The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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AMBASSADOR G. NORMAN ANDERSON

Interviewed by: J. P. Moffat
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is an interview of Ambassador G. Norman Anderson on June 18, 1996. The interviewer is J. P. Moffat. Why don't you give us a little of your background, before you came to the Foreign Service?

ANDERSON: Basically I studied Russian while in the Navy and also went to graduate school at the Russian Institute at Columbia. So my main background, oriented towards the Foreign Service, was in Russian language and Soviet affairs.

Q: So when you came in to the Foreign Service in 1960, the Foreign Service did not immediately choose to avail itself of this background?

ANDERSON: No, I had of course requested a tour in Moscow, but I was told first tour officers could not go there. However, the State Department did suggest I study Arabic, a hard language. I chose Arabic because at the time the Soviet Union was very active in the Arab world. So I thought Russian and Arabic would be a good combination.

Q: Were you the only one to have this combination, or was this a regular thing?

ANDERSON: No, I think I was the first person to have such a combination. There were people who had combined Russian and Chinese, but not Arabic.

Q: And this took most of two years in Washington to start the Arabic training?

ANDERSON: Before I was assigned to Arabic I went to personnel, to the office that assigned people to language training. That was part of the deal, they got some work out of me before they sent me off to language training. but then I went to Beirut in 1961, early 1961, for Arabic. I just stayed on because the ambassador there, Armin Meyer, asked me to stay as his aide. So I stayed there for another three years, four and a half years all together, in Beirut.

Q: Could you cite for us the situation in Beirut in that period between '62 and '66?

ANDERSON: The situation was a bit unstable. When I arrived in Beirut for language training there had just be an attempted coup against the government. The PPS, which was a pan-Arab socialist group, had tried to overthrow the government. So there was a great deal of tension. The main event during my stay there was the presidential election, which took place in 1964. It was something of a landmark because it was the first time there had been a peaceful transition through an election. It came off quite well. Armin Meyer, the ambassador, worked very hard on that issue and I helped him out, so we felt a certain achievement there, after that election went very peacefully and smoothly.

Q: Remind us who won the election.

ANDERSON: It was Charles Helou who came out as the new president. The president had been Fuad Chehab, who had been the commander of the Army. A lot of people thought he wanted to stay on for another term, but as things turned out he did step down, and then that made possible a peaceful transition.

Q: Often junior officers have been used as a way to get to elements that more senior people may not want to be closely identified with, for one of a number of reasons. Were you used in any sort of capacity like that?

ANDERSON: Yes, we in the Political Section of course tried to keep open contacts with some of the more radical elements in the country. For example, some of the Palestinian radicals and Shiite radicals and people of that sort were in my bailiwick, as well as the Egyptians, who at the time were quite hostile towards the United States.

Q: Did you form long lasting attachments that lasted through the years, or was this a tumultuous period where you met someone and then didn't see them again?

ANDERSON: Unfortunately I didn't see some of these people again. Many of them were killed during various periods of fighting in Lebanon. One of our friends became the PLO spokesman in the country. His name was Ghassan Kanafani. Unfortunately he was blown up in a car-bomb attack at one point. So, many of these people simply disappeared during either the fighting involving the Palestinians or through other unfortunate events.

Q: And as you look back with the benefit of hindsight, do you feel that the embassy and you yourself were able to discern the trends that were going to lead the country to so much anguish in the years following?

ANDERSON: I think we did recognize some of the problems just beneath the surface. There was a great deal of hostility between the Moslems and Christians, and the Shiite population in the south was especially unhappy. So the seeds of future clashes were there the whole time. There was quite a lot of feudalism in the country. Various patriarchs ran parts of the country and they had their own militias. So I think we saw the seeds of destruction. We were working to try to promote a more democratic society, but unfortunately the pressures on the country were just too great.

Q: And do you believe that back in Washington this situation was recognized or were you lonely voices out in the field?

ANDERSON: I think a lot of the problems of Lebanon came from the outside actually, even though there were internal stresses. For example, there was a great deal of pressure from Syria, Egypt, Palestinians, and Israel. From the southern part of the country, various attacks took place into Lebanon which were very disruptive. I went to Tel Aviv at one point and had talks at the Foreign Ministry as a very junior officer, and I pointed out at that point that the raids into Lebanon were undermining the democratic situation there, but I don't think my voice carried much weight. Other serious pressures were from Palestinians coming into the country. There were already refugee camps and then later on more Palestinians came and set up their own more or less independent areas there. And at the same time some of the Moslem and Christian groups were setting up their own militias. So, all in all, the country became more and more divided.

Q: When you returned to Russian training at Garmisch, it must have been a pleasant year.

ANDERSON: That was a very nice year. Our first activity was a week devoted to learning. We had a very good group of Russian former officers, who had mostly defected during World War II. Previously I had studied Russian in the Navy with various princes and counts who had defected or left in 1917. So this second group was an entirely different group, brought up under the Soviet system. So it was complementary to the earlier training.

