same worries that I did, that the friendship between the two nations was threatened by this very significant difference over Yemen. By that time the American mediation mission, headed by Ellsworth Bunker, had for a period of time thought it had had a success. The Egyptians and the Saudis had agreed to have the conference at Haradh in Yemen and to try to resolve the issue through negotiation. Each was, of course, pushing its particular set of Yemeni clients...

Q: Excuse me. You're speaking of approximately November 1965.

EILTS: Each was pushing its respective clients; the Egyptians, the Republicans in Yemen, the Saudis, the Royalists. These two parties, theoretically at least were to sit down and work out a mutual accommodation. By the time I arrived in Saudi Arabia, Faisal had come to the conclusion that President Nasser of Egypt had reneged on that arrangement. Instead of carrying through the promises, additional Egyptian troops had been sent into Yemen and the Egyptians showed no signs, at least as Faisal saw it, of wanting to convene the Haradh conference. So the Bunker

mediation idea, which the United States Government had catalyzed and supported, seemed to be falling apart. "Where do we go now" was the issue that was very much on Faisal's mind.

Faisal, after Khartoum, provided money to Egypt and thus brought about the Egyptian withdrawal from Yemen, causing at least the Saudi-Egyptian clash on Yemen to subside.

MICHAEL E. STERNER
Vice Consul
Aden (1957-1956)

Ambassador Michael E. Sterner was born in New York in 1920. He received a bachelor's degree from Harvard University. He served in the U.S. Army prior to joining the Foreign Service in 1951. Ambassador Sterner served in Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt, Washington, DC, and was ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. He was interviewed in 1990 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Well, tell us about your first assignment and what you were doing.

STERNER: I was sent to Aden. It was a small two-officer post. Bill Crawford was the Consul and I was the Vice Consul. It was very much a straight consular consulate for that period of time and I did all the consular work. You know, we got drunken American seamen out of jail, and we repatriated people, and so on...but it had some interesting political dimensions to it. We covered Yemen because nobody else did. We had no post in Yemen in those days. Nothing much had happened for a long time in Yemen. It was one of those remote places in the world that nobody ever got to and nobody had any perceived interest in. But all of a sudden, there was a sort of mini-crisis in the Eisenhower Administration when it became aware that the Soviets were interested in the place. This was peak cold war period and people got interested in areas where the Soviets were making any kind of inroads. At the time the Crown Prince of Yemen, Badr ibn Ahmad, began to consort with the Soviets, invited a Soviet delegation to come and look at oil concessions possibilities, got some Soviet engineers to come down, and made a trip to Moscow, as I remember. Well, this all astonished Washington, and made them realize that Yemen, a place they'd never heard of before, was indeed one of the most strategic countries in the world. Bill Crawford began to get instructions to go up there and cultivate these Yemenis and try to point out they were doing the wrong thing. So the Cold War sort of came to the Consul in Aden and Yemen. We also had at one point responsibility for British Somaliland. That was almost entirely consular in nature - just to visit every now and then, make sure our citizens were all right, issue passports, visas, etc. Aden itself was rather a large territory if you wanted to take it seriously. There was the city of Aden, which was a British Crown Colony, and beyond it you had both the Western Protectorate and the Hadhramaut, sizeable areas to roam about in.

Q: What was the situation in Aden and around, because I've never really fully understood it, and

also why that area remains a hard core Marxist regime? Why in the Arab world which seems so impervious to this sort of business, and how did it happen?

STERNER: That's a very good question. I have no satisfactory answer for it, and certainly my experience in Aden at that time would not have suggested a colonial background that was very different from many other parts of the Arab world. When we were there, it was an early stage in the growth of Arab nationalist movements in the colony itself. But Gamal Abdul Nasser was at the peak of his popularity at the time. This naturally had an impact even in far off Aden. The British were beginning to have to cope with nationalist pressures and movements. There was quite a bit of political ferment in those days but it was all peaceful and only later became violent. When Curt Jones was Consul ten years later it was really dangerous. He had to go around with guards and there were grenades going off in restaurants. It was quite serious. That was not happening when we were there. Bill Crawford...

Q: This would be William R. Crawford?

STERNER: William R. Crawford. Yes.

Q: There are several Crawfords.

STERNER: He was later our Ambassador in Yemen and Cyprus. He tried to be in touch with some of the Adenese who were beginning to become nationalists and opposition leaders. This caused a bit of heat at times between ourselves and the British. They felt we should not have contact with some of these people because we were giving them enhanced credence and respectability, and we had to sort that out with the British and make it clear that we had a responsibility to Washington to keep them informed about what was going on. On the whole our relations were really very good with the British Government down there. Aden is a magnificent natural harbor. It had a large British Petroleum refinery. There was a lot of sea traffic. The port was always full of ships that had transited the Suez Canal, were refueling and picking up supplies.

Q: Was the Suez Canal open at that point?

STERNER: The Suez Canal was indeed open at that point. It was the '67 war when it had a prolonged blockage. Unlike the Aden Colony where there was a very direct and immediate British rule, the British in the Protectorate areas relied on a loose structure of advisors and tribal rulers who were linked to the British individually in protectorate treaties with the understanding that they were not to deal with foreign powers, that the British had commercial rights and privileges, and in return for that, they offered the Sheiks protection. Every now and then the British would feel that one of the rulers was consorting with the wrong people - Yemenis, or going off on his own and required a bit of punishment, at which point a Lancaster bomber would lumber off from Aden airport and usually after a warning so the little town could be evacuated, they'd drop a few bombs to blow up the Sheik's palace. That was the manner of British control which had been going on for a long while.

Q: They'd been using airplanes in the Arab World since World War I.

STERNER: Sure. That was the way to get the tribes in line. On the whole it worked and it was not the hinterland that ended up posing a problem for the British. It was the underground movement in Aden itself.

Q: At the time you didn't feel any great stirring?

STERNER: In our time the movement in Aden was not strong enough to be seen as a threat to British rule, but all of us could speculate from the impact that Nasser and other Arab nationalist movements were having. You remember the Qasim revolution in Iraq happened about this time as well.

Q: That was July 14, 1958.

STERNER: Quite right. We were down there about that time. The British and American intervention in Jordan and Lebanon, respectively, also in the summer and fall of 1958. It looked as if western interests were on the run.

Q: I assume you had the same thing we saw in Dhahran and Bahrain that is, the marketplaces were filled with pictures of Nasser on thermoses, on cups, on pictures, everywhere you went, Nasser was the equivalent of a sort of god. This was in the marketplace.

STERNER: Absolutely. I remember walking through the streets of the bazaar in Aden, and when Nasser was giving a major speech you could walk from place to place in town and not miss a word because every radio in the entire town was tuned in. He really had the power to stir these people up. So one could speculate, coming back to your question, that this would be a tide that would affect western interests in a far-off place like Aden.

Q: Also at the time, and I'd like your feeling on this, as Americans who were interested in foreign policy, we saw nationalist tides as being the wave of the future and we were not sure what was going to happen. We were both for and against them, sort of an ambivalent feeling. One, they might louse up our problems in some areas, but at the same time we were for anti-colonialism and wanted these people to emerge.

STERNER: I think that was very much it. We thought this was something wholesome, a new phase of welcome self-determination in the world, providing they didn't start consorting with Moscow. That was a big proviso because I think subsequently we lacked confidence that these people had the ability to make deals with Moscow and not become the creatures of the Soviet Union.

Q: Now, you went into Arabic training. Is that right?

STERNER: Yes, I left early since it was short of the normal two-year junior assignment in a post. I spent eighteen months in Aden.

WILLIAM R. CRAWFORD, JR.

**Principal Officer
Aden (1957-1959)**

**Chargé d'Affaires
Taiz (1957-1959)**

Ambassador William R. Crawford, Jr. was born in Pennsylvania in 1928. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Saudi Arabia, Italy, Lebanon, Cyprus, Yemen, Romania, Morocco, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by William Moss on March 12, 1991.

CRAWFORD: On July 4, 1972, about 4:00 a.m. in the morning, I got a telephone call from Bonn. It was the North Yemeni ambassador in Bonn, who said, "Bill, it's happened."

I said, "Mohammed, it's 4:00 in the morning here. What on earth has happened?"

He said, "Your Secretary of State is in Sanaa. Relations have been renewed. Now you must make yourself the first ambassador."

Well, at that point I have to go back in history. I had been in and out of Yemen from 1957 to 1959. The job of independent consul in Aden carried with it responsibility for representing on a day-to-day basis US interests in Northern Yemen, as well, where our ambassador in Jeddah was accredited as minister. The Jeddah ambassador would go down to this dreadfully benighted place (or so it was generally regarded) up in the mountain vastness of the Arabian Peninsula and be differential to the Imam of Yemen and so on, but seldom more than once in a tour in Jeddah. Reporting coverage was really left up to the Aden consul, who was nominally the second or third secretary of a non-existent legation in Yemen.

In the period of 1957 to 1959, the Russians and Chinese both - this is shortening this enormously - for different and competing reasons had gotten substantially involved in Yemen. The Russians had shown an interest in the 1920's for genuine strategic reasons because of the country's position controlling the Bab-al-Mandeb southern entrance to the Red Sea. This was part of the Russian historic push south toward fresh-water ports. The Chinese, on the other hand, wanted to block the Russian push southward by their own thrust east to west. They also saw Yemen as a jumping-off point into Black Muslim Africa, in which they were intensely interested.

Suddenly, from our reporting out of Aden, Washington began to concern itself with what the Russians and Chinese might be up to in this funny country that nobody knew anything about. In the course of an assignment that was over two years in Aden, our efforts were really divided between the Aden post and coverage of Yemen. Again making a long story short, as my Aden assignment was coming to an end, I was able to make all the physical preparations for opening a

legation in Yemen. When I left, the job split into two, a legation in Taiz, North Yemen, and a consul in Aden. In those two years, it had become obvious to me that this archaic government in Northern Yemen couldn't last for long. This was a theocratic, despotic, just dreadful medieval kind of regime which forbade foreigners from entering the country, forbade its own students from leaving the country for further education, etc. Jails were overflowing; the overflow prisoners shuffled the streets with a ball and a chain, a huge cannon ball attached by a manacle to the ankle.

But I had gotten to know several of the young men who wanted educations and who were prepared to be ostracized politically and even go into exile for the sake of college study. It seemed to me that they were the hope of the future in Yemen. It seemed obvious that when something happened to the then-Imam (Ahmad), Saudi Arabia would intervene through the tribes, and Egypt would intervene to protect its protégés. And as it turned out there were several years of civil war when the Imam finally died in 1962. But I felt it would be these young men seeking an education, believing in the future of their country, who probably, in fact, would be that future after the anticipated conflict following the Imam's death had sorted itself out.

So I helped a number of them get scholarships to the United States, and one in particular became, over the years, my closest Arab friend. He, in fact, had already gone into exile in Aden and had to support a family. In 1957 he had come into the consulate in Aden to give Arabic conversation lessons. He was threadbare. He came from a very distinguished opposition family in Northern Yemen, the Nu'man clan of intellectuals. Through him, I got really into the Yemeni scene. We had become, as I say, close friends.

Following the 1962-67 civil war, my friend, Muhammad Ahmad Nu'man, as one of the young republicans, had moved up very quickly in the post-revolutionary, post-civil war government, to be political advisor to the president, ambassador to France, then ambassador in Bonn.

WILLIAM D. WOLLE
Consular Officer
Aden (1958-1959)

William D. Wolle was born in Iowa in 1928 and received his B.A. from Morningside College and an MIA degree from Columbia University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1951 and served in Iraq, England, Lebanon, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, and Kenya. He was appointed ambassador to Oman in 1974 and to the United Arab Emirates in 1979. In addition to his overseas assignments, Ambassador Wolle served at the Office of Near East Economic Affairs and as officer in charge of Arab-Israeli Affairs. At the time of his retirement in 1986, he was a senior personnel officer. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

WOLLE: But the best stories I have about Ambassador McClintock came a bit later when I was

in Aden, my next post.

He and Mrs. McClintock, without their poodles, paid a visit to Aden. They wanted to see Aden...I think they went on to two or three other posts in the region. They flew in and were our house guests. As I recall Bill Crawford, my boss in Aden, was away at that time...up in Yemen, perhaps. So Mimmi and I had the McClintocks as house guests. She went shopping with Mrs. McClintock and from what she said Mrs. McClintock was every bit as bold as her husband. In fact, the story about her was that Mimmi was driving the car and they spied a rare parking spot near the shopping center. Before they could get into it another car was heading for the same spot so Mrs. McClintock dashed out of the car, ran to this open parking space and literally laid down on it to scare the other car away until my wife could park.

By the way, Rob McClintock was a great swimmer. He always had a back problem so I understand for his health he had developed a habit of swimming. We took them out both afternoons they were there and he swam back and forth longer than I could keep track of doing his daily exercises.

Q: By the way on that, I heard somebody say that he did this in practically subfreezing weather one time at some post.

WOLLE: The McClintocks were to leave Aden on a P&O Line steamer. We arrived at the dock and went on board with them because it wasn't sailing for another 45 minutes or so. Together we sort of looked around the boat. He observed the lounge and the people there. He peered into the dining room where the first sitting was having a meal. There were gray heads everywhere. He turned to us and said something like, "Well, we certainly will be the only passengers under 70 on the whole boat." Not his kind of crowd. But off they went.

Q: You were assigned to Aden and you went there when?

WOLLE: I went early October, 1958 expecting a full tour of duty. I worked there for Bill Crawford...

Q: That is William R. Crawford.

WOLLE: Yes. He had already served a couple of years at the post. I replaced Mike Sterner, who oddly enough was transferred to the language school in Beirut which was then reopened.

Q: I might add that I have interviewed both Bill Crawford and Mike Sterner.

WOLLE: The situation at Aden was that it was still a Crown Colony. Bill Crawford's job for the totality of his assignment, which I think was 1956-59, was fascinating because from Aden he was responsible for not only the Crown Colony, but the Aden Protectorates, Yemen and British Somaliland across the water. So he traveled to one place or the other frequently. He and his number two, which I became in the fall of 1958, rotated trips up into Yemen, staying at the Imam's guest house in Taiz for perhaps ten, fifteen days, perhaps three weeks, at a time. And

after returning, about three weeks later the other officer would go up and spend some time. So it was a fascinating post having such a mix of responsibilities.

In my particular case, though it turned out to be an assignment of about nine-ten months of duration. For the last several months of my assignment I had another hat to wear myself, which was to be responsible for our relations, few as they were, with Oman. In fact I was up in the guest house of the Imam in Taiz decoding a message on a one-time pad from Bill Crawford down in Aden and couldn't figure out what this one was trying to say. I finally deciphered it and it said that I had been designated to go from Aden to Muscat in mid December, 1958, with Walter Schwinn, our Consul General from Dhahran, in order to accompany him when he signed on behalf of our government the updated Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations and Consular Rights with the Sultan of Oman.

As is perhaps known, Walter Schwinn, over the previous two or three years while at Dhahran, had flown on six or seven occasions to the southern province of Dhofar in Oman usually accompanied by Earl Russell from the Embassy in Beirut to negotiate this updated treaty. But Earl had been transferred from Lebanon and now it was time for the signing. So I had the interesting experience of not only going with Mr. Schwinn to the treaty signing and the pouring of wax, but also meeting the old Sultan.

A month or two later, accompanied by my wife, I flew to spend a few days in Dhofar and a few days in Muscat to meet some of the officials and the very tiny American community. That was a winter in which Washington had decided to open a consulate at Muscat. They had gone so far as to ship from the US the physical things needed to open the office...desk, paper and supplies. I was told to look around for an appropriate site for the consulate, something to rent.

Well, just before I left Aden to go over there, about January, 1959, the decision had been made in Washington not to open in Muscat but instead to open a legation in Taiz, Yemen. But I couldn't tell the people in Muscat anything about that, since that fact was still confidential. So we were welcomed by a red carpet treatment by the American missionaries in Muscat, them thinking that an American consulate would soon be in their midst. And to this day I feel quite guilty knowing as I did that these supplies were going to be reshipped to go to Yemen instead of Oman.

Q: By the way there has been an interview done with Walter Schwinn which we have on his negotiations. It is quite interesting.

WOLLE: Did he tell you about the ring?

Q: I can't remember, would you relate it?

WOLLE: The signing, I think was on December 20, 1958 He was flown by a small ARAMCO airplane down to Muscat, picked me up and we flew to Dhofar where the Sultan was spending all those years. The night before we headed out from the Cities Service Oil Company guest camp to be taken to the signing at the Palace he had said, "Don't let me forget my signet ring because when the wax is poured on I want to make an impression with my signet ring." And wouldn't you

know, he forgot it, I forgot to remind him and he didn't realize it until it was too late. So no impression could be made on the wax. As I say, he never blamed me and I was grateful.

Q: What was the situation in Aden? It is a little hard to go back to that time but Aden seemed to have these multiplicities of governments which take off in different directions and only one city there.

WOLLE: The Colony, the Eastern Protectorate, Western Protectorate, within each Protectorate several different rulers and home rule everywhere it seemed. The British, of course, were not just under the counter but were officially in control in the Colony and they had the Protectorates. So most everywhere I went, the people I had to deal with were British officials, Colonial officials. Aden was then a very quiet, very hot place. Politically, I don't think there was very much interest at that time but it wasn't too many years before lots of trouble developed.

My work during the times I was in Aden was focused on economic/commercial matters. We had an American consular officer. Bill Crawford himself did the majority of the political reporting and contacts with Governor Sir William Luce. I found it was interesting but didn't much more than get my feet wet because the total length of my tour was only about nine months.

Q: How did you find Yemen in those days?

WOLLE: Well, Yemen was really fascinating because first of all the trip up was precarious. We used Jeep station wagons. The drivers we had at the Embassy were Yemeni, and they went all out. If we had let them do all the driving, we probably would have been bounced out, so consequently we did some of the driving ourselves. The old Imam was still the government in Taiz. That was where he made his capital, not up north in Sanaa. In fact, I never got up to Sanaa. While we were in Taiz, as his guests, we took up our own food, etc. The living was quite different.

We were dealing heavily with two or three of his top officials. Foreign Minister Qadi al-Amri was one. I have vivid memories of a couple of meetings with him along with Bill Crawford, and one or two on my own later. By the way, al-Amri was killed in a plane crash in Italy a year or so after those days.

The most vivid memory I have is of being in the market in downtown Taiz one day when suddenly two or three open vehicles with machine guns mounted and triggers at the ready came rolling down the main street and in the midst of this little caravan was a Jeep, perhaps a Land Rover, with the old Imam, himself. He was a fierce looking character. He looked like he would be ready to pluck your eyes out at the drop of a hat.

The city was very, very undeveloped. I had the unique experience while I was up there of signing a lease for two buildings. Now the reason why we signed the lease for two buildings to open the Legation, was that we wanted one building and we knew the one we wanted. The landlord was willing to sign, but the Soviet Embassy, which was pretty thick with the Imam's government at that time, was leaving a three-story, decrepit building, rather picturesque, but it looked unsafe,

and in order for us to get permission from the Imam's officials to lease the building we wanted, we had to lease the other one as well because its influential owner insisted. So we got the okay from Washington. I guess Bill did some fast talking. So we signed the leases, and the physical transfer of funds for the first year's payment took the form of Maria Theresa thalers. There was no paper currency there.

Q: These were rather large silver...

WOLLE: About twice the size of a silver dollar.

Q: One might say that they were certainly the currency of the area.

WOLLE: That is right. You had to carry a box of heavy money if you wanted to do some shopping.

Well, to sign these leases and turnover the first year's payment, we arranged with a merchant to get him some USG checks and load into our vehicle a whole car full of wooden crates full of these Maria Theresa thalers and then physically carry them to the business establishments of the landlords and have the payments counted out. The transfer took several hours and some physical work was involved.

Q: As an aside for the record, I think the Maria Theresa thaler was originally during the time of Maria Theresa in Austria but somehow that had become the currency in the Middle East and it was continual although she had been dead for two centuries. It had continued to be produced in a mint in Switzerland, or some place.

WOLLE: Yes, and all bearing the same original year, 1763. I think throughout this Horn of Africa region these coins were in great use and demand.

Q: We still had quite a few of them in Dhahran at the same time. In case of emergencies we had those and gold Napoleons...so you could buy your way out if there were problems.

Yemen was really quite different from the rest of Arabia, wasn't it? I mean it was a fairly fertile area and had a very large population.

WOLLE: Yes, Yemen had a lot of terraced agriculture. In my time they had suffered a serious drought. That fact led to one of the other interesting things I took part in. Due to Washington's interest in getting into closer relationship with the Imam, as evidenced by its decision to open a Legation, we agreed on an AID program with Yemen. We were going to ship them some PL 480 wheat. We did so, which would be a story in itself, but which I can't tell because I wasn't present when this wheat actually arrived. But on one of my official visits to Yemen, my driver and another colleague from the Embassy in Aden and myself, all went down on another rickety old road to the port of Mocha, nearly abandoned but famous for coffee shipping in the older days, because we had learned that the American ship bearing the first shipment of PL 480 relief flour would be arriving off Mocha at a certain date. So we went down and were greeted very

courteously. But we searched the horizon all through the next day and nothing appeared. Somehow I got word that Bill Crawford in Aden had had later news that the ship had been delayed by a week or ten days. So I never did see that flour. But I did see later some fascinating color photographs taken by an AID transportation expert named Dick Williams, who at a slightly later point flew into Aden, went up to Mocha and supervised the unloading of that first cargo of flour, which had to be done on the backs of Yemeni laborers wading out into the water to take these sacks of flour off lighters with the ship hanging a few miles off shore. In a way it was sort of a race because we were trying to land our relief shipment before the Russian relief shipment arrived. And we succeeded despite the delay.

In fact, on a subsequent trip, maybe my last one up into Taiz, I stopped along the roadside and talked a bit with a Yemeni farmer. We mentioned that American relief flour had arrived in the country and we were happy to be able to help the country in its time of need. His response was something like this, "Well, Imam hasn't given me my share yet." And I think that sort of characterizes the feeling at that time among so many of the Yemenis. They felt a personal tie with the very autocratic ruler they had. This is common in Arabia: a feeling of a personal relationship between the subject and the ruler no matter how many levels there are in between. In Saudi Arabia the King accepts individual petitions.

Q: I think this is something that is often overlooked when we talk about parliamentary democracy, that we fail to realize that there is almost the equivalent of a town meeting type process going on in parts of that world.

WOLLE: And I think a lot of the citizens in those countries feel that.

Q: What did we feel about...the Chinese weren't in there at that time were they?

WOLLE: As I recall the Chinese were not there yet, I may be mistaken.

Q: Anyway, how did we feel about the Soviet competition? What was our concern and how did this take place?

WOLLE: The Soviets had been there with some sort of an aid program and presence for at least a few years. We had not. As far as what developed after we got in with our Legation...I think it was Chuck Ferguson who was the first officer in charge there...I can't say much about it because I was transferred out of Aden by July.

For our part that winter and on those trips up to Yemen we really had little if any contact with the Soviets and the contacts that we had with the top Yemeni officials seemed to indicate to us that at least some of them, if not most of them, were trying to maneuver the situation in a way that they could decrease Soviet influence and begin to rely more on Western help.

Q: Can we talk a little about Aden. Aden turned into a very nasty place. It is often forgotten but it was as bad as Cyprus or almost anywhere else before the British finally got out of there. You said it was relatively quiet, but were you getting contact with potential dissident groups?

WOLLE: I don't think we were getting very much, no. Curiously one of our local employees in the Embassy was very close and involved in one of the local dissident groups. I think Bill Crawford was relying in a small part at least on what he was hearing through this source. But we certainly didn't have the feeling that things were going to blow up. We thought the British would stay on for some time to come. They were the experts in dealing with all the various rulers. They still had them gathering in London for their summer vacations.

Both Aden and Yemen were so far removed from the Arab-Israel scene that, just as I found later in Oman, they are so wrapped up in their own problems that most of the population has very little feeling for the Arab-Israel problem. They spend very little time bending your ear about it. Just the opposite from the situation, say, in Jordan.

Q: Even in Saudi Arabia it kept coming up all the time. Were there any problems that we were getting at all involved in at that time? Boundary disputes between Yemen and Saudi Arabia or anything like that?

WOLLE: From Aden at that time we really weren't. In the incoming messages we were reading about some of these boundary disputes.

Q: At the time that we were there...I was in Saudi Arabia most of that time...the British and the Saudis didn't have diplomatic relations because of the dispute over the Buraimi Oasis which is up near your later hangout the United Emirates.

WOLLE: Right. And I might say that there was at that time, 1958-59, nothing foretelling what later became a violent struggle between South Yemen and Oman in the Dhofar area. That came along nearly a decade later.

Q: Did you get to British Somaliland?

WOLLE: No.

Q: Bill Crawford was your boss. I wonder if you could characterize him because he was later Ambassador to the Yemen and to Cyprus?

WOLLE: I am a great admirer of Bill Crawford and I don't say that because you suddenly ask me that question. I felt he was doing a marvelous job in Aden balancing all these balls in the air. I said to people for years thereafter that I never met an officer of roughly my grade who surpassed Bill Crawford in terms of effectiveness. He went on from that job to Director of Arabian Peninsula Affairs. I certainly came to realize in contacts with the British officials in Aden, that they had an extremely high regard for Bill as the American Consul there. They felt he was very wise, he wasn't stepping on their toes, and his judgment and his ability to look ahead and figure out what might happen was something they valued. So for a good many years after that I stayed in close touch with Bill Crawford.

Q: Who was supporting this [Arab] guerrilla movement [in Israel], what was the origin of that?

WOLLE: The organization that was causing the revolution called itself the Popular Front for the Liberation for Oman and South Arabia. It was backed heavily by the leftist government in South Yemen, from Aden. The supplies came in from South Yemen across the land border. The country down there is quite difficult terrain with some low mountains. During the summer time particularly, the monsoon rain, winds and storms come in from the south and make it difficult to patrol effectively and to keep trails and tracks free of incursions, or to conduct any kind of air strikes or offensive action against the guerrillas. The British and the Omani forces would wait until the winter months to conduct their main operations. But in the summer months the guerrillas would be supplied over these trails.

Q: How about relations with the Yemens?

WOLLE: Oman had diplomatic relations with North Yemen, the Yemen Arab Republic, but not with the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), which was accused and openly admitted backing the rebels in the south.

MARSHALL W. WILEY
Administrative Officer
Taiz (1958-1960)

Marshall W. Wiley was born in Illinois in 1925. He attended the University of Chicago, where he received a Ph.D. in 1943, a J.D. in 1948, and an M.B.A. in 1949. Mr. Wiley was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy from 1943 to 1945. He joined the State Department in 1958, serving in Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: Your first assignment when you came in 1958 into the Foreign Service was going to Taiz. I get confused over the Yemens. Where does Taiz fall?

WILEY: Taiz is in north Yemen. That was back in the days of the old ruler, who kept the country quite isolated. My visa that I received to go into the - what was then the legation. It was something like the 67th visa that had ever been issued for north Yemen. [Laughter]

Q: I was doing work - on the reverse, at the other end. I was in Dhahran issuing visas to Yemenis going to Lackawanna, New York and Youngstown, Ohio. Could you describe a little of what Taiz was like at that time.

WILEY: It was the Imam that ruled the country. He moved around frequently from Taiz up to Sanaa or down to Hodeida. He was very suspicious that there were going to be coups organized against him - which, of course, there was a year or two later. Taiz in those days was very much like a city out of the Middle Ages. They locked the gates at sundown and didn't open them again until the next morning. It was an experience of, literally, going back and living in the Middle Ages. There was no water, except what you could go and hire coolies to dredge out of a muddy pond near Taiz into large containers that you then took back and pumped up to the roof tanks in your building. There was no electricity, except for a small generator that an Italian had set up strictly as a private enterprise. He would sell you a connection up to the generator which he only ran at night. He didn't run it in the daytime. So for a refrigerator, you had to use a kerosene burner type of refrigerator, which was always smoking and the wicks burning out. [Laughter] So everyday living was something of a problem at that point.

Q: What sort of a mission did we have there?

WILEY: In those days when I first went there was just two officers, Bill S(Inaudible) was the Chargé, and I was his assistant in practically everything. The way it worked out, Bill did the critical reporting, and I did practically everything else, including the administrative side.

Q: What was our interest in the Yemen at that point?

WILEY: The major reason that we had opened an office there was our concern over the penetration of Communist China into the Yemen. They had come in and offered some rather substantial assistance to North Yemen, in the way of road projects and other economic assistance. This, of course, caused a number of eyebrows to rise back in Washington, and we thought that we ought to have some diplomatic representation there as well.

So the office was originally manned out of Aden. Then, later, it became fully resident, although, for awhile, it was under the ambassador in Cairo. By the time I got there, there was an independent chargé d'affaires. Then I was the number two man, although it was still not an embassy. At that point, it was a legation.

Q: Were we concerned about the penetration of - for want of a better word - Nasserism there? It certainly was a factor in other parts of the Arab world.

WILEY: This was in the late '50s. We were concerned about Nasserism, particularly in places like Aden, which was strategically considered quite important in those days. But then, at that stage, it was still a British colony. The British were concerned about possible subversion from Nasserite elements in Aden. Yemen Proper there was - that is, by Yemen proper I mean North Yemen, where I was - there was not much Nasserite penetration at the stage that I was there, because the population was pretty isolated, largely illiterate, and had very little contact with the outside world, including the more radical forces in the Arab world at the time.

Q: For one thing, one of the concerns was the spreading out of Palestinians, who were considered to be the bringers of Nasserism at that point, if I recall.

WILEY: There were almost no Palestinians in North Yemen. They were not permitted in the country. Just about the only foreigners there were a few Italians, who had established kind of a beachhead there when they were across the Red Sea in Eritrea. But even the Italians had very small numbers present there, a few doctors that were in the country operating very primitive equipment. Then the Chinese made this move, in which they offered a lot of assistance to the Yemen, and were able to bring in a number of workers who were working on roads and so on, which is when we became more concerned about possible communist penetration of the country, of course.

Q: Well, looking at the Chinese effort there, this was certainly a wide jump from where they were, without sort of a Navy, or Air Force, or anything to support it. Looking at our assumption at the time, did we - was it borne out that this really a real danger, or was this just a sort of a peculiar Chinese effort which was doomed to failure, if it meant to have any political influence?

WILEY: Well, this was the late '50s, if you remember, when the Cold War was pretty much at its height. We were worried about any apparent increase in communist influence anywhere in the Middle East in those days. It was true that the Chinese capability was fairly limited. They certainly had no Navy or Air Force. They were definitely not a military threat to the region. I think we were more concerned about possible subversive activity. The Chinese, there, could have linked up with more radical indigenous elements and attempted to overthrow the regime, in order to establish a regime more sympathetic to them, which is basically what happened down in Aden, of course, in the southern unit later on. South Yemen is still very much dominated by the Soviet Union these days. We were concerned about the possible subversive efforts against the Imam, who was not all that popular at that time in North Yemen.

Q: What was our view of the Imam, or how did you see him at the time? Did you have any dealings with him? What type of person was he? How did he operate?

WILEY: My boss saw him a few times. I didn't see him directly. He was a rather reclusive individual. He kept to his palaces with a few of his friends and concubines around him. He did not appear in public very often. He kept a very autocratic kind of regime. He was quite capable of executing people who showed any opposition to the regime and did so publicly from time to time. But he did not have a broad base of support, except in certain of the traditional elements among the tribes, who had traditionally supported his tribe or his family. It was only a year or so later that the Egyptians overthrew him in a *coup d'état*, and his son came into power briefly and then he was expelled in turn. Then that started the long civil war that went on in North Yemen between the Egyptians, who sent in troops, and the Yemen army, the indigenous army who opposed Egyptians, whom they considered invaders, and eventually the Egyptians were forced to leave the country as you know. But it was mainly the Egyptians who organized the *coup d'état* that did overthrow the Imam.

Q: When you were there, were we watching the Egyptians rather closely? Were we concerned at that time?

WILEY: I think in that period we were rather concerned about the way Nasserism was spreading all through the lower gulf, and in the Yemens, etc. I don't think North Yemen was all that much of a strategic hot point for us. Nevertheless, we were concerned about it, more, I think, because of its relationship to Aden, which, at that point, was considered the more strategic port.

Q: How about oil? Were we thinking in terms of oil there at the time?

WILEY: There was some exploration going on. John Mecom came in when I was there and did some exploration, but then he was unsuccessful and he left again. Subsequently, there, they have been more successful and there is some oil now being produced in the Yemen. But it was never considered to be a major potential for oil there.

Q: So, we weren't thinking in terms of oil reserves there, or something. We were more concerned about its strategic location.

WILEY: I think, yes, in those days we were more worried about Aden, and we were worried about the lower gulf, that were rich in oil, and the possibility that our adversaries internationally could use Yemen as kind of a bridgehead to then move into these other countries that were more strategically important than North Yemen was. And also about Saudi Arabia, because they had always had a rather special relationship with North Yemen, and they still consider North Yemen to be kind of within their sphere of influence. Of course, our interests in Saudi Arabia were much greater because of the oil reserves in Saudi Arabia.

WILLIAM A. STOLTZFUS, JR.

Principal Officer

Aden (1959)

Chargé d'Affaires

Taiz (1960-1961)

Ambassador William A. Stoltzfus, Jr. was born in Lebanon to American parents in 1924. After receiving an AB degree from Princeton, he joined the Foreign Service in 1949. His extensive career included service in Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, Saudia Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and an ambassadorship to the United Arab Emirates. Ambassador Stoltzfus was interviewed by Lillian P. Mullin on May 14, 1994.

Q: In 1957 was Don Heath. And at that time was Yemen still part of that Embassy's control?

STOLTZFUS: I'm not sure. Yemen, you'd have to look up its history. Yemen moved under Egypt. Egypt had a lot of interest in Yemen. And they had a senior representative down there who was getting close to Crown Prince Badr. That is a whole other story. During the time of Wadsworth we went down on a visit to Yemen to see Imam Ahmad, the

Ruler. I'll have to do a little thinking about this before I continue and I'll have to talk to my wife to see if I can recall the facts a little bit better. I'm not exactly sure why we went. Whether it was just a routine visit or we were getting ready for Eisenhower...not Eisenhower himself but the Eisenhower doctrine, through which you gave money to people so they wouldn't go under the Soviets. And Yemen was one of the countries targeted.

Q: We will begin again where you were. Talking about your sort of final months in Jeddah.

STOLTZFUS: Very quickly. I arrived in Jeddah in 1996 and I think that December Ambassador Wadsworth went down to Yemen because that was part of his bailiwick. And I think it was just a visit to the Yemenis to talk about relations and so forth.

Yemen is just...it is something you had to see to believe. Absolutely if you read about how things were in the Middle Ages in Europe, it had to be the same. There were very few vehicles. The roads were not paved. Their ruling family was the Hamid al Din. Their monarch was called the Imam. Imam Ahmad had taken over after his father had been assassinated on the road near Sanaa. And then there were all those tribes in the north that were being paid by the Saudis. They are Zaydis, who belong to the Shiite sect of Muslims. The people in the south are Sunnis. The two groups still don't have much use for each other even today.

But at that time Yemen was totally feudal. The tribes in the north, the Hashid, Bakil and Khawlan, were constantly restless and defying the Hamid al Din rulers. It was much like medieval times where the king had control of some areas but not over the whole country. He had to pay people to stay in line.

In Taiz there is a hill or mountain called al Qahira, the word for Cairo in Arabic. It is steep sided and at the top of it is a fort, a castle.

Q: You were talking about this interesting fortress named Cairo on the top of a hill in Taiz.

STOLTZFUS: Right. The atmosphere in Yemen in those days was absolutely fantastic, and a throw back to the 12th century. One thing I want to say up front is that the Yemenis are the nicest, the most friendly and hospitable people that Janet and I have ever known. And yet they lived under this completely autocratic and medieval tyrant. Of course he had his preoccupations because, as I said, some brooding chieftain who thought he should be the potentate instead of the Imam was always waiting in the wings. So the Imam had his hands full.

In Taiz there is a mountain called al Qahira. And on the top is a fort cum prison. The Imam would snatch a son or two of his major rivals and keep them hostages in that fort. They were hostage to the good behavior of their families. That was one of his systems of control. He didn't have much in his treasure chest and the coffee trade had gradually dwindled. The famous Mocha coffee...Yemeni coffee plantations were not as great as before.

Coffee was largely replaced by *qat*, a mild narcotic grown on coffee-like bushes. One chews the little leaves of the bush. Many Yemenis still chew *qat* and export some. But the Imam didn't have a lot of income from taxes. The Saudis were the ones with bucks, which they used to influence affairs in Yemen. In the 1930s the Saudis with then Prince Faisal at the head of the army invaded and defeated Yemen. Saudi peace terms were generous. However, the south western part of Saudi Arabia is really an extension of Yemen, geographically and socially. Yemen's border might be further north today if the Yemenis had not lost that war.

The Imam didn't allow any schools except the so called *kuttab*. At the *kuttab* you only study the Koran. You sit there and learn the Koran. You memorize it and learn to chant. The students are taught by religious sheikhs. But they do not study the "Three R's" or science.

There was virtually no electricity. We had electricity several hours an evening when the ancient town generator was working. Our refrigerator ran on kerosene and didn't do badly I must say.

One of my most vivid memories when I was assigned to Yemen was the sound of chains. It was commonplace to see somebody who had committed a misdemeanor clanking along in public with chains on his legs.

Q: You would hear that on the street?

STOLTZFUS: Well, sure you could hear it on the street. There was a Yemeni who had become an American citizen and had come back to Taiz on a visit. I don't remember what trouble he got into but he came to call at the Legation one time and he had a chain clamped on one of his ankles with the other clamp up his leg. His jailers had undone the one to his other leg so he could walk over to the Legation. He was indeed clanking along, but he didn't seem that distressed. He felt that he was going to be released pretty soon. I asked him, "Is there anything I can do?" And he said, "No, I just wanted to talk to somebody here." I never heard from him again. So I guess that eventually he left.

Traveling in Yemen was another unique experience. If we were on a trip to Sanaa, for example, to call on ministers there, we would stop at a town where there were no public hotels. In fact there were no commercial hotels at all in the country at that time. There were royal guest houses, and the royal guest houses were not exactly outfitted with the latest plumbing or sleeping or dining facilities. One of the stops on the way to Sanaa from Taiz is Ibb, an attractive town reached in those days over muddy tracks. It was nice to get there but though Ibb was less than 100 miles from Taiz, driving there could take you all day because you'd get stuck in the mud or break down.

Below the Ibb guest house was the local jail. From your room you could hear clanking and the murmur of prisoners. They were in chains which you could hear all night long.

Q: In jail they were chained as well?

STOLTZFUS: That's right. And outside of Sanaa there are or were these little cubicles. You'd

think they were empty or maybe meant for sheep or goats. Then you'd hear these clanking chains. There would be two or three guys in there incarcerated for whatever they were incarcerated for.

Q: What were the crimes?

STOLTZFUS: Mostly theft. It was a poor country, you know. Either theft or some insult to somebody. I don't know that justice was all that arbitrary but the usual misdemeanor...you know, your camel ran over somebody. There would be some reason that they would be locked up. Then of course they had public beheadings too. I never felt the urge to go and watch one but that was just the normal procedure for treason or murder - those ultimate crimes. The authorities would make it known throughout the area that a beheading was about to take place and you were expected to go and watch.

Q: How did they spread the word about the beheadings?

STOLTZFUS: Well, you just knew. It's like small communities with no radio, no electricity, no TV, no nothing. You just know. It never occurred to us to communicate in any way except either send somebody next door if you wanted to have a party and invite them, or go yourself. It was just...these things were known. You'd have a public crier go through town maybe. That is the normal way to do it. He would just go through town calling out the fact that such and such was going to take place at such and such a time.

Ours was a very small community and all of us foreigners knew each other intimately.

We were always at each other's houses. And Yemenis would come to certain events. But obviously the Imam did not encourage his subjects to get any bad ideas by spending time with foreigners. They were careful about that. My wife started a school in Taiz and that is another story - quite an interesting story. Her school is still running. I got permission from the Imam to have that school, which was the first normal kind of school in the history of that country.

When we went down with Ambassador Wadsworth...as I recall it was basically a routine call so we could report what was going on in Yemen.

Q: Where did you stay if there was no...?

STOLTZFUS: We stayed in one of those royal guest houses in Taiz. The Yemenis had done their best to spruce it up and clean out the rather primitive bathrooms and all that sort of thing. It was really quite comfortable actually. But you know, there were no modern facilities of any sort.

Q: You did get the message to them somehow that you were coming?

STOLTZFUS: I assume it was through Bill Crawford, our Consul in Aden, who also covered Yemen. Bill incidentally lives in Washington and somebody must definitely talk to him about Yemen. Because he and his wife fell in love with Yemen the way we did. He visited Yemen for us and reported on the situation in Southwest Arabia.

The Yemenis were so gracious. It was such a unique place. The charm and uniqueness were great for us foreigners to experience. But for the Yemenis themselves it was very tough. They had the dirty end of the stick. There is no doubt about that. They were held under ruthless control and they weren't allowed education or basically any modern amenities. It was the same policy as that of Said bin Taimur, the ruler of Muscat, father of the present Sultan. He had this same idea that you don't give your subjects notions about the outside world lest their eyes be opened to what they are missing at home.

I'll never forget one time when we stopped along the road on one of the trips to Sanaa. The Yemenis are such picturesque people. They wear their turbans and *jambiyas*, a dagger attached to an ornate belt, and in the countryside everyone carries a gun. Such a man was passing by so I asked him how things were and how he was. His answer was, "We don't know anything except the Imam." That was his answer. He was not going to say a thing to me, not even whether his feet hurt. He was perfectly cordial and nice, and if we'd asked him to help push us out of the mud, he would have done it. If we had said we were hungry he would have given us his last piece of bread. At the same time he was absolutely firm on not saying one single thing that might indicate he wasn't happy or that might be reported by us to Sanaa. I'm sure he could imagine my saying, "I met so and so on the road and he said things are tough." He was going to be very careful that nothing like that ever happened. He didn't know anything except the Imam. That was what he said to me.

That was the way it was in those days.

Q: So then after you had home leave in 1959 you were assigned to Aden.

STOLTZFUS: I was assigned as Consul to Aden to follow Bill Crawford.

Q: There were two Yemens then?

STOLTZFUS: Yemen is a unified country now but in the '50's South Yemen consisted of the British Crown Colony of Aden and the Aden Protectorate. The port of Aden was an important fueling station for the British navy. There was a large refinery nearby in Little Aden. That was the Crown Colony. And then there was the rest of "South Yemen" that the British had as a buffer between them and Yemen, called the Aden Protectorate. They never had good relations with Imam Ahmad of Yemen. The Protectorates were divided into half a dozen domains and there was a ruler for each one of them. They were protégés of the British of course. But they were treated as rulers of their domains.

In Aden some local political activity was permitted to leaders of the Trade Union Congress, the precursors of the Marxist government that came into being at independence. The south has always been leftist, progressive; the north conservative. The women are bright and active in both areas but in the south they have had much more freedom, therefore more education and influence in society. This became clear to me when I attended a conference on the upcoming union of North and South Yemen held in London in the late '80s. The women who spoke at the conference were all from the south, and their energy, outspokenness and obvious freedom irked some male

members of the audience, young male northerners who found these southern women unseemly and brazen. They should be at home with the kids and cooking!

We did not stay long in Aden - about six months - before we were transferred to independent Yemen, a much more interesting assignment. We did however have one notable adventure while in Aden. We wanted to see something of the Protectorate, so when an expedition was being assembled to allow some agriculturalists to look at land in the interior and the military to inspect the frontier with North Yemen, the British authorities permitted Janet and me to join it. Several Protectorate Rulers were also included.

We first drove through Lahej, the area of most agricultural interest, and then continued to Dala, traveling over stony tracks through narrow wadis and passes, ideal for ambush. As I've said, relations between the Imam of Yemen and the British and their proteges in the South were poor and security throughout North and South was fragile. Assassinations were frequent; even a British agent in the Protectorate was killed now and then. So our convoy was heavily guarded and it stopped periodically to allow soldiers to run up the ridge on both sides of the wadi to ensure that no hostile force was in the vicinity.

Dala was the province which bordered on independent Yemen. We stayed overnight with a British detachment at the foot of the mountain near the frontier. At this remote outpost there was obviously little in the way of entertainment. After drinks and dinner with the officers we were privy to a little game they played. Rooms in their living quarters were cooled by large ceiling fans, so in the common room the officers gathered around while one of them climbed up on a table and began to ease his bare head against the whirring fan. As he applied more pressure, the fan began to slow. And so on until he had it stopped. This was one of their amusements. They laughingly told us that one inebriated fellow had so miscalculated that he scalped himself. Now, whenever I see one of those overhead fans I'm reminded of the bizarre game we witnessed those many years ago.

The next day we climbed the mountain to check out the frontier. Most of us walked while the rulers rode horses. One of them seemed quite embarrassed to see a lady - Janet - walking, but I don't recall that his discomfort extended to offering her his horse. A sort of nineteenth century note was struck when Fadl, our butler or "bearer" as the British would say, who had accompanied us from Aden, held an umbrella over Janet to protect her from the sun as they climbed.

On a ridge at the top we could look across the valley to the opposite promontory and the gun emplacements of the "enemy." It was amusing to think of that scene only weeks later when, having been transferred to Taiz, we were comfortably at home in Yemen and friends with that enemy.

That night we stayed in a crude stone fort, very similar to the little crumbling castles you see in Britain or Europe, dark and dank. The ground floor was for animals, covered with dirty straw. The narrow winding stairs took you to the upper floor. In one room dinner was served, strictly hot Yemeni food; we sat on the floor. This scene was not for Janet or for one of the agriculturalists, who retired to another large room which was the bedroom for everyone. This

arrangement was not so bad but the bathroom situation was, for ladies, nothing short of desperate. The toilet was a hole in the floor of a tiny room with no door. Janet's husband - me - was not especially sympathetic. Luckily we were in the middle of nowhere, so divorce proceedings could not be initiated immediately! The return trip was accomplished without incident.

Q: So what did we have then? A Consulate in Aden and an office or something in Taiz?

STOLTZFUS: No. We had nothing in Taiz.

Q: We had nothing. It was under the Embassy in Jeddah?

STOLTZFUS: Yemen was under the Embassy in Jeddah. And Crawford or whoever was Consul in Aden would be the one who made most of the trips up and who reported to Jeddah on the state of affairs and what was going on. Bill Crawford was an excellent reporter. His reports of his trips make fascinating reading. He did a super job of that.

At some point, I'm not sure exactly when, towards the end of Crawford's time, we decided to have an office in Taiz. And I think probably at that time is when we shifted Yemen to be under Cairo instead of Jeddah. That might have been 1958 even. Charlie Ferguson was the first official American to reside in Yemen. He was the one who set up our office in Taiz and as Chargé he reported to Cairo.

Then for one reason or another Ferguson decided to go with an oil company, or at least he decided that he wasn't going to stick with the Foreign Service anymore. So he left. I was Consul in Aden and wanted the job so I said, "How about me?" Washington replied, "Well, we have somebody else in mind. His name is Philip Ireland." Philip Ireland was assigned to go. But when Ireland made the assignment conditional on certain things, he put it in jeopardy. I don't blame him. He was getting on in years and Yemen was primitive. I mean it was for a young person. That was not an assignment for somebody who needed medicines or who couldn't handle discomfort.

In those days we were perfectly willing to sleep out in the rain if necessary. I mean...we just loved being in that country. But Ireland asked for certain things, like special arrangements to bring in food and so on from Asmara, Asmara being the Eritrean city where we had a listening post. We had a lot of military there, including of course a PX. But we never asked for that sort of thing. Crawford never would have asked for it. If you needed anything that you didn't have in Taiz, you went yourself or you sent your driver down to Aden to get it. Much of our food was out of tin cans, and there were guinea fowl in the mountains that we shot. We ate off the land as much as we could. There wasn't very much to eat and the eggs were all rotten and so forth.

But it was not the sort of situation that Ireland could relish. To make a long story short, the Department decided that it would be a lot easier to deal with Stoltzfus who was too crazy to ask for anything. So I got the job.

Q: *You went to Taiz a few months after you arrived in Aden?*

STOLTZFUS: Yes. We were not in Aden more than six months or so. We were in Yemen from some time in the late autumn of 1959 to the summer of 1961 when the Department decided it was time to bring me back home for a little change of scenery. I then was assigned to the Personnel Department.

Q: *So you were in Yemen for two years. And you were the only person there in this Consulate?*

STOLTZFUS: It was a Legation.

Q: *Crawford had opened the place.*

STOLTZFUS: No. Crawford did the reporting and covered it from our Aden Consulate.

Q: *And Ferguson?*

STOLTZFUS: Ferguson came in and basically oversaw the building of the office and quarters.

Q: *We actually built a building?*

STOLTZFUS: Yes. A stone structure like everybody else had up there.

Q: *No electricity?*

STOLTZFUS: The electricity was on for a few hours a day. At sundown. You could hear the motor start up...chug, chug, chug. You had electricity for the evening hours, that's all. But we got a kerosene refrigerator and I must say, kerosene refrigerators are great. They work fine. It was amazing. I never expected them to work like that. So we had that to keep things cold. And then we didn't have many demands. We gradually lost weight. I got down to about 158 pounds by the end. But we were fine. We just thought it was great. We loved it.

Q: *How many people were in the office?*

STOLTZFUS: Eventually there were seven. People came and went. I took Ferguson's place and Richard Mitchell - I'm not sure what he did before - he was a young officer and came in as my deputy. We had a communicator, Ralph Gandy. And then when Mitchell left...well, we had a problem there. The CIA put in a radio that I should never have allowed. And that is another story. It was installed in Mitchell's house because the CIA determined it would operate better there than at the office.

Well, so they set it up in Mitchell's house and put up a huge antenna. Needless to say it wasn't 24 hours before one of the Imam's informers told him about it. The Imam said, all right, the Chargé will have to leave. I was declared *persona non grata*. It was sort nip and tuck there for awhile. One of the Imam's brothers was the Yemeni representative to the UN. He said to the Imam, we

can't have this guy thrown out, there is no way we can do that. Another brother, Abd al Rahman, came up to talk to me and then to the Imam, and he got the Imam somewhat quieted down. But the Imam said, "Someone's got to go."

Anyway, for about a week, I suppose, it was unclear whether I would stay or not. But finally the Imam relented. All of his advisors said no, do not expel the Chargé. So they kicked Dick Mitchell out instead, the radio being in his house. That made a good excuse to say, well, it's his fault and so on. So poor guy, he had to leave and was replaced by Bob Brown. And then when I left in 1961, Robert Stuckey took over from me.

Q: And while you were there in 1959, it was rather unsettled?

STOLTZFUS: Oh, yes. My goodness! There were any number of efforts made to assassinate the Imam. I wrote a dispatch once, "Who Killed the Imam?" And there were about six or seven possibilities. And I made a list of who they might be and who might have done it. It was interesting. It was difficult not to have interesting reporting out of there because there was always something happening.

The Imam was definitely marked for assassination and the Egyptians liked his son better. Crown Prince Badr had some sexual proclivities that they took advantage of and so forth. The Egyptians were grooming him to be the next Imam and Imam Ahmad was not really strong enough to do anything about such interference. He rarely saw his son.

Again, that is like the relationship between the Muscat Sultan, Said bin Taimur, and his son, Qabus, who is now the ruler of Muscat. Father and son only communicated by note and lived in different parts of the palace. Said never saw his son. Well, this situation was somewhat similar.

Imam Ahmad took whatever he could get from East and West, while his son was always hobnobbing with the eastern bloc. The eastern bloc representatives were in Sanaa and the western bloc, including us, were in Taiz. I have to correct that and say that the Russians and Chinese were also in Taiz but Sanaa was where all the other Communist country diplomatic offices were: Poles, Czechs, East Germans, etc., doing things to get themselves in good graces. The Imam liked to divide and conquer where he could.

The Imam himself preferred Taiz and the coastal plain of Tihama, Hodeida and Sukhna. Ostensibly Sanaa was bad for his health, it being high in the mountains, cold and rainy, bad for his arthritis. However, since his predecessor Yahya had been murdered on a road outside Sanaa, his reluctance to hang around that city is understandable. Son Badr stayed in Sanaa. He was called the Red Prince. And he had visited Russia. By the way, the Egyptians were also in Sanaa.

Q: The Communists were trying to get a foothold on the Arabian Peninsula?

STOLTZFUS: We were all - East and West during the Cold War - battling for Yemen at that time. I mean, we all had our own projects. And of course the Yemenis were happy to take advantage of that. We had the road between Mocha and Sanaa through Taiz. That was our road

building project. The Russians had the road from Mocha to Hodeida. And the Chinese had the road from Hodeida to Sanaa. So it was kind of a triangle. Each one having his own side. The Chinese also built a textile factory. The Russians improved the port of Hodeida. The East Germans, the Czechs, they all had their little projects. We had a project to improve the water system in Taiz. That was under AID.

We were all there like a bunch of fish in a fish bowl. Each of us doing our own little thing. And the Yemenis were reaping the benefit. That was all right. They were poor. But our job, along with the Italians, British, West Germans and French, were to keep our own influences going there.

Q: And the whole thing was because of location?

STOLTZFUS: Absolutely. See, the bab al Mandab is the bottom of the Red Sea and you have Ethiopia and Somalia on the west side and Yemen on the east. That is a very strategic point, very strategic - the lower end of the Red Sea. Absolutely.

Q: Which the Brits knew long before.

STOLTZFUS: The Brits had known this for a hundred years. That is right. Well, there are many stories about Yemen.

Q: Tell us some stories.

STOLTZFUS: Well, among the various things...we were always looking for ways to do some dirt to the eastern bloc side and get some advantage for ourselves. At the same time we were friendly with the Russians on a social level. Not so with the Chinese.

Yemen could be said to be a microcosm of what was going on in the rest of the world. Beside the U.S. - Soviet rivalry the Russians and the Chinese clearly had no use for each other either. But the Russians had to show at least the outward niceties, so at their diplomatic parties or some shindig at the Russian legation, they would invite us - the Americans and the Chinese. The Chinese always came on time or early. One time after my wife and I had arrived and been greeted by the Russian Chargé and his wife, we found ourselves approaching six Chinese men. When they saw us they immediately spun around and faced the wall. Like six pictures on the wall, they just faced the wall and stood there as we came in. It was a most amusing sight. And the Russian Chargé said, "What can we do with these people?" He found their behavior totally crass. The Chinese would have nothing to do with us of course.

Although I did have a conversation once with the Chinese Chargé. Just strictly on the "QT." I'm not sure I reported that. He was an elderly gentleman, clearly of the old school, and in other times we would have been good friends. And we didn't go very deeply into politics as I recall. Simply wishing mutually for better times.

Q: Interview and oral history with Ambassador William Stoltzfus. This is June 14, 1997. Before we had to put in a new tape, Ambassador, you were telling me about this conversation with the

Chinese Chargé in Taiz, in maybe 1959 or 1960.

STOLTZFUS: Yes. It was either very late 1959 or 1960. We just strolled around in the garden and chatted. I think he was taking some chance doing that. Certainly there were enough of those fanatical, wide eyed people in the embassy who would have reported on him. I'm not sure why he took a chance like that. Anyway, he was very cordial. We had a pleasant talk. And as I say, it was not a lot of high politics, nothing very memorable. It was clear that he was no Communist thug, but a real gentleman.

We always had a lot of fun with the Russians. We were really very close to the Russians there. Just on a personal basis. The Russians always liked to drink of course and when I'd call on the Chargé in the morning, he always had bottles of vodka and cognac ready. I said to myself, "Wait a minute." But we got to have fun with it. It was in the time of...what was the spy plane?

Q: *Gary Powers? U-2?*

STOLTZFUS: Gary Powers. U-2 incident. There were interesting things going on in the outside world, so we had plenty to argue about. And we were certainly not supporting each other in any way, but on a personal level we had a lot of fun. He'd say, "All right now, I've got to get you drunk so you will tell me things." So I'd have a few vodkas and so on. Then when he came up to call on me, of course I had the scotch and the bourbon and everything out. We had fun on a personal basis.

We also did a lot of entertaining because there was nothing else to do there. We had films. The Russians had films. So we would invite each other back and forth. One of the Russians was a man called Organientz, who was quite a rogue. I don't know whether he was their intelligence or their information service man, but whatever he was, he was entertaining.

Q: *You had electricity if you were having films. Or was this your two hours of electricity?*

STOLTZFUS: No. I think we must have had a generator.

Q: *A better generator by this time.*

STOLTZFUS: No, you are right. I mean, how did we do those films? I guess we must have had some kind of generator.

I must emphasize, of course, that on a political basis we and the Russians were in stiff competition. When Dick Mitchell was thrown out over the radio incident, you know, we weren't very happy about that. The foreign minister at the time was friendly to us. There were some indications that the Russians blew the whistle on us. This is probably not true at all, I think that it is much more likely that one of the Yemeni informers reported the radio. However, we let it be known that possibly the Russians did the informing. That was not on...that was a very bad thing to do.

There was a political officer in the Russian Legation whose name was Sultanov. He had an attractive personality. He knew English well and he was always good for a party. We had a party one time to which he came dressed up as a western sheriff. But he had pinned on his lapel the word sheriff spelled with one "f." And I said, "Hey, man-sheriff, our sheriffs are spelled with two 'f's'." I have never seen a guy's face drop like that. I thought of it as just a joke at the time, but I realized later that here was a guy who had supposedly learned English well enough to pass for whatever the Russians might want him to pass for. But here he was caught short. I'll bet he never reported or mentioned his mistake to anybody. As a Russian agent you wouldn't want to make mistakes like that if you wanted to pass as an American sometime.

Anyway, in our game of give and take with the Russians, Sultanov became a victim. The Yemenis were sensitive to our rivalry and knew we were unhappy about Mitchell. In probably a trumped up charge Sultanov was accused later on of an unacceptable indiscretion. He had called at the foreign ministry and when whatever official he met with had left the room for a bit he supposedly was caught trying to peek at some papers on the desk. So they thought this was a good excuse to get rid of the guy. This was a typical balancing act in Yemen. We build a road, the Russians build a road and the Chinese build a road. We get somebody thrown out so they must have somebody thrown out. You know, this balancing act got down to quite a fine art there.

Q: Actually the balancing seems to have started when we moved an office there. We probably did it because the Chinese and the Russians were...

STOLTZFUS: Oh, absolutely. As you mentioned, Yemen is and was poised there in the southwest corner of the Arabian peninsula. It is a very important and strategic location.

Q: Well, let's take up Yemen again when we have our next session. It is a very, very interesting country.

This is June 22, 1997. And the interviewee is Ambassador William Stoltzfus. We are talking still about Yemen and this very interesting period that you were there. You talked a bit about the Chinese and the Russians having emissaries there. But what other countries were already in Yemen before we came in?

STOLTZFUS: The three major powers - China, Russia and the United States - had their legations in Taiz. Then from there on it was a split between East and West. The British and West Germans, for example, were in Taiz. The Italians were in Taiz.

Czechoslovakians, East Germans and some others of the eastern bloc were in Sanaa. The Imam kept foreigners separated; the second tier of powers was divided - the East in Sanaa and the West in Taiz.

As I said, Imam Ahmad never went to Sanaa for security reasons. It was dangerous for him to be up there. Well, to answer your question, we may have been one of the late comers up there. But

when I was there what I have described was the basic split out among countries. And I don't know that any other countries came in after us. So I guess we were probably the last. The UK was already there. The Italians had long been there. They were in Taiz of course. The French kept their Consul in Aden and continued to cover Yemen from there. They did not put a Legation in Yemen.

To revert to 1959. The Imam was said to suffer from syphilis. He didn't have anything of the sort. He had very bad arthritis, but he was an amazing man. He could ride a horse full gallop without using his hands on the reins, although his legs were almost useless. He could barely get around on his legs but on a horse he was in total command at full gallop when he was showing off to his people.

He went to Italy for medical reasons. While he was gone his son, Badr, who was a weakling - and is (I suppose he is still alive) a weakling - was maneuvered by various "liberal" groups including, no doubt, the UAR and Nasser. He was talked into asserting some authority that clearly the Imam had never given him. The Imam having left the country, it would be normal for him to leave the government in the hands of the Crown Prince, just as the DCM takes over when the Ambassador is gone. But he had no notion or certainly gave no authority to Badr to do anything except just hold the reins.

But it was interesting because in Ethiopia there was a similar situation at somewhat the same time. When the Emperor was out of the country and his son was left in charge, his son tried to do some things to liberalize the government, but he was squashed like a bug when his father came back to Ethiopia. And similarly when the Imam came back he is reported to have said, "Is there anything for an old man like me to do around here in this government anymore?" Shortly thereafter he took some draconian measures to squash any liberal thoughts that anybody had - including various mutilations and beheadings.

Beheadings were a fairly normal way of asserting authority in those days. His son he simply punished by what I guess would amount to house or palace arrest. He was kept in Sanaa and not allowed any authority. You never saw him and he was kept very much under wraps after that. That was one of the major things that happened early on in the time I was there.

