

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

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Interviewed by: Mehmet Ali
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[Note: This interview was conducted in Iraq where Mr. Reeker served from June 2007 until June 2008 as the Counselor to the Ambassador for Public Affairs.. This interview was not edited by Mr. Reeker.]

Q: Just a little bit of background information first. Where and when were you born?

REEKER: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, January 19th, 1965.

Q: Where did you go to school then?

REEKER: I went to college at Yale and graduated from Yale in 1986 and then I got my MBA at Thunderbird in Arizona in 1991.

Q: Any specialty for your MBA?

REEKER: It was focused mostly on international finance.

Q: Tell us about some of your first employment.

REEKER: After college I worked for a law firm, an international law firm, a large corporate law firm, Washington and New York-based. They have quite a number of international offices and I contemplated going to law school, but then changed my mind. I got my MBA, but I had taken the Foreign Service exam so I joined the Foreign Service with USIA in 1992. After initial junior officer training I had been assigned to Budapest so I did language training '92 to '93 and then went out to Budapest for my first three year assignment, then to Macedonia and after language training was in Skopje from '97 to '99 when I was asked to go back to Washington as director of press relations heading the press office at State. I kind of moved into the State Department several months ahead of the merger of USIA into State.

Q: So your time in Hungary and Macedonia was for USIA?

REEKER: The initial round. Then after being press office director for about nine months I became deputy spokesman, the deputy assistant secretary for public affairs in the bureau. I did that then until 2003 and then was assigned to be the deputy chief of mission, DCM in Budapest. During that period, because I didn't need language training, I had

some time, so I traveled a lot as a sort of spokesman-at-large for the public affairs bureau, both overseas and domestically.

Q: Where did that take you?

REEKER: I visited most of the different regions. I did an Africa trip, I did a couple of Middle East trips, some in Asia, South East Asia, Indonesia, Malaysia focusing to a certain degree on Arab and Muslim audiences, and I did a Near East trip.

Q: Did you have a particular message that you were bringing to all those communities?

REEKER: It was mostly again, frankly as the spokesman talking in the post 9/11 era about U.S. foreign policy broadly and trying to give some context to it, and how American foreign policy is made. It's a combination of taking into account U.S. interests from obviously a security aspect, the economic aspect and the sort of values aspect, and how that goes through a process, an interagency process to give a little more context to a subject that is not well understood in our own country, let alone abroad. The different factors, whether it's interagency in the sense of developing the White House and the NSC, working the Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staffs, both the military and civilian sides, State, AID and, of course, the intelligence community. And then the other components, the NGOs, the congressional components, the public, and how they impact and influence foreign policy which of course, is what I did a lot of in terms of interagency coordination as deputy spokesman.

So that was interesting. How effective it was, I suppose is a little difficult to measure. I certainly had good reactions, both domestically and abroad. It was clear to me coming into the Department, having been a public diplomacy officer and a press person overseas, the need to do that kind of engagement. The overseas audiences particularly want to hear from Americans. There is something about someone from Washington who, having been seen on TV, provides a particular perspective. I was doing that kind of traveling. It's a relatively low cost thing. In fact one of the advantages is that I had been deputy spokesman for Madeleine Albright in the Clinton administration and for Colin Powell in the Bush administration, so I brought this kind of bipartisan, professional career diplomat aspect to it, but also there is the sort of recognition that overseas, maybe more than domestically, people recognize you as the guy at the podium. So, for the cost of some travel tickets you can engage with audiences, or think tanks, or students.

The Islamic University of Malaysia outside of Kuala Lumpur is a Wahabi institution funded by the Saudis. It is an organization that has students from all over the world, including the United States, actually, both men and women, in English, and something with which the embassy in Malaysia really had no contact because both institutions were wary of each other. My visit there, just one example of the first time trying this out, the political affairs section reached out to them and they said we would like to try that, so they set up a talk for me to give to the students, pretty low key. They thought they would get maybe fifty students or something, and of course they had an overflow crowd of 300 and some. I remember thinking, what am I doing here? There was such an audience, but

again it was very valuable because they listened to my basic presentation about foreign policy and how U.S. foreign policy is made and the different factors that go into it, and then they asked questions, some of them quite critical, but they were really interested and engaged. This huge audience that filled the hall and out the doors, stuck around and wanted to talk and shake my hand kind of thing. So I think that was an argument about how much the embassy is unable to keep up with this relationship. One would think it was a pretty good institution through which to engage a new generation of potential leaders throughout the Islamic world since it is an international university.