In any case, after a year in Garmisch I went to Moscow as a rotating trainee, became the assistant administrative officer and later political officer. Actually, administrative work gave us more contact with Russians than political work. I was the liaison officer with the so-called UPDK, which was the organization that took care of all the servicing of embassies, including providing local personnel. So I had to spend much of my time at UPDK headquarters negotiating for drivers and maids and various services. And when the Ambassador's plane came to Moscow I had to organize the unloading of the aircraft, which meant dealing with the KGB, whose officials were all over the cargoes and made life difficult for us. The KGB, for example, came up with new rules for cargo every time the plane came in. Without notice, for example, we were told to list everything on board, all the equipment and things of that kind. Some of the equipment was very sensitive and couldn't be listed, it was in sealed containers. In any case, we very often had a stand-off during which we had to wait at the airport for many hours, but finally the cargo was always released after the KGB had inflicted what pressures it could.

Q: Were you impressed or unimpressed by those elements of the KGB with which you came in contact with?

ANDERSON: I found them very heavy-handed and very blatant. We of course were followed and watched and our apartment and offices were bugged, but it was all extremely blatant. For example, in our apartment building the shifts from the listening room came down every eight hours in the elevator, so you always knew they were coming from the upper floor. That always reminded you, of course, that you were not alone in your apartment or office.

Q: Of course this was in the Brezhnev era, and perhaps the most exciting thing that must have happened in the period was the Czechoslovak affair. Were you at all touched by this?

ANDERSON: Yes, I was in the political section at the time and the ambassador, Llewellyn Thompson, had sent in a message to Washington regarding what the Soviet Union might do. As I recall, he estimated that the chances were 50-50 that the Soviet Union would take military action. Well, one day in August I woke up and listened to the BBC, which I did every morning, and I learned that the Soviet Union had invaded Czechoslovakia. So of course, I rushed to the embassy. There was no sign of activity in Moscow, however. We all met in the political section and mapped out our activities for the day. We were sent out into town to try and put our finger on the pulse of what was going on. The only unusual event was that Pravda did not come out that morning on time, and this had not happened since the death of Stalin in 1953. As we were out in town Pravda did come out and it was tacked up on various bulletin boards. Not too many people noticed that on page four there was an article saying that the Czechoslovak party had requested fraternal assistance from the Soviet brothers. But anyway, this was the announcement of the invasion, which was not exactly spelled out very clearly. The reactions in Moscow itself were practically invisible. There

were no protests to speak of. One very small group of about three or four people protested in Red Square, but they were immediately carted off by the KGB. But aside from that there were practically no reactions whatsoever. This held true in the following days also.

Q: Do you think that this was because of repression or do you think that people didn't care? What passed for public opinion?

ANDERSON: I think some dissidents did express their opinions very quietly, but it was very dangerous at the time to speak to foreign diplomats. So I think most people just did not want to be arrested and carted off. Anybody who spoke to a foreigner was at considerable risk. At one point, for example, we got lost driving to our destination near Moscow and a truck driver stopped and asked whether he could help us. He probably didn't know we were diplomats. We noticed as we were driving off that our KGB follow car stopped the truck, and obviously the driver was taken away for interrogation. So, it was not easy to speak to foreigners.

Q: Do you think Washington was adequately prepared for this move into Czechoslovakia?

ANDERSON: I think Washington was probably pretty well informed because I believe our embassy had signaled the serious possibility of military action. Of course, in retrospect it is hard to know what we could have done about it, probably not very much. Just as there wasn't much we could do in the case of the Soviet repression of Hungary, which had taken place earlier, in 1956.

Q: ...common knowledge that what few dealings there were during such a difficult period with the Russians often took place in Washington, leaving the embassy out in left field. Was this the situation during that period?

ANDERSON: It was hard for me to judge since I was rather a junior officer at the time. I know that very frequently it was hard to get appointments with high level officials in Moscow. They made appointments very difficult to obtain. I assume that a lot of business was done through Ambassador Dobrynin in the United States, who had access to the highest levels, it seems.
Q: The Soviet Union/Eastern European and the Arabic speaking world came somewhat together in your next four or five years when you went to the Soviet desk and then the Egyptian desk. Can you give us an overview of what you worked on during these periods?

ANDERSON: On the Soviet desk I was involved in Soviet foreign policy, mostly in the Middle East, but also U.N. activities. I did many, many briefing papers during that particular time. Actually, when I shifted to the Egyptian desk it was something of a carry-over because Egypt at the time was very much under Soviet influence. I think there were something like 15,000 or more Soviet troops or technicians in Egypt at the time. Bases and missile systems had been installed. During the first part of my tour on the Egyptian desk, the United States only had an interests section in Cairo with a handful of people, but then came the 1973 war and, following that, peace efforts. Finally we did renew diplomatic relations with Egypt during that time. So, it was a very active period.

Q: During the shift to the Nixon administration were you on the Soviet desk or the Egyptian desk?

ANDERSON: I was on the Egyptian desk during much of that period.

Q: Did it have any effect at your level? Did you notice any changes?

ANDERSON: Of course, Henry Kissinger became Secretary of State during the time I was on the Egyptian desk, and I think that he brought in a very noticeable difference. He was quite interested in Egypt, and he made a great number of trips there. Also, President Nixon went to Egypt during the later part of my time on the desk. There again we, of course, did many, many briefing books. For the first Kissinger trip to Cairo, I think he did depend on us a great deal, but as time went on he neglected to report back what he was doing in Egypt. He probably found our input much less useful as time went on. But in any case, we did quite a lot of, one might say, legwork for Kissinger. I remember one case in which he decided that the United States would donate a large sum of money to a charity being run by Mrs. Sadat. I was given the task of implementing this decision, which was not too easy to do, since there were all sorts of laws that were involved. It involved donating some surplus currency in Egyptian pounds to this particular charity, and that required a presidential determination that this was in our national interest. The decision thus had to be authorized by President Nixon. We sort of had to pick up the pieces as Henry Kissinger went through his diplomatic activities.

