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

AMBASSADOR KENTON W. KEITH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Istanbul, Turkey; Cultural Attaché	1968-1972
"Johnson Letter" resentment	
"Idea Clubs"	
Relations	
Anti-Americanism	
Islam	
German influence	
Environment	
Greece-Turkey issue	
Tangier, Morocco; Western Arabic Language Study	1972-1973
Environment	
King Hassan	
Relations	
Peace Corps	
Western Sahara	
Fez, Morocco; Branch Public Affairs Officer	1973-1974
Environment	
Culture	
Program	
French influence	
US military facilities	
Relations with neighbors	
Damascus, Syria; Public Affairs Officer	1974-1977
Restoration of diplomatic relations	
University linkages	
Relations	
Scholarships	
Cultural Agreement	
AID program	
Israel	
Hafez el-Assad	
American movies	
Baath Party	
Pan-Arabism	
Press	
Secret Police	
Washington, DC; USIAC; Near East, North African & South Asian Affairs	1977-1978
Restructuring USIA	
Washington, DC; USIAC; Special Assistant to Deputy Director	1978-1980
Transferring State's Cultural Affairs functions to USIAC	

President Carter's policies
Anwar Sadat visit to Israel
VOA
Israel
Smith-Mundt Act
Congressional interest
USIA-State coordination
Educational Exchange Program
Iran revolution
Personnel policies
Foreign views of President Carter

Brasilia, Brazil; Deputy Public Affairs Officer 1980-1983
Supervising branch posts
President Reagan visit
Relations
Environment
Economy
Government

Washington, DC USIA; Deputy Director for Near East and South Asia 1983-1985
Charles Wick
"Enemies List"
Israel
Engaging Israelis and Arabs
Libya
Hafez al-Assad
Syria relations
Saddam Hussein
Saudi Arabia
Iran

Paris, France; Senior Cultural Affairs Officer 1985-1988
Congressional views
Fulbright Program
Ministry of Education
Reagan popularity
France's "Third Way"
Mitterrand
Cultural Minister Jacques Lang
American Film Festival, Deauville
Communists
Le Pen
American popular culture
French film industry

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is June 4, 1998. This is an interview with Ambassador Kenton W. Keith. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. I wonder if you could tell me when and where you were born.

KEITH: I was born November 12, 1939 in Kansas City, Missouri.

Q: Tell me a bit about your family.

KEITH: My parents were both musicians at a certain point. My father was a jazz in 1969 musician and my parents met when he was playing saxophone in a jazz orchestra and my mother was a singer. He remained a musician all his life. My mother changed professions along the way and became interested in housing issues, ended up working first for the state of Missouri and then for the city of Kansas City in various capacities and housing authorities. She is now retired in Phoenix, Arizona. My father passed away in 1969,

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about where you were educated and grew up?

KEITH: I grew up in Kansas City and was educated in local schools, including Lincoln High School, which at the time was the college preparatory high school for black students in Kansas City. There were a couple of other institutions which were more or less vocational schools. That was before schools were integrated in Kansas City.

Q: Kansas City was pretty much a city of the old south?

KEITH: It was a city of the border south. Certain aspects of Kansas City historically were quite close to aspects of southern culture, including racial segregation. But I think it would be inaccurate to call Kansas City a pure southern city in the same sense as Jackson, Mississippi would be, for example.

Q: What about in elementary and high school – what subjects interested you the most?

KEITH: Without question the subjects that interested me most were things that had to do with literature, reading, civics, government. I did pretty well in math and science courses, too. But that was a lot more work and drudgery. English and literature have had a deep influence in my life. We had a teacher at Lincoln High School named Neil Herriford, a Harvard graduate. He was a man of great learning and sensitivity and he inspired a lot of us. He opened the door to literature. In eleventh grade, we did Macbeth and that, for us inner-city kids, was a revelation.

Q: How were the libraries in Kansas City?

KEITH: Not bad at all. There wasn't anything that I ever needed that I couldn't find. Even after I had gone off to university, when I was back on vacation and working on papers of one kind or another, I found that either Kansas City's public library or one of its local branches had what I needed.

Q: What type of reading were you particularly interested in?

KEITH: I was interested in fiction and I was interested in foreign lands. Those were the 1950s and by the time I went off to high school, we had just emerged from the Korean war. This was the McCarthy era,. I remember being glued to the television for the Army

McCarthy hearings. So, I did a lot of reading about that. I read a lot of fiction that had some reference to exotic lands or places far away from Kansas City, "Tales of the South Pacific," for example.

Q: This was a generation earlier, but did you read Richard Halliburton?

KEITH: Anything that had those themes was of interest to me. And of course we did a lot of movie going in those days. Certain films that left a deep impression (The Snows of Kilimanjaro, King Solomon's mines, etc.) but the sum total of the films and the books and the articles and the television programs and so on, I seemed to extract from all of that a desire to travel, to work abroad, to be abroad, to have a very wide canvas. I didn't know much about what I would find once I left home, but I knew that it was going to be a lot more interesting than Kansas City, Missouri.

Q: Did this in any way influence where you were looking to get further education?

KEITH: Not really. I was certainly interested in going to school as far away from Kansas City as I could. For a combination of reasons, I ended up going quite close to Kansas City. But the University of Kansas, where I did eventually go to school, 30 miles from Kansas City, was a very interesting place in those days. It was a kind of an island of liberalism in a conservative sea composed of wheat and Kansas farmers. I went for the first time to school with white students and had white teachers. But also there were a lot of foreigners. I had friends who were from South Asia, from Europe, from Africa. I got interested right away in international affairs. Those years and the people I met both in the faculty and among my student peers sealed the issue. I really wanted to know more about foreign cultures and governments. I had a very influential professor and counselor named Clifford Ketzel. He encouraged me not just toward the Foreign Service but specifically toward USIA.

Q: You were at the University of Kansas from when to when?

KEITH: From 1957 to 1961.

Q: This was the beginning of the civil rights movement. There was Brown vs. the Board of Education in '54. Was this having an impact?

KEITH: Indeed yes.

Q: Were you caught up in this at all?

KEITH: I was at one point vice president of an organization called the Group for the Improvement of Human Relations, which was a multiracial civil rights organization on campus. It could hardly be called a radical group, but it was active. Yes, we were out there on the prairie, but what was happening in the rest of the country was very much on our minds. We were mostly the children of the Eisenhower years in which very little activism took place. We were the quiet generation. It was a group of people who were

two or three years younger than I who came along and pushed the rest of us in a certain direction. But there were racial issues at the University of Kansas and we got very much involved in them. So, yes, that was a period that was increasingly marked by the civil rights movement.

Q: '60 was the Kennedy campaign, which seemed to touch a core that hadn't been touched before or since. Did that touch your particular group at the university?

KEITH: I had left the university by then. When I graduated in 1961, I went into the Navy and I was in the Navy for four years. I was commissioned at the university having been a part of the naval ROTC program. So, at the beginning, like everybody else, we were caught up in the Camelot of the period and the youthfulness of the administration and its idealism from the Peace Corps to commitment to improvement of communities -- "The Other America' People were beginning to focus on poverty issues and so on. But I don't think I really had the emotional connection to Kennedy during those early years that a lot of other people did. It wasn't until he was assassinated that that sense of overwhelming loss and confusion that landed on a lot of people by surprise hit me as well.

Q: Did the choice of going into the naval ROTC have something to do with the idea that this was going to get you beyond Kansas?

KEITH: Yes. You don't know where you're going if you go into the Navy, but you know it's got to be in a direction away from Kansas. In fact, at the university when we were talking about our first assignments in the Navy, I was one of only 200 or so black officers in the Navy. It was a challenging environment, the Navy being the last of the services to be integrated. One encountered problems. The executive officer of the NROTC unit at the University of Kansas called me in and advised me that he thought I would be more comfortable on the West Coast and that he thought I would be more comfortable on a large ship rather than a small one. That was fine with me I sensed he was a man who had my interests at heart. As it turned out, I was quite happy and comfortable in the setting that I eventually found myself in. So, he was not wrong about that. I don't know whether he would have been wrong about being on a destroyer out of Norfolk, Virginia, or Mayport, Florida, or some other place on the East Coast, but certainly he was right about being in California and he was right about being on a large ship.

Q: I try to capture some social history while I am doing this because I feel the weight of history as well as just Foreign Service. It's hard to go back to the time when you were 200 black officers in the Navy.

KEITH: I think we all knew each other, too, for the most part.

Q: You were somewhat akin to the Tuskegee airmen. I'm familiar with the Navy. My brother was a 1940 graduate of the naval academy. I lived in Annapolis. I can think of no more conservative an organization in the world, particularly the old Navy. Was there any trepidation on your part before looking at naval ROTC?

KEITH: I didn't really know any better. There wasn't a lot of Navy culture in Kansas City. I was looking around for a scholarship opportunity and for assistance. The Navy had a scholarship program, naval ROTC, in two forms. I took the exam. When I passed the exam, it wasn't anything particularly new. I had been taking exams and had been waiting for results which came in the mail and usually said positive things. That is what happened with the Navy. It wasn't until I got to the University of Kansas that I discovered that there had never been an African American in naval ROTC there, that I was the only one in the program and in the four years that I was there, there was not another. So, it was a very interesting time. Among my professors, there was one naval officer who told me that I didn't really have a future in the Navy, that the Navy didn't need people like me, people of my kind. His name was Gunn, as a matter of fact. I will thank him all my life for inspiring me to do much better probably than I would have otherwise, especially in his courses.

Q: Stick it to him.

KEITH: I look back on this and remember it this mixed feelings, but I had to be the best in his classes. It wasn't the case in all classes. But certainly I had something to prove both to him and to myself.

I graduated in '61 and was commissioned on that same day. I went to an aircraft carrier, the Midway, home ported in Alameda, California. 136 or 137 ships company officers. No blacks but me. There was one black officer in the air group that came aboard. That was it.

Q: When you arrived, how did it work?

KEITH: When I arrived, once I was on the ship, the senior officers did a sort of triage and assigned you to an available job that corresponded, to the extent possible, with your interests. I got what I asked for. I ended up having a very successful tour. I had an education as a 21 year old in charge of a division of 100 men, some old enough to be my father, including many southern white sailors who had never been around a black person with any kind of authority. We learned a lot from each other. We did very well, actually.

Q: What type of work were you doing?

KEITH: I was in charge of a Deck Division, a part of the Gunnery Department. We had an anti-aircraft mission. We did ship's maintenance – chipping and painting, and ran and maintained two of the ship's small boats. As a watch stander, I did regular bridge watches with the rest of the junior officers. I found the Navy and its professional challenges fulfilling, and I thought the competition that existed was very fair and merit-based.. One of the rites of passage for a naval officer at sea is qualification as an officer of the deck underway for fleet operations. It's the Captain's vote of confidence in your ability to handle the ship in all sorts of circumstances. I achieved that milestone while I was still an ensign, which is very unusual on an aircraft carrier. I still have the letter from the Bureau of Personnel, acknowledging the qualification. It's getting to be a bit faded, but I can put my hands on it.

Q: Where did the Midway go?

KEITH: Home port was Alameda, California, across the bay from San Francisco. I made two cruises with Midway. For the most part we operated in the South China Sea. Of course we visited a number of ports in the Western Pacific. I enjoyed the Asia . I found places like Japan, Hong Kong and the Philippines very exciting. That was part of the experience that led to my determination to make as much of my career as I could in an overseas environment.

That was a rather benign period in military terms. At that time American military personnel were still officially "advisers" in Vietnam. So my sea duty over two years was free of the tension of combat, busy and challenging, but very pleasant. Being at sea is a way of life that can really capture you. I didn't want to make the Navy a career, but I found myself very drawn to that life.

Q: Were there any problems along the Formosa Straits or anything of that nature?

KEITH: The crisis that touched us all was the Cuban missile crisis. We had just returned from a Far East cruise and were looking forward to some leave in the Bay Area. Instead, we all went on alert and lived out the crisis with the rest of the world. The only crisis we experienced at sea came earlier on that same cruise involving a fishing dispute with the Russians. Back in the early '60s, there were disputes and a few violent confrontations between Russian and American fishing fleets off Alaska and the Aleutians. Since the Soviet navy moved into position to protect their fishermen, we were sent to show the flag. This took place while we were returning to the U.S. at the end of a Far East cruise. We never saw anything and never got very close to anybody. We ran into one of the storms of the century and turned around and came home.

Q: Sending an aircraft carrier to settle fishing disputes is not the ideal instrument of choice.

KEITH: You have to remember that this was at a time of tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The missile crisis was soon to follow. If it were only a tussle over fishing rights, an aircraft carrier would seem to be a poor substitute for diplomatic negotiations. But it got the Russians' attention and seemed to have the desired results.

Q: Being the only black officer on board… The Navy was getting used to this sort of thing. It was going through a learning period itself as an institution. Did you ever find that you were consulted on how to do things?

KEITH: No. Nobody referred to it in the two years I was in the Navy at sea. No one really referred to the fact that I was the only black officer – or even the fact that I was black. My colleagues were a microcosm of Americans of that day and it would be naïve to think that there weren't racists among them. But I must say that my life was smooth and without rancor or confrontation at the time that I was aboard the Midway. And the

same thing was true for the two years I served on shore duty afterward in Newport, Rhode Island.

Q: What were you doing in Rhode Island?

KEITH: I was at the Officer Candidate School teaching navigation.

Q: Were you making any preparations during this time?

KEITH: I had taken the Foreign Service written exam while I was still at the university and passed it and went to my oral exam in Omaha, Nebraska. I was told that I had passed the oral exam and that my name would go on the register. They knew that I had a military obligation and it was probably a good thing that I was just on the cusp and they thought that my military experience would give me that much more maturity and so they seemed quite comfortable in giving me a passing mark.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions that were asked?

KEITH: Yes. There were a lot of general knowledge questions, but one question was quite specific. I was applying to USIA, whose mission was to project a positive image of the U.S. Naturally, one of the examiners asked how I would respond foreign audiences who might ask "How can you as a black man work for a racist county?" That was one that I had anticipated. I replied that I would certainly not deny the existence of racism in America, but that I could with honesty say that progress on racial equality was clearly on the march. Most of the questions were quite straight forward. They wanted to know whether I really had an interest in international affairs and if had more than a passing acquaintance with world events. They asked about African independence movements, the anti-colonialist movements, and the war for independence in Algeria.

Q: During your Midway cruises, did you have a chance to drop by an embassy to take a look?

KEITH: No, I didn't, but I did meet people from the mission in Hong Kong at a social affair. I met people from the French embassy who came to visit the ship in Japan. There were a few of us on board who had some knowledge of French and we were all sort of pooled to show people around.

Q: You got out in '65. Whither?

KEITH: Out in July and into the Foreign Service in August.

Q: Were you married at this time?

KEITH: I was.

Q: Where did you take your basic training for the Foreign Service, the A-100 course?

KEITH: Here in Washington. It began in August of 1965. The class was six USIA officers and around 26 or so State Department officers.

Q: How did you find the training?

KEITH: I loved it. I was so impressed with my colleagues, who were sharp and positive, very knowledgeable, and very open. I was very impressed with the State Department officer who was our course director, a man named Alexander Davit. I thought he was about the most urbane and suave individual I had ever met. He was an economics officer and I think he was Economic Counselor in the embassy in Paris at one point. I don't think he ever became chief of mission. He had a very droll sense of humor and I thought he was just about the most impressive role model one could find – at least in terms of his persona and the way he came across in public gatherings.

Q: Did you find there was any particular divide between USIA officers and State Department officers?

KEITH: On the contrary. We were very much of the same cloth. We socialized together. The structure of the class was such that we were all together in our groups and going through our group exercises together and didn't separate until the very end of the training. We went into USIA media training. They went into things like the consular course and other kinds of training. But for the bulk of our training, we were all together. We were all together when we received our assignments. We were all together at the end of the course. That was a tremendous bonding experience and I still maintain close friendships with some of my A-100 mates.

Q: Did you have a feeling of where you wanted to go?

KEITH: Yes. I wanted to go someplace toward those magical names like Samarkand, Tashkent, Bukhara, Teheran, Constantinople, Baghdad. I knew very little about the Middle East except fictional things that I had read. But that general area was the most alive in my imagination. Then there was a practical matter of languages. We were advised to look carefully at language training in terms of career strategy. We were told that you really have to have two languages – a world language and one more esoteric. So, I pretty much had French when I came in. I needed to brush it up a little and learn how to speak it as well as I could read it. Then I had to choose another language. I looked at Farsi and the idea of going to Iran, but then I looked at Arabic and saw all those places you could go – Cairo, Damascus, Fez, Tangier, and so on. That decided me on the language.

Q: When you came out, did you go right to language training?

KEITH: I went to language training for six months in Beirut to study Arabic.

Q: This is from '65-'66?

KEITH: Yes. Winter of '65-'66. I found myself in Beirut learning Arabic. From Beirut, I went on to Baghdad, which was my real training assignment.

Q: How did you feel when you got into Arabic?

KEITH: Fine. I liked it. I had an affinity for the language. Maybe I have an affinity for language learning, but I certainly found myself comfortable in Arabic. Then again, I was quite young.

Q: It makes a difference.

KEITH: It does indeed.

Q: Did you get any feel for the group you were with studying Arabic, about the Arabist corps?

KEITH: Impressive. People I knew at that time in Beirut were people I respected very much for their presence and their abilities in Arabic, their general knowledge, people like David Newton, who later became ambassador to Yemen and Iraq, and Ed Djerejian, who was assistant secretary.

Q: Did you have any feeling towards Israel?

KEITH: Not really. Most of us went into this rather special part of the Foreign Service where the pass key is Arabic, not a political point of view, but mastery of this rather difficult language. I believe most of us came to it with no preconception. I certainly had none. If somebody had told me that when you sign up to study Arabic, you suddenly become labeled by certain people as part of a group with a particular mindset and a political agenda, I would have been surprised. Looking back, I have met and known people who are Arabists who probably fit the worst stereotype that has been drawn of State Department Arabists. But that's one or two out of all the ones that I know, out of all the colleagues, out of all the people I have worked with and known professionally. The rest of it is just a bad rap. Since you raised the question of the Arabists as a group, most of us and certainly I know I speak for myself and I believe I speak for most of us who have been labeled as Arabists in the past, have one agenda and that is U.S. government interests, the interests of America and the American people. That isn't always the litmus test for people who are looking at the Foreign Service. If you don't share the view of certain groups as to what is in the U.S. government's best interest and if you think that the best interests of the U.S. may in some cases be served by opposing policies that favor a particular country or a particular point of view, then you are going to find yourself on the opposite side of that question from people who can sometimes be quite important.

Q: I've done a few interviews of people who were Arabists and most of them have come in as practical people and look at all those posts and realize that if they get in there, they can move around a lot and are not going to be in vogue or having to worry too much

about political appointees because no sane political appointee is going to go to Abu Dhabi. It's pretty much a practical decision.

KEITH: For me, it was a language decision and I didn't really have any concern about political appointees because I didn't think that I would ever be in competition for a position with any political appointee. I was USIA, let's not forget. When I first came in, I thought that a successful career for me would have been going up to FSO-1 and anything else after that would be icing on the cake. So, I never thought that I was going to be in competition with political appointees for ambassadorial positions.

Q: How did Baghdad strike you?

KEITH: It was exotic, it was wonderful. I was there at a very benign moment. I was there after the madness of Abdul Karim Qassim and the post-revolutionary violence, and before Saddam Hussein and the Baath revolution. There was a period in which the two Arif brothers were presidents, one succeeding the other. It was not Switzerland, but it was rather benign with a prime minister in a latter period who was quite keen on opening up to the West and particularly to the U.S. There were a lot of sophisticated people in Baghdad in those days. There were people who had been educated in Britain, France, and the U.S. The brain drain that followed had not yet occurred. Iraqis were very sociable, very open, very gossipy, very party loving. I found them extremely pleasant and very easy to be around.

Q: You were in Iraq from when to when?

KEITH: I was in Iraq for one year from the summer of '66 to the summer of '67. In June of '67, I left with everybody else because of the Six Day War.

Q: Iraq is always quite interesting because it is the one country in the Arab world that really had everything going for it. It had a diverse economy, water, oil, a relatively small population, literate, and yet it seemed to be blessed with terrible leaders for a long time. When you arrived there, what was the attitude of our embassy?

KEITH: It was quite optimistic. Our ambassador, Robert Strong, was a solid professional who took a special interest in the junior officers of the embassy. He would have us for tea occasionally and speak candidly about our relations with Iraq. In fact, we had a developing cultural and educational relationship with Iraq that had not existed before. That was new. Before, when Iraq looked to the West they were looking toward Britain. (They had of course strong relations with the Soviet Bloc, which supplied their arms.) But the mid-sixties the Iraqis were increasingly looking toward the United States. To illustrate, the Iraqi government encouraged the development of an important relationship between the University of Baghdad and the University of Texas. That may sound like a benign affair, but think of what was involved in exchanges of students, exchanges of professors, a kind of twinning relationship that got so deep that it had a life of its own and it was operating outside the context of our official relationship. It was a relationship that was of benefit to the Iraqis and of benefit to the long range interests of the U.S. When the

end finally came with the 1967 war the Iraqis actually signaled that they would like to keep that relationship going even as they were breaking diplomatic relations. We had a growing economic relationship with the Iraqis. And the transportation link was there. People tend to forget that PanAm stopped in Baghdad in those days. There was a big PanAm office in Baghdad.

Q: You spoke earlier about our ambassador.

KEITH: Robert Strong.

Q: What was his background?

KEITH: A career officer. I don't know if he had a number of posts in the Arab world, but I didn't think of him as an Arabist. Enoch Duncan was his deputy, not an Arabist. Grant McClanahan was the political counselor, definitely an Arabist, as was Tom Scotes, one of his deputies. On the U.S. Information side, the PAO was an Arabist. The information officer was an Arabist and so was the cultural affairs officer. It was a very well staffed embassy.

Q: What was your job there?

KEITH: I was there to be trained. I had a period in the Cultural section to begin with and then in the information Section. Then I was assigned to the Political Section and was there for the last four months. As tensions were rising in the Middle East and the Political Section was shorthanded, I soon performing core tasks. There was something called the WEEKA, the weekly *tour d'horizon* review of political developments with Iraq. Drafting that document each week was a perfect task for a young officer. You started with the blank piece of paper and tried to capture the mood of the country and highlight important events, the tenor of press reporting, etc. They seemed to like the substance and style of my reports. In the midst of a deteriorating situation I was having a very good time.

Q: What is the difference between information and cultural at that time?

KEITH: The Cultural Officer was really working on educational exchange and trying to create some positive movement between Iraq and the U.S. on the cultural and educational side. The information officer's biggest challenge was a very controlled and very anti-American press. The Information Officer was a very talented man and accomplished Arabist named Dick Jeanneret. He would take me on some of his calls. I recall one such visit that provided me an object lesson in dealing with Arab world press of the time. We were visiting the man who was the country's most respected editor to complain about a particularly unfair anti-American editorial. After hearing Jeanneret out he said, "Well, if you want better coverage and more positive coverage, we need a new press." You help us and we'll help you." I was quite shocked, but Dick merely smiled. In the car heading back to the embassy, Dick laughingly said, "I thought it would be something like that. The editorial was just to get our attention."

Q: You say you spent the last four months in the political section. In a way, things that were happening there in the Arab world really weren't happening in Baghdad. They were happening to the west.

KEITH: Yes, that's true. Baghdad was not on the front line. It was not a confrontation state, as the term later developed. But there was a lot happening in Iraq. The Iraqis believed and with some justification that the Israelis were giving aid and comfort to the Kurds in the north of the country. The Israelis and the Iranians were cooperating. So, Iraq thought it had a legitimate grievance that went beyond a general Arab feeling of support for the Palestinians.

Q: What about the influence at that time of the Soviet Union?

KEITH: The Soviet Union was very influential in those days, but perhaps never as influential as we supposed and maybe as the Soviets themselves thought. The Soviets had a military supply relationship with Syria, Iraq, Egypt, that was thought to be an effective lever for Russian influence. The Soviets were never really able to make very maximum use of that for a variety of reasons, chiefly a deep Arab world antipathy toward Communism and the fear of Soviet influence in their societies. The USSR achieved its greatest influence in Egypt, Yemen, Iraq and Syria. Yet even at the height of that influence indigenous communists were suppressed and often jailed.

What always surprised me, however, was a kind of residual anti-Soviet feeling that you discovered among people wherever you went, whether it was Baghdad, Damascus, or Cairo. Conversely, there was a reservoir of pro-American feeling throughout the Arab world, even in places where we were virulently attacked every day in the press. I don't think you can say that Soviet influence in the Middle East was ever as important as we feared or as they thought.

Q: Did you find that your conversations with Iraqis tended to center around our support of Israel?

KEITH: Absolutely. That was the main issue when you talked about the politics of the area. However, depending on who you were talking to – if you were talking to a middle class engineer or a professor or somebody that you would ordinarily associate with – I don't mean senior military officers or apparatchiks of the government – I would say that their overwhelming concern was not a political one with regard to Israel, but economic development and political and civil rights in their own country. As you said earlier, the Iraqis have always deserved better leadership than they've had. The leadership tends to be the expression of the worst aspects of the character of the country. Ever since I've known it, it's been run in one way or another by thugs.

Q: What about the Baath Party? How did it stand at that time?

KEITH: When I was there, the Baath Party was not in power and it was in some disarray. The Baath Party began as a secular Arab nationalist movement. It had very interesting

roots and some very interesting people who were its philosophical fathers. But like a lot of things in the Middle East, these things tend to be overtaken by political opportunists and people who are not motivated by philosophical ideals. So, what happened in the early days of the Baath movement when it had come to some political prominence was a split along personal rather than ideological lines. By the time I got to Baghdad the Baath Party in Iraq was out. Some Baath Party leaders were in prison. Baath Party military figures were around but they were not in power. The Baath leader, Ahmed Hassan Bakr was around on the periphery in Baghdad biding his time. When in the late '60s he took over government in the Baath coup, he was a known quantity. People at the embassy knew him. I remember being in Beirut when the coup took place and hearing knowledgeable Arabists at the embassy in Beirut saying, "We know this guy and he's reasonable and he comes to our cocktail parties, so he ought to be alright." How ironic in retrospect.