As time went on there were constant efforts to get rid of the Imam. There was a lot of unrest and a lot of discontented people. The Saudis were as always subsidizing and stirring up the tribes in the north. Their chiefs - sheikhs - thought as I may have mentioned earlier that they had just as much right to the Imamship as did the Hamid al Din family. I'm sure that they were being constantly encouraged to stir things up.

The Imam, ostensibly for health reasons, spent most of his time in Sukhna, a little town inland from Hodeida, still on the plain before you start into the mountains. There were warm springs, hot springs, there and I'm sure that was a good place for him to be for his arthritis.

But he also didn't move around much for security reasons as I mentioned. And there was as I said a lot of tension. The Russians were active and we were a symbol of change also. And certainly the UAR and the Saudis were stirring the pot. We weren't opposing the Imam but his obviously

archaic regime was the kind that, with all of the liberal tendencies of Nasser on one side and the highly conservative Saudis on the other, fostered a hot bed of restlessness.

I am not sure whether I mentioned the various assassination attempts on the Imam. And because he kept escaping from them, the belief grew that bullets or other harm would not affect him and that he couldn't be killed by normal means.

He liked to ride in a Land Rover bedecked with all the royal flags and ornaments that you could get on a vehicle. He would sit in the back of the car, which was properly upholstered for a potentate. He'd have outriders holding on to the sides, the driver and someone else in front. And then he'd have maybe one of his family in back with him. There was a stretch of paved road from Hodeida to Sukhna. At that time the country's roads still had not been paved so there was just this one piece of straight road. With people packed in the car with him and his retinue clinging to the sides, the Imam would order the driver to "floor it". That was one of his entertainments.

One time he was riding at top speed when a truck appeared ahead. The truck was parked on the roadside. Just as the Imam came up, the truck made a turn in the road. It was clearly a deliberate move. Of course the Imam's vehicle went kerpluie right into it. The outriders were killed, others injured, but he was not even scratched. This episode was interpreted as another indication of his sort of "heavenly protection".

There were various attempts to do him in. One of the most serious was when he was caught in an ambush with some 25 bullets shot at him at close range. He received four or five bullets in him and a young relative, Prince Hassan bin Ali, who was with him, had a close shave. For days afterward that young man proudly went around wearing the same clothes he had on at the ambush because there was a bullet hole through his robe and he liked to show how close he came to being hit.

The Imam was badly wounded. He was put to bed, the bullets were removed, and he survived. Of course this was a major event and therefore one of those East - West Cold War opportunities. We sent a doctor to attend him. The Italians already had doctors there. The Russians sent a doctor. There was a battery of doctors. It was ludicrous because here were all these members of both sides of the Cold War - pro and anti-Imam - fussing over the Imam and showing how important he was.

Of course, people like the Russians and the Egyptians and many Yemenis would have been happy to have him dead. But it was the better part of discretion and valor to show that you gave the Imam proper attention and cluck-clucked over him. One of my missions was to fly over to Asmara. There wasn't a single x-ray machine in the entire Yemen. Ali Mugassas, one of the few Yemeni pilots, had a single engine plane so he and I flew to Asmara to pick up an x-ray machine from our military establishment there in Eritrea. We flew back with it low over the waters of the Red Sea.

Q: Well, that was one up on the Russians.

STOLTZFUS: We were always trying to go one up on the Russians. I may have mentioned the Hodeida fire and the Russians. Well anyway, let me finish this. The Imam survived the assassination attempt. I guess it may have shortened his life though. I'm not exactly sure when he died. Maybe it was late in 1962 when he died. And then Badr took over after that. But I had left by that time and Bob Stuckey was in charge when Badr took over as Iman.

I had occasion to see Badr. Crown Prince Badr came over to Taiz one time, presumably with his father's permission. I went to call on him. I took the bit in my teeth and I said, "You know, it is very important for your reputation, for your ability to influence things in this country and be a proper leader, that you get around more. You should see people, call on them." And he said, "That's right. Of course we should do that." But clearly he had a problem. No leader's life was safe in certain parts of the country where there were people who would be glad to do the leadership in and take over themselves. Badr clearly didn't have the inclination to tour the country either. I don't think he loved his subjects that well to be a real politician. I think he probably appreciated what I said, but he certainly had no intention of taking my advice.

As I mentioned before, one of the interesting events that happened while I was in Yemen occurred in the port town of Hodeida. One of the Russian enterprises was to dredge the port and build it up. So it happened that there was a fire in Hodeida. The poor section of town was pretty well burned out by this conflagration as you would expect in any kind of shanty town. It was very quickly consumed.

It wasn't a terrible tragedy. People lost their homes, but there were few or no deaths. But it was a good opportunity again for one nation or another to show that they cared a lot about Yemen. The British and the Italians and we Americans started bombarding our governments to do something. The US Navy had a destroyer that was on its way somewhere, maybe to the Persian Gulf or the Far East. It was not far away so the Navy, at Washington's behest, diverted it to Hodeida. The destroyer brought in tents and blankets. Our military also sent a medical team from Asmara to inoculate against the spread of epidemics. We were very pleased to note that the first military presence in the Russian port was an American destroyer. That was a coup. That was the kind of thing we considered a coup.

Captain Klepack, who was captain of the destroyer, was a little nervous about the fact that the pilot who brought the ship into port was a Russian. The Russian actually brought the destroyer in, although for local prestige and for nationalistic purposes the Yemeni director of the port, whose name was Salal, stood on the bridge also. The Russian could not have been more cooperative, and he clearly enjoyed the bizarre situation, so we realized he was not going to run the ship aground or do any mischief. It was a rather unique experience to say the least.

The tents and the blankets were off loaded and the medical team flew over from Asmara. We all stayed in the Hodeida guest house. A tricky moment came up when the Imam decreed that no ship could come in to his port that didn't fly the Yemeni flag. The US Navy doesn't permit other flags flown on its vessels. Catching the spirit of our situation, Klepack contacted his superiors. Our Navy made an exception and allowed the Yemeni flag to fly on that ship while it was in port. That may be a unique event in US naval history.

Then as a grand gift to the crew of this mighty ship, the Yemenis produced a cow - a live cow. And this cow was brought down to the pier. Of course there is no way that beast should ever have been on a ship. That is strictly against the rules too. But to humor the Yemenis the Captain said it was a great present, we'll take it. There was no proper gang plank. It was wobbly with just a rope to hold on to. A very dicey situation. The cow got no farther than halfway up the plank before it fell into the water between the pier and the ship. Then there was a desperate attempt to keep its head above water so it wouldn't drown. Some young men climbed down the side of the pier, put a rope around its neck and held its head up out of the water. It took an hour or more to get this unwieldy beast out from between the pier and the ship. They finally found a net and hauled it out. The poor thing was not too much the worse for wear. It was able to stand on its feet. It was tethered on the fantail. The Yemenis' idea of course was that the cow was fresh meat for the troops.

Well, there was no way the Navy would ever allow anyone to eat uninspected foreign meat like that. That was out of the question. But anyway, the cow was on the poop deck and the crew began to become attached to it. They took care of it and they thought it was great. I'm not sure what they called it but it became the pet of the ship. It was still standing placidly on board as the destroyer departed at the end of the visit. But once out of sight, I am told it was sent to cow heaven and disposed of over the side. The cow incident was one of our favorite memories of Cold War Yemen.

Q: You were in Hodeida observing this?

STOLTZFUS: Yes, we were in Hodeida because of this fire and overseeing our operations there...by "we" I mean our group from the office. My wife Janet may have been there too. We were down there once in awhile anyway. Janet and I were visiting Hodeida when there was the attack I mentioned on the Imam. We were in the guest house when we heard some shots fired and my wife went to the window to look out. I said, "For Pete's sake, dear, get away from the window." There were bullets flying all over. Later that night we found out about the attempt on the Imam's life. That is why we were able to respond quickly, because we were already there. Otherwise communications were so bad that had we been in Taiz it could have been quite a while before I ever learned anything about it.

But we happened to be in Hodeida for one reason or another when this attempt was made and when those bullets were fired. The authorities caught or they ostensibly caught the people doing the shooting and chained them up in the walled yard of a large building. But everything was quite open. There was no attempt to shut the yard gate. A day or two later I saw one of the suspects in the courtyard. His weren't ordinary chains. It was as though he was in the stocks. His ankles were so heavily manacled that he could barely shuffle. I remember those manacles. He could not lift them off the ground.

One of the conspirators, who had killed himself rather than be captured, was later stuffed into a basket, the kind they used to carry *qat*. The corpse was trussed up, put in the basket and hauled up by rope into a tree, then left to swing in the breeze for a few days. I remember that as a fixture

on a Hodeida street for a while.

Q: How many baskets were there swinging around?

STOLTZFUS: There was just that one basket but there were others who were picked up during that time. Later there were several beheadings. I never thought it particularly appetizing or a particularly good idea for the Chargé to watch one of those spectacles. For personal and professional reasons I had no interest whatsoever in watching them. Although we were all encouraged to go. It was a public beheading and you were supposed to go.

Q: Were we interested in watching the Russians build that port and how they used it? Was that of any interest?

STOLTZFUS: No, I don't think so particularly. There was no evidence that the Russians were using the port for military or intelligence purposes, and Yemen needed the port; it was an extremely poor country. This project was a way of making sure that the Russian presence was welcome there and they could keep their oar in.

Yemen's foreign policy under the Imam was simple. One brother, Hassan bin Yahya, was the Yemen UN representative. He was pro-West. Another brother, Abd al Rahman was also pro-West. Basically the leading princes were pro-West and, as I've said, the Imam was just a total opportunist. His son Badr was known as the "Red Prince"; he was the liberal one, more at home with the eastern bloc and very much out of sorts with his father. And out of sorts with the other princes, who were all pro-West.

It was a balancing act...and a way of getting aid from these various countries from the Yemeni point of view. And from our point of view the southeast corner of the Arabian peninsula was important. We certainly weren't going to leave it to the Russians and the Chinese.

In the wings were the Egyptians who, as I mentioned before, had their representative in Sanaa. He was sent by Nasser to cultivate Badr as the next Imam. It was clear that the UAR had a strong interest in Yemen. They didn't have big programs there. But sub rosa they were very much involved. And they were determined to have Badr in their pocket. Badr was weak and, while I am not sure this is really fair to say, we all suspected that he liked little boys. The Egyptians were suspected of taking advantage both by providing boys and also by holding such activities over Badr's head since they are pretty much a no-no in the Muslim world. This was something obviously they had on him.

I remember we got to know the Egyptian representative, Ahmad Abu Zaid, very well. He was Nasser's presence in Yemen. He was a typical fun-loving Egyptian on the surface. And we all had a very good time. We would have a few drinks with him at his place in Sanaa. And we would go out shooting rabbits and birds with him on occasion. Our battle cry was "lazim arnab" (we must get a rabbit). He was very friendly and took a shine to our boys Bill and Philip. He once said to Philip, this was during the days of the shots at the moon, "See, Philip, that is the Russian moon." He was tweaking us by implying that the Russian space project was ahead of ours.

He also gave Philip a rather inappropriate present of a very fine antique dagger. There were some valuable antiques to be bought in Sanaa in those days. I think they are pretty well cleaned out now, although one can probably still acquire *jambiyas*, those curved daggers that Yemenis wear with the fancy belts.

But from the overall political and international points of view, our relations with Nasser were such that they would not likely spill over into the Yemeni situation. Things were reasonably quiet in terms of each of us foreigners having our own projects and really not getting in each other's way. We were trying to outdo each other in a rather gentlemanly way, on the surface. However, the Egyptians certainly had an agenda. And the Saudis were watching closely. It was a restless time in terms of trying to get rid of the Imam and introducing some liberalization. The Egyptians would have liked to add Yemen to their client state base. That is what they were after.

Communications were so bad in the country that it wasn't a question of very well coordinated maneuvers. I mean, if you wanted to do something or see someone you just got in a jeep and drove to the desired place, through mud, mountains and rocks. There were no telephones. There was Morse code, but that was pretty cumbersome. And you were supposed to have permission even to leave town. As in Saudi Arabia, as I explained earlier, you were supposed to have permission before you left the town you were in, or the environs. You were allowed to hunt and hike about in your area, or at least nobody stopped you. But you weren't supposed to drive down the road to the next town. At the edge of town there would be a wooden bar across the road. Assuming the man at the check point was not in a torpor with qat, he would ask for your *fakk* - permission to travel. It was a means of keeping track of people...and there were spies everywhere, of course.

Q: *What kind of spies?*

STOLTZFUS: Well, the informers, the Yemenis. They were all Yemeni. And then there were spies for those against the Imam and spies for those with him. One of the interesting characters there was Ahmad Sayyaghi, a prominent opponent of the Imam. Typical independent operator, paddling his own canoe. He was the Na'ib of Ibb. As I mentioned, Ibb was a town on the way to Sanaa from Taiz. Very picturesque place that we loved to stay in overnight. Although the guest house was over the local prison and your evenings were spent hearing clanking chains down below.

The Na'ib (that means governor of the area) was a pretty tricky character, a swashbuckling, romantic type. Every once in a while the Imam would try to catch him, whereupon he would jump in his jeep with his retainers and race down to Baihan, part of the British Protectorate at the time. He would hole up there until the chase cooled off and then he would come back.

Occasionally on his way to Baihan just ahead of the Imam's men, he would stop at the Legation and we would have a chat. "Well," he would say, "I think I'd better go down to Baihan for awhile." He would complain of the Imam's evil regime and how it wasn't doing anything for the people; of course he was about as feudalistic as the Imam.

Q: And it is June 22, 1997. Ambassador Stoltzfus, you were talking about the chap that was going to Baihan when we had to change the tapes. Perhaps you would like to continue.

STOLTZFUS: Yes. Well, the point is that the country was primitive enough in those days that all kinds of people pursued their own independent agendas. There was no central police force or overall security group that could organize or keep track of things. It was a very chaotic situation. The influences and fortunes of the Imam and his friends and enemies ebbed and flowed.

In my opinion our most valuable contribution while we were in Yemen was my wife's school. She has always been a teacher. There was no school in the normal sense in the whole country. So she was giving our kids lessons. Then the Ethiopian Chargé, whose children were rattling around having nothing to do, not learning anything, asked my wife Janet if she would let his kids come to some classes, and she said, "Okay."

In the beginning the understanding was that anyone who was non-Yemeni would be permitted to attend the school. The Imam did not allow normal schools in the country as I mentioned earlier. The only ones allowed were the *kuttab*, which are schools strictly to study the Koran.

Q: Not reading or writing?

STOLTZFUS: Reading, writing and arithmetic, science, all verboten. Also libraries were out. Book stores were out. No newspapers. None of those things was allowed. So it was obvious that the Imam would not take kindly to a school being started for Yemenis. But then the chief of police in Taiz said he wanted to send his kids. We said, "Wait a minute here. That is not too good an idea." Then the Foreign Minister wanted to send his kids. And there was another Yemeni also. They were insistent. They said, we really need this.

The Foreign Minister arranged for me to see the Imam in Sukhna. When you went to see the Imam you never could get a firm appointment. Forget that. You languished in the sparse local guest house for several days until his eminence or his majesty or his glorification decided he would see you. There was an occasion when we were in Hodeida and met the Pakistani Ambassador, who also was staying at the guest house. He was the Ambassador to several countries including Yemen and by his own admission had made the mistake of coming down to this part of his bailiwick. He had been in Hodeida six weeks and he had not seen the Imam yet. He was absolutely around the bend and then some by the time we saw him. Every evening he would climb on the flat mud roof of the guest house and pace up and down, up and down. He was going absolutely bananas. That is the kind of thing that happened. The Imam couldn't have cared less. You know, have a nice time here, go for a walk. Go hunting. Do what you want, but I am not ready to see you yet.

I finally got to see him. When I entered the "throne room", the Imam was reclining on the floor on these nice carpets and pillows and so forth. His courtiers were kneeling all around him. We are not people who bow and scrape and kneel to anybody, potentate or otherwise, so since he was on the floor I planned to sit down beside him. Before I could do so, he grabbed my belt. And he

jerked. He had very bad arthritis; he could hardly walk but his upper body was built like a gorilla's. From the waist up he was a very powerful man. I dropped like a limp rag beside him. He growled, "What is this I hear about a school?" And I said, "Well, yes. We have a school. My wife has a school and it is for foreigners and strictly for non-Yemenis, but I have understood that there are certain..." He interjected, "Well, my chief of police wants his children to go there." I thought it best to say nothing to that. Anyway, he asked, "Who teaches in the school?" And I said, "My wife." And he said, "Only your wife?" And I said, "Yes, she has a young West German girl who takes the kids to the bathroom and makes sure they don't fall off the cliff and so forth." And he said, "You must promise me that only your wife will teach, then you can have the school." I couldn't believe it. The school flourished after that, with numerous Yemeni students. And it is still going. The AID finally took it over, and later local parents. It was the first school that Yemen ever had that was not religious. I would consider that our number one accomplishment in the country.

One time when I was in Sukhna waiting to see the Imam I brought a film along. It was called "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers". I'll never forget that film. The Imam sent word that he wanted to see it.

Q: How did he find out about it?

STOLTZFUS: Oh, there were no secrets. I mean once someone saw the film case, it was immediately known. I suppose every move I made would be reported to the Imam. If I were to talk to the wrong person or something, or wandered out somewhere. Anyway, there were no secrets. Besides, I probably offered to show it to whoever wanted to see it.

Q: What would you use for electricity?

STOLTZFUS: Well, the Imam's palace had its own generator of course. He certainly had his own facilities. There wasn't one in town but he had his own generator.

Q: These are gas generators?

STOLTZFUS: Gas, or perhaps oil.

Q: He was in Sukhna you say. Where is that?

STOLTZFUS: Sukhna, as I explained earlier, is a town in the coastal plain, against the mountains, between Hodeida and Sana'a.

Q: And he had a palace there?

STOLTZFUS: He had a palace there.

Q: What was it like?

STOLTZFUS: Well, the palace was a large adobe type structure. Usually the ground floor of such structures was for the cattle, goats and sheep. Then you climbed a circular staircase as in castles you might see in Europe of the olden days. You walked up circular, very dark stairs. They were truly medieval structures.

In the Imam's palace the second and third floors where people lived and ate were of course much bigger versions of what the average Yemeni would have. There would be camels in the courtyard bringing food supplies and whatever the Imam and his entourage needed. There were a few vehicles, and of course the Imam rode around in a jeep. But travel and commerce were mostly by camel back.

Q: Did he have his own mosque right in the...?

STOLTZFUS: Yes. And he had his wives and ladies in waiting and a lot of children, servants, etc. in the place. It was a big establishment. Anyway, he heard about this film. So I brought it to the palace and set it up. He wanted it set on the roof, which was flat of course. There was a partition that extended about halfway along the roof. At the narrower end of the roof I set up the projector, and there the men sat. The screen was set up at the wide end of the roof beyond the end of the partition. Thus the women could be out of sight of the men but still see the screen. The women and girls were supposed to be out of sight around the corner, and theoretically we couldn't see them. And we would show the film that way. Every once in a while some of the young ladies would peek around the corner and then get bolder and more visible. Periodically the men would tell them to go back. And then they would come out again. Yemenis like to have fun and their women are not allowed to be trodden on. They like to tweak their males and see how far they can get before the male members of the family really get angry. They stop before that. They like to flirt. So we had fun with that.

I showed that film every night for at least a week. Every single night. I wasn't allowed to leave. You can't leave without the Imam's permission. His guest house was a little mud place on the other side of the compound where we stayed. And the days got pretty boring, even with books and walking around and trying to get permission to leave. Well as long as they wanted to see the same film, I was stuck. So I showed it seven or eight times and they finally let me go.

Q: How long were you there?

STOLTZFUS: I was there a couple of weeks. Time means nothing. You are just there at the pleasure of the Imam. What I am about to say is in the book that Robert Kaplan wrote called The Arabists. For my sins, I am mentioned in the first chapter of the book. Anyway, he recounts what I told him.

One time when I was visiting the Imam one of his retainers brought in a cage. Inside was a wild cat that they had caught. A civet or whatever it was. It was a good size. In its cramped quarters it was full of fury. I felt bad for it. The Imam ordered the guy to open the cage and stuck his hand in it. The cat struck and raked his hand with its claws. The Imam watched for a second or two and then drew his hand out, looked at the blood, wiped it off and seemed quite pleased. He seemed to

get some satisfaction from being attacked by this beast. Then somebody took it away. That is one of the events down there that I will never forget.

Q: Could you tell us something about the Legation itself and what it looked like and how it operated? What the people were doing on a normal sort of day. What your relations were with the State Department. How you received and sent anything to and from them.

STOLTZFUS: Our Legation was initially housed in one of the rather ancient structures of Taiz of those days. Then Ferguson, my predecessor, oversaw the building of the new Legation and apartments for staff. One of the staff, Ralph Gandy, was our communicator. Ferguson also had the Chargé's house built. It was a stone structure with a bare yard surrounded by a wall. The Legation was quite nicely built with a long hall in between offices. All the buildings were close to each other, but they didn't constitute a compound.

By the time we were settled in our house it was basic but comfortable. The furniture was fine. It was not a primitive situation from that point of view.

Q: How did you get the furniture shipped in there?

STOLTZFUS: It must have been trucked in from Aden or Mocha. It certainly wasn't flown in. Mocha is a small port town along the coast south of Hodeida. We put on an addition to our house because we had a couple of kids, so we increased the bedrooms from two to four. We had a nice verandah that overlooked the town and the valley. We were quite comfortable. Our Legation consisted of the Chargé, the number two, a secretary and a communicator. Much of the admin was done in Aden. The AID had quite a good size mission there.

Q: When did they arrive?

STOLTZFUS: I am not sure when they arrived. It must have been sometime in late 1959 or 1960. Their local project was the Taiz water system which was to bring in piping and proper distribution of water for the town, which had no running water at all.

AID was under local criticism from the start. The problem was that in order to get established they felt that they first had to have houses built for their staff. So for months and months all that was happening was getting houses built for the people who were supposed to be doing something. And it raised the local real estate prices. That is the usual thing when Americans go to a place. It raises the prices all around of everything. Whether it is housing or servants or whatever, when Americans arrive they need a certain standard that puts pressure on prices all the way around. And that causes a lot of complaint, not just from the locals but from other foreigners who don't have the kind of bucks that we have.

That was not a very good time for me. It took a long time for them to get going and there was a certain tension between us and AID for their lack of showing something happening on the ground for the Yemenis, as opposed to feathering their own nest. Ralph Workinger, who ran the AID operation there, was a crusty old guy. And there was Jim - can't remember his last name - who is now in the UN, who was also there for awhile.

Everything we attempted took a long time of course. If you ever needed to see somebody or report something it was a laborious process. Officials were always willing to see you but it was a question of getting where they were or finding them. Transportation was difficult wherever it was. Communications to the Department were written airgrams. We sent virtually nothing by electrical means because it was just too much trouble. We had no communications equipment at the Legation except one-time pads.

We did receive coded telegrams from the Department and this was another unique experience. The local people in the telegraph office didn't know any western language. All they could do was look at the shape of the letter and then try to copy the shape. Deciphering telegrams was a heck of a job even with your pad. You know, an "L" and an "F" and a "P" for example were all in long hand and very hard to distinguish. They didn't print. Imagine us trying to copy Arabic letters not knowing any Arabic.

We had a bi-weekly pouch service flown in from Asmara to the Taiz airport.

Q: A courier?

STOLTZFUS: A courier would come in. It was no mean feat to land or take off in Taiz. It was always a risky venture because the runway was built with a mountain at one end and a cliff at the other, and it wasn't very long. And unless the pilot started his run with full power and was able to take off smartly, he had a real problem with the cliff ahead. And you couldn't always land into the wind. A plane of any size - larger than a DC-3 - couldn't approach from the promontory side because that meant heading into a mountain at the other end of the simple runway. So you had to maneuver and drop down from the mountain side and put on the brakes before reaching the cliff. It was not a place that people liked to come in and out of very often.

I remember one time taking off with a Yugoslav pilot. The plane was an Air Commander. And an Air Commander is not one that takes off very quickly. It takes a good runway to get it off the ground. That day the wind was blowing hard and toward the cliff. The pilot said, "We're not taking off down wind in this plane. We have to take off the other way despite the projection in front of us here." He revved up, put on full brakes until we were just shaking like a leaf, and he let go. Faster and faster we went but were still not off the ground. We could see into the hangar as we flashed by. He finally was able to pull the plane up and we just barely got off and made a sharp turn away from the mountains.

When we were clear of the mountain I looked at him and he was breathing heavily and soaked with perspiration. He was absolutely shaken as he looked back at me and we agreed we had had a brush with death. Taiz was a tricky place to get in and out of.

It was always an event to go out to the airport when this little DC-3 came and landed and the courier got off. We would have a little confab with our colleagues and others who also came to see the plane in.

Q: Whose DC-3 was it?

STOLTZFUS: The local airline's.

Q: *And the same courier came?*

STOLTZFUS: Well, whoever it was. It wasn't the same courier each time.

Q: *Did he bring you any goodies as well?*

STOLTZFUS: We didn't do a lot of that. There wasn't much room in those planes. They were small as you probably know. I don't know how many seats a DC-3 has. It doesn't carry more than about 10 or 12 maximum I would say. It came only once a fortnight, and people and baggage were going back and forth. There really wasn't a lot of goodies. And we didn't think about that so much, you know.

Q: *No bananas or eggs?*

STOLTZFUS: Well, no. Speaking of eggs, the eggs bought locally were usually a week or two old and smelled rotten. We used to eat them anyway. Fresh meat was not terribly appetizing in the local markets because the butchers' shops would have sheep, goat, and beef carcasses hanging right out on the street, which was a dusty pathway in between the rows of shops. And between the dust and the flies covering the meat (it was always thick with flies) you didn't feel too much like having them cut down a side of beef or more likely sheep or goat, which I like fine but my wife is not very fond of. So I used to go out hunting, especially if we were hosting a function. These we had often since there were no restaurants worthy of the name and everyone entertained at home. I would go out and shoot guinea fowl.

The best time to hunt guinea fowl is just after harvest. You were right in the middle of the mountains, so all the arable land was terraced. You could walk along these terraces and the guinea fowl would come in to eat the seeds and whatever edible was left after the harvest. And as you came and they would fly off you'd shoot down one or two. In an afternoon, if you were lucky, you could bag a dozen or so. It required a good bit of cooking with lard and wine to tenderize them because they were pretty tough birds.

And there was also mountain hen or partridge. There were gazelles. I didn't shoot gazelles. I was out on some hunting parties where they did but we didn't eat that as meat ourselves. That is another thing my wife wasn't too keen on either.

We had some memorable characters there. One of them I have already mentioned was Ahmad Sayyaghi. The Italian Chargé, Amadeo Guillet, was a very interesting man. He was a royalist and had been an Italian cavalryman. He was an expert horseman. During World War II he was part of a cavalry unit with the Italians in Ethiopia. He fought against the British and others during the war, but he was a royalist at heart and never had any use for Mussolini.

At the end of the Italian campaign in Ethiopia he continued to lead guerrilla skirmishes against the British, but as the risk of capture grew he decided to escape. So he dressed himself as an Arab, as a Yemeni. He pretended that he was slightly off his rocker so he didn't have to speak. His Arabic was fluent but he could never have passed as a Yemeni with his accent. He managed

to get across the straits and over to Yemen. He holed up in Yemen until the war was over and he could return to Italy. Later the Italian government assigned him to its Legation in Yemen as Minister. He was a striking character. He knew everybody there was to know. He brought in Italian doctors and through his efforts Italy became the preferred foreign country. The Imam felt very comfortable with the Italians and went to Italy whenever he went abroad.

Amadeo eventually retired with his wife, Biche, to Ireland. He loved horses. He had a string of horses in Yemen which we used to ride now and then. He was the best known and the preferred foreign diplomat in the country. He was the Dean, and mentor for all us Westerners.

One of the finest gentlemen we met in the Foreign Service was Frederick Reinhardt, our Ambassador to Egypt and Yemen when I was Chargé in Taiz. He visited Yemen at least once - maybe twice - during our tour there. The Imam was usually holed up in Sukhna in those days and I'm not sure Reinhardt ever called on him. At least I don't remember it.

Ambassador Reinhardt took all the inconveniences of our medieval habitat in stride. I think he positively enjoyed it. It was after all unique! He spoke French, German and Russian and of course was a sensation in our little diplomatic and local official communities of Taiz and Sanaa. We will never forget the unhappy Russian Chargé, Mr. Lavrov, who had had a tour in Washington, dressed in clothes obviously bought in the US, and found Yemen beyond the beyonds. He was thoroughly disliked by his staff. But we had an official reception at our residence for Reinhardt and when he spoke in fluent Russian to Lavrov, the Soviet was literally overcome; he found himself back in the real world for a few fleeting moments.

Reinhardt was a huge success with the Yemenis and with our Egyptian eminence grise, Ahmad Abu Zaid. Here I have to interject that the Yemeni stage and players at that time in history were absolutely unique. The real life scene was the 13th century in the 1950's. We were Connecticut Yankees in King Arthur's court. The Cold War was in full swing and Egypt was plotting the overthrow of Imam Ahmad. Yet all of us foreigners - through our common amazing experiences could feel a kinship, tolerance and fellowship totally outside of politics and the normal outlook on life.

I accompanied Reinhardt to Sanaa, where we called on local officials. Abu Zaid, typical Egyptian, expansive, energetic, exuberant, suggested a hunt. "*Lazim arnabi!*" The Ambassador, despite a painful back, was all for it. Shotguns and cartridges were provided and we set forth - in the middle of the city! There were no rabbits in town, but pigeons galore, flying along the parapets and crenellations of the whitewashed, adobe buildings, some six or seven stories high along the street.

Needless to say, our party quickly drew a crowd as we walked along.. Several excited young men pointed to the pigeons and said, "Shoot, shoot!" Without much thought the Ambassador raised his gun and fired. Pigeon falls to the ground - but also some chunks of a parapet, now become rubble. On closer examination we discover the building hit was a mosque. Oh my God, will the religion crazed mob attack and lynch us? Nothing of the sort. Cheers and congratulations and eagerness to please. Nevertheless, no more shooting in town.

Another individual Janet and I will never forget is John Mecom. "Big John" was the quintessential Texas oil man: bearlike build, decisive, commanding voice, generous. Like many of his ilk he preferred being an "independent" and was said to have made and lost several fortunes in his day. His previous key to success was his interest in salt domes. Apparently there is oil to be found under certain salt domes. As I recall, Mecom first approached the Egyptian government for a concession but later, or in addition, settled on the Yemenis, whom a couple of his pilot fish had found receptive to a bid for a concession. Of special interest to Mecom was the salt dome at Salif, a coastal town north of Hodeida. Needless to say I was active in promoting this welcome show of American enterprise in Yemen.

Mecom arrived in Yemen and was received with great excitement by Yemeni officialdom. He had brought with him two breeding bulls. They were huge and magnificent and I wondered, rather crudely, whether the poor little scrawny local cows would be able to accommodate their obvious prowess.

The oil lease was speedily signed and on a subsequent Mecom visit we all drove to Salif to watch the test well being spudded in. We have some home movies recording that event. Unfortunately the tests did not show promise and no oil in commercial quantities was found in Yemen until years later. Mecom's interest in the Middle East came to an abrupt end when some years after the Salif venture one of his planes was shot down, probably inadvertently, over Egypt.

While in Yemen on one of his visits, Mecom came up to Taiz. On learning of Janet's school he graciously paid it a visit. What he thought of the somewhat dingy school room and facilities available in those days in Yemen, the modest equipment and furniture, and the motley collection of students, he never said, but he handed Janet a check for two thousand dollars, the school's first significant income.

Another unforgettable character was my British colleague Christopher Pirrie-Gordon. Typical of many Englishmen of his generation abroad in the military or diplomatic service, he was a confirmed bachelor, highly educated with broad interests. He had a perfectly delightful sense of humor, was extremely hospitable, and above all loved poetry and Italy. During the Hodeida fire episode, when all of our Western diplomats were urging our governments to provide aid to the victims, Christopher once said, "Well, I have spent the morning telling London, Washington, Paris and Rome what to do."

One afternoon on our way down the road between Taiz and Aden we ran across Pirrie-Gordon. It was raining and his Land Rover had broken down. There he was, seated on a rock by the side of the road, sheltering under an umbrella, reading Italian poetry, oblivious to his surroundings and his situation, leaving it to his driver to fuss and fume over the hood of the vehicle.

A favorite poem of his was a tongue-in-cheek portrayal of a scheming seducer and the poor, defenseless damsel: "Have some Madeira, my dear...You really have nothing to fear..." Following dinner at his residence he would offer an after coffee drink saying, "This is not a signal for you to leave." His number two, Ken Oldfield, appropriately called that final brew "one for the ditch". Christopher enjoyed conversations and late evenings.

Years later Pirrie-Gordon was posted to Venice where he won acclaim for his role in raising funds to restore buildings and art treasures damaged in a flood which occurred there.

Michel Harriz, an Arab American with AID, became a good friend. He was an adviser on agricultural projects in the Tihama. On one of his visits to Taiz he brought a little steam engine - it really worked on steam - as a present to our boys. Incidentally, boys are a great favorite with Arabs. Egypt's representative Abu Zaid, whom I have mentioned, loved to talk to our two. Perhaps he missed his family.

Q: Did you get and local produce or grain or fruit of any type?

STOLTZFUS: Well, the local bread was okay. We brought in as much food stuffs as we could from Aden. We had canned goods from Aden. I guess we could have eaten entirely Yemeni food but I think it would have been hard on us over time.

Q: What do Yemenis eat?

STOLTZFUS: Well, as Arabs they eat lamb and goat meat and rice. At least in those days fresh vegetables and fruit were scarce. And they are fond of heavy sweet desserts. My wife has no use for those. They are pretty cloying. Well-to-do Yemenis, like their fellow Arabs elsewhere, have access to all those dishes created by Turks, by Greeks, by North Africans, Indians, Africans, Egyptians. In all the Arab world that is what you eat plus European and American dishes. For parties Yemenis did not serve their own native dishes exclusively.

Q: And what did you have to drink?

STOLTZFUS: We boiled water of course. And there were juices...canned juices. Everything came in cans. Then we had our liquor, the main item we got from Eritrea. There were plenty of alcoholic drinks.

Q: Did you serve them to Yemenis as well?

STOLTZFUS: We tried not to. We didn't ply them with liquor at all. As I said, the Russian and I used to ply each other with liquor just for fun. And for foreigners we always had receptions where we served alcohol. Some Yemenis drank; you couldn't really refuse them. One thing we did not do was sell liquor to them. There were foreigners who did. And that was most unfortunate and a great mistake. Occasionally a Yemeni would ask for a bottle, and if he was a prince it was a little hard to refuse.

The Yemenis would say "your *qat* (i.e. whiskey) works a lot quicker than ours." In other words, your form of getting dizzy is more effective than ours.

Q: How about tobacco?

STOLTZFUS: Oh, yes. Everyone smoked like a chimney.

Q: *Where did they get it?*

STOLTZFUS: They were all foreign cigarettes.

Q: *They didn't raise it themselves?*

STOLTZFUS: Not that I know of. The traditional cash crop was coffee. Mocha coffee is of course famous. But they didn't tend the coffee bushes very well in later years and they gradually found that the market was difficult to sell to. Earlier, Greek merchants in Hodeida carried on a good business sorting and marketing Yemeni coffee and there are a number of varieties. It is very good coffee. I think in recent years it has become less and less a good crop for them. Maybe because of prices or because later as things became more chaotic it became more difficult to harvest and export the beans. Whereas with *qat*, you just let it grow. It is a bush and you cut off the fresh leaves, bundle them up and sell them. Drugs are more profitable and a lot easier to sell.

Qat is a mild narcotic. Something similar to hemp. You chew it like a cow. It is a tremendous time waster. Most afternoons the men (and women separately) would sit in an upper room of their house, open the window to let the breezes in, and talk all afternoon chewing this *qat*. Some of the more modern thinking Yemenis have called *qat* a curse on the country. But they have never been able to get rid of it. It is a national pastime and an addiction. A *qat* session can be a good time to call on Yemenis because they are relaxed and they will chat. Their tongues tend to be loosened. So it is not a bad time to call, assuming they are making any sense. They are invariably friendly in any case.

When you arrive you are given your own bundle. Not about to chew that whole bundle, you might take a few twigs out and you chew and you chew and you chew. It tastes like grass or ordinary leaves. For proper effect you should be thirsty and hungry. And it does assuage hunger. That is probably the original reason poor people chewed it. After chewing a while you take some swigs of water which supposedly enhances the "high". Well, we don't tend to be thirsty and hungry so *qat* doesn't do much for us. It never had the slightest effect on me. I chewed away and couldn't get any results at all. One of the problems with it of course is if your driver has been chewing it and then you go hurtling down the mountain. He thinks he is Schwarzenegger or somebody and he can do anything. This can be kind of risky to life and limb. In those cases I took over the wheel and said, "You sit quietly until you get your brains back."

Yemen as we knew it in the late '50s was truly medieval. It was charming for us privileged foreigners. The only modern buildings were those of foreigners, mainly our Legation and AID housing and offices. There was a wall around Taiz. And you went in and out of the city gate. The Italian Legation was an old Yemeni building inside the wall. The rest of us were up against the mountains.

Everything looked like what you would read in history about the 12th century: walled towns, stone redoubts, twisting unpaved roads, animal driven carts, only an occasional vehicle, men in chains, men with daggers in their belts. The old road to Aden skirted some rocky cliffs up to the

palace of the Imam, which he never used himself. But Badr occasionally used it. The Imam kept a couple of lions there. You could stop and see them, sometimes in a cage and sometimes on the wall, like those of the Emperor of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa. Very picturesque.

During that second tour in Saudi Arabia Janet and I decided to take our R and R (Rest and Recuperation) in Yemen, where ten years previously we had enjoyed the best tour of our career together. Ahmad Abi Said was our host in Taiz, where we marveled at the changes, especially the new and expanded buildings and facilities of the school Janet had started.

We visited some familiar sites in Sanaa also and from there we split up, Janet taking a hair raising ride in a taxi down the mountain to Hodeida and a flight back to Jeddah, and I going to Abha in Saudi Arabia to call on the Governor of the Asir, Prince Turki bin Faisal. The Asir is totally different from the rest of Saudi Arabia. Geographically it is really an extension of Yemen: mountainous, blue colored vistas, water whispering through grassy slopes, forests. Beautiful country. In fact the Hejaz mountain range north of Yemen not only looks like Yemen but the inhabitants are of Yemeni culture in terms of their music, their houses, their clothes, their unveiled women.

ROBERT THEODORE CURRAN
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Taiz (1962-1964)

Robert Theodore Curran was born in New York in 1931. He received his bachelor's degree from Haverford College and his master's degree from Columbia University. During Mr. Curran's career he had positions in Germany, Jordan, Yemen, Mexico, Afghanistan, and Morocco. Mr. Curran was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November 1998.

CURRAN: The Imamate (Kingdom) of Yemen was one of the most remote areas of the Arab World. Probably only the Empty Quarter ('Rub el-Khali') in Saudi Arabia was more isolated from the modern world.

U.S. contact with Yemen was very limited until the 1950s when Washington attention was drawn to increased investment by the USSR and Communist China in Yemen. Because of the fears engendered by the Cold War, it became American policy to establish a diplomatic presence in Taiz, the southern capital, and then to invest in an infrastructure project: building of a gravel road from the post of Mocha in the southwest corner of the country through Taiz to the northern capital of Yemen, Sanaa. Throughout the 1960s, U.S. policy in Yemen was based on maintaining some kind of influence with the Yemeni governments to prevent communist and later Egyptian use of Yemen against U.S. interests in the Middle East, the Red Sea, and East Africa.

The initial diplomatic presence was accredited through our embassy in Jeddah and managed from Aden in the late 1950s and then a legation was set up in Taiz in 1959 with a U.S. chargé d'affaires. Taiz was made an embassy in 1963.

The lack of any Yemeni infrastructure usual to the establishment of a western presence was daunting. There were few roads, no national currency or banks, no running water or sanitation, pre-World War II communications, little modern housing, no paved airfields, and a very primitive government system. Also, the Imam personally approved almost all matters applied to foreigners such as property leases, travel permits, and food imports and his terrified underlings refused to take on any decisions without clear signals from the Palace.

The Italian and Ethiopian governments maintained substantial presences in Yemen. The Italians had built a hospital in Taiz and had a medical facility in Sanaa. The Ethiopians flew cargo - mostly 'qat' - out of Yemen to East Africa. Both the Italians and the Ethiopians were most helpful to the first Americans in Taiz and by 1960, the living conditions for American embassy personnel were comfortable and adequately supported. It certainly helped to have a USAID mission beginning in 1961 as a part of the American team since the Agency supplied a doctor and eventually helped set up a primary school and provided a small airplane.

Communications with the outside world were extremely difficult until it was possible to install a U.S. radio. Before that, the choice was to send an officer by car (10-12 hours) to Aden or by plane to Kagnev Station in Asmara. The Yemeni telegraph operators were illiterate in English, so one-time pad messages were not much help. Because of the lack of telegraphic traffic, policy cables were almost always late or didn't come at all and the embassy in Taiz was pretty much "out of the loop" on the tactical discussions concerning events in the area until late 1963, early 1964.

Q: Today is the 14th of January, 1999. Ted, let's start. First the dates. You went to Yemen when?

CURRAN: In the summer of 1962. I was still assigned to Jordan.

Q: And you were there till when?

CURRAN: Well, I'll tell you now.

Q: At the beginning I just like to get the two dates.

CURRAN: Originally my assignment to Jordan was for two years, from '61 to '63. In the summer of 1962, the Department and the ambassador in Jordan asked me if I would be willing to take part in a feasibility study of opening an embassy in Yemen. And in those days, Yemen was a very, very isolated place. We didn't even have an embassy there. We had a small legation reporting to the embassy in Jeddah.

Q: *All right, well, let's start on this, then.*

CURRAN: I want to muse with you for a minute, Stuart. I've been thinking a lot about this privilege of talking about this situation, and the mood and the circumstances under which I went to Yemen. We spoke, when I was talking about Germany and Jordan, about the resources and the atmosphere that existed in the Foreign Service in the early '60s, and I think two things come back to me very strongly. One is that the government, not in an impersonal way, but in a very personal way, singled me out, for whatever reason, and made me feel as if I was doing something special and that it was appreciated that I would undertake this assignment. And the second thing which is striking to me in thinking back 37 years ago is that there was not even a question of whether my wife and child would accompany me. They of course were interested in the adventure and wanted to go along and felt they would be protected and happy. And the contrast now that I hear from my younger colleagues about the difficulty of spouses - often with careers - figuring how to sort out these assignments, it's quite extraordinarily different.

Yemen, not to be too pedantic, is a small country on the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula. It had a great era several thousand years ago. The Queen of Sheba came from Yemen, and her capital was a city called Marib in the southwest quadrant of the peninsula at that time, probably in the context of, say, 3000 BC pretty well developed because the spice trade came overland, rather than by sea, and there were routes through the mountains of Yemen, proceeding west from India to the corner of Yemen and then north up the Red Sea. I think most people who think of that part of Asia think of it as one unrelieved desert, but in fact, Yemen is very rainy. They have two monsoons a year and it's highly cultivated, and the Arabs call it *al-yaman as-sa'id*, which means 'the happy Yemen,' because of the rainfall. Marib, which I just saw briefly, is still quite a sight. There's a granite dam there, one of the two dozen wonders of the world. Even now it's about 75 to 100 feet high and extends for half a mile across the desert, and some people think it was large enough to permit very widespread irrigation projects.

The advent of Islam in the 7th century brought conversion very early to Yemen, and one of the few mosques built in the lifetime of the Prophet stands near Taiz, which is the southern capital of the country. Divisions in Islam were reflected in Yemen, and the country was divided between the so-called *Shafis* (Sunni Muslims) in the south and the *Zeydis* (Shafis) in the north. The Zeydi Muslims claimed direct descent from the Prophet through his daughter. The Zeydis dominated the ruling circles. The Ottoman Empire had a certain amount of influence in Yemen in the 19th century, but it was a long way from Istanbul to Sanaa and Taiz, and so it was basically a very isolated place. The Imams of Yemen were not the same as the Imams in Iran. Imam in Yemen is more like a king. And the Imams kept their headquarters in Sanaa and ruled the country by playing off rivals and taking bribes and so on. And when I went to Yemen in the summer of 1962, the last Imam was still alive, Imam Ahmad. I'll get to a meeting I had with him shortly.

The last imam before Ahmad, was Imam Yahya, who had a large rule from 1904 to 1948. And he realized, apparently, that he had to have outside help. He somehow sensed that the country was so poor and so backward they couldn't resist outside pressures from the Saudis, who were pushing from the north to take some territory away from what Yemenis regarded as their country, and the British, who were ensconced in Aden, a 19th century coaling station, and still a

substantial British base in the period we're talking about in 1962. Yahya was assassinated in 1948, and his son took over the throne. Ahmad was the first imam to turn to the Russians for additional assistance, and the Russians answered his appeal and began to modernize the army. This was an early step the Russians took in the Cold War and the deal they made modernized the army on the basis of loans and then the USSR used the loans to try to advance their political purposes on the country. The Imam also turned to the communist Chinese, and they built a remarkable highway for him from Hodeida, a port the Russians built, up to the capital in Sanaa. And that had two impacts. One, of course, the Yemenis could control the port, and the second impact was that they could export *qat*, a mild narcotic that many people chew in the Middle East and Eastern Africa. They could export that more readily out through Hodeida. The presence of the communists in Yemen and the increase in the influence of Nasser resulted in U.S. enhanced increased interest in Yemen, which is the reason coming back to why I went there. I think the American concern, if you look at a map, was that the communists might get a firm foothold in southwestern Arabia. The strategic airfield which they were starting to build when I was there could threaten the oil fields in Saudi Arabia as well as provide a secure way station on the path to Africa. And it may seem to us here in 1999 that that was pretty silly, but in the 1960s, when the Cold War was really going strong, that seemed to be quite a serious concern.

I want to make a few more comments about the geography of Yemen when I first arrived there. Yemen is a mountainous country which frames the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula. There is a very hot, steamy coastal plain, which runs from roughly Hodeida in the northwestern corner of the country down to Mokha in the south, basically the point of the country, and then east to Aden, which, of course, was still under British control. This coastal plain is known as the "Tihama."

The first trip to Yemen was arduous. First, I flew to Jidda to meet with Ambassador Parker or Pete Hart and was briefed on what he wanted. Basically, Hart wanted the U.S. to set up an embassy in Yemen. Hart believed that an embassy in Yemen would encourage the Yemenis to be a partner in the anti-Nasser forces of Arabia. And so I flew to Aden and from there flew with Yemen Airlines in a DC-3 piloted by a British pilot into Taiz, where there was not even a paved runway; it was a gravel runway. And I was met by the chargé d'affaires, whose name was Robert Stookey, and I started my work.

Q: How long had we had a legation there?

CURRAN: For many years we had managed our relations, such as they were, out of Aden, out of our consulate general in Aden, and people would make sorties up into Taiz by jeep, a trip that took in my day anywhere between 10 and 12 hours, about 100 miles. It gives you an idea of how fast you could travel. And then about 1959-60 we opened a legation, a very primitive stone building in Taiz without a communications system.

Q: Also, just to clear up the picture, what was the situation around in Aden then. I know there was quite a bit of terrorism, fighting. Had that already started?

CURRAN: The British colonial office ran Aden. The area was called The Protectorate. The tribes

in the area were either paid off or threatened. In 1962, there was little threat to the Brits. The UK maintained an air base, a place for their ships to resupply. Their idea was that they would have their base in Aden and keep a friendly or at least confederation of tribal elements around them, sort of as a buffer against the Yemenis. This scheme caused great mischief, because the tribes were susceptible to being bribed by both sides, and they made a lot of trouble, and the British had continuing difficulty. And the Yemenis were generally willing to make trouble for the British. But it was a very low-level, much more of a medieval type situation than a modern insurgency.

Stockey drove in a jeep - the official American cars in the legation were all jeeps - through town, and it's going to sound like I'm exaggerating, but I promise you it was like going in a time warp back to the middle ages. People were mostly barefoot. As we went by the main gate of the little downtown of Taiz, a little walled city, there was a severed hand of a thief nailed to the gate who had had his hand lopped off the previous Friday and "posted" as a warning to thieves. For minor misdemeanors people were shackled and then turned loose into the street to walk around. They'd clank around in their chains and depend upon relatives and other people to give them food to keep them going. There was no national Yemeni currency. Transactions were in Theresa (Austrian) silver dollars and to a certain extent British gold shillings. Men wore dresses and had a big dagger they would stick into their belts, called a *jambiya*. Every Friday the Imam had a kind of an audience in the central square, and if there was a capital punishment, the capital punishment was carried out at that time by a beheading in public. I was invited to one of these, and I finessed the "opportunity," but I did see a poor fellow lose his hand for thievery. There was practically no skilled labor, and the society was feudal. There were landlords, and then there were people who worked for the landlords - a few drivers, a few people who did crafts, like making pottery and pots and carpenters and so on. The country was suffused in disease: bilharzia, which is a disease you get from a snail, a liver fluke that gathers in still water, and the Yemenis all had it. No roads to speak of, except for the one Chinese road I mentioned in the north, and then the main project the U.S. had been asked to undertake. We were starting to build a road from Mokha in the southwest up to the capital in Sanaa through Taiz. When I got there in 1962, the road was just barely coming out of Mokha.

Q: When you say there was no skilled labor, how were they able, with Chinese and Soviet help - build a port and build this road and also maintain both port and road?

CURRAN: Most of the labor was hand labor, and most of the skilled personnel were Russians and Chinese. And when they finished the work, they departed and left very little expertise to maintain the road, and a little later in our story we'll get to what happened. In fact, one of the issues that came up and came up regularly in my time there was the fact that our road was a gravel road built so it could be maintained by the Yemenis. And the Yemenis said, "Why aren't you paving it like the Chinese road" and we kept explaining how it was better for them, but the Yemenis were never happy. It was eventually paved by the West Germans.

I thought I might just read briefly from my impressions of the town which I wrote at the time. I wrote,

It's a small town, and the city proper, or "*medina*," must have changed very little in the last 500

years. It has narrow streets, old mosques, donkey transport, and many small markets, or *sugs*, where merchants sell their wares under the haughty gaze of the family camel. The medina no longer dominates the city. Stretching away up the slopes of the *Jebel Sabr* [which was a mountain about probably 12,000 feet looming over Taiz] is the so-called New City, with a few shops, a few hand-run factories, and some automobile, that is, jeep, traffic.

In 1962, the cars ran on the left-hand side of the road after the British model. Up on the slopes of the mountain, in the so-called New City, was the Royal Palace.

The Imam Ahmad, who took over from his father in 1948, left Sanaa because he was worried about tribal intrigue, and he set up a second capital in Taiz and built a so-called Royal Palace, and left his son, Crown Prince Badr, to live in Sanaa and deal with the tribes.

The Yemenis generally make a different impression than the Arabs of the Eastern Mediterranean or Saudi Arabia. They're not as volatile. They tend to sit back and take a person's nature and talk about world affairs with much less emotional involvement than is common in Lebanon and Jordan. The U.S. mission [This is summer 1962.] had 140 Americans, which was really quite large considering our interests in Yemen, but most of them were working on the road project, starting with some port development at Mokha. Also, because there was no potable water we developed a water purification system. The Russians and Chinese were around, but in diminishing numbers and in my initial contacts they did not seem to play much of a role.

After I'd spent a week or so in Yemen; and by the way, I stayed in the government guest house. This was a former house of some substance, built of stone, with an inner central courtyard, and the rooms we lived in were around a balcony on the second floor. There were no toilets and no running water. There were communal meals, one at breakfast and one in the late afternoon, at four o'clock. And if you wanted to eat in the hotel, that's when you showed up, and you ate whatever was available and tried not to drink any water or eat fresh salad. I was sort of used to that type of living from previous travels, so it wasn't so bad. After I'd been in Taiz a week or so, an amazing American joined me, an Arab-American named Isa Sabbagh.

Q: *Oh, yes.*

CURRAN: Many people have heard of him. Ambassador Hart sent him to Yemen to help, and he was a huge help, because, of course, he had beautiful Arabic and was very well known. Sabbagh was "Mr. Radio" in the Arab world and he was presented as a person to modernize Yemeni radio. The main radio station was in Sanaa, so we had a reason to go there. Generally, the Yemenis were very resistant to having the Americans see what was going on in the north.

After Isa arrived, we were given an audience with the Imam Ahmad of Yemen, and I will take a few minutes to describe this. We went to the Royal Palace escorted by one of the Imam's sons, and after going through various rooms of what I can only describe as a fetid slum of a series of dwellings paved with junk from Western Civilization - plastic furniture, rubber duckies, strange dolls - and it smelled terrible, we finally arrived in the so-called throne room. Imam Ahmad sat on a cushion, and he had a trapeze right over his head to move around because his legs were

largely incapacitated. His appearance was striking, even grotesque. In order to make himself appear more ferocious, he wrapped a shawl or scarf very tightly around his neck, so tightly that his eyes bulged out. He looked for all the world like a very large, dirty toad. But of course, the Yemenis were all terrified of him, and we tried to show proper respect.

Isa Sabbagh explained that we wanted to help the country and we wanted to go to Sanaa and we wanted to see if we could modernize the radio station, and the Imam listened glassily and then finally said, "*La bas*," which means, 'okay.' So we turned around to leave, and we asked the royal prince when should we leave? And he said, "What do you mean when? You're leaving now." We said, "Well, can we pick up our bags at the guest house?" "Well, all right." Anyway, we went right to the guest house, grabbed our bags, went to the airport, got in one of the Imam's Aero Commanders, with a Yugoslav pilot, and flew to Sanaa.

Q: *You might just explain very briefly who Isa Sabbagh was.*

CURRAN: Isa Sabbagh was originally from an Arab Christian family. He became known during the Second World War when he broadcast to the Middle East for the BBC. Then he came to the U.S. and joined VOA [Voice of America] and then was transferred into the U.S. Foreign Service and eventually became public affairs officer in Jidda, *highly* respected and, in my humble opinion, probably the greatest communicator between the Arab world and the Western world I've ever met.

Anyway, the Imam's private plane climbed over the mountain barrier between Taiz and Sanaa, and we flew over the Sanaa plain, which is at 7200 feet. We had our first look at the capital, which was a city of tall building, five, six, seven stories, built in tower fashion, which make them look taller than they are. The city had many parks, minarets, and lots of colorful people dressed in turbans and robes carrying the ceremonial *jambiya*, or dagger, thrust in a gold or silver belt. Sanitation was not a part of the municipal order, and paved streets were unknown. Individual houses behind forbidding mud walls that line many streets were sometimes quite attractive, with gardens and occasionally a small pool.

These small pools, of course, were a double-edged sword because they were very pretty, but if you put your foot in it you ran the risk of getting infected with bilharzia.

Some well-to-do people kept gazelles as pets to roam in their gardens. The Sanaa guest house was built in the late 19th century. It was a step up from the Taiz guest house because it was larger, had a more ornate central courtyard with a fountain and two floors of balconies with crowded dormitory rooms.

The staff service was much better than in Taiz. One could order coffee and room service - if you could get someone's attention. The main floor lounge in the Sanaa *dar ad-diyafa*, or 'guest house,' was a favorite meeting-place for all the in people in the country, so it was a great place to stay. The director of the radio station did not share his government's enthusiasm for the survey of his station, and it was three days before we were allowed entrance to the premises. We spent the time meeting members of other missions who were working in Sanaa.

And there was one very interesting person, whose name was Ibtihaj Arafat, who is the sister of the present head of the Palestinian Authority. She ran a UNESCO girls' school in Sanaa and actually was beginning to educate some women, which was very revolutionary. I got to know Ibtihaj very well, and I liked her a lot. She looked just like her brother.

Q: Without the beard.

CURRAN: Without the beard. She had had polio when she was younger and so walked with a pronounced limp. She was very cheerful and friendly. Later she was accused of being involved in espionage. I never had any sense of that, but I suppose I was maybe naïve about her.

The main problem with the radio station was not in personnel but in lack of adequate budgetary support. Isa Sabbagh spent most of his time working on teaching program techniques while I tried to analyze the technical side of the operation. The station had one transmitter, which only broadcast short wave, and had only one generator, both on their last legs and needing replacement. Our week was highlighted by an 80-minute interview with Crown Prince Badr. The Prince made daily trips through the town in an antique black carriage preceded by jeeps with a mounted machine gun, camels at a gliding trot, prancing horses, and soldiers who accompanied the march with a piercing falsetto chant and waving of daggers. I was expecting a man who stood on ceremony, but the Prince was a very kind and warm personality, expressed great pleasure at our frankness in making recommendations for the expansion of the broadcasting operation. He wore a coat and vest over a simple robe and gave both Sabbagh and me the impression of being a rather decent fellow who was overwhelmed with the problems that he had in the country.

Q: You talk about this radio station. Why were we interested in a radio station? Nasser was sort of dominating the Middle East airwaves, right?

CURRAN: Yes, *As-saut al-'arab*, (the "Voice of the Arabs").

Q: So what was our interest?

CURRAN: Actually, we didn't have any interest in the radio; it was our pretext for getting up to Sanaa. We had nothing to offer. We weren't the least bit interested in getting involved with Sanaa radio. In fact, we had our own radio, VOA, which we would like to have had better heard in that part of the world. No, no, it was strictly a means of getting in there.

Q: Were we looking at Soviet and Chinese influence there?

CURRAN: Definitely, particularly in Sanaa - this is pre-revolutionary Sanaa now - you could tell the Russians and Chinese, particularly the Russians, I would say, were looking for anti-Western opportunities. It was very troubling.

Q: They were training the army, weren't they?

CURRAN: Right. They had equipped the army, and we thought it was very, very likely that the Russians would build a modern jet airfield, and it turned out that was correct. In any event, Isa and I returned to Taiz with Yemen Air and the British pilots, and then he returned to Saudi Arabia. I spent two more weeks sort of looking around Yemen. And one of the places I went to was Mokha, where we had the so-called American port. I'll just read a little bit about my impressions there:

Mokha is one of many port cities on the Red Sea [and it, of course, is down on the coast called the Tihama, a steaming plain]. Weather hot and humid. Insects abound. The port is a man's city. I didn't see any women. It's directed by a Yemeni, and the U.S. had a colorful ex-Marine there named George Shedd, who had an MA in Middle Eastern studies from the University of Michigan and was an expert from his military service in shallow water off-loading. He'd been in Iwo Jima and Okinawa during the Second World War. He was a real roustabout, but charming in his way. He had a forked (that is, profane) tongue, which the Yemenis for some reason thought was very charming, and he also had an unbelievable capacity to absorb alcohol of one kind or another.

The port facilities were fair, and the acquisition of a generator has made it possible for the American staff to air-condition offices and mess hall. The three Americans lived in trailers so poorly insulated that a night's sleep is hard to come by. Night is a social time for tropical places in the world such as Mokha, and there also was a rich variety of insect and other life going on at night.

Towering over the port was a remarkable structure, a lighthouse erected by the Turks during the 19th century. Ten stories high and very narrow, it dominated the scenery for miles around.

(The metal supports were rusting in 1962, and I understand it's now come down. Too bad. It was really a sight.)

The town of Mokha looks attractive from the port across the bay, but as you approach, the palm trees become a shelter for hundreds of hovels, and buildings that look white from far off take on a dirty yellow hue. Everything was pervaded by the smell of rotting fish and nonexistent public sanitation. There were three bosses in town: the governor of the port, the chief customs inspector, who is in charge of keeping smuggling within reasonable bounds, and the chief of the stevedores, whose role it is to hand out work assignments when a ship anchors offshore. The town was calm, in spite of the frontier living conditions and low wages - 75 cents a day was standard.

One of the clerks in one of the offices remarked that he'd never heard of a riot in a Red Sea coastal town, and I was wondering whether there were some profound political implications in that, I don't know. Anyway, I had never heard of one either.

I returned to Jidda and met with Ambassador Hart and told him that if this question of opening an embassy was to be considered in a Cold War context, then we should do it. That was my recommendation. I wrote a report, went back to Jordan, collected my family, and headed for home leave.

I want to say a word about the chargé of the legation, Bob Stookey. He was a remarkable person, probably one of the great Foreign Service Arab scholars. He wrote articles in Arabic on Ibn Khaldoun, which amazed the Arabs, and he was able to discuss in classical Arabic philosophical issues - an astounding linguist. I would not call him a people person. He was very, very remote and aloof, and he would retire to his home - he somehow had a piano in this little house he lived in - and he would retire in the evening with a jug of martinis on the piano and he would play Bach late into the night. But he was amenable during intervals of piano playing to talk and chat. He was very nice to me personally, but he was certainly an exotic, in the old school. The British had many of these, and Stookey was a great advisor on Yemeni affairs, but I can't imagine that he ever did anything in an executive way outside of that environment. His wife, Louise, was a courageous, thoughtful, and brave lady.