Q: Did he rely on alternate sources of wisdom as time went on or did he appear to do it entirely on his own?

ANDERSON: I think that he liked to have various analyses, but when it came to his own contacts with the highest levels he was the person who knew most about them. There wasn't much we could tell him about what had gone on in these contacts since we were not privy to the exchanges.

Q: ...expertise must have come into play when the Soviet/Egyptian friendship treaty was signed. Were you involved from both sides or from one side or the other?

ANDERSON: Well, we were asked to analyze the significance of this treaty. I was on the Soviet desk and Walter Smith, another Soviet hand, was on the Egyptian desk. The two of us put together our analysis and we agreed completely that we should not overreact to this particular friendship treaty. We didn't think it would have much practical effect. We thought it was mostly a propaganda move. However, our analysis was edited as it went up the line. The outcome was an analysis by our superiors that this was a much more dramatic development. By the time it ended up this was a tremendously important treaty. Actually, I believe Walter Smith and I were right about it because the whole thing fizzled out as time went on and eventually the Egyptians threw out the Soviet technicians and military personnel there.

Q: ...firmly into the Arabic speaking world with your assignment as political counselor to Rabat in 1974. That brought you there in time for such excitements as the Green March. Can you set the stage a little for us about your time in Morocco?

ANDERSON: The Green March was a very interesting event. King Hassan announced that Moroccans would start marching on the Spanish Sahara, claimed by Morocco but occupied by Spain at the time. Of course we were all wondering whether he could actually pull this off, but he did send hundreds of thousands, I think it was 300,000, people down towards the border. They were to march across with their Korans in hand without any arms. So, it was a rather clever propaganda move. Indeed, as time went by, Spain did relent and set up a tri-partite transitional government in the Spanish Sahara. The Mauritanians, Moroccans, and Spaniards ran the Sahara during the interim period. At just that particular time, the embassy was invited to send someone down to visit el-Ayoune, the capital of Sahara. So, I was designated to go down there. The Moroccans took us all around. Their point was to demonstrate that everyone in the Sahara wanted to be Moroccan. So, they had organized all kinds of rallies and we went to a session of parliament and so forth. Everywhere we turned people came up to us and informed us that they wanted to join Morocco. We were sent out in helicopters to some outposts in the desert. We did notice that Moroccan troops were quite nervous at these places. They seemed to be on the alert for attacks by the Polisario, a movement favoring independence. They breathed a sigh of relief when we finally left these outposts. In any case, I think King Hassan very cleverly was able to absorb the Sahara and he did withstand the many attacks by the Polisario over a long period of time. He had staying power, which seems to be the main factor there.

Q: I recall that your first ambassador there, Ambassador Neumann, and his colleague in Algeria engaged in a battle of telegrams that would electrify Washington. Can you bring us up to date on that?

ANDERSON: Well, some people thought there was a bit of localitis involved in the reporting back and forth, and I suppose that was probably true. I think a lot of the people assigned as ambassador to Morocco, as you point out in your own paper, were enamored with the king. He was extremely charming and won people over. It was very hard to be critical of the king. Also the king, I think, had the nasty habit of getting rid of ambassadors he didn't like. So he more or less assured that he had a favorable voice at the embassy. I'm not to sure what the situation is today, but I wouldn't be too surprised if this continues.

Q: As your time there went on the question became more and more one of U.S. military assistance for Morocco. Were you deeply involved in that?

ANDERSON: No, not really. I think those questions were handled on a higher level. We mostly were involved in the political contacts, especially with some of the opposition parties. The ambassador, for example, probably didn't want to be too deeply involved with those because King Hassan would notice and take such contacts amiss. Of course, I think Morocco was very important in American policy because it was one of the few friends we had among Arab countries and King Hassan pursued a very moderate policy on the Arab/Israel issue, so that made him quite valuable, I think, to American policy.

Q: And he was also, was he not, involved in African affairs?

ANDERSON: That's right, I think he had much greater influence on the international level than some others, in a very constructive way, so that made him quite valuable. Also he took a very enlightened view regarding the Jewish community in Morocco, allowed many Jews to leave the country and those who remained, I think, felt quite secure as long as King Hassan was there.

Q: Overseas you returned to what could have been a highly politicized job as the Department's liaison to the Jewish community, is that correct, in 1978?

ANDERSON: Yes, when I returned I was called for an interview with Ed Sanders, who was the senior adviser to President Carter on liaison with the Jewish community. He, I think, felt it was useful to have a career foreign service officer to keep him informed on developments, especially concerning the Soviet Union and the Arab world, so because of my background in both of those areas he chose me to help him out. Basically, he had two offices, one next to the office of the Secretary of State, and that was the office that I was assigned to, that's where I sat, and then he had his office in the west wing of the White House, and he commuted back and forth. As time went on, though, I think he found that he was more influential in the White House, so he spent virtually all his time there. So, I was called over to brief him in the White House on a daily basis, and that was very interesting. In any case, my job was to read through all the telegrams and hear what was going on regarding various issues touching on the Jewish community and the Soviet Union, for instance the question of emigration. At the time the Soviet union had been allowing more people to leave, which was positive, but on the other hand not as many as wanted to leave, so there were pressures for greater emigration. With regard to the Middle East, of course, Mr. Sanders was very interested in negotiations on Arab-Israeli peace efforts, so I tried to keep him abreast. Also, we helped to brief groups of visitors to the White House and State Department on these matters.