Q: How did the June war of 1967 develop for you all in Baghdad?

KEITH: We went to work on Monday that morning and news was blaring from radios all over the city. In fact, the sound of Nasser's *Sawt al* Arab radio broadcasts provided the sound track for that entire period. I was taking my wife and infant son to the embassy that morning for his two month checkup. At the embassy there was a certain amount of controlled panic, but it was quite clear that the situation was drastic. We didn't know what was happening and we didn't know what the truth was. We heard a lot of statements being made about American involvement, American collusion, American support, and some of it was coming from our old friend Jordan. This was before diplomatic relations were cut, but we knew that we were going to be evacuated. I was asked to go with some passports to the Ministry of Interior to get exit visas. I dealt with a young Iraqi officer who was more disappointed than angry. He asked, "Why are you doing this to us?" He was gesticulating and he was very upset. I said, "We are not assisting the Israelis with bombs. We are not doing that. What you're hearing is a lie." He said, "I wish I could believe that." I said, "You can believe it. What you're hearing is a lie." I tried very hard to persuade him that the U.S. was not directly involved in this conflict at all. Eventually, he gave me the exit visas and I walked out. That night, the wives and children were put on busses and sent over the mountains into Iran. We also were told that night that diplomatic relations had been broken. I was duty officer, by the way, and got the call. I took the call from the Foreign Ministry. I told the person who was calling, "I cannot take this call. I'm just a duty officer. You have to speak to our chargé." It was a very complicated night.

Q: While you were getting ready for the evacuation, were the events of July 1958 when Iraqi bombs did nasty things uppermost in your minds?

KEITH: It never got far away from me. One of the things that we were doing in those final days was burning files. There was a file including photographs of some of the things that had happened in the 1958 revolution, the atrocities. They were in file folders in the bottom of a filing cabinet. They left an impression.

Q: We're talking about mobs attacking and dragging some Americans out and hanging

them.

KEITH: The pictures I saw were of mobs attacking the King and his pro-West Prime Minister Nuri Said, dragging the regime's supporters through the streets behind jeeps, hanging them from light poles. There was another file that contained documentation of the regime of Abdul Karim Qassim, who was the post-revolutionary strong man. There were reports on Qassim's principal collaborator, a man named Mehdawi, who conducted public courts against enemies – real or perceived --the people's courts and had the power to pronounce death sentences on a whim. He was one of the most feared men in the history of a country with a long history of cruel men. So, yes, history of mob violence and moments of great cruelty was definitely was very much on our minds.

Q: When one examines the Middle East in the last 50 years, there is always this talk about the Arab mob. When it boils down to it, as far as real lethal action, it's the Iraqis.

KEITH: Yes. Certainly when it comes down to the kind of show trials and public executions and so on, I would agree.

Q: While you were there, did Saddam Hussein cross anyone's books?

KEITH: No. In fact, Saddam Hussein was not a prominent figure at all until Ahmed Hassan Bakr's coup. Saddam was not a soldier. He was a Baath Party functionary. He was a tough. He was a party strong-arm. He was not a brilliant theorist. He wasn't somebody who wrote political treatises. He was a bully and he was a party enforcer. He worked for Ahmed Hassan Bakr and people who were smart, people who were ideologically coherent. He was not.

Q: How did the evacuation work out for you and your family?

KEITH: The evacuation was tiring. The embassy family lost a child in the evacuation. The baby was ill but probably wouldn't have died under normal circumstances. The long trek was very hard on everybody. The evacuation began on Monday night, the first night of the war. We had organized busses and a car caravan. A lot of people left Iraq that night, including all the wives, children and dependent family members. The next day, another convoy was put together, which I led, of non-official Americans and embassy secretaries. The following day, the rest of the embassy came out. We drove over the mountains to Tehran, where we, along with other Americans and many other nationalities who were evacuated from Iraq, Jordan, and Syria, were welcomed enthusiastically by the Iranian people. It was very heartwarming to see the welcome and the hospitality and the many acts of kindness in a very difficult time. Many of us were in Tehran for a month or two while Washington figured what to do with us. We left Iraq in the first week of June, and we saw the Fourth of July fireworks at our Embassy in Tehran.

Q: Was it the feeling that you were not going to be going back soon?

KEITH: It was quite clear that we weren't going back to Baghdad for some time. By the

time two or three weeks rolled around, people were beginning to be assigned elsewhere or brought back to the United States. I was assigned to Saudi Arabia, to Jeddah.

Q: You went to Jeddah in the summer of 1967. What were you doing there?

KEITH: After a few months in Washington I reported to Jeddah as Assistant PAO, one of two officers at the post.

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Q: Today is June 13, 1998. You were in Saudi Arabia from 1967 to when?

KEITH: Until October of 1968.

Q: Who was the PAO?

KEITH: George Thompson was the PAO. He had been there for some years already and was a remarkable and interesting man. I used to think of him as the world's greatest authority – and you can just fill in the blank with whatever subject you like. George had done everything. He had been in Saudi Arabia a little too long by the time I got there and his greatest achievements were behind him. But this was a very interesting time in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis were wrestling with the problems of an increasing number of Western non-Muslim people who were coming to work in the Kingdom and not in menial tasks such as workers from Yemen and Sudan, but in jobs that would ordinarily suggest a rather high public profile. They were trying to find a way to harmonize the presence of this foreign population with their own traditions. At the same time there was, for Saudi Arabia, the beginning of an electronic media revolution. One should not forget that at the time I was in Saudi Arabia, there were no films, no cinemas (Cinema was forbidden). Television had been introduced the year before I arrived, and there were violent protests among conservative elements. Even then, it was the most conservative society I have ever known, and it became even more so subsequently. The country was spiritually guided by the most conservative interpretation of Islam of all seven Islamic countries in which I worked. It was a time when the *mutawa,* religious police, were going around and hitting women's uncovered ankles with a cane and forcing people to leave the shops and go outside during prayer time and pray.

Q: Our embassy was in Jeddah at that point?

KEITH: Yes. In fact, foreign presence in Riyadh was discouraged in that period. One of George Thompson's accomplishments was the establishment of an English language teaching center in Riyadh, which if you don't count our military cooperation was the first American presence on an official basis in Riyadh.

Q: Who was our ambassador at that time?

KEITH: Hermann Eilts.

Q: He was an Arabist par excellence.

KEITH: Yes, and a very fine ambassador. I worked for a number of very fine ambassadors, but he was certainly the first one who really took time to teach. He would call younger officers to his office from time to time and show us a message that he had just drafted and explain its purpose. He was an excellent teacher. It's not surprising that he has moved on to an academic career.

Q: What was his relation to the USIS?

KEITH: Hermann Eilts is one of those managers who notes the sparrow's fall. There was no detail in that mission that was too small and there was no section of the embassy whose work he considered beyond his personal interest and certainly beyond his responsibility. He was very interested in two things that USIS was doing. First, he was very interested in our work with the local press in Jeddah. It was pretty pathetic, we all agreed, but George Thompson in particular did quite well getting in touch with the local editors to encourage balanced reporting and general professionalism. Ambassador Eilts was always available for cultural or social or professional involvement. He was always available to participate in USIS programs. He encouraged other embassy officers to do likewise. Second, he encouraged the establishment of an English language center in Riyadh. I'm not sure whether he saw the establishment of that program in Riyadh in terms of English language or in terms of official U.S. presence, but he was very much behind it. I think he gave George Thompson a very big boost for his persistence in seeing it through. It was not easy. There was a lot of reluctance within the government, but George managed to navigate it through the ministry of education and other ministries and get it established.

Q: At that time, was there the thrust of having the young Saudi students go to the United States as opposed to France, Germany?

KEITH: Absolutely. In fact, the policy was that if a Saudi student could get an acceptance from a legitimate American institution, he would receive a full scholarship from the Saudi government. I was there when the Saudis began to establish a prep school arrangement in the United States in a handful of universities that would take Saudi students in a pre-freshman year and basically bring them up to speed in English. This was prior to the establishment of the Saudi Educational Foundation, a government establishment that at one time managed thousands of Saudi students in the U.S. under Saudi sponsorship. An interesting sidebar to this was the question of whether Saudi women were entitled to the same largesse. It happened that a man, a Saudi I knew, who had been one of the few of his generation who had had experience abroad and had been in Italy and spoke Italian, I believe, had sons and a daughter and was a widower. One of his sons was at the University of Kansas. His daughter was allowed to go to Lawrence, on the agreement that she would stay in a dormitory on the university campus under university supervision and attend Lawrence High School for her junior and senior years Well, she was talented and outgoing and quite beautiful and became homecoming queen

of Lawrence, Kansas High School. Of course, as a graduate of Lawrence High School and because of her grades, she had the right to go to the University of Kansas on a scholarship. She refused the scholarship, saying that her government had a policy of paying for all its university students and she would use her government's scholarship. She came back to Jeddah and ran into the very considerable problem that she couldn't get access to the Ministry to apply for her grant. Her father, who was not only a widower and a man of some age but was handicapped, asked me for help. It was summer, the Saudi government was in its summer headquarters in Taif up in the escarpment. So, the three of us got in my car and drove to Taif, where I had arranged a call on one of the senior under secretaries in the ministry. I said that I needed to know, because of the number of students in the United States and questions that could arise, what the policy was. I said, "I assume that your scholarship policy applies to all Saudi citizens, isn't that correct?" He said, "Well, of course." At that moment we had a policy. So, she went back to the University of Kansas on a Saudi government scholarship.

Q: That's quite a breakthrough.

KEITH: It was a very generous – in fact, overly generous – policy on the part of the Saudi government. The students often had too much money.

Q: There are stories about American University and I'm sure it's replicated at other places – sports cars, etc. – the usual thing when you give young people too much money in school irrespective of nationality.

KEITH: As in many other areas – not just that, but in travels to Europe by family members and extravagancies of the princes in the U.S. and elsewhere. All of that has gradually changed. I'm not saying that it doesn't exist anymore. It certainly does. But the more egregious examples of throwing money around and working under the assumption that money can buy anything are in the past.

Q: Were you at the embassy working with the Saudis to alert them to the problem?

KEITH: I can't say that really. I can't picture in my mind Hermann Eilts going to King Faisal and saying, "Your Majesty, your boys are misbehaving in London and Paris and look silly." I can't picture that happening nor would it have been necessary. Faisal was a man who would have frowned on these kinds of things and probably did. He had a son, his eldest son, Abdullah, who had the reputation of being among the worst behaved in foreign settings. We heard that at some point Prince Abdullah was not welcome in his father's house. I think there were enough people in the country who were sensitive to being taken as caricatures. The same thing is true about being taken by phony contractors and charlatans who came to the Kingdom in their dozens over a certain period of years. There was a lot of money and limited experience and the natural mistakes occurred. But now there is less money, more experience, and so the Saudis could be in the position of wagging their fingers at the Kuwaitis during the Gulf War when young Kuwaiti men were in the discos in Cairo while Egyptians and Saudis were out there in the desert fighting their battle.

Q: Were you personally opening this American education exposure up for the time but with the knowledge that after the first generation or so would come back would end up in meaningless civil servant type jobs or the doctors would come back and run pharmaceutical companies and that sort of thing?

KEITH: In fact, that's not what happened. The first generation of people who came back had very important jobs and went on to be influential in the society. It is those who came a bit later who came back and were somewhat adrift. But the Saudis had such a need for western educated people in the period of the late '50s into the early to mid-'70s that people who were getting training had things to do in the ministries. Those who were trained in technical fields certainly had things to do. In the petroleum sector, of course, ARAMCO's school in Dhahran was very influential. But in my experience in Jeddah and from the people I met in Riyadh, whether it was Khalid Anani, who was the foreign ministry person responsible for the United States and Western Europe with a master's degree from the University of Southern California, or whether it was the man who was running both radio and the proto-television service – these are young men, quite young, and not long out of universities in the United States. My memory of that period is that people who came back and wanted to work and wanted to find positions could do so. There were plenty who didn't want to find things to do and didn't need to.

Q: From the embassy, what was the impression of the power Faisal had at that time?

KEITH: He was highly respected. The King was highly respected and he was viewed as a modernizer after the Saudi fashion. Under Faisal, doors were opened to the West. Western technology, and of course the relationship with the United States thrived. We always regarded Faisal as a moderate force in regional affairs.

On the other hand, his power was somewhat constrained by family politics. Like all Saudi princes of his generation, he was the son of King Abdul Aziz al-Saud. But he had no full brothers. Natural power cliques were centered on groups of full brothers, i.e. sons of Abdul Aziz from the same mother. For example, the three monarchs who succeeded Faisal are all sons of a woman from the Sudeiri family.

The education of Saudi youth in the U.S. was something that Faisal actively pushed. Under Faisal, there was a modest but perceptible move toward educating women in Saudi Arabia. A lot of people thought that was the influence of his Turkish-born wife, but whatever the reason, a women's branch of the university in Jeddah was established, and he provided more primary and secondary schools for girls. This may sound like a backhanded compliment, but the last vestiges of slavery in Saudi Arabia were swept away by King Faisal. Faisal was not a westerner and all of the things that he did he did in the context of Saudi Arabia, its culture, and what he perceived to be their needs. But he wasn't somebody who wanted to see the fundament of the kingdom changed. He didn't want to see a kind of loosening of the moral bonds of the country. But he thought that education was compatible with that and necessary for the kingdom's well-being.

Q: Did you see the religious power as a barrier?

KEITH: Yes, I struggled with it. As assistant PAO, my main responsibility was running the cultural center, a rather unhappy enterprise in a place that's not particularly interested in your culture. But I decided that after talking with a few people I would try to open the cultural center to women one day a week, with no men on the premises at all, getting volunteers from the embassy, spouses, to supervise. I thought this was in the spirit of what was happening in the country - the establishment of girls schools in various places, the establishment of the women's branch of King Abdulaziz University, and so on. Within weeks the initiative was quite successful. Women in purdah, fully covered faces and hands, would get out of a chauffeur-driven Cadillac or Buick Riviera, and would turn out to be the American-born wife of some Saudi and her two sisters-in-law and her mother-in-law. They would come in and spend some time reading, or just talking, or perhaps just having a social gathering.

A few weeks later, a delegation turned up at the center from the Islamic University in Medina. The delegation leader asked me if I felt this new policy was wise. I said I thought this was in the spirit of things and that there was no mixing of the sexes and there was nothing on our shelves that could be construed as harmful or anti-Islamic or anti-family or anything else, and that they were welcome to see what we had. They said, "You're missing the point. The point is, a woman's place is in the home and if you are opening these facilities for them, that takes them out of the home. So, we're asking you to reverse this policy and close to women." I said, "I understand your views, but the policy will stand." They said, "Well, we'll find a way to close it up," and stormed out. Well, my boss immediately had visions of mobs in the street and the place burned to the ground. That afternoon I called Khalid Anani, the man I mentioned who studied in Southern California, and told him what had happened. He said, "Well, Kenton, you should have told me first before you did this so that we could make the necessary communications, but never mind. Don't worry about it. It will not be a problem." That was the last we ever heard of it. But clearly there was a religious objection to our cultural presence.

I mentioned earlier that the introduction of television was viewed by some religious leaders as an unwelcome Western intrusion. In the riots that ensued, one member of the royal family who was leading the protest was killed by the police.

Q: On the Eastern Province, the Armed Forces Radio had had television, which was pretty primitive because television was pretty primitive in those days. The governor apparently liked the western in particular. That is a hotbed of the Wahhabis, but…

KEITH: The Eastern Province is an interesting and very important area of Saudi Arabia from that point of view. It is the Eastern Province that has both the highest concentration of petroleum reserves and the Saudis' Shia population. The Shia are decidedly second class citizens in Sunni dominated Saudi Arabia. So, strains in the Eastern Province remain a feature of the Saudi political landscape today. The people who bombed our facility in Dhahran, the Khobar Towers, were people with a religious grievance against the Wahhabis and a political grievance against the U.S.

Q: Did you have a problem with your effort? Anything that you would do would be undermining the religion… it's almost inevitable. Keeping women from being barefoot and pregnant or the equivalent there… I would think that there would be a problem of you being a young officer wanting to get out and doing things and the more senior people saying, 'You've got to think about the impact." The whole idea is to go out there and convert these people to more modern ways. Did you run across a generational cultural clash within the embassy programs?

KEITH: I don't remember it in Saudi Arabia, though I encountered that elsewhere. I do remember that my boss in Saudi Arabia didn't like the idea of opening the center to women. He said, "We're not here to be crusaders," which speaks directly to your question. But I don't think that was characteristic of George Thompson. I think he was afraid the place was going to get burned down. In fact, as before, the Saudis just stayed away from the American Cultural Center in droves. You would think that you'd get a lot of students at least who would come in and sit down in the air conditioning. We didn't get very many people at all until we began to focus – and this took place really after I left – on English teaching. Saudis were not going to break the door down to read Walt Whitman or George Ball, but they needed English. When we started providing it, then we had an impact. Then later when we were getting beyond the direct English teaching, when the needs expanded beyond our capabilities, then we began to provide technical advice and professional assistance in both government-run and private sector English teaching programs. So, we then had a multiplier effect. We were able to have an effect through English teaching. The question often asked about English teaching is why do you do it? Why does it matter? It matters for a number of reasons. First, countries where a lot of English is spoken have historically been easier for us to deal with. Second, English teachers and materials almost inevitably provide insights into our culture and our institutions and society. So, we have more than one reason to teach English.

Q: Was there any competition with the French or anyone else?

KEITH: We are always in partnership with the British council. I never felt in all the years that I have been involved in public diplomacy and educational and cultural exchange that the British council was a rival. Possibly that's because English teaching, which is a basic thrust of both organizations, was so sought after that there was always a market for both of us. Maybe that was the reason. But also, we tended to be very friendly on a personal basis with the people in the British council whether it was in Turkey or Saudi Arabia or Lebanon. But there is no doubt that the French have always felt in competition with us and do today. It is very much a war out there as far as they're concerned. I have been involved and known people who are involved in the French cultural program and the "diffusion de la culture française" for my entire career. I know how important it is to them. I know how vital an interest it is to them. In France, culture is like life and it's also big business. So, if I have ever encountered a nationality that should be considered allies in the cultural wars who are in fact adversaries, it's the French. I say that although one of my very closest friends was until just a few months ago the man responsible for all of this activity and all of the French cultural centers around the world, Yves Aubin, who became

a close friend in Damascus 25 years ago. We've been close ever since and have houses in France that are not far apart, so we see each other almost every summer. But the relationship with the British was always cooperative. Even in my earliest days, we did jointly-produced programs with the British Council in Istanbul, running debate contests, running English language seminars, and I never had a sense of competition.

Q: I've always felt this at posts where I've been.

You had been expelled from Iraq because of the Six Day War and the whole Arab world suffered a real shock by how the Israelis beat the Egyptians. How much of this intruded on your work?

KEITH: It intruded in the sense that it was always present in the psyche of everybody. Being in Saudi Arabia in '67 was not like being in Syria or in Iraq or in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia did not break diplomatic relations with us, as did most of the other Arab countries. – Egypt. I actually was slated to go to Egypt to open a cultural center in Minya, but instead, because we had no diplomatic relations with Egypt, I was sent to Saudi Arabia. But having said that, the Saudis shared a sense of shame, a sense of failure, a sense of futility with the rest of the Arab world. But '67 was not the first time. Historically, you think of the Arab defeats of '48, '56, then '67, and these were accumulated wounds that never really healed anywhere. That was always present and a part of the landscape wherever you served in the Arab world. It was always a feature of the relationship between the United States and that country. It could be more or less relevant or more or less at the surface, but it was always present. There was always a sense of injury because of a perceived tilt of the United States toward Israel. It wasn't just a perceived tilt; it was all out, full blown support. So there was always a sense of injury. This is one of the great conundrums: Why is it that the Arabs have this sense of injury and resentment toward the U.S. for support of Israel and yet this reservoir of good will toward the U.S. never seems to run completely dry. I have never been able to understand it. I've made as much use of it as I could in trying to establish relationships and institutional linkages between the U.S. and Arab countries, but I've always marveled at the general level of receptiveness. We have had American missionaries throughout that area, except in Saudi Arabia, of course. We've had the presence of American popular culture. We've had in some countries a lot of emigrants to the United States, especially from Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt. So there are those connections, but we have had relatively warm relations with Arab audiences. In Egypt, for example, even in the worst of the days of officially-sponsored anti-Americanism in the Nasser, Americans who worked there were frequently invited to Egyptian homes. People said, "Okay, tonight we're not going to worry about politics and tonight we're just going to have fun," as the Egyptians are very skillful at doing. This was also true to a remarkable extent in countries like Syria and Iraq where there were instances where your hosts were exposed to some sanctions from their governments.

Q: What about what passed for the press at that time? I'm sure in the '67-'68 period, there were all sorts of almost gratuitous pronouncements of people in the U.S. that must have sent cold chills up and down the spines of any Arab about Israel. Was this a problem?

KEITH: Much of it was not. We didn't have a global press in those days. What passed for Egyptian, Syrian, or Jordanian television was poor and lacking in credibility. The word "Israel" was never used. They would refer to the "Zionist entity" and the "Zionist enemy" or something of the sort, but the word "Israel" was never used in the early days. If it hadn't been basically for our own publications and our own wireless file and making sure that the editors got the full text of American statements, I'm not sure that people would have been exposed to the truth. Washington would sometimes note that the local press seldom if ever printed our wireless file items. I was always of the opinion that it was nevertheless important that the editors see these things. In some subtle way, our material would act as an influence on what they wrote or how they edited. The real problem for us was not ill-conceived and ill-informed statements by Americans. The real problem for us was the drumbeat of anti-Israel and anti-American editorials, stories, slanted news stories, in virtually every newspaper in the Middle East. That was the real problem. In some places, it got to be so strident that it was just background noise. We didn't need to read it anymore and didn't. But it did make progress toward regional peace that much more difficult.

Q: What about social life? Was there much contact with the Saudis?

KEITH: The ambassador had a lot of contact with the Saudis and so did his wife, a very

gracious and talented diplomat herself. USIS officers certainly did. My recollection was that there was otherwise little social contact with Saudis, and I'm not sure I know why. I think anybody who wanted to could have invited Saudis. Saudis loved to come to your house, especially the younger ones with Western education. As a rule, they didn't bring their wives, but they loved to come to your house. And in my experience they weren't reticent about having a drink.

Q: Where did you get your liquor?

KEITH: We got the liquor from one of those Scandinavia suppliers -- Ostermann Petersen I think. It came into Jeddah by ship and only the non-Muslim American embassy personnel were allowed to off load while the Saudi customs authorities looked the other way. It had to be us to go down and stevedore boxes and get stuff up to the embassy. You couldn't throw away your Johnnie Walker Red Label bottles or cardboard boxes or anything else to indicate the presence of liquor.

Q: There must have been quite an accumulation at one point.

KEITH: Yes. We were either able to take it out to sea and dump it or burn it in the desert. It was a very interesting arrangement. The Saudis did look the other way for the Christian embassies. But they didn't look the other way for the Muslim embassies. So, after our shipment came in, we were always reminded how many close Pakistani and Turkish friends we had.

Q: Were there any difficult incidents or problems during that time you were there?

KEITH: Apart from that scene with the delegation from Medina that wanted to close the center (and I'm not sure how serious a threat it really was), no. I was in Saudi Arabia for a rather brief time and I did not really like it. I didn't think that I was doing much good at the cultural center. I wasn't really sure at that point that I wanted to stay in the Foreign Service anyway, and I was considering other options.

Q: You met your wife where?

KEITH: I am twice married. My first wife I met in San Francisco and my second wife I met in Morocco. I was with my first wife in Saudi Arabia and we had a baby who was born during our tour in Baghdad. He was two months old when the Six Day War broke out. So, he learned to walk basically in Saudi Arabia.

Q: You left Saudi Arabia in '68. Whither?

KEITH: I seriously considered going into law school. The experience in Saudi Arabia did not encourage me to continue, although I enjoyed Baghdad very much and I had enjoyed my time in Beirut. When I told my seniors in Washington that I was going to leave Saudi Arabia one way or the other, they said, "Don't do anything rash. We'll get back to you." I got a call from a man named Alan Carter, who was area director at the time for the Middle East. He gave me a couple of propositions. One of them was going to Istanbul as cultural attaché. I said, "You've found the right button." That was extraordinary.

Q: You were in Istanbul from when to when?

KEITH: From that fall of '68 until late summer of '72.

Q: What was the situation in Turkey in '68?

KEITH: It was very tense. The Turks were still very hurt and resentful of the so-called "Johnson Letter," which was meant to discourage Greeks and Turks, two NATO allies, from going to war over Cyprus but which was read as an insult by both. The Turks were particularly steamed. There was at the same time growing left-right confrontation in Turkish society. The universities were largely in the hands of leftist elements. The beginnings of what was to become an urban revolution were emerging as I arrived in the fall of 1968. There were widespread demonstrations against the United States. There were anti-American slogans all over town. Coming in from the airport you had to drive by the Fine Arts Academy, where there was a big banner that basically said, "Yankee, go home." That was my welcome to Istanbul.

Shortly thereafter, our ambassador's car was attacked. The ambassador, Robert Komer, went to visit one of the universities in Ankara and his car was burned while he was there. Komer was the ambassador at the time. He had been publicly associated by the left with Vietnam.

Q: Well, he was.

KEITH: They took a public posture to oppose his presence in Turkey because of his role in Vietnam.

In the period that I was there, we went from these early demonstrations sometimes verging on violence to a series of violent confrontations between the left and right on university campuses and city streets. The right was often embodied by the police and security organizations, as well as Islamic-oriented toughs. They were aligned against the basically left intellectuals and students, who saw themselves as revolutionary youth. There was a surprising amount of bloodshed through the period '68-'70, with particularly gruesome photographs on the front pages of the newspapers.

