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

AMBASSADOR L. BRUCE LAINGEN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is January 9, 1992. This is an interview with Ambassador Bruce Laingen on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Bruce, I wonder if you could give me a little about your background -- where you came from, your education, etc.

LAINGEN: I was a farm boy from Minnesota growing up on a farm in southern Minnesota. I am often asked why I joined the Foreign Service and I give the answer that

we couldn't all be farmers. I had some brothers and I began to look beyond that. I went to school at St. Olaf College in Minnesota. It was a liberal arts school in that part of the country. I served in the Navy in World War II and then took a Masters degree in International Relations at the University of Minnesota in 1949.

Q: What did you do in the Navy? Where did you serve?

LAINGEN: I was a V-12 Apprentice Seaman at the University of Dubuque, Iowa, in 1943.

Q: V-12 meaning a reserve program for 12 weeks which turned you into an officer, or something like that?

LAINGEN: Not quite. It was a program that picked up people at mid-term in their college career and sent them off to another college for six months. In my case it was to the University of Dubuque and from there I went to Wellesley College in Massachusetts. I am one of the early male graduates from Wellesley College. The Supply Corps in the United States Navy had a branch of the Harvard Business School there and that was why I was at Wellesley. I spent another six months there as a Midshipman and then was commissioned as an officer in the Naval Supply Corps. I served in the Pacific in World War II with amphibious forces in the Philippine campaigns.

Q: After the end of World War II, what attracted you towards foreign affairs?

LAINGEN: Like I said, I decided we couldn't all be farmers so I had to look beyond the farm. My real attraction, I suppose, to the outside world started with the United States Navy in World War II in the Philippines. I came back from the Philippines and left the Navy in 1946. I did a Masters degree at the University of Minnesota in International Relations and during that time spent a summer in Sweden as a student in a student summer program at the University.

During the process of looking beyond the farm, joining the Navy and serving in the Philippines and that session in Sweden, I thought the Foreign Service looked rather attractive. The outside world looked very attractive. Indeed, I took my first Foreign Service exam while I was a student in Sweden in 1947. I took it in Helsinki, repeating it later a second time in St. Paul.

Q: Was it the good old three and a half day exam?

LAINGEN: Three and a half days, yes. I failed the language (Spanish) three times before I joined the Foreign Service. I had to take the Foreign Service exam twice.

Q: You joined the State Department first before joining the Foreign Service, didn't you?

LAINGEN: When I came to town in 1949 from Minnesota, half way through my Foreign Service exam process, waiting to complete it and looking for a job in Washington, I found a job in INR as a research analyst for Scandinavia for the better part of a year, before the exam process was completed. I joined the Foreign Service in late 1950.

Q: Looking at INR in those days. The Cold War was just really beginning to crank up. There was the 1948 Czechoslovak business, the Korean War started in 1950. What was our interest in Scandinavia? Did you feel that Scandinavia was sort of a backwater?

LAINGEN: Oh, it certainly was a backwater, and yet it was one of those areas that the government felt, given our experience in World War II, that we got into that affair without adequate knowledge, background information and data about the world out there. So they began these complicated and very extensive research projects of every country on earth. I was working in that program in INR. I forget now exactly what the name of it was.

Q: National Intelligence Studies.

LAINGEN: Yes, NIS. So I wrote extensively for the better part of a year on Scandinavia...the Swedish judicial system, the Danish judicial system, etc...contributing to what was destined to become a very massive program. Volume after volume of National Intelligence Studies which presumably would equip us better as a country were we ever to get involved again in a major fracas. As you said, that always loomed on the horizon, increasingly so as we got into the Korean affair.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service when?

LAINGEN: I came into the Foreign Service in November, 1950. At that time the military government program in Germany was still in existence, run largely in terms of out reach in the districts...

Q: We had the Kreis Officers Program then.

LAINGEN: Yes, the Kreis Officer Program. The State Department was taking over some of the responsibilities of local government in Germany from the Army and I was a member of the Kreis Resident Officer class that began in November, 1950. Therefore I didn't take whatever the basic course was at the time...perhaps it was called the A-100 course even then. I took instead a somewhat modified course because it was destined to lead us to become Kreis Resident Officers ...KROs. We were a class, I think, of 32. We went through the course which was an intense program of German language study and to some degree a look at German culture, etc.

I went off to Germany in the spring of 1951. The entire class bundled aboard the former French and now defunct French liner Decross. This class of 32 officers, most of whom were married, I was not, occupied most of the first class quarters on that ship. It was nine

days, nine leisurely days to party, to prepare, if you will. I had on board my green Chevrolet convertible, as did others. We got to Le Havre, off loaded and drove to our posts, beginning with a program in Frankfurt, Germany, at the headquarters of the military government. What was it called, I have forgotten?

Q: HICOM.

LAINGEN: Yes, the High Commission in Frankfurt. From there we were farmed out to our assignments for the next two years. At that point, for reasons that I suppose I will never fully understand, some of us were diverted to other programs...I never became a KRO. I think I would have made a rather lousy Gauleiter. Most of my colleagues did become what we joking called Gauleiters; i.e. the Nazi term for those district governors.

Q: Gauleiter being district leaders under the Third Reich.

LAINGEN: Exactly, that is what they were called then. Gau was a local district and the leiter was leader in that area.

I was diverted from the program to the Displaced Persons Program and went off to Hamburg, Germany and served two years operating out of the Consulate General there in the British zone, not the American zone. I spent the first year issuing visas virtually non stop to the end of the Displaced Persons Program.

Q: I wonder if you could give a little picture of the Displaced Persons Program? How you operated, your decisions, what were the...?

LAINGEN: The Displaced Persons Program was a special program designed to facilitate entry into the United States of those qualified peoples displaced in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as a consequence of the war and particularly as a consequence of the Soviet advance across eastern European countries and into Germany. I forget the numbers but it was a very large program. It included people from places like the Ukraine, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. A lot of them came from the Baltic states. I have often thought, as I watched in the past 18 months here in Washington, D.C. the demonstrations by Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians demanding that the Soviets get out of their countries, that among those people were some I probably gave visas to. Or, if not to them, I gave visas to their parents.

It was a very liberal program in the sense that the requirements were not all that stringent. There was a screening process, particularly effecting their political orientation, health and other considerations. We operated out of Hamburg in what were called displaced persons camps -- many of them being former German military barracks, which was the case for us outside of Hamburg in a place called Wentorf. It was a half hour drive east of Hamburg.

We issued visas almost around the clock. The last day of the program which was December 31, 1952 we issued visas until midnight.

I enjoyed the work. I enjoyed meeting and talking with...and in most instances it was complete families, who benefitted under this program and went to the United States and are now part of the large Ukrainian, Polish, Estonian and Yugoslav communities.

I mention Yugoslavs because it seemed to me that everybody leaving from that area was headed for Libertyville, Indiana. For some reason that seems to be where they found the most sponsors. All of the families and individuals had to have sponsors under the program, as you know better than I, as a consular officer.

Then when that program ended, I left that displaced persons camp and worked full time at the Consulate General in Hamburg under the ethnic German program. This was another program designed to facilitate relief and entry into the United States of those qualified of ethnic Germans who had lived in the Soviet Union areas and had fled as the German army retreated to the West.

Q: The Volksdeutsch program.

LAINGEN: Yes, many of those, who had fled the advancing Soviet Army and found refuge in Western Germany and elsewhere. This program was designed specifically for them. That program operated, for me, out of the Consulate General in Hamburg. I enjoyed Hamburg as a first post, because it was and is a very impressive city with a lot of spirit. Happily in World War II, even though it suffered as much bombing, perhaps, as any city in Germany, the core of the city was not so badly damaged, so it didn't lose its face. It lost much of the port area of the city and much of the suburban housing, residential area, but the part of the city around those magnificent lakes, the Inner and Outer Alster, was not that badly damaged. The Germans with their remarkable perseverance and dedication and hard work by 1951-53 had restored much of the core of that city to its original splendor.

Q: We had seized the Nazi Party documents, the Berlin Document Center and all, was it a difficult problem for you to find out...were we refusing a lot of people with tainted pasts or was this much of a problem?

LAINGEN: I think it was pretty much a pro forma exercise frankly. I can't say. Both the Ethnic German Program and the Displaced Persons Program involved a great deal of background analysis and checking by legions of people. We had access to that thing and when files came to us there was some kind of reasonably final conclusion required by us in a personal interview that we gave each person...reasonable conclusion that these people were not security risks. I think by and large that was a pro forma exercise.

Q: I was doing it with the Refuge Relief Act about two years later, and it was more or less the same thing. And yet, 30 odd years later I get a call from our own Department of Justice asking if I had issued a visa to so-and-so who was accused of being implicated in the concentration camp atrocities, or something like that.

LAINGEN: I never had that experience. I never had any challenge. I never had any reason to think that those to whom I gave visas were any kind of security risk or had any background of that kind. It wasn't a perfect program by any means. By and large, I believe myself, that this country is a lot richer because of an enormous influx of people that were caught up in that tragedy and we are stronger because of it.

Q: And it continues to be. This is our secret weapon.

LAINGEN: Yes, it is.

Q: You left Hamburg and by this time did you feel that the Foreign Service was for you?

LAINGEN: I am part of that generation that when they made a decision to join the Foreign Service, that was it. It was a life time commitment. It didn't enter our minds that we would consider anything else, or leave it. We were so damned happy to be in it. Exceedingly proud. I think then, and I trust still today, that when you pass the Foreign Service examination you have joined a very elite...and I have no hesitation in using that term...service. Proud to be a part of it. Here I was, a farm boy from Minnesota who, if you will, in my view at least, made it and joined that kind of group. Not a part of the Eastern Seaboard Establishment, but a part of the isolationist Middle West, and I was very proud of that too. I felt very fortunate, myself, in my first assignment to have had a tour of that kind in Germany. It was unusual because it wasn't repeated thereafter in the same way. It was still sort of war time Europe, rebuilding Europe. A consular assignment, which I have said ever since, is one of the best training assignments you can conceivably have for a Foreign Service career. The Foreign Service is fundamentally a service of dealing with people and you certainly get a lot of experience in dealing with people in their strengths and weaknesses when you are a consular officer.

Q: And also cleaning up after a war was a tremendous history lesson, if nothing else, for everyone who went through this experience.

LAINGEN: Just to watch and see Europe begin to rebuild. I had had exposure to Europe, and to Germany specifically, three years before as a student in Sweden during that program in Minnesota. At the end of the program I travelled through Western Germany, Belgium, Holland and England and saw...that was only two years after the war...the enormous destruction and tremendous task that those countries faced in rebuilding. By 1953 when I left Germany it was remarkable how much progress had been made.
To have been a part of that, to have watched it, was a fascinating experience. I was very fortunate, I think, in my first assignment in the Foreign Service.

Q: When you move to your second assignment...this was to become sort of a theme that was going to be running through out your career, the Iranian theme...

LAINGEN: Stu, that was a quirk.
Q: I was going to ask how that came about?

LAINGEN: I was assigned as a junior Foreign Service officer and then and now I believe that you go where you are assigned, particularly in your second tour. You don't expect to dictate that.

Q: You don't negotiate.

LAINGEN: You don't negotiate that. If you do and succeed you are exceedingly fortunate.

I got my assignment in Hamburg in the middle of 1953 to go as a consular officer in Kobe, Japan. I looked at my orders Kobe, Japan and said, "Well, why not? That sounds exciting. I'll go there." I had never been to Japan but near it in the Philippines in World War II. I sent off my effects to Japan -- still unmarried at that time so I didn't have much of personal effects. I got on the liner America at Bremerhaven. Had another splendid return home as we were able to do in those days traveling American liners in first class. I did my consultations in Washington and went on home leave to my farm family in Minnesota.

Five days short of going to Kobe, Japan, I got a telephone call at that farm in Minnesota from the Department of State saying, "You are not going to Kobe; you are going to Tehran." And I went to Tehran.

My orders were changed because I was, if you will, accessible, available, dispensable as a single officer. The Embassy in Tehran was building up after the overthrow of the Mossadegh regime and the restoration of the Shah to his throne at that critical juncture in Iran's post-war history. The Embassy under Ambassador Loy Henderson felt it needed greater staff. I and several other officers, two of them in particular, who were also single, travelled on the same plane arriving in Tehran that summer in August. This was my first exposure to Tehran by a quirk of fate.

Q: To get a little feel of the situation, a single officer was considered a much more moveable commodity and in effect was, particularly in those days. There was a real differentiation made between single and married officers. A single officer could be put somewhere where a married one would find it a little more difficult.

LAINGEN: Yes. I think that was true. I still think that is sensible and practical. Certainly at that point all of us felt strongly that we were a disciplined Service, that we were subject to orders, particularly as junior officers. We went and were expected to go where the Service needed us. I was fascinated. I looked at the map. I had never been to Tehran before. My farm family was certainly fascinated to know that I was going to that distant place. I remember at the time looking at the list of posts that we had in Tehran at that time, including several consulates and consulates general. One of them on the map was Meshed. Of course I didn't know how to pronounce it and said, "meshed." Eventually I served there.

Q: You arrived there when?

LAINGEN: It must have been in August, 1953.

Q: This is a very interesting time. What was the political situation at the time of your arrival?
LAINGEN: I got there I suppose within weeks, at most a couple of months, after the rather tumultuous events surrounding the collapse of the Mossadegh regime and the seizure of power by Zahedi.

Q: He was a general.

LAINGEN: General Zahedi was in power -- with certainly the support, and in the view of a great many people, the active involvement of the CIA in facilitating the overthrow of the Mossadegh regime, the return of the Shah from Rome where he had fled several weeks before that, and the beginning of a very different relationship between Iran and the United States. The larger picture, of course, involved Iran's rather difficult post-war history involving the Soviet occupation of a province of Iran, Azerbaijan. And our active involvement at that time through the United Nations and seeing the Soviets eventually forced to withdraw their presence, and more significantly, their influence. It was a time, also, affected by the oil nationalization program that had been carried out by the Mossadegh regime and the difficult relationship that then ensued, particularly between the Iranians and the British, but since we were a major participant in terms of oil, involving us as well.

Loy Henderson was our Ambassador at the time. Herbert Hoover, Jr. was a frequent visitor to Tehran at that time, leading the American side in discussions relating to the oil nationalization issue.

Q: He was Under Secretary?

LAINGEN: Yes. He was designated to deal particularly with this nationalization process and turmoil involving American, Dutch, British and other oil companies that ensued thereafter.

I was a junior officer assigned to the economic section. I served under an ambassador whom I will always regard as one of the giants of American post-war diplomatic practice. That was Loy Henderson. He had his critics as well, but I will never be among them, at least in respect to the way he treated junior officers in the Foreign Service. I was a lowly FSO-6. That was the lowest rank at that time. I was on my second tour. I had a strong sense of respect, having been a naval officer before that, for authority, and I certainly felt it towards the Ambassador at that point in a large and growing Embassy.

It was a very large and powerful Embassy in Tehran at that time. And yet, Loy Henderson was the kind of Ambassador who was capable of reaching down to the lowest ranks of his staff and showing respect and regard for them in allowing them to participate as backbenchers, if you will, in his staff meetings. I wasn't an active participant in those meetings, but I was allowed to sit in on them and listen as other officers were. I thought that was a real credit to him and certainly a contribution to my capacity to serve effectively there as a junior officer in the economic section.

Q: One does have the feeling in interviews, that Henderson more than anybody else did look upon the Foreign Service as a Service and had a regard for the training and assignment of junior officer looking ahead to the future of the Service.

LAINGEN: He did. I had a high regard and respect for him. He had a wife who was one of the dragons of the Foreign Service as we used to call a wife who threw her weight around a little bit. But that didn't trouble me too much because I was a junior officer without a spouse and therefore was quite prepared to be used, if you will, and she certainly used junior officers in a protocol sense.

Q: To give a little feel for this, how would she do this?

LAINGEN: The Embassy in Tehran then, as it is now, is located in a large compound...27 acres...then on the outskirts of the city, today in the heart of the city. An Embassy presence, a foreign presence, an American presence loomed very large in those days, so there was a good deal of social life in that city in the diplomatic corps. Outside power, foreign political influence was sort of concentrated in the American Embassy and the British Embassy. So Ambassador Henderson did a great deal of entertaining with political purposes in mind. That required, as it does today, I think, the active participation of the staff in support of an Ambassador who does that kind of diplomatic representation. Mrs. Henderson had no hesitation of ordering us around as junior officers to be here, there, in the protocol line, ready to translate, ready to pick up at her command a personage from the receiving line and take him off somewhere to the buffet table or get him into the conversation. She was very tough on that and expected me and other officers and their wives to be available at her whim. Not only at those parties, but sometimes at other more limited circumstances in the Residence to be there, to be helpful. As I said, I was single, and assumed that was sort of natural in the Foreign Service. Others who had been their longer, not least spouses, began to chafe at that, did chafe at that, although much less then than they do today. But there were plenty of people in that Embassy who were restive with that. There was irritation at times contributing to this image of ambassadors' wives who were known as dragons.

Q: What was your economic job?

LAINGEN: I suppose I wrote one of the most definitive studies of the Iranian cement industry that was ever produced. I recall it was a 20 page despatch. I wasn't an expert on cement, but it was one of my assignments early on when I first got there to do a report on

that in a despatch. In those days all reporting didn't come in by cable as it does today. Much of the reporting in any depth went in by despatch by pouch.

I had a variety of assignments as a junior officer in that section. Most of it focused not so much on oil but on other Iranian small industry. Most of the time it was an assignment under an economic counselor who used us as sort of errand boys to go off and do specific things.

Q: Who was the Economic Counselor?

LAINGEN: A man named Bill Bray, who is since deceased. I did not know him after that tour.

Q: What was your impression...here you were a junior officer for the first time in this area...of the Shah?

LAINGEN: Our impression was that we were on an upward roll. Things could only get better. The Mossadegh regime was behind us. We had a regime in place under General Zahedi which was very responsive to American interests. An oil settlement was eventually worked out. It was a very optimistic period in terms of American interests in that part of the world. The Shah was still, at that point, rather a young monarch and in view, I think, of most of the rest of us, susceptible to American interests. Malleable, if you will, in terms of insuring that policies of his government and of Zahedi under him, would be responsive to American concerns and interests. The United States was a very large player in Tehran at that time. It was the player.

Q: This was the time that the American and the British views were beginning to diverge, at least it is my impression of this, getting it a little bit later in Saudi Arabia. That we were going along with the idea that as long as the oil was coming out and a sufficient profit was coming through it didn't have to be a complete American monopoly. It could certainly be in the hands of the local regimes. The British still had a strong proprietary feel about it. At least that was my impression where I was in Saudi Arabia. How did you see it?

LAINGEN: I think it was a period of decline for the British paramountcy in Iran. From that point on they had to share their political presence in Tehran and in the area generally with us in ways that they never had to do before; they had to share with American oil companies in ways that were not the case before.

Q: Were you getting emanations from your British colleagues about this?

LAINGEN: I didn't personally sense it much at my level. Our relationships were very cordial, very good, very close. The British, I suppose not least in the atmosphere of diplomacy were circumspect to how they reacted to us. I did not sense that kind of conflict at my level.

Q: How about your contacts with the Iranians? Were they the professional, upper class Iranians?

LAINGEN: We had a lot of contact with the Iranians, but largely with the upper class -- the westernized, English speaking element. I was not a Farsi speaker. I and others assigned at that time immediately began Farsi training. My Farsi competence never evolved to the point where I could carry on much of a political dialogue. It was largely kitchen Farsi, but it gave me enough to suggest to the Iranians that I was interested and fascinated by their language and culture and was prepared to learn a little bit. Most of our contacts were those who were the product of an intense Embassy representation program with upper class Iranians. I didn't talk with many rank and file Iranians. I saw a great many, of course. Tehran then, too, was a big city. We travelled around in it with ease and without any concern, including the bazaars.

It was a fascinating time, particularly for a single officer available to go do your thing and travel a great deal. We travelled a lot around Tehran and other cities on both personal and representational trips. I also served, as did others in the Embassy, particularly single officers, as discussion group leaders in the Iran-America Society, the binational center that was beginning to grow at that time and would eventually, by the time I served in Tehran the second time, become one of the largest in the world.

I remember in those discussion groups, where I would meet rank-and-file ordinary Iranians who came to these discussion groups to strengthen their English capability, getting into a lot of discussions of political issues at the time. I remember how impressed I was, and I have recently been rereading some of my letters written at that time, of how despite the Embassy's conviction, the official American line that the Shah was in good shape, that his regime was responsive to the interests of the Iranians and was doing well in terms of winning support of the Iranian people, that this wasn't necessarily totally true. Many of these young people were critical of that regime in ways that at the time the embassy did not fully comprehend.