Q: This position lasted through at least one other foreign service type, has it just...

ANDERSON: I think there was one person after me.

Q: With the benefit of hindsight do you think it was a valuable and constructive thing to have such a position?

ANDERSON: I think it was a very valuable position because it helped to keep this senior advisor to the president informed about the facts of what was going on, otherwise he might form opinions that were based on incomplete information or information that could be less accurate.

Q: One of the more frustrating experiences where you were, as I understand, trained in the Ukrainian language in preparation for being assigned as Consul General to Kiev, a post to be opened. Unfortunately, this was interrupted by the Afghan war. Did you find it as frustrating an experience as it must have been?

ANDERSON: My wife and I were in Ukrainian together, and we got to know the Ukrainian community in Washington quite well, a very nice group. However, at Christmas in 1979 the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and President Carter decided not to open the post that we were going

to the following summer. So, this was quite frustrating; however, we were shifted to another Slavic language, Bulgarian, and we ended up going to the area, at least, to Sofia, where I was DCM.

Q: We were always brought up on the truism that Bulgaria was the closest state to the Soviet Union in the outside world, and yet now, since the disappearance of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria has been very surprisingly successful as an independent state. Do you have any wisdom to share on what makes Bulgarians tick?

ANDERSON: Bulgaria in the early 1980s was not quite the overt police state that, say, Romania was. The president at the time, Todor Zhivkov, was able to keep very tight control, but not through having a lot of policemen in uniform in evidence, and there were no Soviet troops in the country. I think the Bulgarians did show a certain fondness for the Russians because the Russians had liberated them in 1878 from the Turks and Russia lost something like 200,000 troops killed in that campaign. So, there is a very long term historical relationship. At the present time Bulgaria still, I think, resembles Russia more than a lot of the other states in the area. Although most Bulgarians have studied Russian, for example, some of the other people of the area, such as the Yugoslavs, have not done that. But even today, the Bulgarians have reverted to rule by their Socialist party, which is made up of former Communist leaders. So, in a way, now they're more Russian than the Russians. The Russians have turned to greater democracy, and recently voted against the Communists.

Q: While you were there what was your main preoccupation at work?

ANDERSON: We were trying to broaden our relations with Bulgaria, to try to wean it from the Soviet Bloc. This was obviously a very long term effort. It was not going to happen overnight. But we did, for example, try to develop commercial relations. Various American companies became involved, Pepsi Cola for example, became involved with Bulgaria and started buying Bulgarian wine for sale in the United States. There was a trade fair in which American companies took part in Plovdiv. All in all, though, progress was extremely slow, the control of the Communist party over the country was very, very firm, despite the fact that such control was not overt. It was pretty subtle. We spent two years there and we were never once invited into a private home. Whereas recently we happened to go back to Bulgaria several times and were invited to homes practically every day.

Q: We've been led to believe that the Soviet KGB used the Bulgarians for various purposes over the years. Did you detect any of this?

ANDERSON: Just at the time I was leaving, there was an attempt against the Pope and many people thought the Bulgarian secret service, which was called the DS, was involved in it at the behest of the KGB. I think the situation is a bit unclear, as to whether that was actually true or not. Undoubtedly the two secret services--the KGB and DS--were very closely involved and the Russian ambassador was a God-like commissar figure in Sofia. So the connections were very, very strong.

Q: Were you able to have good relationships with your Soviet colleagues there?

ANDERSON: Actually I did have quite a good relationship with the Soviet DCM there. There were two different DCMs. The first one was quite friendly and we had many conversations. The second one was more of an ideologue, and he had written a book about the United States. He'd never been to the United States, but he wrote a book about capitalist exploitation and repression of the masses, from the far away vantage point of Moscow. The Soviet Embassy people nevertheless were relatively friendly and we did get together quite a bit.

Q: Well now a counterpoint in your career reappears and you're off to the Arab world again as DCM in Tunis. Can you set the stage for us on your time in Tunis from 1982 to 1986?

ANDERSON: Tunisia was similar to Morocco in that it was a friend to the United States, a rare friend in the Arab world. In fact, President Bourguiba had been very pro-American ever since Tunisian independence in 1956. He'd been granted a visa to the United States even before that at one point when he was under pressure from the French authorities. So he remembered it with great fondness. He was probably the most pro-American leader in the Arab world. We rewarded Tunisia with a great deal of economic and military assistance. So the United States had a very close relationship with Tunisia.

What stands out in my mind were some of crises that took place while I was there. For example, the Israeli Air Force bombed PLO headquarters in Tunisia. Usually when that kind of thing occurred, the mobs formed up downtown and marched on the American Embassy because they held the Americans responsible for such activities.

Just to backtrack, when I first arrived in Tunis in 1982, the embassy was surrounded by a cordon of buses, military personnel with dogs on guard all around the embassy, because at that time, Israel had invaded Lebanon and was crushing the PLO in Beirut. Finally the PLO leader, Arafat escaped to Tunisia and was saved. But in any case, every time tension arose between Israel and the Arab world, the United States was blamed. Another crisis was the raid by the United States against Libya. That was also held against us, of course. Mobs again formed up and marched on the embassy; fortunately, the police were effective enough to keep these mobs at some distance.