On the university campuses, there was an organization or a collection of groups that called themselves the "Idea Clubs." In my role as cultural attaché, I had a lot to do with the universities and I had a lot to do with professors, often of the left, and some of them were allied with the Idea Clubs as faculty advisers in this early period. Over two or three years those Idea Clubs transmogrified into the Turkish People's Liberation Army. In fact, some of the people who were later killed in clashes with the security forces, and one person who later admitted to bombing my car, were Idea Club members whom I would see occasionally in one setting or another. At some point, a leader of the movement emerged, a man name Deniz Gezmis. On one memorable occasion, I took Daniel Lerner and Ben Wattenberg to a conference for faculty and senior scholars at Istanbul University. In the middle of that conference, Gezmis and a group of his supporters, all dressed in combat fatigues, broke in and announced that the event was over. Gezmis came up to me and said, "I know you. I know who you are. I'm going to take care of you personally." Our Turkish hosts were just as terrified as we were. Then the Gezmis group followed us until they were sure we were off the campus. Well, Gezmis, before he took care of me, the Turkish military took care of him.

Q: What happened to him?

KEITH: Eventually he moved from threats to action, and was involved in a number of things including kidnappings, bank robberies and murder. He was caught after a gun battle with Turkish authorities, tried and very quickly executed. He was hanged. My car was bombed in front of my house on the day he was sentenced. On the next day the U.S. Vice President was arriving on a visit to the country. This was Spiro T. Agnew. He was of Greek descent, and a combative public figure. He wasn't the perfect choice for a visit to Turkey at such a turbulent time.

Q: This must have been about '71.

KEITH: Yes.

Q: I was in Athens when he came. He was told by somebody, "You're going to go to all

sorts of Orthodox ceremonies" and he said, "But I'm an Episcopalian." He was told, "You're Orthodox while you're here."

You had come from Saudi Arabia, where nobody went to the cultural center. What about in Istanbul?

KEITH: Things were very different. There was an extremely active cultural life in Istanbul, and American culture was highly respected. I got to know a good many people in the theater and the writers and musicians. Successful Turkish adaptations of American plays were regularly seen. James Baldwin directed Fortune and Men's Eyes in the theater of his friend, Engin Cezzar. There was everything from Hair to Man of La Mancha. Most of these cultural figures were on the left, and they were opposed to our involvement in Vietnam and other American policies and actions, but that didn't prevent me from forging some very close relationships that have endured over the years.

At Istanbul University one of my goals was to help with the development of a political science chair, which at that time was just coming together. I determined to bring distinguished American political scientists (e.g. Lucian Pye and Daniel Lerner) to the campus for lectures, discussion, and consultations. I knew this kind of academic exchange brought both substantive partnership, but also gave the fledgling group at Istanbul some needed self-confidence. I sent most of the chair's young professors to the U.S. either on a Fulbright grant or an International Visitor programs of some kind.

I mentioned earlier the "Yankee go Home" banner stretched across the entrance of the Istanbul Fine Arts Academy that made such an impression on me as I was entering the city in 1968. In fact, I made it a point to be very close to the institution throughout my stay in Turkey. We created a lovely little gallery at the American cultural center, with the policy of alternating exhibits of Turkish and American artists. The new gallery's very first exhibit was a group show of student work from the Istanbul Fine Arts Academy. The opening was packed and the reviews were wonderful.

And looking back with nostalgia, that was the beginning of an arts program that was fully open to the public with no metal detectors or obvious security. There was always the potential for disaster. After all, there was a real civil war underway. People we knew were arrested because of their political activity and treated harshly. Yet our gallery continued to be a place Turks liked to visit.

Q: They have a real drive and are very serious about their country. That's what I've heard.

KEITH: Turkey is a very nationalistic country. Turkey is almost totally Muslim, and yet the first self-definition of any Turk is likely to be ethnicity rather than religion, even in conservative Anatolia. Kemal Ataturk was clearly the most important figure in modern Turkey. He instilled a sense of Turkishness and a sense of nationhood in the floundering aftermath of the Ottoman Empire. He was the one who crystallized in the minds and souls of the people the fact that they were not Ottomans but Turks.

Q: My wife when she was in Athens had some Turkish girls from high school and found – and I've heard this from others – that it was not just getting out in the middle of the street and saying that you were a Turk, but you were going to do something, were going to improve yourself for your country. It was more of a focused nationalism, your duty towards your country as opposed to running around waving flags.

KEITH: That's right. The motto that Ataturk left with his people is "Be proud and work." That emphasis on the link between nationality and personal effort is deeply ingrained.

Q: I would have thought that there would have been such a close tie going back historically with Germany that we would find ourselves sort of in second or third place.

KEITH: Historically speaking the German influence was very strong in Turkey. There has always been a lot of respect for Germany in Turkey. By the time I got there in the late '60s, early '70s, the prevailing sentiment of Turks was, "We're part of NATO. We're part of an alliance that is led by the United States." Then came the mass waves of Turks going to work in Germany, some of them establishing themselves in Germany, many of them learning German, making money in Germany and coming back to Turkey, some with German wives. There was a great deal of contact between the two countries because of this. And naturally there was an enormous economic impact on both countries. Nonetheless, the United States was the dominant foreign power in the consideration of most Turks. After that, I think, although politically the weight of the United States is very strong in Turkey, in almost every other way, the weight of Germany is greater.

Q: In the cultural center, what was your principal focus?

KEITH: Our principal focus was trying to form effective relationships with institutions that had been essentially closed to the U.S. Cultural institutions in the city of Istanbul were very important in forming political attitudes. There was no television in Turkey in the '60s. There was an experimental television station at Istanbul Technical University, but almost no one had a television set in 1970. I know this is a little hard to conceive. On the other hand, there were many theaters. There were nine stages of the Istanbul Municipal Theater alone, and a number of influential private theaters. The theater in Istanbul was a major venue of political debate and activism. A lot of politics were acted out on stage and plays were chosen by directors and theater-owners because of the political message they conveyed. Plays were written by politically engaged Turks. It was my purpose to try to promote as much contact as I could with those institutions and we did a lot. We routinely obtained the rights to translate American works, financed translations, brought in specialists in stagecraft, and even had a major American theater figure, Art Housman, spend a year in Istanbul as a kind of free-floating consultant.

Q: How did you work with the consul general in the embassy?

KEITH: The embassy in Ankara had ultimate control of our budget, but the man who really was in control of the money that I had to spend on my programs was the cultural

counselor in Ankara, a man named Leon Picon who turned out to be a mentor and in some ways my professional father. My boss in Istanbul for most of the time I was there was a remarkable man named Marshall Berg, who encouraged all our cultural initiatives. From that perspective, the working environment could not have been better.

The consulate general was an easy place to work. We had a good working relationship with our colleagues. Istanbul was a place where a lot of intrigue went on. It was a natural friction point in the Cold War environment. Because of its location, because of its history, there were intelligence interests on a grander scale than the country would normally warrant. So, there were spies all over the place of all nationalities. It added spice to the stew.

Q: It sounds like something out of Eric Ambler.

KEITH: Eric Ambler described Istanbul both eloquently and accurately, as have Graham Green, Agatha Christie and others. It's definitely a place the inspires writers.

The consulate had other preoccupations. But we could always count on our colleagues when we needed them. Jim Spain and Doug Heck were the consuls general when I was there, both excellent officers, both real pros. Heck knew the city like the back of his hand and the Turks respected him. Jim Spain had a different personality, but he was also a thorough professional with a scholar's knowledge of the region.

Q: You were trying to break in. You were dealing with the theater, the university and getting to that class, which is just a class that is out there throwing rocks at the police. Was this a problem with the government?

KEITH: I didn't have much contact with government officials. I had contact with university officials, but there was really no Ministry of Culture structure I had to deal with in Istanbul. There was a municipality that I dealt with because of the municipal theater and so on. But these were people who were basically not really functionaries. It wasn't the government apparatus I dealt with in other settings. I think one part of your question is, did the government object to my getting in touch with these people? I think probably the government had some concerns. Some of its concerns were expressed not to me directly but to people at the consulate. At a certain point toward the end, after my car was bombed, after the Israeli consul general was assassinated, after a kidnap list was discovered that I was told had my name was on it, the government provided me with a 24 hour bodyguard. They clearly knew who I was but I really didn't have much direct involvement with Turkish government officials at any point.

Q: You mentioned your car being bombed. Were you in it?

KEITH: I was not in it, fortunately. It was parked in front of my house. In fact, I have always thought, perhaps naively, that I wasn't meant to be in it. The operation was carried out, we later learned, by the Turkish People's Liberation Army. If they had wanted to, it would have been far simpler to bomb the house than the car, because the

exposure to street lights and the physical orientation of things. In any case, the car was totally destroyed. It was just twisted metal. If I had been in it, I wouldn't have survived. In fact, we were very lucky. We had houseguests that night that, and I might well have been taking them back to their hotel at midnight, when the bomb went off. Instead, we had persuaded them to spend the night at our home, and we were all turning in when the bomb went off. A second bomb was timed to go off simultaneously in the back parking lot of the consulate general. That bomb didn't do much damage. The biggest loss was my 1965 Corvair, a car that as Ralph Nader observed, was unsafe at any speed.

Q: What about the Greek equation? During this time you were there, the Greek colonels were doing their thing. They came in in April of '67 and went out in July of '74. Did that play much of a role? We weren't wild about them. We hadn't taken their side completely, but we were very much involved in bases and everything else in Greece.

KEITH: Yes, it was part of the background of our political presence. We were perceive to be the allies of the colonels. It was the belief of most Turks that our interests were served by the colonels. It was never with the same intensity as Arabs feel about our alliance with Israel, but Turks were uneasy about our relationship with the Greek regime.

Q: Is there anything else we should discuss about this particular time?

KEITH: Turkey was where I really learned to do my job, where I really grew up, where I really found out how potent the kind of work we do can be. I had strong mentors in Turkey, and indispensable Turkish colleagues in the cultural section. My Turkish staff, including Bilge Olçer and Meral Selcuk -- both of whom were figures in Turkish society -- taught me an enormous amount. We used cultural programming and educational exchange as the fundamental building blocks of our activity in Turkey. I sincerely believe that we can prove – if any proof be needed – how indispensable this kind of work can be.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? We'll pick this up the next time in '72 when you went to Morocco.

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Today is October 30, 1998. We're in 1972. You went to Morocco. You were in Morocco from when to when?

KEITH: I was in Morocco from the summer of 1972 until the summer of 1974. I was assigned to Fez as the public affairs officer – by way of a year of focus on western Arabic, Maghrebi Arabic, in Tangier. There had been an Arabic language school run by FSI in Tangier for some years. That school had closed, but they thought it was a good idea for me to go and re-establish contact with some of the former instructors. I was able to organize my own courses with Ahmed al-Harshni and Mohammed Senhadji, two veterans of the FSI school. Both were good teachers.

What I discovered in the first year in Morocco was that I really had no interest in learning

Maghrebi Arabic as a spoken dialect. I spent much of that time working on classical Arabic, or more accurately, standard written Arabic. I found the western dialect, the Maghrebi dialect, impenetrable and not very attractive and I found also that anybody I really needed to deal with could understand a sentence in more or less classical Arabic or in French.

Q: Is classical Arabic essentially what is used in educated exchange?

KEITH: Yes. It was the language that was understood by educated Arabic speakers from Morocco to Iraq. That is a language that is taught. That is the language used in public media. Most important, perhaps, it is the language of the Koran.

Q: Why have they tried again and again seemingly without a great deal of success at establishing a Maghrebi Arabic corps? There were problems with a school at one time and they found that the language wasn't terribly transferable.

KEITH: I guess the best two Maghrebi Arabic speakers in the Foreign Service that I knew were Larry Pope and Chris Ross. Larry actually spoke Maghrebi Arabic. Chris Russ spoke classical Arabic with enough Maghrebi terms and words to pass it off as Maghrebi Arabic. Of course, I knew also at least two Peace Corps volunteers in Morocco who were extraordinary linguists. They spoke not only Maghrebi Arabic but one of them got by very well in Berber, one of the several dialects. The Peace Corps had a need to communicate in the villages in the Moroccan dialect. That was not really the case for diplomats.

Q: What was the situation there then?

KEITH: The situation was rather tense. I remember having an offsite with Ambassador Robert Newman, who had a policy of assembling the junior officers for a no-holds-barred session away from the embassy. He wanted us to let all of our instincts come out in a conversation that was not monitored by our direct embassy supervisors, and would not be interpreted as criticism of authority. He took us down to a place called Sidi Yahya and we talked for a couple of days. The underlying assumption in 1973 was that King Hassan was in the end game of his regime. There had been two assassination attempts, one that took place just before I arrived in 1972.

Q: There was the shooting down of the airplane.

KEITH: Yes. The society was still reeling from these very dramatic events. For various reasons, we thought the tide was running against the King. Whether it was a disaffected political class in Fez or Casablanca or whether it was disgruntled laborers in Casablanca and elsewhere or whether it was disaffected villagers in the Rif, we thought it likely that a combination of things might soon lead to the demise of the King. Well, that was 1972. Here we are in 1998 and the real concern now is looking at his succession and trying to come to some conclusion about whether his designated political heir, his son, is going to be capable of taking on the country's leadership. Hassan has proven over the years to be

an extremely able man, extremely agile on the political scene, a man who understands the society as well as anybody ever has and the dynamics of the political life of Morocco. If you've had many years of experience in the Arab world and go to Morocco and think you may be able to transfer that knowledge, you're in for a big surprise. Morocco is very different from the eastern Arab world, where I was much more comfortable and had a stronger grasp of family dynamics. In Morocco, there is a kind of insularity that goes down to the neighborhood, village level. There is a book by John Waterbury called "Commander of the Faithful" that is a very good analysis of the political dynamic in Morocco that works from the village level to national politics. I've often recommended that book to anybody who is going to go to work in Morocco.

Q: How about American relations with the country?

KEITH: We had interests that went beyond what we normally had with anybody else in the Arab world. We had a longstanding and very sound military relationship with Morocco, including bases and VOA transmitters. Moroccans were perceived until 1973 as moderates in the Arab-Israeli dispute. We also liked the king. We thought he was a force for stability, a moderate man. We knew that his cultural references in the West were not American but French. We knew that he had a personal history that made him suspicious of Western interests in his country. But he was somebody we thought we could trust and I think that has been borne out over the years.

We had a stubbornly low level of commercial and economic interests in Morocco. Morocco's main source of wealth in those days was phosphates. In terms of regional politics, my period in Morocco preceded the conflict in the Western Sahara. Morocco's main external irritant was Libya. The Libyans would broadcast stories about local corruption in *Moroccan dialect.* Much to the Moroccan government's chagrin, the Libyan broadcasts began to gain credibility, and they were certainly entertaining. However, as I say, this was an irritant, not a real threat.

Q: What about the situation in the Western Sahara?

KEITH: There had always been controversy over land in the Western Sahara, and it took on greater importance when the Spanish withdrew. But those were back burner issues when I was in Morocco and didn't explode until later. It was in the late '70s when there was the famous Green March. The King, again drawing on his extremely acute sensitivity to the Moroccan mentality, was able to mobilize ordinary Moroccans - in what really wasn't much of an interest to the average man – but managed to whip up a frenzy and cause what was essentially a peaceful demonstration.

Q: When Moroccans and Americans get together, they always talk about the first recognition in the United States and their close relationship. This is still a theme.

KEITH: Yes. Moroccans refer to this often. The legacy of the Peace Corps was much more important than the legacy of early recognition and that early legation in Tangier. We had up and down relations with Morocco in the early days, as did all seafaring

nations whose ships came close to the Barbary Coast. In any case, it wasn't 18th century relations that really mattered in our 20th century relations, but the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps in Morocco had almost unblemished success in the years that I was there. Extraordinary young Americans lived in villages, taught, worked, and I believe fulfilled as well as anyplace in the world the ideals of the Peace Corps, often in very difficult circumstances. Certainly Brazil and Morocco have produced the most successful of the Peace Corps legacies in my experience.

The relationship with Morocco was not of primary importance from the perspective of American strategic interests, particularly after we began to use satellites for communication.

Q: In the early days, it was a fallback position for bombers.

KEITH: Yes, but that's long past. There were communications facilities in Morocco that were important to us at the time. We had to disengage from that gently. This was certainly an instance where technology influenced policy. For all the years when we needed those facilities Morocco had great importance, especially in the estimate of the Pentagon. Then came a time when those facilities were not needed at all. That transition was rather abrupt. We had challenge of disengaging, giving up our base facilities for example, without harming our political relationship.

Q: After a year of language training, you went to Fez?

KEITH: As branch PAO.

Q: What was Fez?

KEITH: Fez is one of the old imperial capitals. Several cities in Morocco were dynastic capitals and represented the most important city at a moment in history. These included Meknes, Marrakesh, Tetuan and Fez. These cities were centers of Moroccan and Islamic culture and they still have vestiges of these things, but Fez is unique. Most Moroccans still consider Fez the cultural capital of the country, and the seat of its aristocratic class.

The old city of Fez hasn't changed very much. You still can\t drive cars in there. You have to be on your toes or the donkeys will knock you over. Artisans still bang on copper trays. It is taking a step back into medieval Islam to walk through the old town of Fez. Fantastic place. It is intimidating in a way that Marrakesh is not. Marrakesh is a much more accessible city for a Western observer and more comfortable for tourists. You can wander around Marrakesh and go to Jama al-Fna, the open square that remains the center of local trade and entertainment. There are no real hindrances to enjoying a place like Marrakesh if you're a tourist, but Fez is a bit different. It requires some work. It is intimidating and getting lost in that labyrinth of old Fez is very easy. A lot of people rely on the local urchins as guides and that's not always a safe thing to do. Fez is historically very important both for Morocco and for the Islamic world. It's one of the great the centers of Islamic learning. There is still an Islamic university that rivals the importance

of Al-Azhar in Cairo. There is a class of ecclesiastical thinkers who still have some impact in the Arab world. Islam in Morocco has important local flourishes that many of in the rest of the Islamic world see as bordering on the heretical, particularly the veneration of local saints. It's certainly very different from what would be standard Islam in the eastern world, but at the same time the Alaoui dynasty traces its roots back to the Prophet.

Q: I would have thought that running a USIA operation in Fez would be very difficult in a society that would be almost impervious to what you were trying to do.

KEITH: No. I guess if you were honest with yourself, you knew that you were not there to revolutionize the relationship between the United States and Morocco. My major effort in the one year I was in Fez was to use focus on education and links with education in the U.S. We tried to acquaint educators in Fez with pedagogical development in the United States. We managed to develop a good relationship with the local director of the Ministry of Education and some university people, especially teacher trainers. For example, on one occasion the annual meeting of directors of American schools in the Middle East took place in Rabat. I arranged for a group of local teachers to audit the meeting with a translator. At that point I thought we had really gotten some momentum going. It was fortunate in a sense for me that the USIS leadership in that country in Rabat was focused on something that was so entirely different from what my interests were that I think they sort of wrote me off in Fez. As long as I wasn't making problems, they just let me go on and do what I wanted. I found that ideal.

Q: What were they doing in Rabat?

KEITH: Bob Behrens was the PAO. There were widely varying opinions of his leadership, but undoubtedly he was a man of vision. I think he was able to see that this alien society – and believe me, Morocco is an alien society to the United States – would never relate deeply to the U.S. under prevailing circumstances. I have never been in a more exotic country in that regard than Morocco. I've been in countries that are a lot further away from the United States or from Europe, but I've never been in a more exotic country. I think what Behrens wanted to do was to transfer as much of an American cultural experience into Morocco as possible in shortest possible time span. He believed that importing American the contemporary American experience, whether in the form of shopping malls, or bowling alleys or Cineplex movie houses would create broader cultural affinity with the U.S. among ordinary Moroccans. I think the experiment was doomed for various reasons, but he was certainly a persuasive advocate for the initiative. He managed to enlist a number of wealthy and well-placed Moroccans that they could serve the cause of mutual understanding and make money while doing it. In the end, it didn't go very far. But it did galvanize and involve everybody on the staff in Rabat. Basically, since I wasn't really a part of that process, I was allowed to be off in Fez doing my own thing.

Q: With our efforts there, one always thinks of the King as pulling all the strings. Were there target groups that you felt were important in Moroccan society?

KEITH: Yes. I think it is fair to say that the intelligentsia – the politically aware and active elites in Morocco – were not on our side. Whether they had grievances against the U.S. because of our stance in Middle East issues, our support of a non-democratic king, our involvement in Vietnam, and their preference for French rather than American culture. Many intellectuals were influenced by education in France, from which they emerged with a leftist, anti-American ideological bias.

Q: Were the French intelligentsia connections still pretty strong there?

KEITH: Yes.

Q: Of course, this was a cultural battleground for France.

KEITH: Very much so. It was an early lesson for me that the sense among my French counterparts was that I was an adversary. They nurtured the image of a United States grasping, trying to extend its influence, trying to replace France as a western cultural reference.

Q: I've talked to people who served in Paris and said that the foreign ministry there believed that we were trying to supplant them in Africa. And this was just not what we were trying to do at all.

KEITH: Yes. I have a very close friend, a man I've known for 25 years, who is a senior member of the French foreign ministry. One of his jobs was as the director of *La Francophonie*, the French effort to project and protect French language and culture all over the world. There is no way that I will ever convince him that supplanting the French in any way is not a major goal of the United States. A few years later, in Cairo, when I was asked by my French colleague how much money the United States puts into the American University in Cairo, and I told him practically nothing, he could not believe it. Basically, he got as close to saying, "Well, I know you're lying for reasons of state" as he could and still maintain our friendship. But his point was, if the United States has an American university in Cairo, this was a goal that the French would love to be able to achieve and it just defied logic that we wouldn't be supporting it to the maximum extent. On that point I agree with him. I think we should be supporting it to the maximum extent, but we weren't and that doesn't seem to be a high priority of the U.S. government.

Q: You were there at an interesting time – the October '73 war. Every time there was one of these wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors, it always has reverberations all around the Arab world. W hat happened?

KEITH: One thing that surprised all of us was that the Moroccans sent some planes and joined the fight and actually saw combat against the Israelis in the '73 war. In fact, the anecdotal evidence that came out of that experience suggested that the Moroccans were quite committed in their combat against the Israelis.

Q: Did we train them?

KEITH: I believe there was some staff training from time to time, but the bulk of western training they got was from France. Our military relationship with Morocco was quite straightforward: we were paying for facilities. It surprised everybody that the Moroccans went over there and fought so enthusiastically. The biggest impact of that was a local impact. It was a great shock to the Jewish community in Morocco that had managed to survive and hang on. There were Jews historically and even after 1967 who were advisors to the King. The Jewish communities, although greatly diminished after '67, continued to exist. But the '73 war was a shock and a lot of the Jewish community in Morocco went to France. In fact, the atmosphere for them, which had been remarkably tolerant, changed.

Q: Why would this happen? There had been a number of wars…

KEITH: I think it was a surprise to everybody but the Moroccan government. As to why then and not before, I just don't know the answer.

Q: I was wondering whether they shut down your office for a while?

KEITH: No. This occurred during the Islamic month of Ramadan. It was a tradition at the Center, one established by one of my predecessors, Chris Ross, that we conduct a nightly Ramadan chess tournament. The tournament went on as usual, and we couldn't really detect any unusual behavior or comment.

Q: Were there concerns about mob action?

KEITH: We got a couple of extra soldiers standing around, but no. Not in Fez.

Q: In your work in Fez, did you find that there was more or less support for the King?

KEITH: The King has relatives all over Morocco including, of course, Fez. That was a period, the early '70s, in which he was spending a lot of his time at his Fez palace. The focus of anti-Hassan sentiment was certainly not Fez. It was Casablanca and Rabat. The traditional links between the King and Fassi society were strong and remained strong. Fez was not a hotbed of anti-Hassan sentiment.

Q: Was there much connection between Morocco and Algeria?

KEITH: No. They're rivals, and that was brought into sharp focus in the Western Sahara with Algeria's ongoing support for the Polisario. The same thing is true about Libya. Morocco is isolated. The Tunisians really had no regional role except to keep their heads down. The Algerians and the Libyans have always been tough opponents for King Hassan. As I've mentioned before, in those days the Libyans were broadcasting into Morocco in Moroccan Arabic and with the kind of radio broadcasting what we call today call "shock radio." They had incredible sources and knew about corruption and favoritism and unfair treatment down to the village level and they were talking about

those things on the radio. Libyan radio was admired because it dealt with everyday life in Morocco and it was so accurate.

Q: Did we do anything to foster the enmity between Algeria and Morocco?

KEITH: I never heard of such a policy and I don't think it existed. We had difficult relations with Algeria, but we had important economic interests there. Algeria has major gas deposits and American companies had significant commercial interests and were looking for an even more important role. Our long term interests in Algeria were far more important potentially than our interests in Morocco. So, there wouldn't have really been much impetus for us to do anything in the '70s that would promote instability.

Q: You left there in '74.

KEITH: Yes, in July of '74. Earlier that year President Nixon had visited Syria, ending a hiatus in diplomatic relations of seven years that followed the 1967 war. I got a telephone call from Washington offering me the opportunity to open the USIA post in Damascus. But I also was told that there were several other people who were in line and I had to tell them that day. So, I accepted the challenge. Who would not? It was a wonderful opportunity. I had about a month to organize myself to leave Morocco and go to Damascus.

Q: You were there from when to when?

KEITH: I arrived in Damascus in July of '74 and left in November of '77.

Q: And how long did you say relations had been shut down?

KEITH: Seven years.

Q: Why did we open them up? Something rings that Nixon made this trip to the Middle East maybe to get away from the heat at home.

KEITH: I have always kept separate in my own mind Nixon's travails at home and his achievements internationally. Nixon was a disaster on the home front and actually quite an able internationalist. His actions in Latin America were, I think, the continuation of a somber history of intervention and heavy-handedness, for example in Chile. But I think what he did in Syria was in the same philosophical vein as what he did with China. The Syrians in everybody's opinion were indispensable to any progress toward Middle East peace. They were then and are now. Nixon recognized that. He didn't simply appear at Damascus airport and say, "Okay, we're now going to open diplomatic relations.' There had been a process of negotiating with the Syrians over disengagement of armed forces facing each other since the end of the '67 war. The measure of Hafez el-Assad had been taken by Henry Kissinger, and the judgment was that you may not agree with the Syrian president on important issues and you may not like him personally, but he had been shown to be a man of his word, someone who respected his commitments and had the

strength to make them stick in his domestic situation. It made sense for Nixon to take this step, to make this gesture, which by the way, it was not a popular move in Israel. But he did it. He ushered in what was an extraordinary honeymoon period for the United States and Syria. It was the most fruitful period of engaging the Syrians in the peace process that we had seen. Those years of close relations would eventually come to an end as a result of developments in the Lebanese civil war. The Syrians entered that fray with our blessing, but as it turned out they pursued interests in Lebanon we opposed. There are many good books on that period. In general, I still think of that period in the mid-'70s as one of lost promise. We were on a steady negotiating track and our relations with Syria were developing in many areas. We had made enormous strides. A kind of understanding and trust occurred that was momentary but was real. It could have been exploited.