Q: Did Ambassador Henderson or the political counselor make any effort to sort of tap...the fact that you had these junior officers out there...a good place to take a temperature reading of what's happening?

LAINGEN: Oh sure. I think they did. Not only Henderson, but the political counselor, the DCM. We were encouraged to get out there and report. But I think a lot of it got lost. A lot of it wasn't listened to. We didn't want to listen to it. When I say "we" I mean the American government beginning in Washington and extending out to the field. It was a time when so much confidence and hope and conviction surrounded the return of the Shah and the belief that this was a trend responsive to Iran's own needs. We didn't listen much to what we were hearing. It didn't register very strongly, looking back on it now.

Q: What was your impression about this post-Mossadegh feeling toward the Mossadegh government, both within the Embassy and also from the people you were talking to?

LAINGEN: He was a populist and a great orator. Looking back on it today, I think one must conclude that we were not very perceptive at the time. You see in Tehran you can get a crowd for almost anything at any time. By the time I got to Tehran, several weeks after the overthrow of the Mossadegh regime, the crowds were on the streets shouting their praises of Zahedi and the Shah. Looking back on it I think I too was overly awed by that apparent support of the mass for the return of the Shah and an end to what seemed a pro-Soviet, leftist leaning, Mossadegh regime. We brought ourselves to believe that that regime was out of line, out of touch with Iran's larger interests and the interests of the rank-and-file in the streets.

We were wrong. At least history tells us we were wrong if events since that time is any indication of that. As I indicated before, looking back on it and on what I wrote at the time, I was hearing different signals from at least those young people in the Iran-America Society. But I apparently didn't listen sufficiently, it didn't register strong enough. The total effect of that in terms of reporting to the Ambassador and up through the ranks wasn't having enough effect.

I would have to reread the files, I was not a political reporter at that time, to find out how much of this we were reporting to Washington. I wouldn't be surprised if there was a good deal of reporting of this other view on the part of some people that the Shah and Zahedi were also out of sync with a lot of their people, but as often is the case, reporting of that kind isn't carefully read in Washington.

Q: Even if it is, what do you do about it? This could be true of almost every country.

LAINGEN: Right. The later revolution, of course, I can speak volumes on.

Q: We will go into that later. Part of this is by the year 1992 we have seen the dissolution of the Soviet Union so looking for people who are looking at this period at a later time, what was the feeling there of the Soviet threat and internal communism?

LAINGEN: The threat loomed large. The Soviet Union was the big bear to the north. And, of course, it was. It had been a big bear for the Iranians in Czarist times. The Iranians and Russians had fought wars. Iran had lost territory, its integrity was often threatened. There was the Azerbaijan affair after World War II. It was the height of the period of concern worldwide on the part of the United States for the Soviet threat. The beginning of serious Soviet threat in the aftermath of the Truman Doctrine, the Korean concerns and all of that. And, of course, the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc were immediately there to the north. It was close at hand. It wasn't far away. So there was a lot of concern about that and, not least, the concern, in the largest strategic sense, of Soviet access to the warm waters of the Gulf to the south and control over the oil of that region. There was a big concern at that time.

I don't recall dealing with any Soviet diplomats at the time. We had very little contact with them. The Ambassador saw them, senior officers saw them I think at diplomatic functions. They were not far away physically in that city. Tehran is a city that has a very large diplomatic presence, not least a physical presence. The big powers in Tehran have large compounds reflecting the roles that they have played politically in that country. The Soviet compound in the city of Tehran is an enormous place and smack dab in the middle of the city, always was there. The British compound is even larger. Both of them have not only downtown compounds but separate compounds in the upper suburbs of the city where it is cool and they can go in the summer.

I mention these because the physical presence of these embassies in itself is a very interesting indicator of political history when outside powers have intruded upon Iran, both geographically, on the part of the Soviet Union and the Russians before them, and the British, and politically by the Russians, the British and by us. Eventually, serving in Meshed, as I did for about five months as the acting consul in that city up near the Soviet border, I felt and sensed the Soviet Union even closer because the only reason for that little post being in Meshed at that point near the Afghanistan and Soviet border was a listening post, intelligence wise vis-a-vis the Soviet Union and the Soviet threat. The results of the Soviet threat implicit in the body politic of Iran through the Tudeh Party, which is the Communist Party of Iran. It is still extant, although illegal today under the revolution. At that time it had a very active presence, but also illegal at that point. Nonetheless, a very large threat in itself.

Q: When you engaged Iranians, particularly the younger people, in political discussions, did they all go under the assumption that the United States put the Shah back in and gave you a wink about the CIA really doing all this? Was this sort of accepted among those young English students?

LAINGEN: We didn't hear much about that. It was an accepted fact, as you said, that the Shah was back on the throne and the official line was that the mass of Tehran had come to the conclusion that Mossadegh was wrong and that popular sentiment and political powers within Iran itself had restored the Shah to his throne. The role of the CIA was not very well known at that time. There may have been an assumption on the part of a lot of Iranians, saying it was there, but that didn't really become, I don't think, a large factor in Iranian thinking about the United States until later.

There was a great deal of enthusiasm it seemed and I think a lot of it was genuine popular enthusiasm that with the Shah restored to his throne there was a different and hopeful direction in Tehran. And, of course, the United States also benefitted from the fact that among a lot of Iranians the United States was a "good" outside power compared to the Soviets and the British.

During earlier years, in contrast to the physical intrusion on the part of the Soviets and the British, the Americans had been there in humanitarian terms, in education and

philanthropy, in hospitals and schools. Much of it done through the extensive work of American missionaries, religious missions. Although these missions were designed to convert people to Christianity, most of them, I think, recognized that they weren't going to be converting many people, but they were very active in education and medicine. And I think even today Iranians remember the United States best because of our presence and contributions in those private ways. There were streets named in memory of missionaries who had been active in education. There were still schools in 1953, '54, and '55 when I was there, run by them. And hospitals run by them. This sentiment that America had been active in those fields was very strong among a lot of Iranians. It overshadowed the suspicion or anger, if you will, to the extent that it was there, about American intelligence activities messing around in the politics of Tehran.

Q: Did you feel that the Shah, when he came back...his secret police was really operating heavily at that time or was it still a sort of honeymoon period?

LAINGEN: It was very much a honeymoon period for the Shah. It was an upward roll on the part of all concerned.

Q: You didn't feel that the secret police was a major factor?

LAINGEN: No, that didn't begin really until later. That sort of presence and feel of the secret police, didn't exist at that time.

Q: What about the Iranian as a political animal? How did you see him or her at that time?

LAINGEN: The Iranian was not much of a political animal. There wasn't much politics in Iran in terms of a majlis, parliament, that was of any power. It was seen dominated by a military regime under General Zahedi and the Shah. There wasn't much politics to be seen. There were all kinds of feeling on the part of the average Iranian that the real politics were in the embassies of the big powers. They were the ones who were running things. There was that belief, that acceptance, that sentiment, on the part of most people -- and yes, the elite as well. They seemed prepared to live with it. On the part of the mass, if they thought about it at all, sort of an assumption that that was a given. It had always been that way in the recent history of Iran.

This also relates to the escape goat syndrome that looms so large in the Iranian psyche. A product of historical experience. As I said, foreign powers had always been intruding in modern times in Iran...the Russians, the British. That was largely to be accepted as a given. And when things went wrong, Iranians would point to them as being responsible much more then they would examine themselves. That is what I mean by the escape goat syndrome. They would look to others as being responsible for their ills, not surprisingly perhaps, given the way outsiders have intruded on them in their history.

The point, however, is that that scape goat syndrome is so considerable, or was then and still is, as to cloud the vision of Iranians about what they need to do themselves to clean up their own act.

Q: This does run through some other countries. Greece has it, the Middle East,...

LAINGEN: The American factor in Greece is a very strong and powerful one. Not surprising given the Greek presence here. But the foreign presence virtually behind every tree in Tehran is a powerful influence.

Q: These huge foreign compounds at a certain point become a real detriment don't they because they are much more of a symbol than an ordinary embassy which is just a nice looking building.

LAINGEN: Detriment to whom?

Q: The power owning it.

LAINGEN: Well, I feel that way. I hope and pray that when we resume relations with Iran, which we will someday, that by that time our compound will have burned down and we will be forced to go to smaller quarters somewhere. When we bought that compound in Tehran in the forties and built a chancery building...which, by the way, we called "Henderson High" because it was red brick and architecturally unattractive, not unlike a suburban American high school...it was still part of the syndrome that a foreign diplomatic presence had to be big -- and we were big then in terms of numbers too. It's true that we did build it on the outskirts of the city at that time. This was at least a gesture towards some degree of awareness of Iranian sensitivities. But by the time of the revolution in 1979, of course, it had been absorbed into a much larger city and was smack in the middle of that larger city. It is a detriment, I think, in today's world, because it is a kind of red flag to politically sensitive Iranians.

Q: You had an assignment from 1954-55 for about four or five months in Meshed?

LAINGEN: Five months in Meshed.

Q: As a listening post. This is one of these terms that is used again and again. But you as a young officer going up there, how does one run a listening post? What do you do?

LAINGEN: Well, we didn't do much, frankly. We let the CIA presence do most of the listening. We were a very small post, but we had a CIA presence and that was its real function. I was there to preside over a very small consulate for a short period of time. We had, I think, five Americans at that post. It no longer exists. I was there periodically to report to Tehran, which then was rather distant. There was no airline. There was occasional air traffic in a DC-3. No railroad connection. There were no paved roads to Meshed. It was a two day drive, at least, to get there.

It was a distant outpost of American influence and presence in Iran as well as being a listening post. As consul, I was that "presence". We regarded that kind of presence in the outback as important in our larger political interests in Iran. So I reported also my impressions of that place to Tehran. About how we were seen and regarded there. We were well regarded, at least by the establishment. There was little indication on the part of the rank-and-file in that place that there was any political concern about the United States -- the people of that city being largely religious oriented...there is a major religious shrine there that preoccupied the Iranians. Much of that is still true today.

Looking back on it I think my presence was inconsequential. This was evident in the fact that at one point the lock of my safe...I had a large safe...jammed. We had a one-time pad in terms of reporting classified information and I couldn't get to it and report any intelligence even if I wanted to. It took about five weeks before I could get the damned safe open with the help of a security officer coming up from Tehran. I guess American interests still survived despite the fact that for five weeks there was no "listening" that I know of nor any reporting from Meshed.

Q: Were you picking up that the Soviets were mucking around there at all?

LAINGEN: I would assume they were. I never sensed that, however. We didn't see them. There was no Soviet diplomatic presence. The British were no longer there. They had a consulate general complex that was very splendid, but closed because of the consequence of the oil nationalization program and not reopened. The only consular presence were the Americans, the Afghans, the Indians and the Pakistanis. A very active consular social set. I am convinced that I picked up my hepatitis, which I suffered from there for some weeks, by eating things at the Afghan Consulate General on their national day which I probably should not have.

I traveled occasionally with my agency presence outside of Meshed, along the Soviet border, to observe -- he presumably doing his own observing with his own contacts among tribal elements in those areas. We did not have, that I know of, any of the intelligence listening capability that we had developed by 1979 when they were very important in terms of watching Soviet satellite capability from listening posts in that part of Iran. That didn't exist at that time.

It was listening in terms of recruiting agents...agents in terms of reporting capability, I suppose, in large part, and observing visually.

Q: Would you walk by the local religious shrines and see if the people were jumping up and down?

LAINGEN: We did, but they weren't jumping up and down politically at that time. It was a very quiet place during my time there. There certainly weren't any anti-Shah disturbances. This was in the short term aftermath of the Mossadegh overthrow and

nobody was going to put his neck on the line too far in terms of major disturbances against the regime. That is a very conservative corner of Iran anyway where liberal elements were not very strong. It is a major religious center. It is a very prosperous area of Iran and always has been because of its agricultural strength. That, I think, also left it a much less politically active corner than for example Isfahan and Shiraz and cities like that in the south.

Q: Which were also religious centers but...

LAINGEN: Much less so.

Q: On the religious side, did you have any contact with religious leaders?

LAINGEN: Oh, very little. I don't recall at the time at least in my contacts, observation and experience, that the clerical community was playing any serious role at all. They certainly were not a threat. There were the senior clerical leaders that the Shah was beginning to attempt to recruit, to win over, if you will. I don't recall ever meeting the senior religious figure in Meshed, except as I dealt with the civilian governor general who in Meshed is also the overseer of the shrine and in that sense a kind of religious leader himself. I saw a lot of him. Talked a lot with him. We had a very good social relationship. A very dignified individual. But I don't recall ever talking with a cleric directly. Islam was not seen in those days as a large political factor.

Q: You are a farm boy from Minnesota who probably hasn't had much exposure to Islam and you are put there. Were you given any sensitivity courses?

LAINGEN: No. I was not given any sensitivity training in terms of the role of Islam in Iran. I don't recall that any of us had that. I don't recall that we thought much about it. Most of us thought about it simply in the context of an appreciation that they were Muslims. We didn't think much about the distinction between Shiite Islam and Sunni Islam -- as that affects the way in which the clerics play a political role under Shia Islam. Frankly, about the only thought we had for Islam at the time was a respect for it. We knew that we could not go into the shrine in Meshed as non-Muslims, as Christians, because that would have been seen as intrusion of the worst kind. We respected that. We didn't think much about it politically. It was not seen and felt a political force.

We respected it not least because in Meshed at the time there had been an incident just before I got there where the daughter of the AID director...we had a large AID program in Iran which got even larger after the Mossadegh regime was overthrown...who had put on a veil, a chador, and gone into the shrine. Someone had discovered her and there was a great tumult over that although there was no physical hurt to that person. I'm afraid our thoughts about Islam were largely devoted to photography of their magnificent mosques.

Q: Did our policy towards Israel intrude at all?

LAINGEN: No, not that I recall. It certainly wasn't yet a big factor politically.

Q: Having served slightly later in Saudi Arabia where Islam was so all embracing. Everything was run by religious leaders, practically. Israel was such a factor and got thrown into your face again and again. But you were somewhat insulated from this?

LAINGEN: Yes. I don't recall that being a subject. Let me clarify that I was an economic officer and not that active in terms of political reporting or observation. I probably should have done more than I did. But I don't recall in talking with my colleagues in conversation in that Embassy that the Israeli factor was all that large. It became one over time. Today it most assuredly is. It may have been then in ways that I did not sense.
Q: One last question on this. What about corruption? As an economic officer working on things like cement, etc., was corruption a concern?

LAINGEN: Sure. We shrugged our shoulders and smiled. We assumed that was part of the Iranian psyche, a characteristic of the Iranian scene, how things were done. We didn't think much about it. It was there. Baksheesh and all that was rampant in the bazaar. It was a fact, we knew it was there. As I've said, I was assigned in my first days and weeks of my tour in Tehran to the office of the AID director, the one who ran the Point Four Program in Tehran at that time, as a flunkey -- mostly running errands before I went over to the Embassy and the economic section. I mention that because at that same time another relative flunkey in the office was a young Iranian called Zahedi, the son of the General who was running the place. Zahedi eventually became the last Iranian Ambassador to the Shah in this city. He and I worked together in that office. There was, I am sure, if one were to study the AID program in Iran which became increasingly large in the years that followed, you would find a lot of corruption. But I can't identify it or recall any specific instances of evidence of it at the time.

Q: Were there any events that happened while you were there?

LAINGEN: No. We travelled a lot in Iran to the cities of that country. It was a great time to get around that city. We enjoyed it. It was a great assignment. Not least because of an Ambassador whom we all respected. His Minister, Bill Rountree, was another senior diplomatic figure in our post-war diplomatic history. Exciting because of the politics of the time, the aftermath of the Mossadegh regime. The beginning of what became a very large and eventually disastrous American-Iranian relationship. It began in those years that I was there and culminated in the years when I served there a second time.

I came down with hepatitis, which regrettably, spoiled a lot of my time in Meshed. We had a reasonable amount of medical attention, happily, because of Presbyterian missionaries. I can't over state my own view how Presbyterian, Catholic...particularly Presbyterian in the northern segments of Iran...played such an important role in affecting Iranian views of the United States. And it is not only in that country; there are other countries, I think, that you can identify in that part of the world where that was a factor too. But it was very large in Iran because of the role those missionaries played in the

beginning of effective education, not least for women, and good medical facilities. I am still of the view regarding future Iran-American relations that that sentiment is not gone -- certainly not among older Iranians who still remember that good side of the United States. A powerful influence which I greatly respect and admire.

Q: In the Middle East so many missionaries did turn to education and medicine because conversion has been most ineffective.

LAINGEN: Even though they felt that by indulging in those fields that was one way to achieve conversion.

Q: Well, in a way it did in that it showed the good side and a residue of goodwill.

LAINGEN: Yes. I don't know how many the Presbyterians converted, but I suspect it would be less than fifty, and that is probably an exaggeration.

Q: You left Tehran in 1956 and came back to the State Department where you served for four years. What were you doing when you came back?

LAINGEN: I was assigned to the Greek Desk. Three relatively junior officers were assigned at that time to what was called GTI...Greece, Turkey and Iran. I was assigned to the Greek Desk. Another friend was assigned to the Turkish Desk and another to the Iranian Desk. Reflecting the arbitrary nature of assignments at that point, none of us had ever seen or worked in the countries to which we were assigned. I had never been to Greece. I overflew it once. I had no competence at all in Greece. I was the assistant Greek officer; assistant to an officer named Ben Wood, Charles Benedict Wood, who died this past fall. I was exceedingly fortunate to work with him because of his own competence, style and personality. He was a great guy.

I was assistant Greek Desk officer for two years and then after Wood left served as the Desk officer for Greece for the final two years of a four year stint in the Department at that time.

At that point Cyprus did not have a separate Desk. Cyprus was not that much of an issue. It did become one, however, in that time to the point where for the last two years I had an assistant who was the Cyprus Desk officer.

I was assigned back to Washington in 1955 and took the midcareer course for the last months of that year and began my Greek Desk tour in 1956. I was assigned back about the same time that the Minister of the Embassy in Tehran at the time, Bill Rountree, whom I referred to earlier, was assigned as the Assistant Secretary for NEA. At that point, NEA, as you recall, extended everywhere from East Pakistan to Cape Town. There was no separate African Bureau yet.

Q: And it included Greece, Turkey and Iran.

LAINGEN: Yes. I mention him, as I did earlier, because I respected him and appreciated serving under him. I have been fortunate in the Foreign Service to serve with some very capable people as my chiefs. I was fortunate in a personal sense at the time because Bill Rountree as Assistant Secretary said to me one day, "Why don't you come out and meet the girl next door?" So I went out for a dinner party and met the girl next door, whom I later married.

Q: That was Penne.

LAINGEN: Yes, Penne.

Q: In this period of 1956-60, what were our interests in Greece, as you saw them as Desk Officer?

LAINGEN: We had a large AID program. It was the aftermath of the difficult period involving the post-war Greek civil war. It was a time of growing American military presence and the evolving Cyprus problem. We were heavily preoccupied with the Cyprus issue during that time. My assistant for the last two years then became in effect the Cyprus Desk Officer, Archer Blood.

I like to joke that he and I resolved the Cyprus issue in 1960 in the Zurich Agreement. The Prime Ministers of Greece and Turkey went off to Zurich, Switzerland and resolved the Cyprus issue by setting up an independent Cyprus with agreement between the two states.

Then I left in 1960 to go to Pakistan and Arch Blood left to go to East Pakistan. We like to joke that as soon as we left the Desk in 1960, things began to fall apart. The Cyprus agreement that had been reached began to fray at the edges and fell apart in the sixties.

Q: During this period both Greece and Turkey were already in NATO. What sort of feeling did you have towards the role of Greece...I come at it from a different period in the next decade, 1970-74, and the Greeks were so occupied with hating the Turks in the Cyprus situation that their NATO role was mainly to make sure they got whatever the Turks got militarily. Did you find yourself having to sit down with the Turkish Desk Officer and compare notes to make sure that the balance was equitable?

LAINGEN: No, it was not a large factor. We didn't focus much on it.

Q: Also it was a period of profound Greek-American preoccupation with....

LAINGEN: I don't think there was any particular serious problem of any kind. There was always friction because of the Turkish and Cyprus issue. We saw a lot of Greek-Americans. The problem is that we don't have many Turkish-Americans in this country, but a lot of Greek-Americans. I don't think there are any Turks in Congress, but there are

Greeks. I came off that assignment with respect for the Turks as solid partners, but I had more enjoyment with the Greeks because they are fun.

Q: What about Makarios and Grivas and the search for independence and Enosis? Did this mean that you were having to consult with people handling British affairs? Was this a problem?