Another crisis was the bread riots. Bourguiba, who was becoming quite elderly at the time, decided suddenly to double the price of bread. This set people off into the streets and over a hundred people were killed in this rampage. Law and order completely broke down and it was a very tense situation. I happened to be Chargé d'Affaires at the time. Bourguiba called me to his palace in Carthage to try to explain what was going on . I remember the trip out there quite well. It was around six in the evening. Everywhere smoke was billowing from fires and burning tires in the streets. We drove out the long distance to Carthage with a driver and a security man and on the way there was a group of people throwing rocks. They hit our windshield, which was shattered immediately. We sped away. We finally got to the palace and Bourguiba explained that everything was under control. He had just instituted military law. After he explained the situation, I got on the telephone to the embassy and we relayed the gist of the conversation back to Washington. Meanwhile, our security officers had been very busy trying to protect the American school and get the children back into the hands of their parents. The embassy of course was right downtown and various mobs were marching back and forth being shot at by the police before our eyes. We had to

spend the night in the embassy because of a curfew. This was one of the more harrowing experiences I've had in the foreign service.

Q: Did you have to deal with Arafat or his assistants?

ANDERSON: No we didn't have any contacts with the PLO during the time I was there. Later, however, the embassy was authorized to carry on a dialog with Arafat.

Q: The diplomatic vineyards led to your elevation to be ambassador to Sudan in 1986, a year after the overthrow of Nimeiri and a very difficult time. Could you set the stage for us on your time in Sudan?

ANDERSON: The situation was somewhat shaky when I arrived out there. The new government had just taken over, the democratic government of Sadiq al-Mahdi who was prime minister. This had been preceded by a year under a transitional military council. During that particular year of transition there had been some events that hurt relations with the United States. For example, Nimeiri, the dictator, had been quite a friend of the United States. He supported peace in the middle east, he supported President Sadat and the Camp David agreement. He was very anti-Libyan. He was quite an enemy of Qadhafi. In a third area, he'd also been quite helpful, he was secretly involved in smuggling Jews, Falashas, Ethiopian Jews from Ethiopia, by way of Sudan to Israel. Well, this particular airlift became public in the transitional period. So there was a severe reaction against the U.S. and its role.

The transitional military council put on trial various members of the Nimeiri regime for involvement in this airlift of Falashas. During the trials, which were televised, the role of the United states was depicted and this led to numerous anti-American demonstrations. Before I arrived there, in November 1985 the embassy was reduced; there were something like 225 Americans there at the time and that number was cut by perhaps 10%. These were people involved somehow in the Falasha issue.

Then just before I got there, this was in April 1986, Libyan terrorists attacked an American staff member and shot him in the head. He survived, but unfortunately was incapacitated. That led to another evacuation, so when I arrived in Khartoum there was only a skeleton staff of about 52 people. This was way down from the Nimeiri period in which the Embassy had been quite large. The main problem facing me on arrival was the question of terrorism.

One of my first jobs was to look at the security situation and decide whether we could bring back some of the other employees plus the dependents who had been evacuated. It turned out that there were a lot of reports about impending terrorism against Americans but some of the information, as it turned out, had been fabricated. Informants had given all kinds of reports in exchange for money from the US. Some of them had even passed lie detector tests. So I guess the lie detector was not infallible in this particular instance. Because one of these informants finally let it out that he had fabricated all the details, such as what kind of vehicles were going to be used for kidnapping Americans and where they were going to be taken and so on and so forth. Reports about snipers waiting here and there to ambush people. All these things were completely fabricated. Anyway

after a few months there we got permission from Washington to bring back some staff members. By the end of the year, this was about four or five months later, we were allowed to bring younger dependents back. So finally toward the end of 1986, we were operating at more or less a normal level again after very much disruption.

Of course the disruption had affected all of our programs there, such as economic aid and military assistance. Without staff there, obviously we couldn't carry on some of these activities and a lot of money in the aid pipeline for Sudan was being held up pending an improvement in the security situation. So finally by the end of 1986 we were able to resume some of these activities.

Q: Sadiq al-Mahdi was certainly one of the more enigmatic figures. What is your reading of him?

ANDERSON: I always found him extremely charming and affable, a very polite individual. He was the great-grandson of the Sudanese Mahdi of the 1880's, who was really the first Islamic nationalist in Sudan. He set the tone for the country for many years afterward..

Sadiq al-Mahdi was the leader of the main religious sect in the country, the Ansar sect, these had been the followers of the early Mahdi. The Ansar sect was the basis for Sadiq's political party. Well, no party won a majority in the 1986 elections, so Sadiq al-Mahdi had to forge various coalition governments during his time. The main other sect in the country the Khatmiyyaa sect, had also become the basis for a political party, the Democratic Unionist party. These two parties, Sadiq's party, which was called the Ummah Party and the DUP, the other sectarian-based party, were the main parties in the coalition government. Then, the opposition was made up of the National Islamic Front, which was more militant. The three groups were in intensive competition with one another, which made democracy unstable.

You asked about the personality of Sadiq al-Mahdi. Actually, he probably should have been a university professor, because he liked to talk very much. Whenever I had to go see him, I always had to rush through my talking points, before he started talking, because once he started talking, it was very difficult to insert any ideas. So I had to make sure my presentation was concise and to the point. He was always very good at listening for a very short period of time and he did absorb what was said to him. But then he liked to philosophize and give his point of view at length. He was always very charming. Of course, his loquaciousness made him somewhat difficult to deal with, however.