Q: While you were there, what type of work did opening up a place that had been shut down for a while require?

KEITH: One of the things that occurred to me when I first got into Damascus, one of the things that I observed was how eager the various institutions were to restore a relationship with the U.S. And this was despite the fact that Syria was a police state and people were still under close scrutiny. In many areas Syrians in positions of responsibility recognized that the country had suffered from a lack of contact with the U.S. over those seven years. Whether it was in the communications field, business, culture or higher education, the absence of an American connection had been keenly felt. For a number of reasons, the political realities of post '67 Syria fostered a reliance on the East for their international educational and cultural exchange. Even Syrians who had been able to study in the Soviet Union or East Germany sensed that they were being deprived of something important. They wanted to recover lost ground, and they wanted to do it as quickly as possible. There was a prevailing sense that we were in a honeymoon period and it might be fleeting. What they wanted to do and what I endeavored to do as much as possible was to create a kind of a safety net of institutional linkages that could survive a political break or a waning in our political fortunes. So, we had the university linkages. We established a scholarship program. A good friend in Beirut at the time who was working for AID, Tom Ball, an extraordinary man. controlled a number of scholarship grants to the American University of Beirut. With a telephone call and a quick trip to Beirut, I was able to come back with a pocketful of master's degree scholarships to AUB in certain development fields. So when I was making some initial calls at Damascus University I had something I could offer, and for the first time in years Syrians went off to study under American sponsorship. Things were moving very quickly and Washington was very happy. That was a period of enormous fun. A very promising and optimistic period.

Shortly thereafter, a large AID mission was established in Syria, and we soon had a major development program there.

But of course, as we had predicted, our political entente came to an end and those relationships were tested. They survived one way or another for some years. Despite the fact that Syria has been on our terrorist list, we've had linkages and visits and so on, a relationship, often on life support, that has survived the political vicissitudes.

Q: Did you find yourself in competition with the Soviets?

KEITH: Yes, very much so. The Soviets took very careful note of what was going on and didn't like it. The Soviets helped some of their graduates and some of the products of their educational system organize a sort of university-wide institutional bias against Western graduate degrees.

Q: I would think, particularly given the background Syria and the residue of the late French and all that, that this would have been foreign to them.

KEITH: Well, there were a lot of entrenched interests in people who had come from the SU and other eastern counties. Our ambassador was Dick Murphy. I eventually convinced him that it would be in our interests to negotiate a cultural agreement with Syria. He was very suspicious of this and so was the Department as a whole, but we had had the experience of working in Baghdad with a cultural agreement that we used to carry with us on calls. When Iraqis would express apprehension about working with the U.S. we would take out this cultural agreement and remind them that our countries had pledged to work together in the cultural and educational field. I know that was a rather simplistic way of approaching it, but the act of establishing a cultural agreement with annual implementation meetings and reviews put in place a mechanism for our continued conversations in an area where we could certainly find some common ground. I think that has helped us over the years in Damascus and still is helping us.

Q: Why would there be opposition to it?

KEITH: When people think of cultural agreements, they don't think of the little ones that we have had with Syria and Iraq where you can do as much or as little as your resources dictate. They think instead of those big cultural agreements with China and the SU. I used to hate those because it meant that whenever a senior person, a president, went to visit Moscow, there wasn't a hell of a lot they could agree on but they always signed cultural agreements and those cultural agreements committed us to do certain things. Congress was quite pleased to see those cultural agreements put in place but they never voted any money to support them. So, the money had to be taken from the USIS budgets of other posts. Of course, that didn't make ambassadors very happy. So, there was a general anti-cultural agreement bias.

Q: Was there any opposition on the Syrian side?

KEITH: The Syrians actually wanted it. They Syrians were used to dealing with the SU and other countries where a cultural agreement was a standard way of operating. Curiously enough, the Syrians had not negotiated a cultural agreement with the Soviets. When we negotiated and eventually signed a cultural agreement, my Soviet counterpart, with whom I was on quite friendly terms, called me that very day was quite distressed. The Russians were quite put out that the Syrians had signed one with us before they signed one with them.

Q: The ones with China and the SU ended up an awful lot of tit for tat stuff. We send engineers; they send engineers.

KEITH: What we were interested in was actually getting Syrians to the United States and getting some American professors to Syria. We started very early with a very small Fulbright professor program. I was the beneficiary of the war in Lebanon when we had Fulbrighters there who couldn't stay because of the fighting. They were diverted to Syria and I was happy to have them. But that was our real push, to get Syrians moving to the U.S. and Americans coming to Syria. For so long, that had not happened.

Q: What were the Syrians interested in?

KEITH: The Syrian government was interested in medicine, applied science and engineering. They especially wanted a number of scholarships for medicine. We wound up having through the AID program a number of doctors studying in the U.S. Professors in the liberal arts wanted more scholarships, and so did I, but the money was in development assistance. Thus finding money for literature majors was tough. Nevertheless, I was happy to see students in any field going to the U.S.

Q: Did you find you had to tread carefully because of Israel watching over what we were doing?

KEITH: I didn't. Obviously, there was no Israeli presence in Damascus. However, it was not a secret that the Israelis looked upon our rapprochement with Damascus with some disquiet. But it also should not be forgotten that Israel was engaged, albeit indirectly, in security cooperation with Damascus. It is in this general realm that the Syrians were shown to be as good as their word. Assad promised to prohibit strikes on Israel by Palestinian groups from Syrian territory. That was in the '70s and here we are in the late '90s and I think even the Israelis would say that in all that time he has honored his commitment.

Q: The Jewish influence is so important in our political environment. has. I'm thinking about my time in Saudi Arabia back in the '50s. One had to be so careful. Did you find this a problem?

KEITH: Well, it's certainly a problem in the minds of Arabs that the United States is so pro-Israel. Even my closest contacts in Syria with people who had background in the U.S., perhaps an American degree or an American wife, always took for granted the pro-Israeli bias on the part of the U.S. The underlying question was, given that pro-Israeli bias, is there something of value for Arabs in a relationship with the U.S? If you wasted your time by arguing that there was no U.S. bias toward Israel, they would simply say, "Here are the statements. Here are the public statements." This was the history. You don't waste much time trying to rewrite it.

Q: How did Dick Murphy operate?

KEITH: Dick Murphy was a great representative of the U.S. in Syria. Assad trusted him. He was able to talk to Assad in Arabic. His Arabic was good enough that it alone was a building block in our relationship with Syria. That can't be overemphasized. I think Dick Murphy was regarded by his political officer as doing too much of the political work and he certainly did a lot of it. The bulk of the political reporting that came out of the embassy was his. Certainly the most important of the political reporting that came out of the embassy was his. Murphy was not a one dimensional ambassador who only cared about the political He knew the importance of establishing an aid relationship, an economic relationship, and the importance of trying to change some of the Syrian laws that stood in the way of an expanding cultural relationship. He understood the importance of a cultural and education ties, and he worked hard in those areas. Some of my colleagues at the embassy complained that Murphy kept too much work for himself. But I saw a well-rounded ambassador who didn't lose sight of what he thought was the most important thing at that moment in history, and that was establishing an effective relationship with Hafez el-Assad, but who also gave a lot of time and direction to the major areas of our efforts in Syria. Concerning the everyday management of the embassy, he put a lot of well-deserved trust in his Deputy Chief of Mission, the very able Bob Pelletreau.

Q: What was our estimate of Assad, what he was after and what his survivability was?

KEITH: Survivability was… In Syria in the '70s, you didn't make many judgments on survivability. Every day that he was in power, he was setting a new record. Syria before Assad had never been described as a model of political stability. But we looked at Assad as an intriguing figure. A lot of people don't remember that in September 1973 when the Black September confrontation took place between the Jordanian government and the Palestinians in Jordan, the Syrian president at the time dispatched troops to assist the Palestinians. Assad, who was the air force commander, refused to go along with Syrian intervention and withheld the air power to support it. That precipitated a crisis in the government and he emerged the big winner. An intriguing figure.

Q: The confrontation with Islamists in Hama, had that happened?

KEITH: No, that came after my time in Syria. Assad was an Alawite, a sect viewed by strict Sunni Islam as heretical. He was against political Islam, against fundamentalists, and fought them. Indeed, he was fairly ruthless in his effort to neutralize organized opposition to his government and its Baathist ideas. He was in firm control of Palestinians who were in his territory. Despite his arms dealings with the East, he suppressed organized communism in Syria and jailed communist figures. He had shown that he could be trusted once he had made his commitments, which were not easy to come by.

In the Lebanese civil war, we thought that he had, at least in the beginning, done what we wanted him to do. When Syrian troops poured across the border, their initial goal was to save the Christians from annihilation in Beirut. For those reasons, Assad was an

intriguing figure. Most ambassadors who have been through there have suffered to some extent from the accusation that they were hoodwinked by this monster. I don't think so. People like Chris Ross, Talcott Seelye, and Dick Murphy are sharp observers and good analysts and I think over the years they've seen what Assad is. They know his shortcomings and nobody denies that there are thuggish tendencies in his government. Nobody denies that the man has supported acts of terrorism. Nobody denies that Assad is a bad guy in some ways. But also, nobody denies that he has brought certain things to the table that we like and that in any case, moving forward in the peace process requires his cooperation. In the end, it will require his cooperation. Secretary Shultz miscalculated when he thought that solutions could be reached without the Syrians.

Q: He was told by Ambassador Paganelli that Assad wouldn't buy into this agreement and Paganelli was lynched because he was telling them how Assad would react, which was exactly the way he reacted.

KEITH: Of course.

Q: Was American culture – movies, magazines, etc. – allowed in there?

KEITH: It was a slow process. No, not movies. Television, yes. American television series. I got involved in that because the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) was trying to negotiate from their offices in Rome an agreement with the Syrians to bring American cinema back to Damascus. But they had another agenda and that was that the MPEAA wanted to be able to deal directly with cinema owners and the theater owners and not with the government. The Syrians were not going to budge on that, though we had lots of talks.

Q: What was the issue? Was it Israeli influence?

KEITH: I don't think so. I think that was part of the MPEAA agenda – not just in the Middle East, but all over the world.

Q: But so many governments had pretty strong central control.

KEITH: Yes. MPEAA was ready to temporary compromise, but the Syrians weren't interested in compromise. My negotiating partner at the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance (wonderful title, no?) told me one day he had no maneuvering room whatsoever. "The Party won't accept." So when I departed Syria there was still not American cinema on theater screens.

Q: Were there any particular problems that you had in Syria?

KEITH: There were always layered throughout the government people who really were opposed to this new liaison with the United States. You never knew when you were going to run up against this, when for no apparent reason, some project or some program would run into an inexplicable delay or some document that was necessary didn't materialize.

Yes, there was always that. This was not necessarily government policy, but it was a heavily bureaucratic state.

Q: Some ayatollah.

KEITH: Less an "ayatollah" in the Syrian context than a "revolutionary." But the fact is that the Syrian government -- Hafez el-Assad, and his lieutenants and the people around him -- were less ideologically committed to the old Baath Party tenants. They had long since come to compromises with the basic tenants of Arab socialism. But there were people who were true believers and they were the ones who you often ran up against.

Q: What about the Iraqi connection, did that appear at all?

KEITH: The rivalry between Iraq and Syria was deep and bitter. Both the Syrian and Iraqi Baath parties sprang from the same political wellspring that emerged among Arab students debating in French coffeehouses in the '20s and '30s. These discussions were led by people like Michel Aflaq, a Christian Syrian who preached a kind of secular Arab socialism and renaissance. Secularism was important because many of these intellectuals were not Muslims and they tended to regard religion – not just Islam, but Christianity as well – as a counterrevolutionary force. So, that secular component was very important.

Also, they believed in a kind of pan-Arabism in which national borders were inconveniences. They certainly believed in civilian control and the importance of civilian philosophical and ideological direction. Having said all of that, the split between the Iraqi Baath Party and the Syrian Baath Party was much more complex, and had probably less to do with ideological differences than other things, and was in the end more a personality conflict than any ideological one. But it was nonetheless real. It has proven to be very persistent. You look at the fact that some of the old philosophers, the old ideologues, of the old Baath Party gravitated to Baghdad rather than Damascus in their later years. Some people might be tempted to say that would indicate that the Iraqis are more ideologically pure. That's nonsense. Neither side is ideologically pure. Neither side represents the model the old thinkers were trying to put together. The Baath Party of today in its two centers of strength bears no resemblance to its founding ideology.

Q: I wouldn't think this would have much to do with our relations with Syria.

KEITH: No, not really. Of course, there were ideologues who still were associated with political slogans and political platforms and they were not particularly pro-American. In some ways, they were useful to Assad when he needed to truck them out. But they really were not decisive in our relationship or even very important.

Q: You mentioned that the Peace Corps was rather important.

KEITH: Not in Syria. We didn't have Peace Corps in Syria. That was in Morocco. I think the Peace Corps was extremely important in Morocco, as it was in Brazil and many other place, but it never existed in Syria.

Q: Because of a bias towards Israel, did you find that in political campaigns or what have you, our relationship with Israel would be trotted out?

KEITH: Our support for Israel was always a factor in public discourse. It was always present in the press and on Syrian TV. Interestingly, during that period the Syrians were relaxing control over what media material came into the country. They allowed the importation of Time and Le Monde and a few west European newspapers and journals. (Not, however, the International Herald Tribune) But they remained very sensitive to coverage of regional affairs and practiced an awkward form of censorship.

In a short time they shifted gears and decided to reach out to the western press. I was called in and told by the man who was in charge of their international press relations opening to the press and their relationship with the Western press and I was told that the president had decided to do some interviews. They had a list of American and wanted me to rank them in importance. Thus began Assad's outreach. They would call me in and ask, "Is this person sufficiently important for the president to give his time to?" And they were most eager to see what was actually printed. With time they became more knowledgeable and they didn't need me for that, but at the beginning, they did; they didn't know anybody in the American press and simply categorized it as a Zionist propaganda arm. Also, they were interested in what various politicians were saying and they were able to identify where their issues intersected with the issues of particular policy makers in the U.S. Steve Solarz, for example,. His district had probably the largest concentration of Syrian Jews in the U.S., and the plight of Syrian Jews was a major issue for us. It was the subject of a potent "60 Minutes" report.

Solarz visited Damascus a couple of times while I was there to discuss the issue with the Syrian government. The Syrians were hesitant to receive him, but eventually allowed the visits and gave him full access.

Q: They had an issue about marriages.

KEITH: Marriages of Jewish women. This was the focus of the "60 Minutes" story. Mike Wallace came in.

Q: "60 Minutes" is a news program and had a reputation of sort of ambushing people. Did you have any problems with that?

KEITH: No. Wallace actually did a reasonably good job. I think his production and the key production people who came in were particularly good. One was Christine Ockrent, the Belgian who eventually married Bernard Kouchner, the man who created Doctors Without Frontiers. She has become a media star in France but in those days she worked for CBS in those days. The Syrians were satisfied that the story was balanced.

But it wasn't all peaches and cream. The secret police were excessive every now and then. Nick Ludington, an Associated Press reporter, was beaten up and taken to jail. In

fact, I was having lunch with Christine Ockrent when I got the call that he was in jail. I immediately called the press liaison and the reporter was freed very quickly. It was a case of poor coordination within the Syrian government. It was certainly an act that went against their effort to open up to the western press.

Q: Where did you go when you left Syria?

KEITH: I came back for my first Washington assignment.

Q: You came back in '77.

KEITH: That's right.

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Q: Today is April 12, 1999. We've got you in Washington in 1977. What were you up to?

KEITH: In my first Washington assignment I was assigned to the Office for Near East, North African and South Asian Affairs (NEA), where I was desk officer for what seemed like half the Arab world. We had an excellent team at that time, arguably the most impressive in history, which was borne out by the raft of promotions and the number of colleagues who eventually became ambassadors or held other very high positions. Ed Penney, who was covering Egypt and a couple of other countries as a desk officer, was seconded to the National Security Council and for many months I covered his countries and mine.

Q: '77-'78. Was the view from Washington quite different? Was this an eye opener for you?

KEITH: Yes, it was. USIA was in the process of restructuring under the Carter administration. For the first time, a USIA veteran, John Reinhardt, was the director. We became known as the United States International Communication Agency (USIAC). Thankfully that sobriquet didn't survive the Carter years. One major positive change was the integration of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Exchange, which had been part of the State Department, into USICA. It was hoped that many issues in our public affairs structure would be resolved with this change, but that never happened. USIA had two major areas of focus. One, those activities that were funded by the Fulbright Hayes Act in which educational and cultural exchanges were to take place without regard for U.S. government policy objectives as such. Of course, the broader goal of American influence in the world was served by our cultural programs, but they were to be directed without concern for specific political goals. These programs were to be free of political influence and non-partisan. This is according to legislation that anybody can read in the Fulbright Hayes laws. On the other hand, we had policy-oriented programs funded under the Smith-Mundt Act which specifically to advance the interests of the U.S. government and to serve an advocacy role overseas. Recall that we were in the midst of the Cold War and in competition with the Soviets and their allies. I've never heard a credible argument that

this kind of advocacy or propaganda was not necessary.

With the birth of USIAC, those two functions were brought under one roof. Many influential academics and political observers felt you shouldn't mix those two functions n the same organization. Some argued that USIA (USICA at the time) was so steeped in propaganda that almost inevitably there political aims would be introduced into the Fulbright program the broader educational exchange program, and they would in short order be tainted and eventually ruined. That didn't happen. There will be some even today who will argue that the Fulbright program is not as pure as it should be, but I think that any reasonable assessment of the program since the late 1970s and over these past 20 years would have to say that the Fulbright program has not fallen prey to the propaganda aims of the USIA.

For John Reinhardt, and his deputy, Charles Bray, a critical task was to keep those functions separate and maintain their effectiveness.

After a year in the Area Office, I was tapped to go to the front office as special assistant to Charles Bray. Bray's main responsibility was to manage the transition inside USICA, including the VOA. As his special assistant, it was, for me, a fascinating and challenging time. He would call me to the office to discuss a particular issue. "How do you see this?" he would ask. When I gave him my assessment of an issue and a recommended course of action he would say, "Fix it." And that would be the end of the discussion—until, of course, I reported how things turned out.

What were we working on at the time? People and functions from the old State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Exchange (CU) were working in our building under our supervision for the first time. Especially important was working out a way to produce effective coordination between the powerful Area Offices and the E Bureau, as CU was now called, that was directed by a political appointee. Coordination between the Area Offices and the advocacy function of the old USIA was not a problem; this was an arrangement of long-standing. Fortunately, basically everybody "got it." Under the very able Alice Ilchman and her equally able career service deputy, Marshall Berg, a working relationship with the Area Offices developed with very few problems. The purity and principle of peer review in the educational exchange programs were respected by all.

Moreover, we worked out firewalls between the programs funded by Smith-Mundt money and Fulbright-Hays money. I think it is in fair to say that John Reinhardt and Charles Bray and their team did a very good job in maintaining the credibility of the organization in both fields and guarding against inappropriate activity on both sides while maintaining the Agency's reputation with important constituents in Washington and overseas.

Q: When you arrived in '77, this was early on in the carter administration. Each administration carries some people who are red hot on something. They hover around the White House. The Carter administration was somewhat ideological, as later the Reagan

one was, two opposite ends of the spectrum. Did you find that the NSC or the people from the administration were trying to fish in troubled waters?

KEITH: Certainly not at first. I think that there were, as time went on, when President Carter's views about America's role in the Third World began to play out, then those issues had an impact on all of us and particularly within the advocacy function. The president's views on AID and how AID money should be spent, his views on human rights and the role human rights should play in our overall foreign policy, all of those views as time went on began to have a heavy impact on the way we did our work overseas. Some longstanding relationships had to be changed and modified. This was particularly true in Latin America, but it was true elsewhere as well. I think that there are people today who will look back on the Carter administration as one of ineptitude in certain areas, particularly in domestic policy, but I think that if you look at the perspectives that many others have from overseas, there was a lot of affection for Carter and there was certainly a lot of respect for his stand on human rights.

Q: How did that play in the Arab world?

KEITH: Certainly his image of fair-mindedness, of evenhandedness, was a major factor in the role he was able to play in the Camp David talks. For the first time, the major Arab protagonists came into these talks with a sense that the American president was going to play fair, with a sense that the American administration for once was not going to be a pawn in the Israeli camp. I think that if you look back through the books of people who were present in the negotiating process, that was borne out. Carter was just as tough on the Israelis as he was on the Egyptians. Some very important progress was made, building on the opportunities presented by Anwar Sadat's dramatic visit to Israel.

Q: Speaking of the Sadat visit to Israel, were you doing Arab affairs at that time?

KEITH: As it happened, I had left Washington and was working in Brazil. But of course it had a major impact on me, having worked on those issues for so long. I can't think of a more dramatic moment than that.

Q: While you were doing your thing in Arab affairs, did this include Israel?

KEITH: Yes. Israel was in my bailiwick.

Q: Did you find that there were different rules dealing with Israel from the Washington perspective?

KEITH: Different rules, no. I would say that there was a different interpretation of U.S. interests on the part different American administrations. Every administration for which I worked pursued what they took to be American interests. Most have felt that American interests were best served by maintaining a special relationship with Israel. So, the question is, did that amount to different rules. It's hard to say. It certainly amounted to a different kind of relationship with Israel than we had with the rest of the region.

Q: I've never served in Israel, but I would think that Israel would at least in its multiplicity of communication outlets – newspapers, broadcasts, etc. – it would not be too difficult to get where America stood. Maybe they wouldn't agree with it. In the Arab world, there would be a problem of getting the American position out.

KEITH: With exception perhaps of Lebanon, the communication outlets in Israel were more like those in the West. Of course in Israel there has always been a very active marketplace of ideas and differences of opinion that always had voice – newspapers, TV, other media. And as I say, there were variations in the communications environment within the Arab world. We're not talking about opposite ends of a spectrum. In Lebanon, Jordan, and North Africa there moderate voices. And when we say "moderate" we are generally referring to people who are more or less supporting our aims. Still, the question of whether or not the Arab world could get our message is a good one. Often, it didn't. Our tools were not really very effective on a day-to-day basis. Take the VOA, for example. We had an excellent Arabic service over those years to the Arab world, but most people didn't listen to the VOA. The only time really that we had the kind of listenership we wanted was when bullets were flying. In the midst of crisis, people would turn to the VOA.

Q: What would they listen to otherwise?

KEITH: The BBC Arabic Service, the *Sawt al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs) from Cairo, and along in the '80s came a station in Monte Carlo broadcasting in Arabic that was very influential.

Q: The VOA was basically separate from what you were doing.

KEITH: It's important to understand the relationship between the VOA and the rest of USIA. VOA has a charter which basically says that they are obliged to report fair and accurate news. VOA was not supposed to be reporting the views of the U.S. government except when they are clearly identified as such – as in "The following is an editorial representing the official views of the United States government." Now, that chunk of time when they're giving the editorial views of the U.S. government, how do they get those editorial views and how is that vetted, how can a person sitting across town from the State Department writing an editorial be certain that the views expressed really are the views of the U.S. government? That is a process that is sometimes troublesome and quite a tricky. In principle, there is a process that links the editorial offices of the Voice, the appropriate desks at State, and the appropriate policy and desk officer positions at USIA. Very frequently, there isn't perfect harmony. By that I mean a particularly harsh editorial might be flagged to attention of the USIA desk. We might object to that editorial on grounds of timing or tone, or even errors of fact. But Voice is resistant to "uptown" control, and there can be struggles that always take too much time to negotiate. There is a clear separation between the policy apparatus and the VOA news function that was always respected. Where the news office sometimes upset U.S. ambassadors in the field was in their choice of people to interview for news stories. Sometimes they would find

people who were not really representative of anything but their own eccentric views. We were separated from the VOA, yes. We are separated from the main function, which is the reporting of the news and presenting images of the United States through features on American life, the music programs and so on. Where we were joined at the hip was on the presentation of U.S. government policy through editorials.

Q: What about the pro-Israeli lobby? Did you find that would take exception or was that a problem?

KEITH: I wasn't ever in a position to hear direct complaints from Israel, but there was vigilance on the part of people who were concerned about the well-being of Israel with regard to programs, activity with Arab states, particularly anything that touched on Israel or direct Israeli interests. For example, there was congressional interest over the establishment of a USIA post in East Jerusalem that would be connected to the consulate general in Jerusalem rather than the embassy in Tel Aviv. An ongoing issue was our choice of certain Palestinian Arabs for exchange programs when and those particular individuals were not well thought of by the Israelis.

Q: How were they resolved? Was there pretty much a veto?

KEITH: It could never be said it was a veto. There were complications and the Israelis had ways of complicating programs and our lives, but they certainly didn't have a veto. Israel could say that you may leave on this program but you may not be allowed to return. You go back to the whole issue of the USIS program in Jerusalem. It continues to exist but under scrutiny. We have two cultural operations in the city of Jerusalem, one on the west side and one on the east side. The west side basically is for the Israeli population and the staff is basically Israeli, although they make an effort to reach out to Israeli On the eastern side our staff is basically Palestinian and the programs are directed to the Palestinian population in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza.

Q: How did you coordinate the USIA message with the Department of State?

KEITH: The actual implementation of public diplomacy programs in the field is an integrated process. The ambassador or the consul general in the case of Jerusalem and senior officers in the mission are all part of the country team and that country team has its public diplomacy goals and activities with the PAO as principal implementer. That is an arrangement that has been in place for generations. On the question of coordinating programs between agencies on the Washington end, there are sometimes complications, differences. USIA has its own set of requirements. There are things that the Agency is supposed to be doing that are unique. Part of that uniqueness is legislated by the Smith-Mundt Act that set up USIA and prohibits USIA products from being disseminated in the U.S. State doesn't operate with the same restrictions. Thus, State's "public affairs" program, which seeks to develop understanding and support for our policies, is aimed at American citizens is an activity USIA officers can't be a part of. This is going to be a challenge when USIA is rolled up into State because Congress has always made clear that it did not want to see money that was appropriated for advocacy programs abroad used to

influence American public opinion. Every time that the issue has been raised in Congress, the result has been an even tighter control, not relaxation. Congress watchers – and there are those at State who watch very closely – do not want that to happen. At the same time, the State Department has a role of making foreign policy more relevant to the guy in the street. We, USIA, have the tools to do that. State has not. The public affairs function at the State Department has always been a under-funded.