LAINGEN: Yes, it was a problem, but not a serious one. We and the British consulted a lot, saw each other a lot. But I, frankly, looking back on that tour on the Greek Desk, don't recall many major issues that confronted us at the time. It was a remarkably calm time -- other than the way the Cyprus problem grew and eventually led to the Zurich Agreement and was resolved. We nurtured that with them, but we were not large players in that agreement. They went off and did it themselves. I often point to that as an example of how sometimes when we step back from things these countries can do it better themselves. I put that in context in a later time in Indian-Pakistani relations when they went off after the tragedy of 1971 and came up with a similar agreement which they worked out themselves.

I have never served in Greece. I traveled in Greece as Desk Officer a couple of times and came to know then a gentleman again whom I look back on with great respect and interest named Philip W. Ireland, who died just a couple of weeks ago. He served as Consul General in Thessaloniki, Salonika, at the time I was on the Desk. He was a very strong presence, as he always was, to the point that we sometimes referred to that sector of Greece as Northern Ireland.

By the way I recall seeing a great deal of another American private presence that has been such a positive factor in relationship with that country, and that is the American farm school in Salonika. It was run then by the Landales, founded by a gentleman named House. It is still there today. I think it is a presence that has done as much for us in terms of long term respect for the United States as anything we have ever done in Greece.

Q: Same way with the American University of Beirut, Cairo and Istanbul.

LAINGEN: That is right. All over the place. Beirut particularly, of course. I recall that in one of the first speeches that Terry Sutherland made recently after coming back as a Beirut hostage, he said that the best way to punish these bastards who held him hostage was not to seek them out and kill them, but to rebuild the American University of Beirut. And I agree with that.

I saw something of Cyprus at the time...visiting and meeting with Makarios and coming away with enormous respect for the personal stature, power of that individual. Not someone who one could penetrate or influence very easily.

Q: I heard somebody say that a Secretary of State told you that the problem with Makarios was that Cyprus was just too small for him.

LAINGEN: Oh, exactly. That is a very good point. We had an American business interest in Cyprus that preoccupied our time then occasionally. That was a copper mining complex in the western part of Cyprus. We would spend a lot of time about supporting its interests, particularly as we began to worry more and more about the Turkish/Greek divide in Cyprus.

Q: One of the things that is often thrown at any capitalist country, particularly the United States, is that American industry overseas dominates us. We are out there just for further trade or the exploitation. You have a copper interest on Cyprus. Cyprus is going through a difficult period and you say you spent a lot of time on it. What would you do?

LAINGEN: There is a limit to what you can do, obviously. That interest has to function under the laws and practices of that sovereign country. But what we did and what you can do is to meet with these interests. The Desk Officer has to have an open door in my view in Washington for American business interests who want to come in. They are not all convinced that there is that much help they can get from a Desk. I think on the whole we see less of American business interests than we should. I think that certainly has been true historically over time as far as American diplomacy overseas. I think that is changing. An American embassy is expected to be a lot more active in terms of supporting American business overseas than it was before, unless you get into a real crunch as we did in Tehran in terms of American oil interests.

But we met with these company people when they came to town and counseled with them about our appreciation and awareness of the way British policy was affecting Cyprus at the time and the way in which the place was either going to pull itself together or wasn't. Of course it did in the large sense in that Zurich Agreement.

Q: Our role in the Zurich Agreement was....

LAINGEN: Bystanders. We didn't have a role in it. They went off and did it themselves. There was a lot of saying, "For God's sake you have to resolve this problem." And we have been saying that to the Greeks and the Turks ever since, with less success, now. It was Karamanlis for the Greeks and who was the Turk? It has slipped my mind.
Q: You were in the GTI in NEA, which in those days covered Africa. You represented one corner and Africa represented the other corner but things were pretty well focused on what we would call today the Middle East...we were just coming out of the Suez Canal situation. Did you feel that you were kind of on your own?

LAINGEN: Oh sure. We were a side play. And Africa was too. Who thought much about Africa in those days? Looking back on it I can't imagine how an assistant secretary could conceivably have coped with the bureau that large, except that there weren't that many crises in Africa in those days, I guess.

Q: Just one thing and we might call it quits. What does a Desk Officer in those days do? It sounds very impressive. You have Greece and you are the Greek Desk Officer. You never served there before and all of a sudden you have the cradle of civilization. What do you do with it?

LAINGEN: At that time for a junior officer, a Desk Officer assignment was a great one. I still think it is a great one.

Q: It is called a Country Director now.

LAINGEN: A Country Director usually extends to more than one country. That is another story. The Country Director position never evolved exactly the way it was supposed to and we had hoped it would in the early seventies. We then got into this regrettable trend of more and more Deputy Assistant Secretaries. The power that the Country Director was supposed to have was diminished because of this other strata, layer, up there that regrettably is still there in such numbers. A country desk, however, in many respects I suppose even today, still is the core, the repository of whatever intelligence and knowledge we have about a given country. It is assumed, at least, that that is where the expertise is -- where people who think most about both big and particularly small issues are. That is why the person assigned there, I think, should not be someone who never served there but someone who has served there and knows the language to some degree. It is the place where...and again it depends on the country...the Desk Officer for Togo, for example, I suppose is a country that is not going to loom very large ever in American interests. But he can be consequential because he is the only one who ever thinks about Togo. On the French Desk there are a number of officers and the real expertise is divided among them. But it is an important position. Certainly an important training position, I think. In terms of the evolution of a senior officer, in political terms at least, he ought to have a desk officer assignment. I was happy to have had one at that point.

I was also very fortunate, I think, as an officer in the Foreign Service, to have had a lot of in and out assignments. I didn't stay long in the field, ever. The only extended period were the two assignments in Germany and Iran to begin with, marking a total of 4 years. Otherwise my assignments have always been in and out giving me the satisfaction of developing family connections, preserving them back here and strengthening my roots in terms of understanding my own country, which I think sometimes can be weakened if you don't have frequent assignments back in Washington. Of course, by law today the Foreign Service is expected to be on that kind of rotation. It didn't used to be.

Q: You got Greece. It is a complicated country. The politics is complicated, the people are complicated. How do you develop expertise? Did you read your way in?

LAINGEN: Never studied Greek. Certainly didn't do all of that.

Q: Did you have files that you could read? Did people talk to you?

LAINGEN: Yes, there were files I could read. Looking back on it I guess I read a lot of them in the first year or so I was assigned there. I was fortunate to have a Desk Officer supervisor...I was the assistant to a Desk Officer named Ben Wood who knew and felt, and I think understood the Greek psyche very well, having both travelled and served there. I learned a great deal from him. I had very good relations with the Greek Embassy as a Desk Officer surely should have. That's the slot with respect to a country in the Department in Washington that must work the hardest to insure that the relationship between the Department of State and that embassy in this city is good. That is his job, more than anybody else -- to make sure that he has contacts there and that there is good relationship in terms of access for that ambassador to senior levels in the Department of State. Not to the point of becoming a victim of clientitis, but being mindful of the fact that that embassy, depending on the country, can be a very important player in how you carry out your job.

Sometimes they can be supporting actors in the process, and usually are. And big players, sometimes, depending on the country. Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, for example, was a powerful player in Washington.

Anyway, I saw a good deal of the Greek Embassy at the time. The Greeks are not only political animals, but they are social animals and like to talk and party. There was a great deal of contact that I had at that time. I still look back on that experience as probably the best in terms of relationships with foreign diplomats from another country that I have ever had in this town. Because of what they are and the intensity then of the growing American-Greek relationship, a good relationship at the time. We hadn't gotten into the Colonels period, we were in an upswing in the Cyprus period, if you will. It was a good time.

I did my best to read, as a Desk Officer has to do, I think, about Greece, including, not least, classical Greece. I remember that Edith Hamilton was still alive at that time, approaching her nineties.

Q: "The Greek Way."

LAINGEN: Yes. I called on her in her apartment here on Massachusetts Avenue. She was a big figure in terms of how we talked about Greece at that time. We had a very active Greek Ambassador at the time. George Melas. He liked to throw his weight around town both socially and politically. The Greeks can in this town, of course, because there are so many Greeks in positions of consequence. Not only in the Greek Orthodox Church, but also in terms of American business interests and in the Congress. Anyway, Melas was a great guy. I got married during my stint on the Greek desk and there was a gift from the Greek Ambassador which I still value very much.

Q: Today is April 7, 1992. This is continuing set of interviews with Ambassador Bruce Laingen. Bruce, we are now at Karachi. You were assigned there from 1960-64. What was your assignment?

LAINGEN: I was a political officer. I guess I was the number two political officer, deputy to David Linebaugh.

Q: What was the situation? Obviously it was a changing one in Pakistan at the time, but when you arrived what was the situation?

LAINGEN: When I arrived there was no crisis. There was no Pakistani-Indian war as there was occasionally. That didn't happen until 1965, the year after I left. Karachi was still the capital although there was talk of beginning to move it north under Ayub Khan. Ayub was the President. He had his basic democracy movement underway, which was an attempt on the part of that Pakistani leader in the never ending effort on the part of Pakistanis to try to put some kind of democratic processes of government in place. So unsuccessful by contrast to India. In the aftermath of partition, India, I think all of us would agree, has set a rather enviable record in the developing world for reasonably effective processes of participatory government with elections that work. Pakistan, in 1960 when I arrived, had not achieved that objective or process, and frankly hasn't achieved it since. But we had a president in place, Ayub Khan, who had been a general, as so often is the case. He had put his approach to democracy in place which he called basic democracy. It didn't work very effectively.

I always remember the arrival in Karachi...the Pan American round the world flights landed in Karachi and Delhi in the middle of the night. We landed that night not at the civilian airport but the military airport for some reason. I will always remember the drive into that city having never observed that degree of mass humanity, miserable humanity, as I did then. Seeing sleeping bodies on every street corner and driving into town through slums, particularly around one section that we remember as "breathless corner" because the smell was so offensive. It was difficult arriving in the middle of a hot night and beginning a tour of four years in a city that I found then and still find today in the subcontinent singularly unattractive. It has no character. It was a city then teeming with refugees, and is still teeming, from partition and this was 13 years after partition. Masses of people living in squalor and poverty.

But it was also a city and assignment that was interesting despite the singular unattractiveness of the city itself. There was nothing appealing about Karachi for an American family in terms of family relationships except the beach on the Arabian Sea. We would go there a lot. But professionally it was an interesting tour because Pakistan in those days was deep into its problems with India. My particular assignment was mainly to report on Pakistan-Indian relations.

Q: Did you ever bat around with your colleagues why India seemed, with this multi-cultural society, to be able to develop a type of democracy and Pakistan which was less multi-cultural didn't seem to be able to cut the mustard?

LAINGEN: I don't have a good answer to that. I am not sure there is a good answer to that. Part of it, I suppose, lies in the heavy military tradition of that section of the subcontinent. The Pushtuns and other ethnic tribal groups had under the British been very strong in military tradition, with and for the British. Perhaps it was less so in India. That was one contributing reason. I suppose another has to be the fact of leadership. The Nehrus had a different approach generally speaking to government and rule than these Pakistanis who tended to be, except for the first couple of years under inadequate civilian leadership, more inclined to the military approach...authoritarian, hard-handed, forceful leadership at the center.

Perhaps also the fact that Pakistan then, and still is, rather fractious in its composition. Tribal groups up against the Afghan border, Baluchis in Baluchistan, Pushtuns, and Sindhis down in the south. But then you can say the same thing about India.

Q: How did you go about your work? How does somebody in a fascinating and important situation go to work? We are talking about the 1960s.

LAINGEN: Well, this was my first assignment as a political reporting officer. I don't know if I was more effective than anybody else. I don't know if we were all that effective. We went about our business making contacts with as many people as we could. We had a problem in one sense of a divided country. Pakistan then was still made up of West Pakistan and East Pakistan. We had a Consulate General in Dacca, but you still needed, if you were going to have any kind of effective reporting to get over to East Pakistan once in a while. I had a very effective leadership in a couple of very good Ambassadors...Bill Rountree and later Walter McConaughy...who were experienced leaders and kept good tabs on the rest of us. I did not speak Urdu. In fact looking back on it we had very limited capacity in that language. Fortunately at that time, and still today, English is a very common language particularly in the upper levels of Pakistan.

We lived in a suburb of Karachi called the Public Employees Cooperative Housing Society...PECHS. We did a good deal of entertaining. Representation was still looked on then, down through the ranks, as something terribly important. We put a heavy burden on our wives and family in that process. Knowing where I have been and knowing where the Foreign Service has been and looking back on it, if I were to begin that tour over again today, I would do a lot less of routine representation and regret all that burden on my family because I think the product of that effort was rather limited.

We had good contacts in the Foreign Ministry. There was no problem of access. We had contacts with all levels of society despite some sensitivity on the part of the regime...Karachi was still the capital of the country and without a very actively functioning democracy, despite the claim to basic democracy on the part of Ayub Khan, and despite their sensitivity at times about contacts with the opposition.

We had at that time also an active diplomatic corps. There was a large Indian Embassy in Karachi. A good segment of our work was contacts with other representatives of the

diplomatic corps, particularly with the Indians, to get their point of view there in Karachi of their problems with Pakistan.

Q: Could you discuss how we viewed from the Embassy at that time the ongoing Indo-Pak problem?

LAINGEN: You are right in calling it ongoing. It had been ongoing at that point ever since partition, 13 plus years earlier, and it was certainly in full speed at that point building the tensions that would eventually lead to war in 1965 between the Pakistanis and the Indians. As an embassy there and in Delhi, I think we were guilty of clientitis. I think both embassies too often got supportive of one's own embassy and critical of our opposite number. We didn't have enough interchange between the two embassies despite efforts on occasion to have exchange visits. Groups would come up from Delhi and we would go down to Delhi. We didn't have enough of that. Tensions weren't always at a high pitch. They didn't really develop into the kind of situation that contributed to war until the time I was leaving.

Those years were also marked by two major events involving the Kennedy administration. The first, the visit of Jackie Kennedy, and the second, of course, the assassination of President Kennedy. The first involving the visit of Jackie Kennedy saw her come in dimensions that made it essentially a state visit, both to India and to Pakistan. She came, of course, in good part because of the personal relationships between Ambassador Galbraith in Delhi and the Kennedy family. There was a sensitivity on the part of the Pakistanis at that point, again in the context of their larger problems with India, that she was going to go only to Delhi. The Pakistanis raised a good deal of concern about that and eventually a Pakistan segment was added to the visit. I think the Pakistanis always felt then and thereafter that they were just a tag on in the Kennedy administration. There was a good deal of concern among Pakistanis that would surface once in a while over the Galbraith relationship with the Kennedys. They felt Galbraith being in Delhi would work to their disadvantage.

Q: For the record, John Kenneth Galbraith was a Harvard professor, an economist of tremendous note, with an ego of tremendous note, too.

LAINGEN: And a personal friend of President Kennedy.

Q: Here you had Galbraith who had made a name for himself as seeing India as his particular playground. Were you almost geared up to rebut his telegrams, etc.?

LAINGEN: Yes, there was too much of that. Looking back on it I remember there was that sort of feeling in our minds, that he had this, they had this...a larger country, of course, and Pakistan has always had that problem in dealing with the impact of the subcontinent in Washington. Delhi was the big player, yet there was the other side of the coin that Washington also saw Pakistan more as a military ally, strategic ally, and that played in our favor. That was a concern that Galbraith and others had in Delhi.

Some of this changed to some degree in 1962 with the Chinese invasion of segments of Kashmir and Ladakh. But that too raised more concern on the part of the Pakistanis, particularly the military types, when that for a time added a kind of military component to the relationship between Washington and Delhi.

Q: We sent in some fighters and gave them airlifts, etc.

LAINGEN: Yes. The Pakistanis were nervous about that. We watched Delhi's reporting very closely. There were times, frankly, when we wondered if we were seeing all of their reporting. But I think the people in Delhi also had the same sentiment. It was regrettable. It developed a kind of competition between the two embassies for impact and favor, if you will.

Q: I suspect that remains to some extent.
LAINGEN: It is probably inevitable. Particularly at a time of shifting strategic relationships, as we are experiencing now in the aftermath of the Cold War.

But to go back to the Jackie Kennedy visit, it did have the dimensions of a state visit with political implications. Galbraith, of course, did everything he could to make a success of that visit. Since the Pakistan segment of it followed the Indian one, the Pakistanis were determined to outdo the Indians, both in the enthusiasm they could arose for her, and the splendor that accompanied the visit.

It was a splendid visit in Pakistan, as I am sure it was in Delhi. All kinds of trappings. I was the escort officer for Jackie Kennedy in her travel throughout the country. I was not the control officer, that was Linebaugh, the political counselor, but I was the designated escort officer, so I travelled with her and saw directly how much the Pakistanis worked that visit to build favor in Washington.

Ayub Khan was the President. He had the command of the military at his fingertips and he used it to great advantage. I forget now whether the Ayub visit to Washington followed or preceded that. There was during the time I was there the visit of President Ayub to Washington when there was the celebrated first time effort on the part of a President to use Mount Vernon as the locale for a very splendid state dinner...the lawns of Mount Vernon. Ayub Khan was transported up and down the Potomac by boat with Kennedy.

During the time I was there President Kennedy was assassinated. I, like everybody else at that time, will always remember where one was at that particular time. I will never forget the sentiments, the concerned feelings we had when that momentous news arrived, particularly the way that Ambassador McConaughy at the time immediately called the Embassy officers together in the conference room for a moment of silence. It was a very heavy burden that we all felt had happened.

Then we were strengthened by the tremendous outpouring of sympathy and empathy on the part of the Pakistanis from the ground up.

Q: I was in Yugoslavia, a communist country, and again it was overwhelming. It was a world event.

LAINGEN: Genuine sympathetic outpouring and regret and concern. I think it was special for the Pakistanis, and for the Indians too, I am sure because Jackie had been there just the year before.

Q: In your reporting were you able to get to military officers to talk to them?

LAINGEN: Oh, sure. We had good contact, especially with the military. We probably saw too much of them, because it was in a sense a military regime under Ayub despite his pretenses of democracy. There was plenty of contact with them. The military attachés had even deeper and stronger contacts. It was a very close military relationship at that time. CENTO was still in existence.

I don't recall a presidential visit but I certainly remember Vice President Johnson's visit.

Q: How did that go?

LAINGEN: Oh, it went over in the usual Johnson fashion, with a good deal of people-to-people contact on his part. Lady Bird was along. I was the escort to Lady Bird at that point. I seemed to be escort for the wives at that time. I came to appreciate what a magnificent lady Lady Bird Johnson is. I also came to appreciate watching Lyndon Johnson. What a towering ego that man had. How he expected all to pay due respect to that ego as he proceeded through that visit.

I will never forget the arrival of Lyndon Johnson at the Karachi airport. Any such official visitor of that stature always produces cars and confusion and a great deal of hustle and bustle, but this one was Lyndon Johnson at his best, or his worst, if you will. The trip from the airport into Karachi, which was a rather long one, must have been very similar to the retreat from Bull Run. The confusion and chaos of that motorcade...Lyndon Johnson stopping, ordering his motorcade to a halt and everyone then competing for place in that line...the diplomats, the chiefs of mission, ordered out to the airport to be a part of all this. So not having that much patience with all this stopping, some of them tried to get ahead of the motorcade by going around it.

But it was on one of his stops of that motorcade that Lyndon Johnson found the camel driver, whose name slips my mind at the moment.

Q: He became a very famous camel driver.

LAINGEN: He was a camel driver and Lyndon Johnson asked him the name of his camel. This guy said, "Camel, of course, Sahib." And that was the end of that effort to establish the name of the beast. But it was at that point that Lyndon Johnson said to this character, "Come and visit me in Washington." And, of course, he eventually did. The camel driver became celebrated in Washington because of the sort of grass roots eloquence of this fellow, apparently in his contacts with the Vice President and President here, and with the press. It came through as sensible eloquence. And a dispute continued for years thereafter as to whether these were actually his words or was it a very clever interpreter adding substance and color to words that were not all that eloquent.

Q: What about the opposition? Was Bhutto a figure at that point and part of the public opposition?

LAINGEN: Yes. Bhutto was a figure and beginning to give us trouble. He didn't really become as large a player then as he would be in the years that followed. He was very young, energetic. I didn't see him. I never had any contact with him. The Ambassador did and I think the political counselor on occasion saw him. We had good contacts with the opposition despite some degree of sensitivity that seems always there in a quasi-military regime about such contacts. Part of that involved getting over to Dacca in East Pakistan and seeing people like Suhrawardy who was a major player in East Pakistan. I got over there on a couple of occasions.