Q: Meanwhile the trouble was brewing down south which erupted in 1983 into what became one of the more intractable civil wars. From up in Khartoum were you fully aware of the depth of feeling and the problems that were going on down south?

ANDERSON: The civil war and then the famine that resulted from the civil war were two of the main issues we dealt with virtually every day. Every single demarche I made in Khartoum had something to do with these issues. The war had been going on for quite some time. It really started in 1955. Then during the Nimeiri period it was resolved for a time in 1972 by an agreement between Nimeiri, who, of course, was a dictator, and the leader of the rebel movement, Joseph Lagu. The settlement was quite a good compromise, and it lasted for 11 years, until 1983, when the war resumed. But Nimeiri himself undermined the agreement by whittling away at it. He

undermined southern autonomy. Then also he instituted Islamic law in 1983. The war resumed in 1983, actually it resumed just before Islamic law, but Islamic law was a contributing factor in preventing a new peace agreement. Nimeiri started implementing some of the Islamic punishments, such as amputation of hands, and this made it all the more difficult to reinstate a settlement of the war and the war just got worse and worse.

We were very much aware of it because it had an effect on our relations, of course. In every respect it undermined our aid program. It was very hard to bolster the economy when the economy was being drained by the war, which was very costly. Some people thought it cost about a million dollars a day, which is a terrible drain on a very poor economy. Then also, people were starving in the south. So we instituted a tremendous relief program, but it was difficult to implement it because neither side in the war really endorsed the relief program very much for one reason or another. So then our military assistance program was affected because we didn't want to provide arms that could be used against part of the population in the south. The United States was very active in peace efforts. We tried to put the two sides together again and again. A lot of people blame Sadiq al-Mahdi but the rebel leader, John Garang, was very difficult to deal with and not particularly amenable to peace efforts.

Q: What were his motivations? He's a very controversial figure.

ANDERSON: When the war broke out again in 1983, he was in the Sudanese army. He was a colonel stationed in Khartoum. He's quite intellectual, he'd studied in the United States, went to Grinell college and the University of Iowa, and got a Ph.D. In any case, he was on leave in his hometown in the south when a rebellion, or mutiny broke out in that hometown, which is Bor, and the rebels asked him to lead the movement. He agonized over this decision for some time but finally decided he should be more loyal to his fellow southerners than to the dictator Nimeiri, so he did take up leadership of the rebellion. This movement was called the SPLM, Southern Peoples' Liberation Movement. The military branch was the SPLA, for army. The SPLA or rebel army became quite strong quite fast. The numbers grew and all during the Sadiq al-Mahdi prime ministership in northern Sudan, the southern rebels took over more and more territory and finally ended up besieging the few southern towns remaining in government hands. The Sudanese army remained in control of several of the larger towns but all the rest of the area was under rebel control. The rebels refused to let food into these towns, so a lot of these people were starving in the towns and in the countryside. Because of the civil war, farmers were unable to grow crops. There were not just the army and the rebels fighting, but all kinds of marauders and tribal militias and what not were rampaging around the countryside. So nobody could provide adequate food for the population either in the towns or in the countryside.

Q: You were there for al-Mahdi's political demise and his replacement in effect by Turabi, am I correct?

ANDERSON: That's right. This was in June 1989. It happened that we had been in Washington, my family and I, for consultations and we arrived back at Khartoum airport at two a.m. on June 30. Well, it just so happened that two a.m. was zero hour for the coup. We were just about the last flight to arrive. We didn't notice anything at the time, we got into our car and drove off. But literally

minutes later the airport was taken over by the rebels, by the mutineers I guess you would call them, not the southern rebels. We drove past army headquarters on our way from the airport and that was very quiet. Well, moments later the coup plotters took over the military headquarters.

I was called out of bed after a very short sleep that night and went into the embassy. We'd heard on the radio that a coup had taken place. There was nothing very noticeable on the road, everything was very, very quiet. So I drove to the embassy without incident.

We had very good contacts with the Sudanese military. First of all because we'd had a long-term military assistance program, particularly under Nimeiri. Our aid was quite large. Many Sudanese officers had trained in the United States, so we able to contact these people to try and find out what was going on. We had good sources on what was happening and we also listened to the radio.

Well, it was very surprising that the population seemed to acquiesce in the coup, even though it meant the demise of democracy. Unfortunately, Sadiq al-Mahdi had disappointed people very much. He hadn't resolved any of the country's serious problems, he hadn't resolved the civil war, he had many, many economic problems. He didn't institute reforms, so that the country became poorer and poorer as time went on. Also he had a sort of non-aligned foreign policy which catered mostly to Libya, Iran and Iraq. In the end, everybody was quite disillusioned, so nobody stood up and tried to save the democratic regime.

The military officers who took over imprisoned all the political leaders, including Hassan Turabi, the leader of the National Islamic Front, which had been one of the main opposition parties, but had also participated in the government at various times, too. Turabi had been Minister of Justice with Sadiq and he'd even been Foreign Minister. So he'd been part of the government. One of the problems that Sadiq had had to face was trying to balance between the more extreme Islamic elements and the more moderate elements. He ended up making everybody unhappy. He couldn't really satisfy anybody, so he ended up without very much support. Anyway, Turabi and the National Islamic Front, volunteered to help the military coup leaders as time went on. They provided many of the officials, especially the middle ranks in various ministries. With time they really infiltrated the government and became a very powerful force. But that was not the case from the very beginning.