But even if it weren't under-funded, its primary focus would remain the famous noon briefing. That is what everybody is focused on, not only in PA but in much of the Department. Then somebody comes in like Madeleine Albright who really does understand these public opinion issues and public diplomacy issues more than her predecessors have and she doesn't understand why it is that you cant make the housewife in Peoria understand that this is important to her. That is why there is a temptation to use as much of these facilities and these monies as possible to conduct a public affairs campaign. In the beginning of the process of negotiating the amalgamation of State and USIA there was a real lack of understanding on the difference between Public Affairs (that function designed to inform and communicate with Americans) and Public Diplomacy (that function designed for foreign audiences).

But getting back to the early years and the question of how USIA and State coordinated policies and programs over years, it was really pretty straightforward when it came creating media products whose aim was advocacy. Policy officers USIA went to meetings at State, the same meetings that were leading up the noon briefing, and then used this background idea was to help shape the media products such as VOA editorials, the Wireless File (a daily transmission to the field used for policy background and press placement), magazine articles and the like.

Q: How did John Reinhardt and Charles Bray work? Were they interested in the Arab side?

KEITH: I don't think that you could say that either would have been considered a specialist. Their concerns were not at that time focused on specific foreign policy goals, whether it was the Middle East, Europe, or Africa. They were fixed on creating a new agency, USICA, and both were broadly supportive of what the Carter administration wanted to do.

Q: What were those early days of "USICA" like?

KEITH: There was a period when everybody was staking out territory and looking for new ways of operating in this new environment. The absorption of CU posed the policy issues I've spoken of earlier, and it also required a new kind of constituency building and fence mending both in the Washington area and throughout a skeptical university world. That was a real challenge. I think it was extremely fortunate for the Agency that they were able to attract – because of the idealism of the Carter years – really top notch people who brought with them a kind of prestige in the academic world that was absolutely crucial at that time. Alice Ilchman was absolutely first-rate -- sensible and approachable.

She was able to attract some of the best people in USIA to her staff as well.

Q: Did you get involved when you were wearing your Arab/Israeli hat in the choice of people for educational exchanges? I would think this could get very political.

KEITH: Yes, it certainly can get very political. In every city and every capital and every location, it was very political. On the Arab side, the people who were from the elite whose parents were Western educated tended to be moderate politically and pro-American. These represented an important bastion of support, but they were a kind of elite. Should we have focused our attention on those people as they generally expected, or should we have focused our attention on people who weren't in that group?

Q: Of course, the elite that you're talking about is the easy group in which we've been doing it for years.

KEITH: That's right. So, you have a young assistant cultural affairs officer who has been out at the university and he speaks good Arabic and is out there practicing his Arabic and he meets students who are not well disposed to the U.S. They like him, but they're not well disposed to the U.S. or its policies. He comes back and argues very strongly that there are a couple of them that ought to be selected for programs in the United States. You get pressures sometimes from the country itself, from authorities in the country. Why are you picking this person? You have the same questions from ambassadors and the same questions from political officers and DCMs.

On the other hand, there are cases in which our exchange programs have been seen as valuable political patronage. One case in particular sticks in my mind: the supremely unqualified nephew of an Arab foreign minister who ended up with graduate scholarship in the U.S. So, yes, these programs can have important political coloration.

The same thing applies in Israel. We have had for years programs that have targeted Israeli Arabs. That has not always pleased certain people in the right wing of the Israeli government and the right wing is in power. It can make life complicated. They don't take people out and stand them against the wall, but they can make life quite complicated.

Q: Was Iran under your control?

KEITH: Iran was part of the NEA area.

Q: This was the beginning of when all hell broke loose there. Was there a problem while you were still dealing with that?

KEITH: This was one of the clearest failures of American policy during my career. It is sometimes alleged that no one at Embassy Tehran had an inkling of what was going on at the universities and in the bazaars. Nonsense. We had people there who could see what was going on. I was working in NEA at the time and attended the weekly State Department policy meetings. There was no secret that the country was in turmoil. USIS

people were sensitive to the currents that were running through Iranian society, but it was very difficult for our people in Tehran to engage with the people who were making changes because – and this is one of those moments to which you just alluded – the ambassador didn't want them to.

Q: There were very clear instructions to play it just one way in Iran, which is essentially the Shah's way. This had been going on for some years.

KEITH: There was a perception that if you engaged with the Shah's enemies, you were giving them aid and comfort and you were giving them credibility. There was a sense that we needed to be putting all of our effort into preserving the Shah's regime. He was a good friend of the U.S.

Q: At the Agency, were there attempts to reach out beyond and to try to change it?

KEITH: Oh, sure, there were. I could give you names of people who knew what was going on and who were involved with Iranians. By the way, it wasn't just people who were loyal to the Shah who were coming to the Iran-America Society who were involving themselves in our programs. There would be plenty of times when there would be people who would be in American libraries during the day and demonstrating against us at night.

Q: How was it to work in the front office of USIA for a career State Department officer?

KEITH: Charlie Bray certainly brought with him the perspectives of a career diplomat. But he had an unusually strong disregard for doing things the way they had always been done. He had a very thoughtful and rigorously probing mind. He was constantly trying to get to the crux of the matter. In fact, if I was of any value to him, it was probably interpreting him to a lot of people in USIA who did not understand what he was getting at, and their attitudes to him.

Q: I just finished interviewing Ted Curran, who was very unhappy with the Bray-Reinhardt combination. Was this an individual or was there a problem within USIA?

KEITH: I'm not sure what Ted's particular problems were, but having been closer to them than he was, I must say that I didn't share his unhappiness. One reason some senior officers were unhappy with John Reinhardt had to do with personnel assignment policy. They introduced certain kinds of personnel policies with regard to senior officers that had not been strictly applied, to wit: either go back overseas after your Washington assignment or retire. That was an abrupt break with past practice and seemed to be applied without compromise. Understandably, this policy created some hardship – or at least some real inconvenience. We lost some of the best we had in their generation, such as Dave Nalle, they couldn't accommodate to the new policy. On the other hand, the departure of these officers opened up promotion possibilities for others. And Reinhardt was somewhat unapproachable, even for his long-time colleagues. He was no longer an old boy, but director of the Agency, and he acted that way.

There were a lot of expressions of concern with the reorganization of the Agency. I'd like to hear Ted's specific criticisms because, as much as I admire Ted as a colleague and mentor in my early career, I was never as unhappy with them as he seems to have been.

Q: You were there at the end of the Carter administration. It got particularly hit - and there was almost a paralysis – by the double hit of our hostages taken in Iran and also the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Carter had come into office with the idea that, yes, you can do business with the Soviets and all of a sudden, he found he couldn't. Did this strike you? Were you watching an agency wrestle with a problem at its level?

KEITH: The Agency, of course, had the same kind of challenges as the rest of the administration. There was a loss of U.S. prestige and that certainly had an impact on the way people responded to our foreign policy goals and objectives. The period from 1980 to 1983, the transitional period from Carter to Reagan, I was in Brazil and the colonels were still in power. People in Brazil who didn't want Figueiredo and the military regime were taking some heart from Jimmy Carter and his insistence on the importance of human rights. In fact I think Carter's resume of that period would be, on balance, pretty positive come out throughout Latin America. Similarly, in the Middle East Carter was seen as a fair-minded American president. He is still regarded as something of an honored figure in Egypt.

But Afghanistan showed the weakness of the Carter presidency, and the response to the invasion – boycotting the Moscow Olympics – was seen by many, particularly in the Islamic world, as something of a joke.

Q: You left the head office of the Agency when?

KEITH: In 1980. I went to Brazil.

Q: You were in Brazil from when to when?

KEITH: From 1980 to 1983.

Q: What were you doing?

KEITH: I was deputy PAO.

Q: You were located in Brasilia at that point?

KEITH: I was located in Brasilia but my main responsibility was the supervision of the six branch posts and the program division. The "P" Division was responsible for the creation and implementation of programs and public diplomacy materials in an organized, systematic approach throughout Brazil. It was a time when the Agency was growing up as a public diplomacy agency as well. We recognized we could not have an impact across the board, that we had to put our limited resources in certain areas and try to develop much more sophisticated tools and approaches to our exchanges and so on.

That was a very interesting time. I believe we really matured in that period.

Q: In Brazil, how did you find the situation? You mentioned the colonels. You had served in Syria and other places.

KEITH: Rather benign. Of course, I was not there in the period of the heaviest repression and at the same time one would have to say that what happened in Argentina's "dirty war" never happened in Brazil on that kind of scale.

Q: None of the disappearances.

KEITH: By the time I got there in 1980, there had already been some political liberalization. There had been a general amnesty and people who left during the troubles of the early '70s began to float back in and to emerge as professionals and lawyers and journalists and so on. They were free to act, to talk. The most noteworthy of the old revolutionary group, Figueiredo, was writing his memoirs. The whole period I was there from '80-'83, the country was preparing for elections, preparing for a transition to democratic government. One of the things that we helped with was the examination of constitutional issues and the building of democratic models. They were taking a pragmatic approach to the writing of a constitution and the establishment of a legislature and a professional legislative staff. We had much to offer. They also wanted people to come down who were ex-legislators, ex-senators and congressmen for advice about the role of the legislator.

It was an interesting time for us to be there. At the time, we had the president and the vice president in separate visits to Brazil. Figueiredo, the president, was a sick man in both real and metaphorical sense. He really was in poor health, and metaphorically the system had produced him, the generals, the colonels, was old and sick. They had been outgrown by the population. It was just inevitable that there was going to be this move to a democratic system. A new generation of technocrats, including a number of economists who had been trained at the University of Chicago, was rising to power. It was a very fascinating time to be in Brazil.

Q: Were we at all tainted because our ambassador to the UN, Jeane Kirkpatrick, had reached the attention of Ronald Reagan mainly on the theme that these authoritarian regimes in Latin America are really not bad as far as we're concerned? I would have thought that at least from the point of view of our people stationed in Argentina, we're watching this dying breed. This was not the message we wanted to give out.

KEITH: No, it wasn't. But Jeane Kirkpatrick never came to Brazil while I was there, the president and vice president did. Those visits had great symbolic importance. We were encouraging the move to democracy. The Vice President was Bush and the President was Reagan. Say what you will about the Republican administration of that time; they were professionals and they listened to the professionals in the field. At 6:00 am, we'd be there and Reagan, Shultz and their team would listen and ask questions. "Will this speech work? Are we making the right points?" I sat down with their speechwriter and we went

over much of the policy material, and we could see how we had influenced it the final product. They were listening. I admired that even if I didn't particularly identify with that party.

Q: Can you talk about the intellectual and political elite that was waiting to take over after the military stepped down? Were we working with them?

KEITH: As I said, for better of for worse, a lot of the people who were running the Brazilian economy were out of the University of Chicago. We were working with the emerging political elites and with the academics. We were also working with the major media, helping to establish links between them and the U.S. The emerging elites were people who were not radicals, they were people we knew we could work with. They were for free markets, economic reform and democratic governance.

Q: I would have thought there would have been difficulty. One, Brazil is a huge country. Two, the capital is not London, Paris, or Rome, where everybody gets together. They all live somewhere else. I would think that the sheer problem of the shadow government waiting to get in being in Sao Polo or Rio…

KEITH: The truth is, we were closer to those people than we were to the government. We had posts in Rio, Sao Paolo, Recife, Belo Horizonte and Salvador. We knew not only the emerging political elite but the cultural elite from George Amado to the hottest young photographer. They wanted to know us and we wanted to know them. They wanted a close relationship with us and we wanted one with them. We had a lot more in common with them than we had with the colonels and generals.

Q: How about the colonels and generals? I would have thought that there is nothing more annoyed than a dying establishment sitting there brooding while they're watching people pay attention to others.

KEITH: The problems with the country were outgrowing them. The problems could not be handled anymore the way the generals worked. There was an inevitability about the change that was coming. By the way, the generals and the colonels were basically pro-American, too. They had been junior officers serving with the Allies in World War II.

Q: Did you find connecting to the media, getting the word out, how was it best done?

KEITH: Actually Brazil was the first post in which I felt no compulsion to "get the word out," or to win hearts and minds. We had important cultural and public diplomacy equities all over Brazil, including an active collection of Brazilian-American centers in the northeast. In fact, our public diplomacy challenge in Brazil was different from any I had experienced in Turkey or the Arab countries. Brazil was already a modern state with a world-ranking economy. The economy of Sao Paulo state was second in Latin America after the economy of Brazil itself. The country had a crime problem in its large cities, but no internal instability or threat from outside. Its media, especially the large TV networks, dominated the Lusophone world, and its famous tele-novellas (soap operas) were popular

throughout Europe and the Spanish-speaking world. There weren't any wars, skirmishes, or serious tensions with neighbors.

Culturally, Brazil was, for me, a fantastic new world of music, literature and art. And Brazilians already had a deep appreciated American art. They acknowledged the impact of American jazz on their music and the influence of American writers

Our concerns about Brazil focused on two areas: the march toward democracy and their massive economic challenges. I've touched on the democratic evolution. Economically, the country was in chronic trouble. There was galloping inflation, which was a major worry. There was heavy investment in the Brazilian economy by American banks, and there was looming the almost inevitable default on the huge debt they owed to Chase Manhattan and other American banks. Their monetary policy and the IMF prescriptions were putting heavy pressure on consumers. So to put it mildly, we were confronted with different kinds of challenges than those I had known in the Islamic world.

Q: The advent of Reagan on the scene… For those from outside, he was a movie actor and as an extreme right-wing person. Did it take a little persuasion of the people to trust Ronald Reagan?

KEITH: Yes. There was a certain amount of that. I think that there was a period in which the people were trying to get used to the idea of Reagan, but he was so charming when he came to Brazil. Brazil was an important country for us and he went rather early on in his tenure. I think the power of his personal appeal and magnetism largely won them over. His speech in Sao Paulo to the State Legislature was pure Reagan, full of admiration for the Brazilian people and encouragement for their political evolution. He had only briefly glanced at the draft, but delivered it as if he had written every word himself.

Q: How about the Malvinas/Falklands business between Argentina and Great Britain? Did that cause any problem with us?

KEITH: Oh, no, on the contrary. Brazilians and Argentines never had much love lost between them. Although I think it may be an exaggeration to say that the Brazilians cooperated with Britain, certainly there was not very much concern on the part of Brazil when the Argentines were soundly defeated, even though both countries were controlled by military dictators.

Q: Where did you go in '83?

KEITH: Back to Washington.

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Q: Today is October 4, 1999. What happened in 1983?

KEITH: I left Brazil and went back to Washington as deputy director for Near East and

South Asia. That was a tour that eventually lasted just two years – '83-'85, and then I went off to Paris. As deputy area director, I handled mostly the Arab world and North Africa, as my boss was a South Asianist and he basically handled the South Asian posts. We split duties but each of us focused on the area of his expertise.

Q: You didn't mention Israel. Was it part of the equation?

KEITH: Yes, the NEA area includes all of the Arab countries and Israel and all of the South Asian countries – Pakistan, India, Iran, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh…

Q: The head of USIA at this point was Charles Wick, a controversial figure. He could get funds which other directors probably couldn't. He had political clout. How did you find him and his impact on what you all were doing?

KEITH: I think you touched on the important things. He brought with him something that too rarely have the directors of USIA had and that is political clout. Ed Murrow had it. Carl Rowan had it to a certain extent. We really didn't have anybody after that with that kind of political power or name recognition until Charles Wick came, bringing with him the personal relationship between the Wicks and the Reagans, That relationship certainly benefited USIA; there was a spike in the USIA budget at that time. He moved us into the television age. He was a man of great enthusiasm when he was with USIA. I thought his enthusiasm for his international television projects worked somewhat to the detriment of other areas of public diplomacy, but he definitely deserves credit for moving us into the television age.

Q: Did he have a point of view or was he reaching down as you were working on this very politically charged area of the world?

KEITH: I think he learned important lessons early in the game. He was not a policy man. He didn't have a deep of understanding of international affairs. In the earliest point in his Poland v. Poland fiasco, when he sought to influence affairs in Poland with a kind of political variety show, the Agency was in danger of becoming a laughing stock. At that time he was surrounded by political advisers who were committed to an ideological agenda that I'm not sure even he was comfortable with. I'm fairly certain he was uncomfortable with some of the politically-appointed ideologues who came into USIA under the sponsorship of right wing figures on the Hill. I think he felt they were a distraction to his main goal, which was modernizing the Agency's delivery system. Eventually he began to get rid of them. But he really didn't focus on those things until they became an embarrassment. Les Lenkowsky was the deputy director of USIA for much of the time that I was in Washington. He was and remains a person with a very conservative political agenda. He made no secret of that fact while he was there.

The enemies list. You've probably heard many of my colleagues talk about the enemies list. Lenkowsky publicly denied the existence of an enemies list, i.e. a list of Americans whose intellectual output or service in our overseas programs was prohibited because of their liberal credentials. When that became public there was outrage, and the Agency

took some real blows. Lenkowsky, as you've probably heard, denied any knowledge of such a list and put the blame on "mindless gnomes in the bowels of the Agency" acting without direction. Agency employees were furious, and within a day or two people were sporting "Mindless Gnome" buttons.

In fact, Lenkowsky was one of many with neoconservative beliefs who came to prominence during the Reagan years, were less prominent under George H. W. Bush, were completely out of power under Clinton, and re-emerged with George W Bush. Under Reagan they brought with them a foreign policy agenda which was an aggressively American agenda with far less multi-nationalism than we had practiced since the end of WWII. The kind of cultural relativism or political relativism that marked a more liberal period in our history was gone. No remnants of that. There was a very strong feeling that our system - open markets, free markets, free enterprise, American democracy as a model – we should not be apologetic for these things and we should not be too eager to allow a relativist discussion. Other versions of popular governance or economic systems were irrelevant in their agenda. It was a tough period. Also, Lenkowsky and the people around him had a very enthusiastic pro-Israel agenda, to the extent that it sometimes became a problem for the Department of State, which also had quite a pro-Israeli agenda at that time. But the nuances and the steps forward that you took at the appropriate moment, the effort to try to get the sides together to fulfill a longer range agenda which was held at the State Department was sometimes threatened by the more tactical activities at USIA. They might have taken the form of a VOA editorial that was ill-timed, that was particularly aggressive toward one or another Arab government or leader at a time when the U.S. was involved in delicate negotiations with the very same government. We were in a very confrontational stance.

But on balance the experience with Wick was probably good for USIA. He brought us kicking and screaming into the television era; he made us think about the use of new technologies; he didn't listen to people like me who talked about communication on a human level and face to face, etc. It wasn't that he didn't believe in those things necessarily. It was that the important thing to him at that moment was the use of the new technology and the establishment of USIA as a modern purveyor of information. He could be extremely persuasive. I observed him in action with ministers in Brazil and Jordan, and King Fahd in Saudi Arabia, and they took him quite seriously

Q: Did you find yourself acting as one of the gnomes in USIA?

KEITH: Vis-à-vis Lenkowsky I certainly considered myself one of the gnomes. In fact, I sported a gnome button, that I still possess, for some days after this comment was made in public. As deputy director of NEA, I was responsible for interacting with the Department and with the media on issues of public diplomacy and of public policy. So, when the part of USIA that was responsible for putting out material – brochures, pamphlets, and so on – wanted to do a piece on terrorism in the Middle East, it had to come through my office. I wasn't the final arbiter, of course. It would be an issue that would be discussed also with the appropriate State desk, but there was a political support structure for people who had a more aggressive propaganda agenda in those days –

political support structure on the Hill and in academia and think tanks – whether it was the Heritage Foundation or other foundations who supported a more aggressive and more conservative agenda. So, those of us who were in the mode of the chess player moving pieces as it seemed to make the most sense at that moment, trying to get to a certain level of exchange and engagement between Arabs and Israelis, were in a way the opposition to that other way of thinking. I don't want to give you the idea that we had battles every day, but there was a sense that we, the gnomes, were standing in the way of effective policy action on these items.

Q: At the time, the Israelis were somewhat their own worst enemies because of the settlement policies. The Lebanese invasion had not gone well. There was still the aftermath and the Begin government was not sitting very well in Washington. That helped as far as trying to have a balanced field.

KEITH: I think that if you look back on that period there were certainly ups and downs. There were times when we were very angry with the Israelis over settlement issues and other things as well. But there was no comparison between the level of our relationship that was even at its lowest point still well above that of the Arabs in general. That was in the early '80s. It was a time when the American public was only just getting used to thinking of people like Sadat and others in the Arab world as people you could deal with and who weren't all terrorists killing handicapped tourists on ships. We have come a long way since then. Still, although we can have our differences with Israel, there are still things that are givens in our relationship. One is that Israel must maintain a the qualitative advantage in defense capability. That is always going to be a major foreign policy given for the U.S. We are never going to let Israel fall into a position of being unable to defend itself. But as we have moved on, our involvement with the Arab world has matured and their involvement with us has matured. Their understanding of the position of Israel in our foreign policy scenario is quite well understood. Often, you will have conversations that begin, "We understand about your relationship with Israel, but…" There was a maturity in the relationship that was just beginning in the 1980s. If you look back at Camp David with Carter and compare that with the Oslo and subsequent discussions, you will observe a more mature negotiating style, an understanding as of 1991 and the Madrid Peace Talks that we were all in the same riverbed. There were currents in that river that were moving faster than others. There were whirlpools in the river here and there. Don't forget that that it was a very conservative Israeli government that went to Madrid in 1991, but even they, including Begin and Netanyahu, then sensed that a direction had been taken, a course had been set, and it was just a question of pace and conditions along the way. We're still a long way from peace, but the outlines of a settlement can be seen through the fog.

Q: Did the Palmer spy case come up during your time?

KEITH: No, it was afterward.

Q: How about the Libyan bombing?

KEITH: That was also afterward. The relationship with Libya was very much a part of our concerns at the time. The mental stability of Qadhafi was a big question and it wasn't just Americans saying that the colonel was a little apt to go off the deep end but Arabs as well. They sometimes found him amusing but also quite an unstable and dangerous man.

Q: At any point, were we looking at how to get through to this man?

KEITH: Especially in the earliest days after the previous regime there was a desire to have a relationship with him. We had a very strong relationship with the old King and his government before the revolution. We had a base in Libya. Wheelus. I think the history of that period will show that there were some missed opportunities on both sides. But finding a rapprochement with Qadhafi was not an easy matter.

Q: What about Assad?

KEITH: I mentioned Assad's relationship with Dick Murphy, but he was somebody the U.S. respected from his earliest days in power. He seemed to be a less impulsive leader than some of the other Baathis around him, and his role in the Black September events bore this out. I had been to Jordan just months before this happened and the swagger and almost arrogance of the Palestinians marching around the street with their Kalashnikovs made it clear in my mind that there was going to be a clash between the Palestinian groups and the Hashemite government. Thus Black September 1970 and Assad's emergence as the Syrian leader. When I arrived in Damascus in 1974 he had definitely consolidated his power. Although he was a member of a minority sect, there was a grudging respect – even admiration for him in much of Syria. By 1974 when I got there, he was already setting a record for longevity in a country that had suffered chronic instability for generations.

Q: We're talking now in 1999 and he's still there.

KEITH: His health is not great. But I remember him as a young man and yet the eldest of the Baath Party people around him. I remember going to a public meeting with all the Baath Party senior leadership on the stage, including the president, and being struck by how young they were – even he, who was five to eight years older than the rest of them.

Q: Could we develop any friendly operations in Syria?

KEITH: We had a very close relationship with Syria in the mid-1970s.

Q: I'm thinking now in the time when you were back in Washington.

KEITH: What came later was a very schizophrenic relationship with the Syrians. We were quite pleased when the Syrians entered the civil war because it looked as though the Christian population in Lebanon was about to be swallowed up. For his own reasons, Assad did not want to see that happen. Then our relationship with him was deteriorated rapidly because of his evolving role as the Lebanese civil war continued. With shifting

alliances and ongoing violence, we then came to a point where we were shooting at Syrian positions from battleships in the Mediterranean. In less than three years we went from a point where we had an active AID presence in Syria, one of the largest in the world, and where we were genuinely making progress with the Syrians on the peace front. Along came the civil war in Lebanon and that changed everything – not immediately, but it put everything on a different track. We have not recovered from that.

Q: During this '83-'85 period, was USIA doing much in Syria?

KEITH: We had a reduced presence. We had gone up to quite a lot. But USIA never really left. At one point, I think we were down to one officer. That's the way we started in '74 when I went there to reopen diplomatic relations. So, we've had a kind of up and down relationship with the Syrians, recognizing all along that without them, we're not going to find peace in the Middle East.

Q: What about Iran and Iraq, who were waging a horrendous war at this point? We had no relations with Iran and Iraq was not the happiest place.

KEITH: It was very hard working in Iraq. The Iraqis were very closed. As deputy area director I visited to Baghdad in that period. They wanted a relationship with us but they wanted it at minimal levels. They wanted to take advantage of our antipathy toward Iran but they didn't want to be beholden to us. Many of our allies in the Arab world were actively supporting Saddam Hussein's Iraq at this point, and there was a general assumption that we were too. In any case, we shared with the Saudis, Kuwaitis and others a desire to curb Iranian influence in the area. In order to thwart that, to work against that, we were prepared to be of some assistance to the Iraqis in their war with Iran. Of course, the Iraqis had been the aggressors in this war. Saddam Hussein was a most unsavory character. It was a very bad set of options for us. But on balance, the Arabs thought they could live with Saddam Hussein more easily than Iranian style Islamic revolution.

Q: How did we operate in Israel? The Israelis know more about us than they probably know about their next door neighbors. Was there anything we could do there in terms of USIA?

KEITH: We've always had a very strong program in Israel. If one of the main goals of the USIA program is to promote an engagement of institutions and people, we did that in Israel very well. We had one of the best Fulbright programs in the world. One of the most efficient, well-known and important institutions in the country was the U.S./Israel Fulbright Commission that operated in the same building as USIA.