Q: Do you know anything, did you follow him?

CURRAN: I believe he's still alive, retired, and living in Texas. Another thing about Bob was that he was one of the great performers of Bach on the piano. Anyway, I thought very highly of him and shall always be grateful for his hospitality and attention to me.

Well, another character I have to mention in this story was an American doctor in the Taiz mission from Baltimore, named Gireau Foster. Gireau Foster was ostensibly, or allegedly, the doctor for the American community. Actually, the U.S. had decided that it was in our national interest to keep the Imam alive, so his main job was to minister to the Imam. Gireau was very popular at the palace and with the Imam. He told me that the Imam probably had every disease known to man and a few that weren't and that keeping him alive was a very strenuous and difficult operation. And I'm going to kind of mix the timetable a little bit, because while I was on the ship going home, the Imam died, of "natural" causes. And I saw Foster later in the States, and he told me the events of that night, which were quite striking. Foster obviously knew the Imam was coming close to the end, so he prudently got himself an exit permit and always kept his bags packed. He had his wife and children with him. And when the Imam expired, Foster was with him, and he then closed all the doors to the royal bedroom, and he said to the retainers: "His majesty is sleeping, and he's got to have a good night's sleep, so I don't want anyone looking at him until tomorrow morning. He'll be very upset if anyone looks at him." And he went home, collected his wife and children and threw his stuff in the car and drove to Aden in the night and got out. He correctly, I think, assumed that he might be blamed for the departure of the Imam. About a week later - I'm not sure of the timing exactly, but I'm pretty sure it was September '62 - there was a coup d'état in Sanaa, and Prince Badr fled. The coup was Egyptian-managed, probably with Russian connivance, and the whole Imamate family in Yemen was murdered. They were swept up and just gunned down. So when I got to Washington, I found myself in the startling position of having recommended by cable that we set up an embassy in the Kingdom of Yemen which was now the Yemen Arab Republic. So that starts a new chapter. Shall we try a little more this morning?

Q: Oh, yes. In the first place, what about the eastern Yemen, between Oman and Aden, more or less? What was the situation there?

CURRAN: Well, the Protectorate ran over to the Oman border, and the Sultan had a palace in Shalala and was in those days on good terms with the British. Our consul in Aden used to call on him as well.

Q: I did want to ask you, obviously this was the time of high Nasser, before the '67 War, which didn't go well for him. The Soviets were obviously a big threat, but you must have been looking at Egyptian influence there, which was part of the coup later.

CURRAN: Well, in the summer of '62, when I was looking around with Isa, you could tell the Egyptians were on the scene - and I think maybe even in some of my messages back I shared the view that the Egyptians would like to play a larger role - but as long as the Imam Ahmad was alive he fended them off and used the Russians to keep them off.

But the Egyptians ran the coup, so there was a curious debate in Washington: "Yes, it's important to have an embassy there, but who's the enemy?" The enemy had shifted. Exactly what you were saying was that instead of being a question of a communist threat, it was Nasser *cum* the communists which became the threat.

Q: What about the Saudis? At the time you were up there on this initial survey, what was the role of the Saudis?

CURRAN: It was a mixed role. The Saudis were generally on good terms with Yemenis, royal families and so on. There was disputed territory between them, which had to do with the takeover of the Saud family from the Hijazis in the 1920s. Sabbagh and I spent a good deal of time with the Saudi ambassador in Sanaa in the summer of 1962, and even though he was very worried about being assassinated by the Egyptians, he certainly felt he was on good terms with the Imam and the Crown Prince. Then when the coup came, the Saudis pulled their ambassador out, and also took Badr in and supported Badr's effort to get the northern tribes to help him take the throne back, a campaign that never worked.

Q: While you were up there on this trip, did you have much contact with the various tribes and get a feel for the tribal nature of the government?

CURRAN: Well, everybody you talked to under the Imamate had a tribal connection. In fact, the Iryani family were one of the key tribes in the north, and eventually the so-called revolutionary government took the Iryani tribe into the government and Abdurrahman Iryani, a man that I knew, became president for a while.

The other interesting thing is that there was still a Jewish presence in the summer of '62. This small contingent had originally had a significant community in a town called Sadah, which was north of Sanaa, and some of the jewelry that was available had supposedly been made by Jewish craftsmen. There were a few Jews in Sanaa, although I never met anyone who called themselves Jewish. Sadah was inaccessible. There was no road, and we didn't have access to helicopters. After the Egyptian inspired coup and the new so-called Field Marshall Sallal became president,

all of the remaining Jews left.

Q: Yemeni Jews became a distinct feature of Israeli society later, gave it a very Mideastern look, as opposed to the Jews that had come out of Eastern Europe.

CURRAN: Well, yes, they were very exotic-looking, with painted lips and very dark complexions. The women as portrayed in “The National Geographic” of that era were lovely.

Q: Now let’s turn to Washington in the fall of ’62. We talked about what we do next in Yemen.

CURRAN: And Ambassador Pete Hart from Jidda kept saying, “Well, it doesn’t make any difference; Yemen is still a geopolitical threat.” And there were many people in Washington, stimulated by the British to a certain extent, saying, “Don’t do anything, don’t recognize now. Hold off. We’ll handle things in Yemen,” and so on. I’m not sure why the U.S. persevered. I think the Cold War years probably prevailed, and we said, “Well, we want to have a seat at the table in Yemen, and we won’t have a seat without an embassy.”

Q: Oh, yes. This was very much the attitude. We weren’t going to give up anything.

CURRAN: Right. Pete Hart, who was, after all, in Saudi Arabia and was, in fact, arguing against the Saudi position who opposed recognition, and I think at that period, as I’ve been thinking back on it, there was a certain amount of anti-British feeling in American government. Why should we follow their lead?

Q: Oh, definitely, and the British were beginning to give up things, too. We were beginning to take over from them in the Persian Gulf. I forgot to mention, but when you were there, what about oil?

CURRAN: The Yemenis were hoping to find oil, and the Mecom Oil Company, run by John Mecom, who was very fond of Yemen and invested a good deal of money there, couldn’t make a major strike. It was while I was on home leave during the coup when one of his airplanes crashed at the Taiz airport, and that was the end of Mecom operations. He sort of regarded the crash a jinx, and he pulled out. So during my period, which lasted till the summer of ’64, Mecom had no operation there. Now Yemen has discovered oil, and it’s a great help to the country.

In any event, in January 1963, the Kennedy administration decided they would open an embassy in Taiz and I was asked to go back. I went back with my family, my wife and daughter, Sara.

Q: How old was your daughter?

CURRAN: My daughter was not quite two.

Q: That took care of the school.

CURRAN: Yes, there was no schooling problem. I’m going to describe what it was like for my

wife to go to Yemen. She was really a good sport about this. The embassy consisted of the chargé, Bob Stookey; there was an economic guy named Bob Brown; there was a consul, and there was me. And, of course, I was in Washington when recognition occurred. I can't say I felt I played a particularly significant role in the debate, but in any event I was somebody who'd been on the ground, and I'd been up in Sanaa. I could describe the new airport they were building in Sanaa and the communist profile. Perhaps it had some influence.

The family and I flew from the U.S. to Cairo where we met the Michael Sterners (who had served in Aden and visited Taiz), and people along the way were very nice to us, both in Cairo and Jidda. The consul in Aden, John Wheelock, also was very kind. We got out to the airport in Aden for the trip to Taiz. The British pilots were gone, and the airline was now run by Yemenis. I might add that the British eventually came back because the Yemenis proved they couldn't fly the DC-3s, but anyway, in those days they were trying. Luckily we didn't know that. We got out to the Aden Airport - it was probably 6:00 a.m. - and we got into the plane. We were the only passengers along with all kinds of goods sort of loosely thrown in, not very well packed, but no pilots. And my wife, who was, as I say, a pretty good sport but not without concerns about flying in rickety old airplanes with her daughter, was not very happy. Finally, two guys in flip-flops jumped into the plane, went up and shut the cabin door, and started the engines. The plane taxied out to the tarmac and started hurtling down the runway for takeoff and then screeched to a halt and stopped right in the middle of the main runway, with aircraft - you know, British military jets - around, and so on. And one of the Yemenis jumped out of the plane. My wife said, "We ought to get off of this plane." I said, "You can't get off in the middle of the runway," and almost had to restrain her from jumping. The copilot or whoever he was jumped back in the plane and explained they'd forgotten to take the cover off of the air speed indicators, so that had to be done! Then they shut the cabin door and took off.

We got to Taiz - to the dirt airstrip - and I couldn't say it was old stuff, but anyway it was not unexpected. This was all new to my wife, and as we circled over this airport, she said, "I don't see any airport." It looked like a cow path. But of course, we did land there. Then there was no one to meet us because the telegraph service wasn't operating. So it was kind of a tough arrival for a Foreign Service wife.

I might say that because there was only one telegraph line, it was very difficult to communicate with the outside world. And as some of the old timers will recall, and probably you do, Stuart, we had to use the so-called one-time pads. We would laboriously compose our classified cables and take them down to the Yemeni telegraph office, and they would charge us a dollar a group. A "group" was a five letter encoded block. And of course, the groups were in western letters, and the telegraph operators were basically illiterate, so there were garbled names. First you had the technical problems, and then these guys were more or less transliterating what they saw - so most of the time we didn't even try to send cables. We would collect our outgoing traffic, put it in a bag, and an American would take it down to Aden and transmit everything from Aden. Taiz was a very primitive place.

Marcia and I eventually got to town and everyone was very welcoming, including the Yemenis, by the way. And there were a couple of things that I'd thought might be interesting to recall, and

then you could ask some questions.

One big adventure we had was to build a secure vault. We had a young person from AID who was supposedly an administrative officer, but he knew nothing about the Arab world, and he contracted with a local contractor to build the vault - reinforced concrete - in the back of the embassy building - basically a stone shed. This young fellow was very proud of what had been built. You know, it looked really terrific, a lovely whitewashed edifice. The next day, the monsoons started just after we had our ribbon cutting, and had a particularly violent rainstorm. The next morning, all that was left of the vault was the wire reinforcement, because the contractor hadn't put adequate concrete in the sand, and it all washed out. So that was one of the little hazards of doing business there.

Another job that we had as embassy officers, which might be of interest to young officers going overseas now. In those days, there was a large number, probably 500, of Yemenis who had served in the U.S. Merchant Marine during the Second World War and were entitled to Social Security payments in their villages. Incredibly, we had to go from village to village in Yemen with a jeep load of silver thalers and pay off these accounts. The recipients would put their X on the account, and we would drive on. Because of my Arabic, I accompanied the consul on two or three of these trips, and there's an adventure my children love to hear about, so I'm going to tell you.

We were driving in the Tihama from Taiz to Hodeida. We drove to Mokha and then started north over the sand track to go to the next town, which I think was Zabid. As it happened, there was a rainstorm in the afternoon. And what you did traveling in Yemen in this situation was to get yourself up on a dike, so that the flow of the water wouldn't sweep you away. So we were sitting on a dike waiting for the water to return to normal levels and eating a peanut butter sandwich when there was a sudden scratching at the windshield. It was pitch black. So we got a flashlight and flashed it out, and here was a baboon looking at us, and a big fellow - he was about three or four feet high - and he smelled the peanut butter and he was trying to get his fingers in the crack of the windshield and tear the windshield off. And it looked to us as if he was making progress. We had a pistol with us, and I was trying to reach out - I was not driving, I was in the passenger seat - to try to at least scare him with a pistol shot. What happened was, he tried to get the pistol away from me. The other thing we had was a flare gun. We thought we'd scare him with a flare gun. I went to the backseat and went out and shot a green flare up in the air, and that really got his attention, and he looked up, and suddenly his hair stood straight up, and he turned around and just ran down the dike and disappeared. And we thought, Are we clever or what? Green must mean "Go" to baboons! And then there was another thump on the car, and a desert leopard had landed on the car, took one look at us and then took off after the baboon. I'm telling you, our blood pressures were up. Finally, the rain died down with no further alarms, and we went on into Zabid and stayed in the guest house there and "held court," and passed out the *riyals*. Then we went on to the next town.

Q: Speaking about passing out Social Security and all, Yemen had traditionally sent its men abroad. I remember - we're talking about three or four years before - issuing visas to Yemenis when I was in Dhahran who were going to, as I recall it, Youngstown, Ohio, and Lackawanna,

New York.

CURRAN: And Detroit.

Q: And Detroit. And there were large Yemeni communities there.

CURRAN: Many are active in the auto business.

Q: An awful lot of Yemenis left from Dhahran. I know because we didn't have really any Saudis emigrating. It was just Yemenis. And they would appear with scraps of paper saying, "Ahmad Muhammad was born in Yemen in 1373," or something.

CURRAN: Yes, of course. Yemen was on the Muslim calendar. As a footnote, my daughter, Diana, who is an obstetrician, was practicing near Detroit and called me up to get some urgent lessons in Arabic because quite a number of her patients were Yemeni women or children who still don't speak English, and she had to know how to ask them where it hurt.

The British and the Saudis continued to meddle and muddle in 1963, but as I say, it was fairly low-level fever. The Egyptians had all they could handle with the tribes in the north, and we were pretty much left alone. The Yemenis wished we'd invest more in our road, but they were glad to have us there, and I think that people who were worried about the British and the Saudis and the Egyptians and the Russians saw us as maybe a long-term counterweight.

Q: You were the public affairs officer, and I would have thought that Radio Cairo would have been fulminating against the United States and its Israeli connection. Did you get into that?

CURRAN: Two comments on that. First of all, my assignment was as public affairs officer, but in fact, I found most of my work was as a political officer until we got a full-time political officer. And the second point I'd like to make is that the Yemenis were not much interested in the Israeli issue. All the fulmination from Cairo about *isti'mar* ("imperialism") and *sahyuniya* ("Zionism") didn't strike a chord with the Yemenis. They were interested in what was going to happen to their country, and as is the case throughout the Arab world, personally they were very welcoming to Americans. And the fact that two or three of us spoke pretty good Arabic didn't hurt either.

I thought I might go back now to text for a minute and read part of a comment I wrote going back to Sanaa in January, 1963. Since earlier I described what Sanaa looked like before the revolution, this is what it was like after the revolution.

The municipal airport is still unpaved, and the road to town still meanders over irrigation ditches, straining the springs and shocks of every vehicle heading for the city. The manager of the government guest house is the same swarthy rogue who must be dealt with before lunch, as his addiction to *qat* reduced him to unconsciousness after the noon hour. The streets of Sanaa are still dusty, and many persons still wear the exotic national dress complete with rifle and dagger. But in spite of many physical similarities, Sanaa has undergone a profound change. Instead of an

atmosphere of intellectual stagnation, there are ideas and bright young men promoting them. Government officials are accessible, aware if not informed about the outside world, and eager to talk with foreigners. It's true that much of the thinking and intellectual ferment is disorganized, even chaotic, but there's no question that the younger generation now in command in Sanaa is hurling Yemen into the modern era.

The changes are not only intellectual. A great deal of building has been done, particularly in the western part of the city near Bir al-'Azab and out along the road constructed by the Chinese communists towards. Preparations are going forward to pave the central square, "Freedom Square," and new and better hotels are being installed in one-time royal palaces. The Qasr el-Fashayer hotel, for example, is head and shoulders above the government guest house in terms of food, service, toilet facilities, and there is even talk of a bar. The Egyptian presence is obvious, but by no means dominant. They bear the brunt of the military effort, and the number of planes on the ground and in the air over the capital attest to the magnitude of the UAR [United Arab Republic] investment in Yemen's external security. UAR military police in red berets are scattered around the city to keep an eye on the well behaved Egyptian GI's in their fatigues strolling the streets and haggling with storekeepers, but there are no Egyptian officials holding government positions, nor is there any likelihood there ever will be. How long Egypt will stay is another question. Many Yemenis believe they will leave soon.

The size and impact of the communist effort is hard to measure. The Sanaa-Hodeida Road, built by the Chinese communists, is greatly admired as an example of the way communists get things done. Contrary to Western predictions, the road has not disintegrated; it is constantly if extensively maintained, and the U.S. gravel road in the south is held up to frequent ridicule. There is not much enthusiasm about the Russian- built harbor at Hodeida. Facilities are proving expensive to maintain for the small amount of commercial traffic, and the long channel into the harbor tends to silt up. The result is the Yemenis are wondering now out loud if it wouldn't be better to find ways to improve road link with Aden an international port and one which these Yemenis consider an outlet for Yemen. International organizations are playing a small but important role. WHO, UNESCO, and the International Red Cross are all present. Their staffs, many from other parts of the Arab World are playing an important part in the maintenance of Yemen's independence.

It think that that kind of sums it up.

Q: You were mentioning the United Arab Republic, as it was called in those days. At one point, Nasser included Yemen as well as Syria. But you left there when?

CURRAN: Egypt and Syria created the United Arab Republic in 1958. It fell apart in 1961 or so. I wouldn't bet my life on this, but I believe that Syria, Egypt, and Yemen negotiated a new UAR in the spring of '63. The final papers were to be signed sometime after the revolutionary celebrations in Yemen in September '63. Then the Syrians backed out and the Egyptian/Yemeni "union" continued for several years.

Q: In Syria there was a lot of objection because a lot of Egyptians came in and took office in

Syria, which didn't sit well, and it didn't last. You mentioned there that the Egyptians probably wouldn't do that. I would have thought that Yemen would have been ripe for that, if for no other reason than that you needed clerks who were literate and that sort of thing.

CURRAN: Well, I think the Yemenis were and are a lot like the Afghans were in another of my incarnations, which we can talk about later. The Yemenis are very independent and basically unwilling to accept ground level foreigners running their lives. And they resisted it. This was evident in our new chargé's (James Cortada) visit to the new President of Yemen, Abdullah Sallal. Did you know Cortada.

Q: Yes, he's down in Orange, Virginia, and I've interviewed Jim. He was mayor of Orange at one point.

CURRAN: Was he? Is he still alive?

Q: I think so. [Note: Cortada passed away in October 1999]

CURRAN: Jim Cortada was quite an unusual person, very dynamic and fun to work with. He and I went to see Sallal, and Sallal, you know, was a man of very modest background. He had been a sergeant-major in the army and was promoted to field marshal before he became President. And what we found was a very weary man - this is April '63 - showing signs of the power struggles between tribesmen: Zeydis, Shafis, army elements, and internal security problems caused by the Egyptians. His health doesn't seem to be the best either. During the interview his hands kept straying to his stomach and heart to try to ease the pain he felt. We thought he probably had bilharzia, too, although no American doctor ever got near him. Despite his political and physical discomforts, he obviously enjoyed our visit. He was very friendly and asked us to come back and see him any time. We managed to announce some emergency wheat, which he was very pleased about, and we made the point that we hoped that someone beside the army would get the wheat. He expressed gratitude and said, of course, that they would. We talked about our scholarship program, which USIS had started, and we had 60 people on scholarships in the States in those days, which was really quite dramatic. Sallal said, "Well, 60 isn't much." And I also pointed out to him that we weren't interested in competing with the Russians; our main interest was in maintaining the independence of Yemen. And the President then turned and said, "Well, we appreciate this." This comes back to that point you were asking before about in what light did they see us. They didn't really see us as major players, but as a smallish trump and they could play against the Egyptians and the Russians.

Q: What about the CIA? Did the CIA get into this? I can't imagine, particularly in those days, not getting them there.

CURRAN: Of course, they were present. I doubt that it's possible to talk about that. The people that were involved there were very discreet, very careful, and I think very effective - and also very much in tune with our attempt to keep a lower profile and not be seen as confronting the Egyptians and the Russians directly.

Q: Very soon after, a real solid war developed between the Egyptians and the Saudis, which we ended up arbitrating. Was that happening when you were there?

CURRAN: Well, it certainly happened, but we were such a sideshow it didn't have much impact. However, Saudi propaganda about their attacks against the Egyptians in Yemen got such a high profile that CBS sent Winston Burdett in to Yemen to cover "the war" and I still have a copy of that tape. And Burdett and his cameraman, a fellow named Joseph Faletta, did an absolutely fantastic job of assessing what was going on. I could say he had some help in terms of being taken around Yemen, but the bottom line of the CBS report was: "This is a very serious situation, but it's not World War III." Burdett pointed out that the Egyptians were trying to use air power, which was correct, to crush the Yemenis, particularly the tribesmen of the north, but he said in his opinion it wasn't working, and we agreed with that. One thing that was interesting was when he was in the Saudi zone of Yemen, the Saudis, or the Yemeni royalists, took him and Faletta on a trip, and they said, "Okay, now we're going to let you watch while we bombard Sanaa." So they went off to some place, and there were some lights in the distance, and they set off some artillery, and then they went back. A week later, Burdett was telling us, "Boy, I was right in the middle of the war and I watched Sanaa being bombarded." We asked, "What date was that?" And both Jim Cortada and I had been in Sanaa that day and there was no bombardment at all, so it was complete hogwash. Burdett did a really first-rate job on analyzing what's going on, and he said, "You know, Yemen is a poor but honest independent country caught between the British and the Saudis, and they're trying to figure out what to do."

And in the long run, of course, the Egyptians gave up. It was too expensive to conduct a Vietnamese-type anti-insurgency program in Yemen, and the British wore out, too. And now the whole place is under the control of a Yemeni. I use the word control loosely. [Note the number of tourists being kidnapped]

Q: While you were there at that time, basically '62-'64, were the British a presence at all?

CURRAN: Well, for a while we had a British chargé in Taiz, but they pulled him out to underline opposition to the Yemen Arab Republic. That had repercussions because in June of '63 a bunch of British personnel on some kind of training mission strayed into Yemen and were caught. I think there were about 20 or 30 of them. And they were brought to Taiz and locked up, and we - Cortada and I - were alone there, had to negotiate their release. And the Yemenis, and this is kind of typical, instead of threatening show trials or anything like that, treated the British pretty well. They put them in one of the former royal "palaces," and they had a swimming pool. (They all got bilharzia swimming in the swimming pool.) Eventually, we got them out for about \$20,000, and it was all pretty businesslike bargaining.

At the risk of telling war stories, I will tell a couple of stories about the British soldier release. After capture, they were brought in by convoy and I met them at the South Taiz border. The governor of Taiz was somebody I saw a good deal of. We're talking about a "government" in Taiz of maybe 20 people total and the governor made most of the decisions. Plus, the Americans were about the only foreigners who had movies... and so we entertained officialdom a lot. When the lights went out they could have a little drink of something stronger than tea. So good personal

relationships prospered.

The governor and I were waiting for the convoy to bring the British troops in - all men, by the way; the Yemenis released the women - and we were standing around, and what happened gives an idea of the brutality of the place. The tradition, as you know, in the older Arab World is that when a person of authority is given a scroll and he accepts the scroll, he has to do something about whatever is written on there. As we walked, an old crone was trying to give the governor a scroll, and he didn't want to accept it. So while we were talking he kept turning his back on the woman and walking this way and that. And she kept right after him, whining and pushing the paper at the governor. And finally - I could see his temper rising. She came up to him, and he said to me in Arabic, "Just excuse me a minute. I have a matter to take care of." And he turned around and smacked her, right in the side of the head with his fist, knocked her sprawling, and I looked around to see if anyone else was shocked. No. The governor turned back to me and said, "Let's see, what were we talking about..." and just left her there, unconscious, I think. Maybe someone came and dragged her away. That was one level of human dialogue.

The wait for the convoy dragged on and to relieve the tedium, the governor said, "Would you like to see the Imam's lions?" I said, "Sure, I'd love to see the Imam's lions." So we went up to a "palace" which was nearby, and we went into a courtyard and we stood on a wall about five feet high. Five lions were let out into the enclosure with their trainer, and he ran them through some paces, sort of like a circus, ran them around in circles and maybe through a couple of hoops, I don't know. They were as close to us as three or four feet, and if I hadn't been with the governor I might have been really concerned. I know this tale sounds bizarre, but that kind of stuff happened every day in Yemen.

Q: Was a gate locked at night at this time?

CURRAN: Absolutely, in the Old City.

Q: The Old City, yes.

CURRAN: Of course, we could go around with our diplomatic jeeps, but one didn't. But there really was no police force.

Q: Tell me about your wife. How did the wives of people, how did the Egyptian wives get along there?

CURRAN: Well, my wife, first of all, was quite occupied getting the house that we lived in habitable, which she did. She actually found a reliable servant who had been trained by the Italians. We had the best pasta in town. Marcia spoke Arabic by then and was able to manage quite well. Obviously, she had to worry about having a two-year-old around, but in a way, having a small child meant that the upper-class Yemeni women felt comfortable coming to our house with their children, and Marcia would sometimes arrange "coincidentally" to have the American doctor there, so he would look at the children. Oddly, the male-female thing didn't seem to be a problem when it's medicine, although they always kept their veils on when he was

in the house.

My mother and father came to visit us while we were there. My wife had a tea party for her acquaintances there, and my mother was treated the way senior women are treated in the Middle East - with great respect. But life in Yemen was generally an effort to keep active and occupied. We had a primitive golf course; AID built us a tennis court, and we had lots of colorful day trips. And one of the things that I think is not true any more is we never had the slightest fear that anybody would lay a finger on our wives or children. And I guess you know, if you've been in Dhahran, Arabs are very strict about the way foreign women are treated. I don't know whether you had the same experience, but I never had the slightest worry about leaving my wife alone when I went off on field trips, and it would have been unspeakable if they'd ever been molested or hurt.

Q: What about AID?

CURRAN: The AID people didn't have much leadership during the 1962 revolution and were subject to poor morale, but during the spring of '63, a very visionary and good guy named Jim Megellas came to run AID. Megellas had been mayor of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and was a friend of Kennedy's and I suppose got a job in AID as a result. He was a wonderful public administrator, and he restored order. The basic AID program was managed by the Bureau of Public Roads, the Mokha-Sanaa road. And the BPR was run by an old Oklahoma tough who had been used to dealing with prison labor in building roads in Oklahoma, and he treated the Yemenis the same way. So one of the early situations we had was how to teach him to be a little more respectful of his Yemeni employees. In addition, to get Americans to work in Yemen, AID had to hire a lot of contract employees. Some of them - this fellow who ran the port in Mokha was an example - drank too much, or tried to "date" Yemeni women, or just brawl.

Anyway, Megellas sorted everything out very quickly and smoothly. The big thing he did was build a little trailer camp for most of the BPR employees out away from town. They had a perimeter fence and community activities so that these Americans, who came in from Middle America, had a place to live where they had a doctor there and they had a little school and they were pretty much protected from the outside world. And the road made progress. By the time I left they had gotten past Taiz and were on up into the mountains. And I think the road was completed in 1964, all the way to Sanaa.

Q: There was a problem - I can't remember exactly what it was - with AID and people having come out of Cairo to go look at a safe or something like that. That doesn't ring a bell?

CURRAN: No, I don't remember that. It might have been later.

Q: It might have been a little later.

CURRAN: No, I would say the main problems we had, I mean to the extent we had problems with AID, were the attitude toward the Yemeni workers, and occasionally exotic health problems, particularly viral meningitis, and a couple of times we had some very, very scary

evacuations.

One of the things that was a huge help to the U.S. mission in the summer of '63 was that AID approved an airplane for our mission, a little Piper Aztec. It was a 6-seater, so it meant in terms of Medevacs you could get to Asmara, instead of having to rely on the twice weekly DC-3 service, or you could get to Aden. One could even go to Sanaa for a day to work and come back instead of having to beat your way up the road and back. So the airplane was a big help. The pilot was a former Air America flyer. It took a while for him to learn that Yemen wasn't Laos!

The U.S. has an aid program of considerable scope [this was the spring of '63], centering on the Mokha-Sanaa Road and the Taiz water project. This has been augmented in recent weeks by the arrival of a public administration specialist and by the gift of medicine and by the USIS scholarship program. U.S. aid was not stopped by the revolution and has continued in the face of some harassment from officials in the Taiz area.

I'd like to interrupt and say when our people talk about "harassment," we're really talking about the fact that Yemenis couldn't understand why we didn't pay bribes, and as a result, they would make their presence known by holding up paper and permits. We saw it as harassment, and they saw it as our not understanding how to do business. We had a GSO assistant who came in for a while who was magic. Suddenly, in the spring of 1963, a new Yemeni administrator was hired and our "harassment" problems vanished. His name was Abdulla Saidi. He got everything done for us. We got road permits in 20 minutes and all other permits which had been problems. But then, suddenly, we had an audit during the summer, after Megellas came in, and the auditors found that Saidi was tacking 10 percent onto all his transactions and using the money to pay off. So we had to explain to him that Americans don't do that, and he said, "Oh, I'm very sorry, well, I guess I'd better resign." "Well, okay." So then he disappeared into Aden.

I was down in Aden in the fall, and I was in the back streets wandering around and I came across Saidi, who had opened a little hardware store. And I went in and it was a beautiful little store, kind of like Sears of Aden, with lots of American tires and parts and so on. And I said, "By Allah, you've really prospered, and I'm glad to see it." (He was a nice guy.) "Oh, yes, God has been good to me," and so on. Well, I went back to Yemen, and I mentioned to Megellas, "There's something funny about this. We'd better have a look at it." So AID went through the purchase orders, and they found that what he'd done was take advantage of an AID GSO who was not terribly attentive. Saidi had had the American sign a series of purchase orders. Then he took them along when he resigned. He went to Aden and very carefully doled them out to suppliers over a period of several months and bought jeep tires and things like that, set up his shop, and was living happily ever after. And because of the complications of trying to go get him from Yemen in Aden under British law, there was nothing we could do. The "happy" ending.

But anyway, the general situation in Taiz began to improve. Some of the new government began to try rational planning, resource allocation, budgeting. There were fewer people running around the country with favorite schemes. The U.S. tried to push the Yemenis to start a regular tax collection system. That was very, very difficult.

At the same time, the U.S. had to keep up its own assistance programs. But also, there were people in the Congress who were saying, "Suppose the communists take over. Aren't we sort of funding a future communist government?" But outside of Taiz, things were still shaky. I wrote in June 1963: "The Yemen Arab Republic is broke and has no prospects of filling empty coffers. The UAR is beginning to withdraw its troops, even though Yemen has many troubles with internal security, and the people are waiting for the government to show some results. Sallal is trying frantically to get financial help, and he is turning to the Russians and to us. We gave him wheat, but we wouldn't give him money, and neither would the USSR, so (in that period into the summer of '63) they are having a lot of difficulties."

I think it wasn't until the Egyptians took another look at it in the late summer, and came back not with troops but with money, that the situation turned around. So by the time I left in the summer of '64, everything was relatively stable.

Q: Well, now, down in Aden, sort of the Yemeni opposition force against the British was a rather violent Marxist type of people, you know, sort of like the IRA or something like that. Was that reflected, or was Aden just a different world?

CURRAN: Aden was a different world, and in 1964 before I left in the summer, the insurgency in Aden, such as it was, was pretty inchoate. Some anti-British terrorists were able to pull off the near assassination of Sir Charles Johnson, who was the British High Commissioner - and in fact I was at the airport when the attack occurred, fortunately on the other side of the building - someone threw a grenade at him. Sir Charles was unhurt but angered. He was the prototypical old Brit, "You've got to use force with these wogs," was totally unsympathetic to development of any kind of self-government in Aden. Eventually, the British got tired of dealing with the tribes and pulled out.

Q: A question I wanted to ask: what were you doing with having scholarships for students? I would have thought it would be a very unpromising hole, not because of their intellectual capabilities, but really because of their preparation. How did you work with it?

CURRAN: Well, the Yemenis are great survivors, as you know from your experience on the Gulf, and most of our kids had gone to secondary school in Aden or in Ethiopia and had come back to USIS Taiz with enough academic credentials and language to pass whatever the English language test was. And also one of the things USIS did during my tenure was start English language training.

Q: Where were they pointed, the Yemenis, the 60 scholars?

CURRAN: A lot of them came back and were in the government in the '70s and '80s. In fact, my two successors, Dick Jeanneret and his successor, who was there in the '67 War, found that Yemenis were remarkably loyal to their home country and didn't stay in the States, which you might think, but came back to live in Yemen.

Q: Where were they going to school, do you remember?

CURRAN: Well, a lot of them went to Middle Western schools, and Kansas was a favorite location - also Texas. Many of them wanted to be oil engineers and pilots. As I say, a lot of them came back; a lot of them went into government.

Q: We've covered Yemen up to... You might tell what we want to cover, Ted.

CURRAN: Yes, well, we've covered my first basically full year in Yemen, up to the first celebration of the Yemen revolution, and I would suggest we turn from here to the second year I was there, with the more or less consolidation of the revolution and then plans for my departure for Washington in July 1964.

Q: Today is the 22nd of January, 1999. Okay, Ted?

CURRAN: Yes, I've been doing some reflection since our last conversation and particularly with the suggestion that you had, Stuart, to look at Parker Hart's book, *Saudi Arabia and the U.S.: The Birth of a Security Relationship*. It was fascinating to me to read this book and realize that, in Ambassador Hart's, view what was going on in Yemen was pretty much of a sideshow. In fact, his main concern was the birth and maintenance of a security relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States, and the threat that Nasser and the UAR posed to that relationship, and Yemen was really only seen from his point of view as a sort of minor subset of a much bigger and more important problem, whereas we poor peasants in Yemen were thinking of ourselves as being really important because the Yemen situation was geopolitically important, but also because of the relationship with the British, which Hart takes into account, but again, pretty much as a sideshow.

In any event, I wanted to start this section by just mentioning again, as I have several times in this oral history, what a huge advantage it was to have my family supporting me so conscientiously in this very, very difficult and backward place. My wife and I had one two-year-old when we went to Yemen and we started another baby in Yemen - arrived after we left - but it was a really terrific aspect to have unqualified support of them, in addition to which most people can't believe my parents made two visits to Yemen during my two years there. And again, that was really a wonderful feeling.

I want to move now to an event which happened actually just before this previous tape ended. I'm reminded of it because in Parker Hart's book he referred to it, very much in passing. I went back to my notes and looked at my notes and saw it rather differently. It was a visit by Ralph Bunche, who was the special emissary of U Thant to Yemen-

Q: U Thant being-

CURRAN: -the Secretary General of the UN, and Ralph Bunche, of course, a famous figure in the UN. We remember the visit as a culmination of the hope we had that the Egyptians and maybe the Russians would be playing less of an intrusive role in Yemen. Parker Hart saw it as a

card to play to try to get the Egyptians to be more cooperative. In any event, Bunche came to Taiz, which was, as noted, a very primitive airport, still unpaved, and the UN staff, who rejoiced under the acronym of UNYOM (UN Yemen Observation Mission), had never been in the southern part of Yemen. I don't think they'd even been in the northern part very long. There was a Major General Riki from India, who was in charge of UNYOM and he sent an advance man down from Sanaa. Riki's representative was startled to find it took two days to drive the 80 or 90 miles between Sanaa and Taiz.

When the announcement was made that this great man, Ralph Bunch, was coming to visit Taiz, my wife and I can still remember standing on a hilltop overlooking the airport, and it was the only time in my life I've actually seen hills black with people. I think the whole population of southern Yemen turned out to see who this "miracle worker" was, probably imagining - I don't want to be denigrating Yemeni mentality, but it was sort of as though a great magician or shaman or savior was coming. And the crowds were so huge that they couldn't land the plane, so the UN plane, a DC-3, circled over Taiz while the Yemeni militia finally managed to clear the strip. And then, when the plane landed, the crowd surrounded the airplane, and UN security people were absolutely petrified. But Bunche had great presence, got into a jeep with the governor, and they rode to town, the distance of about four miles, and it took them I think four or five hours because all the way they were surrounded by people who wanted to be touched and hand in petitions. It was really quite an extraordinary time.

Now, as I was thinking about the Parker Hart book and Bunche's visit, I think one of the handicaps we were under in Yemen in addition to the unbelievably primitive conditions, was the lack of really adequate communications. I think I mentioned earlier that whenever we did a classified cable we had to use one-time pads. I don't know whether you ever ran into that or not.

Q: Well, I know of the one-time pads.

CURRAN: Well, you can imagine trying to do a 10-page cable on a one-time pad. That's a very tedious and difficult exercise. And that's what we had to use, or we had to fly to Asmara or to go to Aden to use more modern facilities. And it wasn't till this period I'm beginning to talk about that we got an updated communications system.

Q: Well, Bunche's trip was for what purpose?

CURRAN: Well, the idea was that the U.S. government was very nervous about, not Yemen, but whether the Egyptians and/or the Russians would use northern Yemen, particularly a new airport that was being built near Sanaa, for geopolitical reasons. The Egyptians to threaten East Africa and the Russians, East Africa and beyond, maybe the Middle East. But the idea was to use Bunche to get the great powers to back off and leave the Yemenis alone. It didn't work, but I think it's very hard to see these things in long contexts, and as I'll mention later on, I think the tide, in a way, did turn that summer because, as the Yemenis got more self-assurance with their new form of government they began to take a more careful look at the outsiders and what their motives were. The Bunche visit may have helped Yemeni self-assurance.

We got a new telegraph system installed in 1964 and it made a tremendous difference in our ability, obviously, to receive messages and send messages. It was “clandestine,” meaning the embassy had not declared the system officially. Originally, it was a hand-keyed system, and I was on a visit in Asmara, which was operated by the National Security Agency Kagnev Station in Asmara, and the man who subsequently was a good friend of mine in Washington, but we didn’t know each other in Yemen, heard I was in town from Taiz and said to me - we went into a secure room and he said, “I’ve something very serious to tell you. There’s a new communications facility opened up in Taiz and we’ve no idea who has it.” And I said, “I don’t know. How I would know?” He said, “Well, we can tell it’s an American-trained operator.” You know, I wasn’t supposed to talk about it. So anyway, they knew a radio. My colleague said, “It’s near the U.S. embassy. You’d better look into it.”

Q: This was obviously an Agency (CIA) operation.

CURRAN: Yes, but the man in Asmara was trying to help, and I guess I should have said something, but I didn’t.

So I want to kind of go over some of the highlights of the last year without going into a lot of the detail I went into in the first half because the scene is pretty well set. Interrupt any time.

One sort of thing that was very clear to me after the first year and a half there was that being an Arabist was a huge advantage, almost an indispensable advantage, and I have a copy of a message I sent - nothing like a 30-year-old to tell the Department how to run their business-

Q: Oh, absolutely, yes.

CURRAN: - and I said that it was in a way shocking that the U.S. Information Agency was training people up to this level and the State Department wasn’t. I mean, there was really only one Arabist at the post. And the result was that the USIA trained another Arabist; the State Department didn’t. They had people in school, but they weren’t trained up to a level of being able to communicate speedily and well. So I thought that was an achievement and that at least the next PAO was an Arabist. I also got started on an English teaching program which I’m very proud of, and it still exists in Yemen after all these years. It was modeled on the old binational center we had. Ostensibly, we had a binational board, and it was set up by an English teaching expert whose name was George Wishon. Because he heard about this place and probably because I was whining about needing more resources, he came to see what was going on. I met him in Asmara. I brought him over in a Yemen Airline DC-3. It was kind of a typical story. I know it sounds a little like a “war story,” but it gives you the flavor of what it was like to work there. Halfway across the Red Sea, the Pilot came back and said to me, with George Wishon listening, “You live in Taiz, right?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well, you know, I’ve never flown into Taiz before, and I’d appreciate it if you’d help me find the airport.” And Wishon is looking at this guy, you know, what is this? So anyway, I went up front, and actually it was difficult to find the airport in Taiz. They had no beacon, and you had to know the topography. There was a very large mountain next to the city, and so you had to come in on the north side of the mountain, around the corner of the mountain, and then you saw the dirt air strip, and that’s where you landed. And

you only got one shot at landing because at the south end of the strip there was a hangar, so if you missed you couldn't take off again, so it was very exciting. So we landed just before a horrendous monsoon thunderstorm. We drove shakily through the roads of Taiz. We got to the house, and my daughter, who was then two, two and a half years old, was lying on the floor being tended to by a doctor because a wild dog had jumped on her while they were walking home from something or other, and she banged her head or something, you know, head injuries, covered with blood. Anyway, the doctor turned around and very matter-of-factly said, "Well, a wild dog knocked her down." And poor Wishon's eyes were now big as saucers. And then the power went out, and in the middle of the power outage - we were tending to the daughter, getting supper, and so on - there's a knock on the door, and a Yemeni tribesman arrived, with a huge dagger and a gun over his back, and Wishon opened the door. It was a messenger from the governor, and he wanted to see me at the Republican Palace - and because there are no telephones, that's the way you got messages. So anyway, the messenger's arrival was spectacular and did nothing to hurt my reputation in Washington.

There was one more story connected with Wishon. Wishon did an inspection, and one of the things that he also reported was that it was very hard to get English teachers, so USIS had to use the expatriates who were available, and one of them, our best teacher, was a Greek lady. And Wishon was testing several kids in the school, and one of them he was sitting down next to - you know what they go through on these: "What's this?" "It's a-." And this little boy said, "What eez thees? Eet eez a benzil [What is this? It is a pencil.]," in perfect Greek-American. (We always wondered what happened to the little boy. Anyway, the English-teaching program really took off, and it was a big advantage for our AID program and for the government, and a lot of the kids who went on scholarships to the U.S., young officials and so on, passed through our English Language Program.

Another really extraordinary event, and I'm not sure how this happened, but it wasn't called the Central Command then, but it was the fleet based in Bahrain.

Q: It was COMIDEASTFOR, Commander, Middle East Force.

CURRAN: Correct, it was the precursor to the Central Command. In any event, for reasons that still defy my understanding, they decided that they would make a ship visit to Hodeida. Apparently the Yemenis thought that this was a good idea. I think the Yemenis were always glad to tweak the Russians, who had built the port, so we got Yemeni approval, and the USS Turner arrived offshore Hodeida.

Q: A destroyer.

CURRAN: Destroyer Escort (DE) actually.

Q: Destroyer Escort.

CURRAN: Yes, not a big ship, but still pretty big for those times in Yemen. And the Hodeida Channel, which came in from the Red Sea, was about three miles long and not very deep. And I

went out with a lighter to meet the destroyer, and the first thing I noticed was the destroyer was flying a Yemeni flag, but it was the Royalist flag, so we had to fix that right away. And then I said to the captain, whose name I've now forgotten - wonderful guy, but about as uptight as you can get, as you know, the commander of a ship, if anything happens, he's finished... The captain had never been to Hodeida and nobody else had, and they didn't have any charts or anything. They had a Yemeni pilot, you know, who kept looking around at this modern ship. I told the captain, "You know, the Yemenis are going to fire an 18-gun salute when you come into the harbor." He said, "Oh, that's fine." I said, "Well, you know, they have kind of old guns, and I'm not sure how this is all going to work." And he couldn't understand why I was talking to him about it. Anyway, we inched down this channel with radar going and sailors doing soundings all the time. We get to where the honor guard could welcome us, and these guns start going off. They didn't have ceremonial rounds; they were firing live ammunition over the ship. And I thought the captain was going to die.

However, we made it safely, and were greeted by the Hodeida governor, who was a tough old bird and was charmed by the ship! We had a tour of the ship. Of course, the sailors were just entranced by this guy with the dagger and robes, and so there was a crowd going around the ship. The governor came to one of these over-the-horizon guns with special radar you can see over the horizon. So the ensign was proudly explaining to the governor that they could hit, you know, a dime 15 or 20 miles away. I was translating all of this, and the governor said to me, "Well, what about closer targets?" And I said, "Well, I suppose they could hit closer targets." And he said, "Well, could they hit that boat" - and he pointed to an old fishing boat about 200 meters away, which had people on it. So I said to the sailors, "Well, for example, he's very impressed you can hit these targets. Can you also hit that boat?" "Oh, yes, Sir, we could." So the governor said, "Well, do it." And the ensign said, "Sir?" I said, "I think it's a joke." Actually, it wasn't, I don't think.

And then they gave the governor and his staff a dinner, and then afterward showed a movie. They had a very safe movie, a cowboy movie or something. And when the lights went down, the governor said to me, "When do they serve the alcohol?" Of course, as a Muslim, he wasn't supposed to drink, but he'd been a guest in other U.S. facilities, and when the lights went down, the Muslims enjoyed having a little drink. Maybe they did that in Dhahran, I don't know. But on the USS T, no drinks were served.

Q: No, they didn't. We were with Wahabis in Dhahran, you've got to remember. I mean, we drank, but only with Americans. There was a lot of alcohol around, but mostly bootleg.

CURRAN: But you didn't serve it to them.

Q: It was called sadiki.

CURRAN: Right.

Q: But we didn't serve it to Muslims.

CURRAN: Guests. Well, obviously, when you get a little away from the center of things it's different. When we get to Afghanistan I have a few stories, too. Anyway, the poor Governor was really disappointed.

Q: You might want to explain that American naval ships have, since the time of President Wilson, been dry.

CURRAN: Yes. Anyway, I actually didn't realize that at the time myself, and I thought that probably they could accommodate a visitor, but nothing doing.

The other thing that I remember particularly from the trip was that the governor was so pleased with the hospitality on board that he invited all the men on the ship to what he called a picnic. So as was usually the case, I went along with this, and we went into a kind of a courtyard, and I didn't know what on earth they were planning to do. I thought it would be a *mansif*, where you have food around. Well, they were so to be honored particularly, to show how fresh the meat was, that they herded the lambs in and did them in right in front of the sailors, cut their throats. And of course, you know, Americans aren't used to seeing that, and a couple of them fainted dead away, which the Yemenis thought was really a howl; these tough American warriors passing out.

Another project in that last part of my tour involved the Smithsonian Institution sending Gus Van Beet, at that time a leading southern Arabian archeologist - he wasn't an Arabist - to look at the Sabaean ruins of Marib. And Gus Van Beet turned out to be a wonderful man. I'm afraid I've lost touch with him; I don't even know if he's alive. But he was a very loose and relaxed scholar. And the time came to go out to Marib. We were in Sanaa, and the UNYOM people, the UN mission people, were still around. When they heard Van Beet was going to go out and see Marib, which at those times - if you didn't mind being kidnapped by a tribesman - you could go out and look at it, this incredible granite dam and some ruins. So the UN all wanted to go with him. And Gus said, "I think Mr. Curran should go with me." And I was really tempted, but they were going to go on an Egyptian military plane, and I had at that time one and three-quarters children and I just thought - with still some active fighting going on - I really wasn't sure it was a good idea, so I didn't go. And as it turned out, there was a dust storm in Marib, and Van Beet had a hard time seeing very much. The Smithsonian, I think, would have been interested in taking on the Marib ruins, but the United Nations, because of the trouble with the UN mission, wouldn't fund it, and I guess the American government thought it was just too far out and too dangerous. So nothing was ever done, and I don't know now whether anyone's working on Marib.

Q: I don't.

CURRAN: The next big event was something in which we took a good deal of "I told you so" satisfaction. I mentioned earlier that there was a quite conflict between us and the Yemeni government because the Chinese had built a poorly-engineered paved road between Hodeida and Sanaa, whereas our road was gravel and graded and so on for local maintenance. And the Yemenis didn't care about how easy it was to maintain; they wanted a paved road. Well, after a tremendous rainstorm, the Chinese road in July of 1963 washed out, and I can't tell you how

pleased we were to point out why to the Yemenis. It was terribly expensive fixing the road because it washed out in a mountain culvert and blocked traffic for, I don't know, a month; they'd barely got it fixed before the celebration of the first year of the Republic. It may not merit a mention in an oral history, except that we got so tired of arguing this issue that for us it was a great feather in our cap that that road finally collapsed.

I want to talk a little bit about the celebration of the first year of the Yemen Arab Republic. It was really quite an event. It was held in Sanaa. It was a two day event. The Egyptians didn't actually pave the central square, but they put liquid tar on the surface to keep the dust down; the Egyptians put on a parade, and two of the Egyptian leaders, Amr - and was it Hassan el-Amr - and Anwar Sadat, came down from Cairo. The Egyptian leaders brought President Sallal with them. Sallal had been treated for bilharzia, which is a very debilitating liver disease. And the UAR had Cairo trying to get him well, or that's what they said. And when he came back, he looked to us worse than when he'd left, so I don't know. I don't think he ever went back to Cairo for medical treatment again. The government built a special parade ground in an area outside of Sanaa (not in the town - I think there may have been a security concern) - and they had quite a crowd there. First they had a speech by Sallal. There was a very dull part of the speech while he was thanking the Egyptians and talking about Arab brotherhood, and then the second part of the speech was very popular because he really took out after the British, and the Yemenis all ate that up, and there was great applause and so on. I had one quote: "If those dwarfs invade, our brave soldiers will kill two British for every Yemeni in battle." Great cheers and so on. Then the Egyptians had a parade, and their parade was marching a bunch of their raw recruits, young Yemenis that the Egyptians had tried to train, and these poor kids had no idea about marching to music or what to do with their guns, and the Egyptian noncoms were marching along, pushing them into place. Mack Sennet stuff. This was followed by a tribal parade which everybody got into, the audience, the camels, the horses, daggers, and rifles. And that lasted for about two hours, and it was a huge success. And then there was a mighty fireworks display in the evening. It was really quite an impressive display.

The next day was geopolitically important, because the Russians opened an airport which no one had been able to get near, and we all got out to photograph it. It was a huge jet airfield, a 9000 foot strip, and of course, our intelligence people - we had our military attaché there from Cairo - they were all just absolutely clicking film right and left. And it said a lot to Washington in terms of adding to the danger of having this significant Russian and Egyptian presence. The only thing they hadn't thought of was automated stairs, you know, to bring up to a big jet plane. So military planes were okay because they're close to the ground, but in the course of the ceremony, one of the VIPs came in from Cairo - I don't know who it was - in something like a 707 or the Russian variety of that, and they had no way to get him out of the plane. So they finally backed up a truck and a stepladder and got him out.

The year 1963 ended rather tragically for America, not so much in Yemen, but because it was, of course, the year that Kennedy was assassinated. When you're living in a small overseas community where everyone is very close and where you feel very intensely your Americanism, it was really probably one of the two or three biggest shocks of my life. I was in Aden actually the morning we heard about it. The first reports were that he'd been shot but not killed, and by the

time we got back to Taiz, we knew that the President was dead. Not only were the Americans struck, but the Yemenis were - terribly, terribly affected. And we had a condolence book at the chargé's house, Jim Cortada's house, and I think it took us three days to accommodate all the people who wanted to express their grief.

Q: We're talking about a condolence book that people come in and sign and put anything they want.

CURRAN: Yes. Right. It took us three days to accommodate the Yemenis who wanted to come. Guests cried and tore their hair. I suppose there were two reasons. One is that they saw America as kind of being the "great hope of the world," as it were. And I think Kennedy came across generally to the world as a new spirit in international relations. So it was a very, very sad time, and the Yemenis were casting around for some way to honor the fallen President, and they fixed on the city water system for Taiz. And after a debate, the Kennedy family agreed, so there exists still in Taiz the John F. Kennedy Municipal Water System.

Looking back at my notes and having read the Parker Hart book, there was a significant change in Yemeni internal politics at this time. A very distinguished tribal leader named Abdulrahman Iryani began his ascendancy and eventually became president, after about 10 years. And I have a long message which was written by the well-connected German ambassador, a message I translated and sent to Washington, which predicted what would happen. What the ambassador said was that the Yemenis really were fed up with the Egyptians and the Russians and they wanted to have a more independent government. And Iryani and his tribal group, as I say, over a long time, were able to do that.

Q: I just wanted to ask - you were there when the Republic was established in 1962.

CURRAN: No, I was on home leave. I was present at the first birthday of the Republic.

Q: What was our feeling by the time the first year was over? How had the Republic worked - difference, changes from the monarchy - what was the approach?

CURRAN: The Yemen Arab Republic was completely different from the Imamate. It was a real national government, not a tribal confederation. The Yemen Arab Republic introduced some things which the Royalists never bothered with - secondary education, more educational opportunities at the college level. Progress wasn't an enemy; it was one of the goals of the state. The revolutionaries, I think I mentioned earlier, wiped out, murdered all of the Royal Family, so that they got rid of a lot of infrastructure, but they replaced it pretty quickly. They established a national currency, including paper money, which Yemen had never had before. They had banking. They had a for serious government service. So in the context of those days, as I think back on it, although many Americans were worried about Yemen being a communist base or an Egyptian base, I think we thought - that is, most of us who were there - that the revolution was basically a good change for Yemen. Public health was established, water systems.

Q: The John F. Kennedy Water System.

CURRAN: Yes, and others. And the roads were modernized, and the airports were modernized. So I would say, on balance, the revolution helped Yemen.

Q: *Well, then, you left when?*

CURRAN: The summer of '64.

Q: *And whither?*

CURRAN: Well, I was assigned to be the Near East Desk officer for USIA, and we can go through that pretty quickly.

JAMES N. CORTADA
Chargé d'Affaires
Sanaa (1963-1964)

James N. Cortada was born in New York in 1914. He grew up in New York, but spent his high school years in Havana, Cuba. He attended college in New York five years, until 1932 and joined the Foreign Service in 1942. Mr. Cortada's career included posts in Cuba, Spain, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: *So, we come rally to 1963 where you got a very interesting assignment. How did this come about?*

CORTADA: Stuart, I'm still somewhat mystified about some of the ins and outs of that damned thing, one of the weirdest experiences that I have ever been in, and looking back I'm still puzzled. The revolt had broken out in Yemen. The Imam had been kicked out but the northern tribes were supporting the Imam, while the southern tribes were backed by Egypt and 50,000 Egyptian troops. Civil war between North and South raged. The Department of State came to the point of recognizing the Yemeni Republic as the government, despite a lot of British and Saudi Arabian pressures to the contrary, but they did. And the Yemenis appointed the same Ambassador to the United Nations and Washington. To the best of my knowledge, from the little I was able to gather, and I must admit I didn't probe very much either, the United States was puzzled as to what to do because of the presence of the 50,000 Egyptian troops in the place and the fact that for all practical purposes, Yemen had become almost an Egyptian, if not colony, a zone of influence with a civil war going on. There was a man in the White House, on the National Security Council, Robert Komer, who from the best of my knowledge had never worked in the Arab world but apparently had a great deal of influence in the Yemen question. President Kennedy is said to refer to the Yemen conflict as "Komer's War". Years later, he was proposed for Turkey as Ambassador, and I think the Turks objected.

Q: *He went to Turkey as Ambassador for a while.*

CORTADA: I thought he had been refused.

Q: No, I think he went there for a while, but maybe I am wrong.

CORTADA: I think he got refused. But whatever it was, it was not a particularly fruitful thing. In one of these books about the Kennedy administration, President Kennedy is quoted as referring to “Komer's War” with respect to Yemen. But the man didn't know beans about the place. I never met him.

Take a look at the picture, at the moment when the question came up. Phil Talbot, no direct experience in the Arab world, Howard Cottam, the senior Deputy Assistant, splendid gentleman, very talented, Ph.D. in agriculture, experience in Brazil, never had put foot in the Arab world. The other Deputy Assistant Secretary, Jim Grant was a lawyer, out of AID, had never dealt directly with the Arab world, the Director of the Office of Near East Affairs which included Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, etcetera. Bob Strong had served in Syria for a relatively short time when our Embassy in Syria was closed down and he went out together with the whole staff. Hence, his experience in the area was almost negligible. This was the set up in Washington. Fortunately we were very strong overseas with all our embassies headed by top flight ambassadors. But there was not a clear understanding in the Department at top level of what all the basic issues were in connection with Yemen.

Somebody had come up with the proposal of sending to Yemen a gentlemen who has since passed away and whose name I don't remember. It was Charles something or other, very active in DACOR. He died last year. Well, he was offered the Ambassadorship to Yemen. He had never been in an Arab country, spoke no Arabic and Yemen is a place where if you don't speak Arabic, forget it. He very wisely turned down the proffered honor. For some reason that escapes me, Bob Strong wanted Bob Stookey who was Chargé - you see the Ambassador to Saudi Arabia was also accredited as Minister to Yemen before we recognized the Arab Republic of Yemen, when that connection was severed. When Stookey was removed I came in as Chief of Mission in my own right. The question in my mind was why did Bob Strong want to get rid of Stookey. Bob belonged there. He negotiated the recognition of Yemen, and was one of the most competent classical Arabists in the Service. He and his wife had no children, thus he had no responsibilities in that sense. His wife was teaching Arab kids how to read English. Bob was a musician. He was also a painter. He had the confidence of the Arab officials in toto.

Now, there were two projects the United States had going in Yemen. One was building a road that began nowhere and went nowhere. Well that's not quite true. It began on the Red Sea in Mocha and went all the way up to Sanaa. And there were the waterworks in Taiz, there not being a single Yemeni engineer in the whole place.

The head of the road building project was a very cantankerous, elderly gentleman who I believed had retired for one of the States' Departments of Transportation. As an engineer, he was a crackerjack, but without a doubt one of the most insensitive persons I have ever met in dealing with peoples of another culture. He despised the Yemenis, and he treated them harshly. As a

result, there was constant friction. The Yemenis retaliated by stealing from the AID road project. It was a nasty situation. And he was forever complaining that Stookey wouldn't do anything. Well, what they should have done was not remove Stookey. They should have taken that old codger and gotten him the hell out of there, as they eventually did, after I left. He didn't get funny with me because I was extremely firm with him when he tried it. Strong insisted upon Stookey's removal and Talbot went along with it.

I came in one Monday morning after one weekend and the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Howard Cottam asked to see Phil Talbot immediately, that a question affecting my future had come up. Talbot with a sheepish attitude, and not more than five minutes told me to get ready to go to Yemen immediately as Chargé. That was it. No, not even like that, just get going. No explanation, what was the rationale, what was I supposed to be doing. It left me uneasy. I didn't like it. So I went to see Bob Strong. It was obvious after a 10 minute talk with Bob that he couldn't care any more about Yemen than flying to the moon. Furthermore, all he wanted was to get Bob Stookey out of there, have me work something out with that old cantankerous fellow, and get the damned road built. Beyond that, he couldn't care less, had no understanding at all of the relevance of that place once the British would leave, as indeed happened later. For me, the temptation was to tell them all to go to hell. I was on the promotion list already for class 1, and I just didn't like that kind of attitude, very cavalier. There was no justification, no rationale. But with a civil war going on if I did so, they might have said: "Jim is chicken." I decided therefore to accept the assignment, finish the road and waterworks. Given Talbot's lack of candor, I did something very unusual. I wrote a memorandum of instructions from him to me in connection with the assignment, what I was expected to do and that at the end of 18 months the assignment would be ended. And damn it if Talbot didn't initial it. Because we had a child in grade school, another one in high school and another in college, my wife, Shirley remained at our home in Orange for six months to get the kids lined up. Then she spent a year with me. And it turned out to be a very interesting assignment. And quite possibly prevented World War Three or at least 50,000 Egyptian and 50,000 British troops having a go at each other.

Q: You were showing me some letters of appreciation concerning an incident...

CORTADA: And the appreciation of the British Parliament in the matter. Notice that that congratulatory note from the Secretary of State Dean Rusk was sent to me from Rusk's office. Interestingly, I never heard from Talbot or any of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries, or the Director of NE about the plaudits including one from Rusk.

Q: Well, I think in the first place, could you explain what that situation was?

CORTADA: The situation was this. Sixteen British servicemen under a Colonel Blimp, who served as cooks, accountants, etc. in Aden where the British had 50,000 troops got their directions mixed up, because they had to go every year into a camping type of thing. And the Colonel Blimp instead of going south, went north.

Q: He is the eternal Colonel Blimp as a generic term for a doddering old guy, a military incompetent.

CORTADA: Absolutely. Because that's what happened. Instead of going south, he goes north...He might have been a major for all I know, but whatever it was, when you make a mistake of that kind, and you've been having fights with the Yemenis right along...So they wind up in the hands of one of the wildest of the Yemeni tribes. On the frontier between Aden and Yemen.

I'm sitting at my breakfast table, with the BBC on, and lo and behold, I learn about the incident. Now, we had difficult communications capabilities with respect of the Department of State, so I knew I wasn't going to hear anything about this for a while. I began to take steps to find out what this was all about. I went to see the Yemeni military governor. He didn't know yet either because his communications were terrible. In the meantime, the British down in Aden through their contacts were trying to see if they could do something with the frontier tribes with no success. What happened was that the then tribal commander for that whole area was closely associated with the government in Sanaa.

I found out that the sixteen prisoners were all coming to Taiz where I had my embassy. Accordingly, I made arrangements for them to stay in an old palace and since bilharzia is an endemic disease they had a pool there full of it. I requested the American community to give me all their beer. We kept these soldiers in beer for a whole week, fed them, and had their clothes washed. In the meantime, the government of Yemen, whether prodded by the Egyptians or not, I don't know, tried to turn the incident into an American one, one that involved the United States. They wanted me to go to Sanaa to talk with the President and his Cabinet.

Q: What's the difference between Taiz and Sanaa?

CORTADA: Sanaa became the political capital of Yemen. Taiz was the capital during the Imam's period. And after the revolution, they moved to Sanaa.

Q: But you were in Taiz?

CORTADA: We were in Taiz because we still had the Embassy facilities there, and it wasn't easy getting the proper quarters, etc. in Sanaa. At the time, there was no need for it, really, because we had a very large AID encampment and supplies, all in Taiz. It didn't make any sense to move out of there until the road was finished.