Q: A lot of ink has been spilled on Turabi as a somewhat sinister figure in the area. What is your appreciation of him as a man, a leader, an ideologue? How do you come down on him?

ANDERSON: He was certainly the most impressive political personality in the country. Sadiq al-Mahdi was quite impressive and very well educated himself--he'd gone to Oxford and studied economics. But Hassan Turabi was even more of an intellect and scholar. Really on an international level. He was certainly one of the most clever politicians and impressive ones. He's not at all what you'd expect from an Islamic leader. He's not a mad mullah or anything of that sort, he's very suave and sophisticated. He has a sort of self-deprecating humor and is extremely good at dealing with foreigners. Of course, he's extremely ideological, has answers to every question based on Islamic ideas. During our time there, he really portrayed himself as a moderate. I think compared to say, Khomeini, he was a moderate indeed. He always seemed quite rational.

Q: But since your time he appears, has he not, to have become more and more involved with the no-goodniks of the international world and to foster terrorism and so on.

ANDERSON: I'm not sure exactly what the evidence is implicating him in terrorism. I did see him in Washington several years ago and he had not changed very much. He was still expressing quite moderate views. He is more enigmatic, I think, than most of the other leaders there. He never expressed extreme Islam, I mean, he didn't favor wholesale amputations or anything of that kind. His basic platform, I think you'd say, was more in the moderate range than the extremist range. Now what his role is behind the scenes is very hard to gauge. I don't really know to what extent he may have encouraged the presence of terrorists. I just don't have a basis to judge that.

Q: Well you were certainly at a post that raised interesting policy questions and they were certainly criticisms as well as plaudits for what we were doing in Sudan. How do you view your time there now, with a little perspective?

ANDERSON: My main regret, of course, is that democracy was overthrown. We did try very hard to influence Sadiq al-Mahdi in the right direction on various issues such as ending the war, famine relief, economic reform and also foreign policy. Unfortunately, Sadiq was never quite decisive enough on any of the issues. For instance, there was a very good opportunity to end the war. In 1988, one of the coalition parties, the Dul, signed an agreement with John Garang, which was quite moderate. It suspended Islamic law, for example, thereby overcoming one of the most controversial issues. Sadiq al-Mahdi unfortunately did not wholeheartedly endorse this agreement. At the time, he was trying to keep the National Islamic Front in the government. He couldn't have it both ways. He couldn't keep the Islamic extremists in the government and also promote peace, because the Islamic extremists were against any tampering with Islamic law. Yet the agreement with the rebels was reached by one of the other Islamic leaders, who headed the other sect. So if one Islamic leader could accept freezing Islamic law, why couldn't the others? Well, Sadiq wavered between these two elements--moderates and extremists--and he failed to support this possibility of real peace and then it was lost, unfortunately.

Also on the question of famine, Sadiq didn't exert the leadership that was needed. The rebels didn't like the idea of sending food to the south because they felt the army in the towns would benefit and as a result be able to hold on to the towns. Also in the towns were many, many southerners who had taken refuge from the chaos in the countryside. They were the ones starving. These were not northern Arabs, they were southern Sudanese. The rebels were thus willing to sacrifice their own people. The army in the north also didn't like famine relief because it felt that if food went to southern areas occupied by the rebels, this food would fall into the hands of the rebels and strengthen them militarily. So nobody liked famine relief. Sadiq, unfortunately, recognized that the army could overthrow him at any time, so he didn't want to push too hard himself on famine relief when the army was opposed. So that's why it was extremely difficult to get these various relief operations going. We negotiated, for example, for a whole year to get an airlift by the ICRC (the International Committee of the Red Cross). The only reason we finally succeeded was that during one of the five or six cabinet reshuffles, a very good Minister of Defense came into the job. The man had worked for Nimeiri. In any case, this defense minister, was extremely forceful and

decisive, and he decided to allow the ICRC to fly relief to both sides of the fighting. But without his forceful decision, even this airlift probably wouldn't have worked out. Famine relief was very difficult to implement because everybody was against it and made even agreements hard to implement.

Q: You went to another exciting country when in 1993 you were nominated to represent the then CSCE in Macedonia. Or as we should say once for the record, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This was a somewhat unusual assignment reflecting in many ways a changed world. Can you tell us how you came to be selected and what role you played in Macedonia?

ANDERSON: President Bush had taken the initiative for sending a mission to Macedonia. Two missions were sent out by the CSCE, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in 1992. One went to Belgrade and had branches in what was left of Yugoslavia, in *Kosovo*, Voyodina and Sandjak. The other mission was sent to Macedonia. Macedonia at the time was under a great deal of pressure and nobody knew whether it could maintain its independence. It had declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, at the same time as Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia did. Of course, everyone was worried that the war in Bosnia might spread to Macedonia.

Now the United States had not officially recognized Macedonia and some of the European countries had not either. There was no international diplomatic presence there. The CSCE was actually the first international presence. The CSCE mission was started by another American diplomat, Bob Frowick, who is now in charge of the elections in Bosnia, so I'm sure the Macedonian experience was very useful. In any case, I replaced an American out there. Bob Frowick had only been able to spend about two or three months there. The State Department wanted somebody to spend a longer time. So I was asked to go out and replace another person, Bill Whitman, also an American, who'd also been there just a very short time. I went out for six months, but ended up staying two years.