We had lots of important cultural exchange with Israeli, much of it voluntarily by major American artists. There excellent exchanges with academics, with the people in government, and with journalists. Israel is a political society. If you're on the road in a bus going from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the driver will have on a political talk show. It's the most political society, politically aware, that I've ever seen, particularly when there are elections approaching or when there is some kind of choice that has to be made, the

Oslo Accords, etc.

Q: Did you find that you were having to play a cautious hand when you were dealing with Saudi Arabia because of Saudi sensibilities?

KEITH: Even by the '80s, the Saudis had largely rid themselves of the stereotypes of earlier years, throwing money around and misbehaving in Europe and the U.S. By the '80s, mid levels of the Saudi government had been educated in the United States and Britain and were quite sophisticated, certainly sophisticated enough that you could have frank political talks. In general terms, we encouraged the Saudis to play a moderating role in the peace process in general terms, but this was not a difficult case for us to make. The Saudis hated instability in the region, and for good and obvious reasons. We have always been able to rely on them. The Saudis would preach to us. They would accuse us of being unfair and not evenhanded in the Arab-Israel disputes, but they had a way of looking at their strategic and long-term economic interests that eventually was beneficial to our relationship. Even so, we couldn't take the Saudis for granted. There's a lovely story that works best in Arabic, but you'll get the point. Kissinger was planning a trip to the Middle East that excluded a visit to the Kingdom. King Faisal on hearing this is very upset. He has his ambassador in Washington go to Kissinger, and after much pleading Kissinger agrees to stop in Saudi Arabia. So, a few days later Kissinger is sitting with the King in Riyadh who says, "So, Henry, you weren't going to come and see me." Kissinger looked at him with a look of complete incredulity and said, "Your Majesty? This whole trip was just to see you." Yes, you had to take into consideration the Saudi sensibilities, but our strategic cooperation was very much in our interests.

Q: Were any of your staff sitting down and thinking long-term about Iran? We're only about five or six years into this impasse which remains today. But we all know that eventually we're going to have relations there and that there is good will at some levels in that society that will come out.

KEITH: In that period, there were people who were saying, "We've got to look at this situation in the long-term." Bill Quant, who was assistant secretary of state during the Carter years and a well-respected Middle East scholar was saying exactly that. He argued that there were political realities in the U.S. and what the Iranian students did and the government condoned is going to be a determining factor in our relationship for some years, but we have to be looking down the road. Iran is going to have strategic importance for us in both economic and political terms into the future and we need to find ways to reach common ground. But of course that becomes harder with the passage of time and the hardening of positions on both sides. And it has already been a long time.

Q: It has. But it's like our China relationship. Everyone knew what was going to happen at the end of the road.

How about relations with the State Department?

KEITH: Relations between USIA/NEA and the State Department geographic bureau

were always good. Usually we knew the senior people – assistant secretaries, deputy assistant secretaries – from shared field experience, and the trust was strong. The real problems for us were within our own agency, not with State. The State Department's problem was finding its own turf, getting a seat at the table for important decisions that were being made at the NSC level. But as I say, the relationship between the NEA area in USIA and the NEA area in State Department were good.

Q: Did you have a person on the NSC?

KEITH: Not at the policy level. That was something of an issue at one point, but Charlie Wick did make it over to the State Department for the Secretary's meetings. He got a place at the table probably because of his relationship with the president. There were USIA people at the working level of the NSC. The NSC has its own press operation and we had good people from USIA working in that area. Some of them have gone on to senior USIA positions.

Q: Let's stop at this point. Where are you going to go in '85?

KEITH: Paris.

Q: To do what?

KEITH: Be senior CAO.

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Q: Today is February 21, 2000. You're gong to Paris as CAO.

KEITH: The position of Senior CAO was established in the '70s to do two things: first, allow for prestigious academics to enter USIA for a limited time in the largest posts such as Paris, Rome, New Delhi and the like. Second, it was seen as a capstone position for career USIA cultural affairs specialists who were not interested in the press and information role a PAO had to play. An example of the former was the Senior CAO position in Rome where the first incumbent with that title was an eminent professor of Italian politics.. These were senior positions that enabled a handful of career CAO professionals to get to Senior Foreign Service levels usually achieved only through successful service as PAOs. In some ways, my assignment as SCAO Paris broke that mold. I had been very active in cultural affairs, but I had also been a PAO with the traditional range of responsibilities.

Q: It seems a little bit like taking coals from Newcastle to be pushing American culture in France.

KEITH: That is unfortunately the prevailing view of the Congress. The sense is that the West Europeans are allies who know American society very well. So Congress questions why we spend so much money on public diplomacy in Western Europe. But the truth is

we have very legitimate interests in establishing exchange links between our institutions and French institutions, in trying to counteract some of the negative popular images of the U.S. that are seen on French television. The amount of anti-Americanism that exists in Western Europe, particularly in France but also in Britain, especially among intellectuals and media figures, is surprising and it has its influence. I believe we are cutting our programs there at some peril.

When I went to Paris, the Fulbright commission was in limbo. The reason was that the French had their interests and what they wanted to do with their own money for scholarships in the U.S. They wanted to support French students coming to the U.S. in selected fields that would take the edge off American competitive advantages in certain areas. They certainly were not interested in going in with American government educational programs and sending people back and forth to study film writing, American history, and so on. So, that was a real challenge. The thing that helped save the Fulbright program was the name itself and the prestige that has always attached to a Fulbright scholarship. So, I thought that it was my task as the senior cultural affairs officer to get on the board as the vice or co-chairman with the French Ministry of Education official assigned to the position by the French government. I wanted to try steer this the program out of the backwaters of French educational interests, and to find ways to encourage them to devote more positive energy to the commission. There was no likelihood of getting more U.S. government funding, so I set out to show how we might could involve the private sector in not just scholarships but in new institutional relationships between academia and the private sector. It was a totally new concept for the French and they took to it like ducks to water. I went to a major French bank and persuaded them to create fellowships in the U.S. in the field of public finance and monetary policy. Fellowship recipients would have what amounted to internships in the bank's Paris headquarters. The bank's name was associated with the prestigious title of "Fulbright." The French loved it, and they began to pay much more attention to the Fulbright Commission.

Q: You were in Paris from '85 to when?

KEITH: From '85-'88.

Q: In a way, what you were describing about what the French wanted to do with the Fulbright program sounds very much like the Soviets wanting to send all their students to go take nuclear physics and not being very interested in American…

KEITH: Or any Third World country, whether it's Turkey, Egypt, or Burundi. They feel generally that they need doctors, civil engineers, petroleum engineers, or increasingly computer engineers, and they're not concerned with Hawthorne scholars or even linguists. That is why American influence on Fulbright boards has to exist to ensure some kind of balance. You cant deny the legitimate desires of a board to help bolster a faculty of engineering, but allowing that to systematically exclude of people who are in arts and letters would not be in our interest. We have this challenge in virtually every country where there is a Fulbright Commission.

Q: Was there in France when you got there in '85 a place within the university system of solid American studies? We have European, French studies. Americans learn about other countries in their universities. But there seems to be a certain lack of solid American studies.

KEITH: There were institutes of North American studies in a couple of universities, including the University of Paris. But the French academic system generally is so broad and is so penetrating in its level of inquiry. In history or English language studies a student may be required to have a remarkably deep knowledge of certain aspects of our society.

We developed a lot of cooperation with the French in their annual examination process. This was a wonderful opportunity for us. We were asked one year for some help with one of the subject areas that was to be a part of the national examination for English language students at an advanced level. It struck us that not only could we supply some information, but we could start supplying lecturers and specialists. One of the first questions was about slavery in the antebellum South. We arranged for the eminent scholar on that question, John Hope Franklin, to have a sort of telephone hookup with the people who were writing the exam questions. That worked so well we took matters a step further. We said, "For your examinations, if you're going to have American topics let us know what areas we can help you with. Give us enough time and we'll bring people over to have seminars with your test writers." That worked extremely well, and helped us develop much stronger relations at the Ministry of Education.

You never knew where the French would aim their academic inquiry. I sat on a jury on one of the French universities where a student was defending a doctoral thesis on the Harlem Renaissance. He did not come out of a department of American studies such as you might find in other countries, but that obviously didn't mean you could not study American subjects in great depth.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

KEITH: Joe M. Rogers, a political appointee, a businessman from Tennessee, very warm, a very easy man to work for. He was perhaps not the most qualified ambassador of the U.S. and was the butt of a certain amount of joking on the part of the French, but in his quiet way, I think he advanced the relationship for one reason, he was the personal representative of Ronald Reagan, the most popular American president since John Kennedy.

Q: I would have thought the French would have been ill-disposed toward Reagan's politics.

KEITH: Yes. You might think that Ronald Reagan would be the incarnation of all the negative stereotypes the French have about the U.S. A cowboy, a political conservative, a confrontational figure in the Cold War. But you would be wrong. I was always bemused by the outpouring of admiration and even affection for Ronald Reagan among the French.

I saw kids standing on street corners selling Reagan tee shirts. I believe he gave many French citizens feeling of confidence in American leadership. Of course this was not a unanimous view. I believe there are always competing intellectual strain in France. Those who believed in an Atlantic alliance were buoyed by Reagan's confidence in the U.S. and his forthright support for increased freedoms in the East.

Q: How about dealing with the intellectuals there? It's such an important group in France. Did you find that this was a difficult group to crack?

KEITH: Well, it was a very interesting time in French intellectual life, and the relationship with the U.S. was always a kind of reference point for competing points of view. Certainly the trendiest philosophical trend in France in those days was that of Les Nouveaux Philosophes, The New Philosophers, represented by the very media-conscious Bernard-Henri Levy. They represented a break with the existentialism of the post-war generations. Their critics described their thinking as a Reaganite right-wing philosophy dressed up in French rhetoric. In self-defense they would occasionally indulge in anti-American rhetoric, although Levy once told me that his only argument with the United States was that his books didn't sell here.

There was also a movement that was seeking a "Third Way." They were seeking a philosophical basis to support the idea of state intervention in a market economy. They wanted to make sure that those entitlements the French were used to, would never be challenged, but at the same time that the bankruptcy of socialism was certainly indicative that another way had to be found. Their slogan might be "neither the American model nor the Socialist." Italian, American, and German philosophers associated with this quest were being discussed in the coffee houses – and French philosophers, too.

The traditional Left, the Socialists and Communists, were in retreat. The Socialist president, François Mitterrand, who virtually destroyed the Communist Party in France and who was the deciding factor in the force modernization effort that was so important to American policy, was leading a Left in disarray. The Socialist party lost the legislative elections massively, bringing in Jacques Chirac as Prime Minister. As for the Communist Party, the faithful were defecting from the party in droves. They regarded their leader, Georges Marchais, as authoritarian and backward, and blamed him for not allowing the reforms that were taking place in communist parties in the rest of Europe.

Our relations with the Socialist government of Michel Rocard were somewhat schizophrenic, you're right. On the one hand, Mitterrand had been indispensable in the force modernization effort, and seemed to be a committed supporter of the Atlantic Alliance. On the other, there was a strong undercurrent of anti-Americanism among the socialist ministers. Jack Lang, the minister of culture, was one of the most vociferous in criticizing the pervasive presence of American popular culture. On a trip to Mexico he publicly decried the "Coca-cola Culture" that aspect of American culture. I was dispatched complain about some of his more strident anti-American gestures – and not just the Coca-cola Culture incident. He had also made a very public show of not going to the American Film Festival in Deauville. He told me, "I can understand why your people

would be a little bit upset, but you should advise them to look at what I do as much as listen to what I say." He started ticking off the things that he had done to help promote American culture in France. He said, "What other minister of culture you know of would give a subsidy to a nightclub so they could continue to bring American jazz groups? What other minister of culture do you know where an American writer who just needs a few months and a place to sit and some food on his table while he's finishing a book, or a photographer, can simply go to a foreign government and say, 'Can you help?' I do this all the time. We put them up with a studio and a typewriter and a stipend not because they're writing about France and even though they are not French citizens, but they're producing something we think may be valuable to humanity. He reminded me that his ministry supported the American section of the Cité Universitaire, where American students could come and be supported by the French government outside the government to government exchange relationship. "You go back and tell them that we have our problems with the popular culture but that we are very supportive of what's best in American cultural." He gave a Legion of Honor to Ray Charles while I was there, as well as to Leonard Bernstein, James Baldwin, and I.M. Pei. He was showing respect for American culture. The most popular films were still American films. Interestingly, a number of American authors who were translated into French – Paul Auster, for example, somehow captured the imagination of the French much more than American readers.

Q: He didn't go to the film festival. Was this making a public bow to the left-wing intellectuals?

KEITH: Yes, I think so. It was a very public gesture and he made it clear in public statements that he saw no reason for an American film festival in France. It was a wonderful festival. The city of Deauville, located not far from the Normandy D Day landings, was administered by Anne D'Ornano, a woman from one of the rightist parties and was quite pro-American, so there might have been an element of French politics involved as well.

Then came the legislative elections that swept the Socialist government out and brought in the Center-Right government of Jacques Chirac, creating an uneasy co-habitation between Socialist president and Gaullist prime minister. On the surface there seemed to be friendlier attitude toward the U.S. among the new crop of ministers. François Léotard, the new minister of culture, announced publicly that he would be attending the Deauville Film Festival. But by and large, I would not say the Chirac government was fundamentally closer to the U.S. than it's Socialist predecessors. There was always an element of the kind of Gaullist chauvinism we sometimes found maddening.

Q: How about the universities? One always thinks of the professors there being bastions of Marxism.

KEITH: Universities were a reflection of what was happening in the rest of France. There is always an element of chauvinism in France and it does not have to be on the left. It can be right in the center and it can certainly be on the right. There is great respect in France for French literature, French culture, and French language, even from people who are not

particularly well educated. The fact that French presence on the international stage is in decline culturally is regarded as unfair and regrettable, and the villain in the play is the United States. We are seen to have an unfair advantage because of our wealth and our power. Even on the Japanese stereos the French buy, the controls buttons are in English.

Having said that, however, our relations with French universities were generally very good, and often took place outside the realm of government-to-government programs. On a visit to Lyons once, my French host invited me to a luncheon to celebrate the 10th anniversary of a bilateral exchange program between the engineering faculty at Lyons University and an American university. We had known nothing about it. And as I was leaving Paris, it was Hélène Ahrweiler, Rector of Paris University, who pinned on my medal as *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres.*

Q: Did you see changes in the French intellectual establishment coming about? During this period, you had the Gorbachev period in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's warts were beginning to show at that time.

KEITH: Yes, Gorbachev himself was regarded very positively, but the Soviet Union was bankrupt in intellectual terms as far as the French were concerned. What was more interesting among the French of the left and especially of the far left was the renaissance in national communist parties around Europe and elsewhere, particularly in Italy, where they saw an emerging communism free of the totalitarian trappings of Brezhnev and the Soviet Communist Party. Unfortunately for the communists, the French Communist Party itself was run by a man who was basically a Stalinist and who did not go with the reformist current that was sweeping the rest of Europe. As a result, there were a lot of disaffected cadres in the Communist Party and people just fell away. Actually, some of them turned in disgust to the extreme right.

Q: Were we concerned about Le Pen?

KEITH: Increasingly.

Q: As far as hoping that he wouldn't make too much contact with the Senator Helms side of our political spectrum?

KEITH: That was never a concern. The man is so chauvinistic there is very little concern that there would be any effective coordination between him and right wing groups in the United States. But there was real worry about the possibility of violence along racial lines in France because of the immigration question. Immigration spilled over into the kind of racial politics that people like Le Pen were able to exploit. There were highly visible icons in France representing opposite sides. You had the whole moderate-liberal-left-relativist side represented by Mitterrand and people like activist Harlem Desire who were trying to promote a France more welcoming and hospitable to the diversities that came with immigration. On the other hand, you had the Le Pens with the Skinhead support, who were disaffected because of high levels of unemployment, who felt they were disenfranchised at least partially because so many people of color had been brought into

the country to do work that they should be doing. So, you really had at times a sense that this could erupt into organized violence – not like the Skinheads, who every now and then would pummel or even kill somebody they didn't like -- but a more generalized movement that would be very dangerous to French democracy.

Well, it didn't happen. There is still a Skinhead problem in France. There is still racism and there are still acts of violence. But this is definitely a minority and a lunatic fringe phenomenon. That isn't to say that the immigration problem and the other racial problems have been completely solved; they haven't. Ordinary people, people you've known for years, will sometimes say pretty outrageous things about what ought to be done about immigration. They're scared. They're scared that the French way of life and what is France could be so altered that you would not be able to recognize it. In many places around France you can see that the character has been changed over the last couple of generations because of the immigrants who are walking the streets and populating the bars and sending their kids to the schools. It's not hard to understand where resentments can arise and be politically exploited.

Q: How about visits of opera or other music?

KEITH: Our officially-sponsored cultural presentations program was practically non-existent. The reason was, it was totally unnecessary. Paris had, as far as American cultural expression was concerned from jazz to symphony, orchestras, classical music, ballet, modern dance, writers, more than any city in the United States except New York, Los Angeles, and possibly Washington. I think it would compete even with Washington. In the three years that I was there, we had every major orchestra including the NSO, New York, Philadelphia and Cleveland, all on commercial tours. Our major conductors came to lead the Orchestre National de Paris and other French symphonies. You could count on seeing Isaac Stern, Andre Watts and equally famous performers on Paris stages every year. Paul Taylor, the Dance Theater of Harlem, Alvin Ailey…well, you get the picture. And as for jazz, Miles Davis and the other great stars were regulars during my years in France. Of all the major performing jazz musician at the time, the one who didn't come was Sonny Rollins, and French promoters kept calling me to ask if I couldn't intervene just to get him to think about coming. You want to complete picture of what is happening in American jazz? Go to the south of France in the summer. That's where everybody is. There is a concert cycle that starts in Montreux in Switzerland and then goes to Nice, Antibes, Salon de Provence, Nîmes and Marciac with smaller stops in between. American jazz is alive and well and it's living in the south of France in the summer.

Q: Do radio stations play a lot of jazz?

KEITH: Jazz is certainly played on French radio, but I don't know of any stations devoted solely to jazz. In a way, what exists may be even better. Where you hear jazz is on *France Musique,* the FM station that features serious music. So, jazz, being a serious music, is played on *France Musique*, as is symphony music, as is other classical music. You know you will hear good jazz periodically every day on *France Musique* because it is considered in France a major cultural art form.

Q: Where there any things that would fall within your purview on the cultural side that took explaining or that the French didn't quite understand or were not happy about?

KEITH: A persistent issue was French concern about the impact of American popular culture on the society, particularly on youth. The French didn't believe they were competing on equal terms because they didn't have the resources for producing and marketing French cultural products. They were especially concerned with the dominance of American cinema. They believed that the German and Italian cinema had already been crushed by the waves of American movies, and they were determined that the French cinema would be protected. What developed was a major debate over the limits of French cultural protectionism in a worldwide free trade environment. American movies are, after all, an exported commodity, and if you take steps to close the market in some way you are in theory violating GATT or WTO rules against barriers to trade. So, this was a debate that began in earnest in those days and continues to this day. Government in the eyes of the French has a right to protect its cultural heritage. In the analogy of American NFL free agency, your culture is your franchise player. There must be an exception to completely free exchange. That is what it came to be known as: "*l'exception français,.*" which would exclude certain cultural products from free trade protections. On the face of it, some saw this as an almost fascist impulse, but there was a simple pragmatism at the core. The French film industry was under threat because most of the screens in France were showing American films, often American films of poor or indifferent quality. They were looking at the fate of the German film industry. In the '70s the German film industry was thriving, with well known and innovative directors like Fasbinder, Wenders and Herzog. But by the end of the '80s, the German film industry was virtually dead. The British film industry was essentially being absorbed by American studios and television. And the French film industry was under heavy pressure from across the Atlantic. You could go to any town in France with a movie house and you would see a succession of American films that most educated Americans would not pay to see. This, in a country like France, was bound to lead to some kind of protective action.

They started by putting a surcharge on the importation of American films, the proceeds from which would go to the French cinema industry. Of course, the Motion Picture Export Association in the United States was pounding on the door of the Special Trade Representative, saying, "Look what they're doing to us. They're making us support our competition." Well, yes, but the market for U.S. films was very solid. By the 1980s, income from foreign sales of American films could virtually assure that a picture that bombed in the U.S. could still break even.

Q: I think this is the general calculation. There were an awful lot of shoot 'em up adventure movies.

KEITH: Exactly. The smart thing for MPEAA to do would have been to find ways to protect the market its market share but show some creative self-interest in cooperating with French cinema. They were perfectly ready to receive that kind of initiative. U.S. film industry people came to the Cannes Film Festival and made public statements about their

great respect for the French cinema, but no real cooperation was accomplished during my tenure. Spielberg told the French media how much he had been influenced by the great French filmmakers and promised financial support to keep the industry healthy. As far as I've heard, he hasn't done much. He's made some noises, but he hasn't really done anything. It may not be his fault because the French are sometimes very hard to help.

Q: Did you get caught in this?

KEITH: Well, I certainly got involved in the whole issue of intellectual property. When Congress was debating accession to the Bern Convention on copyright protection, they held hearings in Paris, and I was given the responsibility to organize them. The hearings were designed to help Congress write implementing legislation for our long-delayed accession to the Bern Convention. There broadly two competing groups seeking to influence the committee: On one side were the creative people (film writers, director and actors) – French and American united in common cause. On the other were the money people (producers, marketers and distributors), also both French and Americans making a common front. It was a most interesting exercise.

Q: Were there any great events that might have impacted on you?

KEITH: No. We had no big crisis. It was really a positive period in our relations with France. Two major commemorations – and the French love commemorations – took place that helped underline the long history of Franco-American cooperation, the long history of Americans and French fighting together in wars, and the long tradition of mutual help when it was most needed. It happened to be a period in which some important moments in that long relationship were highlighted. We celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty, a gift to the American people from France. There was amazing hoopla on both sides of the Atlantic.

Q: There is a copy on the Seine.

KEITH: There is, and it faces west, toward the United States. There is also the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which the French loaned us the for display here in the United States. I remember going to see it in the office of one of the French archivists. She had her dog in the office. They're a lot more relaxed than we are.

That period began a series of things including the 50th anniversary of the D-Day landing. There were good reasons for us to celebrate together. The French do that exceedingly well. They think that if you're going to do something like this, then you really do it.

Ironically, the celebration for the Statue of Liberty provided an insight into the occasional awkwardness that arose because of the "cohabitation," the division between socialist Mitterrand and his political Gaullist rival Chirac. Although Chirac was prime minister, Mitterrand went to the U.S. to take part in our celebration and Chirac was not invited. But Chirac was not going to be left out. As mayor of Paris, he decided to do his own celebration in the capital, and he made his wife, Bernadette, responsible for organizing it.

So one day I got a phone call from the city hall. "This is Bernadette Chirac," she said. "I'm calling on behalf of Jacques Chirac and I'd like you to come to a meeting about the Statue of Liberty." At the meeting she began to outline the celebration plans, then turned to me and said of course they need an American marching band. "I assume we can rely on you for that." There were two weeks left. Well, we got them their marching band and they were quite happy. Our U.S. military colleagues came to our rescue and found an army band in Germany that they brought over. It all worked out perfectly. American soprano Barbara Hendricks, who was living in Paris at the time, sang the Star Spangled Banner and the Marseillaise.

Q: In '88, you left.

KEITH: I could have stayed one more year in Paris, but in '88, the job of public affairs officer in Cairo came open. It was the job I'd always wanted. For somebody who had worked in that part of the world, that is the job you're looking for. I had a chance for it, so I left Paris a year early and off I went to Cairo.

Q: You were in Cairo from '88 to when?

KEITH: '92.

Q: What was the state of American relations with Egypt when you arrived?

KEITH: Mostly positive. We had a very strong relationship with the government, particularly with Mubarak. We had an enormous AID mission there. I think the aid money that was going to Israel and Egypt accounted for the lion's share of American aid spending worldwide. It was clearly meant to support both governments and their roles in the peace process. As a result of this development assistant the quality of life of the average Egyptian was being gradually improved by sewage projects, a new telephone system, provincial healthcare centers, etc. At one point, AID was building a school a day. Our projects were not spectacular in the way that other donor nations worked. The Japanese built a huge, beautiful opera house and the Chinese built a basketball stadium. These were visibly symbolic, the kind of showcase projects where you drive by and say, "That beautiful thing was built by the Chinese or the Japanese." No, a lot of the stuff that we built – the world's largest sewage system – you couldn't see. But it did improve the quality of life of people in Egypt. There were challenges because we were pressing the Egyptians for economic reforms which had to start with a reengineering of their social welfare system. We felt that necessary reforms included major reform of the government apparatus. Millions of Egyptians worked for the government basically as a form of welfare, creating huge state enterprises that were tremendous drains on the society. These were moves we pressured the Egyptians into taking that put pressure on the poor; short run pain, we believed, as a necessary precursor to long range economic health of the country. Still, if you have to raise the price of bread because you can no longer afford to subsidize bread, or if you have to raise a four cent bus ride to five cents, etc., it's hard for us to imagine what a dramatic difference that can make to people, but it did, and Egyptians blamed the resulting difficulties on Washington.

And it wasn't just the poor. You could get a very well reasoned, very articulately presented argument by a middle class Egyptian educated in London, New York, or Chicago, as to why this huge and this massive government structure was good for the country, why even if it was inefficient in what it actually produced, it was by their lights a way of giving people a few pennies and some dignity and keeping them off the streets.

Q: Were there concerns on our part… We had gone through something equivalent to this in Iran where we had something like 40,000 technicians, Americans, and it didn't sit very well. It was one of the causes of the revolution.

KEITH: The situation was never as acute in Egypt as in Iran. There were occasional editorials about so much of the AID money going back to the United States through American contractors and so on, but it was not the AID program itself that came in for the most criticism, so much as it was the government itself. Mubarak was not regarded as a brilliant man. In fact, he was the subject of a lot of jokes because he was maladroit and his public statements were occasionally quite awkward. So, people began to think of him and his political allies as the major problem with the society, more than the sinister American hand.