Q: How far apart were Taiz and Sanaa?

CORTADA: Oh, I'd say about 250 miles, and we were about maybe 75 or 80 miles from the Red Sea, so we could unload the stuff, and bring it in much easier than if we were all the way up there. And we weren't going to have the AID encampment in one place and the Embassy in another.

President Salah was trying very hard to get us involved in the British incident. Also, I was in charge of British interests as relations between the United Kingdom and Yemen had been broken just before I arrived. I took the position right along that the incident was a British-Yemen

problem, that I'd be glad to help out in one way or another. Hence, I stayed in Taiz and did not go to Sanaa. What I was really doing was narrowing the options, because I wanted to resolve the problem very quickly. I was afraid of possible reactions. There had been fights between the British and the Yemenis in the Beihan area where some Yemenis had been hurt. Some Yemeni officials wanted to exhibit these Britishers in cages like monkeys. I knew very well that if that happened, then the fat would be in the fire. The British Commander in Aden would not tolerate it. So, I was playing a very close game of bridge. Fortunately, the British government gave me a free hand. Eventually, about three or four days after they were in Taiz, the son of the Sheik of the frontier, a young man in his late '20s who was also a Cabinet Minister, was sent to negotiate with me.

Once that happened, I knew we were very close to some kind of a deal. I knew damn well what the angle would be. When this young man let me know the day before that he was coming to see me and that he would be in the government guest house, I believed his father would also turn up. And sure enough, that happened.

Well, in the meantime, I had prepared together with our USIA officer, a very capable Arabist, a memorandum which we had cleared in advance with the British, as an apology. A sort of "I'm sorry these boys made a mistake. It's not going to happen again." That kind of stuff. I got that approved. I had it in my pocket.

When the young minister came in, he said: "You know, we have this problem." I said: "Look, wait a minute, is your father here?" "Uh, uh." Just like I figured. "Would you do me a favor of going upstairs and asking him how much does he want for these soldiers." He got up, went upstairs, came back. A thousand dollars a head and four thousand dollars for damages allegedly made to a village in his area. I responded: "Twenty thousand dollars and they are all mine, right?" "Yes, alright." "The American government guarantees the payment of twenty thousand dollars. When are you going to give them to me."

Well, it was a deal. By the end of the week, the soldiers were on their way back to Aden and the crisis was over.

If they'd been American soldiers, they'd probably still be there, under the concept of not one cent for tribute and all that kind of business! But for the British, the solution was cheap. That's how that crisis was resolved.

Later on, When I was Diplomat in Residence at UCLA, I gave a series of lectures on management crises, and wrote up the whole thing. It has been published by UCLA, but without the background I've given you.

Q: Well, with the situation, you said you went there, and you gave yourself your own instructions. How did the AID project go while you were there, plus Mr. Cantankerous, the engineer?

CORTADA: Smooth as silk, because once I got in the picture...You know, there's such a thing as

physical appearance. This old man, big burly fellow had a bum leg, he always had a lot of pain in it, which I think contributed to his testiness. Bob Stookey was short, about 5 feet six, soft spoken, excellent war record. He was a tank officer during World War II in North Africa, a very fine man. But I think Bob's appearance affected the road engineer's attitude in part. Well, I'm not exactly a shrimp, and in my youth, I used to box. I was a wrestler. I was an oarsman. When that old man first tried to get a little funny with me, I said: "Hey, forget that I am head of this embassy. I don't give a damn who the hell you are, where you come from, what you've done, you're not going to be abusive, that's all there is to it." Then a major crisis occurred. When for some reason or another, heaven knows what provoked it, but one night I was having a small dinner party at home, and the engineer came running to my house. He reported that "Somebody has just pumped a bunch of shots into the cabin of one of my workmen. You argue for good relations with the Arabs...and see what you get." I went to see what happened. Sure enough, there was a family there with a wife and baby and a bunch of bullet holes on the crib side. They had just gone right over the baby's crib. The bullets had also gone over the American worker while he was sitting and severed the top of his undershirt without hurting his skin. I gave an order to stop all construction immediately. Halt everything. Nothing opens tomorrow morning.

In the morning, I had a long session with the military governor, after reporting to Washington, the Department came back and gave me a free hand to settle the problem any way I could.

I wanted to stop any more threats of that kind, and furthermore I wanted to halt all the thievery which was going on. For thirty days, I kept the whole job closed down. Almost bankrupted the country because we were the biggest single source of cold cash in the place.

The old engineer got over any more nonsense. As the weeks went by and I simply wouldn't give in he really became frightened and told me "You're going to get us all killed." I responded by saying: "Hey, you're the guy who says that we diplomats mollycoddle Arabs. I don't mollycoddle anybody, including you. We're not going back to work until such a time as they meet my demands. And if that takes forever, I don't mind playing golf every day." That took all the fight out of him anymore and there was no more nonsense.

Well, eventually, they sent down the Vice President, a very able and sensible military man. I felt the time was right for settling the issue and agreed to start up the project. 2000 men went back to work. Robberies were stopped, the engineer quit being cantankerous and matters went smoothly.

Just about 18 months were over, I was already within sight of the Sanaa plateau and final short lap. Meantime, the waterworks had been inaugurated.

At a Chief of Mission's conference in Istanbul I reminded Talbot about my memorandum. A little later a couple of NEA inspectors swung through the area and came to Taiz. I was firm in holding NEA to the letter of the memorandum and left exactly eighteen months after my arrival. I had continued to feel uneasy about the NEA lack of interest in the Yemen scene. I had written a letter to the late Rodger Davies who got killed...

Q: *In Cyprus, yes.*

CORTADA: Rodger was an excellent Arabist, but he had a sick child and for many years he served in the United Nations I think, so he could be near appropriate facilities. But while I was in Yemen, he became Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for NEA. After one of my visits to Aden, I wrote Rodger that in my judgement, the British would be out of Aden entirely within five years. They had given Kenya independence, were now dependent upon the North Sea for oil, no longer on the Middle East. I didn't see them spending fifty million dollars a year keeping 50,000 troops in Aden. For what purpose? I believed the Department had better start thinking how they were going to make up for that absence because somebody was going to try to fill it. Rodger wrote back that I was mistaken. Stated he had been assured by the British Foreign Office that they would be there at least ten years. Well, they were out of there just a few years later. Left a vacuum. Iran tried to step into it. We've had the Gulf War. There shall be peace in that area only as long as we have troops in the place.

Q: *Well, you left there in 1964. Right. Why did you get sent to UCLA? Was that at your behest? Was that your request?*

CORTADA: No. No, I simply insisted on wanting out of Yemen as per my memorandum of assignment. I was indifferent with respect to my next assignment.

CURTIS F. JONES
Principal Officer and Consul General
Aden (1965-1967)

Curtis F. Jones was born in Bangor, Maine in 1921. He received a bachelor's degree from Bangor College in 1942 and served in the U.S. Army for the following three years. Mr. Jones' Foreign Service career included positions in Lebanon, Ethiopia, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. He was interviewed by Thomas F. Conlon on March 29, 1994.

JONES: For example, your military involvement in Yemen. Nasser had sent troops to support the [Yemeni] republicans against the forces of the Imam of Yemen, who was supported by Saudi Arabia. [The Saudis] really were our good friends.

So when I said that I'd like a transfer out of NE, they said, "Okay, we'll see what we can do." And sure enough, in mid-1965 I went to Aden as Principal Officer and Consul General, with the Consular District of Aden and the South Arabian Federation, which was another British colony in fact, if not in name, and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman.

When I was transferred out of NE, I was not overjoyed about the assignment to Aden, because Aden, at that time, was going into a revolutionary phase of its own.

Q: A rather dangerous place, as a matter of fact.

JONES: It was. In fact, [the Department] subsequently sent me a bulletproof vest! Ironically, the man who sent it to me was Curt Moore, who died from machine gun fire from Palestinian terrorists in Khartoum in 1973. However, I also felt somewhat uneasy about leaving the Egyptian desk job to Earl Russell, who transferred from the Israeli to the Egyptian desk. I suspected that he was going to step into the same "swamp" from which I was now escaping. I didn't want to wish this on him, but on the other hand, I don't think that it would have been good for him if I went to him and said, "Earl, you're taking a job that's going to kill you." [Looking back on it], I don't think that the job did him any good at all, but that's a personnel matter on which I was not consulted.

Q: Speaking of personnel matters, I presume, then, that your assignment to Aden was arranged directly by the Director of NE.

JONES: Oh, yes.

Q: As we said before, the Bureaus were in charge [of assignments to] all of the "key" jobs. Routine jobs may have been handled in Personnel, but the Bureau had a lot to say.

JONES: Well, they keep reorganizing the State Department, but "plus ca change, plus c'est la même chose." [The more things change the more they remain the same.]

Q: Well, anyhow, the situation in Aden was a very dangerous one. An insurgency was building up and the British had considerable forces there.

JONES: Yes, I believe so.

Q: Did this insurgency mean that you had serious difficulty in moving around the city of Aden?

JONES: Not exactly. When I arrived, I began to sense from talking with the Adenis that there was a different view toward Americans than toward the British. It was my destiny that I served in three posts where I watched the British leave: Libya, Port Said, and Aden. Soon after I arrived, I concluded that the British efforts to create a political structure which would enable them to retain hegemony over South Arabia were totally fruitless - out of reach. Not only did I have this view, but 99% of the Adenis and South Arabians I talked to had this view. The exceptions, of course, were the Sultans and the people who were in office. However, a number of the British military and civilian officials there [held the same view that I did]. I'm not sure I ever heard a British military man admit this, but a number of very sharp, articulate British civilian officials - lawyers and bankers, people in the middle range of the civil service - agreed with me. They said [privately] that this was a lost cause and the sooner the British got out of there, the better.

Q: Who was the British High Commissioner, the senior man?

JONES: Turnbull was the High Commissioner for, I guess, all of my tour. I believe he may have been High Commissioner in Africa somewhere - possibly Kenya. Turnbull was a fine gentleman but definitely of the old school - quite conservative. I'm sure that he would have been horrified to realize what I was being told by some of the people in his administration.

The strategy of revolutionaries, as you know from your own service in Southeast Asia, is very often to go after the people most sympathetic to their cause. One of the victims of this was Sir Arthur Charles who, I think, was the senior law officer in Aden. He was assassinated about a year after I arrived. I began to realize by this time that the "hard liners" had gotten control of the rebellion in South Arabia. But, as so often happens, a rebellion begins with the more moderate elements - and Abdullah Asnaj was the leader of that group. Then they are replaced by "hard line" elements, until finally, when the British were driven out, power accrued to some really "tough guys." But they still weren't tough enough and were themselves thrown out by some even more bloody-minded types.

Q: Was this political constellation largely limited to the Aden area, was it being promoted by other Arab states, or were the communists involved in this at all?

JONES: There was some, peripheral support from Egypt, but essentially this was the republican faction in Aden and South Yemen - the same faction which Nasser supported militarily in Yemen.

Q: When did the Egyptians withdraw their forces from Yemen?

JONES: Of course, one of the reasons that they did so badly in the 1967 war was that, for reasons I'll never understand, Nasser stumbled into that war with 50,000 or 60,000 Egyptian troops in Yemen. They were withdrawn from Yemen about a year or so later.

Q: So this was well after the time you went to Aden.

JONES: Well after. I am not aware that any overt attempt was ever made to kill an American in Aden. A bomb was thrown at our compound and exploded. Two or three times teenagers tried to burn the lift vans of the departing Naval Attaché, which were sitting out in the street, in front of the Consulate General. So I took it on myself to assign a Marine to sit out there on the sidewalk and just keep the kids away. One night someone fired a gun from a hillside above the office. The bullet hit the wall about two feet from the Marine. I heard the shot and went down [to see what had happened]. I've never seen a man so ashen-faced in my life. I reported this to the Department. The Department cabled back and said, "You are not authorized to station Marines off the premises of the Consulate General."

Q: The Marine was right in front of the Consulate General.

JONES: Well, he was in the street. So, from then on, anything that could be burned was "fair game," although I think, in fact, that we lost nothing. The only casualty on my staff during the whole time that I was in Aden was my house boy, who was just walking down the street when a

grenade was thrown at a passing British patrol. He was wounded. He got himself back to the Consulate General. I took him up to the British Hospital.

When I mentioned that I had witnessed the departure of the British from three different posts, I was very fortunate, personally, that the British were always extremely friendly and cooperative - able allies and friends. Of course, when I took my house boy to the hospital, they immediately got a doctor out and gave him A-1 medical attention. He came through this experience very well.

On only one occasion did I, myself, feel in danger from rebel activity. Of course, I had the same old difficulty that I had had in Syria in establishing private contact with locals, because I'm a foreigner and how do people know whether I'm passing the essence of their conversations with me on to the British. Obviously, I was on good terms with the British and was invited to all of their parties. I did go over to the Crater area to play tennis. The Crater area is a few miles farther into town from the Consulate General. On one occasion, when I left the tennis court, there was a man out in the street in Yemeni dress. As I got into the Consulate General car and started to back out, he came up close and pretended to direct traffic. I thought that this was a very peculiar way to act. Either the man was deranged or else he was going after me. So I walked back into the tennis court. As soon as he saw me go back inside, his expression changed and he disappeared. If he was prepared to shoot me, he wasn't prepared to involve the Arabs with whom I was playing tennis. I don't know whether this was a [serious incident] or not.

Q: In any case, at the time you thought that you were in some difficulty.

JONES: The only other item of interest in Aden, from my personal point of view, was that the 1967 War occurred during my tour. One consequence for Aden was a minor insurrection among the South Arabian personnel among the British forces. There was some shooting, and there may have been some British casualties - I can't remember. There was quite a bit of unrest for a couple of days. Then, subsequently, a memorandum was circulated to all of the posts in the area, drafted in NE, as I recall, by Bill Crawford, who was at that time, I think, the officer in charge of the Israeli desk. This memorandum said that the 1967 War is over and, although we regret all of the unpleasant ramifications, we think that we can safely say that we can put it behind us and that Arab-Israeli progress toward peace will continue.

I took advantage of my being principal officer at my own post to circulate to the Department and to most of the posts in the area a telegram stating my personal view that the Arab-Israeli War was not over, that the situation was going to get much worse before it got better, and that the consequences of the Israeli seizure of the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai, and the Golan Heights were going to be very severe. I can't remember if I referred, in the cable, to the fact that I had taken an orientation trip in 1965 when I was still officer in charge of the Syrian-Egyptian desk. At three Embassies - Cairo (under Ambassador Luke Battle), Baghdad (under Ambassador Bob Strong), and Damascus (under Ambassador Ridgway Knight) - I had posed to each Country Team the hypothesis that Israel would take the first, convenient opportunity to seize those territories. I had expected to be shouted down, but all three Country Teams were virtually unanimous in agreeing with me. They all anticipated it. So when it happened, the Middle East watchers were not surprised.

Q: Let me just go back to your position in Aden. How big a staff did you have there?

JONES: I had a Vice-Consul who also acted as a commercial officer. He and I would take turns in making visits to Muscat and Oman to check on activities over there. We also took turns visiting Salalah [Oman], where the old Sultan's palace was. I had three or four American personnel performing administrative functions, including a GSO (General Services Officer) and code clerks; and an Assistant Naval Attaché.

Q: Was there very much "routine" consular work there, by which I mean passport, visas, and so on?

JONES: There was a fair amount. The Vice-Consul spent one-third to one-half of his time on consular work, but some of it included shipping services, because Aden was and still is a major port.

Q: It was a major port at that time for ships that would "bunker" at Aden, because the prices were advantageous, as I recall.

JONES: Exactly. A big "bunkering" port.

Q: But the main focus of your work was political and consular.

JONES: Yes, though to some extent it was economic as well.

Q: You were in Aden then when the 1967 War began, and your perspective would be an interesting one, considering your background in the Middle East.

JONES: The 1967 War itself was probably Israel's most decisive victory in all of the rounds of the Arab-Israeli war, and its ramifications, of course, in the succeeding decades have been considerable. At the moment, at the time of the War, there were the usual repercussions in the Arab world.

I was on the periphery at the time, down in Aden. But even in Aden there was a minor mutiny among the Arab forces of the [British-controlled] South Arabian Federation. It was a fairly unpleasant episode. As I recall, lives were lost, including some British personnel, and it took a few days to restore order in South Aden. But that is, of course, a side show, compared with the main event which left Israel in control of the Sinai, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank, which are still under vigorous contention as we speak, in July, 1994.

ROSCOE J. SUDDARTH
Political Officer
Taiz (1965-1967)

**Political Officer
Sanaa (1967)**

Ambassador Suddarth was born in Kentucky and raised primarily in Tennessee. He was educated at Yale and Oxford Universities and Massachusetts Institute of Technology and served in the US Air Force before joining the Foreign Service in 1961. Primarily a Middle East specialist the Ambassador served as Political Officer and Counselor in Yemen, Libya, Jordan and in Saudi Arabia, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. He also served with the Department of State in Washington in senior level positions concerning primarily Middle East and Political Military matters. In 1987 he was appointed Ambassador to Jordan, where he served until 1990. Ambassador Suddarth was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: Today is April 26, 1999. We've got you in 1965 going to Yemen. You were there until when?

SUDDARTH: 1967.

Q: '67 of course being a critical date.

SUDDARTH: That's right.

Q: Can you describe how you saw Yemen in 1965 when you arrived? Where were you? The capitals kept changing.

SUDDARTH: Well, yes. The capital was in Sanaa. It had always been, even under the imam, that they kept diplomatic missions in Taiz, which was similar to what happened in Saudi Arabia where your missions were in Jeddah and the capital was in Riyadh. There was a certain sense in both cases of xenophobia, keep the foreigners at a distance. But when I got there in 1965, the government was allowing missions to move to Sanaa. That became a major issue for the mission. Political conditions, which were fairly unstable... The situation in '65 was, there were some 50 or 60,000 Egyptian troops who had come to Yemen after the revolution in September of 1962 at the behest of the new revolutionary Yemeni government. They were being opposed by royalist forces, the forces of the ousted imam, whose son, Imam Duggad, I think, up in the mountains of Yemen, who were being sustained by the Saudis. So, you in effect had a proxy war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia with Yemen being the killing field. The Yemeni tribesmen were fierce. As Egyptian soldiers would sometimes get waylaid, often the tribesmen would send them back with their lips and their ears cut off. So, the tribesmen were pretty fierce and they were well armed.

So, you had a government somewhat under Egyptian dominance under President Sallal and Hassan Amri with a restive population. Some tribes were for the government. Some were against them. All were susceptible to bribes. Then you had a very interesting triumvirate of republican statesmen who wanted a more moderate view. They didn't want the military dictatorship. We

were often dealing with them. These were three really highly respected, wonderful Yemenis - Abdul Rahman El-Iryani, who was a judge, a neighbor of ours who I got to know pretty well, the uncle of the present deputy prime minister and foreign minister; Mohammad Ali Uthman, and there was a third, Ahmed Noman. We were often at the U.S. embassy dealing with those three. The charge would have a very occasional meeting with Sallal or Amri, which was generally hostile on both sides. We were suggesting that the Yemenis should try to move to reconcile their part of the population. The Yemeni government was accusing the United States of being in league with Saudi Arabia and opposing the new revolutionary government and we would reply that, after all, our very presence there and the major decision that John Kennedy made to recognize a republican government against an oppressive regime were sufficient proof, plus the fact that we had a very large aid program. One of the structural problems of our embassy was that we had a very large AID mission in Taiz with an airplane of its own with a very senior director building a major road in Yemen, building water projects and all kinds of things with a rather junior charge d'affaires, Harlan Clark. One of the problems that we got into was that the AID mission was often being approached by these tribes that were up for grabs in terms of allegiance to do water projects. The Egyptian intelligence assumed that they were going there to scheme for overthrowing the regime. This is all part of a backdrop to the events of 1967 when they accused the United States of trying to subvert the regime.

But right after my arrival in August of 1965, there was a conference, where as I recall the royalists and the Yemeni government tried to get together on some kind of reconciliation. I'm not entirely clear on who the parties were. It may have been that the republican triumvirate and the Yemeni government were trying to get together, but I think it was the royalists. But none of that came to any fruition. So, for the two years that I was in Yemen, there was a series of battles, skirmishes, by the Egyptian army that never seemed to have much of a clear as to the battle plan. We were restricted to the triangular portion of Yemen which is from between Hodeida, Taiz, and Sanaa, whereas the rest of the country was a battle zone that was off limits to diplomats.

There was another element. Aden and South Yemen were still a colony of Britain and a major port on the route between the Suez Canal, Britain, and Australia, filled with major consumer goods and things for people to buy duty free. The Egyptians and the Soviets were sponsoring various groups that were based in Taiz to invade and overthrow the regime, which was a set of traditional rulers propped up by the British with a very active British army, British colonial, and British intelligence presence there. We were often able to go over to Aden and be the protecting power for Britain. So, I remember translating many foreign office notes protesting British overflights over Yemen. Whether or not they actually occurred or not, I'm not sure. But there were two sets of battles between the Egyptians and the royalists and also between the Yemeni Egyptian supported groups. One was known as Flossi and another was known as the MLF. Flossi was Egyptian dominated under Abdel Makowi and it was more moderate. The MLF was a semi-Marxist group that eventually prevailed in South Yemen and brought in a crypto-communist government. It was only in 1967 when the Egyptians were defeated in Yemen that the British decided to pull out and to establish a regular government there.

Q: What was your job there?

SUDDARTH: I was the political officer. Our mission was broken up into two. We had one embassy and we had a branch office in Sanaa with our embassy and charge d'affaires being in Taiz. So, I was the lone political officer in Taiz. We had an economic officer in Sanaa, David McClintock and later David Newton. Pat Quinlan was in charge of the office, who was doing political work there, although much of the work of the office in Sanaa was backstopping or keeping itself alive administratively with just those two officers. Louise Quinlan was a very inventive spouse who helped out. So, we had a very small and very divided mission. The AID mission probably had 50 people and the total embassy was probably 10-15 people altogether. Only five or six substantive officers.

My job consisted of trying to figure out what the Yemenis were doing and to report on the press on developments. I had some contacts of my own. I was the interpreter in Taiz with what they called the Republican Council, the three people I mentioned. But there were interesting things that went on. At one point, Sallal fell out with the Egyptians. President Sallal was actually exiled to Cairo. Hassan El-Amri, who was head of the army, prime minister, I think, took over. There were several suggestions of coup d'etats which were made to the United States government which we rejected that I won't really go into. Not royalists. These were people who were loyalists but reformers. There was also a group known as the Favored 40. It's kind of an interesting story. They were the technocratic backbone that we dealt with. In 1946, Yemen, was criticized at the Arab League under Imam Yah for not educating its people. So, they were forced to send 40 young boys around 12 to Brummana High School in Lebanon. Then the next year, they forgot all about those. It turned out that these 40 then went on from Brummana High School to scholarships around the world - the United States and Europe. Then when the revolution hit, it turned out they were the only 40 who had anything like a semblance of a university education. Some of the Yemenis were absolutely brilliant - University of Chicago, Sorbonne, LSE, all that sort of thing. So, these were sort of the technocratic side of the government. Many of them were ministers and are ministers today.

So, you had a rather fragmented scene with a bunch of technocrats who had been U.S. educated, while Sallal and El-Amri, who in effect followed a Nasser line. They were anti-West, anti-U.S., anti-imperialist, anti-Saudi. I should add as a backdrop to all of this that it's obvious by inference that the Russians, the Soviets, and the Chinese, decided in the late '50s that Yemen was the soft underbelly of the peninsula. Sensing the oil riches of the peninsula, they made a concerted effort to put in big aid programs in Somalia, Ethiopia to some extent (although Haile Selassie resisted a bit), but particularly into Yemen, where they built the principal road from Hodeida to Sanaa. That was the Chinese road. But the Chinese had a similar feeling. I think they felt that the traditional monarchies of the peninsula were ripe for revolution, for subversion. The way to do it was to start with the most dissolute of the areas and that was in Yemen because the court of Imam Ahmad was really extremely dissolute. This was prior to my period, but it's interesting.

I know it's been of historical interest to Hermann Eilts, who has written a lot about this area. That is, when Colonel Eddy came in 1946 on a mission after having interpreted for Roosevelt, he brought a Navy doctor with him who wrote a long report on the state of the court in the Imamate. It was a really racy document. The court turned out to be - many of them were mainliners on heroin. They had a number of Italian doctors that had come in and were mainlining them on

heroin. The visiting US doctor also examined a number of these people who were in wretched states of health and it included a lot of venereal disease. Hermann Eilts has tried to track down this report. I saw it when I was in the embassies, but it's been lost track of. But it's a fascinating report on the dissolute morals and morays of the Imamate's court. Thinking on about the situation, it was unstable because the Egyptians were unable to conquer the rugged areas of northern Yemen. As a result, there was a kind of stalemate. I think that a military historian would hold this Yemen adventure, which a lot of people called "Nasser's Vietnam," partially responsible for the Egyptians' ignominious defeat in the 1967 War. They had the crack units of the Egyptian army down there trying to quell the Yemenis. They got amply rewarded. Yemen got a lot of foreign exchange which Egypt had none of. So, they by selling qat, this mild narcotic, to overseas Yemenis and selling it in Aden, plus coffee, Yemen had a fair amount of foreign exchange, which the Egyptians grabbed onto. What happened was, an officer who had served his year in Yemen was able to buy a Mercedes. An enlisted man was able to buy a refrigerator, which they would put on their backs and carry on board the ships as they were going back. So, Yemen became a kind of privileged depot for the Egyptian army, which was really the ruling class in Egypt at that time. So, it was rather lucrative for the individuals that went down there.

Q: It also meant that you didn't want to get shot.

SUDDARTH: Well, that's also true. I think the Egyptians were not particularly adventurous. It also was occasion of the first use of poison gas. This was in 1967 and it was in a remote area that we were not able to verify from the embassy, but there was reporting, which I can't verify, that Egyptian aircraft had used poison gas on some of the Yemeni royalist forces.

Thinking back on other issues, one issue was the move of the embassy to Sanaa. Harry Simms, who was in charge of our area in NEA, I remember, came out and was trying to push a reluctant Harlan Clark to move the embassy up to Sanaa. We actually did move, but Harlan Clark in retrospect may have been right. The conditions in 1966 when we were getting ready to decide on the move had heavily deteriorated politically. With Nasser in Egypt, we were on a confrontation. In Yemen, again, the mutual recriminations that the Yemenis were not broadening their government and from their point of view that we were supporting the Saudis. We were just in a very bad political situation.

In addition, during this period, the Yemenis wrapped up and charged several Yemenis with espionage and machine-gunned them in the Revolutionary Square of Sanaa. The United States was accused - and I won't get into whether this was true or not - of having had an agent who was Major General Rahumi among the people who was shot. So, that was yet another albatross around our neck. They also expelled the principle AID third country employee. He was a third country national, a Lebanese named Michel Hariz, for being implicated in this. So, with these political elements, Harry Simms came to town and had a long acrimonious argument, most of which I didn't personally hear but some of which I did, with Harlan Clark over "When are you going to move to Sanaa?" Have you heard all of this before?

Q: I get it in different aspects.

SUDDARTH: In effect, what happened was, Harlan Clark wasn't relieved, but his two year tour had come up and could have been renewed. Lee Dinsmore, who was running the Sanaa office, was made charge d'affaires. We were an embassy. We used to be a legation, but we had never availed ourselves of having an ambassador because our relations didn't justify it.

So, in the summer of 1966, we started to move our people up. The AID mission was to stay in Taiz where they had built a whole compound and had great infrastructure and whatnot. I need to talk about the AID mission, too. So, we then started renting houses and renting a large building for our embassy and using our old embassy or part of it as well. People who were in Sanaa like David Ransom can be more authoritative about that aspect. But the way we did business was, we flew up there virtually every week from Taiz in the AID plane. So, I made as political officer many trips. Part of these were actually negotiating for housing, which was also a good way to get to know the people in the area, the lay of the land. So, we rented several houses, including one for me, one for the administrative officer. Lee Dinsmore already had his house as charge. It was moving along really quite well. We did move. But we moved at virtually the same time that there was a particularly intense trooping down to Taiz of tribal sheikhs who would talk to us politically, talk to the AID people. The Yemeni government began to get suspicious that something was up. In retrospect, perhaps we should have been more circumspect in what we were doing.

But what happened was, I actually moved and my family moved up in March or April of 1967. Then in late April, the famous bazooka incident occurred. I can spare listeners a lot of detail by referring you to an article I wrote that was published. I won a second prize in the Jack McFall Manuscript Contest. This was put into a volume called "Tales of the Foreign Service" that came out about 1969 or '70. It was called "Diplomacy in a Yemeni Jail." It was a volume that Kissinger actually did a little epigraph for.

To briefly state this, the Yemeni government charged that in late April six AID employees in our compound in Taiz launched with the help of Yemeni tribesmen a bazooka and machinegun attack against certain Yemeni outposts. I can't remember what it was. They were not outposts, but installations close to our AID compound. They then took two of the AID employees and took them into custody. At that point, I was in Sanaa and we were very concerned about this because of the deteriorating political atmosphere. I was dispatched to Taiz to assist Ali Jones, who had come in to run the Taiz office when we moved up as an embassy. It was a really pretty rough scene. It was obvious that it was being orchestrated by the Egyptians with the help of a very notorious Yemeni minister of interior, Ahnumi, who I will get to. I need at this point to mention as a prelude to this - and people should refer to our despatches as we chronicled the downturn in relations and without being paranoid what seemed to be a pattern of systematic harassment of the American mission. The background to this is that in January of 1967, the U.S. government cut off the PL 480 wheat aid to Nasser. My belief is that Nasser then decided that he was going to try to find ways of countering this and of getting back at the Americans and chose Yemen as his first scene. My belief is that Yemen was the first part of his pressuring the United States government and once we solved this affair of the two AID employees, Steve Liapas and Harold Hartman, the next day, the Egyptians closed the Strait of Tiran, which then led to the June war. Again, this systematic pattern of harassment included doing things like stealing cars from our mission, which

we would then try to get back. David Ransom can detail that a great deal more, although I wrote a couple of airgrams about it to detail what was happening. But it was obvious to all of us in the mission that there were people in the Yemeni government who were trying deliberately to get back at the United States government. I remember even trying to appeal one of their more egregious things. They had a parade and a national day of sorts in Taiz. I remember going up to Lieutenant General Juzailan, who was about the number three person in the group under Sallal and El-Amri. He spurned my advance because he didn't want to talk about this particular incident. It was obvious to me that he not only knew about it. We were often not given access to important Yemenis and had to deal through low level people in the foreign ministry.

The other thing they were often doing, they would seize our sealed diplomatic pouches and insist on opening them. We'd go through a long song and dance about how this was diplomatic immunity. So, there was just a pattern of this that was going on.

Well, then these two gentlemen were accused of espionage and were put in detention. There was a great parade of propaganda put out about how the U.S. government was trying to subvert Yemen. In addition, the AID mission that was separate from our embassy office in Taiz, was broken into by Egyptian intelligence. The contents of the safe in the director's office were removed. The safe itself was totally removed. The vault of the mission was gotten into and most of its files were taken out. This caused Dean Rusk to assert the rather rare diplomatic right which is called the Right of Legation, whereby a diplomatic mission has the right to the sanctity of its files overseas; they are inviolate and no one is supposed to go into them. So, this was a major breach of diplomatic rights. Our government very rightly protested this.

The upshot of all this was that a mission was sent down from Cairo under Dick Parker, who was the political counselor, who is a scholar in residence at the Middle East Institute. He was a welcome addition to me. He was a friend, a senior officer that I admired and had known in Beirut. They had also expelled Ali Jones. What I did (This was really my own decision.) was, I decided to go in and to share the cell with the two incarcerated AID employees, Liapas and Hartman. To say it was a cell - it was actually a rather pleasant Yemeni style bedroom in the converted house of the former prime minister, which ironically looked directly over my former house up on the hills of Taiz. So, I was able my moving in with them to assert in corporal terms the fact that the United States government believed these two were innocent and we were going to go to great lengths to protect them. But I was able to go out and cater meals. We had several stories written up in "The New York Times," "The Los Angeles Times." One of them was entitled, "A Little More Beaujolais." Our pilot from the AID was also an amateur cook. We had evacuated all of our AID personnel by then, closed our AID mission. So, he would cook up meals which I would then cater back and forth. We all gained about 15 pounds in this 15 days of confinement. We ate extremely well.

Parker and I would be talking with the Egyptian colonel down in Taiz. Finally through lots of high level intervention with the Egyptian government (The Yemenis were really not very approachable.), we were able to get Liapas and Hartman put on a plane. I remember flying in this Ilyushin with them up to Sanaa, where they were remanded to the custody of Lee Dinsmore. Just before they were due to go to the airport to leave Yemen (I was with them. This is all written

up.), there was another group of Yemenis under Ahnumi, this bad minister of interior, that said they couldn't go. So, we had to wait around several hours while the Yemeni government settled this. Finally, they were able to leave. I was sent back to Taiz to be in charge of the Taiz office to supervise the evacuation of our AID mission. The people had left and we had to pack up all of their goods. I was rather pessimistic. I thought, given the fact that the Yemenis had been so hard on us up to that point, they weren't going to be very cooperative. Lee Dinsmore thought otherwise and he turned out to be right. They formed a six man committee with an Egyptian colonel really in charge but a Yemeni nominally in charge. We went through with a crew and packed up the household effects of the entire AID mission over the next two weeks. There was one crisis. What we would do was have an advance party that would go into a house and it would find all the soft drinks and put them in the refrigerator. Then we would try to find all the "Playboy" magazines and we would put them in the living room so that the committee that came in to supervise every little article would quickly get very interested in the "Playboy" magazines and we were able to evacuate three or four of these loose pack arrangements every day. We had one incident illustrated that one should never joke in a foreign language. I remember, we had had some Cokes, I thought, put in the refrigerator. I said in Arabic, "Who stole the Cokes" at which point the head Yemeni said, "You have insulted the dignity of the Yemeni government. We're breaking off this operation." It took another day of apologies on my part for us to get back and do it. But these are amusing sidelights.

But it was a difficult operation. We had to take out the entire embassy files and commo equipment. We started breaking up our code equipment, our communications gear. Then I thought, "Gee, what a crazy idea that is. This stuff is expensive." So, we just shipped it all out in something like 100 pouches. We were able to get that out. But the really ironic end of all of this was that we had completed the operation and I was leaving Taiz to go on to my new assignment... I was out at the airport. My wife and children had already been evacuated, as all dependants were in late April when this incident occurred. I was at the airport debating in Arabic with two Egyptian officers the legality of the closing of the Strait of Tiran. It was June 5, 1967 -- the day that was the beginning of the Six Day War.

Q: When the Israeli air force attacked-

SUDDARTH: That's right. So, we were waiting for the Egyptian airplane to arrive that was going to take me on to Ethiopia. Well, it never arrived because the Israeli air force had decimated the air facilities in Cairo where this plane was coming from. After waiting several hours, I went back to the embassy to find that it was besieged by an angry crowd. There were still a few personnel wrapping up final details at the embassy. We had to secure ourselves. We had no communications. At that point, the Big Lie occurred, where Nasser charged that U.S. aircraft were helping the Israelis. So, these so-called Yemeni terrorists, freedom fighters, South Yemenis, that were quartered in Taiz were targeted on our embassy. They were trying to set fire to our drapes from the outside while we... All we had were wastebaskets full of water that we would use to push the things out. At one point, I suddenly realized that in the bags that I had in the back of the car was the final pouch from the embassy which contained a number of 45 bullets, shells, for our hand weapons. The Yemenis had started to set fire to all the cars in the compound. I remember rushing out with Lou Lemieux, who was a great New York kid who was tremendous

in a street fight and was a very fine fellow. The two of us went out to the car. I was able to open the trunk. It was molten. It was very hot and burned my hands a bit opening up the back of it. I grabbed this brown vinyl suitcase and ran back into the embassy while the Yemenis were kind of startled that we had come out. We got this thing back in. My concern was, had it gone off, the 45 shells could have killed several Yemenis and then they would have just decimated it. I remember, at that point, the Yemenis had broken out all the windows. We had to sleep on the floor for 48 hours until they could get help to us to get us out.

The other thing that occurred, another funny irony, was that the president, President El-Amri, I guess, had declared all the American embassy PNG and we were to get out within 48 hours. Suddenly, all of our former local employees in the AID mission came rushing to the embassy wanting their back pay. We were actually authorized to pay it, but I said, "No, we're not going to pay anything until we're out of here. We're not going to be held hostage." The Italian ambassador intervened. I remember writing him a diplomatic note saying that the Yemenis said they would release us only on the guarantee of the Italian ambassador. So, I wrote him a note on my own hook. There was no way to communicate. I was like one of those 19th century envoys out of communication. I wrote him an official diplomatic note with a seal on it saying that the U.S. government guaranteed to back up his guarantee that we would pay all just claims from laborers and employees of the American mission. That was the way that we were allowed out of Taiz.

We were driven up to Sanaa at breakneck speed (I'm surprised we didn't run off these three major mountain passes between Taiz and Sanaa.) only to run into another mob that was rampaging in front of our embassy in Sanaa. We had to go a back route and finally sneak in that way.

The upshot was that we were then grouped up... This was three or four days after the war started. We were put on a chartered plane, which they held up. It was a Yemeni Airlines plane. They charged us \$40,000 for this little DC-3 to go to Asmara. We had a few dollars... We had some money on hand to pay them. But we had it arranged that as soon as they arrived in Asmara, the Ethiopian, which is a friendly security service, came out and impounded the plane and took the \$40,000 back, which we got back. So, there were a lot of high jinks going on on both sides on all of this. Then various of us had a reunion, a kind of bittersweet dinner with Lee Dinsmore and the collective remnants of the American mission about what had gone on. Then I remember Jim Fernald and I had to fly, we had to go all the way to Uganda and fly up over Libya to get to Athens, avoiding both Sudanese and Egyptian airspace, which had denied that to any U.S. friendly carrier. It was also a war zone.

I guess one other detail in this deterioration before this Liapas-Hartman incident was, the Yemenis started staging a series of spy trials. In early 1967 they brought out various espionage trials. It was an open trial and I was the political officer, so I went to it. The notorious Ahnumi was judge, prosecutor, and everything. I remember coming up to him at one point and saying (which was a rather silly thing to do given the fact that I was very junior and I didn't have any instructions) that I hoped that these would be just trials, fair trials. I remember him saying to me something in Arabic that, "Justice will out," something like that. Bob Pelletreau, who was a

language student at that time, came on his field trip to Yemen at this stage. I remember, Bob was a very distinguished graduate of Harvard Law School, so I dragged him over to listen to these proceedings and then I made up a story. I said we had a Department of State expert and a very distinguished lawyer who was looking at the legality of these proceedings. So, we were all playing it pretty much by ear at that point in Yemen.

Looking back a bit philosophically, it was very hard in those days to straddle friendship for Saudi Arabia with some kind of an opening to Egypt. The Kennedy administration had tried it earlier on with Nasser. In '62, that was one of the motivating factors for recognizing the revolutionary regime. Bill Macomber, who was head of AID for the Near East and had been ambassador to Jordan, hated Nasser with a passion. He was the person who was pushing to cut off the food aid and eventually had it done with the consequences that I've outlined, which I believe are the case.

I should add that Dick Parker has a different view from mine. I highly respect Dick and he is much more of a scholar on this, but Dick believes that there is a case to be made that there really was a British intelligence attempt to create an incident in Taiz and that the Yemenis blamed that on the United States but that the British intelligence was very aggressive in South Yemen. They were often fomenting problems in Northern Yemen in retaliation for the drive to take them over that was being supported by the North Yemenis. But I still think the evidence is strongly in favor of the fact that it was an Egyptian plot, it was part of a sustained effort to harass our mission, and that they manufactured the tracer incident. They made a rather visible display of firefighting that was visible from the AID compound. I just don't think that was the British intelligence that did it or would have done a thing like that.

So, that is the Yemen story.

Q: Go back a bit. When the various tribal leaders were coming down and talking to AID, were you able to get together... This was a very sensitive thing. You had to figure out which tribe was which that you wouldn't be giving water to the wrong tribe or it would look like you were playing... Were you able to play a role in that or was AID sort of pushing you to one side?

SUDDARTH: Well, I think that we could have done better on this. I have to give AID credit. Jack Binns, who was the AID director, and then Bob Hamer after him, were quite good. Yemeni tribesmen would come and then they would very dutifully hotfoot it up to the embassy and say, "We have this and this and that." I think in retrospect, a stronger political hand from the chargé would have helped, but I can't gainsay him on this. I think they had a legitimate right to go see AID but they did talk a lot of politics. Yemenis all talk politics. We probably should have and perhaps we did caution them, tell them, "Look, we are not in a position of talking politics. This is a sovereign country. We are not interfering in your affairs." I was the tribal expert of the thing. I remember on an efficiency report saying that I had become the foremost tribal expert in the U.S. government, which is probably true. I was about the only one. But we knew pretty well... There were the two basic tribal units, the Hashid and the Bakeel. Both of them, the Bakeel in particular, were very anti-regime. The Hashid, Abdullah Ahmar, would swing back and forth being paid off... The idea was to get paid off by the Saudis and by the Egyptians and by the British if you could do it as well. But there was a lot of venality. It's still the case. There is no strong central

government. The tribes are stronger.

Q: What was in it for us? Wasn't there a point when rather than their kicking us out, why didn't we get the hell out?

SUDDARTH: Well, I think that's a good point. The harassment was fairly petty. There was this espionage charge that weighed heavily in the Yemeni's minds, which I think they believed was true and I'm not saying that it wasn't. So, there were some actions on which perhaps the U.S. government was vulnerable. But as I say, one way of not doing it was to not invest in a major move to Sanaa. But I think you face this in diplomatic situations. Is it better to engage and suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to isolate yourself? It took us several years - 1972, I think - to get relations back with Yemen. I am a believer that even Yemenis should be in contact with one another.

Q: That's what diplomacy is about. How about our relations with the Egyptians?

SUDDARTH: Well, the Egyptians were behind the scenes. We had very little contact with the Egyptian mission. We had very little in common. Egyptians were, this was their number one priority. You had Abdel Hassan Al-Khouli, who was a vice president who was traveling back and forth all the time. They were trying desperately to break the back of the royalists. There was also one time when King Saud, who had been divested by the royal family in Saudi Arabia of his throne in 1964 or thereabouts, went to Egypt and was paraded around Yemen in 1967 by Hassan El-Amri, the head of the armed forces. The Americans were invited to the banquet, which we of course refused to go to. So, there was a kind of desperate Egyptian attempt to consolidate this revolutionary government and to bring greater pressure on the British. After all, to the British this was a great anomaly to have a column in 1967.

In the midst of all this, you had a Chinese-Russian rivalry that burst out. This was during the time of the Cultural Revolution and you had Chinese workers in their textile factory that were marching against Soviet imperialism. So, we found we were kind of a little microcosm there in Yemen of world powers who were vying in this really very obscure part of the world. I have to emphasize that the aid programs were very important. We did this amazing road project. Some interesting color here. The way we paid the Yemeni laborers, at least at the beginning of the project, was we brought a big, heavy armed car and paid them in Maria Theresa dollars – gold coins.

Q: The old Austrian coin, which was sort of the coin of the Arabian Peninsula.

SUDDARTH: That's right. This road was extraordinary. Unfortunately, its specs were for a dirt road compacted by oil.

It was a major project. I think it cost \$40 million. It took several years over three mountain passes. But we didn't even get credit for that. The Chinese had paved their road to Hodeida. We hadn't paved ours. So, people driving fast would hit the loose things and go careening off the side of the mountain. So, there was an editorial which talked about the "road of blood, tears, and

death,” which is what the American road was all about. So, that was yet another negative in what should have been a very positive response to American aid programs. Why we didn’t get out... It was the inertia of trying to do business. We were having similar problems in Egypt, in Iraq, and in Syria. This was in the revolutionary stage of Arab nationalism before the ‘67 War, which clipped their wings. So, this was all very heavy wine and twisting the lion’s tale was something that they thought was going to get them some... It would get them more credit from the Chinese and the Soviets that were also major donors. So, the Yemenis were playing that kind of game as well.

Q: Did you see at the time... In today’s light when you get into one of these mountain tribal wars, you know you’re going to lose practically with a regular army. Did you see it as a losing thing?

SUDDARTH: I think we saw it as a stalemate, which meant in effect the Egyptians were going to lose it. How long were they willing to sustain troops there? We spent a lot of our time trying to get the American mission in Saudi Arabia, the U.S. government, to be a little bit more evenhanded. The U.S. government was never terribly forceful in terms of repudiating the royalist effort. The Saudis were leaning on us from one direction. So, I remember tensions between our mission’s viewpoint and the mission’s viewpoint in Saudi Arabia, which viewed Yemen as a very dangerous threat to the stability of Saudi Arabia and the more the Saudis could do. The Saudis, of course, ever since time immemorial have thought that Yemen was their satrapy. When the ‘67 War occurred, in effect, the Egyptian troops pulled back. Yemen became more moderate gradually. The South was given independence. But unfortunately a very leftist government came in there. So you then transplanted a more moderate Yemeni revolutionary government with a much more radical South Yemeni one.

Q: This probably is a good place to stop. Is there anything else we should cover about Yemen?

SUDDARTH: I think that covers it pretty well.

Q: How about your family? I would have thought it would have been rather difficult?

SUDDARTH: It was difficult. Yes, my dear wife and our two wonderful kids that were one and three years old respectively led an idyllic life in Taiz where from our balcony you could in the rainy season see eight mountain peaks with rain going on them all right at the lower slopes of Jebel Sabr, which was 6-8,000 feet high, even higher perhaps. Yemen was an incredibly beautiful country with terraced hillsides and was very green during six months of the year down in the Taiz area. In the midst of all that, I had to move them up to Sanaa. Not that we didn’t have the odd scorpion in the bedroom and diseases in Taiz.

There is one amusing story. In those days, they wrote a private efficiency report on you. Our chargé d’affaires, Mr. Clark, who was a fine man and he was married to a fine lady who was a former British nurse. She wanted all the ladies in the embassy to do charity work at the Yemeni hospital. My wife was a French colonial who had grown up in these conditions all her life and knew exactly what was good sanitation and what wasn’t. She wasn’t about with two young children to go in and scrub Yemeni toilets. So, she volunteered our houseboy to do it. That

wasn't quite in the Florence Nightingale tradition. I remember having an adverse comment on my efficiency report about my wife's lack of enthusiasm for his wife's charities.

I wrestled them away from this idyllic place in Taiz and we moved up to temporary quarters in Sanaa. I remember that our cook and houseboy were helping us and they had put some local water in the refrigerator which my wife by mistake thought had been boiled. She drank it and gave it to our kids. They were sick as dogs with dysentery just a couple of days after moving up there. Then it was only two or three weeks that this incident in Taiz occurred that I was asked to go down to Taiz for the AID prisoners. In the meantime, we evacuated all our personnel. I remember telling my wife coming back, "Honey, you and the kids are going to have to leave." She said, "No we're not." She was new to the United States. I said, "This is an order of the U.S. government." She said, "Well, I don't give a damn. I'm not going to leave." I had to go over and get my friend, Al Mathews, the Defense attaché, to come over and tell Michele, "This is real." So, I left. We weren't able to do any packing, just rudimentary packing. Michele left, moved to the house of the administrative officer to consolidate the families before getting on the flight. Somebody in conversation said, "You know, you can't be too safe in situations like this. What I do is, I take my engagement ring off and put it in my vanity case." So, Michele did that. It was only when she got to Paris that she realized that one of the Yemenis had gotten into her belongings and stolen her engagement ring and some other items, which was a devastating blow. It was a really wrenching experience for my young family although they were able to spend four months in Paris with her parents. So, the toll that these things take on your family are sometimes overlooked.

Q: Yes. When you left Yemen in 1967, where did you go?

SUDDARTH: I went from there back on home leave and then to Libya.

DAVID M. RANSOM
General Officer
Taiz (1966-1967)

Ambassador David M. Ransom was born in Missouri in 1938. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Princeton University in 1960, he served in the US Marine Corps from 1962-1965. His career has included positions in Taiz, Teheran, Beirut, Jeddah, Sana'a, Abu Dhabi, Damascus, and an ambassadorship to Bahrain. Ambassador Ransom was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November, 1999.

RANSOM: Yes. I requested to go to what I thought was the most Arab World country-- the most unchanged-- and that was Yemen. The Department was only too happy to grant my wish. Nobody else wanted to go there. It was a kind of trial by fire. The whole embassy was thrown out in about

11 months after my arrival. So, I had my first experience in Foreign Service evacuation very early in my career. Yemen was a good introduction to the tumultuous politics of the Middle East as well as our activities in the Middle East. Again, there was a group of people in that embassy who became friends of mine. Rocky Suddarth was a political officer. David Newton was the economic officer. There was a guy named Lee Dinsmore, who is still alive. He is quite an elderly man now living out in Wisconsin. He was a good friend. Matt Gerlach was the administrative officer. You lived with these people in ways that an outsider would never understand.

There was often literally nothing to do. There was no TV. There were no VCRs. There was not much radio. The only recourse you had for society and succor was your Foreign Service colleagues. Members of the CIA station and the military got together. It was an era where hard drinking was part of the job. Marjorie and I did more than our share of that.

Q: You're mentioning Marjorie. Had you gotten married?

RANSOM: Yes, I had gotten married. When I was in graduate school, I went one summer to study Arabic at Princeton under the National Defense Education Act and there was a lovely student, Marjorie Marilley. She was in the class ahead of me, having gone into Columbia a year before me. She was working on a master's degree at Johns Hopkins, also in Middle Eastern studies. So, we found there was a lot to talk about. It was summertime. Flowers were blooming. It was a lovely, lovely time. We subsequently married. She joined the Foreign Service as well and served in USIA.

While I was going through basic school in the Marine Corps, she was in an introductory class for the USIA Foreign Service in Washington. I used to drive up in the evenings after work to see Marjorie. She went off to become the first woman to serve in the Middle East as a Foreign Service officer. Yesterday she was promoted to career minister while serving in Amman, Jordan. She called up the man who had been her boss in USIA and noted that 35 years earlier as she had started out, he had been more than fair, supportive, and helpful to a young woman who was shy and uncertain about her surroundings. She hoped he would take some happiness in the fact that she had lasted and gone so far. He was delighted.

Q: How did it work when you joined the Foreign Service...

RANSOM: At that time, there was a written regulation in the Foreign Service Manual that required women officers to resign when they married. Men who married were not required to resign. It was considered "unseemly" for a Foreign Service female officer to be married. "Unseemly" was the term. They thought what men did at home at night in bed with their wives wasn't considered unseemly.

Q: It was "seemly."

RANSOM: It was "seemly." We weren't social revolutionaries in any sense of the word. She had two tours in the Foreign Service and was assigned to India. I had finished up my tour in Okinawa. There is a story here, too.

Marines in that day and age were never given orders as to where they went for their next post, but they were always supposed to volunteer for that service. So, when you got your orders, you wrote out a request to go to where they had decided to send you. So, each tour was therefore defined as “voluntary” in the Marine Corps. At the division headquarters in Okinawa, there were just hundreds of papers coming across the desk of the personnel officer - e.g. whoever requested assignment to the Continental United States, to such and such a base, via the Pacific. I sent a request for assignment to such and such a base in the Continental United States via the Atlantic. Nobody noticed and it was approved. So, I pocketed that and went hitchhiking on military airplanes to get to where Marjorie was at that time-- in India. She made her way up from Bombay to Delhi when I finally got in on an airplane. Some Navy plane was flying there for some reason from Thailand. I went to the pilot and said, “Can you let me sit in the back?” He said, “Sure, Lieutenant. Hop in.” So, there we were in New Delhi.

We became engaged there. She finished out her tour of duty, having seamstresses stitch up her wedding dress in the heat of Bombay while she really wondered whether this was the right thing to do. She resigned from the Foreign Service because she had to. She quit because that’s what women did in those days. I thought that was perfectly reasonable.

She went back to Norfolk. We married. We started a family. Several years later, after three children, Marjorie received a letter from USIA saying, “We may have discriminated against you under the 1965 Civil Rights Act as interpreted by various court cases.” The letter didn’t say anything else. So, Marjorie said, “Well, what do we do?” To be honest, I didn’t know what we would do if she went back to work. I couldn’t think of any redress. This was all unknown at the time. So, I eventually decided on something that I thought was terribly clever. Again, this is an example of the stupid things that you do that work out well in the long run. I drafted a letter for her which said, “Yes, indeed, I was discriminated against and that is provable. As a remedy, I would like to be reinstated in the Foreign Service, full-time, at a rank that assumes all the promotions that I would have received had I been serving.” I thought that was the end of it.

In fact, Marjorie, after seven years, was reinstated with all the promotions that I had made and which had been so hard to get on my own in the State Department during that period. That started something that was simply nightmarish: our life together as a tandem couple. Our life would be marked by this experience. Marjorie brought in the soft side of diplomacy. You know what USIS does. They are journalists, educators, artists, writers, people who have nothing to do with power in the present generation but think they see and control the future. And they’re right.

My friends and acquaintances were the “heavies”: the businessmen, the generals, the diplomats, the people who have all the power in the world in their generation but are mortally afraid of the tomorrow. So Marjorie’s and my lives fit together not just with our different clientele, but as part of a working partnership in the Foreign Service working in the Middle East. It was glorious. Two incomes. One special, wonderful life.

Q: Your first tour in the Foreign Service was in Yemen serving there for eleven months from 1966. Then the embassy was closed.

RANSOM: I left in 1967, when the Secretary of State pulled out the entire embassy after two AID mission members had been imprisoned and some 24 other members of the AID mission had been declared *persona non grata*. I have always regretted that on a list of 24 troublemakers at that time, my name was not included. It would have been a world of honor to have been tagged *persona non grata* by a government that so dishonored its own country, as the al-Salal regime did at that time.

I left. I left all of our things behind, hoping they would be sent later. Marjorie and I had just been married. I was a very, very junior officer in the embassy--the most junior. I had been working in rotational assignments in the embassy, first in administration and then in consular affairs. I had a naive faith that nothing would happen to our effects and that they would be packed up and shipped. In fact, despite having packed up, nothing was shipped. We left our first post with only the earthly goods we could carry on our evacuation flight. So Marjorie I faced a difficult second tour financially, having to replace all that was lost in Yemen.

Q: When you arrived there in 1966, what had you heard about Yemen and how would you describe both our relations with the government and the government itself at that time and Yemen in general?

RANSOM: Yemen had only opened up to the outside world a few years before. Our embassy was situated in the town of Taiz not so far from the much more developed British port city of Aden. But the actual government was in the capital of Yemen, Sanaa, about two and a half hours north by road. There was a new American road which had been built even though there was not a single car or truck in the country. So, Yemen was primitive in the extreme in its development. It is mountainous country divided by tribes and regions. There was a continuous internal struggle, often with lethal weapons. The republican government, which had overthrown the old imam, maintained itself with help from the Egyptian army. The rebels, the loyalists, were supported by Saudi Arabia. So, we found ourselves in many ways in a difficult position, but we had very good relations with the Saudis. We also tried to maintain good relations with the Egyptians and the Republic of Yemen. It didn't work terribly well. A straddle of this kind was impossible to maintain not just in Yemen but in the Middle East in general. Nasser and our government were in competition and eventually Nasser decided to get support from the Soviets rather than try to engage the Americans, whom he saw as overly friendly to Israel.

Nasser was also after the Saudis and other conservative governments. He thought he was the wave of the future, representing increasing military elements, progressive Arab nationalism, and socialism. His target was not so much Yemen as Saudi Arabia and the port city of Aden. When it became clear the British were going to withdraw from Aden, he wanted to be the successor government there. That created all kinds of strains in our relationship with the Egyptian government. Not only were the Egyptians going after our good friends, the Saudis; they were going after our good friends, the British.

We had an AID mission in Yemen, and we were trying to make the best of a difficult situation. The Egyptians decided that the American embassy in Yemen was getting in their way.

Furthermore they were unhappy with the American government after we turned down the sale of surplus wheat to Egypt. So they moved against the American embassy. Based on some trumped up charges, they put a couple of AID members in jail. They PNG'd some others. They got what they wanted, which was the decision by the secretary of state to withdraw American personnel.

Q: When you arrived in 1966, how were things going? Had the Egyptians started this campaign already?

RANSOM: They had started the campaign. I arrived in early 1966. By August of 1966, the Egyptians stooped to the most egregious form of intervention in Yemeni affairs. They put virtually the entire government of Yemen - all the ministers, the prime minister, many of the deputy ministers - on two airplanes and flew them to Cairo nominally for a conference there with Egyptian counterparts. But once they had landed, they put them all in jail.

Q: Not under pleasant house arrest, but just in jail?

RANSOM: No, it was in jail. They weren't mistreated terribly, except for the misery that comes in being falsely imprisoned. But that gave the Egyptians the unchallenged opportunity to run the country as well as they could. It was a very unhappy and difficult time.

The denouement came in 1967; then the Egyptians challenged the Israelis directly. Nasser badly overestimated his power. He closed the Straits of Tiran. He lost the war.

Q: This was known as the Six Day War.

RANSOM: He lost the war and had to withdraw from Yemen as a consequence. His great adventure in Yemen came to nothing despite the loss of a very large number of Egyptian soldiers.

Q: Was there a war going on while you were there?

RANSOM: There wasn't much fighting, but there was a large army of occupation - 50-60,000 men with airplanes, tanks, garrisons, the usual sort of intelligence and whatnot. There were some clashes in the east of the country where the local -- and very independent -- tribes would pick a fight with the Egyptians. The Egyptians generally stayed in the cities and tried to maintain themselves there with as little fighting as possible.

Q: How were our relations with the Egyptians from your perspective? Did we have any?

RANSOM: Relations with the Egyptians were difficult in those days. They were hard to love because of the imperial role that they were playing and because they saw themselves increasingly pitted against us everywhere in the Middle East with Soviet support. So, it was a diplomatic task of some difficulty. The Yemenis particularly felt that we were the aggrieved party. In fact, that turned out to be true.

Q: During the time you were there, what was the Saudi role?

RANSOM: The Saudis had come to the conclusion that the Egyptians were really after the Saudi kingdom even more than they were after Yemen. Yemen was just a great stepping stone in that direction. The Saudis thought the Egyptians wanted to set up republics in Saudi Arabia as well as in Yemen. So, they undertook to subsidize the tribes of Yemen who opposed both the Egyptians and the concept of a republic. The Saudis created, in effect, a buffer between themselves and the Egyptians and sought to strengthen popular standing by a low level of warfare.

When the Egyptians were forced to leave after the 1967 War, finally pulling out in November, the Saudis funded one last spasmodic effort by the tribes to take the city of Sanaa. But the city held out on its own against all odds and expectations. The republicans inside the walls of the city just didn't give in to the tribes. That was more or less the end of the societal calm in Yemen, even though the Saudis maintained their support for the royalists and the tribesmen. It was the long, slow process of shifting to a new relationship between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Yemen. It has never been easy, natural, and popular, but it's pretty much a set formula now.

Q: Could you talk a bit about the embassy? Who was the ambassador? What were we doing and trying to do?

RANSOM: We had no ambassador in Yemen. We had a chargé d'affaires named Harlan Clark, a man who had had a considerable amount of experience in the Middle East and had been picked at one point by the Foreign Service leadership as a "comer". He had been sent off to other parts of the world like Tokyo. That did not seem to have worked terribly well. Harlan Clark ended up back in the Middle East and in a very small part of the Middle East at that, running an embassy that was under a great deal of pressure. He left shortly after I had arrived. It wasn't exactly clear to me why, but I think that some people in Washington had been unhappy with his management of the mission and the leadership there. Clark was assigned to a diplomatic advisor's job at some university in the United States. His job was never filled, but the duties were simply given to a wonderful man named Lee Dinsmore. He had been a political officer in Yemen. He was a canny Middle Eastern hand, a very sweet and thoughtful guy, a leader in difficult times, and someone with whom I am still friends after all these years.

Q: What type of relations did we have with whatever passed for the Yemeni government when it wasn't in jail?

RANSOM: Well, there wasn't much of a Yemeni government after that purge in August of 1966. We tried to find it and have a dialogue with some of its members, but in fact, we were dealing with a very shadowy group. There was a president, Abdullah Salah. He offered several spontaneous reassurances. But in fact, the Egyptians were calling the shots

Q: Was there a feeling at that time that we were marking time or just displaying the flag or was there more a feeling of, well, this is a rough patch and we'll last it out and things will get better?