In those days I recall you didn't fly direct from Karachi to Dacca, which would have been an overflight of India; you had to go all the way down around the tip of India, past Colombo and then up again, because of the sensitivity of the Indians involving Pakistani overflight of their country. So we travelled by Pakistani Airlines but by a circuitous route.

Once Secretary Rusk came on a trip and because of the nature of his visit and with the military aircraft we were able to fly directly.

The Embassy was then in Karachi, but the issue that affected us certainly in a logistic sense was the fact that it moved eventually to Rawalpindi as a temporary capital on its way to the capital being built in Islamabad. The American government and the Indian government and the Vatican did not have sufficient foresight to appreciate that was going to happen, so each of those three countries built a magnificent new embassy in Karachi while I was there. When I first got there we were in temporary quarters, which was very difficult. Eventually we built this new chancery, which President Ayub helped dedicate.

But by the time it was finished, President Ayub already had made the decision to move the capital to the north, so that chancery became one of the largest consulates general in the Foreign Service at that time.

Since the move to the north took place in 1963, we set up a branch embassy, if you will, in Rawalpindi, actually with the residence in the Hill Station in Murree as the process of building in Islamabad took place. That was part of the excitement of the personnel in the

community at that time, watching that process take place. We had great pride in that new chancery, because it really is quite an attractive and handsome place.

Q: That was at the height of our building embassies abroad to display all the best of American architecture and building techniques.

LAINGEN: And the best encompassing openness, glass.

Q: This was before we turned into fortresses with reason.

LAINGEN: Exactly.

Q: How would you describe both William Rountree and Walter McConaughy as ambassadors...their style, outlook on the situation, etc.?

LAINGEN: Well, they were two different personalities, but I guess I would have to conclude that they essentially ran the Embassy in an essentially similar pattern. They were firm, strong leaders. I think each of them probably looking back gave about the same degree of freedom of movement to their officers, staff in their contacts. I think McConaughy, because he came later in the time I was there and during the time that some of the political problems surrounding Ayub and his stature in the country were greater, so I think McConaughy was a little more nervous about contacts with the opposition than Rountree was. Rountree was a kind of family friend for me and my family because it was through Rountree that I had met my wife, having come back from an assignment in Tehran at about the same time that he did. He became Assistant Secretary and I became Desk Officer for Greece. He invited me over to meet the girl next door and she eventually became my wife. I don't say this to suggest that I had a special pull or influence with Rountree. Perhaps it was there. I think there was a little sensitivity on the part of my colleagues that I had some kind of special relationship, but I did not feel that and I don't think Rountree used it or allowed me to use it in any special way.

They were both essentially strong careerists who led their Embassies in similar fashion. I don't recall any special difference in the way they led that Embassy.

Q: Did you have the feeling as a political reporter that CIA or the military intelligence side was weighing in too heavily? This would seem like a place that they might.

LAINGEN: No. I don't recall looking back on it that I had any particular concern on that. Perhaps the political counselor, my chief, did in ways that I didn't sense or appreciate. But I recall having a very good relationship with the people down the end of the hall. The military attachés were very active, of course, because the regime was still essentially a military one, military traditions being as strong as they were and always have been in Pakistan. We had an alliance relationship with Pakistan with ups and downs, but on the whole the relationship was very close.

Just a word on reporting. In those days we still did airgrams. Some of our most eloquent reporting, possibly little read, was done by despatches. It was also the time that the WEEKA was developed. It was a weekly report to Washington done by airgram. For a good deal of that time I had responsibility for collecting and editing that weekly report to Washington.

Q: I might mention for the record that the airgram was designed to save on transmitting expenses and was designed to look like a telegram but was actually sent by pouch. The idea being that back in Washington nobody ever looked at anything that wasn't a telegram because it wasn't urgent, so this was an interim measure. Later on everything was sent by cable.

What about the Soviet threat there?

LAINGEN: Looking back on it, I don't have any particular feel for that. It was there. This was during Khrushchev's time. Our focus was so much on the India-Pakistan relationship. At the same time there was the alliance relationship we had with the Pakistanis essentially because of the Soviet threat. But, it was not my particular focus of reporting and I don't recall any particular incident or aspect at that time that looms all that large today in my memory. It was just a given.

Q: What about Afghanistan? Was there any concern of the great game being played by the Soviets in Afghanistan?

LAINGEN: It was being played up there, but I didn't get directly involved in it until a later assignment in Kabul. Again, looking back on it I recall Afghanistan figuring largely not in the context of the great game eventually between us and the Soviets, but rather in Afghanistan's difficulties with Pakistan over Pushtunistan. That is an essentially unresolved, still today, border issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan which we generally refer to as Pushtunistan because it is that area of the Pushtun tribes on both sides of the border.

The British in their time resolved this by something called the Durand Line, which became the international border but it was not always fully accepted by either side, certainly not by the Afghans, certainly not by the Pushtuns up in Kabul. That controversy, a very old and historic one, was very much alive at that time. Very much a subject of reporting from the Kabul Embassy.

Looking back on it, it occupied much too much of the time of those reporting on it from Kabul, but I guess it loomed very large up there.

There were border incidents all the time, small ones, but they did not involve any serious conflict.

Q: As a political officer and you were reporting on Indo-Pakistan conflict, how did you feel when you were doing this? Was there any role that the United States was going to play in any of this, or was this just keeping everybody informed?

LAINGEN: Well, we tried to play a large role, of course; the Kashmir issue was at the heart of India-Pakistan relationships, as it is so forcibly today. For the first time, I think, since partition, today in 1992, American tourists and other tourists are not going up into Kashmir because of armed conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir. Then we were very much involved in that controversy; constantly looking for ways to try to contribute to a resolution of it. Both then and during my tour back in Washington during the three years that followed my assignment to Karachi the Kashmir issue was a front burner issue. Today, looking back on it and considering it, I have to conclude that it must be, probably will be, one of those forever unresolvable issues on the international scene. It has been active since the conflict there in 1948 that saw UN observers put in place who are still there today almost fifty years later. A plebiscite was directed by the United Nations at that time; the Indians refused to implement it and that still is a demand on the part of the Pakistanis.

I recall then and the three years that followed on the Desk in Washington, how much we involved ourselves in that issue, to the point of getting out and having maps all over the place; even drawing lines as to how to divide Kashmir. One of the big ideas at that time was that the only way to resolve it was to partition it with the line going right through the capital of Sirinagae. Looking back on it I am reminded how futile all of that was. How difficult it is sometimes for any outside power to go in and make any reasonable kind of contribution in situations that amount to civil war with all the emotions that go with such crises.

Q: Why were we doing this?

LAINGEN: Because Kashmir was the core of the problem between the Pakistanis and the Indians. That concern in our view was turning the Pakistanis, in particular, away from the larger issues we saw, and that was the Soviet threat up there to the north.

Q: Did you feel that the Pakistanis and the Indians were in a way toying with us or encouraging us to get involved, or were they accepting the fact that we would weigh in with something?

LAINGEN: Well, the Pakistanis expected us to be involved. As they saw it they were the weaker power and given our special relationship with the Pakistanis they felt that we should be in there putting pressure on the Indians to resolve it, of course to the favor of the Pakistanis. We were under constant reminders from the Pakistanis that we weren't doing enough to resolve that problem.

Q: You left there in 1964, is that right?

LAINGEN: I left in 1964 when things were beginning to hot up considerably between the two countries. It didn't break into war until some time in 1965. I went back to Washington to become Office Director for Pakistan and Afghanistan Affairs...called PAF.

Q: Was there a reason for this division? Was it that they couldn't have one person wearing the India and Pakistan hat because of the conflicts between the embassies? I would have thought there would have been an Indo-Pak Desk.

LAINGEN: So far as I know that never has been because of the sensitivity between the two countries. It was then and still is rather a big issue. Today, of course, it has evolved to the point where Mr. Solarz and others in Congress feel it should be a separate bureau and it is about to become one. I forget who was my counterpart on the India side at that point. We were separate and distinct. But there was an Office of South Asian Affairs that supervised both offices. It was headed during most of the time I was there by Turner Cameron and his deputy, Carol Laise. Their job in part was to try at times to mediate between the two desks.

Q: You did have this war in 1965, about a year after you got there, and you were representing Pakistan. Just to give a feel to somebody who is not aware of how the State Department works, what happens to a desk officer when their country is at war with somebody else?

LAINGEN: I suppose, it should, and I think it probably does bring out the best in us. Fighting brings out some appreciation between and among us that our real interest here is the American interest and not our particular clientitis toward one of the two countries. I think you come up against an appreciation that, damn it, both sides are wrong, carrying their dispute to actual conflict. Having said that, I think there still is a natural tendency on the part of a desk to be more understanding and more assertive in trying to convey to your superiors why the Pakistanis, in my case, behaved the way they did. Sometimes that is seen, I guess, as clientitis to an excessive degree. I don't know that I was guilty of it or my counterpart was guilty of it; I just think it was there. It was a relatively short war. At this point I don't remember much of the details.

Q: What brought it about?

LAINGEN: Border clashes, aggravated, as always, by Kashmir. The clashes were along the main border, not primarily at that time up in Kashmir...mostly along the border in Sindh in Pakistan. I honestly don't remember who mediated, who brought that conflict to an end. I have a mental block right there. I will have to look at my record of the time.

Q: As this thing was moving up towards a war, were we trying to do anything? Did this happen suddenly or were you able to see it building up and try to do something?

LAINGEN: Yes, we tried to do something, but there is a limit to the capacity of any country, whatever the closeness of our relationship to prevent their doing what we saw

was stupid to carry this thing to conflict. The armies were then in large numbers up against each other on the border, and they still are regrettably excessively so. They are their own worst enemies, the two of them, and they have carried it to war two or three times.

That period in Washington for me on the Desk, doesn't loom very large in my mind, despite that war. It ended but it wasn't resolved. There was a cease fire which eventually became permanent. But it was simply a prelude to a much large war that was to begin in 1971.

Q: That was the one over Bangladesh.

LAINGEN: The creation of East Pakistan.

Q: When Galbraith left he was replaced by Chester Bowles, who was another big gun in the Democratic establishment. Did you feel that he was sort of overpowering the issue from your vantage point?

LAINGEN: I don't know if I would use the word overpowering with respect to Chester Bowles. That term doesn't fit. He was not as big a man physically as Galbraith. He was a more sensitive man. In that respect I think there was the concern of those of us working on the Pakistan side that he was even closer to the Indians and closer to having some impact in Washington than even Galbraith had. Both of them were political appointees. Pakistan had career ambassadors. That was not lost on the Pakistani leadership, that the White House was sending political appointees to Delhi and career types to Pakistan. Nor was it lost on us and we worked on it. It was in our mind somewhere all of the time that the Indians had a somewhat stronger voice in Washington.

Q: Of course, when you are talking about political appointees you are talking about high caliber as far as their impact and all. There are political appointees and political appointees. These were very top drawer political appointees who were very close to the President rather than someone who was getting a pay off for party support.

LAINGEN: That's right. There are different varieties of political appointees, with different impacts in the process. India has had some big names.

Q: You left the Desk and had a little hiatus in the War College from 1967-68.

LAINGEN: I feel very strongly about senior training for the Foreign Service and I have a special feel for the War College, I guess because of the time I spent there. But I think the Senior Seminar is better in some respects because of the emphasis it places on the domestic scene.

Q: I had a magnificent year myself in Senior Seminar.

LAINGEN: I was critical of our curriculum at the War College...not publicly critical, but I sensed when I was at the War College for that year that the focus was excessively on our relationships abroad and the strategic situation abroad and not enough on problems at home. I was never reminded of that so forcibly and visibly as I was the night that I returned to Washington in the Spring of 1968 from the traditional overseas trip that War College students take...in my case to the Far East. I returned to Washington late in the evening on a Spring night in 1968, the night after Martin Luther King was assassinated. I saw Washington burning as we returned home. I was forcibly reminded of how much the domestic scene impacts on our capacity to project our power and influence and stature abroad. I will always remember that scene as we arrived back in Washington.

Q: I remember going up Wisconsin Avenue to the white suburbs, which essentially it was, and seeing members of the 22nd Airborne in flak jackets patrolling the streets. This was an incredible sight.

LAINGEN: I always remember the War College with favor, as I did when I was back as vice president, because I think particularly during the years of the Cold War the more opportunity that Foreign Service Officers had to know their military counterparts the better. They loomed large and the need to understand how the military think and work was critical. Just as it is important for them to know the Foreign Service. I think political officers in the Cold War period were always deficient in a pol/mil sense. A War College assignment strengthens that weakness, if you will.

Also, it is always reassuring, I think, as a student at the War College to see in the top notch of the military how capable they are. The selection process for the War College is very good, producing the very best of the military as students.

Q: How did you find the Foreign Service Officer was viewed by the military? At this time the Vietnam war was really cranking up as far as American participation was concerned.

LAINGEN: Basically with respect and appreciation. I think the military always leaves the War College at the
end of a year there with a new and favorable appreciation for their diplomatic colleagues. I think that is mutual on both sides. Looking back on that particular time when the Vietnam war was going, it was the State Department representatives who were generally the hawks, and the military tended to be more the doves. It was the bombing pause period in 1968. I was not a hawk; I was always quite concerned with the trends in Vietnam and always grateful throughout that period that I was not a French speaking officer so that reduced the chances of my being assigned to Vietnam. I would not have wanted to be assigned to that issue.

Brent Scowcroft was a classmate at that time.

Q: He was later and is today National Security Advisor.

LAINGEN: That is correct. It is a remarkable opportunity for both the military and the civilian students because during the years that follow when you go on with your professional careers you run into these people and usually they are in significant places of influence that greatly strengthen your capacity to carry out your own work. In my case, Brent Scowcroft; we know where he went. Another became Commandant of the Marines; one became Chief of Naval Personnel; one became head of NSA. These were very useful contacts later for both sides, I think, in bureaucratic Washington. I am very high on the War College, prejudiced as I am because of an assignment there. But I think it is a very good opportunity for both sides to know each other a little better.

When I go back to the Senior Seminar, where you include the military, the focus is so much more on the domestic scene. It is a big advantage for the Foreign Service. We don't know our own country well enough.

Q: I know I spent a year doing that and you got a feel for the pulse of city government, for example.
LAINGEN: I envy you, I never got that assignment. Some people get both, but that is rare.

Q: Well, then off you went...you couldn't get yourself off the subcontinent...to Kabul for 1968-71. How did that assignment come about and what did you do?

LAINGEN: Looking back on it, it was the most rewarding Foreign Service assignment I ever had. It was a Deputy Chief of Mission slot and that always, I think, is one of the better Foreign Service assignments. Not better than being the chief of mission, but a training ground for becoming a chief of mission. In many posts you have opportunities of being chargé, not unlike being chief of mission.

I was there, again under a political Ambassador, Robert Neumann, an active Republican who in time, and I think today, regards himself as a kind of professional Foreign Service Officer.

Q: He served in at least three different countries.

LAINGEN: Later on he became Ambassador to Morocco after a long stint in Kabul where he wore out three DCMs and then he was in Saudi Arabia briefly. I have a high regard for Ambassador Neumann. His leadership was very effective in Kabul at that time. The regime in power was still a monarchy, King Zahir. The problems that confront Afghanistan today were there then, but very much in the background and the king was safely in command.

I remember that leadership of Neumann also not least because Mrs. Neumann was for us a classic, latter day example of the Foreign Service senior wife who played the role strongly and expected the rest of the staff and wives to support that role. Not as a dragon. I would not call her one of the dragons of the Foreign Service. Not at all. She is too much

a human being, too warm and personable to be called that. But certainly someone as the senior wife who expected and assumed that the rest of the wives would play their part in projecting American values, influence and presence in that country.

My wife sometimes chafed under her, as the second wife, and looking back on it I suppose she would have rather played some different role, but I better let her speak to that. But it was a given under Neumann that the wives would play these roles.

Q: What was Ambassador Neumann's background and how did he operate?

LAINGEN: Well, he came out of academia primarily, the University of Southern California at Berkeley. He has an academic streak to him, therefore, in the sense that he tends to examine all issues in great depth to develop as much perspective and understanding as possible. He came from a political background too, but not an active political role. I think, if anything, Mrs. Neumann was a little more of that than he at that time. He ran a tight ship in the sense that he was clearly in command and personally involved in most issues and expected to be fully informed. He ran, I thought, a very effective country team operation.

And incidentally, he introduced there what I think is a useful device and which I used in Malta when I was ambassador there, and that is the idea of a wives country team. He would call in periodically the senior wives of the country team and brief them in a depth that they otherwise would not have of problems confronting the United States at that point in its relationship with Afghanistan. After all, wives as we all know in the Foreign Service, traditionally at dinners and so on sit next to prime ministers and foreign ministers and are expected to carry on some kind of conversation with them. Too often it tends to be about children and family and not much beyond that, but this was a recognition on the part of Ambassador Neumann that wives ought to be a little bit better informed than that and to be able to respond intelligently in such conversations. It is a very useful device. Maybe other ambassadors have done it, probably more than I know. It was the first time that I experienced it.

The country team worked very effectively there, as I think a country team must. He drew on it heavily. He expected the senior officers to operate as a team, keeping everybody informed, including, I think as much as possible the CIA intelligence components and the military components. He had very close relationships with the king, which mattered a great deal at that point. He also had some relationships with Daud who eventually seized power.

Q: Daud at that time was...?

LAINGEN: He was a cousin of the king, out of power, but in the background. He was there and Neumann carefully, with the acquiescence of the king, kept up that relationship. It was important, looking down the road when Daud took power.

At that point we had access, the military attaché did, to a DC-3. So we travelled a good deal around the country and that was very helpful because transportation in Afghanistan wasn't always easy. We were players in the "great game"...the great game being that historical term applied to the time when the British in Imperial India competed with Czarist Russia for influence in this buffer region of Afghanistan. After World War II we inherited that role in a sense. We became the players, with the Soviets on the other side. We, with large aid programs, were the big players to try to keep Soviet influence manageable. We assumed after a decision in the mid-fifties in the Dulles period that we would not be a military player against the Soviets in that region.

We did maintain a military relationship through training programs which were carefully tended, but the main competition was in the economic area. Very large aid programs, relatively for the size of the country. And a large Peace Corps program in Afghanistan at that time. I am one of those who in the early sixties when the Peace Corps came into place, and I confess it today, was very skeptical about its role.

Q: I think this is true. I certainly was. I thought a bunch of do-gooders wandering around making trouble.

LAINGEN: But I changed my view, as most of us have, I think, and today I have a high regard for the Peace Corps. Above all because of the way it strengthens young Americans to play more effective roles in their own society when they come back home. Not that they accomplish all that much in a tangible sense on the ground in these countries -- although English speaking programs were a large component of that in Afghanistan and I think was certainly helpful.

But the economic competition between us and the Soviets, going back to my comment about transportation and communication, saw us and the Soviets build this remarkable network of roads in Afghanistan. We built between us a great, country wide, circular concrete and asphalt highway. Where our aid program stopped, the Soviet program would pick up either immediately or a few blocks on the other side of the town. That eventually saw the Soviets with a big advantage when they invaded militarily in later years. But we did put in place a rather remarkable highway system.

We also helped build in the early period with Afghanistan a great hydroelectric and irrigation facility down in the southwest part of the country -- the Helmand Valley, and I would love to go back today to see how it has progressed in terms of the big emphasis we put on irrigation and prospects at that time of agricultural development.

We had a visit in Kabul while I was there from Secretary Rogers. It went very well. And a more celebrated visit from Vice President Agnew, then still in office. But he was already a target of a good deal of criticism at home, and it was evident in Kabul by Peace Corps members demonstrating against his being there. One of my tasks as they demonstrated outside the Chancery was to go out there as the Deputy Chief of Mission and try to reason with these young Peace Corps volunteers to keep their protests civil while the Vice

President was in the city. Whatever you may feel about Vice President Agnew's later activities, as a visiting dignity which he was during that visit, he played his role beautifully. He followed his script. He then was an attractive, strong figure and he came across very well with the Afghans.

Q: How does one report political happenings in a place like Afghanistan? Or does one?

LAINGEN: Oh yes. Political officers always find things to report. In those days you were still expected to do a lot of reporting, particularly conversations with influential or potentially influential figures. We did a lot of reporting, of course, as we sensed their attitudes towards us and the Soviet Union. We did a lot of reporting on the Pushtunistan issue. Again the problems between Afghanistan and Pakistan were there all the time. We did a lot of travel. Afghanistan is the kind of country that inevitably compels political officers and economic officers to get out there and look because it is such an exciting landscape. There are long distances between cities and interesting places to go to. So we did a lot of "trip reporting" at that time.

Certainly there wasn't political reporting in terms of daily reports of a parliamentary debate because that sort of thing didn't exist of any consequence. It was mainly the kinds of direct relationships that you were able to develop with the Afghans at all levels. Sometimes you were left with contacts with people in the streets and the bazaars who were in your view at the time possibly reflective of trends in that country.