Our job was to try to promote stability and the territorial integrity of Macedonia. That was our mandate, but how to go about it was not spelled out. We, first of all, had to determine what the threats to stability were and also what to do about these various threats. In reality, there were all kinds of threats to stability and we had a very broad mandate. We became involved in one way or another in all these different issues. Meanwhile, the UN also sent troops to Macedonia. The CSCE mission was started toward the end of 1992 and UN forces arrived in January 1993. I finally got out there in March of 1993, so the UN was already in place when I arrived. No American troops were yet there though. Later on, about 500 American troops were added to the UN contingent. All for the sake of stability. Well, the CSCE had the first international political presence there. It was welcomed by the government because it was a sign of international support for independence of the country.

As I mentioned, there were various threats to stability, some of them were external threats and some were internal. The main threat the international community had in mind was the threat of Serbian military intervention. The fact was, the Serbs could roll into Skopje, the capital, within about two hours and nobody could stop them, not even the UN. The UN didn’t have heavy

weapons, it was a very lightly armed observer group. It was enough of a trip wire to keep the Serbs out and they were busy elsewhere. Some of the other threats came from other neighbors.

Bulgaria for example didn't really feel that Macedonia should be a separate entity. Bulgarians to this day believe that Macedonians are really Bulgarians. Now, the Macedonians don't agree with this, so there are tensions with Bulgaria. Also with respect to Albania, a large part of the population in Macedonia is ethnically Albanian and some of the Albanian elements there believe in Greater Albania, so there is always a threat of Greater Albania, which causes problems in the area.

Finally, Greece may have been more of a problem to the country than any of the other neighbors because the Greeks felt that there was an irredentist threat from Macedonia. Back in history Macedonia had been a much bigger country and part of it was northern Greece. The Greeks did not want to recognize an entity that had once extended all the way to Thessaloniki and most of northern Greece. The Greeks did not accept the name Macedonia. They objected to membership in international organizations. However, a compromise was reached on the UN and Macedonia came into the UN as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Greeks did not want Macedonia to be a member of the CSCE, or the European Union. At one point Greece closed the border and cut off supplies of oil to Macedonia, which created severe economic strains and in effect destabilized the country. Those were external threats.

There were also internal threats, ethnic tensions among various groups there, especially Albanians, there were Serbs, Slavic Muslims, gypsies (roma, as they were called) plus other groups which did not always get along well. So there were problems of ethnic tension. Finally, the economy was in very bad shape. A lot of people were out of jobs, had no way to support themselves. There was potential for unrest on the economic front. So in all these areas we monitored and tried to help the government maintain its stability.

Q: I gather in a sense, that it's quite a success story, Macedonia.

ANDERSON: Fortunately, Macedonia had good leaders, especially President Gligorov, who is very moderate. Ironically, most of the leaders there are former communists. It turned out that they were the most moderate elements in the country compared to some of the right wing nationalists who indeed did want to go to Thessaloniki and take over, ideally speaking. The right wing elements were a very serious threat to the stability of the country.

Q: So your job was really in large part exhortatory and representing the US and international, well more correctly the international community.

ANDERSON: That's right. We represented the international community. The United States later recognized Macedonia and right now, in July 1996, is sending its first ambassador out there after having had an interest section or liaison office, as it was called.

Q: ... credit for bringing about this happy situation, particularly deeming the elections to have been free and fair.

ANDERSON: Our CSCE mission did, I think, contribute to stability. For example, we helped to conduct a census which was very politically sensitive there. The Albanian ethnic group in particular thought it was undercounted. But we helped to monitor the census so it was conducted properly, along with the European Union.

Finally in 1994, presidential and parliamentary elections were held and our mission was charged with the task of monitoring the elections. We called in a lot of outside observers from CSCE countries and set up monitoring. We also went around urging the various political groups to participate. The right wing elements, who were a something of a threat to stability, did participate in the first round of elections because we exhorted them to do that. They had been telling us that the elections would be rigged. So finally, they maintained that the first round was rigged and refused to participate in the second round.

The CSCE found that the elections, even though there were some irregularities, were basically fair and free. We in our final report and press conference on the matter, we stated that, despite some irregularities, the elections were valid. Now the right wing parties did not like that pronouncement and they organized various rallies and demonstrations. But we urged them not to resort to violence and I think we had an influence in keeping the situation calm. In any case, the elections were fair and free. I believe they did lead to a further period of stability in the country.

Q: You, certainly, next perhaps to Jack Matlock must be the premier linguist in the recent Foreign Service what with Arabic, French, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Macedonian to your credit. Is there any hope for others to follow in such a pattern? To what do you credit you linguistic ability?

ANDERSON: Well, it was all by chance, in a way, according to assignments. I think, obviously, languages are very useful. You don't need them until you really need them. You could probably get by with English in many situations, these days, but in a crisis, you may not be able to get by with English and you may have to rely on some exotic language. For example, in the coup in Sudan, if you didn't understand the Arabic radio broadcasts, you didn't know what was going on. Also the new leaders did not speak English, so my contacts with them had to be in Arabic. A foreign language is definitely a window on the culture and thinking of such leaders and makes for a much better understanding of developments.

Q: Well thank you Mr. Ambassador.

ANDERSON: Thank you.

End of interview