RANSOM: The discussion in the Middle East Bureau at the time revolved around the question of

polarization and where our bets should be placed given what people saw of the future of the area. These are two different questions. Polarization meant that we didn't want to see a Middle East divided between conservatives and radicals and we didn't want one group to be backed by us and the other to be backed by the Soviet Union. There was a fear among a lot of the Arabists at the time that we would end up as the friend of Israel and of conservative Arabs and neither one had much of a chance of surviving the tide of events in the Middle East. Both the Israelis and conservative states like the Saudis as well as our friends, the British, wanted very much for us to take sides forcefully. We ended up being pushed in that direction whether we wanted to or not. Our speculation about the outcome of the changing scene in the Middle East was not all wrong, but rather ill-conceived. In the final analysis, it was mostly wrong because the Egyptian regime and the radical Arab regimes over a period of many decades failed while other regimes--the family states on the peninsula in particular, and in Jordan--not only survived, but in fact flourished. Our short-term bets worked out, helped by the fact that the Soviets simply folded over a period of time.

Q: In Aden, there had been a rather violent or radical group fighting the British. Was that going on while you were there?

RANSOM: Yes, it was, and that was a full-scale war with the radical groups supported out of the north by the Egyptians. That was a cause of complaint by the British about us and our association with the republican Yemeni government. The British had decided to change their "east of Suez" policy and withdrew from Aden. From that time on, they had to focus on setting up a successor government. The one they set up didn't really work. It was to be a federation of sheikhs who ruled local areas in that part of the world. In the end, they were overcome by local radical forces. The British eventually tipped the scales by throwing their weight behind the anti-Nasser radical forces who were closer to them. They were communists. So, the British, when they left, played something of a contradictory role in their desire to see Nasser and his minions defeated. They succeeded in that, but at the price of creating in Yemen a state that was in 25-30 years to become one of the most unsuccessful and troublesome pseudo-communist states in the world.

Q: It's a little hard to capture, at the turn of the century, the feeling of the British and to a lesser extent the Americans had about Nasser. He was not considered a benign influence in the Arab world.

RANSOM: I had come out of graduate school thinking that countries like Egypt were probably representing the wave of the future; that they were going to set up systems and institutions that were badly needed in the Arab world as a whole - schools, hospital systems, road systems, national development programs-- all of which had never really been built under British and other foreign rule, I thought that nationalism in general was something that couldn't and shouldn't be thwarted, but should be embraced and channeled. My hope ideologically was that we could find a way to assist the establishment of a new regime of the Middle East. I am afraid that that hope was rather dashed when I got to Yemen for several reasons.

First, the Egyptians didn't want to cooperate with us. They were spoiling for a fight. Second, they were associating themselves with the Soviets which made me extremely uneasy about the overall

balance of power in that part of the world. The Soviet embassy was huge in Sanaa and was very active in supplying military equipment, economic aid, scholarships, etc. In that contest, I didn't like coming out second best. Third, the Egyptians were imperialist in ways the British never dreamed. They were heavy-handed, false, and shameless in their willingness to intervene in the society in order to impress their opponents so that they could get their way. As I said earlier, they packed the entire government aboard airplanes and flew them off to prison in Cairo. That was something that changed my views about the Middle East—just in the course of one day.

It was an education for me, a young man without a lot of experience in the Middle East. The academic lessons I learned in graduate school were tested in the crucible of Yemeni politics. I must say that everything I saw in that first assignment to Yemen served me terribly well in the rest of my career in the Middle East. My views didn't really change very much after that experience and the issues didn't either - not until the Berlin Wall came down.

I also made very good friends in the embassy. We had an extraordinarily close relationship among the staff. There wasn't very much to do in Sanaa or Taiz except to see your colleagues in the evening. We were young and gabby. Everybody in the embassy was a friend. Rocky Suddarth, who became ambassador to Jordan and now is president of the Middle East Institute, was there at the time as a political officer. He only had two posts before, but I looked on him as kind of a veteran. David Newton was the economic officer. He became head of our mission in Iraq and ended his career serving in Yemen again. He was another good friend. He still remains a good friend.

Q: Where is he now?

RANSOM: He's in Prague heading up Radio Free Iraq. He retired and then was offered his post and took it up very quickly. Matt Gerlach, the administrative officer for whom I worked, had a full career in the Foreign Service and was a wonderful friend to me both there and elsewhere. Lee Dinsmore was a great friend as well, a mentor and a model. Marjorie and I were starting out life in the Foreign Service. We struck a balance in our relationship with ourselves and our work in Yemen which served us extremely well for the rest of our careers. So, I look on those troubled times with a certain degree of fondness and even amazement of how rich an experience it was.

Q: I take it you really couldn't get out and travel much there in the countryside.

RANSOM: That's right. There was a road that had been paved and there was a road that was being built across the wasteland. It was hard to do travel on it. I made that trek twice. Then there was the back and forth between Taiz and Sanaa; there it was possible to travel on the road that we had built. If you got off the road, there were no roads. There were tracks to follow if you were desperate. While I was eager to get out and see as much of the countryside as possible and even walk in some places to perform my consular duties, it took a long time to get to a house where I had to do an investigation. Yemen wasn't a country where you could get about easily. You had to carry everything with you. It was a very, very mountainous and broken country. It was beautiful and lovely but not a place with a lot for tourists.

One of the things that startled me about Yemen was the discovery that a very large number of Yemenis had gone to the United States. They had begun their journeys by getting on British ships in the port of Aden working as stewards and deck-hands. Then they ended up jumping ship in some American port. Where one went, others would follow. Yemenis are a great nation of immigrants. When Vietnam fell, over 2,000 Yemenis came back to Yemen. They had made it that far and were working there in menial jobs. The American Yemeni group tended to work in Detroit at the Ford Motor Company and in various steel mill towns along the Ohio River. There was also a big group in Brooklyn, New York. There was a small group that had begun in California. They were isolated communities and were prototypical immigrant groups who sent a lot of money home. When they returned home, they married Yemeni women and set themselves up lived well on the fairly good estate they had made in the United States. They were never very well integrated into American society, but some became American citizens. We had all kinds of consular issues to deal with because of that.

Q: I would think that you would have an awful time with documentation. When I was in Dhahran, I would have people coming in who were Yemeni and obviously not Saudi because of their headdress and even their looks. They would come in with scraps of paper. It was not a very easy group to fit into our paper bureaucracy.

RANSOM: No, it wasn't and we struggled mightily against visa fraud. I suppose we may have had some successes, but the Yemenis were very clever. By and large, when they set their minds on going to the United States, they managed to do so. In that embassy we had a very, very large immigrant visa business and a very, very small non-immigrant visa work-load—a few businessmen and government people who went from Yemen to the States, but a lot of family members who wanted to visit.

Q: Could you get out and go into the souk, move around in the town or not?

RANSOM: Yes. In fact, I went to Yemen thinking I was going to do rotational assignments in all four parts of the embassy. I didn't have enough time there to get through the Political or Economic Section. I spent most of my tour in the Administrative Section doing GSO work. The Administrative Section was located in Taiz. Harlan Clark, the Chargé, resisted the move of the embassy from Taiz, where he was very comfortably ensconced, to Sanaa, where living would be difficult. When he left, the embassy began to push forward to make this move. I was sent up by Matt Gerlach to Sanaa to rent houses and office space, repair them, and put them in condition ready for American occupancy. That meant taking a building without a single pipe and wire, without screens, without anything but mud floors, with the most rudimentary walls and security protection, and completely rehabilitating it. I must have had 18 houses and a big office building to work on and I did it, not knowing that this really was the work of an entire administrative section. I simply got landlords to do things. We hired a big bunch of workers and I went out and just did my part as a lieutenant should do in the Marine Corps or the State Department, which is get the job done. So, I was in the souk a lot. I also took rented trucks and went down to Aden and bought up fabric for curtains, screens, pipes, basins, toilets, wiring, switches, everything else, dodging terrorist incidents as I went. It was sort of a foolish set of activities. The embassy never did decide whether to be horrified or amazed by what I was doing. But it had to move. They were

finding that in Sanaa, homes and office space was being made available which was suited to American requirements and so they let me go.

I had lots and lots of friends in the souk and I loved going down there. I must tell you that I started out completely inexperienced with bargaining for things and making things work under difficult circumstances. I learned a series of lessons that has served me very well in my subsequent career. It's the opposite of Wal-Mart where you walk in and everything is laid out and the price is already determined. If you pay at the counter, you walk away with the stuff. Yemen was totally different. Setting the price, paying the money, getting delivery, checking the goods, making them work -- all of that was something that I found new, frustrating, fun, and instructive.

Q: How about when you went down to Aden? Were we in contact with the British or were the British acting a little bit standoffish about our activities.

RANSOM: We had a consulate in Aden, so when I went down there I saw people in the consulate. The British, of course, were good friends of ours. They were much beleaguered there and a little unhappy that we were going to be friends of people who were not their friends,--the Egyptians and the Yemeni Republicans. But the British never did anything to make our life difficult; at the borders, taking things in and out, etc. They simply allowed all this to happen smoothly.

Q: Why were we moving to Sanaa to Taiz?

RANSOM: Sanaa was the capital. The government was there. We had long been in Taiz because the old imam never wanted foreigners to live in his holy capital of Sanaa. The embassy sort of set up there and houses were fixed up. The chargé's house in particular was fixed up very well. He didn't want to leave. So, when the policy decision was made to move, it was hard to shift him.

Q: Were you kicked out right along with so many embassies right at the aftermath of the '67 War?

RANSOM: No, we were kicked out before that. Actually, I always say we were kicked out, but in fact, it was the U.S. government's decision to withdraw the American mission, following provocative acts on the part of the Egyptian government which barred us from protecting our people and carrying out our mission. Secretary Dean Rusk pulled us out. But that happened in May. It was not until a month later that the war broke out. Then there were forced departures in many Middle Eastern countries. We were withdrawn before the war.

Q: This would have been in May 1967?

RANSOM: Yes. We departed first on an Ethiopian airliner, a C-47 that had flown over from Asmara, landing on a rainy day in Sanaa. It took us out after a lot of hindrance from local officials. We were sad to go. We thought that we were being pushed out. We were. We didn't like ceding the field to the other side. Marjorie and I were assigned to Tehran-- our stalwart friends in the Middle East. I served out a tour there and went on to study Arabic at our embassy

in Beirut.

MARJORIE RANSOM
USIS English Language Program
Taiz/Sana'a (1966-1967)

Marjorie Ransom was born in New York in 1938. She received her bachelor's degree from Trinity University in 1959 and her master's degree from Columbia University in 1962. Her career includes positions in Jordan, India, Iran, Yemen, Washington D.C., Abu Dhabi, Syria, and Egypt. Ms. Ransom was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in December 2000.

RANSOM: Well, I was fortunate. The minute he got word of his assignment – he entered in December of '65 – we had been married a few months and he was assigned to Yemen. Days after he got news of his assignment, I got a call from USIA asking me to work for them in Yemen. I couldn't work as an officer, but they hired me at the highest level they could, which was executive assistant. I could work 32 hours a week. That was great. I don't know what I would have done in Yemen if I hadn't worked. I would have gone crazy. So, I ran an English language program in Sanaa.

Q: You were there from when to when?

RANSOM: From sometime in April 1966 to May 1, 1967.

Q: What was Sanaa like?

RANSOM: We were first in Taiz for six months. We were there at a time when we had a chargé d'affaires. Our diplomatic relations were at that level. The Chargé had been instructed to move the Embassy from Taiz to Sanaa and his wife did not want to move, so he refused to move. Everyone in the Embassy wanted to move. Our orders read "Sanaa" when we arrived. So, there was no house for us in Taiz. But the Chargé wouldn't let us move to Sanaa. It was ridiculous. We were caught in the middle of this tension in the Embassy and it took us some time to figure it out. No one was very forthcoming. Sanaa was quite a primitive place. The Egyptians dominated the country at that time. The basic amenities were very few. It was a very difficult place to be. We had a large USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) mission in Yemen at that time and they were based in Taiz. Taiz was closer to Aden and we were able to get some supplies through Aden, so that made Taiz a little easier to live in. So, Sanaa was tough.

Q: I was just wondering... It's all very nice for the wife to say she's not going to move, but...

RANSOM: We didn't move until the chargé left. He left in August and we moved the next day.

Q: Who was this?

RANSOM: Harlan Clark. Mrs. Clark did not want to move. I must say, I was in Sanaa with her one day. I was up there doing USIS business. The USIS office was in Sanaa. We heard a terrible noise. First of all, I was at USIS and a loudspeaker truck came around announcing that a public execution was going to take place. It was a political execution. The Chargé's wife was up there. She saw the corpse being taken away after the execution, so one can understand her reluctance to move to the city at that time. It was a very difficult place to live. David and I, however, were eager to move, as Sanaa was the seat of government and the center of action.

Q: What was the political situation in Yemen when you got there in '66?

RANSOM: You had a so-called republican government under Salal, but he was really an instrument of the Egyptians. The Egyptians had a large military presence and were preoccupied with training fighters to fight the British in Sanaa. It was August of '66 when the Yemen cabinet met and decided to express their distress over what the Egyptian military was doing in Yemen, especially the bad treatment they were giving people in the countryside. They flew off to Cairo to complain to President Nasser. They were sure that he couldn't be aware of what his military was doing in Yemen, but he locked them all up and kept them in prison until the 1967 war was over.

Q: This was at a time when Egypt was reaching out. They had the United Arab Republic and they made a treaty between Syria and Yemen.

RANSOM: The Yemen Arab Republic.

Q: Then that kind of died while you were there?

RANSOM: No. It died when the Egyptians lost the 1967 War. They kept the cabinet locked up in Cairo. There wasn't much the people could do. But there was a civil war going on in Yemen at the time. The royalists were fighting it still and the Saudis supported them. The Egyptians had their spy network and we were watched all the time. Our travel was restricted.

Q: The Egyptians weren't very pleasant, were they?

RANSOM: They were hard to deal with. They really wanted to be friendly. It's their nature. It was hard for them. But no, they made life quite difficult for us. In the end, two AID employees in Taiz were accused of blowing up an Egyptian ammunition dump. The Egyptians controlled the radio in Yemen and broadcast this story to the people. They were encouraging mob action against our people. So, the State Department decided that they could not protect us, because they had gotten no cooperation from the Egyptians or from the Yemenis and so they made the decision to withdraw us all. We all left by May 1, 1964.

Q: What sort of work were you doing while you were there?

RANSOM: I was running the USIS office. It was mainly English teaching, recruiting teachers,

running the classes, keeping track of the students, administering exams, and passing out publications. Our activities were fairly restricted. There wasn't a lot we could do.

Q: Was there the divide in Yemen that later became so pronounced between the very hardliner communists and the royalists?

RANSOM: Between the communists in the south and the...

Q: Yes.

RANSOM: When we were there, the British were still in the south. So, the communists hadn't come in.

Q: Was Aden...

RANSOM: The labor movement in Aden was very active.

Q: There were terrorist acts and things of this nature.

RANSOM: Against the British. The Egyptians were encouraging this.

Q: Was this something you had to be concerned about?

RANSOM: Yes. We flew down to Aden a couple of times to do shopping for the embassy. The British were very much on the defensive. We watched our movements. We didn't like to go into the Crater, which was an area where security was very difficult. We were there one day and someone was shot a half hour or an hour later. In north Yemen, there was fighting between the royalists and the republicans – we would hear explosions and we would see fighting in the mountainsides at night, but we weren't directly affected ourselves.

Q: Did you get involved in sending Yemenis to the United States and that sort of thing?

RANSOM: We must have been sending some. Yes, we would train them. I think the numbers were very small at that point in time.

Q: How about Arabic? How did you find the language?

RANSOM: Arabic was a godsend.

Q: I would imagine so that really couldn't..

RANSOM: There I spoke it all the time. I must have been rusty when I arrived because I got no training before I went.

Q: How did this work? Did USIA take advantage of somebody they could pay a little less or were

you getting this, “Well, we’ll try to keep you going this way?”

RANSOM: I ended up running the place for four months in between PAOs. But they had replaced the PAO, so I was usually the second person – I was an extra person. They didn’t keep me as the only representative there. I think it partly was to keep my hand in, but they definitely needed the help there. Thirty-two hours a week was just about right. I wouldn’t have been fully occupied when the PAO was there.

Q: Was Saudi Arabia a presence there at all?

RANSOM: There wasn’t much of a Saudi presence in 1966, no. They were not getting along with the Egyptians.

Q: What were our interests in Yemen at that point?

RANSOM: I’m sure our interests at that point were similar to what they are now, which is the strategic position of Yemen at the southern end of the Red Sea. It’s the chokepoint for the traffic from the Suez Canal going down into the Indian Ocean. There is a sizeable number of Yemeni-Americans, so we needed a consular presence. Stability in that part of the world was very important to us because of Saudi Arabia and Oman, the oil rich countries.

Q: Particularly up in the mountains away from the port activities, was it pretty tribal in Sanaa and the surrounding country?

RANSOM: Oh, extremely. Very tribal. Everybody knows what village they’re from, what tribe they belong to.

Q: Did you get involved? There is a fairly substantial Yemeni community in the U.S. in New York. When I was in Dhahran, I was issuing visas to Yemenis going to those places. Were you seeing Yemenis who had built up a bit of money coming back and settling down?

RANSOM: We did, especially in the... less in the north, more in the southern part of the country called Hogariyya and in Ibb. You’d be walking through the town looking at this quaint town with mud brick buildings and some Yemeni would come walking by you, wearing a Yemeni skirt and a big jambiya. Then, he’d turn to you and he’d say in a Brooklyn accent, “Hi, how are you?” This guy could have lived in the U.S. for 30 years. Sometimes they would come to the States and didn’t have the money to go back and visit. They would just stay here and work and save their money to eventually go back there and settle down.

Q: How about when the AID people were in jail and you were packing people up and pulling out? Did you get involved in that?

RANSOM: Oh, yes. We went from house to house and did inventories. Some people were away when all this was taking place and we had to go and try to help pack up their valuables and pull together what we could. The PAO was away and we had to close up the USIS office and decide

what we would take. We took any information that we felt could be used against any of our Yemeni contacts. It was a very tense time. We had five days notice, five days to prepare for departure. We couldn't be sure what was going to happen from minute to minute. The first people we evacuated were those in Taiz, so we had a little longer time in Sanaa, where we had less trouble with the government.

Q: Was it a matter of the government turning hostile?

RANSOM: I think the Egyptian government did not want us watching their activities in Yemen. They didn't like us there reporting. They had done some things earlier that made it apparent that they wanted to embarrass us and find an excuse to expel us. At the very beginning of this period, we lived on the fourth and fifth floors of a Yemeni skyscraper. A loud knock came down below at the door on the first floor: someone delivering an urgent message in the night. It was a diplomatic note declaring 23 of our people persona non grata (PNG). This was the beginning of the end of our tour. We sat there on the fifth floor and tried to decipher all these names. There were four of us, all students of Arabic, and when we got down to the last name, we could not figure it out. It was the name of an AID employee. Her name was Gwendolyn Whigley.

Q: Not exactly designed for Arabic.

RANSOM: Well, in Arabic, the letter "wow" is a consonant, but also means "and." So, every time we read "wow" in the name, we read "and," instead of realizing that it actually stood for the W's in her name.

Q: So what happened?

RANSOM: As junior officers, we were very excited. We said, "We've got to take this to our Chargé d'Affaires," so we went marching around through the dark, winding, twisted streets of Sanaa to the Chargé's house and knocked on his door late at night. He came to the door, wondering what all the excitement was about. We shared with him the note and he said, "Well, we can take care of this in the morning." So, we were summarily dismissed and sent back. In the morning, he went to the Foreign Ministry to discuss the note and somehow communicated with our government in Washington. I think the decision was made right after that to withdraw us, but it was really in the works already before this happened.

Q: Did you all want to stay or were you glad to get out?

RANSOM: We liked Yemen. Living in Sanaa was like living in "Arabian Nights." It was an absolutely fascinating place to live. There was great esprit among the people in the Embassy. Some of the people we served with are still among our closest friends. Because it was a difficult place, we worked very closely together.

Q: So, you were all pulled out of there. Everybody left?

RANSOM: Yes.

Q: When?

RANSOM: The last planeload left on May 1st, 1967. We chartered an Ethiopian Airlines DC-3 to fly us out. They flew us over to Asmara in Ethiopia, where we had a military base.

Q: Kagnev Station.

RANSOM: Right.

Q: Did you figure this was going to be for a long time?

RANSOM: Well, you couldn't take much out with you. We had no idea what was going to happen, but we knew we weren't going back to Yemen. We had been scheduled for Arabic language training in Beirut in 1968. So, when we got to Asmara, we must have had to wait a few days before we learned what our fate was going to be. We were assigned temporarily to Iran to fill in the time between Yemen and Beirut.

Q: You did that from when to when?

RANSOM: We were in Teheran for eight months, July 1967-March, 1968. We spent some time in Germany beforehand, as David had to have some surgery. So, we were in Iran from July 1967 to roughly March 1968.

Q: What did the June '67 war do to the situation in Yemen that you could monitor?

RANSOM: We were in Germany at that point. Once the war was over, the Egyptians started their withdrawal from Yemen.

ALLAN W. OTTO
Economic Officer
Aden (1967-1968)

Allan W. Otto was born in Illinois in 1938 and graduated from Northwestern University. Before joining the Foreign Service, he was a high school teacher for many years. In addition to serving in Yemen, Mr. Otto served in Germany, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Mexico. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: You left Berlin and you went to quite a different locale. You were in Aden from 1967 to 1968.

OTTO: Right.

Q: This must have been rather difficult, because this was right in the aftermath, or were you in the middle of the 1967 War?

OTTO: We arrived there in March, 1967. The Egyptians were still very much supporting the Republican Government in what was then called the Republic of Yemen, the old Kingdom of Yemen. The Saudis were supporting the former Royal Government. There was an active civil war going on. With the Arab-Israel War in June, 1967, the Egyptians decided that they couldn't afford to put people, materiel, and money into an effort in southern Yemen when their own borders were suspect. And their own ability to defend their borders was suspect, so they pulled out. Then another, rival nationalist movement actually began to do battle with the nationalist movement that had been supported by the Egyptians. In effect, they negotiated independence with Great Britain by November, 1967.

Q: By this time, after the 1967 War, the Suez Canal was shut - is that right?

OTTO: That's right.

Q: And it stayed shut until the 1970's?

OTTO: I left in September, 1968, and it hadn't opened by then.

Q: What was your job in Aden?

OTTO: I was assigned initially as an economic officer. I think that the staffing consisted of the consul general, political officer, economic officer, consular officer, and a couple of clerical people. Once it became independent later in the year, we went to Embassy status shortly thereafter. Then we got the full complement, including Marine Guards, etc. I ended up doing a variety of things, as one does at a small post. Beside the economic work, I also did consular work for a while, too.

Q: With the Israelis, after some initial concern, really beating the hell out of the Arabs, a lot of Arab nations severed diplomatic relations with us, including Egypt and Syria. What was the effect of that war on our establishment there?

OTTO: Well, at that time it was still a Consulate General, and it was still a colony of England. Aden was the colony. The hinterland, which later became the Republic of Southern Yemen, was a protectorate under the British system. The British supported an indigenous government that was based on a royal family, within the protectorate of Southern Yemen. There was a series of tribes, but there was no overriding sort of royal family for the country, *per se*, as they had in Saudi Arabia. The British were hoping that the protectorate government would become the government for the whole place, but that was not to be. There was first the Egyptian-supported, nationalist organization, which, again, was primarily in the Republic of Southern Yemen, and which was operating, to a certain extent, along the borders. Then, subsequently, you had another - I can't remember their names. The one the British were opposing initially was called the Front for the Liberation of Southern Yemen, FLOSY being the acronym. The organization which then went

out and took power was one which was tied in with the Baath Movement in Iraq and Syria, which supported them. It was kind of a strange thing that you had in the Middle East. It was a government which purported, on a political level, to be very much socialist, almost to the point of being authoritarian socialism. Very friendly, initially, with the communist countries. There was a certain amount of competition between Russians and Chinese at that time to see who was going to be more influential. The Russians won out because, basically, they had more to give. At the same time this government had a very conservative, religious basis. During the British time Aden was considered one of their standard colonies. Education was...English was the language of the government. English was the language of the educated elite. Women were basically treated - I wouldn't say exactly the same as men, but after the nationalist government took over, the veils came back, and it was a much different social situation. So it was an interesting time, seeing the British withdrawal.

Q: What about the visa side? I had a touch of this in the late 1950's, when I was in Dhahran, where I found that there were a lot of Yemenis working in the oilfields, and many of them were emigrating to factory cities, like Lackawanna, New York, Youngstown, Ohio, and all that. Did you find that you were dealing with this diaspora of Yemenis at all?

OTTO: To a certain extent. There was emigration. We did issue immigrant visas in Southern Yemen. Prior to the outbreak of the June [1967] War, our representation in the Republic of Yemen existed. I don't remember whether we actually recognized the Republican Government, which had basically overthrown the Royal Government. Prior to the June War - I think it was about April, [1967], or maybe May - but between the time I arrived in March, [1967], and the June War the Egyptians had staged an incident at an AID (Agency for International Development) compound, which purported, I believe, to say that we were feeding arms to the Royalist Government. They took a couple of the AID people and held them for a period of time. They finally let them go after negotiations, but the result was that there was a break in relations between the Government of the Republic of Yemen and the United States. The result was that people who had been assigned to Sanaa - at that time they had two sort of separate capitals, Sanaa, and I can't remember the name of the other...

Q: Taiz, I know..

OTTO: Not Taiz. Taiz was under Saudi Arabia. I can't remember what it was. Anyway, it was in the southern part of the country. All those people were pulled out, and a certain number of them relocated in Aden. Then, of course, we picked up all of the consular work for really all of Yemen. The migration was really related to the Yemeni communities which had always existed in the United States - not terribly large. So the number of immigrant visas was not very high. People there had no particular reason to travel, no particular, economic resources to travel, and I can hardly remember any non-immigrant visa work at all.

WILLIAM R. CRAWFORD
Ambassador

Yemen Arab Republic (1972-1974)

Ambassador William R.. Crawford, Jr. was born in Pennsylvania in 1928. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Cyprus, Yemen, Romania, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by William Moss on March 12, 1991.

Q: We'll be coming back to Cyprus in some detail. Let's talk about your assignment to the Yemen Arab Republic as ambassador. You might treat, at the same time, a little bit of changes you saw when you had been in Aden before, dealing with that area as a junior officer. How did you get the assignment of going to the Yemen Arab Republic?

CRAWFORD: On July 4, 1972, about 4:00 a.m. in the morning, I got a telephone call from Bonn. It was the North Yemeni ambassador in Bonn, who said, "Bill, it's happened."

I said, "Mohammed, it's 4:00 in the morning here. What on earth has happened?"

He said, "Your Secretary of State is in Sanaa. Relations have been renewed. Now you must make yourself the first ambassador."

Well, at that point I have to go back in history. I had been in and out of Yemen from 1957 to 1959. The job of independent consul in Aden carried with it responsibility for representing on a day-to-day basis US interests in Northern Yemen, as well, where our ambassador in Jeddah was accredited as minister. The Jeddah ambassador would go down to this dreadfully benighted place (or so it was generally regarded) up in the mountain vastness of the Arabian Peninsula and be differential to the Imam of Yemen and so on, but seldom more than once in a tour in Jeddah. Reporting coverage was really left up to the Aden consul, who was nominally the second or third secretary of a non-existent legation in Yemen.

In the period of 1957 to 1959, the Russians and Chinese both--this is shortening this enormously--for different and competing reasons had gotten substantially involved in Yemen. The Russians had shown an interest in the 1920's for genuine strategic reasons because of the country's position controlling the Bab-al-Mandeb southern entrance to the Red Sea. This was part of the Russian historic push south toward fresh-water ports. The Chinese, on the other hand, wanted to block the Russian push southward by their own thrust east to west. They also saw Yemen as a jumping-off point into Black Muslim Africa, in which they were intensely interested.

Suddenly, from our reporting out of Aden, Washington began to concern itself with what the Russians and Chinese might be up to in this funny country that nobody knew anything about. In the course of an assignment that was over two years in Aden, our efforts were really divided between the Aden post and coverage of Yemen. Again making a long story short, as my Aden assignment was coming to an end, I was able to make all the physical preparations for opening a legation in Yemen. When I left, the job split into two, a legation in Ta'iz, North Yemen, and a consul in Aden. In those two years, it had become obvious to me that this archaic government in Northern Yemen couldn't last for long. This was a theocratic, despotic, just dreadful medieval

kind of regime which forbade foreigners from entering the country, forbade its own students from leaving the country for further education, etc. Jails were overflowing; the overflow prisoners shuffled the streets with a ball and a chain, a huge cannon ball attached by a manacle to the ankle.

But I had gotten to know several of the young men who wanted educations and who were prepared to be ostracized politically and even go into exile for the sake of college study. It seemed to me that they were the hope of the future in Yemen. It seemed obvious that when something happened to the then-Imam (Ahmad), Saudi Arabia would intervene through the tribes, and Egypt would intervene to protect its protégés. And as it turned out there were several years of civil war when the Imam finally died in 1962. But I felt it would be these young men seeking an education, believing in the future of their country, who probably, in fact, would be that future after the anticipated conflict following the Imam's death had sorted itself out.

So I helped a number of them get scholarships to the United States, and one in particular became, over the years, my closest Arab friend. He, in fact, had already gone into exile in Aden and had to support a family. In 1957 he had come into the consulate in Aden to give Arabic conversation lessons. He was threadbare. He came from a very distinguished opposition family in Northern Yemen, the Nu'man clan of intellectuals. Through him, I got really into the Yemeni scene. We had become, as I say, close friends.

Following the 1962-67 civil war, my friend, Muhammad Ahmad Nu'man, as one of the young republicans, had moved up very quickly in the post-revolutionary, post-civil war government, to be political advisor to the president, ambassador to France, then ambassador in Bonn.

So, as I say, Muhammad was calling the early morning of July 4, 1972, to say that Secretary of State Rogers was visiting Northern Yemen to put the concluding stamp on a previously worked-out arrangement, whereby Yemen would be the first Arab country to re-recognize the United States after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 and the break of relations, in exchange for which we would be as helpful as we could in encouraging international economic aid to this desperately poor country, and we would assign an ambassador to be resident, for the first time, in Northern Yemen.

So back to the 4:00 a.m. telephone call from Bonn to Nicosia. I said, "But Muhammad, it doesn't work that way. Foreign countries don't choose their American ambassadors."

He said, "Well, how does it work?" I described what I knew of the usual selection process. He said, "You'll be hearing from us."

The press that day did indeed report that Secretary Rogers had been in Yemen, that relations were to be resumed, and the United States would assign a resident ambassador for the first time to Northern Yemen. The Secretary's party was on its way out of Yemen on his plane up to Athens. My wise ambassador, David Popper, who had worked very closely with Joe Sisco, who was Under Secretary, for many years, said, "Bill, I think you ought to call Joe Sisco in Athens tonight." It was still the night of the Fourth of July.

I was able to get through to Sisco in Athens later that evening and told him about the early morning call from Bonn.

Sisco asked if I would be interested in the Yemen job.

I said, "I'd love to, but you may or may not be aware that there's rather a veto outstanding on my being considered for this level of position."

He said, "If I were you, I wouldn't worry about that. In fact, this is music to my ears. The Secretary is really taken by Yemen and he wants a dynamic young officer to go there. I'll be in touch with you."

I learned that what subsequently happened was that the Yemeni ambassador to the U.N. came to call on Sisco in the wake of the Secretary's Yemen visit and reportedly said, "We're delighted by the Secretary's visit to Yemen and the resumption of relations after this long break, and the fact that you're going to be assigning a career ambassador to be resident. We realize that in your system, you do not welcome comments by foreign countries on the possible candidates, but. . ."

The Under Secretary interrupted: "Mr. Ambassador, I wish you'd just stop right there and let me tell you who we have under consideration." And a month later I was assigned to Yemen, sworn in by none other than Under Secretary Macomber.

Q: Was the title of the country North Yemen?

CRAWFORD: Yemen Arab Republic.

Q: Could you describe what was the situation there when you came? We're talking about 1972. Not only what the situation was there, but could you describe the relationship between the United States and the two Yemens, the one in Aden, the other in Northern Sanaa. You were going to Sanaa.

CRAWFORD: Right. Yemenis traditionally think of themselves as a single country historically, going all the way back to the Sabean era (Queen of Sheba). They have a very strong sense of historical background, are convinced that at one time their nation extended from what is now the southern part of the Saudi Red Sea coastline, the Asir, which is clearly Yemeni in culture, through what is currently Northern Yemen, the Yemen Arab Republic, and the People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen, PDRY, the capital of which is Aden. Culturally, the Hadhramaut in the eastern PDRY also seems to have been part of that nation.

Currently, in fact, this historic entity has been split up. Aden and its hinterland was the traditional British colony of Aden and the Aden protectorates and is a woebegone place, really all dependent on Aden, which the British used as a coaling station on the way to India. The British played their cards wrong and turned over independence to a Maoist Communist Party when they were finally forced out of Aden, instead of turning it over to a truly center-of-the-road nationalist party, with a

disastrous result. It had a population upon independence in the '60s of about 1.5 million, but that population is down now to about 900,000. In other words, the Yemenis in the PDRY voted with their feet and have fled the country. It is totally dependent on the Soviet Union, which has taken over all the British bases, refinery, and excellent port facilities. It is the only completely controlled Soviet satellite in the Middle East. The Soviets have close relations with the Syrians, and so on, but nowhere else in the area a client state like the PDRY.

Northern Yemen is a mountain country immediately to the north of PDRY, with a population of about 7.5 million, maybe 8.5 million, half the population of the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen exports people and has throughout history. Thus, there are fairly large Yemeni communities in the United States.

Q: In Lackawanna, New York.

CRAWFORD: In the steel mills, the Detroit automobile industry. Northern Yemen is a scenic mountain country, with the most intensive system of agriculture anywhere between there and Japan, and just a wonderful country to be in. The people have a sense of humor and they're open and friendly, religiously tolerant. They have to be because they're divided between Sunni and Shi'a just about equally.

The same former language instructor out of Aden, later to be the ambassador to France and Germany, suddenly become the foreign minister, presiding the day that I present my credentials to the new and democratically elected president of Northern Yemen after the years of civil war. The foreign minister scheduled it so it would be on the tenth anniversary of American recognition of the republic.

Really one of the most remarkable, warm things that could happen to any Foreign Service officer, there was a Cabinet of, say, 12, and seven or eight were ministers who had gone to the United States under scholarships that I had managed to get them when consul in Aden way back in 1977 to 1979. It was really a very special, loving relationship and happy.

I was fortunate, too, because I had extraordinary backing from Secretary of State Rogers, who had had what many people referred to as a "mystical experience," in his visit to Yemen on that July Fourth, to resume this relationship. I won't belabor the story, but through various mechanical failures of airplanes and so on, all the best arrangements collapsed and he had to fly into Sanaa to a tiny airport after dusk had fallen. He had a very tight schedule on this Middle Eastern trip. Everybody knew that if he didn't make it to Sanaa that night, he'd have to do so the next morning. He flew in, tribesmen having drawn up jeeps all along the otherwise unlit landing strip to shine their headlights on it, with all the lighted flares. He just loved it. The Yemenis were very sophisticated, and, as he reported to me, impressed him by not asking anything of him except to welcome the resumption of relations and with the assignment of a first resident ambassador. They said, "You, the United States, have great influence in all those world groups, the World Bank, the IMF, the U.N. Development Program. We just hope that you will put in a good word with them about our needs as one of the five poorest countries in the world."

Rogers was so taken by that, the one country that hadn't asked anything of him in terms of money, that he said, "I really want to help those people. I want to establish an effective American presence and AID aid program. Call on me any time you want."

Q: So it was much more of a personal relationship there, both on your part and the part of Secretary of State, than is usual in countries.

CRAWFORD: Yes, a very special, warm, and loving thing.

Q: Did we have any strategic interests there?

CRAWFORD: We felt we did, very definitely, because by then the Russian-dominated Aden, or the PDRY, was busy trying to subvert Northern Yemen. The Russians were playing on both sides. The Russians were arming both. Over the years, going all the way back to the 1950's, of which we spoke earlier, we had a growing awareness that this country was half the population of the Arabian Peninsula, and that if it turned sour and became like its southern neighbor, the PDRY, Communist controlled and Russian dominated, that you'd have a real danger to the peninsula's oil assets, and particularly with the metastasis of those million-and-a-half Yemenis working in the oil fields. There was a very strong sense of American strategic interest.

I was, indeed, strongly backed by Rogers, and the people in Washington knew that he wanted an effective American presence, so very quickly we had an aid program going, a Peace Corps presence, and had committed in the first year about \$30 million of assistance to various programs. It was a very exciting, rewarding time.

Two years later, again on July Fourth, oddly enough, I was summoned back to Washington to be interviewed by Secretary of State Kissinger, to go to Syria as ambassador, along with Dick Murphy, and Dick Parker. The three of us were interviewed separately by Dr. Kissinger. But in my file that went up to him, the Assistant Secretary of NEA, then Roy Atherton, put in a note which he was kind enough to inform me of. Apparently it was along the lines of: "You asked to see him, but we'd really rather not pull Crawford out of Yemen because we've just got things going there." So that was the way it would have worked, except for the events in Cyprus. I went off on summer vacation hiking in Norway. In the end it was only for a few days. When Ambassador Rodger Davies was killed in Nicosia, Kissinger summoned me back urgently, and within what was then a record time in US history confirmed by the Senate, briefed by President Ford and Secretary Kissinger, and on my way back, not to Yemen but Cyprus.

Q: Back to Yemen. What sort of things would you do as an ambassador? I'm thinking of somebody who is reading this transcript and wants to know what did you do.

CRAWFORD: Traveled all over the country. Ambassadors should never get stuck in the capital. I resisted the efforts of the Department of State to send me a Chrysler Imperial, which would have been operable on only 11 miles of road in the capital. Instead, I managed to get a Range Rover out of them, so that I was able to get all over the entire country, called on tribal leaders and villagers, went to see irrigation projects, water drilling projects, saw the Peace Corps volunteers

in their villages, took them in hand on weekends, those that were stationed in Sanaa, went out on tours all over the surrounding areas looking for archeological remains.

I had a wonderful relationship with the government. As I say, my best friend there had become the foreign minister, and he'd call at five minutes to 1:00 and say, "Where are the corn flakes?" He had a terrible ulcer, so he'd drop in in five minutes, driving my wife up the wall, for literally Wheaties or Corn Flakes for lunch, which was the only thing his stomach would take. We would talk about anything and everything going on in the country. It was still a very fragmented country and a lot of problems remaining from the civil war. But he was passionately devoted to its development and new-fangled techniques as satellite photography for economic development projects and so on. It was a very special relationship.

He was, unfortunately, murdered in the streets of Beirut shortly before I left, two or three months, because he was on his way to Baghdad, carrying proof of an Iraqi attempt to overthrow his own government. He was commissioned by his president to confront the Iraqis with the proof, and they knew he had the proof in hand, and they had a small Palestinian group in Iraq gun him down in the streets of Beirut.

But it was just a wonderful time, building an effective and by and large, unselfish, American presence in a country that had an awful lot to do with the Russians and Chinese, and still liked the Chinese very much. They'd gotten very fed up with the Russians, and wanted the American presence back as a counterpoise.

Q: How did you deal with the Chinese? During that period, we were just beginning to develop relations with the Chinese.

CRAWFORD: Correct, cool. We had effectively no social dealings. We'd bow politely, even shake hands, as I recall, when we met. They were doing some very good things in that country.

Q: They were building a port, weren't they?

CRAWFORD: Principally a road. They saw that the one thing that would get them the most credit was the major road system tying together the three cities of Hodeida, Sanaa, and Ta'iz. They did a wonderful engineering job. What impressed the Yemenis was that the Chinese were not just managers. The Chinese engineers would get down and do manual labor right along with their approximately 10,000 Yemeni workers. It was a pretty effective job, and they ran good health clinics. The Yemenis liked them.

Q: How about the Soviets?

CRAWFORD: They did not like the Soviets. The Soviets, the North Yemenis felt, with justice, had really plighted their troth to the PDRY. The Yemenis saw that the Russian effort in Northern Yemen was basically aimed at extending northward their zone of control in Aden, or, at best, a sort of tongue-in-cheek effort to keep North Yemen from subverting the Russian-controlled

regime in the south, which they could have done if they'd wanted to given their population preponderance. It was a very exciting, building time.

Q: Was Egypt playing a role there at that time?

CRAWFORD: Egypt had gotten really burned. In 1962 Egypt had gone in with an expeditionary force of 50,000 Egyptians at its maximum, to help its side in the civil war, a war which Egypt really lost against the Saudi-backed tribes. Egyptians used to call Yemen their Vietnam. The parallel was far from exact, but they pulled out in 1967 when they lost that war with the Israelis. But that was really a pretext to call home the troops. They had lost the war. They had never managed to extend their control outside the main cities, even with the air force, sophisticated equipment, and the use of poison gas.

Q: Very much the shades of what happened to the Soviets in Afghanistan.

CRAWFORD: Yes. Against tribesmen who were mobile and know their terrain, and who love warfare. The Yemenis were very much like the Afghans in that respect. It's a way of life for the tribes.

DAVID M. RANSOM
Deputy Chief of Mission
Sana'a (1975-1978)

Ambassador David M. Ransom was born in Missouri in 1938. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Princeton University in 1960, he served in the US Marine Corps from 1962-1965. His career has included positions in Taiz, Teheran, Beirut, Jeddah, Sana'a, Abu Dhabi, Damascus, and an ambassadorship to Bahrain. Ambassador Ransom was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November, 1999.

Q: You were in Yemen from when to when?

RANSOM: 1975-1978.

Q: When you got to Yemen here in 1975, what was Sanaa and Yemen like?

RANSOM: Yemen was a country between two states that could not have been more antithetical: the very conservative Saudi kingdom to the north and the very radical Arab communist state of Aden to the south. There was never any question that our major interest in the area coincided with the Saudis', but we wanted them to engage rather than to confront the Yemen Arab Republic. We always had the idea that, in some way, the Yemen Arab Republic could be used against the very radical communist state in Aden—the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. PDRY it was called.

The Soviets had the exact opposite policy. They wanted to see if the Yemen Arab Republic could not be tied more closely to their radical friends in the PDRY. They wanted to see if, by one way or another, their dealings in the Yemens could not be turned into some sort of a relationship with the Saudis - maybe a relationship of leverage, maybe a relationship of engagement. So, they were pumping a lot of money into the YAR, much more than we, particularly for military aid. We were in many ways the misers in Yemen. It didn't bother me in the least.

We had very good friends in the government. We liked Yemen. We traveled around a lot. We found the country very interesting as well as sufficiently important. Marjorie and I - she in USIA and I in State - had a wonderful time. I had never been a DCM before. It took me back to the days in the Marine Corps when I had been a platoon commander in charge of a lot of men and with certain responsibilities. I found that the whole method of dealing with others from a position of command in the Foreign Service had to be very different than that of the Marine Corps, but some things carried over.

Our girls were coming into school age. They were very lively and full of fun. We devoted each Friday to the family, going out on picnics in the magnificent mountains around the city of Sanaa. We had lots of friends, both Yemenis and Americans, and it was a very good time in our lives.

We probably were guilty of exaggerating for the Department the importance of Yemen and the role that it had in the geopolitics of that part of the world. But that is an occupational hazard in the Foreign Service. It happens all the time; we tried to curb it and be reasonable about it and even humorous, but I suppose at times it crept in. What we argued for consistently and firmly was that the Saudis should engage the Yemenis with aid, border settlements, labor agreements, and more amiable discussions of diplomatic relations. By and large, that process in both Riyadh and Yemen was more or less successful. The Yemenis and the Saudis are never going to love each other. They are really two different peoples. One settled on the mountains. The others have their origins in the desert and nomadic life. One doesn't expect to see them really be good friends. Also one was a republican and the other a monarchy, left and right, and that added complications. But we did our best to figure out the politics of the situation and helped to stabilize the government and watched institutions develop.

We had a very large AID mission which was engaged in development efforts. That was fun. We had a small military mission which did a little bit of training and a little bit of arms supply-- nothing like what the Soviets did. Nevertheless, we kept our hand in. We had a very successful program of teaching English and providing scholarships that was run by Marjorie.

Q: What was your impression of Saudi diplomacy? I assume they had a mission there. How did you find they operated?

RANSOM: The Saudis had given up their war in the Republic of Yemen and established diplomatic relations, but they still were not about to abandon their allies, particularly the northern tribes. They wanted very much to see them continue to be a kind of buffer against Yemeni threats. So, they funneled money to politicians and to tribes in the north. We made the argument

that funds should be funneled to the government which would get them more for their money. Eventually, that materialized. But the Saudis were extremely suspicious of the Yemenis and frankly didn't like them. Yemenis came by the hundreds of thousands to work in Saudi Arabia. They had, in fact, a privileged status. They were the only people who could come to the kingdom without a work permit or a visa. They just came. They had to register, but it was easy for them not just to work but also to set up shops and booths--limited commercial transactions. These immigrants sent hundreds of millions of dollars back home in remittances. It was a mainstay of the Yemeni economy, but it led the Saudis to see Yemenis solely as workers and a kind of underclass. There wasn't very much respect or admiration on the Saudi side for Yemen. The great Saudi fear was that the north of Yemen would join with the south of Yemen either through a coup d'etat or invasion or even willing acquiescence and then Saudi Arabia would be faced with a very large threat from a Soviet armed and backed state with a large population pressing against the southern part of the kingdom. It was that that Saudi Arabia was determined to prevent. Of course, so were we. The question was always what was going on in south Yemen? What were the attitudes in the north towards the south? This was hard to find out. We had no embassy in South Yemen and no way to go there. It was very difficult to see people. The Soviets sure as hell didn't tell us much. The Saudis were the victims of a lot of fabricated stories that alarmed them but did not really help them make policy very clearly or consistently.

So, the south was divided against itself. There were coups d'etat, battles, and occasionally talks between the north and the south which made the Saudis very, very anxious and reticent. The Saudis wanted to work to overthrow the southern government. These efforts were always a failure. So, Saudi Arabia teetered awkwardly back and forth between different policy goals.

Q: What were we getting about developments in the south? In some places in the old days, we used to get pretty good information about China through the Yugoslav embassy. Were there any sources of that type or our intelligence sources?

RANSOM: Yes. I worked very hard to develop sources who knew the south from traveling there or who had families or business connections there. The government itself provided us with some information. But it was hard work and I'm not sure we did a lot. I developed a series of cables called "Pidry at the Crossroads," which charted as best I could, the growing tensions between different groups in the south.

Eventually, there was quite an extraordinary culmination to all of that. It happened while we were there. Guerrillas in the north were in touch with one of the factions in the south. While this made the Saudis nervous, we thought this would divide the south and weaken its large military forces. These contacts eventually led to a very serious fight in the south between different army factions. The north intervened in a way that lent moral support to one side. For that, in cloudy circumstances in which the Saudis may have had a hand, one faction of north Yemenis killed the president of North Yemen, Ibrahim Dahamdi. He was assassinated, killed, murdered, and then a story was put out to cover up the crime. It was pretty transparent. But in the tense time, we moved to support the new government of the north only to find a few months later that they had started to do the same thing with the south and this time it was the south that sent someone to north Yemen, to Sanaa, to kill the president. He succeeded in his attempt in the headquarters

where the president was sitting. So, yet a third president came to power -- someone whom I had gotten to know very briefly. It was a time of teetering -- on the verge of collapse -- of the political system in the north, along with a major threat from the south. These were eventful days - coups d'etat, murders, intrigues, conspiracies, and a little bit of Middle Eastern geopolitics.

Q: Did the south have the preponderance of military might or would the outcome be in doubt if they went to war with each other?

RANSOM: Both the south and the north had Soviet military assistance and some U.S. military assistance, mostly paid for by the Saudis. But we believed that the most effective forces were in the south. Certainly the greatest number of tanks, airplanes, missiles, artillery, and such were there. The southern forces fought each other rather consistently but one couldn't dismiss the possibility that they would not be used against the north.

In fact, a year after I left, there was a kind of an invasion of the north by the south. I rushed back to Sanaa from my new post in DOD to help out with military assistance for the north and to provide moral support. The actions we took did help restore a balance in that part of the world and to calm the situation. This was a time when the contest between the Soviet Union and the United States always seemed to me to be very clear. It wasn't always in the forefront of politics, but it was there at the center of our concern. In addition to that, there was a large concern about Saudi Arabia and the hope to foster development and better relations between the disputing states in the Middle East.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

RANSOM: His name was Tom Scotese. He was a wonderful man and a wonderful friend. He took on the responsibility for accepting both Marjorie and myself. There was a State Department policy barred a DCM from having a spouse working at an embassy. Since we had no wives who were posted as or being considered for DCM anywhere in the world at that time, the person out of luck was always the wife.

Q: These were the early days.

RANSOM: This was 1975. So, we had to get the policy changed in order for both of us to go. The director general thought it was a very bad idea. He said, "It's not good for your marriage, David. It's not good for other people in the post and it's not good for the Foreign Service." I said, "My marriage is very strong and we will be the best judges of whether or not it is affected by this. It is very good for the Foreign Service since it gives you a lot of alternatives. You have to deal with the ambassador, who wants this. If he can handle it, why is it a concern to anyone else?" The bureau was noble in its support. They looked at both the assignees and said they were good people, who were right for their jobs. They backed us up wonderfully.

In the end, it came down to a lawyer. I went to see him. His name was Mollenberg. He looked at me and said, "You realize this is illegal." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you write your wife's efficiency report and that's a violation of the Federal Anti-Nepotism Law." I said, "I wouldn't

write my wife's efficiency report for all the tea in China. I will never touch it. I will have nothing to do with signing vouchers for her travel expenses or anything else. There is no way that anybody is every going to get me on the Anti-Nepotism act." He said, "Well, if you're not going to write the efficiency report, who is?" I said, "The ambassador is and USIA have agreed to send out one person once a year to do a second report." He said, "Well, then it's not illegal" and that was basically the end of the argument. We both went. We set a precedent in doing that. For tandem couples, a lot of other barriers then fell when you had this relationship - PAO-DCM - in place. Nobody could object to the many other combinations that would be considered thereafter. So, we made a small contribution of our own to the social change and transformation of our beloved Foreign Service.

Q: What were the Soviets doing

RANSOM: The Yemenis wanted to maintain an independent position and not get sucked entirely into either camp. Each camp gave the Yemenis something that was very important to them. We had a voice with the Saudis. The Soviets had military assistance. So, they wanted to maintain their independence and their leverage as best they could. The Soviets had a tough hand to play. Everybody knew that their favorite partners were in the south, not in the north. But they did their best. They set up a small coalition of radical states on the Horn with Somalia, South Yemen, and then eventually, after Haile Selassie fell, Ethiopia...

Q: Was this about the time that he fell?

RANSOM: Yes. It happened when I was there. The Soviets were overjoyed. The collapse of the Shah on one hand and Haile Selassie on the other seemed to them to be a harbinger of great things to come for them. It looked to many people like the end of our friends. These upheavals posed large risks to our position in the area. Regional powers were important to us as a way of extending our power in the area. Haile Selassie and the Shah were good friends. However, the Soviet efforts at coalition diplomacy in that part of the world basically came to naught even though they enlisted no less a person than Fidel Castro to travel in the area to try to put the deal together. They wanted to include the north Yemenis in that coalition, but the Yemenis managed to avoid the embrace as we offered blandishments of our own for a closer relationship with us and the Saudis. They were clever people and they had their own idea of what was good for them.

Q: I think the thing that is interesting is that in all of the Middle East the south Yemenis seem to be the only ones who really almost embrace the Soviets. Almost everyone else says, "Yes, the Soviets were helpful, but they weren't really our cup of tea." The Arabs' policies were a homegrown thing and they accepted the Soviets as handy suppliers of equipment and support, but basically they were going to do their own thing. Somehow, I've always had the feeling the south Yemenis were more in the Soviet camp than anyone else.

RANSOM: That's absolutely true. They were virtually a communist state and were run by a party which had a uneasy relationship with the military. It was hard to explain why. One reason was that they saw the game working against them. The Saudis were frightening and intimidating. We were not friendly. They were very anti-imperialist and anti-colonialism. They believed that the

Arab nationalist movements that had come to power in the aftermath of the British departure were the more radical,--not the more bourgeois. But there were other explanations. South Yemen is even more divided in terms of tribes and region than the north. Communism was a kind of lowest common denominator that offered no advantage to anyone else and seemed to draw everybody together. That view was nonsense and it constantly broke down. There were no new men in the socialist mold that were being created in south Yemen despite the schooling, enthusiasm, and drum-beating. But it may have played a certain role in helping the radical ethos to maintain itself. But it also drove the economy into the ground. The port simply ceased to function. There were no exports. Everything was nationalized. Agriculture sank. Remittances went down to almost nothing because south Yemenis were not allowed to enter Saudi Arabia or the Gulf. It was the only Arab state where population dwindled and gross national product simply declined year after year.

Q: What about Muscat, Oman? What do we call it now?

RANSOM: Sultanate of Oman.

Q: At one point, it was Muscat, Oman. Was that a bulwark against this?

RANSOM: Yes, we thought so. On one hand, the south was helping an insurrection in the western-most province of Oman, a province called Zufar. That "freedom fighter" movement was something that the British, we, and others felt had to be stopped. Eventually, it was. They never did anything quite similar in either Saudi Arabia or in north Yemen, but that was one of the things that we were concerned about.

Q: Were the British a player in this? I know they used to run certain states in the area..

RANSOM: The British were the dominant player in this. We had a very small role in the matter.

Q: How about in the British representation in north Yemen?

RANSOM: It was there, but it was very modest.

Q: How did you, your ambassador, and the rest of the embassy operate with the government? You had two assassinations in this period. How did we react at that time? What were we concerned about?

RANSOM: Those are two different questions. Marjorie and I are both Arabists and so we had an awful lot of contact with Yemenis and a lot of dealings with them. Yemenis at that point were able and willing to accept invitations and so we saw them a lot in our house. It was a place where there were no movies and no VCRs. Marjorie as a USIA officer got both movies and the first VCR in the country. So, entertaining at our house was a piece of cake. We would show a Marx Brothers movie or something like that and anybody you invited on the guest list would come. Everyone would come. Good meal, good movie, lots of interesting people.

Marjorie's friends were the "softer" side of the society - the journalists, the educators, the few artists that existed, people educated in the West. Mine tended to be diplomats and businessmen - not so many officers (They wouldn't come.), but ministers and politicians. These two groups which would not meet anywhere else would meet around our table or in our living room. We would set it up for a movie like "The Russians are Coming," which they thought was ridiculous, or "A Night at the Opera," which they thought was even funnier. The Yemenis have a magnificent sense of humor and they are very quick and intuitive people. They never missed a point in a movie no matter how culturally biased it might have been. When we showed the movie "Casablanca," but one that is rooted in World War II and which included certain stereotypes of Americans, Germans, French, and Italians, I wondered whether or not Yemenis would get it. They didn't miss a trick. They laughed at the Italian. They loved the American. They hated the German. The Frenchman with his worldly cynicism was someone who came across as being someone to admire but with whom a good Yemeni had to be very careful.

So, they gained that way a kind of picture of America. These classic films gave a picture of America which was altogether sort of engaging and interesting. Those movie nights provided us with a lot of treasured memories and a tremendous amount of laughing. I don't remember being at a post where so many outrageously funny things happened. People spent a lot of time laughing, drinking, going to dinner parties. There were exciting stories. It was a very intense Middle Eastern experience.

Q: They were quite different than the Saudis. My impression of the Saudis was that they were pretty solemn people.

RANSOM: The Saudis are much more aloof and reserved and they certainly don't laugh as much. I think it's probably fair to say they're very, very good friends but they're not as much fun.

Q: Did you have any feeling that there was a certain amount of rapport between the mountaineers of north Yemen and, say, Appalachia, Kentucky, and all that?

RANSOM: The tribalism in Yemen and the splits along religious lines were very deep and fundamental to the society. You have to remember that Yemen was a society that was almost completely walled off from the world until shortly after we established a mission in the country. So, it was laughingly described as a 14th century country rushing into the 15th century. That was a bit harsh, but it was only beginning to develop roads, electric lines and telephones. There was no TV station when we got there. There was a radio station, but they very limited contact with the outside world. The government really wasn't able to keep up with the demands for change. What we saw and were very impressed by was the Yemeni people, who were very hardworking, who pitched in and who, with remittance money that did not come from the government, began to engendered economic development projects on their own - water projects, chicken projects, road projects, electrification of villages with generators. They bought cars and trucks. They were the ones who were moving ahead. The government was laboring to keep up.

It was a unique development situation. We tried to pitch our assistance efforts not to support big infrastructure projects, but to improvements that would leverage off the energy and imagination

of the people. We supported small scale projects and worked with the Yemeni villages with water, grains, etc. I think we had the right idea, although the Yemeni government complained because we had no big, expensive capital project in Yemen. We just said, "Go ahead, complain. We won't do it."

Q: How about exchange programs? There was a sizable Yemeni community in New York, Ohio, and New Jersey, too.

RANSOM: There certainly was.

Q: Did they play a role? Were we sending Yemenis to study at American universities?

RANSOM: Marjorie was sending Yemenis to study at universities. Actually, we didn't send Yemenis to universities. We sent most of our few students to graduate school. By then, they had proven themselves in universities and we knew that they were good science students. They were stable people. But I must tell you that all the while I was there I worried about this policy above all because we sent very few people - at the most 11 or 13 a year - while the Soviets were sending 200 a year to the Soviet Union universities. I wondered how we could ever keep up with this tidal wave of people when they returned, perhaps indoctrinated, or at least inclined to support the Soviet Union against our friends of Yemen. I guess I needn't have worried. Last year, Marjorie was invited back to Yemen by the embassy to help to start a Fulbright commission. There was a banquet where she was the guest speaker. There were 95 graduates from the United States there. It read as "who's who" of Yemeni society -- ministers, businessmen, educators, journalists -- many others, women as well as men. They were enormously proud of their education and prosperous and purposeful. I sat at the head table with a former prime minister who also was a graduate from the American education system. I asked him about these hundreds and even thousands of young Yemenis who had been educated in the Soviet Union - where were they? He said, "I can't think of any who had made an impact in society." He went on: "You have to understand, David, we have nothing against them. We put no barriers in their way. The Soviet Union no longer exists and we don't care about their political views. It's just that they didn't get a good education and they didn't come back with much to offer."

Q: Often, that happens and also there is a certain inoculation by going there of people coming back. I dealt with Africans coming out of Bulgaria who were getting the same type of thing in the 1960's. The Soviet system didn't work very well. It really had very little to offer.

RANSOM: I think there are two things. One is that these students came back without being very impressed with the Soviet Union. They hadn't been very happy there. The other thing was that they just weren't very well trained.

Q: I've talked to an Ethiopian who got a very good course in Marxist economics that was absolutely valueless when he went back to work under Haile Selassie. How were your relations with our embassy in Jeddah at that time?

RANSOM: There was a certain amount of cordial difference over what we should be doing with

Yemen. By and large, it is fair to say that the Department sided with the embassy in Jeddah. But we all knew each other very well. It wasn't a time when, like now, you can pick up the phone and call. You couldn't just call out of Yemen. It was very difficult. Anyway, there were no secure lines. There was no e-mail. Travel was very difficult. But I managed to go up to Jeddah and talk to people. I became actually quite good friends with a political appointee, the former governor of South Carolina, John West, who was ambassador to Saudi Arabia. He was a man I instantly liked and talked to. We invited him to Yemen to visit us with his wife. He had been dean of the law school at the University of South Carolina; he was an extraordinarily intelligent and thoughtful man and game for almost anything. He would take me around with him when he went to visit Saudis, ranking officials, and we'd always have a discussion of Yemen. So, there was a very, very close and cordial connection there with the embassy in Jeddah under a man who was a political appointee, but a very important one and a very good one.

Q: What did our embassy do when there were these two assassinations? How did we react?

RANSOM: The first assassination was an inside job-- the North Yemenis against the others. We had a hard time at first piecing it together. The cover story was clearly incredible. The cover story was a story in itself. There had been a competition for the installation of a telephone system which the Yemeni government was going to pay for with World Bank money. There was an American competitor, GTE, and a French company. We couldn't get nearly as much public attention from the Yemeni government as the French could. In fact, the French invited the president of Yemen, Ibrahim al-Hamdi, who was later assassinated, to Paris on a state visit and he was received at the airport by Giscard d'Estaing-- the Giscard d'Estaing who was the cousin of the prime minister and the president of Cobble de Lyon, which made the telephone wires which would have gone to Yemen. Then there were state banquets hosted by the two Giscard and a lot of tours of Paris arranged by the two. Al-Hamdi got the royal treatment and that made a huge difference. I went to see the prime minister who was going to go accompany al-Hamdi. From a previous trip to Paris, I had some telephone slugs left over. I gave the slugs to the prime minister and said, "Look, these are supposed to work in any French public telephone. You get out of the car on the Champs Elysées and go up to any telephone and try to put one in and call your embassy. Here is the telephone number of your embassy. If it works, buy the French phones. If it doesn't work, come back and buy the American phones. I'll tell you one thing. Ours will work."