That was the kind of thing we did. It was an interesting nine months or so. I think it probably had a lot of merit in terms of outreach.

And then I went back to Budapest and was DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) there for just about three years. And then they asked me to come here.

Q: Yes, and so tell us how you ended up coming to Iraq.

REEKER: I had been asked a couple of times if I would come to be the PA (Public Affairs) counselor here and quite frankly, it was not something I was leaping at, for a number of reasons. I just didn't have a background in this part of the world, and I don't speak Arabic. It just wasn't having been in on the early stages of the lead up to the war, and it just wasn't something I was eager to do. I was pretty honest about that.

I was asked again by Ambassador Crocker, and in the meantime, was told you need to go after Budapest, to spend a year in Pakistan, in Islamabad as the PA counselor working for Ambassador Crocker. Of course, when he changed and asked if I would join him here instead, my wife and I, she is also in the Foreign Service, decided that, okay, we're going to do this. So we signed up and left Budapest a little early so we could do the necessary preparations in Washington, see our families, and get out here the first of June of 2007.

Q: So what was your first reaction coming to the nation, stepping off the plane, essentially the first couple of days?

REEKER: Well, you step off the plane in June and it's pretty darn hot. I think people come with a lot of preconceptions and that's natural, but truly even the most studied observations from afar can't prepare you exactly for the reality of what is here, which is probably one of the factors that led to some of the missteps, if one can use that word, in the whole policy that got us to where we are.

Q: So what would be some of the salients of reality as you found them?

REEKER: Well, first of all as a civilian, and a Foreign Service officer, you are stepping right into an active war zone that is very much dominated, just in terms of numbers, by the military in a tough environment. I think over the years has seen the transformation of the procedures and the infrastructure to sort of support civilians and Foreign Service people coming to work in the embassy. But the cruel thing is, you really have to try to

grasp the local reality. I think perhaps that was something that was missing in the lead up to this.

My personal view is that this is something that will have to be decided and thought about by historians and others in years to come. The theories and ideas about what should happen in Iraq clearly antedate 9/11, and long before the George W. Bush administration, Iraq was an enormous policy challenge for us. As a spokesman and a briefer in the Clinton administration, every day we were challenged about what were we doing in Iraq, where the U.N.-sanctioned regime was clearly falling apart. It was inadequate, and it wasn't accomplishing the goals of disarming or getting Saddam's regime to change. It was clearly hurting the Iraqi people, and there were the almost daily challenges to the no-fly zone and so on. That was the atmosphere that existed and clearly there were threats that Saddam's regime posed to not only his own people, but to the region and to us. I'm not getting into the justifications for the war, per se, but it was an issue that needed tackling and obviously, some people had created a vision, a scenario, a set of goals. The problem was that those were not necessarily vetted against Iraqi reality. Again, I think there was an awful lot that people just didn't know, hadn't even begun to think about what they didn't know, or what the challenges would be in Iraq. They took a vision which became our policy and tried to ram it into the reality of Iraq, and we are still dealing with that.

At the end of this year, certainly under Ambassador Crocker, we have focused very much on reality-based approaches to not only our goals, trying to be more realistic, but certainly in the way we have communicated and reported. That has been a priority of the work under Ambassador Crocker and from the first day he got here that we would focus on credibility, focus on reflecting reality and the challenges that exist here, and what we are trying to do working with the Iraqis to move this forward.

Q: Take us through public affairs section briefly and highlight kind of how the work that you do intersects with the different work areas within the section.

REEKER: To a degree in any embassy, and certainly in the Department, one of the things I liked and found quite interesting professionally is that public affairs and public diplomacy need to intersect with every aspect of the work. It is part of the other work, the economic, the political, and the security. It is of and about those elements, and needs to be involved in really every part of the mission.