It was during that time that we were beginning to try to find ways to deal with the Chinese and the Communist system. It was before Nixon went off to China. But it was the beginning of what later saw working contacts in Warsaw between us and the Chinese. That had ripples in places like Kabul because there was a Chinese Embassy there. Neumann was the type of Ambassador who took risks sometimes and had contacts. Quietly he got authorization in that sort of far corner for contacts that I think the Department concluded wouldn't have some worldwide effect. And possibly what Neumann was carefully reporting from Kabul at the time of his careful contacts with the Chinese had some contribution to that larger relationship.

Q: How about with the Soviets? Did you have much contact with the Soviets?

LAINGEN: We saw them socially. A very large diplomatic compound in the country. They had a much larger military relationship than we had. We did not go to their compound daily or anything like that; we didn't have that close a relationship. But we saw them. We invited them to our home. I think it was in Kabul that I saw the movie "The Russians Are Coming."

Q: It was a comedy.

LAINGEN: Yes, a comedy about a Russian submarine landing on Nantucket. I recall that somebody showed that film to some of our contacts in the Soviet Embassy and they were

both amused and some times indignant, depending on how a character was projected. Their stupidity was projected, but our stupidity was projected equally, so we both had fun with that.

Our main contacts were with...there were two large components of contact, one was the aid program where political officers got involved too because it was a reporting area. The other was the Foreign Ministry where most of the action was taking place at that time.

Q: A country like Afghanistan always seems so remote, particularly with a monarchy. How interested were they in our affairs and sophisticated in dealing with us?

LAINGEN: Let's face it, it was a very thin upper crust that was interested in talking with us and felt that they could talk with us. Our contacts and relationships were essentially with them. They were very interested. Some of them had been to the United States, most of them had not. The degree of understanding and awareness of the United States was pretty limited at that time. We used USIA rather effectively with documentaries, etc. for carefully invited Afghan audiences. I don't recall that I was ever invited to an average Afghan's home. That just wasn't done. The Afghans are very hospitable people. You see them out in the villages and that sort of thing and they will take you to tea, but rarely will they take you to their homes. That is private domain and just didn't happen. So most of the Afghans that we had contact with were from this rather limited upper segment who accepted our invitations and came to our homes.

They are very attractive people. They are essentially friendly, deeply hospitable within their limitations, strong willed, very independent minded. If you can establish a friendship with them it lasts, but if you cross them in any way they can be very tough in their response. As we have seen historically in a larger sense, the British have crossed them and had trouble in their day as players in the great game and the Russians certainly came to that appreciation later.

By the way I should add that the Afghans wanted us there essentially during that time as a balance to this overwhelming Soviet presence. That undergirded everything there. We were welcome for that reason above all.

Q: Did you see any of the underlined divisions that cropped up about eight years later between supporters of Communism and the various tribal nationalist groups that are fighting a war that goes on today?

LAINGEN: Oh, these tribal conflicts were there but not burning at that time. The sensitivities, particularly in the Pushtun area, were there. The conflict between the Pushtuns and some of the tribal elements to the north were there but not hot. The Communists were really quite inconsequential at that time, the Khalq.

Q: Khalq being?

LAINGEN: The Communist Party. We had minimal contacts with that group. Probably should have had more. They didn't loom very large. The king and his crowd seemed to be rather firmly in charge and it didn't require of us, as we sensed it, contact. They weren't very visible. They were very weak. They weren't a segment in what passed for a parliament. Frankly much of the way in which things began to break later came as a surprise to me. I didn't sense that degree of difficulty waiting in the wings.

Q: Is there anything else we should mention about Afghanistan?

LAINGEN: I mentioned that we had these visits. As I said at the outset I guess it is my favorite Foreign Service post, not least because the excitement of the place, the way we played this kind of great game role there, the way we were welcomed by the Afghans for that reason, the way the Afghans, I think, as a general rule were fascinated by the United States, a distant place that they knew little of, excited by evidence of us when it appeared like the visit of the Vice President, etc. It was also a place which was on the high road at that time for hippies from Istanbul to Tehran to Meshed to Kabul to Kathmandu and Delhi.

Q: Explain who the hippies were.

LAINGEN: Young Americans out on the drug road, or out on adventure and getting into trouble too often than not. So we had those who came through and we had our consular cases because of that. It was an exciting place also for families. We were a large American community in a hardship post and that kind of situation in a hardship post, as you know, usually means rather high morale because you are thrown in on yourself. With effective leadership at the top, which we had with the Neumanns, the American community was a cohesive group that had a lot of fun together. A lot of community activity because social relationships with Afghans at any depth were not easy, as I mentioned.

The AID community was very large; the Peace Corps was very large. There was limited American business and limited, but important, military role. It meant for me, being the Deputy Chief of Mission, responsibility for a lot of the management of all of that; it was a very exciting job. I enjoyed it very much and learned a lot from it.

I also during that time in Afghanistan had a brief exposure to Iran in the sense that it was there. Iranians tend to look down on Afghans as hillbillies. We put it this way: the Iranians look at Afghanistan as their Appalachia, their hill people. Afghans speak a dialect of Persian. Some people say it is more pure than Farsi. They call it Dari. That relationship was interesting to watch but not then of much consequence. I just mention it in this instance.

I had an opportunity at one point in 1971 to drive from Kabul over the splendid roads that we had built with the Soviets all the way to Meshed where I had served as acting consul for those five months back in 1954. I was fascinated to go back about 17 years later and

see how much the city had changed from the time I was there and to be impressed that the Shah's modernization program in Tehran was being felt in provincial cities as well. The Shah's modernization effort was not just something that was evident in the capital city, but the provincial cities were also feeling this. I mention this simply because many of us were watching Iran from distant vantage points during this time of the Shah's modernization drive and were frankly impressed with what he was accomplishing. That clouded our vision all the way up to the last days of the Shah.
Q: Going back to the Americans who got into trouble. These are young people. I am an old consular hand and I am sure Afghan prisons are not very comfortable for anyone, particularly an American. How did we handle people? Were they getting arrested for drugs?

LAINGEN: Rarely. I don't recall that there were more than one or two cases during the time I was there where they were actually put into prison. The Afghans usually cooperated with us. We moved them on and got them out of the country. We had the kind of relationship with the Afghans at that upper level that permitted us, generally speaking, to dispose of the issues rather quickly.

Q: This is about the only way you can deal with this there.

LAINGEN: The Turks put them in prison and then you have an awful problem. A young man named Winant, a celebrated case of a young American and his Swedish girl companion had travelled through Afghanistan earlier, years before in the early fifties when Kabul was really an isolated place. He just simply disappeared. He was the nephew of Ambassador Winant in London.

Q: Peter Winant, I think, was his name.

LAINGEN: He and his companion were traveling through on a bus and disappeared and were never seen again. A tragic case.

Q: We have talked about the consular side and basically you kind of work things out in a country such as that. Both sides wanted to get them out of the country as quickly as possible.

LAINGEN: Yes. I don't recall that we had any lasting consular issue involving an individual at that time.

Q: You left Afghanistan in 1971 after a three year tour and came back to Washington where you were Director of Pakistani Affairs from 1971-73. Was this per your choice of wanting to come back or it just sort of happened?

LAINGEN: My assignments have sort of worked out that I would rotate from the field and back to Washington in almost every case except the first one. I didn't actively seek it, it just worked out that way. It was suggested to me that from Kabul I go at that time to

Madras and be Consul General and I turned it down. I said that I didn't want to go there, partly because of the problem with schools. Our sons could have gone to school at Nathizghali in south India, but I didn't want that. So I didn't go and I am glad I didn't go, even though I would have presided in an enormous consular district with hundreds of millions of people. I think the consul general in Madras feels very mighty because of all that.

I went back to Washington and was fortunate in that respect. I feel strongly that the more a Foreign Service officer has an opportunity to know his own country's problems, the better he is equipped to serve overseas again. And I have also been fortunate myself in these in and out assignments in having married someone from Washington. I jokingly advise young Foreign Service officers if they aren't married to marry somebody from Washington. It simplifies your logistics.

Q: It certainly does. You were the Country Director for Pakistani Affairs. What was the difference between this and...

LAINGEN: I had Afghanistan affairs as well. The Country Director program was then in place.

Q: This meant that it was no longer the Desk Officer, but it was the Country Director.

LAINGEN: You didn't have Office Director, you had a Country Directors and then you had Desk Officers underneath you. Later you had Deputy Assistant Secretaries that cluttered the landscape.

Q: Let's talk about this. This just seems a layering. I was talking not long ago to Richard D. Davies who was an old Eastern Bloc hand talking about when he came in in the late forties how the Desk Officer was a major figure. That was the person who did things. But since that time they have added on a couple of more layers.

LAINGEN: I agree, it is layering, and particularly because the layering of the Country Director was later made even more difficult by the layering of more Deputy Assistant Secretaries, and particularly political Deputy Assistant Secretaries. So the Desk Officer soon got lost way down in the bottom, where the expertise really is, of course. It is a regrettable trend. I don't know exactly what the situation is today, but there are too many Deputy Assistant Secretaries, that is clear, and many political appointees among them.

Q: Running close to a hundred of them, or something like that.

LAINGEN: The Country Director position is still there, but the potential that he was supposed to have in terms of access and influence with the 6th and 7th floors has been lessened by the proliferation of Deputy Assistant Secretaries.

Q: Did you find with this new title a difference in how you operated?

LAINGEN: Yes. At that time it was relatively new, a Country Director role. I certainly felt I had more direct access to the upper level than I did from 1964-67 as an Office Director for Pakistan and Afghanistan Affairs. In part I suppose that was a consequence of the Pak-Indian war of 1971, and crises always throw the issue higher up in the layers. So we saw a lot of the Secretary. Saw a lot of Kissinger in those days because of the large role that he played in the celebrated tilt towards Pakistan.

Q: For the record the "tilting towards" was a famous phrase. Tilting became both a buzz word and a war cry as far as the Indians were concerned.

LAINGEN: I was the Country Director for Pakistan and Afghanistan Affairs, and David Sneider was the Country Director for Indian Affairs.

Q: Your arrival and the East Pakistan war, what was the timing?

LAINGEN: I arrived in August of that year and tension broke out sometime in September, very soon after I had gotten back in 1971. That had been building up while I was up in Kabul. This time not so much because of Kashmir, although Kashmir was still there as an issue, but because of the difficulty that the Pakistanis were having by that time in handling their internal division between East and West Pakistan. It had reached the point where the Indians saw an opportunity to be a force in the crisis. This saw eventually the split in the country and the establishment of Bangladesh after a relatively short period of actual warfare in December.

Q: How did you find this? Was this a war that was being waged in the corridors of the State Department too?

LAINGEN: I didn't sense that old kind of competition then between David Sneider and me. It seems to be that we were forcibly required, because of the fact that the Indians and the Pakistanis drove themselves to war, to think beyond that. I personally thought I was fortunate to have someone like David as a colleague on the other side of the wall to deal with at that time. We didn't sense any kind of direct competition. I don't recall at the moment who were the respective Ambassadors in Delhi and Islamabad. I will have to look that up.

Q: Kenneth Keating was in India and Joseph Farland was in Pakistan. Here you were getting along well with the Indian Country Director, but what about the two embassies? Were you sort of sitting there watching them each weighing in with...the subcontinent there has been a classic case of clientitis since the very beginning, I think.

LAINGEN: Yes, I agree with that and there was some of that then. This was a war of enormous consequence for Pakistan and the Embassy felt it because the country lost its other half. It was both an emotional and political and military issue for the Pakistanis to lose their other half, given the way the Pakistanis traditionally in the West looked down

on these sort of small brown people in the East; the Punjabis in particular looked down their noses at them. Sindhis, too, for that matter. And I think the Embassy in Islamabad at that time probably reflected that to an excessive degree. But when you are thrown into a war the immediate objective is to try to find a way to stop it. The risk was, as Kissinger saw it at the time, that the war could become a major conflict in the West as well as the East. It came close to being that at one point. It became a major issue confronting American foreign policy for a couple of months.

You referred to the tilt business. The feeling was that...well, there was a general sentiment, I think, on the part of a lot of Americans that the Indians were throwing their weight around excessively and were getting by with it and gaining territory in effect as a result. The concern was that rightly or wrongly the Indians were prepared to have their advantage territorial in the West as well. I personally didn't ever think that the Indians were prepared or intended to go so far as to occupy Pakistani held Kashmir or to attack Islamabad. It didn't work out that way. I think Kissinger's concerns were frankly excessive at the time about that threat.

Q: Kissinger was the National Security Advisor at that time. Did you have the feeling that he was taking the ball away from William Rogers who was Secretary of State in this?

LAINGEN: Maybe not taking the ball away, but certainly was dominating the strategic considerations.

Q: How did this play? As a Country Director in the State Department where you were on the side where the American weight was being put, how did you deal with him using you? It must have been a difficult situation?

LAINGEN: Yes, it was a difficult situation because decisions were being made up there at very high levels at that point. Nixon and Kissinger were making the decisions. It was a very difficult time, an uneasy time. Very sensitive time where for the first time in my experience, the only time I had that experience, we were second row participants in the situation room in the White House. David and I were over there essentially as notetakers. We were there watching and listening and recording as these decisions were being made in the heat of battle out there. As you know the US was close to actual involvement, moving an aircraft carrier contingent into the region.

Q: It was the Enterprise.

LAINGEN: We moved the Enterprise, a nuclear carrier, to the Indian Ocean at that point -- a very large signal, as far as Henry Kissinger was concerned, to the Indians that there was a limit to what they could do in terms of threatening the Pakistanis in the West.

Q: You were around when this decision was made which always struck me as being...here is this huge subcontinent and sending an aircraft carrier up there, if you weren't going to use nuclear weapons, what were you going to do with it?

LAINGEN: Symbols of that dimension matter in foreign policy as you know.

Q: Did anybody say, "Well, then what?" when this was decided?

LAINGEN: We may have said that, I don't recall that we came up with any sort of situation or strategic papers that would raise that question. Maybe we did, I don't know. It was such an active and busy time just keeping up with what was going on over in the White House mainly. I thought it was excessive at the time because I simply did not believe the Indians were that kind of threat in the West. They wanted to achieve their purposes and they did with direct involvement in East Pakistan. They accomplished that and I think Pakistan is today better off for that having happened.

Q: I think probably most of them would agree to that too.

LAINGEN: Sure. But psychologically it was a very difficult time. On the US side there was great sensitivity, you may remember, about leaks -- Kissinger being that sensitive about leaks then. That was when the so-called plumbers were involved.

Q: These were people who were tapping phones and later it became quite a cause celebré. There were some people in the foreign affairs community who still will never speak to Kissinger because he tapped their phones.

LAINGEN: In this atmosphere there was suspicion of a lot of people, including David and me that we had leaked because we were there taking notes in the situation room. We were interviewed by those who were then sent to investigate. Our notes were demanded. I don't know if we ever got them back, or made copies of them, or what. That was certainly a time when I felt the power of the White House focused directly on me.

Q: You say that decisions were made at an upper level. But here you and David Sneider were both sort of the resident experts on India and Pakistan. Were you both united in feeling that the Indians were not going to take this over?

LAINGEN: Yes, I think we were.

Q: But here is Henry Kissinger, who God knows is no expert on India, certainly proved no expert in Iran, but he was making decisions without using resident knowledge?

LAINGEN: Yes. In a crisis situation, I suppose it is inevitable in a system such as ours and with a bureaucracy as large as ours, that the "desk" for a country where decisions are made or where information is concentrated moves way up the bureaucracy. I sensed then that decisions were being made very rapidly at the top...they certainly didn't have time to discuss seriously about what others thought; they couldn't do that if they were going to also cope with the other problems that confront a Secretary of State or National Security Advisor at such times.

There were times that they were making decisions that reflected, in our view, a lack of understanding. But in saying what I say about the movement of that carrier, I have to ask myself whether I was in fact sufficiently knowledgeable myself to make that judgment. Maybe I wasn't. Maybe there were some things that I didn't know. But looking at it simply from my own perception of how Indians and Pakistanis are motivated to act in such situations, I thought it was unnecessary and that the threat from the Indians was not that great. The Secretary of State or a National Security Adviser with responsibilities of the kind that he has, perhaps that carrier was insurance that was essential, if for no other reason because of American PR and political needs.

Q: Did you sense at that time any tension, disagreement between our consulate general in Dacca at that time and our Embassy in Islamabad?

LAINGEN: That is another story that Archer Blood I trust has...

Q: We have an interview with Archer Blood on this, but I wonder if you could give the Desk view of this?

LAINGEN: I can't really add much depth to that, other than saying that for years that had been an evolving issue -- that our representation in Dacca being closer to the scene, for that reason alone, perhaps, had a much better understanding of what was developing in East Pakistan than the Embassy in the West did. I recall there were times when we would talk way back in the time of my assignment in Karachi, that the Embassy needed to get over to East Pakistan, Dacca, more than we did, because the Embassy was the place where by and large decisions were being made and not Dacca. And yet more than half the people of Pakistan as then constituted lived over there.

John Howison was Consul General there I believe. John, early on, certainly from his vantage point in Karachi later, was sensitive to the problems of East Pakistan more than any of us were. I just have to conclude that it was a classic example of where an embassy was not sufficiently mindful of what was happening in a distant part. The views of the Consul General were not being sufficiently taken under consideration. When those views were expressed in the way that Arch Blood eventually did, it cost him some trouble, unfortunately.

Q: What about the outcome of this war? It was over in less than a couple of months.

LAINGEN: I don't think it went on that long. The intensive fighting was only a couple of weeks I think. But it did run some serious risks of a much greater conflict. I still don't believe the Indians had any intention of taking territory in the West. It was very dangerous for a few days. The crisis in 1965 ended with the Russians, the Soviets, engaging themselves as players. The Soviets were decisive as mediators at that time bringing that conflict to resolution in sessions at Tashkent. This time it was resolved with what's called the Simla Agreement. The Pakistanis went up to the Hill Station at Simla

with Indira Gandhi. This was reminiscent for me of the way in which the Prime Ministers of Greece and Turkey had gone off in 1960 and resolved the Cyprus issue at that time in the Zurich Agreement. Both were examples, I thought then and still think to this day, where issues are better resolved without an outside power being involved, if you can find a way to do it.

The Indians and the Pakistanis finally were mature enough in the aftermath of long years of British colonialism and foreign influence on our part and others, to go off to Simla and come up with a remarkable document, the Simla Agreement, which is still valid today and which is currently under some focus again because the Kashmir question is again hot. Anyway they went off then, Indira and Bhutto, and came up with this understanding. This had seen the downfall of the regime in Islamabad and Bhutto replacing it becoming the Prime Minister in the aftermath of Yahya Khan, who fell from power in disgrace after this loss of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh.

Bhutto, as part of the final settlement, came to the United Nations, the Security Council intervened...this is before the Simla process was begun, but motivated and perpetuated by UN pressure. I will always remember that Security Council discussion and debate because it saw Bhutto at his best in his capacity to play a very large public role. He came to the Security Council as the representative of Pakistan in that debate. He sat there and at one point dramatically tore up the UN Charter to convey the anger and frustration and emotions that he felt as a Pakistani in the way in which the Security Council, as they saw it, had stood by and allowed this theft of East Pakistan by the Indians.
That is an over simplification, but it was an effort on Bhutto's part to convey that public anger publicly in a dramatic way. But having accepted the Security Council decision, after the debate and after it was all over and the war had ended and it was clear that the Bangladeshis would have their country, he came to Washington and saw Secretary Rogers. He hadn't yet become the Prime Minister then; he was on his way back to assume the office when he got there. In Washington he had a meeting with Rogers, and I was the notetaker in his office that day. I remember how Bhutto said to Rogers, "I can assure you Mr. Secretary that from now on I will not be the Yankee-baiter. I intend to build a strong relationship between Pakistan and the United States."

Despite that show of emotion in New York, when he got to Washington he had put on a different hat and was attempting in that way to convey to the United States government that from now on Bhutto would be a different player.

Q: Bhutto was going to be Prime Minister. How was he regarded? He had been a minor figure when you were there before.

LAINGEN: He had always been regarded...going back to the time in the sixties when he was playing around with the Chinese as we saw it in ways that got Washington very nervous. We didn't like at all the way Pakistan with Bhutto as Foreign Minister was playing up to the Chinese. He was regarded as a young upstart who seemed determined to cause problems. That sentiment about him had continued throughout the time we had

known Bhutto. That concern was evident when we saw he was going to become the Prime Minister after this mess in Bangladesh and the fall of Yahya Khan.