Well, the Yemenis went to Paris. The prime minister used the slugs. They didn't work, but they still bought French. The president came back and on the plane with him were two French nightclub hostesses. They were very high class call girls. They established themselves in a house. Sanaa is a small place and you hear about such things very quickly. Apparently, they were part of the telephone deal. That made me very upset, but there wasn't much that we could do. I actually ran into these women one day when I was going down to the local PTT office; they came in to send some sort of telegram or make a telephone call. They were fairly snappy looking ladies, but of a certain demi-mondaine quality, as you would expect from servicing the Yemen government en masse in the evenings. But I spoke to them in my best French and they greeted me. The bodyguards really closed in quickly to fend off somebody like me. Anyway, the night that Hamdi was killed, his body was taken over to their house. The women were shot and undressed. The president's brother was brought in and shot. They were all strewn on the bed. Videotapes were

made. The story was put out that fundamentalists in the north from the tribes had learned about these illicit relationships and found them in the middle of a compromising situation.

This story was obviously not true, but from the outcome, it wasn't clear exactly how this had been engineered or who had done it. We knew who the new president was, but it was hard to believe that this was a brutal political assassination in which our Saudi friends had been involved. I didn't think they did it.

Anyway, piecing that story together took a while during a very tense time. We were much better informed than other embassies and particularly the French embassy. I finally went over to the French embassy two or three days later. I had the story by then. I got to the DCM in the French embassy. I said, "Look, you may think that this is a commercial matter, but I am trying to present this to you as a consular matter. There are two dead French women in this town. You should know how this happened." I told him. Of course, he thought it was an attempt on our part to embarrass the government of France and tilt the balance against them in the telephone contract. But it was not. The telephone system was installed with French equipment and it sure as hell didn't work very well.

Q: Was there any hesitancy on our part in accepting a new government?

RANSOM: Not much. We knew the people. We certainly deplored the murder of someone who was a good friend of ours and of a man that we had admired. But as is normal in situations like this, we consulted with the Saudis. They wanted very much to move on and deal with the new government and that is what we did.

Q: I'm not quite clear as to who was behind this thing?

RANSOM: It was a gang of army officers who were worried that Hamdi was dealing with the south. They were able to tell the Saudis: "This is a danger to you as well as to us and we have to move against them. We want to be sure that we have your acquiescence, if not your support." The story that it was a Saudi initiative is not one that I credit. But almost certainly they had some foreknowledge of it.

Q: What about the second assassination?

RANSOM: The man who was then installed as president of Yemen was an army officer by the name of Ibrahim al-Gashi-- a tribal figure, a nice enough guy. He was almost immediately importuned by a faction in the south that wanted north Yemeni support for its activities. Al-Gashi carried out these talks with Saudi blessing and knowledge. The faction in the south that felt it was being conspired against sent somebody to see him along with a message in a briefcase. The messenger walked into his office, opened the briefcase, and the bomb blew up. It killed the messenger and the president of Yemen, Ibrahim al-Gashi. So, in short order, there was the need to install another new president. This time, the Saudis were very worried. I was there by myself at the time. The Saudis came into town and a very able, wonderful man named Ali Osama showed up as a sort of a super-emissary. We talked about who might be able to restore control, win

support, and carry on. We agreed on a name. I remember even suggesting the name. It turned out that that man did become president and he is, in fact, still the president: Ali Abdullah Saleh. So, we chose better than we had anticipated.

Q: How did this work out? Was this somebody you knew? What was the role of everybody in this?

RANSOM: The society seemed paralyzed. It was clear that the army was going to make the decision. Yemen is a small place. One knew most of the officers. You knew them by reputation and by history even if you didn't know them well personally. Some were strong and purposeful leaders and some were loyal followers. There were only two or three people that I thought could step into the void. How long they would last, I didn't know. But Ali Abdullah Saleh, I thought, was one who should be considered. That was a guess that turned out to be right. I was in no way a king-maker. The discussions with the Saudis served, I think, to confirm thoughts and ideas they had been hearing from other people and which they had themselves. But we did work very, very closely with the Saudis in this period. As it turned out, as I said, Ali Abdullah Saleh did become the president of Yemen and he still is. He is a friend of mine.

Q: What about the role of Islam in Yemen during this 1975-1978 period?

RANSOM: Yemenis belonged to two strains of Islam. There were the Sunnis in the south -- that is the southern part of the Yemen Arab Republic and north Yemen. Sunnis are the Islam of a non-tribalized society -- farmers for the most part.

The other Islamic strain is Zaydi-Shia, which is the Islam of the northern tribes that had always dominated society in Yemen and had supplied imams, leaders, poets, and other cultural leadership. They distinguished themselves in a way so many national religions do in the Middle East, but they are not mainstream Shia. They accept the first four caliphs and that's that. But it was a badge of their domination of society and of the country and had great strength in that sense. They were already so conservative that fundamentalism had not emerged as an issue. Fundamentalism is a quasi-political movement that clothes the politics of a certain group of men in the guise of religion. It cannot thrive unless there is sufficient cultural change in society so that they can claim that western and other influences are undermining Islam. It requires the introduction of a great deal of new law in areas where Islam was always mute - nationality law, commerce law, etc. None of those conditions existed in Yemen in the mid-1970's. Therefore, there was no fundamentalist movement. There is now and that is worrisome.

Q: You were there when the Carter administration came in. In a 14th century country moving into the 15th century, were you reminded by Washington of the human rights thrust of Carter or were you off the screen?

RANSOM: Off the screen. It wasn't an issue in our dealings with the Yemeni government. Jimmy Carter appointed John West to Saudi Arabia as our ambassador. John West had been the first governor (in fact, for a long time the only governor) to espouse Jimmy Carter as a presidential candidate. He was offered the ambassadorial position and accepted it to serve Carter.

I say he did so with distinction. The Saudis still remember him with enormous fondness. But even under these circumstances, we didn't put much emphasis on human rights. Carter did influence our position in other areas. Jimmy Carter was very cautious in the post-Vietnam period about getting the U.S. involved in any way with foreign friends who didn't meet our litmus test for democracy and stability and such. So, the Saudis were never his close friends. But West went a long way to offset that.

Q: How about Israel? Did Israel play any role?

RANSOM: No. Israel didn't play a role. There was almost no discussion in Yemen of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict. There was no doubt about whose side they were on, but it wasn't one of the issues. They had a small Jewish population of their own, maybe 1,000 people. We sort of occasionally looked in on them. As it turned out, years later when I was in charge of the Arabian Peninsula, I was able to work with a very wonderful professor from Yeshiva University, Hirman Tyreel, to extricate the last remnant of the Jewish community from Yemen. There are now only a few left. They go in and out freely. They are basically merchants. They even are traveling to Israel to see their families and this is winked at by the Yemeni government.

Once I took a trip at one point from Chigda overland to Sanaa with Tom Pickering. You have to remember that there were really no roads in Yemen at the time; so we were driving through mountain vastness and up wadis and across sandy stretches without knowing really exactly where we were. In every village we would enter, we would ask where the next village or town was. We would go on from there, camping at night, carrying our own water. It was just a wonderful Middle Eastern escapade with Tom Pickering, who was a great explorer. He asked if I would like to come because he wanted somebody who knew the way. He asked me whether I knew the way? I wrote back and said, "Absolutely. I know the way very well. I know the way as well as anybody." When we were a day out, he said, "Do you really know the way?" I said, "Of course not, but I know the way as well as anybody." But we got to Sanaa safe and sound.

At one of the villages we visited, a man came running up to me. He looked just like all the other Yemenis. He put his hands out and said, "Kutum. Kutum," which means "books." I was befuddled. This is not an expression of greeting or a welcome or anything else. What the hell was he talking about? He invited us into his house for a cup of coffee. When we got in, it became clear to me that he was a Yemeni Jew and what he wanted was indeed Kutum - books. He thought we were bringing him the Torah. When I got back to Sanaa and Tom Pickering had left, I went to see the foreign minister and I said, "Look, you ought to take care of this. There are groups in the United States--non-Zionist Jewish groups, such as the Hasidic Jews in New York--who would be happy to provide Torahs. They would see it as a fraternal matter. They would come here. They would pose no problem for you or Israel, which still doesn't like them. But they would give to these people something they have a right to have. "You admit they have a right to practice their religion." So, the Yemenis did that. The Torahs began to come in. Of course, it attracted more attention to the Jews who lived in Yemen and there was a raised a certain amount of interest in the Israeli issue. The Israelis, however, in those days were much more concerned with getting the Jews out of the Soviet Union and out of Eastern Europe. That was a huge campaign.

Again, to jump ahead to many years later when I was in charge of the Arabian Peninsula, the campaign to get Jews out of the Soviet Union had by and large succeeded after a tremendous diplomatic effort on our part. Well worthwhile, I think. The groups that had been successfully involved in that effort were turning around and looking for other opportunities (Ethiopia, Sudan, and Yemen) to help emigration. I didn't want to see our relationship with Yemen put under that type of pressure. I persuaded people to let me try to work out something for six months or so. I made an alliance with this wonderful professor at Yeshiva University and worked quietly over a period of year or so. We brought the government around. In the final analysis, without any fuss at all, all of the Jews who wanted to leave were permitted to do so and those who wanted to stay are living a normal life, coming and going, working as serious merchants.

Q: At one point (I think this was even before your time), the Yemeni Jews were a significant factor in Israel.

RANSOM: They still are. They came out of Yemen after the war. A head tax was put on which was paid to the old imam and he allowed the Jews to leave. They went out through Aden in what was called "Operation Magic Carpet." They were mostly merchants, silversmiths, and craftsmen, with very long and strong traditions of their own. They maintained their communities in Israel. They had the highest rate, at least among the women, of exogamy of any of the Sephardic Jews. Men didn't have much luck with Ashkenazi women, but the Yemeni women were regarded as beautiful, wonderful, and charming, as indeed they were. Yemenis made a mark for themselves in music and silver and to some extent in clothing and lines of style. But they are not nearly as organized or as purposeful a community as the Russian Jews are now.

Q: What about UN votes? There was always a shopping list of UN votes during this time.

RANSOM: We weren't doing terribly well in those days in the UN. The pressure to get people to vote with us came and went, but it wasn't something we could use as a test of a relationship. By and large, the Yemenis didn't vote with us on any Arab-Israeli issues. They didn't vote with us on most Third World issues. They regarded themselves as independent. Even when the Saudis supported us, they did not. That wasn't a large or strong part of the relationship.

Q: You left there in September 1978. Was there anything we didn't cover, other events or issues?

RANSOM: It was a wonderful time in our life. Marjorie had gone back to work after seven years in the house and she was inspired by new phase of her life. Our lives were being cast in a new mold; Marjorie still had to run the house but we had help for the children and she had a job and a different relationship with me. I did a lot with the kids. So, we fashioned new roles for ourselves and a new way to live. It was by and large very successful.

MARJORIE RANSOM
Public Affairs Officer, USIS

Sana'a (1975-1978)

Marjorie Ransom was born in New York in 1938. She received her bachelor's degree from Trinity University in 1959 and her master's degree from Columbia University in 1962. Her career includes positions in Jordan, India, Iran, Yemen, Washington D.C., Abu Dhabi, Syria, and Egypt. Ms. Ransom was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in December 2000.

Q: You were in Yemen from '74 to when?

RANSOM: We went out in the summer of '75 and were there until '78.

Q: You were PAO.

RANSOM: Yes.

Q: What was the state of relations between Yemen and the U.S.? What did Yemen consist of? It kept switching around.

RANSOM: It was just North Yemen. South Yemen was the communist Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen [PDRY].

Q: We didn't have relations with them.

RANSOM: Correct. When we went to Yemen, Ibrahim Hamdi was the president of the Yemen Communist Republic. We had a large aid program. We had over 100 employees in AID stationed in Sanaa, and a large Peace Corps contingent. My predecessor in USIS had just started a small English teaching program. So, I inherited the English teaching program and expanded it. We had a small Fulbright program. Thanks to a friendly CODEL that came to visit, we were able to expand the Fulbright program from three to 13. We ran the English Language Institute in cooperation with AID. We picked the best of the students for Fulbright scholarships. It was a very successful program. It was a time of great strife and political turbulence in Yemen. President Ibrahim Hamdi was assassinated in the fall of 1977 and was replaced by General Ghashmi, who was himself killed the following June, 1978.

Q: What was the USIA effort?

RANSOM: Public diplomacy was extremely difficult in Yemen. We were much more successful with television than we were with the newspapers, which nobody read. The papers danced to the tune of the person or the embassy that paid them and we didn't engage in that. We supported the central government, development, women's programs, and, as best we could, stability in the area. We had good relations with Saudi Arabia, their big neighbor to the north. It was very much the peak of the Cold War and the Russians were a very big presence, very active and visible. They were very powerful and had a much stronger relationship with the Yemen government than we

had. But it was apparent to the government at that time who the western-educated technocrats were. They were much more effective than those who studied in the East. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Development were both U.S.-trained. So, we worked on a number of public diplomacy issues that were current.

Q: With TV, were you able to put in films and things of that nature?

RANSOM: We were able to place films on TV. Television was new. Whenever we had a speaker or a cultural event, the television people would televise it. We would program our speakers with a small, elect group and then have them interviewed on TV for a broad audience. We were able to have a very broad impact.

Q: Looking at Yemen in those days, it would seem that the natural center of all Yemeni activity would be around Aden. But it seemed like you had a truncated northern country. Was Aden that much of a center?

RANSOM: Aden was an economic mess. I'm not sure exactly what you mean.

Q: I was wondering whether you felt that the north of Yemen was sort of a rogue state, that it fit together in its own boundaries and wasn't a group...

RANSOM: Still waiting for the fall of the south... No, I think northern Yemen had been ruled by imams until the early '60s and the center of it was always in the north with the tribes. It was very different from the south. It seemed to us and it is still an isolated, poor country. It is very isolated and very different and is certainly struggling to establish its basic institutions. We had a professor, one of the neo-conservatives at that time, who came to look at the Fulbright program in Yemen in 1977. He couldn't understand why we were giving scholarships to Yemenis and came with the intent of cutting the program. I introduced him to the faculty of the university and he engaged them in conversation. Then I had him speak on the founding father era in the United States and talked to him about how the Yemenis were setting up their basic institutions, as did our founding fathers, (I emphasized that) and how we were playing a very important role in this by sending leading Yemenis to the United States for study. The Yemenis convinced him that that was absolutely true. He left a big fan and supporter of the Fulbright program.

Q: How did you find being part of a dual team? Were there any problems with this at all?

RANSOM: We were very, very careful in our dealings with our colleagues in the Embassy, David being the DCM and I the PAO. One time, for example, I had some type of argument or difference with AID. They paid a big part of the English teaching program, but I funded the Director of Courses out of my budget. There was some difference over who was going to fund a house for him. David just stayed out of it. That was the best thing he could do. He just said to the Deputy Director of AID, "You settle this with Marjorie. I have nothing to do with this." We had within the country team a natural affinity with the ambassador and became very close friends. We were very careful not to exploit that in any way. I always thought that these tandem assignments worked well when the couple didn't take advantage of their positions over anyone else. We never

had any real problems. I think that's because we were sensitive to the benefit we derived from our being married to each other and I heading a government agency and he being in a sense the vice president of the Embassy.

Q: Yemen was basically a tribal society still?

RANSOM: It still is.

Q: You couldn't actually go to a person and have things flow down. Did you have to consider tribal affiliation?

RANSOM: You always had to know who belonged to what tribe and what his obligations and loyalties were and who spoke to whom and who got along with whom. We had always loved entertaining. In Yemen in those days – and this wasn't always true – people would come to your house if you invited them. They really loved being invited. David would have all his contacts – the Foreign Ministry, the businessmen, the heavies – and I would have the writers, the intellectuals, in most places academics and one or two journalists, and we would introduce them to each other. Often, they would never meet otherwise. They were people who would never meet outside this particular setting. It could cause some strange reactions sometimes. One night, we were showing a Marx Brothers film, "A Night at the Opera." The Yemenis just adore that film. We had the Minister of Interior and a U.S. graduate, a young businessman who was my contact, but he was from the old royal family that he thought would be republican. When he met the Minister of Interior, he looked at him and said, "You don't remember me. You put me in jail in that awful underground prison. That's what you did to me." The two of them walked outside and sat in the dark for about 30 minutes talking. We were scared to death and stuck our heads out to see what was happening, but they just sat there, conferred, and talked it through and talked it through until they reached some reconciliation. We never knew when there would be some unexpected encounter in our house.

Q: What were we trying to do other than to make this a viable government?

RANSOM: We had an aid program that was aimed to help one of the poorest countries in the world. Yemen was one of the poorest 25 countries in the world. So, we had an aid program that was designed to help develop the country. We were dedicated to stability in that part of the world. We were devoted to strong relations between neighboring countries. We wanted to secure peaceful transit through the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean.

Q: What was the role of the Saudi government there at that time?

RANSOM: The Saudis had a very strong interest in seeing things go their own way. They had their contacts with the tribal sheikhs and with the central government. The relationship would often start out well with a given individual and it would become more difficult as time went on. I think that was the case with Ibrahim al-Hamdi.

Q: How about the Soviets and the Chinese? Were they doing things there?

RANSOM: The Chinese and the Russians had very large aid programs. The Chinese built some of the major roads. The Russians were heavily engaged in military with the Yemenis. They also sent hundreds of Yemenis to the Soviet Union to study. And the Kuwaitis were heavily involved in aid. The North Koreans were there, but I am not sure what they were really doing.

Q: Did you run across Africans who were studying in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union came out bitterly disappointed because they found that learning Soviet economics is a way that doesn't lead anywhere? They are designed for the socialist command economy.

RANSOM: I was really struck at that time. The number of U.S. and European graduates who were in Yemen was small, but they stood out head and shoulders above those who studied in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union – less because of the specific knowledge that they gained in the United States than the confidence that they came back with and their willingness to tackle problems in a very flexible way. They were “do it yourself” types. None of the Soviet-trained individuals came back with that kind of demeanor or self-confidence. I would say the British trained were the most like our graduates, but there were French and Italian graduates, too. They made all the difference.

Q: What sort of products was Yemen making?

RANSOM: They must have exported some salt. They hadn't discovered oil. They had some agricultural products. But what they really exported were people. The largest part of their GNP came from Yemenis living abroad. They had huge numbers of Yemenis in Saudi Arabia and in the Gulf. When we were there, the standard of living in Yemen rose dramatically all across the country as a result of the remittances. The workers benefited directly from the increase in oil prices in 1973. For the first time, they were bringing in water pumps and tractors and all kinds of small household conveniences that dramatically changed the lives in Yemeni villages. It was an exciting time in that sense.

Q: Were you able to travel much or was this kind of dangerous?

RANSOM: We could travel. We took one remarkable journey with Ambassador Tom Pickering, who was U.S. Ambassador to Jordan. He loved to travel and cover great distances. So, we went and joined him in Jeddah and traveled from Jeddah to Sanaa by car through the no man's land between the Saudi and North Yemeni border down through Saddeh into Sanaa, to the consternation of both governments, both of which feared for our safety and security.

Q: Later on, the predilection of kidnapping...

RANSOM: That developed later, the kidnapping of individuals. There were some instances of cars being commandeered in those days. It was a little dicey if you went north of Amran and up toward the Saudi border. It was even less safe to go out into the Jowf, into the east, where a lot of the kidnappings now are taking place. But it was nothing like today. We did it. We would travel in groups.

Q: Did the students who were exchangees, Fulbrights and so on, go back into the government?

RANSOM: Some of the most effective ministers in the government are U.S. graduates today. The Prime Minister is... Some of the best people in the Foreign Ministry... The best people at the university. They have done extremely well, the graduates. Unlike many Arabs from many other countries, the Yemeni students returned to Yemen.

Q: Was there any sort of Yemeni lobby coming out of New York; Youngstown, Ohio; or Detroit?

RANSOM: There are enough Yemenis in the United States to form a lobby, but they just haven't done it.

Q: When I was in Dhahran, we became very much aware of the Yemeni communities in the U.S., especially in Detroit and Youngstown.

RANSOM: And Brooklyn. There is a great restaurant in Brooklyn.

Q: How about with the women? Were you able to observe their role?

RANSOM: Most of the women wore a veil because it was something new and revolutionary for them to be able to be in class with men. They veiled, but they sat right next to men and studied right along with them. The numbers were few. But there was a lot of support from U.S.-trained Yemenis in the government for the development of women. When the Yemenis drew up their first constitution, they wrote it in a way that didn't indicate sex, so it meant that both men and women had the right to vote. I brought in women to talk about women in development. There was a conservative group that tried to impede women's progress, but the progressives managed to keep the university coed. A small number of women primarily from good families have done quite well.

Q: I was wondering whether you found yourself up against the Islamic fundamentalist male conservatives that didn't like what you were doing and made things difficult for you.

RANSOM: No, I had no trouble at all like that. In fact, I had only been there about a week when the Ministry of Public Works called me. The minister, Ali Abu Il-Rijaal, sent word that he wanted to meet the new PAO who was a woman. I called on him and he wanted me to do everything I could to develop women, to educate them. He sent me to meet with all the women in his family. His attitude was typical of many of the Yemenis I worked with. They were very excited. They were very proud that the U.S. thought enough of Yemen to assign a woman officer to the embassy. They were very supportive. When I had been in Yemen in the '60s that one year that we were there, and we sent our forms off to apply for driver's licenses, I never got a response. This time, mine came back before David's. They treated me as they would treat any man in that job. I was an honorary man.

Q: I take it that when you left there in '78, you came away with a very positive feeling on this?

RANSOM: I loved it. Our daughters did, too.

Q: Were they being taught at home?

RANSOM: No, there was an American school there. There still is, run by the same man. It was an international school, but run by Americans and with an American curriculum. At the time we were there, it probably went up through eighth grade. It now goes through grade 12.

Q: You never got down to Aden or anything like that?

RANSOM: Not in that period. The United States was putting out feelers to South Yemen in 1978. An emissary came from the State Department who came first, fortunately for him, to Sanaa. He came just at the time that the President of North Yemen was assassinated by the South.

Q: You were there during two assassinations. How did that affect your work? What was the initial reaction to the first assassination? What were we doing?

RANSOM: The first time was the worst. It caught everyone totally by surprise. We had no idea who did it or what the motivation was. Yemenis were extremely nervous. We had a lot of responsibility for all the Americans over there, so we had to set up a warden system and keep them informed as best we could of what was happening. I think the Yemenis established a curfew at sundown. There was a lot of uncertainty for some time. But we never felt in danger and we never did draw down. We limited travel by Americans into Yemen.

Q: Did we come away with any feel about what this is all about, why the assassination?

RANSOM: Yemenis carried out the first assassination; those in the Sanaa streets said it was with Saudi support. The second time, Ghashmi was working with elements in the south to bring about change there. Their plot was discovered and the southerners sent an emissary with a bomb in a briefcase. Ghashmi and the emissary both died from the explosion.

Q: He was trying to upset the southern regime?

RANSOM: Yes.

Q: So they just... Did you have the feeling that you had a hostile regime sitting down to your side there?

RANSOM: Oh, yes.

Q: Was there concern about it moving north? It was a situation where neither side would make much sense to attack the other.

RANSOM: No. The north was so much bigger. The south had much less population. It was a

smaller country. There was always concern about their ability to get Soviet and Eastern European weaponry for their overall strength. There were skirmishes on the border. But I don't remember being concerned that they were going to go into all out war with each other.

DOUGLAS R. KEENE
Political/Military Security Assistance & Sales (Middle East)
Washington, DC (1975-1980)

Mr. Keene was born and raised in Massachusetts and graduated from Colby College. He joined the Foreign Service in 1967, serving first in Viet Nam and subsequently at Middle East posts including Jerusalem, Karachi, Cairo, as well as Amman and Muscat, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. His Washington assignments also concerned primarily Middle Eastern matters, including the Arab-Israel problem. Mr. Keene was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

KEENE: I also want to mention our involvement in the North Yemen – South Yemen civil war. We were very involved in formulating the weapons transfers that took place, briefing the President on where we were and coordinating weapons sales and military flights of materials to Yemen. This conflict is not well remembered but at the time it was seen as important in the Cold War context. Aden being a Soviet client state and the North as our ally. We put in a staggering amount of effort into that.

Things had been developing at a rapid pace for two or three weeks before the 7th floor took much notice and Under Secretary Newsom called a meeting. Informed we had already sent TOW anti-armor missiles to Yemen, he wanted to know who had approved that. I had to say I had. I was an FSO-3 at the time. I thought I'd be in deep soup, but he let it go.

GEORGE M. LANE
Ambassador
Yemen Arab Republic (1978-1981)

Ambassador George M. Lane was born in Maryland in 1928. He studied at the Sorbonne and received a B.A. from Cornell University. After three years in the US Army, he received an MA from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Lane entered the Foreign Service in 1957 and his assignments overseas include Saudi Arabia, Syria, Morocco, Libya, Swaziland, Lebanon, and Germany. He was appointed ambassador to Yemen in 1978. Ambassador Lane was interviewed in 1990 by Richard Nethercut.

LANE: But, nevertheless, it was a great honor for me to be appointed Ambassador, and I was very honored to be able to go off to Sanaa as Ambassador.

As it turned out I was the first Ambassador to present credentials to the new president of the Yemen Arab Republic since his predecessor had been blown up by a suitcase bomb in June, and I got there in September. So the situation in Yemen was not exactly calm either.

Q: When you were appointed Ambassador to Yemen, this entails getting confirmation by the Senate, and often meeting with the President beforehand. What sort of charge were you given in that process."

LANE: Well, in theory all that may be true. But in fact I never met President Jimmy Carter. To this day I have never shaken hands with Jimmy Carter whose personal representative, theoretically, I was, so that is more "honored in the breach than in the observance," I think, in these days. I don't recall being given any particular charge in Yemen. I think the idea was basically, hold the fort, and see what's happening. "Let us know what's happening, and what you think after you get there." I don't recall any particular charge in connection with the assignment. The confirmation process was pretty routine in my case. I was very fortunate, more colorless in the sense that I had not attracted any negative attention from anybody important on the Hill. At that stage, in 1978, there were no political appointees who were interested in being Ambassador to the Yemen Arab Republic. So there wasn't any problem there. At the confirmation hearings, I think, the only person who was in the room was Senator McGovern who asked me a couple of rather simple-minded questions that his staff had obviously given him. And that was it.

So I had a very uneventful confirmation process, and arrived in Yemen in September. And then while we were there, we had all the usual things one has in a Arab post. In October, about a month after we got there, there was an attempted coup against the new president - according to some stories, financed and inspired by Libya - which he was very lucky to be able to turn aside, to overcome.

And then early in the next year there was the Yemen mini-war in February and March of 1979, between the two Yemens, which turned out to be quite an important affair because the Saudis were concerned. There is a certain parallel between what recently happened in the Gulf and what happened in '79. Because South Yemen at this point was run by a very militant Marxist regime. One of the great ironies is how South Yemen of all places, became the most Marxist of the Arab governments. But it certainly did. It was run by a dedicated Marxist by the name of Abd al Fattah Ismail. And after a series of border skirmishes between North and South Yemen, the South Yemenis launched what looked like a fairly serious attack into North Yemen, probably designed to so embarrass the president of North Yemen that he would be forced out and someone sympathetic to South Yemen would take over. The Saudis were worried about this because obviously they don't want a Marxist Government on their border, and there happen to be more Yemenis who live in the Arabian peninsula, than there are Saudis. So the Yemenis are a potential threat to the Saudis.

So apparently what happened - of course, I'm not sure because I was in Sanaa and not in

Washington, nor in Jeddah - was that the Saudis came to us and said, "Look, you've been saying for years that you'll take care of our security, you'll do what's necessary if there's a threat to our security. Well, we think there's a threat to our security down there, so we want you to waive the time frame in the Foreign Assistance Act, and we want you to send immediately 12 F-5 airplanes and 60 M-60 tanks, and 100 APCs" - all of which were part of a long run aid program which we'd all worked out, and had just notified Congress of but it's supposed to run 60 days before you do it. It gives Congress a chance to say "no." And the President at this time, Jimmy Carter - March of '79 - remember what happened in March of '79? Anyway, it was a last ditch attempt to put together the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. It looked like it was falling apart. Jimmy Carter is in the Middle East - or about to take off to the Middle East to try to pull together something so that Camp David won't be a total disaster. And as he's getting on the airplane at Andrews, somebody rushes up to him, and said, "Mr. President, you've got to sign this waiver. It's in the vital interest of the United States to send this stuff to Yemen or the Saudis are going to be mad at us, and if the Saudis get mad at us it could be serious." So Carter signs it and this huge airlift started into Yemen, and of course the Yemenis didn't know how to drive the tanks, the F-5s didn't arrive in time. But it was a psychological statement. It may have had some effect on the overall situation.

Q: Could you clarify this for me and for our listeners? You were accredited to the Yemen Arab Republic. Does that represent North Yemen.

LANE: Correct, yes. This was North Yemen. There is - although as we speak - there is one Yemen.

Q: Yes. Could you explain what happened?

LANE: At that time there were two Yemens. There was the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen, which was the former Aden Colony, which the British had controlled since the 1840s, and which they had given its independence in 1967. And then there was North Yemen which was the traditional Yemeni highlands, a country which had been independent ever since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. And we had never had relations with South Yemen because from the moment the South Yemenis acquired their own independence, we had a Consul General in Aden, but it was with the British. After the South Yemen, or the PDRY, became independent, it was a Marxist state and we never...

Q: About when...

LANE: '67. And we never did have diplomatic relations with it. We were discussing the possibility of opening diplomatic relations with the PDRY in 1978 when the president of North Yemen was blown up with a suitcase bomb, as I mentioned. So there were these two Yemens which were constantly, during my time there, either fighting each other, or talking about unity. Sometimes doing both at the same time. So this was the battle that occurred then in 1979, which did have an effect because the President and the Secretary of State, and Dr. Brzezinski all got involved. The Saudis were concerned and somebody in Washington said, "If the Yemen crisis hadn't existed, we would have had to invent it in order to show the Soviets that we hadn't been

completely demoralized by Vietnam, and that we're still prepared to protect our interest by sending military forces if we had to."

Q: So that suggests that during your time as Ambassador there, there were some rather extensive American political-military interests in the region if only in relation to Saudi Arabia.

LANE: Very definitely in the region, there was no question. Saudi Arabia...it's hard to - well, it's not so hard to remember anymore now - it was a year ago. But in 1979 and '80, Saudi Arabia was producing 10 million barrels of oil a day - 365 days a year - and they were selling it for about \$30.00 a barrel, that's what the price was in 1980. I think that's 100 billion dollars, and that's an awful lot of money. And, of course, because of the disruption caused by the fall of the Shah of Iran, that's the second oil crisis since 1973 that oil production has dropped precipitously. We had a real crisis in oil supply, and if the Saudis hadn't produced as much as we wanted, we would have had a real disaster in this country. Saudi Arabia was very important because of its swing position in the oil supply business, and because of what it did with all its oil money. If the Saudis don't put that money into U.S. Government bonds, we're in trouble. One of the reasons I suspect that we went into the Gulf earlier this month was because if somebody controls all those billions that the Kuwaitis had invested in U.S. Government bonds, and doesn't roll them over (as per their famous movie), the U.S. financial system, which is already in fragile state could suffer a very nasty blow. I'm no economist, but that's my guess.

Q: Were there direct economic interests in Yemen? Does it produce oil?

LANE: It does now. Ray Hunt, not to be confused with Nelson Bunker, but Ray Hunt Oil Company has in the last two years found some oil and is producing some oil, but its not important in the international oil trade. It's important to Yemen, but its not important to the international oil trade. No, we basically have no economic interests in Yemen.

Q: But I judge we had a rather extensive U.S. mission there. Will you describe how that came about, and how you functioned as head of the Country Team?

LANE: We had a sort of a typical U.S. presence, I think, of a medium sized nature. We had the Embassy, we had a USIS office, we had a Peace Corps, we had an attaché...

Q: Attaché meaning military?

LANE: A military attaché, and a small Office of Defense Cooperation, a small military assistance group. We had an AID mission. So we had basically the full package. Not nearly as big as in some countries, but a lot bigger than some others. And as you say, the Ambassador's job was to serve as the head of the Country Team, and we had Country Team meetings at least once a week. I did it once a week partly because the AID mission was here, and the Peace Corps was over there - if we'd all been in the same building, I might have tried to have a short meeting every morning, but basically once a week was enough. And I tried to keep those meetings reasonably short because the purpose of that meeting was for each person in the meeting to tell everybody else in the meeting what they needed to know about what he had been doing the past week, and

was planning to do in the next week. If one of those people had a major problem, they probably needed to come and see me separately, and not bring it up in this big meeting. So I used to tell people at the Country Team meeting, "I expect everyone of you to speak for at least three minutes, and none of you speak for more than 10." I always felt there must be something that went on in their activities that they could talk about for three minutes, the military attaché could say something for that long anyway; that the Peace Corps Director would be interested in, and visa versa, but I didn't want them to get into a long harangue about some particular problem that they had and bore everybody else when it was basically something that probably that person and I could handle.

Q: Did you spend a lot of time focusing on the South Yemeni-North Yemeni relationship? And in that connection, how did you go about, in your political relations, with the Yemen government? And was that somewhat personalized because of the nature of the rulers of Yemen?

LANE: Yes, it was somewhat personalized, partly because of the nature of the situation. But mainly, I think, because of the Yemen mini-war, and the fact that the President of Yemen wanted a lot of things from the United States. So what he wanted to do - he wasn't used to working through the bureaucracy, and I'm not sure he really trusted very many of his Ministers. He was very new, they weren't his people, so when he wanted something, he would call up and have me come and see him. I saw an awful lot of the president of the Republic, and we spent an awful lot of time talking one-on-one in Arabic, which was a little dangerous - not something that I would recommend. But if there were more than just the two of us in the room, he started to act, to posture, for whoever else was in the room, whether it was his interpreter, or one of his people, or my DCM - who was a super guy, he has just been named as Ambassador to Kuwait. So I tended to do it one-on-one, even though I would not recommend it to anybody else. Its not a good technique to use.

Q: Did that cause any incidents one way or another?

LANE: I don't think so. We had our problems, but I don't think there was a case where I came back from one of those meetings, and said the president told me this, and I told him that, and then the president...well, there was one case like that. I think, although I'm not sure, whether the president knew very well what I'd told him but pretended I'd said something different, to see if he could get away with it, and he didn't.

Q: Do you want to elaborate on that, or does that fall into the confidential category?

LANE: Well, no, I think I can...no, I probably better not at this stage.

Q: During the period you were at the Yemen Arab Republic there were the two Yemens. Now in the Security Council deliberations of the Mid-East crisis I notice that there is one Yemen, and it has taken the position at some variance with that of some other Arab countries, and of our own country. Could you elaborate on that please?

LANE: Sure. As I guess I mentioned, there were two Yemens for a long time in history, because

of the British imperialism; the British went into Aden and then took as much of the hinterland as they thought they needed. Since the British gave it up in 1967, the two Yemens have been, as I guess I said, talking about unity, and/or fighting each other and sometimes doing both at once. They realize that they're basically the same people, that they're the same nation, but they have had very different political systems and it's been difficult therefore for them to get together. Also, of course, Saudi Arabia has not been anxious to have a united Yemen. There are more Yemens in the Arabian Peninsula than there are Saudis, and if the two Yemens unite that makes the demographic imbalance even more dangerous from the Saudi point of view, particularly since there is a little bit of the southwest corner of Saudi Arabia that used to be part of Yemen and the Yemens feel it should be part of Yemen again. So the Saudis have always worked in various ways to try to prevent the unification of the two Yemens.

But within the last year, as a result of a series of political moves on both sides of the border, the two Yemens have come closer, and closer together, and although I haven't been able to follow this very closely in the American press, it's obvious that within the last six months, the two Yemens have formally unified. Sanaa is now the capital of the united Yemen. The name is still Yemen, of course, and therefore they are switched to one country in the United Nations.

Now the reason that I think the Yemen has taken a very cautious position on this recent crisis in the Gulf - I hesitate to call it pro- Iraqi because I think that's too strong - but at the same time they clearly have abstained on two crucial Security Council votes. In fact, as an aside, I'll bet that Yemen wishes fervently it was not a member of the Security Council at this particular time. This is very awkward for them because on the one hand they don't want to antagonize Saddam Hussein and Iraq. The Iraqis played an important role back in 1979 in helping to solve the Yemen mini-war in a way that maintained the present president of Yemen, Ali Abdallah Salah, in his office as president. And I suspect he remembers that, so he doesn't want to be too negative on the Iraqis.

Q: Could I just interject - so that the present president of the unified Yemen is the former president of North Yemen; whereas the capital is in the former capital of South Yemen. Is that correct?

LANE: No. The first half is correct. The president of North Yemen is now the president of all of Yemen. And the capital of North Yemen is now the capital of all Yemen. You hear a lot about Aden, and Aden is certainly the famous port, but Sanaa is the capital. And the man who became the president of North Yemen, with Saudi support incidentally in 1978, is Ali Abdallah Salah, and in spite of many predictions that he would be overthrown, or removed, or something, and that he'd never last, here he is twelve years later still very much in office, and not only that, but apparently the man who has succeeded in unifying the two Yemens. Now, it could still come apart, but every day that goes by, I think, makes unity more likely.

Q: It is very possible it would seem to me - this leader of a united Yemen - may play quite an important role. At least he may figure in this present crisis perhaps in the future, and I think your relationship with him gives you a good chance to comment on how he might relate to the United States, or the style in which he might rule his country.

LANE: He's an interesting man. He's a simple soldier in the sense that he comes from a tribe in Yemen; he does not have a lot of foreign experience; he does not have very much of an education; he is a forceful, dynamic man; he impressed some people obviously early on or he would not have become president when he did. Interestingly enough, Vice President Bush paid a visit to the Yemen, and met President Salah, and President Salah liked him very much, and I guess President Bush liked Salah well enough to invite him back for a State visit earlier this year, although it was practically not reported in the American press. President Salah did come to Washington, and there was a White House dinner for him. Then he went down to Texas and had quite a time with Ray Hunt, I understand. And I would guess that President Bush is very unhappy at this moment with his friend, President Salah, who is not standing up to be counted and voting the way we'd like to have him vote in the UN. I suspect relations have cooled considerably between the United States and the Yemen as a result of this crisis. And, as I said, I think the Yemen is doing this because they need Iraq as a counterweight against Saudi Arabia. There may be more Yemenis than Saudis but if you talk military or economic power, there's no question that the Saudis are much stronger, and the Yemenis know that. And the Yemenis are fearful that the Saudis may try to do something, political-military, to break up the unity of the two Yemens, and therefore its very helpful, I guess, from their point of view, to have a nice counterweight like Iraq on the other side which they can count on to be friendly.

Q: Politically, and economically, it sounds as though Yemen now is perhaps moderate in its politics. In terms of its economy has it been a sort of poor neighbor to Saudi Arabia, and to Kuwait, supplying workers for the oil fields? And does that play into the political mix?

LANE: Exactly. The major foreign exchange earner of Yemen for years has been remittances from Yemenis working in Saudi Arabia, primarily in construction. But there are just hundreds of thousands literally of Yemenis who work in Saudi Arabia in all aspects doing all the dirty work - an awful lot of the dirty work. And it's traditional almost for the Yemeni male to go to Saudi Arabia to work for a year, to live four or five in a room, to save all their money, and then to buy a Land Rover just before they are about to come home, drive it across the desert, and around the border post to evade the custom duties, and then set up as taxi drivers in the Yemen. They're very enterprising people. They work very hard when they go abroad, they don't work so hard at home because they spend too much time chewing this mildly narcotic leaf called *qat*.

I should mention too that one of the strong factors for Yemenis is that they have two or three very bright, well educated people now at the top of their government. The Foreign Minister is Abd Al Karim Iryani has a Ph.D. from Yale in agricultural economics, I think. But, nevertheless, as you can see from that a very well educated man who spent some time working at the Kuwait Development Bank, and various such organizations. One of the Vice Presidents is Abd Al Aziz Abd Al Ghani, who went to Colorado College, and then the University of Colorado, and was the head of their central bank for a while, and has been sort of a stabilizing force at the top of their government bureaucracy for years. So they have this dynamic man of the people soldier who is the president, but they also have some other men who come from very distinguished Yemenis families, and who are very well educated. I mentioned just two, but there are others who can run various parts of their government.

Q: You mentioned that Saddam Hussein had played a constructive role, from the Yemeni point of view, in the civil war - or the impending war in '79 - does he also have a good image in Yemen because of his politics, and policies, in Iraq?

LANE: That's hard for me to say. Saddam Hussein, as an individual, was not a factor in Yemen when I was there. I mean, from '78 to '81 one talked about Iraq, one didn't talk about Saddam Hussein. I don't know whether as an individual - I would guess that he doesn't have much impact. The Yemenis are a proud and ancient people. They had a great civilization in Yemen, not as soon as the Sumerians did, but they've had one there for a long time going back to the age of David and Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. So they don't get overly impressed with these leaders who arise in other countries. I wouldn't think they'd be terribly impressed.

Q: We will continue with a question on the preceding tape concerning the relationship between Iraq and Yemen, and particularly between Saddam Hussein and the Yemenis leadership or people.

LANE: Given the geopolitical factors, I think it's much more a question of the Yemen being interested, as I said, in having Iraq as a counterbalance against Saudi Arabia, rather than any great appeal Saddam Hussein may have in Yemen.

Q: Returning to your time as Ambassador to Yemen, to the time in 1979, it was a difficult time for an American envoy to be in an Islamic country because there had been riots after the attempted takeover of the mosque in Mecca against the U.S. for supposedly involvement, and our Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan was burned. Dependents in some posts were ordered evacuated. How was the situation for you at that time?

LANE: This was a very difficult moment, both personally and professionally in the Yemen because what happened was, that the Department sent out a telegram saying, "You should organize a voluntary evacuation. And anybody who wants to leave, should be able to leave and we want to be able to cut down the number of Americans we have in Muslim countries, and particularly in Shia Muslim countries." This was again because of the problems in...not only those two that you mentioned, but, of course, the problems in Iran. And many of us sent back telegrams saying, "There really doesn't look like there's going to be any problem in this country, and we have polled all the people in the Embassy and none of the people, and none of the dependents, want to leave." And then the Department sent out a telegram saying, in effect, "You misunderstood. What we were telling you was, you *will* reduce the numbers 'voluntarily'. We're not telling you everybody has to leave, but we are telling you some people have to leave." So basically every Ambassador was faced with having to try to figure out how to reduce the number of dependents, and how do you do that if nobody wants to go? Well, it was a very awkward and tough situation, and particularly, of course, the host countries were absolutely insulted in all cases. This originally, it is my understanding - I may be getting into classified stuff here - but this went to all countries, including Saudi Arabia. The Embassy in Saudi Arabia basically went back and said, "If you apply this to Saudi Arabia, you are going to destroy a relationship which we have worked years to build. You're telling the Saudis that they're the same as the Iranians. You're

telling the Saudis you don't trust them. Maybe we can get away with this, or maybe it doesn't matter if you do it in the Yemen, but it sure as hell matters if you do it in Saudi Arabia in 1979."

So the order was modified and changed, and limited, but some Ambassadors went in and said, "None of my people want to go." And the Department came out and said, as I just mentioned, "They will go." This caused a lot of bitterness.

Q: Was it accepted in Yemen?

LANE: The military attaché wanted to send his wife out, and the assistant military attaché was basically ordered by the military attachés to send his wife out - his wife and children. Some of the AID people left. My wife did not leave. We didn't have any dependent children there; it obviously made a difference if you had small children. So some people went, some people didn't. Basically I didn't have a dramatic problem because I didn't have to order anybody out while letting my wife stay, which would have been a very awkward position because there were some who wanted to leave anyway. But, I can still remember the Under Secretary in the Foreign Ministry saying, "Ambassador Lane, you understand this country. You've been here long enough to know we're not like the Iranians, or the Pakistanis. We're not going to burn your schools down, or burn your Embassy down. You'll get protests from us if you do things we don't like but, for heaven's sake..." and I didn't think they were either. Half the Yemenis are Shiites, but they don't belong to the same Shia sect as the Iranians, they all thought Khomeini was crazy. They have no religious bond there at all, which many people in Washington seemed to think there was. It was a very tough situation. I understand that Jimmy Carter, and Cyrus Vance sitting in Washington looking out at the world...it's their responsibility, all those people out there, "Are you just going to do nothing, and watch Embassies get burned down?" You feel like you've got to do something. Yet, you do something like this, and of course, it's terrible for morale in the Embassy, and it's terrible for relationships between the United States and the host country. So it was a very tough thing.

The other really tough thing that I had in Yemen which people might be interested in, was during the Yemen mini-war. We had an initial report, this is March of '79, that the South Yemenis had made a breakthrough, and were about to occupy the city of Taiz in southern Yemen, and that the Yemenis troops were falling back - the North Yemen troops. At this same time the North Yemen government was telling us that the situation was terrible, "You've got to send us all sorts of military help because if you don't, we're going to collapse." As a result of that I ordered all the Peace Corps volunteers who were in the Taiz area, to move to Sanaa and this caused a real panic in that area because, of course, all the Yemenis said, "Oh, my God, the Americans are leaving, so things must be terrible." The Prime Minister called me in, and said, "Do you realize you may have brought down the Yemeni government?" And I said, "I'm sorry if that happens. I hope it doesn't happen, but my primary responsibility has got to be for the American citizens in this country, not for the Yemeni government, and I hear these reports that the South Yemenis are coming in, and I hear from every source in your government that you desperately need help, that you're not sure you can hold the line. I've got to do that." Well, as it turned out it wasn't necessary, because they (the South Yemeni) didn't break through. It turned out that the North Yemenis were exaggerating their difficulties in order to get military help from us. So, in one

sense, it turned out that I made the wrong decision; but I'm not sure it was the wrong decision. I'm not sure that I wouldn't do the same thing again if faced with the same situation. But, you know, in miniature, this is the sort of thing that happened in Saigon. You know, what was his name - it's just slipped my mind.

Q: Graham Martin, our Ambassador.

LANE: Graham Martin - felt, if I pull the Americans out, it's the end of the Government. Well, we didn't have the position in Yemen that the U.S. had in South Vietnam, and I'm not trying to equate the two situations but it is a situation that I suspect faces the American in charge, the Ambassador, and it may happen again.

Q: There is a certain parallel with the situation in Kuwait and Iraq at the present time in that some decisions had to be made about reducing the number of American personnel, how it could be reduced, the way in which this would factor into the whole political-military dilemma.

LANE: Yes, it's a little different there because the tough situation that the Department, and maybe Nat Howell who is an old friend, have been facing in Kuwait was, "Okay, who's essential?" You have to tell somebody, "You're not an essential person now, so you leave." This business of who is the essential is delicate.

Q: During your period in Yemen, I would be interested as to the degree of Congressional interest in the post. Did you have visitors?

LANE: That's a good question. In two and a half, almost three years in Yemen, we had two Congressional visitors that I can remember. One was Senator Percy who came early on, primarily I think, because his brother-in-law was head of the Save The Children Fund - the American Save The Children Fund headquartered in Connecticut, and Save The Children was doing some things in Yemen. So he heard about the Yemen that way, and he and his wife came out to visit on Thanksgiving with us, as I recall, the first year we were there. Very pleasant people, very nice.

The other Congressional visitor was Congressman Solarz from Brooklyn who came with a staff of several people who were interested in the Jews in Yemen - how many Jews were there left, where were they, how did they live, were they being persecuted, could he and his staff go visit them? That was less pleasant because the Yemenis were not about to roll out the red carpet for the Solarz group to go visit the Jews of Yemen. There weren't very many left. Almost all of the Yemenis Jews went to Israel in 1948 as the result of the famous Operation Flying Carpet which was mounted at that time. There may be three or four hundred living in certain isolated villages, and I really do believe that they're no more maltreated than anybody else. Their life is no different. There is sort of a tradition in some Yemeni villages that the Jews are the peace-makers because the Muslim tribes won't trust each other but they trust a Jew to be fair between the two Muslim tribes. But those were the only two Congressional visitors really in two and a half years, and this was the period when they were just flooding into Saudi Arabia. In '78 to '81 Saudi Arabia was the place to go.

Q: What about relations with the U.S. military? Were there U.S. Naval visits? Were there any active sort of military programs?

LANE: Yes. We had a Military Assistance Advisory Group, which was called the ODC, the Office of Defense Cooperation; a couple of people, and then there were some more people who came on TDY. For a while there in 1979, we had two Air Force pilots teaching the Yemenis how to fly the F-5 at Sanaa airport in the morning, and the Soviets were teaching them how to fly the Sukoy in the afternoon - at same airport, different pilots. That program, I think, still goes on. I think the F-5 program - the F-5 was a good airplane, a good plane for the Yemenis to have. And we had some people also working with their ground forces; not much in the way of Naval visits. We had a couple but not a lot.

Q: Now you mentioned the Soviets having a military assistance program, a training program there. Was there any dimension of the cold war during your tenure there?

LANE: Yes, yes, very much so really. The first Soviet Ambassador, when I first arrived, was a wonderful old Bolshevik, who looked like a combination of Khrushchev, and a dissipated W.C. Fields - a short stocky guy who drank too much, and was a real aggressive fellow. The Soviets had had a long relationship with the Yemen, supplying weapons, and helping the Egyptians who helped the Yemenis in the Yemeni civil war. So they had 200 military advisers or so in the Yemen.

Q: This would be in North Yemen?

LANE: In North Yemen, not to mention what they had in South Yemen which was even bigger. The U.S. military relationship with North Yemen was almost entirely through the Saudis, which made the Yemenis furious because they wanted direct relationship with the United States and not one dependent on the Saudis. But the Yemenis didn't have any money. The Saudis were paying for everything, and he who pays the piper, calls the tune. So we basically worked fairly closely with the Saudis, as well as with the Yemenis and the Yemenis didn't like it a bit. But we did have these U.S. F-5 pilots training the Yemenis...one of them just sent me a card. He's just been made a Squadron Commander of a fighter wing in Germany, he's now a Lieutenant Colonel - he was a Captain then.

Q: You said the first Soviet Ambassador was rather charming?

LANE: Not really, I mean he spoke nothing but Russian. The second Soviet Ambassador was about 30 years younger, and definitely the second generation of Soviet diplomats. I don't know whether you've read Charles Thayer's book, Diplomat? But the first generation of Soviet diplomats were guys who came right out of the revolution, really tough old Bolsheviks. The second generation hardly...well, the Gorbachevs, well, not Gorbachev, of course, but Dobrynin maybe. But well educated, speak three or four languages. This fellow had written a Ph.D. thesis on the Yemen. He spoke Arabic and English as well as Russian. He was still pretty arrogant, but a much smoother character, a much different type. The first Soviet Ambassador used to go to these formal diplomatic things we have to go to - he always carried a hip flask and nipped at it in

the course of the event, whatever it was.

Q: From your EUCOM position you then retired from the Foreign Service, returned to Massachusetts where you had ties. Looking back over your career, what would you consider the highlights personally in terms of what you felt you accomplished, and secondly, maybe as being an eye witness to something you considered to be of an historic moment?

LANE: Personally the high point has to be Yemen simply because I was the Ambassador, and I was in charge, and it was an interesting time- -a lot of things going on. Much to my surprise really, the Yemen did become sort of headline activity when I was there. The top people in the U.S. Government were interested in what was happening. I remember a long one hour trying to explain Yemen to Bud McFarlane when he was Counselor in the Department.

DAVID E. ZWEIFEL
Ambassador
Yemen Arab Republic (1981-1984)

Ambassador David E. Zweifel was born in Colorado in 1934. He received a bachelor's degree from Oregon State University and served in the U.S. Navy overseas for five years. He joined the Foreign Service in 1962 and served in Brazil, Lebanon, Jordan, Mexico, Oman, Yemen, and Washington, DC. Ambassador Zweifel retired in 1995 and was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in 1996.

Q: What was the status of our relations with North Yemen at the time of your appointment?

ZWEIFEL: It was an interesting relationship in several respects. We had talked about the role of the Soviets in relation to other posts at which I served. The Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), or South Yemen was under Communist rule; we did not have diplomatic relations with the regime in Aden. Contrarily, North Yemen to which I was accredited had a nominally more western-oriented government. In reality, the Soviets had considerable influence in Sanaa, were there in large numbers and were well positioned politically. It was an almost unique situation in some respects. We had sold the Yemenis F-5 fighter aircraft and had a Military Assistance Program, which included training and support for the F-5s, provided in some cases by uniformed U.S. Air Force personnel. At the other end of the selfsame hanger where the F-5s were serviced, Soviet military personnel were helping the Yemenis with MiG-19s, the other fighter aircraft in their inventory. It was head-to-head competition between ourselves and the Soviets.

Another aspect, both interesting and frustrating, was that Yemen always lived in the shadow of the Saudis in terms of our political interests and attentions. The Yemenis were sometimes

difficult for us to deal with. That was doubly so as they related to their richer Arab neighbors. Many of the laborers in Saudi Arabia were Yemenis. They were good workers, and repatriation of their earnings was a mainstay of the Yemeni economy. Despite this dependence, the Yemenis chafed at the Saudi predominance in the region. After all, Yemen was a land of settled agriculturists at a time when the Saudis were poor nomads wandering the desert. The Yemenis felt with justification that they had a history of real civilization, more than just the traditions of wandering tribes. But the economic power and, by extension, political and military clout was now that of the Saudi upstarts. For their part, the Saudis were always wary of Yemen. Historically, the Yemen had always been a sort of Achilles heel for the Saudis. In order to counterbalance the Saudi predominance, the Yemenis curried favor with the Iraqis and other more radical Arab governments.

For our own geopolitical and economic reasons, we always favored the Saudis, and this often put us implicitly a bit at odds with the government in Sanaa. The Yemenis had to content themselves with the leftovers in terms of our resources and attention.

Q: Did we attempt to do anything to further a merger between the two Yemens?

ZWEIFEL: At the time, a unified Yemen was a distant thought, almost inconceivable. A guerrilla insurgency in the southern part of the Yemen Arab Republic, aided and abetted from the regime in Aden, actively sought the ouster of government in Sanaa. Far from fostering union between the two countries, our objective was to ensure that the government of Ali Abdullah Saleh in Sanaa would be able to sustain its independent position.

Q: You've outlined some of your concerns. Do you have anything else?

ZWEIFEL: One of the more interesting and delicate issues which arose during my time in Yemen grew out of the denouement of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. At the end of that chapter of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the U.S. actively participated in the safe evacuation of Palestinian fighters from Beirut. By extension, we undertook to find countries which would accept the evacuees.

In that connection, I was instructed to approach the government in Sanaa. This came at a time when I had been in Yemen for almost two years. I had come from Jordan where Arab-Israeli issues were the all-consuming topic of conversation. By contrast, these matters did not arise in normal conversation with Yemenis. Even when in political dialogue with government officials, Arab-Israeli developments were only broached if I brought up the subject. So, when it came time for the Yemenis to come to grips with our request on behalf of the displaced Palestinians, it was a novel idea, an unusual role for us to be playing. The Saleh Government eventually agreed, and 700-800 fighters and their families were relocated to Yemen. There, despite their Arab affinities, common culture and language, they experienced one of the worst cases of cultural shock imaginable. The Palestinians were thrust at neck-breaking speed back into the 14th century conditions which prevailed in much of Yemen. The culture was as alien to them as it was to us.

Q: I find it interesting that you mentioned that because, over 40 years ago, I was talking to our

mutual friend, the late Bob Houghton, who told me that when he had been in Saudi Arabia, he and his Ambassador once made a flight into Yemen. This would have been in the late '40s, early '50s. He said, "Tom, I have never been in the 14th Century before, but I was on that trip." Who was your DCM during that period?

ZWEIFEL: My first DCM was Ron Neumann, who is now our Ambassador to Algeria. Then I asked Allen Keiswetter to come over from Khartoum to become DCM.

Q: Were they both Arabists?

ZWEIFEL: Ron had spent a good part of his career in the Arab world, compensating in experience for his only modest achievements in the language. He did not have the advantage of FSI Arabic language training. Alan's Arabic was a bit stronger. He also had served in that part of the world, so he had some familiarity with the culture and the issues.

When I was preparing to go to Yemen, the DCM position was vacant. A middle-grade political officer had been Chargé for some time. I made a conscious decision that such a dual vacancy should not again occur when it came time for me to depart post. So, at the outset, I told Ron Neumann that I wanted him in the job for two years; then there would be a change in order to ensure an overlap in one of the top two positions. That was the pattern that followed. I don't know whether it was ultimately the best solution, but I felt strongly on the issue at the time.

Q: How big was your staff?

ZWEIFEL: We had about 70 Americans, not counting Peace Corps Volunteers. There were about eighty of them in country at any given time. As in Jordan, representatives of a fairly full range of agencies and departments were attached to the Mission. It was a good mixture.

Q: How many other resident embassies were in a place like Sanaa?

ZWEIFEL: As I recall, there were about 35 resident embassies. Nearly all of the Arab League governments were represented. There were a few Western European embassies, and even more from the Soviet Bloc. The Chinese, Indians, Iranians, and Pakistanis rounded out the Corps. It was not large.

Q: I presume other Ambassadors would come in who were accredited there from abroad at times?

ZWEIFEL: Yes, there were quite a few who were resident in Jeddah or Riyadh.

Q: Were there any terrorist dangers while you were there? Did you feel safe or secure?

ZWEIFEL: Yemen was a chaotic place. There were always people shooting at each other or getting shot at. One of the events I often recount to illustrate this point occurred shortly after my arrival in Yemen. It involved a couple of Chinese prison laborers; such workers, brought

probably against their own will, were carrying out most of the construction in Sanaa.

One day, an unidentified member of the Yemeni security forces - I am not sure which branch he was affiliated with - took a liking to the Mao suit of one of the Chinese workers. He wanted it. There wasn't much communication between this Arabic-speaking official and the worker who spoke only Chinese. When it became apparent that the Chinaman was not going to give up his suit, there ensued a feeble attempt by the Yemeni to *buy* it. These efforts were likewise hampered by lack of communication. Finally, the worker turned to walk away. The Yemeni did the only thing he could under the circumstances: he drew out his weapon and shot the Chinaman. The bullet caught a second Chinese worker as well, so there were enough Mao suits to go around!

My Chinese counterpart was outraged by the deaths. He proceeded to raise it to the level of a modest diplomatic crisis. About a week later, I went to call on the Prime Minister, Abdul Karim al-Iryani. The Prime Minister was a highly educated, very intelligent man. He was so westernized that I do not recall ever seeing him other than in a western suit. He had attended Yale, spoke impeccable English. He was an excellent and well informed interlocutor.

We had finished discussing our business when he brought up the subject of the murder of the Chinese workers. He commented "This Chinese thing is getting out of hand. The Chinese Ambassador keeps raising the subject." Of course, by then the Yemeni authorities had identified the perpetrator, had him in custody. Al-Iryani continued, "I told the Ambassador I would bring the murderer in front on him and have him executed, but he did not want that."

I have always thought it was the quintessence of the inscrutable east meeting the inscrutable east.

Q: I was afraid you were going to say that when you saw the Prime Minister, he was wearing a Mao suit!

ZWEIFEL: Two members of the Mission staff were shot during my time in Yemen. These were not terrorist actions, nor of any tremendous consequence. But the incidents did underscore the always tenuous security situation in the country.

The first to get hit was a Public Affairs Trainee, a junior USIS officer. He was speeding down the highway one day, going to Taiz from Sanaa. On the way, he passed a scruffy looking man by the side of the road, lugging a weapon longer than he was tall. That was hardly an unusual sight in Yemen where every able-bodied male over the age of ten usually was armed in some way. As the trainee whizzed past, the man motioned to him. Our officer just assumed it was a hitchhiker, so he kept on going. As it turned out, the armed man was a soldier, setting up a roadblock so the President's motorcade could come by. He leveled his weapon and let loose a couple of rounds. One bullet came up through the gas tank of the car and landed in our trainee's rear end. No serious damage, but a good scare.

The other shooting incident involved the AID Director who, with his family, was visiting a very remote area in the northern part of the country. They were traveling in an official vehicle with a local employee as driver. On the way back down from their destination, they were following

another vehicle, apparently full of German tourists, across the essentially trackless gravel plain. The first vehicle pulled off to the side and stopped. Our AID officer and his party pulled around and kept going.

As it turned out, the first vehicle had been stopped by tribal bandits who gave chase. They caught up with the AID vehicle and clearly intended to commandeer it as well. Well, in the discussion which ensued, one of the young car jacker's weapon discharged. The bullet caught the AID Director in the Achilles tendon. Once the bandits realized what had happened, they let the Director get back in his vehicle and the driver took him to the nearest hospital for treatment. It was a very painful wound, eventually necessitating medical evacuation. Yemen was that sort of place-the wild east!

Q: In other words, it wasn't organized terrorism.

ZWEIFEL: Tribal warfare, what have you.

Q: Were you able to move about the country as Ambassador?

ZWEIFEL: I moved around a lot. When I first got there, the insurrection in the south made it inadvisable to go into certain areas in that part of the country. But after it quieted down, I even went into that region. Almost all my travel was done via four-wheel drive vehicle because most of the country is very primitive, poorly served by any sort of infrastructure. To my knowledge, only four Foreign Service Officers have served in both Oman and Yemen. Both were places in which the old Arabian culture was preserved-perhaps because both were historically poor, did not have the means to modernize which so often implies the discarding of old ways and the razing of old buildings, etc. I am proud to have been one of those four who served in both countries at times when they were still relatively unspoiled.