When I got here I had been told ahead of time that the public affairs section operations from communications to programmatic exchanges, the whole panoply of things that we usually do, had kind of imploded. That was the word that was used repeatedly. There had been a PAO, but the previous PAO had left I think about six months before I got here, and the relationship with the front office was virtually nonexistent. The staff, I think, was demoralized, depleted by working under very hard conditions, but without leadership or cohesion. There had been some attempts, I don't fully understand or know the whole history, to bring in a political appointee to run things that had not gone well.

Once I was signed on they got another officer, a terrific officer, Dan X whom I had known since the beginning of my career. He was the PAO in Ankara and he came TDY (temporary duty) to just sort of fill in until I could do the necessary and get here; that helped a lot. He started pulling together some sort of structure and cohesion, and this made it a lot easier for my transition.

I think it was necessary first and foremost, to focus on the press side, the press information side, because the communications had so broken down. The Western and American press here felt completely disconnected from the embassy. They felt they weren't getting information, didn't have contacts and maybe most importantly, the connection between the embassy and the military, the multinational force in Iraq was virtually nonexistent. The section didn't have the necessary connection either with the front office or the rest of the embassy. Even with the local press, the Iraqi and pan Arab media, there wasn't a connection. Given my background I think that was largely why Ambassador Crocker had asked me to come and change the focus.

So I tried to kind of model it on the way we operated in Washington, in terms of the press office and the way we coordinated what we call our guidance collection, our message, our understanding, our extracting from the embassy. This in many ways is a smaller version of the whole Department, given the huge array of different sections and themes we have here, and to open interagency activities with the military establishing that crucial coordination mechanism that just hadn't existed before. That was really the primary thing I set out to do at the beginning: to provide some cohesion and some guidance to the staff, work on staffing pattern, filling out positions.

Then of course, cultural affairs is the other side of our shop that I worked on, not with as great an intensity, because the priority was clearly on the communication and the message, reestablishing credibility which was pretty far gone. I think after the CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority) days there were just sort of gaps. So that was clearly a priority, along with provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs).

Q: Were the PRTs relatively new?

REEKER: Yes. They had started some of those in I guess 2005, but really this year we have gone from 10 PRTs when I started to 25. That's been a major theme and that's what is transforming our ability to work in Iraq. We had a presence, the embassy has a presence, along with the military, throughout the country which can engage at the local level. This is really crucial in terms of understanding what's going on and affecting change, reconciliation and provincial development. All those things have been really key. Not only coordinating those PRTs, but talking about them, explaining them has been one of our priorities.

Q: Is that a relatively new concept? Has that system been set up in other countries?

REEKER: Well, Afghanistan is where it started. The PRTs in Iraq model that. The idea is that of a civilian military fusion, if you will, led by the State Department. The State

Department team leader is in charge and has a team made up of some military, some civilians in different capacities. Each one can be designed uniquely to meet the needs of that particular PRT community, with a focus maybe on agriculture, getting specialists in to do that, working with the military, and also working with the local leadership which is a new concept. Also, there is the devolution of power and authority to the provinces, which themselves, at least some of them, have ancient roots, Anbar, Diwaniyah, etcetera, etcetera, and empowering them all. This whole concept of a new Iraqi constitution and devolution to provincial and local governments was new, and capacity building for those institutions has been a crucial part of our work.

So I established fairly early on a separate unit within the public affairs section, what we call the provincial support unit, that combined operations both from the information side and the cultural and education side. They liaised with the OPA, the Office of Provincial Affairs, which oversees the PRTs, to try to provide the PA and PE support for the PRTs, and also as a route by which to extract information about the PRTs. Through much of the year, given the president's interest and the administration-set policy focused on these PRTs, the hunger from Washington for information and media regarding the PRTs was enormous. There was constant pressure to get PRT leaders to interview with U.S. press, get us information, get us visuals, and things of that nature. Part of the task was liaising and running interference with some of our Washington-based colleagues at State, and the NSC (National Security Council) and the White House on that subject, so I think this unit has helped that process.