But Mubarak was quite sensitive to the dangers of a population under economic pressure. In the early '90s when the Algerians started to riot because of price rises blamed on the strictures imposed by the International Monetary Fund, Mubarak reacted quickly. He warned us that, "The kinds of riots you see in Algeria could happen here. You've got to give me room and some time to implement these things. I know where I want to go, but these strictures are going to get people in the street and that's not going to allow us to make the changes."

Q: On your part, who was the ambassador?

KEITH: My first ambassador was Frank Wisner.

Q A strong professional.

KEITH: Yes. I think his intellectual strength, personal prestige, high energy, and management of the U.S. government resources in Egypt made him the perfect ambassador for the time. He could be a hard man to work for. You had long days. He may have had four or five ideas a day. At least a couple of them were very good ideas. So, as hard as it was to plan ahead and to follow some kind of strategy, at the end of the day, you had to feel that if you moved in the direction that he seemed to be pointing in at any given time, you in fact moving in the right direction, and you weren't wasting time or resources.

Q: How did he use you?

KEITH: He told me when I got there that he found that the public affairs function was

vital across the board, that I should be involved in everything, that my responsibilities were not just in deploying USIS resources, but in being the public affairs advisor for every element of the mission. He said he expected USIS to be active in representational activity and promised he would be available to participate in our programs. He thought we could be especially useful in improving the image of the American private sector in Egypt. There was a residual feeling, especially on the left but also among middle class intellectuals that the presence of American companies was eventually going to be harmful to Egyptian interests. This was an ingrained fear fostered during the Nasser period. They acknowledged that western private interests would increase the availability of consumer products, but feared there will be a price to pay down the road in terms of price rises and a diminished protective role for the state. I've never seen a clearer justification than the one he came up with for a kind of aggressive public relations campaign that would involve American business in Egypt as good corporate citizens. He twisted their arms and got them to shell out some money. We were bringing opera and ballet to Egypt to perform in their new opera house, largely using private sector funds – both U.S. and Egyptian – to finance this public activity. I do think it helped to project a positive image of the corporate sector, and to that extent helped in the broader campaign to modernize the Egyptian economic system.

Q: I'm thinking back to the Nasser times and the newspapers there. Everything seemed to be exaggerated. How was it by the time you got there?

KEITH: It was much milder, of course. We had good relations with all of the major newspapers, including Nasser's old mouthpiece, Al Ahram. It wasn't the Al Ahrams of the Egyptian media that gave us so much trouble, it was the religious papers. Islam has a tremendous trump card. People who declare themselves Islamicists start with a benefit of the doubt in the minds of a lot of people. So, if you are an articulate writer who has suffered for his religion, you can say prints of the wildest nonsense and people won't necessarily dismiss it. Our most formidable foe wasn't the left but the religious right. The religious right regarded as the a more important enemy than the government. Of course they felt that we propped up a government they detested, but our presence in Egyptian affairs was more important than Mubarak. Absent the United States, they believed, Mubarak would be swept away overnight. I think that was nonsense, but it was their basic philosophy. We were the anti-religious element that was standing in the way of a truly Islamic Egypt.

Q: Was there anything we could do on the public affairs side to respond to these attacks of the religious right?

KEITH: It was awfully hard. We tried to get our policy positions into the mainstream papers and to some extent we were quite successful. We had good relations with the major columnists and the managing editors and so on. On the religious side, people who wrote that American society is anti-religious and totally decadent – in some cases, we found that it was at least worth a try to send them to the U.S. on an IV program to see for themselves the importance of religion in American life.

Q: We're probably the most voluntary churchgoing country in the Christian world.

KEITH: That is certainly the impression one would get by visiting any American city on a Sunday, or by watching religious broadcasting. In fact, one of the most important of these figures returned from an IV visit and wrote, "We were wrong about this. A lot of people go to church and live a pious life. But what we weren't wrong about…" and then they'd go on to other matters: the presence of pornography, the presence of homelessness, and so on, that Americans are churchgoing people and certainly don't suffer for their religious beliefs, but somehow the safety net has let a lot of people fall through and the authorities sit back and watch while children become addicted to drugs.

Q: Was there much of a cultural exchange?

KEITH: Yes. We had access at all levels. I've mentioned the importance of cultural presentations in the Egyptian context. We also had an active International Visitor Program, and an extremely active bi-national Fulbright exchange commission. And we shouldn't forget the dozens, really hundreds of Egyptians who traveled to the U.S. on USAID training programs.

The Egyptian experience was different from my time in other Arab countries such as Syrian and Iraq. There were intellectuals in Egypt who, by and large, shared the general leftist anti-American biases. But they were open to debate. The internationally known Mohamed Sid Ahmed was a regular contributor to Western journals and media debates, as were a number of others. I was invited on a cruise on the Nile that had well-known leftist intellectuals from Egypt and Europe such as Regis Debray. I suppose I was invited to provide some balance -- another point of view. We had endless discussions about the next 20 years and the challenges of radical Islam and the challenges of an unfettered market economy and so on. There was also a man there, an Islamicist whose name I don't remember, who had his say. I suppose I was there to provide the view from capitalist America. It was a fascinating four day cruise. There was no real agenda. A group would start a conversation, the rest would wander over and join in. The conversation would carry over through lunch, and in the afternoons we drank gin and tonics. We'd visit the temples along the Nile and have dinner. It was wonderful.

Q: Let's talk about what you were doing at the time of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This must have put you on…

KEITH: A totally different footing. I was coming back from vacation and I arrived the day after the invasion from vacation in France. Everything had changed. That night I went to the home of a French embassy colleague, who lived right down the street. He was of the Socialist Party in France and knew a lot of people on the Egyptian left, as did I. At his house that night, we all were talking about the war. One of the guests was Youssef Chahine, the great Egyptian filmmaker. I became really close to him over the years that I was there and am still in touch with him. Chahine and the other Egyptian guests were beside themselves with glee. They hated the Kuwaitis. To them, the Kuwaitis represented the worst of the worst in the Gulf. They were arrogant, totally undeserving of their

wealth, worse than anybody else. When they came to Cairo as tourists, they lorded it over the Egyptians.

But Iraqis were not much higher on the popularity list. It needs also to be remembered that many Egyptians went to Iraq during the 1980s war between Iraq and Iran. While Iraqi soldiers were out in the marshes fighting the Iranians, Egyptians – more than a million of them -- were plowing the fields. And they were treated badly. They came back with a collective bad taste in their mouth.

Even so, the first reaction of Egyptians to the invasion was a spontaneous feeling: the Kuwaitis are getting what they deserve. But 24 hours later, they had thought things over and the idea of a member of the Arab League, a member of the United Nations, being just swallowed up by a country that is run by a madman like Saddam Hussein was more than they could stomach. Within days, the country had really been mobilized to oppose the invasion.

Q: Was this an official program supported by Mubarak?

KEITH: Yes. Opposition to the invasion was an Arab League decision.

Q: With our USIS effort, was there much need to pound the drums in Egypt or was it that once the stakes were seen, it didn't require much on our part?

KEITH: As soon as Egyptian soldiers were committed, the country was behind them. Egyptians actually took part in combat against the Iraqis, as did Saudis and Qataris. Other countries provided financial and logistical support in the war.

My work changed somewhat because of the presence of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information in exile, a big part of which was in Cairo. Wisner asked me to help them map out a strategy and just basically learn how to run a press office. Thus, I became a kind of consultant to the Kuwaiti government in exile.

At the beginning they were spinning their wheels, trying to get over the shock of events. They were not so much surprised that Saddam Hussein had attacked them, but at the initial emotional acceptance by many in the Arab world. "How could they do this to us? How could the first reaction of the Arab world be such an expression of anti-Kuwait feeling – after all we've done for them?" My advice was : "Job one is going to be facing reality. Reality is that you are not loved despite your largesse. Your money always comes with strings attached. It is regarded as unearned and badly used. And the attitude of your people when they travel is insufferable. So now you take a higher road. You acknowledge that people have misunderstood you or you acknowledge that you may have misunderstood them. But you say that the money you gave to build mosques in such and such a town was not to pray to Kuwait, but to pray to God, and you were pleased to be able to do that. You may not know that mosque was built by us, but it was. We used our money to help Iraq in its long war with Iran. So, we are the victims of an unfair act. We have been victimized by a very powerful enemy who was our brother. We are both

members of the Arab League. Tell the story this way and you'll have people focusing on the right things. And you've got to get your young men out of the discos. That is not helping your image."

Q: Did Americans shop for a commitment?

KEITH: Oh, yes, especially in the Gulf, but everywhere. The Gulf nations knew that we were the only means of protection in a very tough neighborhood. If Kuwait could be swallowed up, so could Saudi Arabia – at least the Eastern Province. So could Qatar and the UAE and Oman. They came out of that experience realizing that as distasteful at some level as it might be, it is in their interest to have a security blanket and that security blanket is the United States. The United States has the resources and the interest, and is not bent on acquiring Arab territory. So, those are the motivating factors behind agreements that we have with all of the Gulf countries.

Clearly such a commitment can only go forward if there Is consensus in the U.S. Congress. And this was certainly a factor in an improving relationship between the Arab states and Israel. It wasn't long before Israelis were coming to the region for meetings that grew out of the Madrid Peace Conference, and shortly after the tertiary boycott by the Arab world against Israel was lifted. So, some progress was made. In an ironic way, much was accomplished thanks to the war Saddam Hussein precipitated.

Q: We couldn't have asked for a better person.

KEITH: I've always thought that Saddam Hussein unwittingly gave my career a boost. The things that I was doing in Egypt were certainly out of the ordinary. I wouldn't have seen Jim Baker 14 times in the normal course of events. The work of my staff wouldn't have been seen often enough to be appreciated by Baker's staff. All of that played into a nice acceleration for my career.

Q: Out of this, you got an appointment as ambassador.

KEITH: Yes.

Q: Did Secretary Baker use your facilities?

KEITH: Frequently. He and his staff, particularly Margaret Tutwiler, were demanding. They were very demanding. When they came to Cairo, in and out of Cairo, many times and had flawless support, they noticed it. So, when the time came for that 1991 Madrid Peace Conference Tutwiler and said, "I want you in Madrid tomorrow."

Q: This might be a good place to stop.

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Today is December 14, 2000. Madrid was when?

KEITH: In the fall of 1991. The process began just after the Gulf War in 1991 and culminated with a series of very intense and successful meetings Secretary Baker held with had with leaders, resulting in the rather sudden decision to meet in Madrid. As I mentioned earlier, a few of us were called who were basically known to the Secretary and his close colleagues because we were involved in his visits to the area. Press and media support to those visits , so Chris Snow, PAO in Tel Aviv, my information officer in Cairo, Marcelle Wahba, and I were drafted to go to Madrid and to work the media requirements there for all of the parties.

Q: When you say "all of the parties," was this the American side?

KEITH: It means everybody. The Madrid Peace Conference was co-sponsored by the Russians and the Spanish with the United States, of course. Everybody knew that there was going to be stupendous media coverage there, and with a major media challenge for the organizers. All sides would obviously wanting to get their stories out to the public, and the organizers wanted to be sure that media coverage didn't actually drown the negotiations. And the basic setup was tricky. The Palestinians were supposed to be part of the Jordanian delegation when in fact that was true in name only. The Jordanians had their own media interests and pursued them. That was equally true of the Palestinians. Hannan Ashrawi was the major spokesperson for the Palestinians and nobody even bothered to maintain the fiction that she was under some kind of control or supervision by the head of the Jordanian delegation. This was technically a violation of the agreement with the Israelis, but in the development of the conference it simply couldn't be helped. As anybody might have predicted, the world media wanted to hear from the two main protagonists, the Palestinians, whose voice was Ashrawi, and the Israelis, represented by Bibi Netanyahu, and the U.S. The Russians made almost no public statements, nor did the Spanish, whose main contribution was excellent logistical support.

Naturally, there were confrontations at Madrid. In the big press palace there was jousting between, the Israelis and the Arabs, more diplomatic than usual, but still quite pointed. They had to put their press offices in the same part of the building, so there were Arabs and Israelis whose offices were just next door, and this provided opportunities for unusually close contact. The proximity of the rival delegations was especially interesting to the American press who picked up some of these encounters in the hallways. One such report landed in the Style Section of The Washington Post, for example, describing a rather provocative, highly stage-managed incident in which an Israeli delegation member challenged a Palestinian to be photographed shaking his hand. The much more worldly Palestinian, a university professor as it turned out, calmly took the Israeli's hand, turned and smiled for the camera.

Madrid was an amazing experience for all of us who took part in it and especially for all of us who had been working on Middle East affairs and the peace process for a long time. There was the memorable moment when the Israelis and the Syrians sat down together at a schoolhouse in Madrid some distance from conference headquarters. In the press center we were crowded around walkie-talkies listening to the updates from the accompanying

security teams. Both the Syrian and Israeli delegations were driving around the site waiting to be sure the other would turn up. Finally, both groups arrived, and were saying to each, "It looks like this is going to happen." Then the Syrians were in the room and the Israelis are walking into the room. The last thing anybody saw before the door was closed was the two sides reaching across the table and shaking hands. I can tell you there wasn't a dry eye in the place. We were all overcome with emotion. It was the beginning of a process that went on and made progress on various levels, not just between the Israelis and the Palestinians but between the Israelis and a broad range of Arabs. This process was the real accomplishment of Madrid.

Q: This was because of the very successful Gulf War thing. We were showing that we were part of the Arab cause.

KEITH: Well, it's true there was a genuine coalition that was a part of the Gulf War. It was a coalition that was born with the invasion of Kuwait. But don't forget there was a long period of time between the invasion in the summer and the January 15, 1991 deadline established by the Coalition when we were hoping that the resolve demonstrated by Desert Shield would bring the Iraqis to their senses and begin a process of negotiation. We were all quite hopeful that something positive emerge in that dramatic meeting between Jim Baker and Tariq Aziz had in Geneva. That night I was at a dinner party in Cairo and everybody got up from the table to watch on television the press conference that followed the bilateral meeting. Of course, we were all crestfallen to hear that no progress had been mad. We were no closer to a peaceful resolution of the crisis than before that meeting. Everybody at the dinner part agreed, "this means war."

Q: Particularly with something like this, you want to keep the atmosphere essentially friendly. I would think that just being media people, a story is a way to stir up trouble. I'm not using this in a pejorative way, but to sort of get things going. Confrontation and all this. I would think your job would be to try to keep this from looking confrontational and their job would almost be to see if they can get something going because it makes for a better story.

KEITH: In this case, the media extravaganza – and I do mean extravaganza – at the Madrid Peace Conference was as much the story as what the principal delegates were saying. The story was not what was going on behind the scenes and it was not really the differences between the organizations and the delegations. The story was that the damn thing was happening at all and that a broad meeting between Arabs and Israelis was unfolding before the eyes of the world. It wasn't the differences, because those differences were quite well known. But the story was about whether or not a process could really be launched. In fact, that is what happened. The inside pages of the story were the human confrontations or the encounters between various members of various delegations – the Palestinians and the Israelis, the Syrians and the Israelis. There was not really much that the press could report of substance in the discussions because not much of that was revealed. But the fact that Madrid was happening, that Madrid was the beginning of a process, was the story.

Another important story was that this was the first time that the Arab world was hearing reports on the proceedings in Arabic via live television feeds. It was the Middle East Television Network, based in Beirut, that was just beginning and was feeding live broadcasts back to the region. People in Damascus, for example, were able to see that their leaders were actually sitting down with Israelis and they were actually dealing with them. This in 1991 was a tremendous psychological change.

Q: How did you work? Were you dealing with the Soviet news media?

KEITH: Yes, but they were just part of the world press corps accredited to the conference. I don't know whether they were controlled by the Soviet official delegation, and I never saw there output. Naturally, there was a desire on the part of the official delegations to get the world's attention through a press conference or some kind of press availability. But there was a limited capacity and active competition for optimum scheduling. That scheduling was part of my responsibility. Not surprisingly, that scheduling quickly became a political issue, though not one we really wanted to see develop. As it turned out, we quickly saw that the main challenge was to balance the best time slots between the Israelis and the Jordanian/Palestinian delegations. In practice, this meant scheduling Netanyahu and Ashrawi to their satisfaction. Both knew the timing of the U.S. network news deadlines and they wanted to be certain they hit those marks. This also meant that the other delegations got what was left. Negotiation was necessary, but I think in the end most people thought the process was well handled.

Q: What was the role of Margaret Tutwiler? She is known for keeping a very tight reign on things.

KEITH: Yes. She was the one who called me from Washington telling me that she wanted me the next day in Madrid. Although she later proved a good ambassador to Morocco, I never thought of Margaret Tutwiler as a *substance* person; she was a process person. She got the process right. She had an enormous capacity for detail. She had an appreciation for people who she felt could be relied on to keep arrangements on track. Once you were in position, once you were running a part of the operation, Margaret didn't interfere much. She wanted to be kept informed, but she was not a micromanager. She simply knew how things should be set up, who she wanted in place. She had to be satisfied that your preparations were okay. But then she was away from it and didn't actually put her fingers on all the buttons or try to pull all the strings. She certainly managed the secretary's press relationship with a lot of talent and understanding of that media world. But she wasn't a substance person. She did the best she could to keep herself informed, but she was not a spokesperson and she was not really involved in policy-making to an extent one could see.

Q: Were there any problems with you or your colleagues with the Soviets or Israelis?

KEITH: Not with the Soviets. And not really with the Israelis after the first day. On that day we had a problem with signage. The agreement was that the Palestinians were there as part of the Jordanian delegation, a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation -- a fiction

nobody quite believed, but appearances had to be respected. Well, the Palestinians put up their own signs that said: PALESTINIAN DELEGATION. I went to see the joint delegation leader, the very impressive Jordanian Marwan Muasher, and said "Come on Marwan, you know the rules." He just shrugged and had the sign changed. We had surprisingly little difficulty with any of the delegations. They all knew that we were there to do our best for them, and the interpersonal contacts were smooth. They understood the ground rules. There was never any real difficulty. Quite the contrary. You had the delegations cooperating with each other. In one small but revealing incident, an Israeli staff member came to the central supply office asking for fax paper or something similar, and there happened to be a Palestinian standing there who said, "Here, we've got plenty." Cooperation on that human level, at the worker bee level, was really very good. So, no, we didn't have any problems at that level. The only mild embarrassment came when the Russians wanted to be heard, they couldn't just walk out on the street and declare a press conference. At one point they wanted to be scheduled in the main press room and we simply ran out of time. We couldn't give them any of the marquee locations, so they eventually had to find an empty room elsewhere in the building with just a handful of journalists. But they wanted to be helpful, so accepted the situation with good grace. As far as I could tell, their voice was never heard in the international arena.

Q: You thought when you left there that this had been a successful meeting. It was kicking off a process which in a way continues to today.

KEITH: Yes. The working groups that were agreed to – working groups on economics and trade, on environment and environmental cooperation, on political security affairs, these were very promising and actually got off to a good start.

After Madrid these working groups would meet periodically in the various capitals and they would obviously include Israelis, so there was a moment when for the first time an Israeli would actually be going to Oman or Qatar or some of the other countries to take part in these working groups. That was in itself the beginning of an important process. The confidence building measures that started there, even though we're in a crisis today, probably have a very important role that has developed over the years and still is important.

Q: You went back after this was over to Cairo.

KEITH: I went back to Cairo. At about this time, there was a meeting of the African-American Studies Association in Cairo. Assistant Secretary of State Cohen was there. I know that Frank Wisner, ambassador in Cairo, spoke to Cohen about me in terms of possible future assignment at the chief of mission level in Africa. I spoke to Cohen during that visit, and I told him I knew virtually nothing about Africa. He said, "Well, you've got some useful languages, so you can learn what you need to know. In a little while you're going to get a telephone call and they're going to ask you if there is any reason why you shouldn't be assigned as ambassador to Benin and you're going to say, 'No, there is no reason.' That's the process." What happened after that, I'm not sure, but I suppose that there was some kind of discussion in Washington and NEA got in the act. I

got a call saying, "There is something that should be more interesting to you, more suitable, which is Qatar." That's really how it happened.

Q: You went to Qatar from when to when?

KEITH: I went in the late summer/early fall of 1992. I arrived on September 1, 1992. I left in July of 1995.

Q: What were our relations with Qatar at that time?

KEITH: Friendly but not very profound. We had close relations with the Qataris in the Gulf War. They allowed us to have a squadron of fighter planes based in the Doha region. But it is fair to say that we didn't have much of a relationship beyond that. There was no major U.S. involvement in their oil and gas industry. There were no major companies there doing large contracts of any kind. We had no military agreement. Once the war was over and we withdrew our planes, there was nothing really in place except a residue of goodwill. We had a situation in which the Crown Prince, Sheikh Hamid Bin Khalifa, was really taking over the day to day administration of the country and was just installing his own cabinet, a youthful cabinet composed of family members and technocrats who had a personal loyalty to him. So, September 1992 was an important point of departure.

Then a month later, there was a skirmish on the border between Qatar and Saudi Arabia in which Qataris died. That precipitated a very serious crisis between the two countries, one which required my rather constant presence with the leadership of the country. It was at that point that I developed a close relationship with the then crown prince, who later became emir, and I think a certain amount of trust was developed at that time. Then things really started to change with regard to U.S. involvement in the oil and gas industry. At our request the Qataris allowed one of our ship-building companies to last minute bid on a contract for natural gas tankers. It was clear that they wanted to see the U.S. show more interest in developing their gas fields. I make the point because I consider this the real beginning of a rapid process that involved American companies in Qatar's most critical economic sector. In the summer of 1992 that process was just getting underway, with Mobil leading the way. By the summer of 1995, there was a great deal of cooperation on every level. At the beginning Mobil was part of a consortium of French, Japanese and American companies that were building infrastructure and marketing Qatar's immense reserves of natural gas. By 1994 Mobil had its own separate deal with Qatar. Then Occidental won a major off-shore oil production deal. Very quickly other American companies were winning major contracts. It all started in 1992.

Q: Before, there had been the Qatar Oil Company [QPGC]. When I was economic officer in Dhahran, I used to go up and visit Qatar. This was 1958-'60.

KEITH: The QGPC still existed, but exploiting natural gas is extremely expensive and marketing it requires some experience. They couldn't do it on their own, so they needed to get a consortium of companies together. That consortium included the Qatar national company. It also included two Japanese companies, the French company Total, and

Mobil. The initial customers were assumed to be in the Far East, and in fact the first so sign a deal was Chubu Electric in Japan. Almost as soon as that five element consortium made the Chubu deal and the ink was dry on that agreement, the Qataris were negotiating with Mobil for an entirely new and this time practically exclusive project: Qatar and Mobil. This made it very interesting for Mobil and put Mobil in a very strong economic position in the country. That is when they became essentially the senior partner in the gas exploitation area. They continue now as Exxon Mobil to play that role.

At the same time, the Qataris allowed us to preposition military equipment. They agreed to allow us to preposition an enormous amount of this material. Equally important, we opened the series frequent joint military-to-military meetings that led to a formal process of military cooperation and consultation.

The Qataris also agreed to host one of the working groups that emerged from the Madrid Peace Conference – and not just one that was largely non-controversial. They agreed to host the political security conference. So, you had for the first time an official Israeli delegation coming to the Gulf to discuss these highly critical issues. So, beginning in 1992 Qatar became important in a broad range of important American interests. I think it was a very fruitful period.

Q: What was the cause of the border dispute?

KEITH: From your period in Dhahran, you'll recall that border disputes exist all around the Peninsula.

Q: When I was there, it was the Buraimi Oasis.

KEITH: In fact, this was related to the Buraimi Oasis situation. Part of the deal that resolved that dispute between Saudi Arabia and the UAE gave the Saudis control over a piece of land that had included the road connection between Qatar and the UAE. This in effect cut road travel between those two countries. And this created a series of flash points around that region. Tribes with various allegiances go back and forth through this area and they rarely recognize theoretical borders.

Q: They know every tree.

KEITH: Absolutely. The Qataris felt the Saudi deal with the UAE essentially sealed one of their borders. But their other land borders were equally uncertain because they had never been properly demarcated. They were insisting on a demarcation and were quite prepared to have an independent group come in and draw a border which would be respected by the Saudis and everybody else. For whatever reason, this was not something the Saudis wanted to do at that time. Tensions were pretty high. When I got there and I presented my credentials, the old emir pointed to this as the biggest problem that existed for Qatar at the time. But, he said, "We're like brothers and we sometimes have squabbles and eventually this will resolve itself and you will see that we are with our Saudi neighbors closer than brothers." I was there for three years, I didn't actually see his

prediction come true.

Q: What sort of role were you playing?

KEITH: The United States government did not want to see hostilities between two of our allies, allies who were important to us in the entire security architecture that we were trying to put together in the Gulf. Had the Saudis wanted and had they decided to deploy their forces, they could have dealt a very serious blow to little Qatar. We certainly didn't want to see that. We wanted the two sides to talk, to step away from the brink, to basically let common sense reign. We wanted to give them our appreciation of the situation and we wanted to back the notion of some kind of negotiated settlement, including demarcation of a border. I think we really wanted also to warn both sides that this kind of armed confrontation was a threat to them both no matter how it turned out. It was very tense for a few days. There was a lot of emotion in Qatar. The emir was not in the country, but if the crown prince, who was in command of Qatar's military, had decided to take some military action, he would have been supported by the population -- at least until people started getting hurt. It was a ticklish time, but one that paradoxically was good for my mission as ambassador because it allowed me to get to know the leadership in a way that otherwise might have taken years. I think they developed a measure of trust in me and I know I developed a measure of respect, particularly for the crown prince and for many of his associates. But I really came to believe in the man's sincerity and honesty in that few days.

Q: Was our ambassador in Riyadh playing the same game?

KEITH: We didn't have an ambassador in Riyadh at the time. This was a problem. We had a long suffering chargé d'affaires, David Welch. I don't know the ins and outs of the story, but there was a long period of time in which we didn't have a chief of mission in Riyadh and it included this period. But of course the Embassy in Riyadh was playing a role. The same kinds of approaches I was making to try to calm the situation down in Doha, our people were making in Riyadh.

Q: What happened? What was the outcome?