Q: Were you much in demand as Ambassador to speak or take part in events, to open various events?

ZWEIFEL: There was a reasonable amount of such activity. Dedication of Peace Corps projects, for example. And there were the usual ceremonial things that you always had to show up for. In both Oman and Yemen, custom required that, whenever the head of state went out of the country, you had to see him off at the airport. Ditto when he returned. A lot of time spent milling around tarmacs. There were a number of occasions in which, as Ambassador, I was called on to speak, probably less than during my tour in Oman and certainly a magnitude less than when I was DCM and Chargé in Jordan.

Q: Any other comments you'd like to make about your time in Yemen or not?

ZWEIFEL: In our career, we always aspire to be appointed as an Ambassador. It is the pinnacle of a career. However, looking back on it, the Yemen experience did not rank among the most challenging and certainly not even the most enjoyable of my career. There were other assignments that gave me a great deal more personal and professional satisfaction.

LISA PIASCIK
Consular Officer
Sana'a (1983-1985)

Lisa Piascik was born in Delaware in 1957. She graduated from George Washington University before entering the Foreign Service in 1980. Her overseas posts include Beirut, Lebanon; Sana'a, Lebanon; Cebu, Philippines; Baku, Azerbaijan; Warsaw, Poland; Abuja, Nigeria; Baqubah, Diyala Province, Iraq; and Paris, France. Ms. Piascik was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2016.

Q: And you went to Yemen.

PIASCIK: Yes, I went to Yemen.

Q: And you were in Yemen from when to when?

PIASCIK: I was in Yemen from 1983 to 1985. It was North Yemen back then. I was the sole consular officer there and had two local employees.

PIASCIK: When I arrived, the ambassador was David Zweifel. William Rugh replaced him.

Q: I think I interviewed Rugh.

PIASCIK: Very nice man. You know in those days consular work was not anything that caught the attention of the ambassador or DCM.

Q: Well I'm a career consular officer. You don't want these guys mucking around with the stuff you know what to do and they don't. They just want people to feel happy and we in the consular business don't make people happy.

PIASCIK: Right. Ambassador Rugh's wife, Andrea, is an anthropologist and she was very interested in culture and family relationships. There was a community of Americans of Yemeni origin living in Ibb Province, out in the mountains, and I travelled there a number of times to verify family relationships for immigration purposes or at the request of the Social Security Administration. It was a very remote area. Andrea asked to come with me once because she was interested in seeing how people lived.

Ambassador Rugh was very concerned for her safety and basically told me to look out for her. She was very capable and a delightful person. I learned a lot from her. She dressed in a modified Yemeni style, in pants with a long skirt over it, and brought along photos of her children. This was an instant icebreaker and she was very good at connecting with people, especially since we

relied on random people in the villages we visited to host us in their houses.

Q: Where was the capital at this point?

PIASCNIK: It was Sanaa. North Yemen and South Yemen were separate countries at his point.

Q: What was Sanaa like?

PIASCNIK: It was small, compact and a little run down. The tallest buildings were the three international hotels: Ramada, Sheraton and Taj. The old city was very picturesque with traditional buildings with geometrical white-washed embellishments around windows and doors, around the windows and doors and colored glass fan windows.

It was a police state. Ali Abdullah Saleh was the president so he kept a tight grip on things. They watched us. I know I was followed home when I visited friends at a housing compound. The government made it difficult to meet Yemenis, especially socially, but there were some opportunities, especially with families that had been educated in the U.S. or Europe or American or European women who had married Yemenis. I was approached on the street several times by girls or young women who were just fascinated to meet a Western woman. Some Yemeni men also were members of the Hash House Harriers. The Hash House Harriers is a tradition established in Malaysia right before World War II. The idea was to promote running and social activities, and became known as “a drinking club with a running problem.” In Sanaa, there would be a run every Monday, around four p.m. The course was set up in a different location each week, with false trails and so on to more or less keep the group together. Whoever set the trail would prepare dinner for the group afterwards.

Yemeni social life, at least for men, revolved around qat chews. Qat are the leaves of a shrub and are a mild stimulant. Hours are spent chewing leaves. I was invited to a couple of qat chews with some of the embassy men. I think it was a novelty for the Yemeni men to have a Western woman present. Everyone was always very polite to me, but the leaves were pretty nasty.

It was pretty easy to travel around North Yemen. We'd go camping on the Red Sea, or for picnics in the surround mountains, or visit the

I was the sole consular officer, and I really learned so much about consular work there. In Beirut, the local staff was very experienced, but my two local employees in Sanaa were relatively new, so I spent a lot of time reading the Foreign Affairs Manual. The consular section was in building right next to the wall surrounding the embassy compound. The section had actually been a Turkish bath. There was a separate waiting room for women, and there were round, thick pieces of glass in the domed ceiling. The interior walls were basically mud and straw covered by plaster. I found this out during a crisis management exercise when some of the players used hammers on the walls of our safe haven area and pieces of the wall started falling apart

Q: Yemenis travel a lot. I mean I always think of Yemenis in Youngstown, Ohio and Poughkeepsie, New York. Anyway, one of my second consular tour was in Dhahran and we had

a lot of Yemenis there and they were going back and forth.

PIASCIK: Yemen was a very poor country and it exported its men and depended on the remittances they sent back. There was a community of Yemeni-Americans living in the mountains in Ibb province, a very remote area. One person we dealt with frequently had been an elevator operator in San Francisco. When he returned to live in Yemen, he brought with him some generators and made a nice living for himself supplying electricity to a couple of nearby villages.

It was an adventure to visit these areas. The villages were just not on any map, so we'd basically have to pick up a guide once we were in the general vicinity. The Social Security Administration several times requested me to verify if beneficiaries were present or alive. I took with me once a junior officer from the U.S. Information Agency who was doing a rotation in my section. This was Adnan Siddiqi. We picked up an armed escort – Yemenis were very attached to their weapons. The road was unbelievable. Lots of hairpin turns, steep, big drop-offs, ruts. We arrived in the village and everyone came rushing out to see what was going on. The village elder located the person we were looking for, and one of the things I asked him was what his last address in the U.S. He said, "Newark, Delaware." Adnan and I burst out laughing since I am from Delaware. It's a small state with a very small population and here we were in this tiny, remote village and there is someone from Delaware there.

Q: Were there problems with tribal feuds or anything like that? I mean in areas we couldn't go to?

PIASCIK: I don't recall that there were areas we couldn't go to, but the government and tribes competed for power. Some tribes saw a strong government as a threat to their influence and economic well-being, and had no interest in a strong government.

Q: Any interesting consular stories?

PIASCIK: We were notified by the U.S. Navy that a group of people sailing through the Red Sea had reported an American couple had run their boat aground and needed assistance. We were able to find out that they were in a very remote area somewhere south of Hodeida, which is the main Yemeni city on the Red Sea. The defense attaché told me he knew people in the Yemeni Navy who could help, so we set off for Hodeida to meet with these people, locate the Americans and help them.

Once we arrived, it became clear that he didn't know anyone in the Yemeni Navy but he saw it as a good opportunity to meet them. No one in the Navy was willing to lift a finger, so we ended up going to the Yemeni intelligence service, the Mukhabarat. We had the coordinates for where the yacht was, and we all went out to this beach where the yacht was grounded and was all off road. We got stuck in the sand several times and had to dig the vehicles out. When we arrived, the yacht seemed to be in good condition. The husband had left for Hodeida and left his wife with the boat, under the protection of the local tribal sheikh. The sheikh had left with the husband, and his wife was in charge. The American wife was perfectly fine, although not happy to be stranded

in the middle of nowhere. The sheikh's wife was real character, but it was clear she was taking good care that nothing happened to the American or the boat.

We did locate the husband and worked with him to locate someone who could get that yacht off the beach. The Navy probably had the equipment but weren't willing to do anything. We eventually found someone who had his own salvage and construction company and after many weeks he was able to bring in equipment. The Americans had had enough of yachting by this point and just arranged to have the boat loaded aboard a ship, ending their round-the-world trip.

There was a very tragic incident involving the wife of a Fulbright scholar. She was taken very ill quite suddenly and was taken to an American hospital in Sa'adah, which was several hours to the north of Sanaa. Nothing could be done and she died. We brought her body back to Sanaa to prepare it for return to the U.S. This was not something the hospital morgue usually did so it was quite an operation. There were also difficulties at the airport because the security forces there decided they wanted to inspect the interior of the coffin. We got them to back down but it took a while. It was very stressful as we all knew this lady quite well.

Q: Did you run into any problems with South Yemen. It was communist, wasn't it?

PIASCIAK: Yes, it was communist. We didn't have diplomatic relations with South Yemen. However, we did have some social security beneficiaries in there, so we sent checks to the British vice-consul Aden for distribution.

ARTHUR H. HUGHES

Ambassador

Yemen (1991-1994)

Ambassador Hughes was born in Nebraska and attended the University of Nebraska in 1961. He entered the Foreign Service in 1965 and served in Germany, Venezuela, Denmark, The Netherlands, Israel, and Yemen. In addition, he held several posts within the State Department. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1998.

Q: Okay, where did you go next, and how did that come about?

HUGHES: Well, I was nominated by the President to be Chief of Mission to Sanaa in Yemen. I think they didn't quite know what to do with me when I was leaving Defense, and I told them I wanted to go overseas, and so they said, "Well, do you speak French? Maybe we could send you to North Africa." "No, I don't speak any French." So Pat and I went off to Yemen.

Q: I've never been in Yemen, so you're going to have to help me a little bit on this. What were your main responsibilities? What were your challenges? What kind of mission did you have? What were our interests and what were some of your objectives?

HUGHES: Well, it's the poorest Arab country probably. It's down in the far corner of the Arabian Peninsula.

Q: Without oil?

HUGHES: Well, a little bit of oil, but the main importance had always been, or seemed to be, the Arabic Straits, controlling the entrance from the Arabian Sea into the Red Sea, and the fact that, because of poverty and instability and in South Yemen the Peoples Democratic of Yemen was a Soviet client, also meant that Yemen played a certain part in the great East-West conflict arena, although by the time I got there in '91, there had been unity between the two parts of Yemen, mainly because the Soviet Union collapsed and the South Yemen economy collapsed and they had no better options at that point.

When I got there, the main tasks were (a) to try to get Yemen to distance itself from Iraq and Saddam Hussein, although there had been a historical relationship between Yemen and Iraq even before Saddam and a bit of a client relationship between Iraq and Yemen in later periods because of Iraq's tremendous oil wealth and subsidization of even Yemen's national budget, for example, from Iraq as well as private individual payments to parties and individuals. Yemen had, they would say, the misfortune of being in the Arab seat in the Security Council at the time of the outbreak of the Gulf War, that is to say, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, and didn't quite know how to behave or how to react. So on the very first vote, the condemnation of the invasion, Yemen did not appear. They are on the books as having abstained, but actually they did not vote. Abdul Ashtar, their permanent representative, just could not get instructions from Sanaa, and so he decided the better part of it was not to go to the meeting, which he didn't do. Their voting record throughout on a number of Security Council resolutions was mixed at best, and Secretary Baker was furious after his meetings with the Yemenese including President Sala at Thanksgiving time 1990 in which he had hoped to least get the Yemenese to abstain on the most important resolution, that is, authorizing all necessary means to the international community to get the Iraqis out of Kuwait, and the Yemenese voted no along with the Cubans.

Also, putting the Yemenese together with Cubans didn't do the Yemenese any good either. But by the time I arrived and the effort was made to continue to get the enemies to distance themselves from Iraq, they had not offered any material support, just to do it, and to distance was allowed anyway, but it was more of a political support and sympathy. There was that. There was also the effort to see if Yemen, for its own best interests, would adjust its policies and positions to be more in the moderate Arab mainstream. The South Yemenese in particular but also North Yemen had been a bit of a haven for various and assorted terrorists over the years. At the time of unity, though, we had to discuss in Washington. I attended a meeting for the Defense Department as to whether or not to continue them being on the terrorism list. The South was, the North was not, and because of assurances which Ambassador Charlie Dunbar got from the Yemenese at the time, we agreed to continue relations with the new Yemen as if they were from the old, and not put the new country on the terrorism list.

They fulfilled that obligation very satisfactorily if not absolutely one hundred percent, but very

satisfactorily including providing information on various people and giving out and taking out a few other things. So there was the terrorism. There was also American increased business interest, the discovery of oil by Yemen Hunt Oil Company, desire to create business conditions welcoming investment flows, repatriation of profits, that kind of thing, and also a humanitarian interest in improving their economy, assistance improving health, and so forth. Their position during the second Gulf War had led to the expulsion of about 800,000 Yemeni workers mainly from Saudi Arabia and from other Gulf States, which had a tremendous and negative impact on their economic well-being, per-capita GNP. So part of our efforts were aimed at certain humanitarian and developmental objectives as well.

Q: We had an aid program of some size?

HUGHES: Well, it was a total of about \$35,000,000 a year before November 1990, and after November 1990 it went down to about \$3½ million a year. There was a decision to continue a couple of projects, strictly health and also the IMET folks could complete their course work after that. Then it went back up to about \$12½ million a year, which is still very modest, and then AID decided to phase out the program and to concentrate just on a few, and that's being revisited now.

Q: Peace Corps?

HUGHES: The Peace Corps was there in quite significant numbers, left to run up to the Yemen Civil War, and did not go back, but I understand from talking with David Newton the other day, who just left there coming back here as Ambassador, that the Peace Corps has decided to go back.

Q: You mentioned the Yemen Civil War. Remind me when that was. Was that while you were there, or one phase of it?

HUGHES: The background - just a little capsule of it - is when unity occurred in May of 1990, it was basically on Northern terms because the South had no options basically. They were no longer needing the subsidies from the Soviets and their friends. The same thing happened there as happened in Cuba, but worse. So they agreed to unity without a lot of hard agreements on things, the government in Sanaa, the former leader of the South would be the Vice President, and alternate ministers, Deputy Ministers, and divide up everything. But it was clear that President Sala from the North had the upper hand and was slowly but surely marginalizing the guys from the South and particularly the leadership, Aza Abib, who also had problems within his own party, with his own former colleagues from the South, many of whom were trying to marginalize it too. It came to a head in 1994, and basically Abib decided that he had to roll the dice and go for broke, because if he didn't, he was going to be out or simply a figurehead. He was becoming a figurehead along the way. He had taken a trip to the States in which his erstwhile number two within the party had done some negotiating with Sala, which got out.

Q: While he was gone?

HUGHES: While he was in the States. My mental image is of a - he did go to Disneyland, and so

here's Ali Sadam Abib in Disneyland while his number two is negotiating behind his back with the President of Yemen. I think it's a great kind of mental image. Anyway, so he never came back to Sanaa. He went back down to Aden and plotted and so forth. The United States did not want to become an intermediary, but we thought it was in our interest to play the role of good offices for the sake of stability in the Arabian Peninsula. So I did some mini-shuttles back and forth between Sanaa and Aden, a number of meetings, and on and on, in which I basically told Ali Sadam Abib that if he tried to push it to the ultimate, that is, attempt to break away, that he would have no international support. I should have been more explicit and said from the United States, because at the time I didn't know that the Saudis and others were telling him that they would offer him support. Well, he did try it and, of course, he lost and he's now in exile in Oman. A lot of other Yemenese are in exile in other places.

Q: You tried that while you were there, or was it after you had left?

HUGHES: No, I was still there as Chief of Mission in Sanaa.

Q: Was there fighting then?

HUGHES: Well, the war started in May with an air raid. There had been a skirmish in Kasern in which both Northern and Southern units were stationed just north of Sanaa, a tank battle within the confines of Kasern, and my Defense attaché was there, because one of the things that we tried to do is we set up a military commission to try to reestablish continece between the Northern military and Southern units which had not been fully integrated. So our Defense attaché and a few of the others, the Jordanians - and the Jordanians actually sent some people from Oman - would visit and try to keep things calm to keep from something starting even accidentally or maybe a plot that would work. I think it was useful, because I think it delayed things awhile, and I think it did probably lower casualties because of the way things had moved around a little bit, so there wasn't that confrontation, but there was that tank battle, but the actual war did start with an area on Sanaa from the south, so we woke up to an air raid and bombs being dropped and anti-aircraft. It's a very interesting alarm clock.

Q: Well, it is, and it's also quite a responsibility for an ambassador these days.

HUGHES: Well, we got everybody out, courtesy of the U.S. Air Force. No Americans were hurt, and every American that wanted to get out got out. We drew down about 65 percent.

Q: And it was largely official Americans? There probably weren't too many non-official U.S. citizens?

HUGHES: Not too many, because some had left earlier on, but there were about five or six gunboats, but there were a few hundred.

Q: You stayed and the other key people did?

HUGHES: Yes.

Q: When you were conducting this informal shuttle, good offices, trying to avoid this happening, were you doing it pretty much on your own as the United States Ambassador or were other countries - you mentioned Jordan in the military area - were others also concerned and involved or pretty much just us?

HUGHES: It was more us than the others. Others, I think, occasionally would try to preach moderation and that kind of thing, but there was not much in the way of direct contact with either Abib or Hosala. There was some, there was some, and we were all using the same sheet of music.

Q: But the Saudi role in this instance was to stir things up.

HUGHES: Well, their view was that their interests were served by having two Yemens which could be played off against each other rather than one united Yemen with 14 or 15 million people. There was a tremendous amount of antipathy between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Of course, the Saudis were on the side of the Royalists during the Yemen Revolution, '68 and '67, and Egyptians came in on the side of Grecians, so it became kind of a Egypt-Saudi war. But an enormous amount of popular antipathy, because in 1934 the Saudis had taken three historically Yemen provinces in the North because of some claims and confusion in Yemen. Historically Yemen had been less a strongly governed country than [a tribal society], but still there's the historic identification of being Yemen. But the three provinces, which were quite good provinces, were taken by Saudi and are still Saudi. So there's a lot of popular resentment against Saudi Arabia. And the Saudis have a policy of direct involvement, pay subsidies, and there have been occasionally allegations of plots by Saudi Arabia. But as it turned out, the Saudis did buy them such things as MIG 29s, the Southerners, and sent them a fair amount of supplies and so forth, and this all went to an air field in the South called Arvion, which is down by Kulla. When there was almost no resistance, that all collapsed very quickly after Aden collapsed, and the forces from the government captured file cabinets with all the records of deliveries, where they came from, who paid for them, all that stuff. I think it's a mark of a maturity of judgment that they held all this stuff to negotiate with the Saudis and other Arab States which supported their breakaway, to negotiate arrangements and *modus ovendi* as opposed to just releasing it and attacking. That was very wise on their part frankly.

Q: Who was the government getting most of its support at this time?

HUGHES: The government in Sanaa?

Q: Yes.

HUGHES: Well, I think the most important thing is that the kind of government which Allis Ali Abib and the others ran in the South was not a popular government. Even though it was the People's Democratic Republic, they did some awful things, absolutely awful things, and there was a popular feeling, "Why should we fight for Abib?" Now, then you get involved in some tribal stuff, even a bit of fundamentalist, nonfundamentalist stuff. I talked with a military commander from Wadi Hidramow, and he said, "We had no interest in fighting for Abib, but when the Northern troops started sacking [others], then we had to defend just our homes, so to

speak." And that was pretty well understood by Sala and people in the North that came in. But that's the main thing. One of the things that was useful too was right when the war stopped I told the Yemenese I wanted to go Aden immediately. I wanted to see what really happened, because there was a barrage of propaganda and information that Aden was really just treated horribly and so forth, and even during the war it was shelled. So I got a call back - this was the Minister of Interior whom I was talking with - and said, "Okay, Sala will give you his helicopter to go down there." I said, "Okay, I'll go tomorrow, because I'm going back to the States to tell Washington what's going on and decide what we're going to do, also to get my daughter married." I felt a little trepidation, because they had a lot of Soviet helicopters, which sometimes had a tendency to fall down. So I went out to the airport. I was glad it was a Bell helicopter and I knew the American company that maintained them, and so I had a sigh of relief actually.

So we flew down to the airport and right over the main stronghold base that the Soviets had built north of Aden on the plain, which took a lot of pounding. It was apparently just full of underground warrens including underground airplane machine repair shops, and so it was clear it was a kind of a point of power projection in mind for the Soviet strategic interest. But anyway, we landed at the airport in Aden. The main terminal which had been built, I think, by the French had collapsed. There were damaged planes sitting there, ammunition boxes strewn all over the place, rocket boxes - just total chaos - bullet holes all through all the big hangars and so forth. There was still a little shooting going on, so we drilled in what had been the headquarters of the Northern army and talked with people there. And Turnishk did come down the next day too, so I stayed an extra day. I met with some of the Adenese whom I knew, people who had been in the government jointly and knew the government before and some private people, a couple lawyers. Some of the Southerners were very bitter, but some of the Southerners also were not happy but also understood that to a certain extent this was a continuation of their own internal coup that had occurred in '86, because - what's his name - the fellow who lost that coup was in exile in Damascus, but three of his brigades had actually gone to the North and were very instrumental in the civil war of 1994. His name has just escaped me. But there was a lot of complaint in the international press and propaganda media that people were being evicted from homes and so forth. Well, a lot of this was people who had been evicted from their homes in 1986 came back and knocked on the door and said, "Hey, remember me. This is my house. Out." In fact, many Adenese confirmed that to me. Well, you'd see these Toyota pick-up trucks heading north with furniture, television sets, refrigerators, anything they could get their hands on. The Northerners claimed that they were taking food down, and, of course, the Adenese said, "Keep your food, but we would like to keep our furniture."

Fortunately most of the crimes that were committed were against property, very few against people, very few, and the claims about indiscriminate shellings and bombings simply weren't true. There were some short rounds that fell in areas, but there was very little damage done. The only real damage I saw in certain areas were a few blocks right around the airport, and even there it was a couple houses damaged but that was all. The North won, Sala won. Sala's power was consolidated. The problem now is how do you pull the whole picture together, and they haven't done very well at that. There's a lot of carpetbagging going on, and Sala has given a certain carte blanche to people to go down to be the director of this, the director of that. Corruption, carpetbagging, as I said, and our message to the Yemenese all along has been to Sala personally.

From others, [this] has been, this is not going to serve you on a long term; it's not going to serve Yemen well. There is an exile community that's active and trying to take over. I think Sala cut a deal with the Saudis. The Saudis would not subsidize actual physical attempts but will continue to subsidize the living expenses of people in Saudi Arabia.

Q: So there were exiles in Saudi Arabia but also in Oman and still Syria and other Arab countries?

HUGHES: Syria, Egypt, Oman, UAE [United Arab Emirates].

Q: United States probably?

HUGHES: The United States. Some have gotten exile status - refugee status, I'm sorry.

Q: This was roughly the situation not long after the war at the time you left?

HUGHES: I actually stayed more than three years. I stayed through November in order to give the next guy, David Loop, very experienced, well qualified. Had served in Yemen before, had been chief of mission before he was ambassador to Iraq.

Q: I did recall as you were talking about Aden in particular that I actually have been to Yemen, or at least to Aden.

HUGHES: Were you in the Navy?

Q: In 1965, a flight from Karachi to Nairobi stopped there for refueling. I remember getting off the plane and looking around.

HUGHES: That's before the Brits left. The Brits left in November '67.

Q: Yes, they were still there, and I guess it was a prosperous, important, strategic location for them.

HUGHES: A strategic location. The Brits came to Aden in numbers in the 1830s, and then after the opening of the Suez Canal, they reinforced because they thought that the French would be trying to come down the Red Sea, trying to down Suez, and put pressure on the British Empire. Aden became a very important point for the lifeline into India and then the lifeline into the Gulf as well. As petroleum began to develop, that was important early on. It was extremely prosperous, but two things killed Aden. One was the Communist government, and the other was the closure of Suez because of the '67 war and the development of different ships, different trading patterns and so forth.

Q: Supertankers.

HUGHES: Really killed Aden. But later because of the Communist government, it never

recovered, didn't know how to recover. When I first went to Aden, I had the same feelings I had when I first went to East Germany and Czechoslovakia. The system had the same results in two entirely different cultures, just neglect, decay, lack of any kind of individual responsibility. Yet the Adenese in particular, but the South Yemenese, they felt a little bit more comfortable maybe because there was a system. The Brits have their system, and then the Communists have their system. It had a structure to it, and there was law and order except occasionally when the leaders of the party did whatever the hell they wanted to do. But there was law and order. Traffic laws were obeyed. Certain things happened, whereas in the North there is no real system. There's tradition, there's co-option, accommodation, floating alliances, arrangements, everything's very subtle, in flux; and that was another thing that drove the Southerners crazy. It was very educational to watch this. The Southerners would come up, and they didn't know how to get a handhold on anything. If Sala's doing this with respect to a ministry there, "Well, how do you do it?" Or if there was an instruction came, something just happened. "Why did that happen? How do you counteract, where do you get a handhold to make it work your own will?" And they couldn't figure it out.

Q: You don't speak Arabic. How did you get along in terms of conversation, language? English?

HUGHES: Well, it was clearly a bit of a handicap. I'm glad that Newton went. He speaks Arabic. And I'm glad President Nasser speaks Arabic, because on one or two occasions I was alone with the President and yet I could not carry on a real conversation with him. Well, I'm glad that the government sent me there. I'm not going to criticize that judgment. There are an awful lot of Yemenese who speak English, mainly because there were no educational institutions in Yemen, and a lot of the Yemenese, even Northerners, went - walked literally - to Aden to go into the British school system to get an education, and then a lot of them went to Cairo for university education. Some went to Beirut to AUB [American University in Beirut] and elsewhere in the U.K. Then for the Southerners, a lot of them during the time of the Soviet empire, so to speak, went to Russia and other places, and a lot of times they studied English there. There were a lot of Yemeni engineers and technicians who speak Czech, German, Russian.

Q: We had a consulate, I guess, in Aden for a while.

HUGHES: Yes, we were thrown out in '67. Excuse me, it wasn't '67. In '73 we were thrown out.

Q: Did we have an embassy then?

HUGHES: There was an embassy. In fact, I was the first American official to go to the building after unity or after we were thrown out in '73. We were looking for the building. We knew it was on the waterfront down there, and there was another building that was just covered, overgrown, with bushes and all that stuff, and there were a bunch of guys there with machetes cutting and sweeping and all that stuff, and said, "No, no, this was the American Embassy," because I was looking for the port master for Aden. I wanted to talk to him. They said, "Well, the Southern Minister of Transportation - he's going into your old embassy. You'll find him. They're just opening it up." They were sweeping and cutting down stuff - nice little building, though. But I went in, and I went upstairs to the office, the outer office where the secretary was sitting, and I

knew and I said, "Yes, this is the embassy." The reason I could tell is there was an American four-drawer safe and one of those steel gray metal desks - remember those? - sitting there. I said, "Yes, I'm in the right place. This used to be the American Embassy."

Q: Anything else we should say about your period as United States Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen?

HUGHES: Well, there is some oil now, but it's probably about 600,000 barrels a day on a population base of 14 or 15 million, maybe even 500,000 barrels a day. Even in Oman, which is not seen as a terribly wealthy state, they've got a population base of about 2 million, and they're pushing a million barrels a day - just to give you an idea of the comparison - but extremely poor. I don't think anybody goes to Yemen without being captivated to a certain extent by the people, their charm, their wit, their courtesies, just the historical situation in which they find themselves. One doesn't have to go overboard to understand the historical situation in which cultures, people, countries find themselves and how they try to deal with it - Israel to a certain extent too, one could make that same kind of comment about. The Yemenese are really marvelous, marvelous people, exasperating at times like we ourselves are, but I found a kind of openness of spirit, a readiness to talk about anything, a willingness to listen if approached correctly. I think Ambassador Newton, Charlie Dunbar, people who have been there over at times - Skip Gnehm had a tour there - wish them well and wish that they will take wise decisions in their own long-term best interests. One of the questions I continuously pose, I'd say, "Well, okay, tell me how does what you're doing in this instance support your long-term interests, either domestically as a regional country or whatever." Now I suppose the same question could be asked here in the United States sometimes. But still I don't think generally one goes away without having a certain affection for a lot of people that they meet and a certain affection for the people and wish them well.

Q: Was access up to the highest level pretty easy for you?

HUGHES: Yes, it was. Well, it had not always been that way, of course, and I think they decided that it was in their best interests, particularly after what had happened in the second Gulf War, in Iraq, their poverty, and feeling isolated in the Arab world to a certain extent, to be seen to be working with the Americans was in their national interest.

Q: And even though we resented the position they took at the Security Council in November of '90 and took it out in a sense by cutback, cutdown, reduction of aid, we were willing to try to work with them in the period that you were there, try to get beyond that?

HUGHES: Well, get beyond that but based on adjustment in our own position, which, in fact, they did do. They did adjust their own position. This was made very clear from the very beginning, my very first day there when I went to present my credentials, that this was an issue that had to be dealt with. We were very frank about that and very clear about that. The Yemenese would say, "Golly, our position's misunderstood, and I'd say, well, you know, from my job in Defense, I used to read what your official newspapers and official radio would say." I said, "I think I understand perfectly well what you were saying. I think basically you made a

misjudgment." And to the Yemenese, as I got to know them, I'd say, "Maybe your calculus was right early on. What was the United States going to do but win? By about the 17th of August when our ground forces started to arrive, you should have a reconsideration about what you were going to do." We had a lot of very frank discussions. There was no doubt that this was an issue, and this was well known. There was an American interest in stability. If you can't engage and try to convince them to adjust and get them to understand why it would be of interest to do so, why bother to have anybody on the ground there?

Q: Did we also have an interest in liberalization, political, economic?

HUGHES: Well, that was the other aspect. I mentioned the economic side, but also political liberalization. They put a good constitution into effect. They had parliamentary elections, which we supported by grant to arrange, and they were pretty darn good elections actually. The second time around on the parliamentary elections maybe weren't quite as good as the first ones, but they were, I think, essentially free and fair and honest, a good turn-out at the polls, and even Yemenese who hadn't bothered to register to vote indicated that they, by their actions, understood that this was something important that was going on, that they should be a part of it. Unfortunately the civil war set back that whole thing, because during the crisis the government put certain measures into effect to put pressure on the universities, for example, on dissidents and so forth, and that caused a real setback, which I think to a large extent the Southerners must accept certain responsibility for pushing it to a crisis which allowed things to go into effect which otherwise, if they had stayed in the government, would not have.

Q: Okay, anything else you want to say about Sanaa?

HUGHES: No.

MICHAEL METRINKO
USS Cole Investigation
Aden (2001)

Michael John Metrinko was born in Pennsylvania in 1946. He graduated from Georgetown University in 1968. After entering the Foreign Service in 1974, his postings have included Ankara, Damascus, Tehran, Tabriz, Krakow, Kabul, Tel Aviv and special assignments in Yemen and Afghanistan. Mr. Metrinko was interviewed in 1999 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Today is the 6th of October, 2003. This is an interview with Michael Metrinko and this is an addendum to the one which we did because after we did the first oral history he got himself off to Afghanistan. This is being done on behalf of the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, Mike, can you sort of pick up what happened to you and we'll move on to Afghanistan? What were you up to after you retired and all?

METRINKO: Well, we have to go back to the year, let's see now, this is 2003, to the year 2001 when I received a phone call from the State Department asking me if I would be interested to going to Yemen briefly.

Q: This is before 9/11?

METRINKO: Before 9/11. To take over the office in Aden that had been set up by the Department of State and by the embassy in Sanaa, Yemen to handle the investigation into the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole. I was asked to do this and I left in March in the year 2001. I was there for three months. I worked over there for three months. I was not in charge of the investigation. That was being done by the FBI, but I was in charge of the office that gave all the support for the investigators.

Q: Well, let's talk about this. Could you explain, what caused, what was the U.S.S. Cole situation and what were we doing?

METRINKO: The U.S.S. Cole was a naval ship that came into the harbor in Aden, Yemen in late 2001 and was attacked by I'm not going to use the word terrorists, because even the U.S. navy does not say it was an act of terrorism. It was attacked by people who had explosives in a small boat, which pulled up alongside the navy ship and blew up. It caused a large number of deaths. It caused a larger number of injured and the immediate reaction in the United States was panic followed by a huge outpouring of FBI and CIA, but mainly FBI and also U.S. marines into the city of Aden which is down on the southern coast of Yemen. They did not know the extent of the original incident and they got there while the boat was still in the harbor and it looked like it might be about to sink. This was in December of the year 2000. I arrived there in March.

Q: Well, in the first place, what were your impressions of Yemen at that time? What you were seeing was Aden and how the people from Yemen worked and didn't work with our people. I mean, you throw a lot of investigators in and you've got problems.

METRINKO: What happened in Yemen and specifically in Aden during that investigation was a huge clash of cultures. By that let's say we had three different cultures. One was the culture of the Yemenis themselves who at first did not want to admit that there had been any Yemeni involvement or that this was a problem. Specifically the authorities down in Aden who did not want either interference in the capital in Sanaa and certainly did not want a large group of foreigners rushing in trying to do an investigation. Aden is a very conservative, somewhat laid back, but extremely city. The second culture was the FBI macho we're here to get this all straightened up right now culture combined with the U.S. marines who rushed in in full force and acted at the very beginning from what I've been told almost like they were attacking Aden rather than coming to do an investigation. Of course they were coming at a time when nobody knew exactly what had happened and they didn't know if they were going to be met by violence or an arms struggle. So, when they actually arrived in the airport without permission from anybody as far as I know, anybody in the Yemeni government, they arrived in full attack mode. The third culture was the State Department culture. The State Department culture which recognized that

there was a serious problem of course, but also, did not want to destroy its relationship with the government of Yemen by letting the FBI take full charge of the investigation in that part of the country or the way we dealt with Yemeni officials.

Q: Our ambassador there was?

METRINKO: Our ambassador in Yemen at the time was Barbara Bodine, a professional career diplomat, who spoke good Arabic and had been ambassador there for at least a year by this point, I think more. More like two or three years.

Q: Yemen, also, at one point there had been a south Yemen, hadn't there? I mean, which had been very close to.

METRINKO: It was a Marxist republic.

Q: A Marxist republic so that added to, I mean you had your traditional regime, but you also must have had some prickly Marxists running around, too.

METRINKO: Well, Aden was rather a strange city. Aden had been a crown colony of the British government or the British Empire. It was called the pearl of the Orient for a long time and the port of Aden for commercial shipping was number two in the world, second only to New York City up until the British empire started to disintegrate and there was a communist coo, a communist takeover. Aden, the Republic of Aden became staunchly communist and commercial life went to hell. The port basically disappeared into nothingness during that period. Under the British we'd even had an embassy there and the embassy building was still there right on the water, a pleasant old sort of hacienda type building overlooking the harbor. There was a civil war, I'm sorry, there was a unification of the two countries, the Republic of the Yemeni, sorry the Republic of Aden and the country of Yemen itself became one country. Then in the year and I want to say 1995, I could be wrong by the date, but there was a civil war, a civil war which only lasted a few weeks and the country became unified again. Aden was strange. Aden itself was unlike the rest of Yemen. It was on the far side of a very steep mountains. It was coastal and Aden looked out. It looked out towards India. It looked out towards Ethiopia. It looked out towards the Red Sea, the Arabic Sea, the Arabian Sea rather. The people there tended to be a racial mixture of those places. A lot of very visibly Chinese and Indian and Ethiopian blood, Somalian blood in the people. You could see this quite easily.

Q: Indian?

METRINKO: Yes, Indian, too because right across the water was India. So, there were Indians living there who had always stayed there. They ran some businesses still. There were some, I'm thinking in the old British consulate there which still existed and which was a throwback to the British Empire. There was an Indian in charge, but a very strange little city.

Q: You arrived at sort of what point?

METRINKO: I arrived in March of the year 2001. Yes, I'm mixing up my years here. March in the year 2001. I had had two predecessors in my job and our job was as the ambassador said to provide adult supervision to the investigators.

Q: Well, now two predecessors in a time of about three months?

METRINKO: Yes, but they were there a short time because this was all patched together very quickly.

Q: I mean this wasn't because they were kicked out or something like that?

METRINKO: No, no.

Q: Just short term.

METRINKO: Short term to set up and run an office so that the embassy could have liaison with the whole group down there because the group in Aden was a sort of mish mash of various investigative authorities. We had the FBI in large numbers. We had the marine fast team, the counter terrorism people. We had diplomatic security. We had NCIS, the naval investigators. We had DIA and we had CIA. So, there was a large amount.

Q: It sounds like, talk about a can of worms.

METRINKO: A can of armed worms.

Q: Yes. What did you find when you got there? In the first place, what did the ambassador talk to you, how was the ambassador dealing with this?

METRINKO: The ambassador had had a bad run in with the FBI well prior to my arrival. In fact she had thrown the head of the FBI investigators out of the country. There was a personality conflict and again a conflict in cultures. The FBI thought that they could make demands and sort of carry on a very aggressive investigation without paying too much to Yemeni sensibilities or Yemeni law. They were going all out and aggravating people there constantly, aggravating the Yemenis. On the other hand the Yemeni authorities were recalcitrant. They weren't interested very much in providing information because some of the people who were being investigated were being linked to the Yemeni government. This was a difficult situation. The ambassador felt that the best way to proceed with the investigation was to keep peace between the investigators and the government. In order for the investigation to run smoothly to keep peace between the officials in Yemen, I'm sorry, the officials in Aden with their superiors in Sanaa with the embassy and with the State Department and with the various offices, the CIA, DIA, NCIS, FBI, marines, etc. and with the operation as a whole.

Q: How did you operate with these disparate groups?

METRINKO: It was an interesting exercise. I was there to help them get their work done in many

ways to try and explain local culture or morays to them, also to report to the ambassador, to make sure that they were reporting not the nitty gritty of their investigation because we weren't supposed to know that. I mean their investigation was a secure investigation, but to report the mechanics, the relationships, the way local officials were either being cooperative or non-cooperative. It led a number of cases to the ambassador going in to the president of Yemen or the minister of foreign affairs or the minister of the interior up in Sanaa just to smooth things over or to sort of get the officials in Aden to move more quickly or to move.

Q: Well, I can't imagine anything worse than putting the CIA, the FBI and the naval investigators all into the small same town.

METRINKO: Small town nothing, we were in the same, we lived together, worked together, ate together, exercised together and many of them were locked into the two floors of the hotel that we had rented for our stay there.

Q: How did this work?

METRINKO: With difficulty.

Q: Well, you know, I mean, normally if you're having an investigation you try to have one entity investigate.

METRINKO: Normally, yes, but this was abnormal.

Q: Was the name of Osama Bin Laden thrown out by the time you got there?

METRINKO: Oh yes, of course, his name was all over. His family was also building the new airport in Aden and it was the Bin Laden Construction Company signs that we could see whenever we went to the airport.

Q: I lived in a Bin Laden house in Dhahran back in the '50s, so I mean...

METRINKO: Of course the Bin Ladens were originally a family from Yemen. They had a lot of family not in that area, but in other parts of the country.

Q: What were you, you know, I mean these people were running around, what were you coming away with? I realize you weren't in the middle part, you know in the secret part of the investigation, but I mean it must have all been pretty clear what was coming out.

METRINKO: What I came away with from Aden was what I also came away with, a lesson from Afghanistan and it's this. We have several agencies in the United States government. By this I include the Department of Defense, we also had Defense Department army attache there, too. We have the Department of Defense; we have investigative agencies or law enforcement agencies, part of the Department of Justice like the FBI. We have the CIA. We have others, the marines, etc. who can be and often are very intelligent, very capable people who know their field quite

well, but who don't know a damned thing about other regions of the world. They try to apply their skill and expertise in foreign environments where it simply does not work. It's sort of like cooking at a very high altitude. You may know the recipe, but when you go to a very different altitude, all of the temperatures get skewed and you can make a mess of your cooking. That's what they were often doing.

Q: Did you find yourself in the way of sort of a lecturer on?

METRINKO: A lecturer, but a lecturer to adults and adults don't like to be lectured at. I also found that many of the people who are sent overseas including by the Department of State were culturally and intellectually incapable of conducting a normal life overseas. They were people who should not have been let out of the United States by any agency. They were either stupid or unwilling to look around and realize they were in a foreign environment. Because of this attitude, sort of caused a great many problems which impacted on the efficiency of the investigation.

Q: Well, can you describe how some of these things went?

METRINKO: Sure, one good example. Diplomatic security went all out to hire a huge number of new people to fill lots of vacancies. Someone taught all these brand new people who were straight out of police forces and straight out of the military and straight out of college. The whole concept of defensive, aggressive defensive driving. This is the type of security driving by zigzagging, by having cars going in tandem as opposed to one behind the other. For example, if two U.S. government cars are approaching an intersection or approaching a circle, one hangs off to the side a little bit, not quite fully behind the first car. If the principle person is in the first car, then the second car is going to be slightly off to the back not too far away and they completely fill up any circle that they're trying to go around. They do this at high rates of speed. They roar down streets zigzagging back and forth together at very high rates of speed, sometimes with sirens, sometimes not. Aden was a nice quiet city. This looked stupid, idiotic and incompetent.

Q: Well, why were they doing this? Did they feel they were targets?

METRINKO: They were attracting attention that was actually. Did they feel they were targets? Well, somebody had told them, some guru back in DS training had told them this was the way they were supposed to drive in a high threat environment. I kept trying to explain that it's only high threat if someone is actively after you, but they had their orders. It was one of the most ridiculous things I ever saw. To give you an example of how bad it was, when I say high rates of speed, they would go 50 miles an hour down city streets zigzagging, you know, causing people to jump out of the way, causing other cars to swerve out of the way. We were supposed to be having a dinner once to introduce or to sort of a dinner in honor of the head of security of the city of Aden. He was coming to the hotel and everything was all arranged. Some of our cars had just returned from driving this way in the city. The security chief came in and he was livid and he said, "My men and I were standing on a street corner trying to cross and your two cars" and he used some other words besides two, "sprayed us with gravel when they swerved around the corner. Don't you realize this is stupid? This is not the way to drive in a crowded city?" Our diplomatic security people were unfortunately quite often inept. Many of them were very good.

Many of them were inept and there was no way to talk to them.

Q: When you start bringing in people who don't understand the culture and all, I've watched this with the military and with other groups overseas. There's a tendency to get, to lock oneself into a bunker, in other words, to go to the hotel and sit around at night and drink and talk about the rag heads or something like that which makes it even worse.

METRINKO: Which makes it even worse. There is another problem with security. We had marines for example. I don't want to talk too much about this because it gets into operations, but we had a fast team of marines there who were very bright young guys. I came out of this with a very healthy deep respect for the U.S. Marine Corps, which I'd always had, but this just sort of enforced it. I think I had 16 or 18 marines with an officer in charge. They never left the hotel. There were two different teams there when I was there. They never left the hotel grounds. I shouldn't say never. Very, very rarely. With the first of the marine officers who was in charge when I realized the marines weren't going out at all, now they would go out to the beach. The hotel was on a beach. They would play volleyball. They would go swimming. They would do things like that, that was fine, but they never in general left the hotel environs. When I told the marine commander, I was going into the city, what about putting marines into the car occasionally and letting them get out and see what's out there. He could not understand why that would "help their mission." I tried explaining that the more they knew about the city the more they more they knew about the culture the more it would help them to defend us in case there was an attack. It would be by seeing the culture outside, by seeing the city streets; they would be able to determine more easily whether somebody was friendly or hostile approaching them. I did occasionally get someone out, but only very occasionally. The marines sort of SOP is if you're assigned to a place, you stay there, you do not leave it. I saw this also at the embassy in Kabul later.

Q: How about the FBI? Did they get out and around?

METRINKO: Oh, yes, they got out and around. They were actually quite funny about it. The FBI would go out in full force. The FBI had SWAT teams there. I should say this first. At various times we had between 70 and 80 people there. Seventy to 80 let's say, 95% men. Too much testosterone.

Q: This is essentially to investigate.

METRINKO: To investigate. Well, you have the support staff for the investigators, too. Let me give you an example. The FBI had a rule that no FBI agent was allowed to go out alone. They had to go out with a SWAT team. The SWAT team consisted of four people, including a doctor or a medic with full medical gear. Full medical gear was the size of a suitcase or more. Now, the FBI had to go out with fully armed, they carried long arms. So, if Joe was going down to pick up his dry cleaning or to get some cereal at one of the little grocery stores he had to go with a SWAT team of four people. Now the diplomatic security rule was that when the FBI went out there had to be an American driver and an American diplomatic security guard in the car because the FBI had their mission, DS had their mission. This meant that if Joe wanted to go and pick up his laundry,

he had four from the swat team and he had the two diplomatic security people. You had Joe plus four plus two that comes out to seven, right? Well, you also had to have a local along who could speak Arabic, that turned out to eight. At this point you're doubling the size of your car. Eight guys with long guns do not fit into one car. So, if Joe went out you had to take two cars. This means that you need another diplomatic security agent to drive the car because only Americans were supposed to drive plus a companion for him, try ten. You were really sitting in high speeds.

Q: Was there the feeling of coming from the embassy or someplace, you know, perhaps if you people get going the quicker you'd get the hell out of here.

METRINKO: Yes, there was very much that feeling, but you couldn't say it because the FBI was very sensitive.

Q: Did you have the feeling that they were able to operate in this sort of thing? How did they, you know, interface with the local people in order to find out what happened?

METRINKO: They interfaced with an attitude of hostility, an attitude that the local authorities were screwing up the investigation. It's quite possibly true. The local authorities had no great desire to have this drag on, but they had no great desire to bring it to an end either. The local authorities' answer would have been to take the people they had grabbed and to have them executed after a quick trial. They wanted it over and done with. The FBI didn't want a quick trial. They wanted to go on and on investigating forever hoping that leads would lead them to other leads, to other leads, to terrorism as a world network. Yemen wanted this to be over and done with. They saw it as a specific problem, a specific incident. They wanted the incident to be wiped out, the perpetrators punished and let's go on from there. The FBI wanted to find out more that might impact on other investigations and other problems. They were both right in their own ways.

Q: Did you find yourself sort of the oil between the two systems or something? Was that you felt your role?

METRINKO: A bit of that. It was also oil between the various gears inside of the investigator who came as well because we had agencies who not only did not talk to each other, we were all sort of sitting there having to talk to each other.

Q: You know, with that many people around, let's say you turned up a promising informant, what would happen? I could see a former [official] sort of sitting at a coffee table and whispering out to somebody and all of a sudden you have to face a barrage of...

METRINKO: You are now being brought before 80 people for your oral exam each of whom is going to have several questions. I never went to any of the sessions. I wasn't supposed to, so I don't know the answer to that, but I do know that in general they only spoke to people who were presented to them by the local authorities. They had a list of people they wanted to talk to. The local authorities would produce these people or not produce these people. It was unclear who some of these people really were. Some of them were unproduceable or were not going to be

produced. Possibly because they were being protected. Possibly because we didn't have the right names. Possibly because no such people existed. Possibly because they hadn't been found.

Q: Was there at all the feeling that there were training camps off in sort of a hydramoot? You know, things were happening now over the horizon in Yemen that were not designed to be beneficial to the United States.

METRINKO: Yes, there was very much that feeling. There was a feeling that some of the officials were in conclusion with the people who had attacked the Cole or with people who had supported the ones who had attacked the Cole. Again, this was very difficult to penetrate. Yemen can be a very, very close; it is a very closed society. Fifty percent of the country, the women are closed off completely, you never see women. The men themselves are just different. I learned very little about Yemen my first time. This was actually my second time. I learned very little about Yemen. I learned about the streets of Aden. I learned a lot about a couple of officials. I learned a lot about things that didn't really touch on Yemen very much. I learned a lot about interagency fighting, interagency sort of rivalry, interagency lack of cooperation. I didn't learn a great deal about Yemen. I learned more about Yemen when I went back last year.

Q: You were there for how long?

METRINKO: I was there for almost exactly three months, from March until June of the year 2000.

Q: How was it, was it still the same situation?

METRINKO: No. What happened was in late May, I don't remember the exact date, either late May or early June of the year 2000. I received a phone call telling us to pack up and leave immediately. There was indication that we were being targeted and the NSC wanted us out of there immediately. They told us to abandon the hotel and get out and move out. What we did was we stayed, well, I got most of the people out that day. I got the FBI and the marines out on a C130 we called them. The other State person, myself and, I'm sorry, the other diplomatic security people, my deputy in the State Department, myself and several others left the next day taking all the cars, the vehicles and records with us. We had a great trip going back to Sanaa.

Q: So, what did you do, just go up to Sanaa?

METRINKO: Went up to Sanaa and everybody went home. I left after four or five days. My tour was up anyway. It was close to being up anyway because of my status. I'd already worked 90 days straight.

Q: Do you have any idea of what this threat was or did you ever find out?

METRINKO: I did, but I can't talk about it. It may have been overstated.

Q: Well, I mean these things often are, but one can't, everybody gets very. While you were there

had the Cole left?

METRINKO: Oh, yes, the Cole had long since gone.

Q: What was your impression, how, did Barbara Bodine our ambassador sort of win or lose or how did this come out?

METRINKO: Ambassador Bodine won, but it was a psychic victory. Yes, she established the primacy of the Department of State as the foreign affairs agency in charge of our operations in Yemen. She maintained that. Yes, she maintained herself as the lead U.S. government official and she kept that in Yemen dealing with the Yemeni government. What she did, however, by having a battle with the FBI was lose or let herself open to a lot of attacks on her reputation back here in the United States. In that sense it was a psychic victory. I have a great deal of respect for her. I thought she was a pretty good ambassador. She had a very tough role to play there. It was a tough job. It wasn't fair that the FBI attacked her or tried to attack her. They saw her as a problem. They saw her as somebody who was [in collusion] with the Yemeni government and it went back and forth. FBI people changed all the time. In fact, one of the problems of the investigation was that most people were there on a 30 day rotation. I was supposed to stay for as long as possible. My deputy was supposed to stay for as long as possible, but the other Department of State people, diplomatic security rotated out every 30 days. The FBI rotated out every 30 days. Others rotated out. So, in the course of three months there, when you keep an average of 60 to 80 people at any one time and they are rotating out every month, you have a huge number of people who come and go. I got to meet 18 to 20 different diplomatic security people there. It went on like that. It just kept switching and rotating out. Some very, very good, some great in fact. Some very, not so good.

Q: Question.

METRINKO: Yes?

Q: You came back from that, do you think that, I mean did anybody, was anybody other than what we're doing right now talk to you who was in an official capacity, lessons learned on this sort of thing?

METRINKO: Nobody ever asked me a question about it. In fact when I came back and called up the Department and said I'm here, would you like me to come in and do a debrief? They did not think it was necessary. That was the desk.

Q: This of course is the thing that people who come out of extremely trying circumstances or something and when they come back, nobody asks.

METRINKO: I know. I know.

Q: I mean it's one reason why this oral history program is going. It's very late, but there are lots of lessons to be learned if somebody wants to look at it. All right, then, you came back.

METRINKO: Well, one thing, one lesson I did learn there, I always point this out to people who are involved in security. We had several different armed groups. We had a fasting of marines who were there to combat the other; the teams set up to do anti-terrorism work and they were bright gung ho marines, real jarheads.

Q: But these were here to protect you?

METRINKO: They were there to protect me and to protect the premises. They were bright young guys and really, really good. Like I say, I came out of there with a very healthy respect for marines. We had the FBI, which was fully armed. The swat teams were heavily armed. We had the CIA, which was armed. We had DIA that was armed. We had NCIS that was armed and we had of course the FBI in general that was armed. We had diplomatic security that was armed. When I got there I asked the question of what their rules of engagement were. It turned out they had never talked to each other about this and they had at least three if not more totally different rules of engagement. So, if there ever had been an incident it would have been very interesting as different armed people responded in totally different ways. This is a lesson for anyone going off to manage diplomatic, an organization where there are different types of armed people.

Q: Yes, that's one of those things you don't really think about except.

METRINKO: That was my old War College training though. I learned that there. I tell you something, if you're in a car driven by the Department of State Diplomatic Security and you have the FBI with you and someone attacks the car, you have totally different responses. What I would do would be every time there was a turnover of the head of any of those groups, bring them in immediately, let them sit down in a closed room with the heads of the other armed groups and say, guys, straighten this out now. You're the ones who determine what the rules are, straighten out and make sure you're all playing from the same amount of deck of cards and they did. It worked out, but it would take a while. Anyway.

MICHAEL METRINKO
Consular Officer
Sana'a (2002-2003)

Michael John Metrinko was born in Pennsylvania in 1946. He graduated from Georgetown University in 1968. After entering the Foreign Service in 1974, his postings have included Ankara, Damascus, Tehran, Tabriz, Krakow, Kabul, Tel Aviv and special assignments in Yemen and Afghanistan. Mr. Metrinko was interviewed in 1999 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Then what happened?

METRINKO: I left in August with an onward assignment as the WAE to go to Yemen to take over the consular section.

Q: You were in Yemen then from when to when?

METRINKO: I was in Yemen from October of 2002 until January of 2003.

Q: When to when now?

METRINKO: October 2002.

Q: To?

METRINKO: To January 2003, four months. No, actually, I'm sorry, I got there in September, it would have been September. I can double check on the dates.

Q: Well, that's all right. What was the situation in Aden at that time? Were you in Aden?

METRINKO: No, I was in Sanaa at the consular section of the embassy.

Q: How different did you find that from Aden?

METRINKO: Very, very different. In Aden I had spent all my time surrounded by guys with guns, surrounded by security forces of my own as the head and principal of an operation although it was only a ceremonial title. In Sanaa I was part of an embassy team in a very well run, well directed embassy which had all the functions of a normal diplomatic institution and I had real work to do all day long and sometimes very late at night. Interesting work and an interesting place. I was also able to go out without security most of the time. I also had my own apartment to live in and that was a semblance of a normal life. Friends, dinners, social life, going to the embassy in the morning, etc.

Q: How did you find, first of all who was the ambassador while you were there or was there one?

METRINKO: The ambassador was Edmund Hull, H-U-L-L.

Q: Yes. What was his background?

METRINKO: Edmund Hull is one of the Department's best Arabists. He spent Peace Corps and much of his career in the Arab world. He is an absolutely fluent speaker. His wife happens to be Palestinian from Jerusalem. You could not have found a better person to be ambassador in Yemen. He was, I mean absolutely perfectly prepared and was going a very good job.

Q: Consular wise what were you doing?

METRINKO: Consularwise, well, Yemen has a large American Yemeni population to begin with, probably about 40,000.

Q: I helped add to that back in the 1950s when I was in Dhahran. I was sending Yemenis to New York and Youngstown, Ohio.

METRINKO: You may have sent the families of the ones we've picked up and locked away.

Q: I remember they used to come straggling in.

METRINKO: Well, the guys who went there in the '50s are now back in Yemen and they're very rich and they have built huge chateau houses and they have big SUVs and their wives have lots of gold jewelry.

Q: You better explain, you used the term SUVs.

METRINKO: Oh, sport utility vehicle.

Q: It's a large almost a pickup truck with a fancy chassis on it.

METRINKO: Yes, exactly, it's like a big Jeep, a big fancy Jeep. The preferred mode of transportation for anybody with money in much of the undeveloped world because you can drive them over dirt.

Q: Where were their wives I mean what were their wives?

METRINKO: Well, you know, the Yemeni American community was very large and it had money that had been made in the United States often at things like running supermarkets, gas stations, commercial life of all sorts.

Q: When I was doing it we were sending them off to work in the mills.

METRINKO: The mills and the car factories.

Q: Yes, but that had ceased. I mean the places had ceased. They'd moved on.

METRINKO: They had moved on. There was a Yemeni American community, which meant there was a great deal of immigration and visa work. There was a great deal of registration of American babies, reports of birth, less reports of death, only occasionally if they had to give [permits to] work to the United States. Because of the number of young children, the number of young women and men who had become American citizens based on their parents having been in America, there was a lot of ongoing immigration work. It was considered something that would add to your value as a bride if you could guarantee the green card to your groom; it upped your price considerably. We had that. We had almost no standard tourism work. I mean Yemenis simply had been banned from going to the United States by us. I was there at a time when all of

the new regulations were in effect about either stopping or so rigorously proceeding with Arab visa applications that it was impossible for an Arab male to get a visa to go to America. Unfortunately, many of these procedures had been put into effect that summer which meant that all of the students who had returned to Yemen. The Yemeni students who were studying in the United States could return to Yemen for the summer got stuck and could not return to school in the United States. This was a problem that every diplomatic post in a Muslim country was facing all around that region of the world and it was a major foreign relations problem. We were not giving routine visas to anybody. If you wanted a tourist visa you had to be a real VIP or somehow get yourself an aid referral or be referred to a truant officer of the embassy to the consular section. We did have those. Basically it was a very restrained or constrained visa operation.

NIV was very brisk. We had a steady stream, you know, several a day of NIV work, non-immigrant visa and a lot of American citizen work. We also had a very active warden system. When I was there indeed we had a terrorist attack on the American hospital and three Americans were killed. This was in January of the year 2003. The hospital of Jibla, J-I-B-L-A.

Q: Who did it did you say?

METRINKO: It was done by one man who was very familiar with the hospital. His wife had been a patient there. It was a missionary hospital. The three people he killed were two elderly, I mean, an elderly nurse, an elderly doctor and an elderly office worker, all of whom had been there for many, many years and devoted their lives to the hospital, maintaining it.

Q: What was the motivation?

METRINKO: The trial was just over recently and I haven't seen the results of the trial. I didn't really follow it after I left, but the motivation, my understanding of it was the Americans were doing too well. They were missionaries indeed in a very, very radically Muslim area. They were sort of placid missionaries. If somebody asked them a question about Christianity they would respond. If they were asked for books they would give, but they would not proselytize actively. The person who did this was what we now call a Muslim fanatic. I'm not sure if it's a good term, but that's what the newspapers use. He did he said because he thought they were having too much of an impact on the community. These were people who spent their time doing good works. They were out volunteering. They were out visiting the prisons; visiting the poor, giving free medical assistance to all sorts of people in the town and apparently bearing witness if you will in the Christian sense. This guy did not like it.

Q: Did you get any feel for the reaction within the Yemeni community?

METRINKO: A lot of reaction. I had been in that town two days before just by chance. I had passed through. I had visited an American prisoner there. We had six or seven prisoners in the country, American Yemeni prisoners. I had done my prison visit. I left and I came back to Sanaa and arrived back in the evening and the next morning I received a call from the hospital from one of the doctors who was crying. He said they had just been attacked and people had been killed. The reaction in the community was I would say extremely outgoing for the Americans. These

Americans were very well known. The officials in the community were aghast. The head of the prison for example, in the town told me the next day that, the killer was captured immediately. He was captured that same day. He was well known. The people knew who he was. He walked in and they just thought he was doing regular business in the hospital with the hospital staff when he walked in. The warden of the prison told me they could not even put him in the regular prison when they captured him because one of the doctors, a woman, had been the prison doctor and she had volunteered at the prison once a week and was the one who would talk to all the prisoners. She spoke very good Arabic apparently. She would carry messages to their wives. She would take messages to their kids, bring letters back and forth, etc. She was sort of regarded as a mother by the entire prison population of the city. The warden said that if we bring the guy here, the killer here, the other prisoners will kill him. Now, that having been said, I'm not sure that was how other Yemeni in this establishment and others feel about it, I have no way of knowing.

Q: Did you get any feel for a growing or maybe it was an established fanaticism within the, this Muslim area against the United States? I mean, you know, I mean, well, this is so much has been happening and we are tagged with supporting Israel and attacking the Palestinians and all that. Did you get any feel?

METRINKO: Let me distinguish between Afghanistan and Yemen. In Afghanistan the entire time I was there both times, both in Herat and in Kabul the year before I do not recall any Afghan ever bringing up the subject of Israel or the Palestinians. The average Afghan doesn't like Arabs, doesn't give a damn what happens to them and because they had so little access to the news they don't really know much about- (end of tape)

I remember a chargé coming back once from a meeting and saying one of the best things about being in Afghanistan is that you don't have to worry about getting beaten up on the Palestinian issue every time you saw an official. Nobody ever mentioned it, they didn't care. I think they disliked, they disliked Arabs so intensely that if they thought about the Palestinian issue they were kind of good. They had no love for Israel either and basically didn't know anything about them. I mean this is Asia. It's not the Middle East. It was far away from things.

Q: Did Iraq play a lot, a role?

METRINKO: No, it did, but it didn't. There was one statement attributed to the governor of Herat who had been, a speech he was giving at one of the local mosques said that the American invasion of Iraq was the same as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Maybe he said it; it was attributed to him, but not clear. The top clergyman, the top mullah, in Herat looked at me when I asked him about Iraq and he said, "We have never forgotten that Saddam Hussein applauded the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and he supported it."

Q: Well, we'll come back.

METRINKO: You know, I think the chief Afghan reaction to our invasion of Iraq was that oh my God they're going to spend money there, they could be spending here instead.