I was told to keep looking at ways to reach out to the PRTs but we have done a great job of talking about them to domestic press, helping them get information and guidance on various topics, so they can use it with local audiences whether publics or media. We have also been using them, providing them tools, public diplomacy tools: exchanges, books, other materials, even speakers, who we have begun to reintroduce to them, and then using them as sources for our exchange programs, for instance. We can make sure we are getting geographic diversity, and the appropriate sectarian message that we want to see in our Fulbright program, using the International Visitor Leadership Program, and some of those programs. The Anbar sheiks, for instance, have been in the groundbreaking programs that have Oval Office visits and a lot of media exposure.

Q: What are some of the skills that you have personally learned dealing with the media?

REEKER: Over the years?

Q: Maybe Iraq, specifically.

REEKER: Well, they require basically the same things and certainly not a background initially in media or journalism. I joined the Foreign Service as a generalist. I was a history major in college and an MBA, and was put into this public diplomacy category and then ended up doing mostly stuff on the press side. I think first and foremost, the rule I always talk about is honesty, credibility is key. You have to tell the truth to the press. You have to try to answer their questions and get them information to meet their needs.

Certainly in our democracy, we rely very much on the press to play this role, for better or for worse. I certainly have my own concerns about the nature of our media, the 24 hour news cycle, and the so-called CNN effect and its ability to create and influence policy. There's an awful lot to be written about it in terms of Iraq, and the media's role needs credibility, and being honest to the best of your ability; but that doesn't mean answering all their questions. You want to get your message out, but you need to make sure you are doing that honestly. So that was key. As I had in the past I had someone like Ambassador Crocker who also believed in that, and was very focused on maintaining credibility, getting information out, and making himself available.

Availability is the next thing after credibility, being available to the press, but also knowing that other people right up to the top are available to you. You have to be near the press officer's spokesman or press attaché, whatever you want to call it. You really need access and to be accessible to the press. Given the nature of, or the reality of the security situation in Iraq, that's been very difficult at times for the journalists that are here, whether they are Iraqis, or the Western press, the correspondents that are based out here. You can't just walk down the hall like you do at the State Department to where the journalists have offices, and you can't even drive down the road to their bureaus, given the security situation. Going to the *New York Times* office is a major undertaking involving security details, planning, and certain risks. Obviously, there are costs involved.

So you make use of what you can. We focused for instance, on email creating an email box where we said queries, press questions or interviewing requests should be directed and making sure that was staffed so that queries were responded to quickly.

We set up twice weekly conference calls, which I think were very effective just to have a specific time available, where usually I or sometimes the spokeswoman would be on this call, Mondays and Thursdays at 4:30, local time. We contracted a service through Washington so that people could dial in beyond that, and that made a big difference. They knew that was the time they could ask their questions and they could hear what others were asking, and to just kind of check in, knowing we were available also, of course, by phone at other times. That was key. Sometimes we had a lot of participants and other times, nobody would get on the call, which was fine.

Again working with the MNF (multi-national force) and realizing their vastly greater resources, both in terms of personnel and infrastructure; they had a 24/7 media operations center, so trying not to duplicate what they were doing, or competing with them. By doing the monitoring and then responding to what they do and finding our own niche so that we complimented each other, knowing when to defer to them, and vice versa, that's been important. So really, credibility, accessibility, and a certain proactive stance that I tried to impress upon our staff and focusing on to extracting from this vast operation, information, some people call it good news stories, about just what is going on. What are we doing out here? What does an embassy do?

We've also focused on our website. When I got here the website lay dormant. The webmaster had been a local hire who had fled the threats like most of the local staff had. We had the fortunate addition to our team of the information resource officer, a local staff person from our U.S. staff in Pristina, Kosovo, whom I just coincidentally happened to know from my earlier time in that region. She came out and volunteered. She is a webmaster and changed our website and took it back under our own control and updated it, and it is a really useful resource now for people.

Q: You are talking about a website for the PAO?

REEKER: The Embassy Baghdad website. We run that, we control that and we put information on there, update it continuously, and can refer people to that. Simple things; the ambassador has been our primary product, if you will. He has the message, he has credibility and we've had almost unique independence from the Department in Washington. Obviously they keep very close contact with him, but the ambassador has done an enormous amount of press based on what I or we recommend to him. We transcribe those interviews and post them on our website at appropriate times so the information is available to all. That has had a good impact.