So there was a good deal of reassurance in having him come to Washington after that UN debate and in effect concede, sort of kowtow to the United States. He was going to put his past behind him and be a responsible, mature political figure, mindful of American interests. That was the image he conveyed in that meeting in the Secretary's office that day. That was reassuring to us as a government. It was reassuring to me. I had always liked Bhutto, myself. He is dead now...regrettably and unfortunately he was executed wrongly in my view. But I had been fascinated by him because of his youthfulness and courage; he was an articulate public figure in his use of English. He was exciting I thought, particularly in contrast to the traditional military authoritarianism of Pakistani leaders.

Despite that, leaders at the top in this country always remained very skeptical of Bhutto.

Q: What was the general thinking of why Bhutto was considered a Yankee-baiter before this?

LAINGEN: Well, that is the way he performed, in part for political purposes in Pakistan; it gained him a lot of public recognition and some public support. He was seen as a Yankee-baiter in large part, however, because of his playing around with the Chinese. It started with that.

Q: Were you Country Director during Kissinger's trip to China?

LAINGEN: Let's leave that until our next meeting.

Q: Today is August 25, 1992. Bruce we left the interview dangling with a question about the Kissinger China visit and whether or not you had been involved.

LAINGEN: I had absolutely no involvement in the Kissinger trip to China. Like everyone else I was uninformed until after it happened even though it was routed through Pakistan as a way station to China.

Q: After this visit did you feel any more warming towards Pakistan? That we had to be extra nice to Pakistan?

LAINGEN: No, I don't recall that that had any affect in broad terms on my view of Pakistan nor the administration's view of Pakistan. My problem is still that I don't remember exactly the date of that trip to China. I should look it up because I don't have it.

Q: Kissinger went to Peiping July, 1971.

LAINGEN: July, 1971. Well, that is one good reason why I don't remember it because I had not arrived on the scene yet. I had left Kabul that summer and I don't believe I had taken over responsibility as country director until September, 1971.

Q: I don't want to over push this point, but when you arrived you didn't feel any sort of warm glow of we really need to be nice to Pakistan because of this visit?

LAINGEN: No, I was part of the community in the Foreign Service and the Department of State in US policy making in Washington that saw Pakistan as still very important, and not least in my case because I had just come out of Kabul where Islamabad as the capital of the country to the south loomed rather large. And I was also conscious of the fact that things were heating up in terms of Pakistan-Indian relations.

Q: We did cover the war in our last talk, so we will move to the 1974-75 period when you were Deputy Assistant Secretary for NEA. What were your concerns then?

LAINGEN: I was Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for more than a year. Why I remained "acting" will remain a bit of a mystery to me to this day. I think I may have mentioned earlier my acronym being ADAS -- Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary. Daily, if we had something of interest and consequence happening in the Bureau and affecting that corner of the Bureau for which I was responsible, we would report that in an end of the day blurb to the Executive Secretariat upstairs via the Operations Center. I recall reporting one day something happening, and just using the acronym, saying that "ADAS Laingen reported such and such..." So it went into Secretary Kissinger. And Kissinger, as was his wont, would jot down on the side of these things what action he wanted taken. In this particular instance he wrote down -- "What is an ADAS?" So the Executive Secretariat tasked the Bureau to respond to the Secretary what an ADAS was. I guess we sent up some kind of piece of paper describing what that strange acronym stood for!

Q: What were your concerns as the ADAS?

LAINGEN: The ADAS during that time was still...the Bureau was heavily occupied at that time with the fall out from the geopolitical, geostrategic changes in South Asia that followed the war of 1971 and the creation of Bangladesh and all of that. I think we talked about that earlier.

Q: Yes.

LAINGEN: We didn't have another war. We haven't had another war since, happily, between Pakistan and India. Although we have come close to it on several occasions. I don't recall any issue of major consequence that I would highlight particularly.

Q: Then you moved over to become Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southern Europe from 1975- 77. This is almost unheard of to move from one Bureau to another in this manner.

LAINGEN: I recall how it happened. During a staff meeting one day I got a note saying I should go and see Arthur Hartman, who was then Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. He had asked to see me. So after the staff meeting I went over to see him and he told me that I had been designated as someone who might possibly be available to shift and become one of his Deputy Assistant Secretaries. He had three at that time. This just came out of the blue to me. A total surprise. As it turned out later I learned that I was one of the early participants in Secretary Kissinger's GLOP -- Global Outlook Policy. It was to broaden people's perspective by moving among Bureaus. I don't know to this day how much shifting there actually was. I was a very visible example of that policy.

The story goes that the Secretary was in Panama one day on a trip through ARA countries. He was struck, according to the story, by how little people who served in the ARA Bureau and in that region knew about any other part of the world, so compartmentalized had ARA become. He was supposed to have said, "They hadn't a clue where the Suez Canal was." They knew, of course, all about the Panama Canal. He wanted to put an end to that. So he instituted some kind of an effort to broaden the Service's perspective -- an effort that eventually became known as the GLOP policy.

I had no experience, whatsoever, in that Bureau except having worked on Greek, Turkish and Cypriot Affairs earlier.

Q: They had just been moved into the EUR Bureau back in 1974.

LAINGEN: Fairly recently, that is correct. But my corner of the Bureau as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southern European Affairs, included Spain, Portugal, Malta, Italy -- countries for which I had no feel of any kind. So I was a novice. Happily I had people who knew a good deal about those countries. And I came to know a lot.

Q: Who were some of the people? How did you tap their knowledge?

LAINGEN: The important ones, of course, were the ambassadors on the spot, not least Stabler in Spain and Frank Carlucci in Portugal.

Q: Wells Stabler had held your job hadn't he?

LAINGEN: That is correct, he had. Two exceedingly able career ambassadors, both of whom presided, if you will, over their respective Embassies during periods of major political changes in their two countries. Spain seeing the transition from the Franco period to what is there today under King Juan Carlos. And Frank Carlucci in that very sensitive and difficult time involving the overthrow of the Salazar regime and the transition to what is there today...which today works as it does in Spain, but there was a period during the transition when it was extremely sensitive and uncertain as far as American interests were concerned.

Q: Were you there when sort of an officers' coup took over from Salazar?

LAINGEN: I hadn't come onto the scene at that point.

Q: From other interviews I got the distinct impression that Kissinger was very unhappy in what was happening in Portugal and was tending to want to do more there and at one point we had a pretty weak political ambassador and DCM and Carlucci came in and took over and told Kissinger, to some extent, "Let me take care of this." Did you get involved in any of this?

LAINGEN: I was involved in the sense I was there. I was watching it. I was aware of it. I was aware of some degree of tension or confrontation between Carlucci and Kissinger. Carlucci being prepared to take more risks with the civilian political elements in Portugal. Yes, there was that feeling that Carlucci was standing very tall against the Secretary of State who wasn't all that certain that he could leave it that much in the hands of an Ambassador on the scene. As it has turned out, I think Carlucci was right; the Secretary was not wrong, but certainly less well informed in terms of what was happening there then was Carlucci. I think Carlucci's performance on the record in Lisbon during that time was one of the classic stories of the capabilities of the career service of the United States Foreign Service to cope. He had good people working with him. There were able people in the Department. But it was very much a Carlucci performance in which he alone took and held and exercised remarkable intellectual courage to manage that transition. I trust that some one...I don't know if Carlucci has ever written anything...

Q: He has...

LAINGEN: He should be interviewed in a program like this. Frank Carlucci today is too busy a person to ever find time to write anything. I hope some day he will put down his recollections on paper.

Q: Did you have any dealings with Kissinger or was it all with Hartman as far as this particular business was concerned?

LAINGEN: I did not myself deal much with Kissinger directly. It was almost entirely through Hartman. I don't recall that there was any occasion...great sensitivity when I was on the carpet, if you will. I was involved in all of it but it was almost always through Hartman.

Q: What about in Spain? When you arrived there what are the pluses to bringing somebody in who hasn't been dealing with this? You do come with a fresh look and you haven't all this ingrained in you. What was your impression on how we looked upon the post-Franco situation at the time?

LAINGEN: It was fresh all right because I had no experience of any kind. I had never been there. I had in Bob Barber as Country Director for Spain and Portugal, someone who had been there and who performed extremely well during that time. I had a sense, myself,

as I think did all Americans dealing with that place at that point that anything was a plus over where Spain had been and over where Franco had taken the place.

I recall, myself, being very much in accord with Wells Stabler thinking that while there were a great many uncertainties in respect to this untried new leader that Franco had blessed with his support, Juan Carlos, I thought he was someone we could take some risks with. He, from where I sat, was performing remarkably well under the circumstances. And certainly has in the period since then, culminating now in his performance during the Olympics. Performance, that isn't the word, he didn't perform, but his son did. He came in seventh in yachting, the Crown Prince Filippe.

Q: We were referring to the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona.

LAINGEN: I think Juan Carlos is...he has been roughly 20 years on the throne.

Q: Were you there when there was that abortive putsch?

LAINGEN: I was not there, nor did I recall being involved at this end at that time. I can't speak of any other specific issues other than those...they so much dominated our activity...the transition in Portugal and the advent of Juan Carlos in Spain. Almost everything else blurs into non-memory in my case.

Q: I can understand that. Look, say, at Italy. Italy essentially has had the same government since 1948 with various permutations.

LAINGEN: Italy was there on the sidelines. And yet Italy can never be on the sidelines, given the importance of the country and the way in which we had up to that time been concerned about the Communist threat in Italy. Several elections took place during the time I was there and several transitions in government took place while I was in the Bureau. There was always that concern about how well the Christian Democrats would cope. They weathered it. I don't recall who the ambassador was in Italy at that time. But it was a side show in the sense that the major political concerns at that time were Spain and Portugal.

Q: Did you get involved in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus?

LAINGEN: The Cyprus issue was still there at the time. Exactly where the Cyprus was at that point...?

Q: The invasion had taken place in July, 1974. Did you get involved in arms embargo in Turkey at all?
LAINGEN: Oh, yes, I remember the arms embargo in Turkey. With respect to Turkey I remember Sarbanes and John Brademas...

Q: These were two Greek Americans...

LAINGEN: Two Greek Americans, one in the Senate and one in the House, both of whom had had obvious concerns given their Greek constituencies and their Greek-American background over what was happening in Cyprus. And feeling very strongly about the Turkish invasion and carrying their anger and irritation and their legitimate concerns to the point of pushing the arms embargo against Turkey so strongly as to run into very frequent confrontations with the Department of State, and with the administration which felt, of course, that the Turkish arms embargo was prejudicial in terms of larger American interests affecting NATO.

That issue still prevails to this day in the sense that the Turks are still there. I can recall how frustrated I was then and have always been about the way in which the Turks have carried their presence in Cyprus to the point of having 24,000, as I recall the figure, troops in their part of Cyprus and never removing them. This is far more in terms of numbers and presence then conceivably would be required in any strategic sense, but in political terms determined to keep them there as evidence of their determination to keep the Greek Cypriots in their place.

I recall traveling in Cyprus at the time. This was...Ambassador Rodger Davies was murdered at the time in Cyprus. The exact date of that I don't recall. I had known another American Ambassador there in an earlier period when I was Greek and Cyprus Desk Officer...it was Toby Belcher, who has since died.

Q: Rodger Davies was assassinated on August 19, 1974 and William R. Crawford, Jr. replaced him and was there until 1978.

LAINGEN: I remember the terrible tragedy of the killing...it was not an assassination of Rodger Davies except that he fell victim to gunfire in the turmoil of the place at that time.

I saw a lot of the diplomats of the two countries, Greece and Turkey at that time, and in Cyprus. I always thought, myself, that one of the tragedies of peoples on the surface of the globe is that some of them are destined to live side by side, destined to forever have problems with each other, and the Greeks and the Turks are among them and the Pakistanis and the Indians are another pair. It seems impossible for them ever to come to any kind of accord that does not shortly fall apart. A small island like Cyprus, a terribly small place, but nonetheless has loomed so large because of the way in which peoples of two other countries look on it as an important place where emotions are greatly caught up. A lot like Kashmir between the Indians and the Pakistanis.

The Greeks and the Turks wisely concluded in 1960 with the Zurich Accord that perhaps the only solution was for them to both agree on some kind of independent status for the place. That worked for a time and still works in the sense that there are now two independent portions of the same formerly independent republic.

Kashmir having never reached that point and in my view today, 1992, the only solution for that tragedy...and it was very tragic in terms of the impact on the people of the place...the only solution for that is independence. Regrettably neither the Pakistanis nor the Indians as governments are prepared to see that happen, although increasingly, I think, there is evidence that peoples in both countries are prepared to move towards some kind of independent state themselves.

This is getting outside of where we have been, perhaps, but the Kashmir issue cannot help but be affected by the way in which self determination as a sentiment is today contributing to all kinds of political change. This is evident particularly in the former Soviet Union and also in Yugoslavia.

Q: Outside of Congressional pressure, how did we deal with Greece and Turkey? Did we have to watch the balance very carefully?

LAINGEN: Well, we had to watch it very carefully. Not least because of what you just indicated that there was an American domestic political interest involved, given the substantial Greek minority in this country. I have always said that one of the problems the Turks have in this country is that there aren't many Turkish restaurants, but there are a lot of Greek restaurants. And the sentiment among them is very strong and there is a natural American inclination to be supportive of the Greeks, not least, I guess, because they are Christians and how that affects public attitudes.

But I don't recall that there ever was a massive American public interest in the problems between the Greeks and the Turks, except to the degree to which the Greek-American community has been able to fuel that. Fuel is probably the wrong term. It is not meant to be critical, it is a natural consequence. I think for that reason there is also that feeling that the Greeks in that situation were a kind of minority, dealing with a larger country like Turkey. That the Greeks were the ones that we should be generally supporting.

For that matter I felt that way myself, believing and seeing how the Turks had so ruthlessly, forcibly involved themselves to protect a relatively small minority of people on the island. I guess I was instinctively naturally affected as well by what I hope is a majority feeling among most Americans that ethnic considerations should not affect American foreign policy...that the Greek-American minority should not have the degree of influence simply because they are Greek-American that it had in this particular case. It makes it difficult for people working on an issue in the Department of State to hold on to their objectivity, if you will, or their impartiality. There is this American domestic political influence or impact that one has to keep one's eye on over one's shoulder if nothing else. Of course the major one in American experience is the Jewish-American community.

Q: As regards Israel.

LAINGEN: Yes. The Greek-American community has never been as effective a force as has the Jewish-American community through PACs such as AIPAC, but given their relatively small numbers, the Greek-Americans have been remarkably successful in influencing American policy towards Greece, the Greek-Turkish issues and particularly the Cyprus issue.

Q: Did you get many delegations of Greek-Americans coming to see you?

LAINGEN: Oh yes, we saw them all the time including the Primate of the Orthodox Church in the United States, the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church of North and South America, who I think at the time was Iacovos in New York City, and still is. Iacovos is the Archbishop of that Church and I believe was in the seat at that point.
I don't recall being hailed down to meet personally with Sarbanes and Brademas, but the fact of their strong interest in anything we did affecting Cyprus was very much in our minds all the time.

Q: It was a very interesting province or dioceses of your day because you had the Spain and Portugal emergencies, and the Greek-Turkey-Cyprus problem, and with Italy and one wondering about the various elections and how the Communists would come out.

LAINGEN: The Communist threat never rose to the point where they could command government.

Q: They had a little less than a third, I think.

LAINGEN: Yes.

Q: But on that subject, were people dealing with Italy at that time saying, "These are Communists, but different Communists and in a way they don't pose in or out of power quite the same threat as, say, the French Communists or some others."?

LAINGEN: Yes, we heard that all the time. I don't think that had any particular impact in terms of lessening our American concern. We were aware of that, people talked about it. Tagliati was still in command, as I recall. The European face or Italian face on Communism, I forget the term we used, was supposed to lessen the danger in the view of a good many editorial writers, and so on. But I don't think that ever affected American policy. There remained that strong concern that we must do everything we can because of that threat to insure that the Christian Democrats, or at worse, the Socialists, in Italy maintained control over the Italian government.

Q: Did you ever feel in dealing with Southern Europe that when EUR got together that you were the younger brother or something, the big boys being France, Germany and England?

LAINGEN: No, never had that impression. The issues were so large affecting Southern Europe at that time, particularly Spain and Portugal, that I certainly never had the feeling that we were of less interest, of less consequence, of less importance to American policy. Those were very consequential issues and times affecting that corner of Europe.

Q: In fact much more because the Northern tier was relatively tranquil.

LAINGEN: Yes, it was.

Q: They were in place.

LAINGEN: That is correct.

Q: Before you went there did Malta play any role at all? It was part of your bailiwick wasn't it?

LAINGEN: Yes, Malta was part of my bailiwick but it never entered my consciousness in any significant way. I had not been there and had no reason to go there. The Ambassador at the time was Bob Smith and I don't recall that he raised any particular issue of consequence to us. Mintoff was in power and sort of a known nuisance in the background. But we had gotten beyond the point where the Sixth Fleet had been banned from entrance into Maltese harbors, so that was something we had accepted and had to live with. I can not recall a single Maltese issue that occupied my time as Deputy Assistant Secretary.

Q: How did you view the Sixth Fleet which is our Mediterranean military presence? Was this a tool while you were there or was it just doing its thing?

LAINGEN: I think largely it was doing its thing in the sense that it had been there for so long and was a presence that we assumed would always be there. I suppose I was prejudiced in my own instance simply because of the fact that I had served in the Navy and tend to regard most things Navy a good thing, which may not be a very objective point of view. The movement of the Sixth Fleet, the availability of carrier units to make a statement, to be present, was something that was there and we accepted it and used it.

Q: Did you ever sit down and say that it might be nice to have the Sixth Fleet pop into Oporto or Barcelona, etc.?

LAINGEN: I don't remember specific cases, but, yes, we certainly did. And Greece and Turkey as well.

Q: From your perspective was the Sixth Fleet sort of like a chess piece that could be moved around?

LAINGEN: I can't remember a specific instance, but, yes, I recall assuming that it was there and available to use if it might be helpful. How we used that fleet, in port visits, became a major issue in the minds of the Turks and Greeks.

Q: Then you went to Malta where you served from 1977-79. How did that appointment come about?

LAINGEN: It came out of the blue. I had not sought it. I didn't expect it. I hadn't thought much about that place. It came about I suppose largely because one career ambassador had completed a tour there and there was need for a change. I mention career, we had had political appointees in Malta before and we were to have them again in the future. But at that point a career ambassador had completed two years, so part of the process of change was to look around and put someone somewhere. Naturally at that point in my career, as it affects all Foreign Service Officers after x number of years you like to hope that your name is being considered somewhere as an ambassador. I didn't expect mine to be considered with respect to Malta. I remember having some considerable reservations about going there, about accepting it. I didn't think it was a very important place. It isn't a very important place. I guess my ego was not exactly furthered by my being assigned to a place like Malta.

I recall discussing it with Art Hartman in that context. I remember even getting some impression from Phil Habib at the time, who was Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. I recall both of them encouraging me to look at it as a step in a career ladder, reminding me realistically Laingen that you may never get another appointment as ambassador and I had better take it and go with it. And I did.

Malta, after all was not a hardship post. It was a place where I could bring a family and be comfortable. Phil Habib swore me in a ceremony on the eighth floor. I can recall that ceremony for two reasons too in the context of my own sort of ego, if you will. I suppose it also reflected the fact that it was a small country and the ceremony was in the Adams Room and not in the Franklin Room.

Q: These are ceremonial rooms. The Franklin is the big one and the Adams is the smaller one.

LAINGEN: But it was the time when more of those swearing in ceremonies were taking place in the Adams Room than is the case today, where all of them seem to occur in the Franklin Room. It was also the time when money was short so there was no money available for any kind of champagne or wine afterwards. I can recall in my remarks that day after being sworn in, sort of directing a barb at Carol Laise, who was Director General of the Foreign Service at that time and who was present, saying rather facetiously that I regretted the fact that the Department was so poor as to be unable to help me provide any kind of drinks for my guests. I should have reminded myself that I could have put up the money myself, I suppose, but I didn't.

Phil Habib presided at the ceremony and I was reminded of that in the recent death of Phil Habib. Reminded of the enormous respect that I had for him at the time and that I think everyone serving as a career officer in the Department of State had for him.

Q: What were your instructions or goals when you went to Malta?

LAINGEN: I don't recall receiving any written instructions. I recall benefitting from a final reporting message from Bob Smith, who was my predecessor. Our interest in Malta at that time was essentially an interest that has continued throughout this period and to this day, although in the aftermath of the Cold War it matters less. Our interest was to insure that the Soviets did not gain a useful, political, and certainly not a military presence on the islands. Because Malta, whatever its insignificance in terms of its size, nonetheless is an island republic in the midst of the Mediterranean Sea in a kind of strategic choke point, if you will, in that body of water. In historical times it loomed very large. Also in World War II when it held out against massive Italian and German bombing assaults. It was very important then for Allied shipping in the Mediterranean. We continued to feel that way about the place after the war and into the Cold War period, even though, again, in modern times the usefulness of that port, Grand Harbor, and it is a grand harbor, was much less then in earlier times.