Q: That's one of the political. I mean they're right. It is a matter of concern. How about in Yemen? We're talking about fanaticism and anti-Americanism.

METRINKO: Yemen is very, very different. Number one it's the home ground of Osama Bin Laden. His family is from Yemen originally. His father was Yemeni, not Saudi. Yemen borders Saudi Arabia. Yemenis are always in Mecca. They're in places like that. They're not particularly pro-Palestinian. No one is, but Yemen if you'll recall was one of the few countries that openly supported Saddam Hussein during our first war with him. In fact, they supported his invasion of Kuwait and they paid dearly for that support because when that war was over Kuwait and Saudi Arabia simply ceased giving any assistance to Yemen. So, they paid big time for their support. They learned a lesson then.

Yemen has a far more conservative approach to religion. Afghans and Yemenis are both religious - at least in outward appearance they're both religious - but I never felt uncomfortable for a moment with any Afghan [mullah] I met. They were always hospitable and pleasant. I didn't meet more than one or two Yemeni [mullahs] and they happened to be American Yemenis. In Afghanistan it was very easy to go into a mosque and if you were old you could walk into them. I knew religious leaders. I knew religious teachers. I saw them all the time. In Yemen this simply wasn't done. I don't think that the embassy has any relationship with the Yemeni religious hierarchy that I know of. It's possible the political section did, but we sure did not in the consular section. As opposed to Afghanistan where I had good relations all the time with Afghan religious personnel or people. I never myself was subjected to any sort of pressure or problem because of our support for Israel in Yemen. I was met unfailingly with hospitality and friendliness by Yemenis. On the other hand I don't speak Arabic, so I don't know what was being said, you know, behind my back, but in Yemen I got out a great deal. I went to homes, Yemeni homes for dinners and I left the city many times to go off on visits to see my prisoners, to visit the American communities in various places and the subject was never brought up with me really.

Q: How did you find the Yemeni Americans? How were they, what were they up to in Yemen and were they a problem or not for the Yemenis or the Americans.

METRINKO: No, just the opposite. They were building big houses. They were buying big cars. They were putting up satellite dishes. They had very beautiful houses. I mean, you know, regular little palaces. They were investing in agriculture. There were tractors, things like that. They were opening up businesses and it was considered very much, very desirable to go to America to get involved with one of these families that you could get the money to go to America yourself. Whether or not any of them support Al Qaeda, etc. I have no idea. The ones that I met were friendly and hospitable to me. It's a rather strange thing. It's a town in Yemen called Al Qaeda. That's the name of it. I passed through it at least ten or 20 times on my various visits. It's about six hours from Sanaa. It's funny: the sign at the beginning of the town, "Welcome to Al Qaeda," at both ends of the town, went up after the attack on the towers. There was no problem with it; it's just that so many people wanted to stand to get their photographs taken under the sign. These were mostly the foreigners which I actually have my photograph. Luckily I remembered not to send the film into the United States to get developed. I had it developed locally because I don't know what would have happened if I had sent film in, you know, given the psychologically in

America right now and someone had seen me standing with a gun and I had a scarf around my head under a sign that said Al Qaeda.

Q: Going back to my experiences when I was in Belgrade and particularly in Macedonia with Yugoslav Macedonians often went to the United States and then they would come back and get themselves a bride. Do you have a line on this?

METRINKO: You know, big time, yes. In fact, it was sort of standard. You have by now the second and third generations, often the third generations in the United States. People go back and forth all the time. It's sort of like this constant coming and going and sifting of people. Cousins, brothers, uncles, aunts, grandma, grandpa, mom, dad, your daughter, your son are back and forth. Now, the American Yemenis who have not been to Yemen are sent back in their late teens to sort of get to know the place, to spend a year or so with grandma and grandpa or an aunt or an uncle, and very often to pick up a bride or a husband. So, we had a fair number of young American girls who were Yemeni by background coming back to marry guys who spoke no English and we had a fair number of young guys from New Jersey and California who were coming back and had just married a non-English speaking bride from the family village. Yes.

Q: That's kind of fun.

METRINKO: It's kind of fun and they're very often very nice, interesting people. I met a lot of nice people that way.

Q: Yes. You mentioned these Yemeni Americans in jail. What did they get in jail for and how were they treated?

METRINKO: Yemeni jails are not unpleasant, not particularly. In fact, how many did I visit? I visited four different Yemeni jails. Everybody was in jail because of a homicide. Often homicide involving either honor or land. Now, in one case for example, well, an automobile problem involving a death afterwards where the guys got out and had a fight and somebody opened up fire. A fight over land with an uncle and somebody getting killed. People get put into jail and there is a death penalty in Yemen. Somehow or other my predecessors in Yemen had forgotten to pay attention to the prisoners. They simply had stopped visiting and they had stopped keeping records. I've always felt particularly sensitive to knowing about prisoners. It's an important, that's why the Foreign Service is [there], after all.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: The first thing I did when I arrived there was to ask for a list and then get it checked. The FSN in charge of this had just come newly to the job. He'd only been there for a month or so. He didn't know he was supposed to have been doing this. The officers who had been there had simply not done it apparently. We discovered that one American had been executed and nobody even knew for example. Others were out of jail and others were in jail, but we got it all sorted out. Basically they were American men or American guys who had come there at least in four cases, American guys who had come to Yemen on these long visits and had

not understood how far you could or could not go. Yemenis who grew up in Yemen know the parameters of behavior. The American guys would come from California or New Jersey and on arrival at the airport be presented with their own Uzi or their own G-3 automatic or semi-automatic and a dagger and a belt to wear. Unfortunately they didn't know when and how to use this stuff. So I had at least four American young guys because of that sort of dumb, stupid, nice guys, a little bit of testosterone back home, back in Yemen for the first time with too much money, probably reacting to the reaction of Yemeni guys to them.

Q: What about blood feuds? I've that heard in Afghanistan you don't want to get involved with a blood feud, which we can talk about later, but what about in Yemen?

METRINKO: Yes, there are. Yemen has been a fairly stable society for a very long time. Yemeni society is still as feudal as Afghanistan is. It's tribal, feudal, with little remote villages and people who carry individualism to a real large extent living in towers. It's there. I don't know enough about it to go farther than to say that it's there, but certainly fighting over land is common. Two of my young Americans were in prison because they had gotten involved in a fight involving land claims.

Q: Did you run into the problem of Yemeni American guys or just Yemenis gone to the United States, married an American girl, brought her back to meet the folks, had a baby and then she couldn't get out? It certainly was a problem in Saudi Arabia and it continues to be and Iran and Iraq.

METRINKO: The Yemenis have the same sorts of laws that the other countries do about women not being allowed to travel without parental permission or without spousal permission. In my time there we had a couple of cases that seemed to be developing in that way, but they never really developed full-time. In other words, women who came in and would complain about the way their husbands were treating them, but nothing really definite in my time there. We could counsel them, we could give them advice, we could tell them the law and that was about it. No one who ever actually said, "I have to get out of here and I want to take my kid with me."

Q: How about while you were in Yemen did you, how were communications with consular affairs and all that?

METRINKO: Right now, I mean it's good because everyone has e-mail now. In fact all of my officers communicated routinely everyday on their own with their counterparts back in the Department. I did with people in CA. Communications I'd say are excellent now as opposed to pre-e-mail. Now, you have to know who to communicate with. We had good communications. We answered congressionals that way. Most of our congressionals would never have been seen by the ambassador and the DCM. We answered them routinely by e-mail because that's how things are done. It's all e-mail.

Q: Did you find, I mean, you're still a creature of the older Foreign Service and all, did you find this instant communication a good thing or a nuisance or how did you find it?

METRINKO: Well, in general a good thing. You have access now to a great deal of expertise that we never had. In the old days everything would have had to come through the boss who would have then have gotten it through the DCM or through the ambassador even to ask routine questions of the Department. Now you don't have to bother with that. In fact, much of the routine work I didn't have to bother with at all. I could point my officers in the right direction and I could often say, really you ought to ask someone about this in the Department.

To give you an example, because of the changes in visa processing for Arab males were having to wait forever and ever for the FBI and the CIA and the State Department to clear applicants. Even after they were interviewed their names would be sent in and it would take several weeks or several months to get a response from the Department on individual cases. You could work around that by dealing directly by e-mail with the agencies concerned or the Department saying these six cases are okay. They have time until next semester. This one has a week to go and you could have five, ten, 20 e-mails back and forth to get it straightened out. Without ever, no one in the sort of upper floor of the embassy ever even knowing this was happening. Certainly I did that, my officers did that, trying to get things straightened out like that.

Q: I must say, one of the things one always learned as a consular officer even back in my time was try to keep the ambassador and DCM and all out of it because they don't know what you're doing and they're too used to getting clearances and puzzling over it.

METRINKO: Or trying to set you off in a different direction. I would say you know, this embassy was a real exception. The ambassador was excellent. The DCM was excellent. Of course I attended staff meetings all the time. The ambassador was also a personal friend, which makes a big difference. The DCM was one of, I think one of the best DCMs I've ever see, Alan Mizenheimer, I think really, really good. He did not have a strong background in consular affairs, but he knew that he had to understand it. He did a very, very good job. We had every week like clockwork he was down in the section for an hour meeting or an hour and a half meeting on consular issues. He would say things, I would say things and this was, we're going to have this meeting no matter what's happening and we did every week. Plus access immediately whenever I needed it or whenever he needed it for an exception. We worked very carefully with visa referrals, he and I to keep the ambassador's name out of things for example. You don't want your ambassador talking about visas with people at cocktail parties. So, the ambassador and he both knew whenever a visa question came up they would give somebody my card or my name and phone number and ask them to call me and that's how I got it. This worked and they were professional. Very, very professional. They also knew the area so well that it made a big difference, too.

Q: What was your feeling about almost, well, the understandable clamp down on Muslim young men getting visas because you know, to me a name check sounds, names can be dillied with and a short interview is not going to. You know, you say, are you a terrorist and normally the answer would be no no matter what they are. I mean I'm not quite sure what this, how this would work.

METRINKO: Clamping down on travel by Muslim men to the United States and especially on education travel, coming here to study is one of the stupidest things the American foreign policy

and security establishments have ever done. The reasoning is simple. The leadership in Afghanistan today are friendly to the United States and open to American officials because they have all studied or lived in the United States. This goes on and on and on country after country I've been in. People make friends, they marry here, often they have wives here and then they go back to their own country and take a position and become very useful both in helping us and explaining us to their colleagues. What we have done is ensured that our successes ten years from and 15 years from now will not have that. That when they go in to see an official in Yemen or in Saudi Arabia or in Indonesia or Malaysia or wherever, 15 years down the road that that person will be somewhat hostile from the beginning because that person either got screwed financially by us or lost his chances of an education in the United States. The people who come to the United States in general to get educated here are people with a little bit of money and a little bit of standing already.

I remember one report from our embassy in Indonesia was that the visa problem, the visas for children of VIPs, members of the parliament, etc., was the major foreign policy issue that the embassy was facing because so many hundreds of them had gone back to Indonesia for the summer and the change had come [before they returned]. I was dealing with very, very well placed VIP students who could not come back to America and who lost either their semester or the rest of their education in the United States. I could think of several cases of that where fathers were highly placed officials and they also lost things like their down payments on their apartments or their... They lost thousands of dollars and it just went on like that.

Q: The problem is anyone knowing anything about the business, the screening really doesn't, it is so I mean it's hard to think that the screening can do anything or if it does it can be taken care. I mean if there is something to it and if you put the name in and it's various ways. It either will turn something up right away or it won't.

METRINKO: Well, I've also, I've always felt this way that if somebody was really coming from an organization who was going to do an act of terrorism against the United States especially now they wouldn't use their own name. They would have a pseudonym or they would be using a passport belonging to someone else and there would be no way to find this out.

EDMUND JAMES HULL
Ambassador
Yemen (2001-2004)

Ambassador Hull was born in Iowa and raised in Illinois. He was educated at Princeton and Oxford Universities. After service in the Peace Corps, Mr. Hull joined the Foreign Service in 1974 and had postings in Amman, Beirut, Jerusalem, Tunis and Cairo as well as serving as Ambassador to Yemen from 2001 to 2004. In Washington, the Ambassador served on the National Security Council and as Advisor to the Secretary of State on Counterterrorism. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005

Q: You're going off to Yemen. How would you describe Yemen's political economic situation before you went out and sort of the situation that you were going to?

HULL: Of course, the primary U.S. interest in Yemen was the interest of counterterrorism, and Yemen had been identified by Al Qaeda as an important node in their international network. Al Qaeda used Yemen not only as a base to launch attacks in Yemen, e.g. the USS Cole attack, but also as a location to support attacks elsewhere in the world, notably the East African attack. The linkages also included linkages to the 9/11 attacks. In fact, one of the pieces of evidence which linked Al Qaeda to 9/11 attacks was obtained in Yemen by a very astute FBI agent who, in questioning of people detained in Yemen related to the Cole attack, helped establish Al Qaeda's responsibility for 9/11.

Yemen had been ruled by President Saleh for 25 years. Saleh had come to power as a young colonel. No one had given him much chance of lasting. There had been a number of coup d'état before his takeover and most expected those to continue, but Saleh proved them wrong and proved to be a very wily politician who had established control over a very difficult political situation. The difficulty derives in part from a relatively weak central government and very strong tribes especially in the north of the country. Saleh had, in addition, pulled off the remarkable feat of uniting northern Yemen with southern Yemen and that had happened in the early '90s in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union when the Marxists in Aden found themselves without a patron, with very few political options and had agreed to unity with the North. That unity had been challenged in the mid-90s when the south attempted to secede, but Saleh successfully defeated that secession and kept the country unified.

Q: How did he do that?

Hall: That's part of the story. He relied in that on tribal support from the north and also support from the mujaheddin, the Islamic fundamentalist fighters who had fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets. Therefore, there were very important and very significant links between the government in Sana'a and this radical group. That was what was giving the FBI and the Naval Criminal Investigation Service (NCIS) a great deal of concern in investigating the Cole attack because the question was to what extent were government officials complicit in the Al Qaeda attack against the USS Cole.

Economically the Hunt Oil Company of Texas had discovered a modest amount of oil in the Ma'rib area of Yemen. That's the northeast part of Yemen, and they had constructed an oil pipeline across Yemen to a point on the Red Sea above Hodeida. That was Yemen's economic lifeline. Some 90% of Yemen's hard currency was derived from the sale of that oil. Otherwise, Yemen was the odd man out in the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries had a great deal of money and very little population therefore very high per capita income. Yemen was the opposite. It had very little national income and a very large population and therefore it was a country that was among the poorest and least developed in the world.

Q: When you went out there, how stood relations with the United States? Yemen is not

supportive in the first Gulf War. It probably is in opposition.

HULL: Indeed. In the '90s, Yemen had a seat on the Security Council and was one of the few countries that voted against the UN Security Council resolution authorizing Operation Desert Storm. As a direct consequence of that, Jim Baker had largely terminated our military and our economic assistance programs in Yemen. Relations had gone into a deep freeze. Of course, with the attack on the Cole and with the suspicion in the CIA, FBI and NCIS about possible official complicity, relations were difficult, to say the least. There was much speculation in the American media and in some circles in Washington that Yemen should be a future target in the "War on Terror." After we had dealt with Afghanistan, Yemen was a prime candidate for future U.S. military operations.

Q: What was your perception? Were you going out as a hatchet man or a smoother over or what were you going to be doing? What was your agenda?

HULL: I had been to Yemen the previous year in my capacity as acting director for counterterrorism, and I had on that occasion met President Saleh, Prime Minister Iryani, the foreign minister, the interior minister, and some of the military. I had also talked with Ambassador Bodine, at that time our ambassador there. I had also been in touch with the FBI and NCIS ever since the Cole attack itself. So I had a very good sense of how the investigation had occurred and the substantive results of the investigation. It was a mixed picture. The FBI had gone into Yemen and at that time the investigation was being led by John O'Neill, a legendary figure in counterterrorism. The FBI had gone into Aden with the expectation that they could operate as they had in East Africa, in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam where they had been given a blank check by the governments and really, pretty much a free hand. It was a very different situation in Yemen. Of course, Arab and Islamic countries had a great sensitivity to American presence, to American dictates and in this case of course, the government had connections they were very sensitive. So they frankly had things to hide. The investigation really preceded by fits and starts. Our ambassador, Barbara Bodine tried very, very hard to press it, but John O'Neill wanted an even more confrontational approach. That sparked a conflict of two very strong personalities, and Ambassador Bodine eventually denied John O'Neill country clearance to pursue the investigation, and the FBI had to send an alternate lead for the investigation. That had surfaced in The Washington Post. Secretary Powell was not happy with State Department and the FBI squabbling surfacing in the media, and one of my objectives on arriving in Yemen was to get a team effort and a more productive investigation.

The investigation had moved from Aden to Sana'a. While in Aden the FBI felt itself as much a target as investigators and the level of paranoia was very high indeed. They brought that attitude with them to Sana'a. They would not sleep in hotels. They slept on the compound in a makeshift dormitory. They would go outside the embassy compound only for investigation purposes and for as little time as possible. There was a great deal of friction between the diplomatic security elements who insisted on providing protection and the FBI which wanted very much to protect itself by a much more overt show of force. One of my early undertakings was to sit down with all involved and to hammer out arrangements so the investigation could be pursued. In that regard I had a couple of advantages. I had very good friends in the FBI from the interagency process, the

counterterrorism security group process, so I really came to Sana'a with a good reputation. We were able to come to an understanding, and they knew clearly that pursuing the investigation and getting results from the investigation was one of the highest priorities that I had as ambassador.

We were greatly assisted by the post-9/11 atmosphere because there was a great deal of sympathy for the United States government. We received many expressions of sympathy and condolences from ordinary Yemenis as well as official Yemenis and so, in that propitious environment, we were able to press the investigation and to get Yemeni cooperation in a number of ways, including handing over of significant amounts of documents and other evidence that was even allowed to be removed to Washington for processing by the FBI laboratories. So we're in a situation where the investigation was showing very gratifying results and moods brightened and cooperation within the embassy and between the embassy and the Yemeni security organs was prospering.

Q: I talked with Mike Metrisko who was there before you got there. The thing was scary because you had the State Department security people, you had the FBI and he had I think the Navy investigators. All these people had different views of the situation. They were running around, driving on the sidewalks and they were sort of hostile to each other and making a hell of a lot of enemies among just ordinary people. It was a bureaucratic mess, and they were armed.

HULL: Mike was talking about this situation in Aden. He had deployed to Aden and, as I said, paranoia was added to legitimate threat. Yes, the situation was teetering on the brink of being out of control, and there was a real mix of people overreacting. Great damage being done. There was a lot of talent and high motivation, but the trick was to bring it together in a team effort. Some of the FBI investigators were among the best informed on Al Qaeda in the world. I'm thinking of a number of Arab-Americans, who spoke fluent Arabic and had an encyclopedic knowledge of Al Qaeda, at least as far as their cases were concerned. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service also had thoroughly professional people. Our station had some talented people, including Arab-Americans. It was the ambassador's job to take all this talent and put it together in a team so that people would feel comfortable with each other and that we would show more results. That was our approach.

Q: How did the investigation come out?

HULL: The investigation eventually led to trials in Yemen and convictions of the key Al Qaeda participants. In this regard, there's much to be said because in between there were jail breaks and recaptures, and we'll get to some of that, but the bottom line was the Yemenis eventually, with a great deal of help from the FBI and NCIS, were able to convict and sentence the perpetrators.

Q: During this was the Al Qaeda operation also moving? Did they have something in Africa too?

HULL: Al Qaeda's main effort was directed against the embassy. They had links to Eastern Africa but the most active plotting was to attack the embassy or failing that, other American targets. We knew this from intelligence that we were gathering through various means, intelligence that proved quite reliable, if piecemeal. Initially, in 2001 and 2002 it was really a

question of whether with the cooperation of the Yemenis, we would get Al Qaeda or whether Al Qaeda would get us.

Q: How cooperative was the Yemeni government?

HULL: The Yemeni government in the aftermath of 9/11 said the right things. Saleh had sent a private message to President Bush pledging support. Soon after I arrived in a national holiday speech, Saleh had reiterated publicly that support. But the whole question was whether or not they could convert that rhetorical support into practical cooperation and show results. So we really needed to do so, and we also needed to resolve this issue of whether in the “War on Terror” Yemen was going to be a target of the United States or whether it was going to be a partner of the United States. There was a great deal of speculation in the Western media that it was going to be the former, which caused the Yemenis great nervousness.

I was asked about this early on at a town hall meeting held for American citizens in Yemen. What you must know is there are about 30,000 American citizens in Yemen, vast numbers of them, and the vast majority of those are Yemeni-Americans who came to the United States, many who were recruited by Henry Ford to man the assembly lines in Detroit and then had returned to Yemeni with modest savings and lived there comfortably. So we had a lot of constituents in that sense. At an early meeting in my residence, I had a standing-room only crowd, primarily Yemeni-Americans. The regional security officer at the time, Chance Rowe, was made extremely nervous because most of them were wearing their “jambiyas”, their ceremonial daggers, and he didn’t know how wise it was to send his ambassador into that kind of a meeting. But they were all very happy to be invited, they were very curious about the new ambassador and one of their first questions was whether Yemen was a target in the war on terror. I went out on a limb and expressed my opinion that Yemen was a “partner” and not a “target” and that we would get much better results through that partnership than otherwise. This was reported, as I knew it would be, in the international media, and I never heard any kind of rebuke from Washington, so at least at that stage I was going to get enough slack to explore a counterterrorism partnership with the Yemeni government.

Q: In Afghanistan the Taliban was giving refuge to Al Qaeda, to the training camps and all that. Was there anything, what was he doing?

HULL: That’s an excellent point because in Yemen there were no fixed training camps and U.S. military action would have been against very amorphous targets. Not to say that there weren’t identifiable targets, but it would’ve been a very difficult and costly undertaking, and when it was looked at, I think, that was seen to be the case. We had from Saleh, both a private and the public pledges of support, so as ambassador, my priority was to convert that into practical action. When I made my initial call on the president to present my credentials I was given an early opportunity to raise specific issues. Now normally presentation of credentials are protocol affairs and no business takes place, but I had decided we didn’t have time for protocol and in scheduling the event, President Saleh also indicated to me that he would not be adverse to talking business. Not only did I get the presentation opportunity very shortly after having arrived, but he also re-jiggered the order of ambassadors to leave me the last ambassador and therefore, to leave time

after the ceremony for a substantive discussion. In that discussion, I handed President Saleh a memorandum in which we detailed for him two individuals who were playing leading roles in Al Qaeda in Yemen. One was Abu Ali, who was really the godfather of Al Qaeda in Yemen, and the second was Abu Assem, who was a Saudi and who was the primary financier for Al Qaeda operations in Yemen. I asked the president for assistance in either capturing or killing these specific individuals. We agreed that we would establish a special channel to pursue this objective, and we were therefore launched as quickly as possible.

Q: How did that play out?

HULL: Well, a number of things happened. On the intelligence front, of course, there was this defense vs. offense game going on. We knew Al Qaeda wanted to attack the embassy or American targets and therefore we had to initially strengthen our defenses. When I arrived, the embassy was shut down. The same authorized departure that made it impossible for my wife to accompany me to Yemen had caused most of the embassy operations to close and people were at home. This over a long period debilitated our operations and so an initial objective was to get the embassy more secure and get people back to work. The regional security officer, Chance Rowe, had ideas and took me on a tour, showed me upgrades that have been made by my predecessor and explained to me additional things he wanted to do including closing off a grilled part of the front wall and replacing it with a masonry structure to block views into the compound, mounting barbed wire on the walls to prevent scaling them and a number of other measures which I immediately gave the go-ahead to. My predecessor had been reluctant because of concern that the embassy would become a fortress. I gave priority to the security of the compound, but also because in Yemen, because of centuries of instability, individual homes and buildings were fortress-like. The Yemenis took for granted that you would secure your place of residence against attack by others so I didn't think we stood out in the Yemeni culture. In any case, we fortified the embassy, and we also began very intense intelligence gathering to try to figure out what Al Qaeda planned and counter that.

We got the embassy back to work, but the authorized departure had sent home the majority of people. We had no public diplomacy, we had no economic section. I think at the time we had one political officer. We were really limping along.

Q: How about consular? With so many Yemeni-Americans there, this would be overwhelming for the consular officer.

HULL: We had a consular section, three officers as well as locally hired people, and we got them functioning again because you're right. We had a very large consular operation and an important one to a lot of Yemenis and to the Americans who were still in Yemen.

Q: Were you able to rely on or was there concern about the Yemeni security forces?

HULL: We had an interesting security situation. We had our local guard force, of course. We had the Marine guard unit, and they were augmented by U.S. military deployed TDY. The intelligence people and the FBI also had security capabilities. Outside the compound, we had a

guard force from the Central Security Forces of the Ministry of Interior and we had also agents from the Political Security Organization which was Yemen's equivalent of the CIA. They were there not only to protect us, but also to keep track of embassy operations. So we really relied upon the Central Security Forces under the Ministry of Interior. In this regard, we were quite fortunate because Minister of Interior Rashid al-Alimi proved to be a remarkably competent partner. The force itself was under the command of the president's nephew, and he too proved to be an unusually conscientious and effective commander. So for our own security we had two very good partners.

Q: In spite of the situation there, the local tribesmen continue to kidnap people. I mean there's an awful lot of ransom and all that. Were these things going on?

HULL: We were very concerned about kidnapping. When I was in charge of counterterrorism at the State Department, on a number of occasions we had incidents of kidnapping of foreigners in Yemen so I was very aware of the problem. Usually these were not strictly speaking terrorist incidents. Oftentimes, local tribesmen would have a grudge against the government. Perhaps there would be family members detained, perhaps it would be lack of government response to needs for services or roads or health. The tribes would take a foreigner hostage, treat him or her well, but only release them when the government made some concession. Of course, this was insidious because it led to an attitude that this was harmless kidnapping and it was also kidnapping that occurred with impunity because the tribesmen were rarely punished. The outside world couldn't distinguish between tribal kidnapping and terrorist kidnapping so Yemen's reputation was suffering and on occasion in the mid-90s, the kidnapping had tipped into actual terrorists incidents. On one notable occasion, foreigners were taken captive by terrorists who were demanding release of colleagues and other political demands. In that incident, the Yemeni forces had actually undertaken military action and two of the foreigners died. The situation was unstable and detrimental to Yemen's reputation.

Early on I undertook a concerted effort to stigmatize any kidnapping as terrorist and spent quite a bit of time in my early days making the rounds of tribal sheiks in Sana'a, meeting with them and arguing with them to speak out against this practice of kidnapping with several sheiks actually doing that. Gradually, the onus began to develop on anyone who kidnapped foreigners.

Q: North Yemen tribal and southern Yemen more developed: is that a good way of visualizing it?

HULL: There's a lot of truth in that. The south was quite different. They had a different history, they had the British rule direct and indirect, and they had the Marxist regime. Southerners were generally more sophisticated, better educated than people in the north. The tribal structures in the south had been attenuated whereas tribes were still robust in the north. So there was still, in many ways, two Yemens. But Saleh had very cannily recruited a team of individuals from the south into his government. The Prime Minister and the foreign minister for example. At the time, Saleh had rather effectively papered over the differences. He spent a great deal of time in the south, in Aden particularly during the winter to send a number of signals; one, that he was president of all of Yemen and two, he delighted in occupying the residence of the former British High Commissioner to remind everyone that Yemen had succeeded in throwing off the yoke of

colonial rule. It was not a perfect situation but it was functioning, and Saleh was attending to it.

Q: How were relations between the two neighbors, Oman and Saudi Arabia?

HULL: The relations with both were improving. Historically, they had been very tense, and Yemen had fought with both Oman and Saudi Arabia. The Sultan of Oman had come to power in part by successfully resolving the Dhofar rebellion and that's the part of Omar that borders Yemen. The Omanis were quite adept at winning over the Yemenis subsequently by their diplomacy and the modest aid program helping build, for example, roads. By my day, relations with the Omanis were quite good.

With Saudi Arabia of course, there was a great deal of tension up to the mid-'90s when the Saudis were backing the secessionists in South Yemen in their civil war against the North. But with the coming to power of Abdullah, as Crown Prince and then eventually King a different tack was taken by the Saudis, and they implemented a very astute diplomacy to make the Yemenis the good neighbor. That had culminated in 2000 with the Treaty of Jeddah which had finally established the border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. When I arrived in Yemen in 2001, a German company was in the process of actually demarcating that border that had been agreed. In this instance Robert Frost's observation held true: good fences make good neighbors. The Saudis were very active, very influential and in their own way, very generous with the Yemenis, and the relationship was a good one. That's not to say that there weren't very serious issues. The Saudis perceived Yemen as a source of weapons, explosives, terrorists and drugs. The Yemenis perceived the Saudis as a source of financing for Al Qaeda in Yemen. As you recall, the chief financier in Yemen was Abu Assem al Mekki, a Saudi who was drawing upon very deep Saudi pockets for Al Qaeda operations. So both sides had issues.

Q: Bin Laden or someone in his family was very much involved in the honey trade that was centered in Yemen. Was that anything at all?

HULL: Not much. Yemen does produce the best honey in the world, especially in the Hadramaut, which is bin Laden's ancestral homeland. The counterterrorism community in Washington took a long look at the honey trade to see whether it was a vehicle for terrorist financing. I remember I decided one day that I had to get smarter about honey because there was talk in Washington of doing something about this perceived problem. I went to a honey shop in Sana'a and got a lecture from the owner who warned me that there was a great deal of deceit that took place in the honey business, and the main culprits were unscrupulous dealers who would take inferior honey from the United States and mix it with the superior honey from Yemen and sell it as pure Yemeni honey. I was advised to be on the lookout for such crimes and given a number of practical tests for the honey to make sure that it was unadulterated. In the end, as far as I could tell, counterfeit honey had as much or more claim to being a problem as honey financing of terrorism.

Q: What about Iran and its influence? Was it a factor?

HULL: It was, but I think we should leave that for the end of the discussion because it comes to the fore in 2004.

Q: Were you able to get a public diplomacy operation going?

HULL: First, we had to get some cooperation going because public diplomacy is rarely effective in the abstract. You really need the right policy and the right programs and then you can convey them through public diplomacy.

Al Qaeda was enjoying quasi sanctuaries in Ma'rib, Jowf and Shabwa. We needed to be able to get into those areas to function there and to gain the support of the tribes. President Saleh provided me an opening for this in my initial months in Sana'a when he called me late one night, as was his habit to call you around 11:00 or midnight when he had something on his mind. He made a plea with me to undertake economic assistance, development efforts in these deprived areas. This was exactly what I was looking for, a presidential invitation for us to do something in these difficult, remote areas. I did research on the tribes, including using Paul Dresch's work, and it seemed to me that the problem was we had a vicious circle in places like Ma'rib. You had bad governance which led to an alienated population, which led to continuing violence, which led to discouraging any kind of investment, which meant unemployment, which meant more violence and fed into the government ignoring the area and back to bad governance. What it seemed to me was we needed to replace that vicious circle with a virtuous circle; improving the governance of the area, attracting developmental investment, foreign investment, creating jobs, improving services, strengthening governance and then around and around.

I came up with PowerPoint presentation. We did it in Arabic because generally we functioned with most of the Yemeni ministries in Arabic. It was about an eight- or nine- slide presentation. I needed some way to get it reality checked with the president, and I chose for that his political adviser, Abdul Karim Al-Iriani, who is perhaps the most brilliant man in Yemen, a former prime minister and a former foreign minister. He came from a long line of intellectuals and judges and was himself extremely well educated. He had a Ph.D. from Yale, and was one of the few individuals who could deal with President Saleh without personal fear. So I took my approach to Abdul Karim, explained that this was my thinking generated by the president's request and asked him to take a look at it and see if it was suitable.

Now about this time another significant event occurred, and that was I got a call from Ryan Crocker in the NEA front office saying that there was a possibility of President Saleh being invited to Washington. This was something that I pushed for before leaving for Sana'a at the NSC with Zal Khalilzad, who was then senior director for the Middle East and South Asia. It had turned out that there was an opening in late November, and Saleh was being considered for that opening. The problem was that it was during the month of Ramadan and in taking the dates to President Saleh, I knew it would be extremely difficult for him to travel during the month of fasting, but nevertheless, I raised them. As expected, Saleh noted the problems it would cause for him, said he would be delighted to go but asked if we could back it up to December. When I checked with Washington, not surprisingly, December was not a viable time period. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas there were short work weeks and a packed schedule so it was really Ramadan or nothing. I so presented it to the president, and he accepted the Ramadan timing.

In conjunction with the visit then, Al Iriani had proposed that we also take a look at some kind of memorandum of understanding on the issue of counterterrorism whereby each side would lay out what it could do for the other in the various areas of military cooperation, intelligence cooperation, and economic development, etc. It was not meant to be a legally binding agreement or a detailed enumeration, but rather to put down broad principles that could serve as a basis. I agreed to take a crack at drafting such an agreement and after doing so sent it back to Washington for its opinion and also made a copy available to Al Iriani for him to take a look at.

The following Friday I was on my way to the Yemeni Equestrian Club because I often went horseback riding on Friday, and got a phone call while in the car that President Saleh wanted to see me urgently. I turned around, went back to the embassy, changed from my riding gear, went to the president's office and found an absolutely irate President Saleh who proceeded to take me to task for the plan and for the "treaty" that I had proposed. It took me a little bit of time before I realized what had happened. The documents that I given Al Iriani for his private reaction had been sent on to the presidency and then the presidency had sent them onto the Cabinet and they had caused a political firestorm. I had never seen the president quite this irate before and I honestly thought that my days in Sana'a were numbered and that I would be deemed *persona non grata* in short order. President Saleh ranted for a considerable amount of time. When he finally calmed down, I very quietly went through the origin of both documents that the president had been generated by his request to me, that the proposed memorandum of understanding had been Al Iriani's idea. If either or both were objectionable, we could toss them in the wastebasket. I had no need for them, but I was trying to meet a Yemeni request in both regards. That gave Saleh pause and put it in a different light. He still said nothing good about Plan Ma'rib, but he did say he wanted to think more about the memo of understanding. Clearly, the problem with Plan Ma'rib was the starting point for the vicious circle was that it was "bad governance"-- a point that could be argued easily by the fact that the governor of the province had been exiled from Sana'a for keeping private prisons and his corruption, and he was well-known for being a drunk. In any case, that was put aside and instead after some consideration by the president, a green light was given to pursuing the memorandum of understanding.

Q: Well, then did he make the trip?

HULL: He made the trip. It was late November 2001 so two months after 9/11. I had preceded him back to Washington and had hoped to find Washington focused on Plan Ma'rib and the proposed memorandum of understanding. Indeed, there were interagency meetings to discuss the memorandum of understanding, but I soon realized that neither of these proposals stood any chance of serious consideration. There was still a very strong camp in Washington that considered Yemen a target rather than a partner in the war on terror and who were interested in browbeating Yemenis or taking forceful measures. So the NSC representative from the counterterrorism office in the interagency meeting on the memorandum of understanding, John Craig, the former ambassador in Muscat, effectively "deep-sixed" any talk of a positive engagement. I was left in the delicate position of the president coming with no serious Washington engagement on the memorandum. Saleh quite unintentionally provided me my exit strategy from this embarrassment because on his arrival in Washington he called me over to the hotel where he was staying and said that he had changed his mind on the memorandum and that

he was not prepared to sign it, but the foreign minister could sign it. In response to which I said that was not the original understanding, that we should put the memorandum of understanding aside and focus the visit on the meetings and more general understandings. So quite quickly of course, the whole issue of signing anything went away.

Saleh went around Washington and met with all of the significant people in the new administration: DCI Tenet, FBI Director Mueller, Secretary Powell, Secretary Rumsfeld, Vice President Cheney and ultimately with President Bush. The meetings were hit and miss. Saleh at times was good, but at other times really insisted on talking about issues to which Yemen was marginal. For example, with Secretary Powell he used the majority of the meeting talking about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and we risked having the visit confirm in Washington's mind the image of Saleh as an unreliable partner in the obsession which was Washington's at that time quite naturally the war on terror. As we approached the Oval Office meeting, I met with my colleagues in the Yemeni government, Ambassador al-Hajri and Foreign Minister Qirbi and very candidly assessed that unless we focused President Saleh on terrorism in the Oval Office and made sure that he and President Bush had a meeting of minds, the visit would not be productive.

I was also given the opportunity to pre-brief President Bush in the Oval Office. We had about 15 minutes before the meeting. Secretary Powell was there, Condoleezza Rice, and Bruce Riedel, the National Security Council director. President Bush, when we walked into the Oval Office, got up from his desk, came toward us and said, "Who is this guy and what do I want from him?" Secretary Powell turned to his ambassador, and I had a chance to, in about 45 seconds, lay out what was involved in Yemen and what was involved with President Saleh, and encourage the president to be very direct, very clear about what we wanted to mention specifically: Al Qaeda's leadership Abu Ali and Abu Assem, and to reach a partnership with President Saleh that together we would eliminate Al Qaeda's basic operation in Yemen. That was an objective the president, understood easily and could identify with. Bruce Riedel very helpfully chimed in that President Bush would be well advised to pre-empt any discussion because in President Saleh's past meeting with President Clinton, Saleh had begun and half an hour had really been wasted with Saleh giving a long, meandering lecture to President Clinton about Middle East politics. So armed with that, President Bush did seize the initiative, and as soon as President Saleh was seated, laid out his interest in the war on terror, that he wanted a partnership with Yemen but that we needed to go after Al Qaeda and that Al Qaeda had faces and we needed to go after the individuals.

President Saleh responded vigorously, also very directly, said we are in pursuit of these individuals, we will have them soon, "we will butcher them" which was language that the Oval Office was not adverse to hearing at that stage in the war on terror. So in the short space of some 35 or 40 minutes, the two presidents had reached a meeting of minds, and we left the Oval Office. As ambassador, I thought I had a very good basis for pursuing my front on the war on terror.

Q: If you've got something you want done and you're mad at somebody there's a tendency to look around for small countries, Jordan is one, Yemen another but also the Africa countries who don't go along with us and it's like showing that they're the problem. They really want to be

tough and they gang up on countries which have their own problems and all and the policy types who want to prove that they're tough or something. It's a phenomenon, it's a disturbing one, but I guess it's a bureaucratic, natural one. Did you find this and were you concerned about this in Yemen?

HULL: It was very much the case, particularly in DOD and some people in the NSC. There was almost a preference that Yemenis would be obstinate and give us an excuse to take forceful action. Langley, however, was much more sophisticated and all along preferred cooperation, as did the FBI, so as ambassador it was really my job to manage these forces and to get enough of a result coming out of a cooperative track so that those back in Washington who wanted forceful action didn't have reason to pursue that.

Q: Did you pick up, I mean you had been in the midst of the counterterrorism business a preoccupation. You saw Al Qaeda as a problem and all of a sudden the focus is moving toward Iraq. Were you sensing that at the time? Was it of concern to you?

HULL: At the time it still wasn't moving toward Iraq as the president had decided that Afghanistan was the initial front on the war on terror.

Q: That sort of forever had been made an issue. That made sense.

HULL: Right. And I think he was well advised in that regard, so we were still dealing with the lead up to Operation Enduring Freedom and then Operation Enduring Freedom itself.

Q: Enduring Freedom being going into Afghanistan?

HULL: Right. The problem for Yemen was that there was a period between Afghanistan and Iraq when there were no other active military fronts and that's when some in Washington had a distinct preference for doing something forceful somewhere else and that somewhere else could've been Yemen.

Q: It's a shame when you think about particularly when you get people all heated upon over a subject.

HULL: Very true.

Q: What is known as a very dangerous country.

HULL: Very true. And we came very close at times in Yemen to moving toward an Afghanistan-like approach.

Q: Did you have a sense, whatever you were doing, monitoring from your connections back in Washington and all that you have a monster that could be unleashed?

HULL: Yes. We knew that there was a school that wanted Yemen as a target, and we were aware

of ongoing planning in the Central Command. We also knew though that Central Commander Tommy Franks did not want a Yemen front and therefore, we were not without allies nor did George Tenet want to go out after Al Qaeda in Yemen militarily. So it was a question of really showing enough results through a partnership that would keep the hawks from gaining ascendancy and what really helped us in this regard was an operation in the next month of December.

You'll recall that President Saleh told President Bush that he was pursuing and surrounding our two primary targets, Abu Ali and Abu Assem. In mid-December Saleh called over and asked to see the chief of station. My response was that if anyone was going to see the president, it would be the ambassador, and I felt very strongly about this because I have seen in other places in the Middle East where the chief of station had established a relationship directly with the head of state and where the ambassador and the State Department were excluded and I was not going to have that happen in Yemen. So I said there could be a meeting but it would be with the ambassador. So he relented, we had a meeting in the ministry of defense, unusually because they normally had it in the presidential palace. Saleh told us that there was an operation being mounted to act against our two identified targets. Abu Ali was in a good location just outside Marib. Abu Asim was identified in Jowf to the north. He invited us to follow the operations, and we wished him good luck and we proceeded to a very intense couple of days as the Yemenis undertook this.

Unfortunately, the Yemeni had very little surgical counterterrorism capability so these operations turned into very clumsy, very noisy military operations involving armored vehicles, mass movements of troops. It wasn't very surprising that when they showed up at Abu Ali's compound on December 18 he was long gone. They got permission from the tribes to check it and verified that he was no longer there and that incident ended disappointingly, but not disastrously. The operation in Jowf, however, was not so fortunate. There the Yemeni military surrounded the compound and while they were negotiating with the tribesmen to check it for Abu Assem, a Yemeni Air Force jet overflew the compound and broke the sound barrier, which the tribesmen took to be the beginning of an assault and therefore they opened up on the Yemeni military and killed 18. Of course, the target was long gone so the operation had great casualties and was for naught.

We were depressed when we got this news back in the embassy and felt very bad indeed for the Yemenis who had suffered losses and for the opportunities that had been missed because this meant that in the future these targets would be very hard to find. It was somewhat of a surprise to me then to learn that the reaction in Washington was one of encouragement. We had notified Washington that this was in train. They were following it very closely as well and the fact that the Yemenis had spilled their own blood in pursuit of these terrorist targets was a stronger argument for a potential partnership than any words that we could have had, and very interestingly, the reaction in Washington for the first time was that we had serious prospects for working with the government of Yemen against Al Qaeda.

Q: Did this open up a relationship for training the Yemenis?

HULL: Well, things moved slowly. Washington was just beginning to wake up to the possibilities that we had been presenting them for some months. The first reaction of Washington was to dispatch Bill Burns, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, to have a meeting with President Saleh. Bill was one of the finest diplomats of his generation, an extraordinarily competent fellow, someone who had the full trust of Secretary Powell, Deputy Secretary Armitage and the respect of the National Security Council so we were absolutely delighted that he was coming out. He came out the following January, and we set up a meeting with President Saleh. Because it was winter, Saleh was in Aden, and Bill arrived in Sana'a with the intent of getting briefed and then proceeding to Aden for a meeting with the President. During the briefing for Bill, our defense attaché very expertly laid out in a map briefing the operation on December 18, what happened and why Yemeni forces were unable to effectively undertake this counterterrorism operation because they only had capability of moving large forces very slowly. What was needed was for us to engage with the Yemenis in training counterterrorism forces that could operate agilely and effectively.

Bill, of course, needed very little convincing. He had a good picture so we were ready to proceed down to Aden for the meeting with president. Bill was on a tight schedule. He had to meet with President Saleh and then he had meetings in Riyadh with the Saudi princes that evening so he made a plea that his return from Aden be in time to catch the commercial flight to Riyadh to keep those meetings with the Saudis. To get down to Aden we were offered the presidential helicopter, and we rode in it. Later we realized we were taking our lives in our hands in doing so when a U.S. Air Force team evaluated the Yemeni helicopter fleet and found it, including the presidential helicopter, to be unsafe in the extreme. We didn't know this at the time so we climbed aboard. We arrived in Aden, met with President Saleh.

President Saleh again was at the top of his game, reiterated what he had said in the Oval Office, said that the December 18 setback did not deter him. He was as determined as ever to eliminate Al Qaeda and whatever the U.S. decided he was going to pursue that objective. Bill had from President Saleh exactly what he needed to take back to Washington. Unfortunately, Bill had now lost his opportunity to catch the commercial flight to Riyadh from Sana'a and so we made a plea to the presidential staff to somehow hold the airplane until Bill could get back. In the event they didn't do that, but Saleh instead commandeered a Yemeni Air 737, brought it to Aden, put Bill and his one staffer aboard along with an entire lamb that had been prepared for their in-flight meal, and Bill was sent off in style from Aden to be in time for his meeting with the Saudi princes.

Q: During the time you were there what happened with Al Qaeda?

HULL: The Al Qaeda issue in the first installment played out over the next year and it was on our part an attempt to gain actionable intelligence. Where were the people we needed to get? And to also create a capability either on the part of the Yemeni or aided by us to get them, and at the same time, to keep track of what the Al Qaeda was trying to do against us so that we weren't blown up before we had our chance. Both sides of this were quite intense and involved a great deal of first-rate intelligence work. After Bill's visit, Washington made the policy decisions to engage with the Yemenis in a serious fashion and that involved both a military track and an

intelligence track. We started to get a bit of economic assistance that we could use in the remote tribal areas. We began to build the embassy back up, including the public diplomacy capability. The central part of this was a training effort of the Yemeni Special Forces which was their designated counterterrorism unit and this was commanded by Ahmed Saleh, President Saleh's son. They had been trained by the Jordanians so we weren't starting from scratch, and we had U.S. military trainers, both Marines and Army Special Forces coming into Sana'a and working with the Yemeni special operations forces.

That turned out to be an extremely frustrating undertaking. The Yemenis were still extraordinarily suspicious of us and when our people came in and the equipment came in they insisted on vigorous inspections including of highly sensitive equipment and there were very high tensions between the American trainers and the Yemeni trainees because they suspected each had ulterior motives. The situation became even more complicated when the Yemenis started to impede diplomatic pouches. We defined virtually anything as such, anything we wanted to slap a sticker on saying "diplomatic pouch," including very large pallets of equipment, electronic or otherwise. The Yemenis defined diplomatic pouches as being the orange bags in which things were put. So we had an extremely frustrating situation where the Yemeni would allow in weapons intended for their forces, but equipment that we needed for our purposes would be obstructed. We also had a problem in that the Yemeni Special Forces, as it became clearer and clearer that in effect, we were training a praetorian guard for the president rather than an active counterterrorism unit.

Fortunately, we had at the same time been working with the Central Security Forces under Colonel Yahia al Saleh, the president's nephew, and Minister of Interior Alimi. There we found a totally different picture. We found a great deal of trust, we found commitment on the Yemeni side and we found a willingness to engage in the terrorist fight. So although our efforts with the Special Forces didn't pan out, our efforts with the Central Security Forces had very good results. We were developing other options at the time over these months because Washington was pressing to show results. The Afghan situation had gone well over a matter of months. We were still in the planning stage for Iraq. Washington wanted some other victory to show on the war on terror, and Yemen was a candidate for that. And that's when we entered into discussions with President Saleh about deploying the armed Predator as another option in going against the Al Qaeda target, which led, in November 2002 to a successful strike against Abu Ali who was in a car heading back to Marib, and he was eliminated.

Q: Was there at all an option of Al Qaeda just to haul out?

HULL: Al Qaeda had invested a great deal in Yemen and was not about to give up that investment. They had in August of 2002, a plot well advanced to attack the U.S. Embassy with rockets, and we were fortunate in that the rocket they were preparing for the attack misfired killing one of the Al Qaeda operatives and severely injuring a second one. It was that mistake by Al Qaeda in August that short-circuited their plan. Then working with the Yemenis at the crime scene we made the connection to Al Qaeda and regained the initiative so that the following November we were able to eliminate the head of Al Qaeda by the strike in Marib.

Q: You left there when in 2004?

HULL: In July.

Q: By that time did you feel Al Qaeda was not much of a presence?

HULL: After Al Qaeda lost its leadership, there began a long continuing campaign to take out other key Al Qaeda operatives. Of course, while we were doing this in Yemen, it was being done more generally in the Gulf, e.g. in the UAE. Bin Laden lost his key operative for the peninsular region so between what we were doing outside of Yemen and what we were doing inside of Yemen, Al Qaeda was being steadily degraded. But they were not totally defanged. One of their decisions in the aftermath of the successful operation against Abu Ali was to mount an assassination attempt against the American ambassador, me. They had a cell of very experienced operatives dedicated to that mission for the better part of 2002.

Q: What was life like for you under these circumstances?

HULL: We had a great deal of security. Our most important tactic was to be unpredictable, to have no set pattern, to alter our routes, our times. I remember I had a Monday evening bridge game. The Regional Security Officer came to me and complained that it was entirely too predictable, and so on occasion, I would spend Monday afternoon at the defense attaché's apartment so I could make my bridge game without making the transit predictably on Monday evening.

The plot against me involved an attack against my motorcade and the plan was to stake out two intersections to the right and to the left of the embassy because when we came out of the embassy we had to either turn right or left and about a block down the road in either direction there were intersections which the attackers planned to stage at and then either using a rocket or a vehicle bomb to attack my vehicle.

Q: Did they get close?

HULL: They got to the stage of the surveillance and planning. Before they were able to execute the attack the Central Security Forces, the minister of interior got information as to the location of the key plotter who was then set to flight; they were never able to execute the attack.

Q: I take it your family wasn't there?

HULL: My wife was there.

Q: How did that work out?

HALL: Amal was from the region, a Palestinian from Jerusalem. She was quite used to dicey situations. She maintained good security practices and enjoyed her time in Yemen very much.

Q: What about the rest of the staff? The intent is aimed at the ambassador, but you have other people going out all over the place who don't have the same protection.

HULL: It was an issue. We had a very street smart embassy in that we got a lot of training from Diplomatic Security and other security forces. The one thing about a tour in Yemen was that you became very practiced at personal security whether it was checking your vehicle or avoiding crowds. But remember after the hit on Abu Ali in 2001, pardon me, 2002 and then the subsequent degrading of the Al Qaeda network, we steadily gained the initiative, and we steadily gained more and more security for our personnel. So we were able to expand our operations safely and there were no official Americans harmed during this entire period in Yemen.

We did have a serious plot by the Iraqi intelligence at the onset of the Iraq war, and what happened with that was that we were aware and forewarned from Washington that the Iraqi intelligence service generally would respond to our invasion of Iraq by trying to harm us elsewhere in the Middle East. We didn't know that they intended to do it specifically in Yemen until my colleague, the Italian ambassador, asked to see me one afternoon. He came over, said there was a friend of their embassy who knew an individual who claimed knowledge of a plot. We convinced the key individual to come into the embassy. We debriefed him. His knowledge of the Iraqi intelligence service was quite accurate. He had specifics for us: who was involved, where they were located, what kind of bombs they had. We passed that information to the Yemeni Political Security Organization, and at 2 a.m. in the morning they raided the house, arrested the individuals and located three sophisticated explosive devices. They were not going to be aimed at the embassy. It was too hard a target, but at the public affairs officer and the defense attaché. So we had cause to be concerned, especially with the Iraq war onset.

Q: How did the lead up to the Iraq war and then the Iraq war play in Yemen?

HULL: There were very strong feelings against U.S. action, and in the lead up there were a number of peaceful demonstrations. The government was using the peaceful demonstrations to allow people to let off steam. After the invasion of Iraq, a demonstration was planned with the intent of similarly letting off steam but it was quickly taken over by Yemeni Ba'ath Party members loyal to Saddam who directed the demonstration to the vicinity of the embassy. We had within a block of the embassy at the Sheridan Circle a large, a very large crowd of people, and their intent was to approach the embassy and we did not know whether or not the Yemeni security forces would hold. The embassy went to high alert. We had the internal security plan going into effect. I remember walking around the embassy, and there were Marines deployed there for training purposes who were loading their automatic weapons. I thought we were coming very, very close to blood being shed, possibly by Americans in defense of the embassy. The crowd turned violent, there were shots fired from the crowd at the Yemeni security forces. The Yemeni security forces returned fire, and I believe three demonstrators were killed, including a young boy. The security forces never abandoned their positions, and eventually the crowd, having been met with this resolute defense, dispersed and the embassy was not attacked. We did not have to use force ourselves to defend the embassy. The government then realized that it was too dangerous to allow demonstrations to take place, certainly in the vicinity of foreign embassies. They were banned. The Iraqi Ba'ath members who organized them were detained, and

we got assurances from Saleh that all necessary measures would be taken to protect the embassy and Americans in Yemen and indeed during that period, during the war no Americans were harmed.

Q: I realize you were far from the scene but we're talking about the period of Internet and e-mail and everything else. How did you feel about the lead up to the Iraqi War because you had been very much involved in terrorism aspect? I mean the rationale for going to war. How did you feel about that?

HULL: I knew that one rationale that we relied upon – i.e. the Iraqi connection to Al Qaeda-- had no foundation to it. The question of weapons of mass destruction was a serious issue, it seemed to me. We had people deployed to Sana'a by the State Department, health people, to give us vaccinations against smallpox for fear that the Iraqis had that capability. But it was hard sitting so far away in Sana'a to really appreciate what was going on in the inner councils in Washington and on an issue about which we had very little to say. We did realize early on that we were going to war with Iraq if only because the magnitude of the deployments we were making could not be sustained for very long and that we would have to use those troops once they were in the region.

Q: Did the Yemenis make any protests or were you called upon to get their support? Or what happened?

HULL: We were instructed to explain our rationales and to seek support. Saleh warned us against going into Iraq. He was very consistent in this, but having paid such a huge price for supporting Iraq in 1990 Saleh did not in this instance go public in opposing our attack on Iraq but he did privately, very consistently, and in retrospect very cogently outlined the risks of that action.

I might say just a word about two other subjects in terms of the broad counterterrorism strategy that we were pursuing in Yemen. One was the economic development part and the second was the public diplomacy part.

As I mentioned earlier, our economic development effort was keyed on the remote tribal areas where Al Qaeda had gained footholds, and as we proceeded on the security side we also got enough resources to initiate programs there. Ironically, the resources were not the traditional ones, the economic support funds or others identified with foreign assistance, but rather from the Department of Agriculture and the 401b program which involved providing excess American agricultural commodities which were sold in Yemen and then these funds were used. But we did have a rather substantial pot of money, tens of millions of dollars. We found that by going out into the regions, it was rather easy to identify cost-effective projects that had very demonstrable impact on the quality of life of the tribesman. For example, in Medghil which was a village about two thirds of the way from Sana'a to Marib for \$250,000 we were able to build a health clinic and then also arrange for training of health personnel and equipment and medication, that in the year after we finished it was treating daily an average of 50 persons each day. The news of this facility spread throughout the region and people would come from great distances. Relying really upon our Foreign Service nationals, Yemenis working in the embassy, we were able to replicate that throughout Marib and Jowf and make a significant impact on health services. We also

undertook a very ambitious project of equipping a large regional hospital in Marib itself for some \$7 million and created the first sophisticated hospital in those remote tribal areas.

We did work in agriculture as well and even some work in the cultural domain. For each of these projects, we had our distinctive brand, a Cammariyyah (moon-shaped) window which incorporated the flag of Yemen and the flag of the United States so that our efforts became very broadly known throughout that region, and we were credited as being the first foreign government to go into those regions in an effective way and provide tangible benefits to the tribesmen in those regions. I, myself, made maybe half a dozen trips to Marib and got into the farthest reaches of Jowf where I don't think any American ambassador or really any foreign diplomat had previously gone.

On the public diplomacy side we found most effective to let the Yemenis take the lead, and the Yemenis were very good at their own public diplomacy. The critical element of this was to convince the Yemeni public that Al Qaeda was a threat not only to the United States, but was a threat to Yemen itself. Al Qaeda really made this easier in some of their targeting. For example, when they attacked the French oil tanker which was carrying Yemeni crude in 2001, and it became clear that Al Qaeda attacks were threatening Yemen's economic jugular and were having practical, damaging effect on Yemenis, not only in general, but specifically on the fishermen in the area. The Yemeni government had some very sharp people working on their public diplomacy. They told us they had seen what had happened in the Washington area, the role of Washington residents in the apprehension of the Beltway sniper, and that they were purposely intending to conduct their public diplomacy to elicit the same kind of practical cooperation from the Yemeni citizens and indeed, in a number of cases, that kind of practical cooperation did lead to counterterrorism successes for the Yemenis.

Q: Were the Chinese doing anything because they had built that road way back, and we were pretty nervous about that at one time back in the Cold War era.

HULL: The Chinese were very ably represented in Sana'a by a diplomat who had formally been the main interpreter, Arab interpreter, in Beijing, but the Chinese were preoccupied with commercial interests. There was no greater promoter of exports in the diplomatic corps than the Chinese ambassador whose reason d'être was to sell things Chinese in Yemen.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover, do you think?

HULL: We were very actively pursuing the issue of democracy and human rights which was another major effort of the administration. There was an election, parliamentary elections scheduled for Yemen for 2003, coincidental with the invasion of Iraq by the Americans. Saleh considered postponing those elections but in the end went ahead with them. They were extremely well organized, the National Democratic Institute, the UNDP, and IFIS played very important roles with the Yemenis in organizing those elections. We were providing financial assistance to that effort. We were working with all the parties in Yemen, the ruling party, the Socialist party and the Islamic party. As the elections approached, the Europeans became alarmed by the general instability in the area and pulled out. The National Democratic Institute stayed the course and

actually brought an observer delegation of some 20 experts to watch the election. The embassy, the American embassy, fielded an observer delegation of an equal number, some 20 from across the embassy organized by a political officer who had formerly worked for the National Democratic Institute, and the elections were a significant success and a step forward for Yemen. Largely as a result of them, Freedom House that year moved Yemen from the category of “not free” to “partly free.”

The Yemenis subsequently sponsored a large conference in Sana’a, co-sponsored by the Europeans, to which they invited both official and nonofficial representatives from across the Arab world and it was a remarkable conference that produced a Declaration of Sana’a putting these representatives formally on record in promoting democracy in the Middle East. I had not taken it very seriously. I thought the words had little significance without practical implementation. Washington, at least the NSC, saw it in a different light. On a subsequent visit to Washington with Foreign Minister Qirbi, we met with the National Security Council leadership, with Steve Hadley, who was then deputy national security adviser, and Elliott Abrams. For the first time in my tenure as ambassador, the first subject raised by the NSC was not terrorism, but rather it was democracy. They were aware of Yemen’s elections, they were aware of the Declaration of Sana’a and were very interested in using that declaration to further promotion of democracy in the Middle East. Therefore, it was not a total surprise when I received a phone call several months later from the National Security Council wanting to invite President Saleh to the Sea Island Summit of the G-8 which President Bush was hosting and which would have as its theme promoting democracy. So, my tenure in Sana’a was really book ended by two visits by President Saleh to the United States. The initial one in November, 2000 in the wake of 9/11 and the last one, I believe it was in June, 2004 for him to meet with administration officials in Washington and then attend the G-8 Summit in Sea Island, Georgia. For Saleh that meeting, those meetings in Washington were really somewhat of a victory lap because by that time Al Qaeda’s operations in Yemen had been virtually shut down. Our counterterrorism cooperation was broadly speaking well established, and there was virtually no one left in Washington who any longer debated the question of whether Yemen should be a target or a partner. The partnership was really established on firm ground.

Q: On the democracy side, how strict was it with women?

HULL: Women in Yemen were extremely impressive. They were some of the most dynamic, most competent interlocutors and partners that we had. If you recall during my confirmation hearing, Senator Wellstone urged me to attend to the situation of Yemeni women, and I had done that. Therefore, we had a good many projects with Yemeni women in training them, in the formation of NGOs and political activities. I had also had the honor of working with the first Yemeni ministers who were women, two women who were ministers of human rights. We had an extremely fruitful cooperation with them. So we very much respected the role of women in Yemen, we did our best to promote it.

Q: Were they secluded or not?

HULL: In the cities, most went veiled and mostly Gulf-style veils, which had been imported by

Yemenis coming back from working in the Gulf. They were the dominant garb now, not the traditional Yemeni veil. The women found ways of nevertheless, being active, and I remember during the parliamentary election some of the most active campaigners were women and more so for the Islamic party than for the ruling party. They would go throughout the Medina, they would go into other women's homes, they would have their discussions, they would do their campaigning and largely as a result of this, the Islamic Party did very well with the women's vote during the parliamentary election.

Q: You mentioned Iran. What sort of role did Iran play?

HULL: Initially, Iran was not active, but towards the end of my tenure, during the last month there was a rebellion in the north in the town of Sa'dah by a group that had links to Iran. These were the Huthi party. Al Houthi was a tribal leader who wanted to bring back the monarchy in Yemen. He was opposed to the whole Republican experiment, and he gathered around himself in Sa'dah a group of followers. He had traveled to Tehran, and he had gotten moral and probably material support from the Iranians who saw in this group, a fellow Shia' whom they could support. Ironically, of course, the dominant political actors in Yemen were also Shia' (Zaidi) so it was not really a question of Sunni versus Shiite, but Iran was looking to fish in troubled waters and find a party it could support.

End of reader