Q: Tell us about the section's interaction with the Iraqi government.

REEKER: That's been another important area, engaging with the Iraqi communicators and trying to help them, because they are important to having the Iraqis tell their own story. One of the messages I have tried to impart all year is that we are no longer going to speak on behalf of the Iraqis. Iraq is a sovereign country, and while we have influence and we certainly have interests here, we can't and should not speak on their behalf. If they have a question about what the Iraqis think, they are going to have to go ask the Iraqis. But, to make that effective, we tried to work with the Iraqis so they can understand how to run a similar press communications operation, and that's a work in progress. I work very closely with the Iraqi government spokesperson and an advisor to Prime Minister Maliki. I try to meet with him, again with our military colleagues who are also very much engaged on this, and trying in other spheres to empower and engage with spokespeople from all the different ministries and the military side. We have done briefings together, and offer opportunities to brief. We have offered some training programs to provide them equipment, things to get their operations up and running, like we do in so many countries, and again, my experience in Central and Eastern Europe in post-transition Kosovo, in conflict environments, has been helpful. In a lot of ways there are a lot of similarities. These are countries in transition, learning how to do these things. Dictatorships don't necessarily have successful communications operations along the lines that we do. We have seen some real developments in that area. They are increasingly speaking for themselves, ready and willing to engage media and journalists in a variety of ways, and understanding the importance of doing that. They may have a different approach than we do sometimes. That's one place where we constantly need to work with our military colleagues, who are not as attuned perhaps to local sensitivities, regional sensitivities, or letting the Iraqis speak for themselves, and we have come a long way on that too. That's where our combination of diplomatic efforts varies, in the way we

look at the world and our interaction with Iraqis versus the way the military does, just by virtue of primary goals.

Q: Could you share an example of that?

REEKER: There are a number of examples where the military is ready to speak and answer questions or respond to press reports, that really need to be addressed by Iraqis, and that's something that we can bring to the table with a certain understanding of the historical or regional context that may seem just wrong to them. And of course, they say, "What's wrong with these State Department people?" Maybe we don't always get it right, but constantly about speaking about how it is perceived in the region by Iraqis and certainly, while the military are great and have a very sophisticated communications operation, our military colleagues standing up on television in uniform is not always the most effective or useful approach. Indeed, it is sometimes counterproductive in terms of meeting our longer term goals and needs. I know what it is like, because we read things in press or hear things in the press. You always want to respond, but it takes a lot of thinking through what the implications are of that and when it is better to say nothing. Sometimes it is better to be far more subtle or try to work with Iraqi counterparts to help them respond appropriately, and I think we have done that more and more throughout the year.

Q: Do you have any personal harrowing security stories to share?

REEKER: No, I have felt relatively safe. We have all been fairly resilient under tough conditions. We are in a war zone with a presence of untrained, unarmed civilians. Questions continue to be asked about this. The determination was made that this mission and its importance outweigh the red lines or dynamics of our deployment, if you will, as diplomats previously. We are so far beyond the point in Iraq where a U.S. mission would have not only been drawn down, but closed and padlocked, however, the national interest dictated that we work at a different level and take the necessary steps to try to ensure security, and we have done pretty well. We have had casualties this year. Obviously, for my own situation, I have generally felt pretty safe.

My vehicle was destroyed by a rocket, shrapnel from a rocket that landed very close to it, but I wasn't in it, so that was good. You know, you run into these challenges. I mentioned going to the *New York Times*. As a matter of record, the press was invited to the Times around Christmas time and arranged with the security office to travel there. It's not far; it's across the Tigris from the international zone, but it involves a major movement which includes advance teams and helicopters in the air and moving me in personal protective equipment to this location, and securing the location, just so I can have lunch with the *New York Times* correspondents.