KEITH: The outcome was that there a cooling-off period based on an understanding that some kind of negotiation would ensue. With regard to the actual skirmish that set off the crisis, nobody was brought to justice, no international court rendered a decision. The GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] did not act. They met but they didn't act. The Qataris were hoping for support for what they considered to be a clear case of aggressive behavior on the part of the Saudis, but no action was taken. As the weeks went by the tension began to diminish. The United States and Britain and others who had historical knowledge of the region in question began to discuss territorial questions, setting in motion a process that eventually ended up in quiet negotiations that brought the tension level down. Those discussions didn't solve the basic problem in my tenure, but the tension level went down, and the Qataris felt they were able to continue to work within the GCC, albeit with some residual bitterness.

It has to be said, however, that the Department displayed quite a bit of exasperation with Qatar, which was viewed as unwise in risking military confrontation with Saudi Arabia. I believe this contributed to a period in which the Qataris – especially the crown prince – were treated with a certain coolness. Qatar was a small country and not yet a big player in the energy field. That changed of course. But my State Department colleagues were slow to recognize the character of the Qatari leadership, unlike the Pentagon and the U.S. private sector.

I suspect there were those in the Department who also had some doubts about a new ambassador who had not paid his dues working in the regional bureau and who may have seemed to be too willing to give the Qataris some credit in their argument with the Saudis and their frustration with their GCC brothers.

That was definitely the Roger Dangerfield period in Qatar's relations with the State Department. No high level State visitor came to Doha for nearly all of my tenure, while such visits were regular to other countries in the neighborhood, including Bahrain just a few miles away. It was, for me, embarrassingly difficult to arrange for meetings with senior Department and administration officials for the foreign minister, who was under instruction from the crown prince to establish such contacts. It was even difficult to arrange for standard security arrangements for such visits.

The Department trailed the Pentagon in recognizing Qatar's importance to our Gulf security goals, and lagged behind the U.S. private sector in recognizing opportunities in the natural gas sector. The Defense Department was especially effective in establishing high-level relationships in Doha, both on the military-to-military side and with the civilian leadership. In fact, the Qataris came to regard General Joseph Hoar, the CENTCOM commander who visited regularly, as both a military man and a representative of the Clinton Administration.

Q: What was the Qatari government and how did you deal with it?

KEITH: It depended on the issue. For the political ones, I dealt with the under secretary for political affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a remarkably able man who later became a minister. But the minister of foreign affairs was always accessible to me when I wanted to see him. The crown prince and his father were always available; I never asked for an appointment and didn't get one, not once in the whole time that I was there. On economic and oil matters, I dealt with the Minister of Energy and Industry, a graduate of an American university, a technocrat. Again, instant access whenever requested. Both sides were working hard to develop this relationship.

That access was always useful and I didn't abuse it. And indeed there were areas that were pretty scratchy. The Qataris thought our "dual containment" policy, which essentially sought to isolate both Iraq and Iran, was just silly. They thought our sanctions on Iraq hurt civilians and spared Saddam and his henchmen, and they therefore took on humanitarian initiatives Washington didn't approve of. They also advised us to reach out

to Iranian reformers. They could barely hide their disdain for our policy of simply refusing to deal with any Iranians, whatever their policies might be.

Sometimes we were unhappy about the way some of our companies were treated in negotiations or in contract awards and so on. Part of my job was making that clear. But I think you could say that from 1992-1995, relations for the U.S. and Qatar in almost every important domain way went from irrelevant, to important, to vitally important.

Q: What about getting military equipment propositioned?

KEITH: This went very smoothly. I know this came as something of a surprise to some of my Department colleagues because they had still not fully understood how determined the Qataris were to cooperate with us on defense/security issues. My communication on the pre-positioning issue was basically with Central Command in Tampa. They asked whether the Qataris might agree to pre-positioning. When I took it to the Qatari government the answer was immediately positive. The Minister of State for Defense let me know Qatar would agree as long as it didn't cost them any money; they were still trying to scrape together the money to develop their gas. The cost of a barrel of oil was going south. (Their budget was based on oil at $19/barrel, and at that time it was hovering around $15.) They said, "Yes. You can take this as blanket approval." When I went back to the Department to report this, they couldn't quite believe it. But CENTCOM did, and the entered into serious negotiations within weeks.

Q: Were you concerned that because you were getting a blanket approval, the Department of Defense might overdo it?

KEITH: No, I was not. The Department of Defense people I worked with were by and large some of the most measured and able people I've met in U.S. government. There was a supply corps major general who came out as the chief negotiator. He had great professional knowledge, authority, and the human touch. At every stage, they were careful to keep me completely in the negotiating process and careful to get my counsel on pace and the amount of cooperation they could reasonably ask for. In fact, we got everything we asked for.

The issue of a "status of forces" agreement came up during the discussions. Their position was: "We don't want a formal treaty, but we will sign an informal understanding. But that's just for your benefit. We are not going to mistreat your military people. If they get in trouble, we'll turn them over to you." That has been the way it's been.

Q: When you get into Status of Forces, you end up in the hand of Pentagon lawyers who go overboard.

KEITH: We had learned a lesson by the process that had begun before in the UAE that ended up in unending squabbles. The problems of the UAE are a bit different than they are in Doha. But that was just a part of the pattern of cooperation that was in the eyes of

some in State just too good to be true.

Q: Will you speak about the takeover of power in the spring of 1995?

The situation in Qatar had been tense for some time. The crown prince was running the country on a day-to-day basis, but it became clear from many sources that his hands were being tied by the emir, particularly on important economic issues. The emir and the crown prince were in agreement on most security issues, I believe, including the close partnership with the U.S. But there seemed to be a drift in domestic economic affairs, and perhaps problems in family politics as well. In any case, the frustration level of the crown prince, the cabinet ministers, the Qatari private sector and various members of the family began to emerge in the late winter of 1994. In the spring of 1995 there was an official visit to Doha by Nelson Mandela, and when the crown prince did not appear for the official state dinner hosted by his father, the emir, most of us in the diplomatic corps sensed that a real rift had taken place.

When the emir left on his annual vacation to Europe, the crown prince moved to take over the leadership. Of course we were not caught unaware, but we had no hand either in the decision to oust the old emir or in the change of power itself. In fact, it was a family decision, as have been all the changes in leadership under the Al-Thani rulers. The coup was bloodless and very quiet. Early on that May morning, Qatar TV showed the long line of Al-Thani family members, representing all the various branches and the old emir's brothers, paying their respects to the new ruler. There were no roadblocks, no tanks in the streets, no closing of borders, no closing of the airport. The English-language radio station played its usual top-40 pop music programs. Daily life throughout the country went on as usual.

Most significantly, the foreign minister announced that the country would continue its membership in the GCC (although the new emir was still fuming over the GCC's lack of support in various disputes). We were assured that cooperation with the U.S. would continue as before.

Q: You left there in 1995.

KEITH: Summer of '95.

Q: Whither?

KEITH: To Washington, USIA, where I was area director for Near East/North Africa/South Asia.

Q: How long were you there?

KEITH: I was there from the summer of '95 until the winter of '97. In that time, I did the thing that area directors always did, which is manage field operations and try to coordinate support. But at the end, I was the lead negotiator for USIA in the

consolidation process.

Q: What did you feel about it?

KEITH: I hated the idea of the consolidation. I thought it was a mistake then and I think it's a mistake today. But once the decision was reached to do it, I felt it was my obligation to try to make sure it was done as well as possible with as little harm to the function as possible. To that end, we were part of an interagency working group which I think was well organized. I admired everybody I worked closely with – my State colleagues, my AID colleagues, and the ACDA colleagues. We all learned a lot about each other in the process and I think we came up with a very good blueprint, which unfortunately was not adopted in meaningful form. Mistakes that were made then we are paying for now.

Q: What did you feel were the major problems?

KEITH: Well let's start at the beginning. Although there were four agencies nominally involved in this process at the beginning, only two, the Department of State and the U.S. Information Agency, had major equities at stake. (USAID managed to wriggle out of the consolidation, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency was a small entity, already housed in the Department, whose absorption by the Department was mainly a bureaucratic process.) The real negotiations, involving jobs, budgets, real estate, program, field operations, and melding of cultures involved just two agencies: the Department of State and USIA. The major challenge, therefore, was to take these two agencies, with their two distinct cultures and missions, and meld them in such a way that the original function of each would be preserved at comparable cost or less.

The context for those involved – especially from USIA – was one of limited credibility for the entire concept. One year before, after the idea was breached by Warren Christopher as part of the vice president's government reform drive, Vice President Gore dismissed the idea of a consolidation of State and USIA, judging that the two organizations had different missions, and not that much money would be saved. How right he was.

Q: Then why did the consolidation idea get revived?

KEITH: Senator Jesse Helms, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, loved Christopher's recommendation on consolidation of the foreign affairs agencies. He actually had nothing against USIA, from what his staff told us, but he wanted to see an end to an independent USAID. The irony, of course, is that USAID's independence was untouched in this consolidation process. Christopher's successor as secretary of state, Madeline Albright, choreographed a very public rapprochement with Senator Helms, hoping to gain his cooperation in important administration policy goals, including payment of our UN arrears and the ratification of the Chemical Test Ban Treaty. The administration back-tracked on consolidation as part of a deal with Helms.

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Q: Today is January 11, 2001. How was this consolidation to take place? Can you describe the process?

KEITH: The White House wanted a blueprint for consolidation by mid-summer 1997. The Department of State took the lead in structuring the negotiations. The announced structure looked like a pyramid. A steering committee, which would consist of the heads of each of the concerned agencies, was to lead the process. Under that committee there was to be an executive committee, a senior group that would meet regularly to review the work was that was being produced at the working level.

At the day-to-day negotiating level, there were senior representatives for each of the organizations and I did that job. We in turn were to review the work of the numerous working groups. Those groups were supposed to cover the whole range of issues that were a part of the process, from personnel to corporate culture. There were some in the Department, for example, who hoped that the working group designated to work on the "Reinvention of the State Department" would attack some of the Departments long-recognized systemic problems, including the infamous policy clearance process that was partially responsible for the NSC's ascendancy and the Department's decline in the policy battles.

From the beginning it was clear that that structure, as originally designed, wasn't going to work. The heads of the agencies were not going to be meeting regularly. As far as I know, they never met. At least, they never met in the context of that "supreme" steering committee. The State Department's overall coordinator was Patrick Kennedy, and his USIA counterpart was deputy director Penn Kemble. That became the kind of court of last resort for unresolved issues. That putative second tier became the actual first tier. The next tier became the second tier.

Each of the organizations was represented at my level by a very able person, somebody with a lot of experience and, amazingly, somebody who was open minded. As the weeks went by we spent hours discussing the bureaucratic and human realities of such a major change. Much time was spent on the guiding principles of the consolidation. One such was "equal pain" where down-sizing was part of the blueprint. The agencies were to share loss of jobs, pay grades, and so forth. Fortunately, Skip Gnehm [Ambassador Edward Gnehm, Director General of the Foreign Service] set the tone for this by clearly stating his commitment to equity from the very beginning.

Q: How did AID escape? Why weren't they going to be part of it? And what about arms control?

KEITH: The lobbying effort in congress and in the executive branch on behalf of an independent AID was successful. It was led by Brian Atwood, who was then director of AID. In the end, there was talk of a closer relationship between AID and State in policy terms, and there was an undertaking to combine non-policy aspects of AID –

management, travel, etc. But the effort to roll up AID within the State Department bureaucracy had failed. AID would remain an independent organization with its own budget, its own personnel system, its own location.

ACDA, a much smaller agency, with a very similar responsibilities in many ways, did not take a great deal of time as far as the negotiating process was concerned. ACDA's Director, John Bolton, had credibility with those members of Congress who were reluctant to give up the agency's independent treaty verification power, so there was really no real roadblock at the time of the negotiating process.

Q: USIA and State have always worked well together in the field. How did the negotiations work out from your perspective?

Most of us understood and accepted the fact that some consolidation, in areas such as security, payroll and other aspects of management, probably made sense, whether the broader consolidation took place or not. Nobody anticipated that those things would be a major problem. But it was also understood that, in terms of the basic functions, you had two different kinds of organizations and two different cultures. USIA's culture emphasized creativity and output. It was a culture that was open and sought to contact foreign audiences and to be as much in touch with them as possible, an organization that had adopted new technology that was valuable to the extent that it was open and accessible, an organization that had relied on new technology to help overcome the loss of personnel in the field over the years. It was an focused on output. The State Department, a much larger organization, a much more bureaucratic institution, was rooted in private and protected government-to-government relations, with an emphasis on security that influenced all aspects of its operations at home and abroad

And it *is* true that the two agencies looked for different kinds of employees. USIA looked for different kinds of talents and skills and promoted for different kinds of achievement State. The State Department rewarded different kinds of achievement than USIA, emphasizing the ability to analyze political and economic developments, and report on them accurately and quickly. As I mentioned, there was a "notional" working group that was supposed to reinvent the Department of State. Maura Harty, the talented State Department officer who was my counterpart, was fond of saying that the infusion of USIA people into the Department would have a positive influence on that staid institution. In fact, this was the opportunity for change, but that particular working group was never staffed and never met.

Q: It was one of those things put off to one side because it was too difficult?

KEITH: Perhaps. As I look at it now, I have become personally convinced that there was an element of self-satisfaction in the Department, and a rather pervasive view that the changes that it needed to make were not substantial and didn't need to be a part of this process. Thus, the Department simply grafted USIA onto itself. Our task was to provide a blueprint for consolidation by August 15, 1997. It was to be on the President's desk sometime very shortly thereafter. The assumption was that by the time that blueprint was

actually completed, it would have already been discussed at all levels of the Department, including the level of the Secretary of State, and it would just be a matter of a rather quick handover to the White House. However, that didn't happen. The blueprint was finished as scheduled and turned over to the secretary. That, as far as I know, was as far as it went. Some elements of the plan were eventually implemented in whole or in part, but the negotiating hierarchy disappeared, and the blueprint became, in effect, a series of suggestions.

Q: Was there lingering disagreement among the negotiators?

KEITH: Yes, but that really in became meaningless because decisions on implementation were simply unilaterally made by the Department. But there was "bracketed" language in the blueprint, which was to have been worked out in higher councils. One had to do with the powers of the newly created under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs. The other had to do with whether or not the educational and cultural exchange budget should remain a separate line item in the Department's budget or simply folded into the general operations budget.

Regarding the first unresolved negotiation, the power of the under secretary, the question was how do you manage the field? How do you coordinate public diplomacy and make sure that from the Washington end the right resources, the right media resources, the right speakers and so on, are being obtained and programmed and sent to the field in a coordinated way to further a specific program and policy? How do you do that in the new setup? With USIA, that function was performed by the area office. The area office didn't produce media for the field's use or didn't produce programs, but it was able to ensure that the right things were produced and were able to deploy them in furtherance of policy goals. Now, instead of an area director, who was an all-powerful figure in USIA, that entire function was envisioned by State negotiators to be handled by a person of office director rank, a lower echelon officer who has limited authority in Washington and the field. In the Department's scheme, all the budget and the programming authority would reside with the assistant secretaries for regional bureaus. The under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs would have no direct authority over field operations. This is the usual template for field management within the Department, but it would make a coordinated public diplomacy very difficult. The USIA position was that the function served by the USIA area director should segue into that of a deputy assistant secretary within a regional bureau. As a DAS, that person would have the authority and to supervise and sustain field operations. That function doesn't exist at the appropriate level today. That has to be changed.

Q: Is there any pressure to change it? Is there an understanding on the part of the now-departing powers that be?

KEITH: Yes. The issue has been raised, according to her, by the outgoing under secretary on two occasions. I'm not privileged to know what happened except that it didn't work. My feeling is that eventually it is going to become clear that it has to be made to work and that the only way to do that is to give the officer responsible for coordinating public

diplomacy the authority and the rank to do it. You can't do it as an office director no matter how talented you are; it's just not possible, not with the kind of state department that exists today. People can see the problem. But on the other hand, there is an element within the Department that does not value public diplomacy and does not want to see public diplomacy absorb resources that could be used for something else.

Q: In fact, how have things been working out in the early stages?

KEITH: In Washington, the main thing that was adopted from the process was the work of the administrative working group and the personnel working group that made sure everybody in Washington had a place to sit and that some serious attention was paid to the human dimension of this process on the *Washington* end.

I stress that because the field situation was both better and worse in some ways. Better in the sense that field operations did not have this affliction of disharmonious cultures. People worked in the field all these years. Everybody had a job. Everybody knew what their job was. The PAO [Public Affairs Officer] was part of the country team, just as the AID mission director was, or the Pentagon's military attaché. Operations in the field were integrated in a way that was not possible in Washington. So, in some ways there was no real change from day X to day X+1. You have to take into consideration also that for years the Department had been going through various efforts to streamline management process in the field and all the agencies were involved. From the field perspective, it was anticipated that there would be an easier time of making this transition. In one sense, that was true. The consolidation was easier the field than in Washington.

In another way, however, it made life much more difficult. What happened was that the PAO was no longer an agency head with the rights and the resources that he or she had in the past. Now a PAO had to call upon consolidated transportation services, consolidated financial and fiscal services, administrative services. The assumption was that this would result in cost savings. After all, the thinking went, an administrative assistant is an administrative assistant, a chauffeur is a chauffeur and there is no reason why a PAO can't just order those services from a consolidated base. And there was no reason why these people who had previously done similar work for USIA couldn't simply do that same work across the street or down the hall reporting to the admin counselor instead of the PAO. It was soon realized that many of these people were integrated in the public diplomacy programs in a very important ways. In other words, they weren't just administrative people but they took part in the planning and implementation and reporting on programs. Chauffeurs were not just providing transportation; they were part of a program.

Q: They were distributors.

KEITH: They were distributors of information. But the loss of agency-specific administrative support caused an even larger problem. PAOs suddenly found themselves doing the kinds of paperwork and administrative details that had in the past been done by other people on their staff. PAOs complain that their administrative burdens are keeping

them out of the fields, away from their audiences. This is a major problem. I know this is something that has been discussed widely in Washington and I know that there are people, including Patrick Kennedy, who have acknowledged that this process went too far, took too many of the resources out of the hands of the PAO, and that some redress is important. We're at the end of an administration, so there is going to be a delay of some months before anything can take place in that regard.

Q: Most of us who've been in the Foreign Service have grown up with USIA and found it a very comfortable mix. It has its strengths and its points of contact that are extremely useful. Why would anybody feel it's not useful?

KEITH: There is an element within the Department that believes the only real calling is that of a political officer, that one has to bow to the unfortunately realities of economics and give some authority to an economics officer, but that's it. The admin person has to make sure the cars are running and bills are paid, but really what this is all about as a career is the political officer.

Q: There have been proposals supported rather high up of getting rid of the consular function, particularly the visa function, to push that off to the Immigration Service, which would cause real problems.

KEITH: There are very few things that are embodied in U.S. law that have to do with our diplomatic functions abroad. One of them is the consular function. It's hard to see that function being voluntarily given up by the Department.

Q: One of the concerns I heard from people is that USIA rather than pursuing a projection of the United States and United States goals, etc., looking ahead… We'll become more a flack for the present secretary of state to make him or her look good. In other words, to cut out all the very careful work that's gone on to show that we are interested in long-term things.

KEITH: This was a major concern. It is not comforting to realize that the Department wanted to downgrade even more that part of USIA that was responsible for these long-range issues – educational, cultural affairs. As a part of the blueprint, the person responsible for education and cultural affairs was to be an assistant secretary of state with a finite budget. The Department negotiators bracketed that but did not disagree about the need to have that person at the assistant secretary level. It wasn't until long after that blueprint went forward with everybody's signature that it was suddenly discovered that the plan the Secretary of State was putting forward would have the person in charge of the educational and cultural affairs become a deputy assistant secretary.

Q: Which is way down.

KEITH: Yes.

Q: A deputy assistant secretary is more a briefcase holder for the assistant secretary.

KEITH: Except that a deputy assistant secretary is higher by the same distance than an office director. In any case, there was sufficient fuel among the constituents in the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau, stakeholders throughout the country in the academic world and so on, and there was sufficient unhappiness in Congress with the notion of downgrading that position to deputy assistant secretary that, despite their embarrassment, they had to reverse their position and establish the position at the assistant secretary level. It still bewilders me. It would have cost the Department nothing to go along with this recommendation. I cannot understand why they decided to downgrade that position. I believe nobody at my level and nobody that I dealt with, including Patrick Kennedy, could explain what was happening except that it was a decision made by Madeline Albright herself.

Q: Did you feel that up at the Albright level, Madeline Albright seemed to be surrounded by people who for the most part, with the great exception of Tom Pickering, were from outside and were almost a protective coterie.

KEITH: I frequently had that feeling, and I believe the case was clear with Madeline Albright and Jamie Rubin, the spokesman and assistant secretary for public affairs. I think it's fair to say that when they're awake, these are all able people, but you're right that their primary responsibility was to her and to her as a political figure, and certainly not to long-range public diplomacy goals They didn't have them. Strobe Talbott as the deputy secretary had long-range thinking. He's a person for whom the long-term was important, especially when he considered the changes that were going on in Eastern Europe and so on. However, he was also absorbed in constant telephone calls from the Hill on many issues. He was certainly not in a position to this kind of thinking into policy, and I cannot recall a single instance in which he worked on a long-range cultural or educational issue.

Tom Pickering is also a man who knew as much about public diplomacy as anyone in the building. But his work as undersecretary for political affairs was completely absorbing. If he ever got involved in the consolidation issues I was unaware of it. Who at the top levels of the Department gave time to this consolidation process and who thought it through for the long-term? Pat Kennedy. I have to say that if Patrick Kennedy had been the final arbiter, things would have been very much better than they turned out. Patrick Kennedy's heart was in the right place and his mind was in the right place. He was a hard negotiator and I never agreed with him on some issues. But on the basics, I think there wasn't very much space between us on how things should go. After things left his hands they got changed for reasons that even he can't explain.

Q: This sounds like a classic case of where the personal staff assistant mice nibble away at something for who knows what reason.

KEITH: That would certainly jibe with my understanding of what happened. I also think there was an element of pique on the part of the secretary of state with regard to the director of USIA, whom she thought was not a team player.

Q: That kind of open hostility can often have its own echoes with the personal assistants down the line who behave in a way they think is how the boss would want.

KEITH: Yes. I think that's right. In the case of the relationship between Albright and Duffy, we suffered and ultimately the U.S. government suffered because that relationship was so bad. Somehow, Brian Atwood managed to stay out of it.

Q: In a way, you must have breathed a certain sigh of relief when AID dropped out of the picture. USIA was structured pretty much like the State Department. We'd all been living together. AID had a completely different focus. My guess is it would have been very, very difficult to meld them in without having major surgery.

KEITH: It was hard enough to combine USIA and State. I agree with you that it would have been even harder to integrate AID. My belief is that they should be separate organizations and I think eventually that will happen.

Q: When this was done, what happened? Were you retired at this time?

KEITH: No, my day job was as area director for NEA. I had a very able deputy who was able to make sure things went on from day to day while I gave all my time to this process.

Q: When it went through, what was the reaction within USIA, when the bill of particulars that you all worked up went through?

KEITH: The main concern people had, once they knew that this thing was going to happen (right up to the end, senior people in USIA thought it wasn't going to happen), the main concern then became "What happens to me? Where do I go? What happens to my job? I'm a personnel specialist. If they need five personnel specialists and they've already got five over there, what happens to me?" That absorbed everybody for many months. Then the process of sorting out real estate and office space was very trying. Then, complaints started coming from PAOs in the field, who had previously been rather quiet.

Q: You retired shortly thereafter.

KEITH: The report was finished on August 15, as mandated. I retired on November 30, 1997.

Q: It's an unfinished story. Of course, all diplomacy is an unfinished story. I want to thank you very much.

KEITH: It's been a pleasure.

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Q: Today is March 15, 2002. Since we last spoke you returned to service following the events of September 11. Can we go over this period?

KEITH: In late October 2001 I was asked if I would return to active duty service on a limited appointment to go to Islamabad, Pakistan, establish an information center for the coalition, and serve as media spokesman for the coalition. For several weeks, conversations had taken place between the White House, the Department of State, Pentagon, the British prime minister's office and the government of Pakistan about the establishment of the center. Major issues of staffing and location had already been addressed, and much was in place in Islamabad when I arrived in November.

On a daily basis the press contingent in our briefing center was composed of the world's television networks and correspondents of its major newspapers. But of special relevance to the Center was the Islamic press. Usually, more than half of the audience was composed of journalists from the Muslim world, including Pakistanis, Arabs and East Asians. My staff and I engaged actively with the Muslim media. We made a special effort to work with the Arab press. I made myself available for background and on- the- record briefings and a number of on camera interviews.

My job was two-fold: First, to counter the misinformation that bedeviled our efforts in Afghanistan, basically involving developments on the military front, but also on the impact the war was having on innocent civilians. Second, to counter the belief in much of the Muslim world that the Coalition was engaged, not in a war against terrorism, but a war against Islam. The basic hostility of the Islamic media was a reflection of public perceptions throughout Islam. Reaction to our bombing was extremely negative. The Coalition was believed to be acting without authority, without proof of a case against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, and especially without the proper regard for innocent life.

Q: How long did you stay in Pakistan?

KEITH: It was an expensive operation to run, with a staff drawn from various countries who had to be supported. We decided to close down the operation when Kandahar fell to Coalition forces and the so-called Northern Alliance, marking the end of major combat operations. There was still fighting going on in remote areas, but the Taliban was a spent force in terms of being able to take and hold territory.

Q: What do you think your center accomplished?

KEITH: Well, certainly we took the media field away from exclusive exploitation by the Taliban ambassador in Islamabad. We were able to refute his outlandish claims as soon as he made them, rather than waiting for many hours while London and Washington reacted. But did we change the anti-Western attitudes in the Islamic world? No, I think not. And of course Bin Laden is still at large.

But we did leave on a rather optimistic note. The Coalition can be proud of the fact that the widespread starvation predicted for the winter of 2001-2002 in northern Afghanistan

by international organizations was prevented by a truly massive effort, at the heart of which was the U.S. Also, there is some room for optimism for the rebuilding of Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai seems to have the respect of most of the political factions in Afghanistan, and has gotten off to a reasonably good start as interim leader. The Bonn pledging conference has established the will of the developed world to come to Afghanistan's aid with billions of dollars. I would say that the elements are in place for a positive, if challenging, future for the country. But the U.S. and our coalition partners will probably need to assist Afghanistan in many ways for years to come.

End of interview