Malta could be easily bypassed. But yet it sat there and sits there as a hard piece of rock at that choke point in the Mediterranean. We were and have been successful in insuring that Mintoff, who was the Prime Minister leading a socialist, Labor Party government, kept a degree of neutrality in the Cold War period. He did not align himself with the Soviet Union, although occasionally implying that that was a threat that we ought to consider, never carrying it to the point of doing anything. The Soviets have eventually gained a diplomatic presence, which they didn't have when I was there. Mintoff was a small thorn in the side of the Alliance simply because he had so dramatically denied entry by the Sixth Fleet, ordered the Navy out, in the early years, before I got there. He did his damnedest to play the few cards that he had as a small island republic to get everything out of us and other Western allies by posing this kind of threat or warning that if we didn't take care of Malta and provide some degree of assistance, he might turn to the Soviet Bloc.

So that was my principal preoccupation while I was there, trying to deal with this man who was a very difficult political person presiding over a party that was generally assumed to be considerably left of center without being Communist and therefore a potential danger to us.

I had a reasonable personal relationship with Mintoff, but no American Ambassador ever had a comfortable one with him. Indeed, my immediate successor, Joan Clark, was denied any kind of official relationship with him. He refused to have it from that point on, during her time there and continuing for a time afterwards. To this date I am not aware of just what triggered that kind of cut off that began with my departure and continued throughout Joan's time there.

Q: You say you worked to prevent the Soviets from having a foothold there. You are the American Ambassador, how do you work to prevent this?

LAINGEN: We did what we could together with our allies, particularly the British and Italians, to be as forthcoming as possible in small things...trade, investment, and American commercial presence, which is what the Maltese kept bugging us about. Doing what we could to encourage the Italians, who are and were the NATO ally most obviously concerned, next door...Malta is culturally a very Italian place in many respects...to provide assistance to the Maltese. To do things for and with Mintoff that would curb his appetite a little bit in terms of turning to the Soviet Bloc.

We couldn't go in there with the Fleet, we were denied that. We couldn't force American business to go in there. It was damn hard to get any American business to look at the place and it still is. We have a few American industries on the island and we kept pointing to that in conversations with the Maltese about how we did really care about the place. But we had very few tools to work with. We took a lot of this talk from Mintoff as bluster and bluff and negotiating tactics -- that he wasn't really going to turn in any large way to the Soviet Bloc, not least because that would have aroused enough political public opinion in Malta to endanger his own political party's hold on power.

Eventually that did work to our advantage because a year or two after I left, the opposition, Christian Democratic, called Nationalist Party in Malta, did win an election and remains in power to this day.

Q: Were you able to deal beyond Mintoff with his party or the opposition party?

LAINGEN: I had no problems in dealing with the opposition party. I didn't let that affect my attitude. If anything we had too many contacts with the opposition, the Nationalists, and not enough with the Socialists. It was not a situation where the ruling party attempted to tell us, as an American Embassy, who we could see and couldn't see. That didn't happen. There was enough of a democratic process to prevent that from happening.
Q: Was the Soviet fleet there?

LAINGEN: No, it never came. The British came in on one or two occasions. When I was there the British military presence was formally ended. After independence, when the Maltese gained their independence from the Brits, the arrangements included provisions for the Brits to continue a military presence. In that sense there was that kind of indirect NATO presence, although they were there not as NATO representatives, but as a British military presence as a product of a former colonial relationship. So we had visits from the Ark Royal, a major British aircraft carrier. Within a few weeks after I left (I continued in Malta for a time as the head of a CSEC delegation), the formal break totally in terms of a British military relationship occurred in a rather elaborate ceremony in March, 1979. Earlier we had seen the beginnings of the British military pull out. I recall a visit to the island by Lord Mountbatten when the British Marines on land were formally withdrawn

in another elaborate ceremony. I recall watching with fascination this kind of dramatic and royal ending to a couple of hundred years of British political and military presence on the island.

Q: How did you guage the feeling of the people on the island? With the withdrawal of the British this meant jobs for a very small island.

LAINGEN: There was no difficulty determining the political currents on the island of Malta. It is very open and on public display at all times. The press is free. Political parties are free to badger each other, including physically. A good deal of concern at that time by the opposition party, the Nationalists, was that the governing Labor Party was using its goons, strike squads, to break up political gatherings and that sort of thing. I had very close and friendly relationship with the head of the opposition party.

I did see Mintoff on several occasions. I don't mean to say that anyone got very close to Mintoff, ever. He is not a very easy man to deal with. He did not and does not, even though he is still out of power, divulge his tactics very publicly to you or closely to you. Malta is a kind of microcosm, it is a tiny place. It is 350,000 people, all of them concentrated on two islands, most of them on one. It is an island republic, a country. And yet it is a kind of city state and to most Westerners I suppose they would look at it working as a city council and yet it has all the trappings of a big state. It has a diplomatic service, it has a president, prime minister, palaces, a tiny navy, a small military force, the tradition of Britain and all of the trappings of ceremony that date from that time. It is a heavily Catholic island where the Church looms very large, both culturally, politically and in a religious sense. It is a fascinating microcosm of a larger place.

After having gotten there, I never regretted my assignment as Ambassador. The diplomatic corps was and still is relatively small. I think we had 13 or 14 embassies at that time. I think it has grown now to around 20. Because of the intense politics of the place that was sort of lived every day among the Maltese, because of the continuing feeling that there was a conceivable risk that the Russians might get in there, the diplomatic corps sort of fed on itself, talking a lot. It is a very social island, a lot of parties, particularly on the Nationalist side and the more Western-oriented business community. They love to entertain. They love the diplomatic corps. They like to get them to their dinner parties. They like that to be reported in the newspapers. In that sense it certainly is not a quiet backwater. You can soon develop a very large case of clientitis, I suppose, because you get so involved in their social and political life.

It is small and that affects your attitude eventually. The main island is only about 18-20 miles in length and I can recall how after months of living in a place like that you begin to think, "My God, am I going to have to drive all the way up to the other end of the island? It is a long way!" And to go to the other island of Gozo it meant taking a ferry. It is also part of the jurisdiction of the American Ambassador to Malta, the island of Gozo, which has about 20,000 people. It is an absolutely beautiful place and a place that culturally is very close to Italy, not least in terms of its fascination and love for opera. I am one of few

Ambassadors in the Foreign Service I suppose who can drop a line in a cocktail party to this day to the effect that "My God, when I heard `La Boheme' in Gozo it was absolutely magnificent." People will say, "Where the hell is Gozo?"

Malta is out in the Mediterranean and you ask most Americans where Malta is and they haven't a clue. I recall telling my mother where I was going and she said, "I know where Malta is, it is about 50 miles south of Sicily," and it is. This reflects the fact that geography in the old days in our country was more important than it is today. People knew then where places were and my mother was a teacher.

Q: Also, too, World War II was a great geography teacher to people. You picked these things up, but I don't think you do now.

LAINGEN: Malta wasn't a decisive battle front of World War II, but most Americans who lived through World War II will recall that Malta was an important place then because it was such a dramatic example of a place that held out against massive German bombardment.

Q: And also the fact that it held out was extremely important for the whole battle of the Mediterranean and the defeat of the Afrika Corps in North Africa.

LAINGEN: That's right. It also is the only country on the globe's surface, certainly for a length of time it was that, a sovereign state run by an order of knights, the Knights of Malta. This began in the 16th century when the Turks tried to take it and failed. It has been a kind of symbol of resistance ever since to outside intervention with among other things some dramatic examples, which the Germans did not destroy, of medieval military fortifications. And, of course, the Knights of Malta remain a sovereign state to this day. There is an Embassy of the Knights of Malta in Malta. The sovereign body today is in Rome.

Q: One thing you haven't mentioned is the Libya connection. Libya at the time is run by an ardent Islamic nationalist, certainly anti-American and anti-West, Muammar Qadhafi. With considerable oil money, Qadhafi has been quite a trouble maker as far as sending either troops, or money or weapons to trouble spots. I would have thought that this would have been a place that he could have bought.

LAINGEN: I didn't mention Qadhafi, and I suppose I should have, because he was symbolic of the Soviet threat. It was he that visibly symbolized the possibility of a Soviet threat to the island given the degree, and it has varied over the last couple decades, of closeness between Qadhafi and Moscow. At that time it was a reasonably close relationship. Yes, that was part of that concern that motivated us all of the time, that the Soviets might gain some entry via the Libyans.

The Libyans and the Maltese have a peculiar relationship. They are relatively close geographically. The two peoples, the Libyans being Arabs and the Maltese having been

influenced over the centuries by an Arab influence as well, have to some degree a cultural relationship, although not much. I mean the Maltese are basically Western European oriented...in style and culture and interests. They don't have much in common with their Libyan neighbors in that respect. I don't recall a single mosque anywhere on the island of Malta. And yet Libya matters. It was there. They had a considerable economic relationship. Oil was a factor.

Qadhafi came to Malta at least once while I was there. I recall the diplomatic corps being lined up at the airport as was the custom to meet heads of state, and being struck by what all Americans are struck by in the case of Qadhafi...his instinct of commanding attention by his dress and his manner. He always wore a military hat, which to me always looked too big and rested on his ears. He was accompanied by his own goon squads shouting and leading demonstrations there at the airport in support of Qadhafi. Qadhafi and Mintoff are two rascals, if you will, of similar persuasion. I can see that they had a lot in common in terms of political instinct and political skills. But the Maltese as a group and certainly the opposition party in Malta had nothing of any kind in common with Qadhafi.

I also remember dealing with the Libyan Embassy in Malta, particularly the Libyan Ambassador who was someone whose son was studying at the University of Idaho and whose natural instincts were Western oriented but was carrying out his responsibilities as the Libyan Ambassador, presumably loyally. I wonder what has happened to that man because I find it difficult to see how such a person would forever be inclined to stick with what has happened in Libya.

Q: When Qadhafi visited was there a concern that he might come up with some horrendous offer of money that just might upset everything?

LAINGEN: There was a concern that he would come up with offers that would include a military relationship of some kind. And he had some success in that sense. Whether it was while I was there or shortly after I left I have forgotten, but Mintoff did come to an understanding with Qadhafi that saw a military training mission on the island. The possibility of that was a concern that I felt throughout the period and affected a lot of the things that we did with respect to Malta. We weren't able to offer much to counter that because of the absence of a NATO relationship. We had provided in the past and since that time we have provided a couple of them -- some used naval yard craft for their small navy. It was part of the effort to deter Mintoff from carrying this too far. But mainly we relied on the Italians to offer military training and assistance enough to counter the Libyan presence. We were simply not in a position to do that ourselves and they were reluctant to accept it lest it violate their (Mintoff's) professed neutrality.

Q: You left Malta when?

LAINGEN: I left Malta in January, 1979. I regret the fact that I was ordered to leave in January for family reasons. Looking back on it, it is an example, I think, of the Department of State sometimes forgetting that transfer orders can affect a family's

educational interests and needs. I had to pull my family out in the middle of an academic year in a place where our interests it seemed to me didn't require that kind of dramatic sudden change. I wonder to this day why the Department felt it necessary to move me five months ahead of the time when I could have been moved more easily later with less disruption of my family's academic requirements.

In any event the order came through and with it an accompanying assignment to head the American delegation to a CSCE conference in Malta on Scientific, Educational and Cultural Cooperation in the Mediterranean. It was one of the early conferences of the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe).

Q: The Helsinki Accords.

LAINGEN: Yes. Early on, Malta under Mintoff was one of the big thorns in the side of CSCE, because CSCE operates on a voting basis where consensus has to be achieved before decisions are made. Decisions are not made by majority vote. They have to be made by consensus and any member, certainly at that time, could frustrate or impede decisions or progress by voicing objections. Mintoff was magnificent in doing that. It was part of his style. Here was a venue, an international organization, where he could do that in spades as a small country, and he did, almost frustrating the original decision at Helsinki setting up CSCE by endless Maltese demands of one kind or another.

One of the ways that the CSCE, the Western allies, worked to cope with that was to throw a bone once in a while. One of them was this conference on the Mediterranean, which Mintoff wanted to extend to deal with security issues as well and which we resisted in part because that was not one of CSCE's purposes in any event to get into security issues as it is today under different circumstances.

In any event I was asked to stay on in Malta for a couple of months as head of that delegation. So I moved out of the residence and moved into a hotel in Valletta and did that. I enjoyed it. The accord that we reached at the end of that conference was not one that affected the future of the planet. It was of very large interest to Malta simply for no other reason than that it gave them a place in the sun. For Mintoff personally it was a big plum because he could claim that he had demanded and accomplished this conference. It was held in a conference center that was the former hospital of the Knights of Malta which had been converted into a conference center. It is a splendid place. This was the first international conference held in the center.

I don't remember much about the decisions at the time except that I was supported by some very effective Foreign Service officers, much better schooled in CSCE issues than I was at the time. I came to appreciate in terms of person-to-person relationships the diplomatic capacities of small places like Austria, Switzerland, Finland, not least the Vatican. Small countries of little consequence normally in most issues, but who loom large in an organization like the CSCE.

I recall particularly the Vatican representative at that conference and how very professional and able the Vatican's diplomatic service is. I have often said that few diplomats write as well as do the members of the Vatican's diplomatic service.

Q: You left there when?

LAINGEN: I left there on the very day that the British ceremonies took place in Malta marking the final end of British military presence. Then I was assigned back in Washington, as is so often the case with Foreign Service officers who aren't available or useful in any other context, to the Inspection Corps. I began work with the Inspection Corps as head of a delegation going to Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay. I spent a month or so in preparation for that and was about to leave for those three countries to inspect those embassies when I took leave in Minnesota in early June, 1979.

While I was there I had a telephone call from the Director General of the Foreign Service telling me that the Secretary wanted me to go instead to Tehran to serve as Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy for a period of four to six weeks while the Department and the White House made a determination as to what kind of diplomatic presence we were going to have in Iran in the aftermath of the revolution that had taken place in February and in the aftermath of the departure of Ambassador Sullivan in March and the fact that the Chargé d'Affaires who had remained in place, Charlie Naas, needed to be relieved as well.

I don't recall if I said immediately on the telephone, "Yes, of course I will go," or whether I said, "I will call you back." I hope with respect to my wife I said at least, "Let me call you back." My memory doesn't serve me very well on that respect.

My memory does recall, as I may have mentioned earlier on, a conversation of almost 26 years earlier when I had been on that same farm, on leave between assignments having completed an assignment on Hamburg and about to go to Kobe, Japan as a vice consul, all my effects having been shipped to Kobe. I got a similar telephone call that time from a personnel officer in the Department of State saying, "You are not going to Kobe; you are going to Tehran" because the Embassy in the aftermath of the Mossadegh overthrow in the summer of that year was building up staff and needed officers who might be available. I was single at the time and thus presumably available. So my assignment was broken to Kobe and despatched to Tehran. So in that sense history was repeating itself for me when I got this call in 1979.

Q: How did you feel about this?

LAINGEN: Coming back from Malta and picking up the Inspection assignment, I recall having...it was a time when having served there earlier, as an old Iranian hand, I and many others were watching what was happening in Iran in the aftermath of the revolution. I can remember talking with Henry Precht, who was then the Country Director for Iran, about what was happening and he, I thought facetiously, saying, "Wouldn't you like to go

to Tehran?" And I pooh- poohed that and said that I had been away from there too long and was not the one to go. But when I got that call in Minnesota on the farm telling me that the Secretary of State wanted me to go to Tehran, as a loyal Foreign Service officer my first instinct was to say, "Yes, of course I will go."

I can also recall feeling excitement. That was where the action was. I am not sure I said that I would call back or immediately said, "Yes." That is important because my wife at the time had reservations. She said, "All right if you want to go, go." But she was strong in her reservations, and I can recall that she told me that that was not the place to go, that we shouldn't be there at all. What we should do, in her view, was to put a fence around the country and let them sort themselves out rather than take any risks with the place. But she was the loyal spouse, in the days when spouses had less to say, and she said, "Go ahead and go, if you want to go." So I went.

I want to interrupt to relate an incident with regard to EUR yesterday. I had called the Portuguese Desk in the Department to ask whether they would send through the pouch to Lisbon a copy of a book I have done on my Iranian experiences for the Swiss Ambassador in Portugal, who happens to be the same ambassador who served as the Ambassador from Switzerland in Tehran at the time I was there and who was massively helpful to me in my Embassy then. The Portugal Desk Officer in the Department of State currently has a slight accent, and is clearly from the subcontinent. When he told me his name I knew he was from the subcontinent because it was Ahmed. He is Pakistani born, lived there until his teens and now is a naturalized American citizen who is the Desk Officer for Portugal, of all places. I told him I assumed he must be the first Pakistani-American to be a member of the career Foreign Service of the United States. And he says that he thinks he is. He volunteered to me that it was a fascinating, dramatic example of the way anything can happen in the United States of America.

Q: Today is November 25, 1992. In our last interview you explained how you got your assignment to go to Iran and how overjoyed your wife was with this assignment. What was the situation as it was explained to you in Washington and when you went out, and what were you supposed to do about it?

LAINGEN: The revolution had occurred in February 1979. Ambassador Sullivan was presiding in the Embassy. The Embassy, as you know, had been overrun in the midst of the revolution. In the zeal and passion and excitement of the revolution the revolutionary types descended on the Embassy and occupied it for six hours, but it was restored to Ambassador Sullivan's control by leaders then coming into power but not yet in office, including the future Foreign Minister Yazdi. Thereafter the Embassy had revolutionary guards whom we referred to gently as thugs, on the compound. A squad of them, indeed at the beginning three squads of them from three separate revolutionary groups, were placed in the Embassy for our "protection." Ambassador Sullivan remained on the job for a time, until March.

Here in Washington those responsible for Iranian affairs, from the Desk on up to the President began their considerations of what to do next. Do we try to reestablish a relationship with the regime or do we get out and decide that it is hopeless? A policy review, and I wasn't involved at that point as I was still in Malta, began in early March, 1979. That review concluded that our interests in the country, and particularly the region, were still big enough for us to require an effort to rebuild a relationship, to try to salvage a relationship with this new crowd coming in. The old crowd by that time having been out or on their way out either in prison or exile.

That review of policy continued on through that year until the Embassy was seized a second time. But those early reviews concluded that an effort should be made to try to rebuild a relationship. One of the side affects of that was that Ambassador Sullivan had to leave; he was too much identified with the old regime. That left the place in charge of the DCM at the time, Charlie Naas, who became Chargé d'Affaires when Sullivan left. Charlie remained on the job until I arrived in June, a decision having been made by that time that Charlie had to leave as well. He had weathered a rather difficult time, obviously, and it was time for him to leave as well.

I was asked to go, instructed to go and man it for four to six weeks until we sorted things out and decided what we would do.

I don't recall, Stu, whether we talked about Walter Cutler or not last time.
Q: No, I don't think we did.

LAINGEN: As part of the review of policy and the conclusion that we still should continue to make an effort to establish some kind of relationship, however limited, with the new regime, Walter Cutler was identified and designated as the Ambassador. Agrément was sought from the government in Tehran, the provisional government of the revolution. Agrément was received from them. Then in late May, 1979, in the aftermath of rather considerable pressures against the Jewish community in Tehran...Iranian Jews in the city at that time were still rather active and reasonably large community were being so harassed that Senator Javits from New York moved a resolution in the United States Senate which was very critical of the regime in Tehran for its policies towards minorities and particularly the Jewish minority in Tehran. That got the radicals behind the scene in Tehran, but including elements of the provisional government, agitated and there began a series of large demonstrations against the Embassy.

The Chancery was not overrun at that time in late May, but it was attacked. The flag was torn down, graffiti all over the place. And, more significantly, the Agrément for Walter Cutler was withdrawn.

The authorities here in Washington said that they couldn't do that and we got into a confrontation...our government and the government in Tehran. That continued for several weeks and finally the decision was made to send me out as a temporary Chargé with the

rank of Ambassador...we wanted to get that message across to them that I was still a senior type, sent out there to resume the discussions with the authorities.

As far as my own instructions were concerned, in addition to being told that my assignment was temporary, I was to do what I could do in the first place to enhance the security arrangements in the compound at the Embassy. Do what could be done to get those revolutionary guards, by that time reduced to one squad of about 30, removed from the compound. They by that time were an awful red flag for our proud Marines who didn't think much of the idea at all, having others on the compound, particularly revolutionaries, sharing the responsibility of protecting their compound. The first item on my list of instructions was to do what I could even in that short time to see if we could accomplish their removal.