When I got there I found out the advance team had encountered a dog that I guess belonged or at least had sort of been adopted by some of the *New York Times*' own local guards, and that dog had attacked one of our bomb sniffing dogs, which are valuable assets. The security people made a determination that they had to shoot this dog and they

did, which given some of the other anxieties and press about personal security contractors and others just fed into that image. Anyway, it turned out the dog had a very checkered past and it was kind of a vicious dog, so I didn't feel as bad about its demise. Anyway, those are some of the unique aspects of this.

I travelled with the military. You make certain decisions. I went out once with military colleagues for an event where we had arranged for distribution of some U.S. donated soccer equipment, and we had set up a program with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to highlight this distribution. A lot of media with TV cameras got to this site which was outdoors. Our security had determined they could not secure it, and had to cancel the trip. It was a high priority for the ministry and, frankly, for the ambassador, because we had gone through a lot of difficulty and misunderstandings between the military and the ministry and how the military approached this. The minister had been offended and we had done a lot of diplomacy to work this out, so I felt it was really key to go ahead with this ceremony, which we asked the ministry to do.

So I joined my military colleagues and rode with them to the location. Security with the military said they preferred I kept on my flak vest and my helmet, but once it became clear I would be joining the minister on a dais giving remarks in front of television, I made a judgment call that I could not sit there with a helmet on. It was just simply untenable to accomplish the public diplomacy that we were trying to do. At a certain point you make a unilateral decision and I felt comfortable enough that if the minister could sit there without any protection at all, I could do the same thing. So I did that and it worked out very well. But those are some of the decisions that you do have to make. Life is not risk free and I never felt that we did anything foolish or pushed the envelope too far. In any of life's encounters here in Washington, driving on the Beltway or anything else, you are taking certain risks. You have to make personal calculations about that, and I do think those have to be exactly that, personal calculations. For some people this may not be an environment in which they are going to be able to work effectively.

Q: Just a couple more questions; what do you think had been your most significant accomplishment here after almost a year?

REEKER: Well, I think getting the section organized, which is a pretty broad word and a broad accomplishment. Obviously, I didn't do that by myself, it took a team. Building a team and making it one big team with the military and establishing those links is probably the most important legacy that will endure.

I suppose too, we focused on message, making sure the message was credible, honest, consistent. Really, with Ambassador Crocker we were able to do that, and that's been key to the policy. Whether you support it or not, at least we were making every effort to tell it like we saw it, and do it honestly, accepting the challenges and the downsides, and not overplaying or overhyping or spinning, as the term may be. Indeed, telling it from our perspective, and why we feel a certain way, is tied directly into the sort of ground-breaking testimony that the ambassador and General Petraeus did twice during this year; first back in September as required by Congress. There you had a unique situation where

the ambassador, a career diplomat, and a general went back to Washington to testify before Congress with enormous media and public expectation globally; not testimony by the secretary, either at Defense or State, or an administration figure. It was these two professionals, career people, doing this and we did that very independently to maintain again, credibility. The fact is that this was their own testimony, their view of how they saw the situation in Iraq, and their recommendations for moving forward; theirs and no one else's. We felt that we also then needed to immediately surround that and to coordinate that, so it wasn't seen as the White House spinning this, or the State Department and Defense. We did that.

Q: You went back to DC for that?

REEKER: I went back. I planned Ambassador Crocker's media in conjunction with General Petraeus' staff who were doing his side of the press and we coordinated that. Again, my own Washington experience was probably helpful in deciding which interviews we would do in a limited time to try to give the broadest and most balanced access. There were joint press conferences and some joint interviews and a mixture of television, radio, the key print media and some of the so-called required things: meeting with the *New York Times* editorial board, and the *Washington Post*. We did that quite independently both times, both in September and again in April.

So that was a major thing, but if you want to go back to the specific question of accomplishments, it was creating or recreating an operation that had essentially imploded. That goes broadly across PAS, not just the press operation but also our cultural and education affairs, reestablishing our exchanges and getting Washington a little more engaged and aware of what we are doing, not only the challenges, but what we can do. Indeed, there are great challenges that tended to be conventional wisdom in Washington and probably still are in many corners. How can you do anything in this security bubble? How can you conduct public diplomacy, and the fact of the matter is, you can. You have to go out and do it, but you also use other methods, like technology, like the internet, teleconferences, a lot of email to the Fulbrighters and, in fact, we have a very successful Fulbright program. We engaged the Washington bureaucracy to make sure that that program continues. Other exchanges too and focusing more attention on cultural heritage, for example, and getting Iraqis involved in that sphere. Again, we often worked with the military to make sure that they understand the importance of some of these things. However, State, as a much, much smaller operation, brings a certain value-added approach to public affairs, public diplomacy in a different manner than the military does, ever conscious of the fact though that the military is the elephant in the room. You can't pretend that it's not there.

I have often made the joke, when I describe Embassy Baghdad, that every embassy around the world has a defense attaché office. We do too, except ours is headed by a four star general with 170,000 staff. They do understand that it is unique, what we do. And, it is unique out here. Just about every U.S. government agency is represented in this embassy in some capacity. Then we work with this military presence which, of course, is a multinational force, overwhelmingly American but particularly here, at the embassy

and headquarters multinational force Iraq you have Brits, Australians, Georgians, and Macedonians, so that's a very interesting aspect.

Of course, from the military point of view you have all the services, all five services, including the Coast Guard. So it is unique, it is interesting. I feel like I have learned a lot, and I say often that one of the most valuable aspects of the work is understanding the military better, because I think this is the future. I would hope, facing something of a similar nature because of its impact and all that, and I do think future challenges in terms of security and diplomacy will involve combined work of the military and diplomats. This involves understanding the corporate cultures on both sides so that take-away I think is a valuable lesson. I am happy to be finishing my year, I'm probably a better Foreign Service officer for it. A personal challenge, and it has certainly been interesting.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your next assignment.

REEKER: I have been nominated to be the next U.S. ambassador to Macedonia so I will go back to the place where I served almost a decade ago, which is exciting. So I will leave here later in June and have a Senate hearing later in the month if the Senate so agrees and approves, I expect to go in September to start as the chief of mission there. So that's a new and different thing. In fact, it will be interesting to be in the Balkans again which still faces some challenges. Macedonia has a number of challenges and of course, one uses the experiences one has to form current and future endeavors, for example, coming to Iraq I didn't have experience really in the Middle East. I had traveled through a little bit, done some speaking, but I fell back on my Balkans experience, which has actually been fairly useful because the challenges are surprisingly similar. This is much, much bigger and tougher and meaner in some ways than what I encountered in the Kosovo conflict, but I applied those lessons and it's somewhat useful to apply certain lessons learned here, both in policy and diplomacy aspects and also the interagency work. Certainly one thing, which is something I realize more and more, is that there is a continuum to deal with leadership and management challenges as they arise.

Q: Any final thoughts?

REEKER: Well, just that it is very important to do what we are doing, particularly about Iraq because this is a foreign policy challenge, or undertaking or endeavor, which will impact broader U.S. foreign policy, and certainly domestic aspects of our country including the way we are viewed and how we deal with the rest of the world. It will impact the rest of my career, and probably the rest of my life. So I think it is crucial that we look at it, how we got to this point, what we went through, how we explain it, how we engage the rest of the world about it, and how we really understand Iraq, because it is sort of surreal to come out here. I am sure there will be things that will occur to me or that I will realize, or things that I will take away that I am not even aware of yet, but it is important for historians to look at this from lots of aspects and see what we can learn about it for the future, for the diplomats here now, and certainly how we have approached it in terms of communications and press. We have not dwelled on the reliving the past

and how we got into this and the cause per se. We have focused on the challenges we have right now.

As I mentioned, Ambassador Crocker believed that what we have done in the past five years will not be what we are remembered for, as much as for what happens in the next five years. That may be hard to grasp right now, but I think it is true. How we emerge from this is going to be very important, and it is a long term thing. That's not making any prescriptive judgments about the policy or whether we should stay or not, but what is clear is that it is far more complicated than being pro-war or anti-war which is what it boiled down to in many ways in the U.S. political context. We are where we are, and how we deal with the challenge that we have right now is the most important thing at hand. It is for the historians to take all this and look back at it and the hopefully, formally advise future policy makers of the things they might do differently in terms of reality-based policy making.

Q: Thanks for your time today.

End of interview