The second instruction was to do what I could to enhance the morale of the Embassy community, largely then confined in their social and official activities to the compound itself. A third responsibility was to again look to how the consular function of the Embassy could be rehabilitated. A fourth was to continue to work as Charlie Naas had done to put some order into sorting out our military supply relationships with this new regime.

I guess it was largely that list of instructions, as well, of course, to communicate as Charlie had already been doing on behalf of Washington, that we fully accepted the change in Tehran, that we had no intention to work with the Shah to restore him to the throne, that we were well aware that circumstances had changed totally in Tehran and that we accepted it. Those were my instructions.

Q: What was your impression of how the people you talked to in the State Department or the White House felt about the situation in Tehran?

LAINGEN: There was divided opinion as there had been throughout the time that future relations were being discussed in the aftermath of the revolution in February. But always those who felt that the risk was worth taking prevailed. I think they were a rather substantial majority. That was my opinion of people here. We couldn't just walk out. We still had a great deal of things to sort out on the ground in Tehran, not least the military supply relationship, and it was best that we make that effort.

Q: When you talk about the military supply relationship, what were the issues?

LAINGEN: There was something like 12 billion dollars in incomplete orders placed by the Shah, where the equipment had not been delivered. There was also a substantial amount of spare parts for an existing US supplied military inventory. We had had, for that matter, before the revolution, during the Shah's period, a very large military supply relationship, cash payment, involving on the ground in Tehran hundreds of military personnel handling this complex supply relationship. Most of those had left in the aftermath of the revolution, couldn't stay on. All of those orders and all of that

relationship was lying there untended and we needed to get at it. I still had the head of the Military Assistance Group, MAAG. He had weathered the first assault on the Embassy in February and stayed on. It was Maj. Gen. Philip Gast, United States Air Force. He was doing his best with a small remaining staff, but some kind of impetus had to be put behind that to get it moving a little faster.

Q: Here was a revolutionary country which at the time we felt with the Soviet Union so close as rather problematical and here you are talking about billions of supplies which were obviously of great value. It was a way of siphoning off Iran's oil wealth and going to the defense industry. At the same time there must have been a concern about the kind of outfit we were strengthening? What were we trying to do?

LAINGEN: Your question made reference to the Soviet Union. We were still talking then about the depths of the Cold War when the Soviet Union...

Q: Oh, yes. In fact it was at the very depths of the Cold War...well it hadn't quite reached the Afghan stage which came at the same time.

LAINGEN: In any event, the Soviet "threat" loomed rather large in the minds of everyone. Of course, in the final analysis that threat and oil interests in the Persian Gulf were the considerations that kept us concluding that to try to have a relationship even with this questionable regime was worth the effort. That we had to be there.

Vast numbers of US military suppliers, business, commercial, defense industries, were involved in all of this -- that was another major consideration, of course, that went into the decision after February to make an effort.

You refer to whether I had any consultations with the White House. I did not. I did not see Jimmy Carter. I should have, I think, particularly in light of what happened. Although when I went out there it was only a four to six week assignment. Under such an assignment one wouldn't expect to see the President.

I don't think I even saw Secretary Vance before I left. I saw him in September when I came back on consultations. But before I went out it was temporary enough in the assignment to make it seem necessary only to talk with the people at the Assistant Secretary level.

Q: Did you talk to anybody at the Iranian Embassy?

LAINGEN: No. I did not.

Q: How did you get out there and what did you find?

LAINGEN: I arrived in Tehran June 16, 1979 and was met at the airport by Charlie Naas and a large entourage of security escorts. This was my first return in a substantive official capacity since I left there in an official capacity in 1955. I obviously returned to a very

different Tehran, both in terms of the growth of that city, and in a revolutionary context a very different scene of revolutionaries everywhere, not least at the terminal building in Tehran. I will never forget the impression of traveling into the city from the airport that evening with Charlie Naas in an armored plated limousine with escort cars both fore and aft. Each of them were loaded with security types who had no hesitation when it was necessary to clear traffic to jump out of their cars and wave their pistols and Uzis...

Q: These were Iranians?

LAINGEN: Yes, they were Iranians. ...waving their guns and Uzis around to clear the way. It was a rather dramatic entry back into Tehran. And, of course, along the way at that time one could still see the visible impact of the revolution in terms of burned out buildings, particularly banks, theaters, and Western business establishments. By that time they hadn't changed the names of the streets, so you still had Eisenhower Blvd. and Queen Elizabeth Blvd. and a few names such as that. They were to change in a few weeks or months.

Q: I assume one of the first things you did was to sort of appraise yourself of the morale situation. How did you find the management, morale and effectiveness of the Embassy when you got there?

LAINGEN: The effect was evident as I drove into the compound that evening. To see the way in which it had become a kind of used car lot and yard sale lot because of the masses of supplies, not least wrought iron patio furniture which seemed to have been in abundance in our houses in Tehran and was now stacked on the Embassy compound here and there -- all still a product of the time during the weeks preceding and after the revolution in February when the American community descended upon the compound for evacuation purposes accompanied by much of their own supplies and possessions. Most of their personal possessions had been shipped out, but a lot of their furniture was still there. The compound was a mess. It was 27 acres and you can put a lot of stuff in there, but it still looked crowded with cars and stacks of household equipment and supplies of one kind or another. It was a very disorderly looking place. Understandable because not much had been accomplished in cleaning this up, although there were additional personnel assigned to Tehran, particularly from military installations in Germany, to help -- since many of the personnel whose cars and other property were still there on the compound were military personnel now transferred to commands in Germany.

I found the morale of the Embassy high...in a beleaguered mission is usually high because it is beleaguered. But this situation, nonetheless, was a little down because the outlook was still very uncertain. They were thrown in upon themselves. They couldn't get out very much at all around the country. They could travel to some extent within the city of Tehran. This is no criticism of Charlie Naas and his colleagues who had been through a very tough time and had done their damnedest. In the light of that kind of experience that they had gone through, many of them still there in June, I thought morale was remarkably high, given the circumstances.

My reception by the officials of the provisional government of the revolution headed by secular leaders of the revolution, particularly representing the National Front, was very good. They weren't jumping over themselves to embrace me or anything, but they were courteous, polite, on the whole very friendly. I never had any difficulty during the months that followed to gain access, to see members of the government, which I did acting under and speaking to the mandate that I have described of communicating to them a desire to continue to build a new relationship, to remind them that we had no policy objections to the fact of the revolution, to appeal to them in particular for cooperation to improving security affecting the personnel of the Embassy and the compound. That kind of welcome was evident on the Fourth of July, which was less than three weeks after I arrived on this temporary mission. We made a judgment that we would go ahead with an official ceremony celebrating the Fourth of July, which one would normally do in an embassy, of course, but this time it had to be carefully considered because we didn't know what kind of reaction we would get.

So we had a noon time reception at the Residence, inviting a fairly large number of officials of the Provisional Government, including some military representatives. We had a surprising large turn out, including the Foreign Minister, the Defense Minister, and I think a couple of other Ministers.

I will not forget it because I made an effort to get the Foreign Minister to join me in a toast at one high moment. He chose not to have it photographed or in any way thus signaling to the community outside the compound that relations were that warm. But at least he came and we had a good conversation. He declined any alcoholic beverages. The reception got some good publicity in the press.

It began, that event on July 4 the building of optimism among us that eventually became wishful thinking and eventually saw us make some judgments about our durability in Tehran that proved totally unfounded.

Q: As you looked at the situation then, you had the Provisional Government, and as I take it the Mullahs and the religious fundamentalists off to one side like a big cloud. What was the tie as you saw it?

LAINGEN: Well, there was the Provisional Government headed by Prime Minister Bazargan, a distinguished Persian, Iranian, private individual, a gentle personality, presiding over a very difficult situation. He was respected largely, however, because of his long years of opposition to the Shah, going back to the fifties. He was surrounded by other ministers, also secular, many of them from the same political movement, the National Front, from which Bazargan came. In other words, I had to deal with a sitting government with people occupying all the normal ministries that you have in a government with which most ambassadors at embassies have to deal. You can't ignore them totally and go behind the scenes and try to find somebody else to deal with.

Behind the scenes, however, we knew there were other elements of the revolution that had brought it about, particularly the clerical elements from the Ayatollah Khomeini on down. Their power, their role, their activity was concentrated in a Revolutionary Council with which I never had direct contact, which was not a visible organization to the rest of us, any embassy, or for that matter the Iranians themselves. It was very much behind the scenes. It was another element of power which we all knew was there but with which we did not deal directly. I never did have that kind of contact with them that amounted to much except on some social occasions I would have contact with this or that cleric, this or that mullah. I called a couple of times on senior mullahs, including a man named Beheshti. He was a powerful influence whom we knew was active behind the scenes and who was a member of the Revolutionary Council. I had a warm reception from him, but a very tough conversation because he was very critical of previous US policy and he let me know that.

Q: What was the thrust of your response to this?

LAINGEN: The thrust of my response to that kind of an approach from a cleric was to reiterate, as I did many times in the months I was there before the Embassy was taken, that we did in fact accept the revolution in Tehran, that we had no intention of trying to turn it around, that we knew reality when we saw it. The Shah was not going to be a factor in our decisions on the future of Iran. I accompanied that with frequent reminders, speaking in many ways personally. I said, "Look, we are a country that also has some reason to respect a larger spiritual value. We are a religious nation of people as well and respect your belief that Islam should be a large consequence in your decisions." I made it very clear that I understood how they felt about a higher spiritual value. That didn't carry much water, I suspect, but I went on with that kind of thing.

As the summer went on, the six week assignment began to lengthen for a variety of reasons. One, I think was that Washington concluded that Laingen was doing reasonably well out there and that his presence was helpful. In any event Washington wasn't coming very fast to any conclusion as to the future of the place, particularly the naming of an ambassador, other than the possibility of naming me.

Morale did improve in the course of that summer. Security, generally in the country, seemed to be improving. The involvement of revolutionary comités and roadblocks seemed to be beginning to lessen. We were able to get out of the compound and travel about the city with a little more ease. Indeed, by August we were able to begin sending people out to former consulates in Shiraz and Tabriz where our consular facilities were closed but still manned by Iranian employees. Again, it was further deepening our wishful thinking, our preference to be optimists.

We were beginning to get cooperation as well in improving the security on the compound. I think it was in August that that effort reached the point where the security group on our compounded headed by a particularly unattractive thug named Mashalla, was removed forcibly by other revolutionary elements. Early one Sunday morning I was

startled, knowing that an effort of that kind was being planned -- the Office of Protocol had kept me advised of that but not knowing precisely when it was going to happen -- startled to find myself one Sunday morning as I got up in my swimming trunks and bathrobe and opened my door on the second floor of the Residence to find confronting me, face to face, a couple of revolutionary guards with Uzis presumably ready to fire aimed at me, they not knowing who I was. They had gotten into the back of the Residence through kitchen windows looking for elements of that revolutionary squad that they were evicting. They were examining every nook and cranny of that compound to find them and flush them out. These two who confronted me ordered me to sit down, which I promptly did, and then went into my room and searched carefully, including all of my closets, finally concluding that I was legitimate in some fashion.

They accompanied me downstairs where I found the two Marines who normally at that time spent the night on watch in the Residence, they too having been surprised by these guards that had crept through windows in the kitchen area, very unhappy at the situation they had gotten themselves into. The group of us, four or five of these "friendly" revolutionary guards, myself and the two Marines spent a few worrisome minutes looking at each other in the entrance foyer of the Residence until we sorted it all out.

In the course of the morning the eviction of that other group was accomplished and these new revolutionary guards stayed on the compound for a few days, but within a short time the Marines were back in control of the compound and regular Iranian police became the guards outside the walls.

That was a very important development event because it did a great deal to restore morale on the compound for the Americans who lived and worked there. It was seen as very tangible evidence that the Provisional Government, at least, did want to continue to try to build a relationship with us and let us remain. As this process went on, and we were having some progress as well in discussion in sorting out the military supply relationship, Washington apparently concluded that it might be a good idea to keep me on not only longer as Chargé d'Affaires, which of course they did, but eventually to conclude that my being named as Ambassador to the new regime would be a positive development.

Late one afternoon in August I got a telephone call as I was playing tennis on the courts on the compound -- which were always carefully guarded by both Marines and revolutionary guards during the time they were on the compound -- I got a call from either David Newsom or Ben Read...

Q: Newsom was Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Eastern Affairs and Read was Under Secretary for Management.

LAINGEN: ...informing me that the White House wanted to put my name to the Senate that very day as Ambassador to Tehran and how did I feel about that. Obviously I was surprised and said, "I need a little time to reflect on that. I very much would want to talk with my family." It was of sufficient consequence to cause me to consult with what

mattered to me most at that point, I guess, and that was how my family felt. I knew if I were named I would be there a much longer time and much of that time would still be a situation where we still had no families of any kind with us. All dependents had been sent home in the aftermath of the revolution in February, so there were no dependents of any kind in our community.

Washington was very understanding of that and after several other telephone conversations over the next few days it was concluded that I should come back to Washington on consultations in early September, which I did. In consultations at that time it was decided to leave the question of my being named as Ambassador in abeyance. There was again some question as to whether it was a good thing to do it. There was always some question apparently back here as to whether it was a good idea to elevate a Chargé -- whether that was a sufficient signal to the new revolutionary regime that we had accepted the revolution. In any event, that issue of whether I should be elevated as Ambassador was never fully resolved.

Eventually, I got the impression that a decision in Washington had been made that it was not the best thing to do in terms of naming an ambassador and they began to consider others. Indeed, as I understand it, when Foreign Minister Yazdi came to New York in early October for meetings of the General Assembly and for a meeting in the course of the General Assembly with Secretary Vance, a decision had been reached to name a different person as ambassador. In fact, Secretary Vance had in his pocket, I understand, when he sat down with Yazdi, the name of that person. H was ready to ask Yazdi to ask his government for Agrément. That conversation went so badly however, that that request was never extended. It will always be an open question for me, and an uncertain answer, whether, if I had been named Ambassador and whether in so doing we had signaled that we had accepted the revolution to that degree, whether things might have been different in November.

Q: What went badly in the discussion between Yazdi and Vance?

LAINGEN: It was mainly the atmosphere. Yazdi was so aggressive, and this was the first high level conversation that had taken place between the new government in Tehran and Washington. All previous conversations had been at my level. There had been no substantive conversations at a high political level. The conversation was icy. Yazdi was full of a lot of propaganda about the revolution. The question of getting a hold of the military supply relationship bogged down in suspicion, which was wide in government circles in Tehran, and expressed particularly by Yazdi; that we really had no intention to do much to help them resolve this. They felt, throughout, that if we had really accepted the revolution and the new state of reality in Tehran, that we would have been much more aggressive in resolving that issue, that we would have been much more forthcoming in price considerations, contract resolutions, than we had signaled to them. So the conversation went badly and it was so reported to me in Tehran. It was a bit of a let down obviously. That was early October.

Q: When you were back in Washington I take it you still had this feeling of cautious optimism. Since you and your Embassy were reporting this, was this sort of the mood also on the Desk, the Bureau, etc.?

LAINGEN: Yes, it was. All of us were motivated by a mission. We thought that it was a mission achievable, that there were enough signals, there was a sufficiently good atmosphere for us to continue to work to try to find a basis for a relationship with this new crowd. Most diplomats, I think, tend to be optimists. Most of us are sort of convinced after long years of service that problems can be resolved, and, of course we want to resolve problems, that is our job. That is the way we approached this thing in Tehran, I think, all of us. We were all optimists. Yes, we were all cautious optimists. I don't think we were naive, although given what eventually happened I am sure we can be accused of having been naive and unrealistic in our optimism at the time.

Q: Well, there are always events that overtake whatever...

LAINGEN: Well, there was one very large event that overtook us on this one. But enough had happened in terms of our relationship with the provisional regime...when I say "us" I mean both Washington and us in the field...to believe that there was an upward trend and that we should work to try to nourish it, to keep it going. I came back on consultation with that kind of spirit. I found the same spirit in Washington. They obviously wanted to hear from me directly. I recall making a commitment to myself to try to nourish that optimism, try to contribute to it, believing Washington wasn't yet sufficiently accepting the view that I had communicated that there was an upward trend -- including in our discussions about resolving some of the thousands of commercial problems that were lying around needing resolution. We had a number of visits from American business representatives. We had encouraged them to come to check it out on the ground, but not to stay. The only way we told them that they could hope to begin to resolve some of their problems was to come out and take a look.

I said that we were beginning to have some very serious discussions about the military supply relationship. We were approaching a point where an Iranian mission of military officers would actually come to the United States and go out to Omaha and sit down and look at the vast amount of paper and records that had accumulated affecting that supply relationship.

I remember having a breakfast session, in Washington during consultations, with American media representatives and talking to them about this situation. The general impression that I communicated and left and believed in was that there was a favorable enough trend in Tehran for us to continue the effort. Granted that we had not yet seen the Ayatollah and that we were not in direct contact with the Revolutionary Council, but we and indeed virtually every other embassy in Tehran to which we talked were convinced that things were looking up.

I went back to Tehran in mid-September and I remember the first day I got back because a leading element in the Revolutionary Council, an Ayatollah named Taleghani, had had a heart attack and died. He was widely considered by most observers, including us, as a rational, moderate voice in the Revolutionary Council. There was a great deal of regret among us that he had suddenly disappeared from the scene. The day I got back there was a very large memorial service on the grounds of the university in Tehran where the diplomatic corps was invited. We all attended and mingled with vast crowds of clerical and secular Iranians accompanied, however, by substantial security because it still was not advisable to be involved in large public gatherings at that time. But his voice disappeared from the scene and that was, looking back on it, a particular loss in terms of the moderation we thought was building, even in the Revolutionary Council.

Q: What were you getting from the other embassies there?

LAINGEN: Their attitude was essentially the same as ours, that things were improving. They were watching us, of course, very carefully, because we were an important barometer of what might be happening and what might happen in the future. And we were watching them. They saw the beginning of that seemingly improving trend when they watched the Foreign Minister and me mixing very informally together, especially at that July Fourth reception. I reported to them or talked to them about the way in which the ministers of the government had received me and talked with me and seemed to welcome me and what I said to them. I think most of them were essentially as optimistic as we were.

Looking back on it, the one ambassador who was more cautious than others and in light of what happened, perhaps the best informed, was the Ambassador of Turkey. The Turkish Ambassador consistently warned me and others in conversations that we were a long way from Nirvana; things could turn badly. He was proven right.

Q: Did you have any meetings with the Soviet Ambassador? What was our feeling towards the Soviet "threat" at that time?

LAINGEN: The Soviet "threat" was there and we recognized it. We didn't expect the Soviets to intrude, invade, they obviously needed to be cautious and careful themselves in how they dealt with this new regime because there was no love lost for communism as an ideology on the part of a regime that was so dominated and motivated by an ideology like Islam. They, and particularly elements of the Communist Party, then underground, remained carefully discreet.

I had a few conversations with the Soviet Ambassador. I think I had one official call on him in the official calls I made as a new fellow on the block when I arrived in June. I saw him at diplomatic receptions. There was no warmth in the relationship. I didn't gain anything from him. I think we regarded each other very warily.

Q: What about the arms sales business? When one looks at this the complication of a modern military system is such that it's a mixed blessing when somebody gets involved with the United States or any major power, because you need a lot of people from the supplying country to take care of things. How did we deal with this and how did the Iranian military look upon this when we withdrew all our technicians and all that?

LAINGEN: The military aspect of our official relationship with the Shah was obviously very, very large. It was immense.

Q: Many people, I must say even from the side, I thought, "My God, what are we doing here?" This didn't seem like a good idea.

LAINGEN: It is easy to say that today, maybe you said that at the time.

Q: I am not talking about any deep thought, just from the side. There was criticism.

LAINGEN: The military issue was immense. All of us, I think, had reason to be wondering about it and possibly puzzled by it, even possibly apprehensive about where it was taking us. Some, with a lot more prescience than most of us at the time, had serious reservations. It required a very large, visible, physical American presence that was part of the something like 60,000 Americans who lived in Tehran in the heyday of the Shah with all of our trappings and cultural accoutrements and things that we carry with us as baggage.

The clerics and others leading the revolution were able to cite that as evidence of the Shah's, as the Ayatollah put it, "West Toxification." The Shah's regime was that closely linked with the West and evidence of it was this vast military involvement and all of the American culture that came with it. It obviously loomed very large as a factor in the revolution itself.

Sorting all this out after the revolution became very, very complex. They couldn't stay, that large community of military advisors and business representatives who were involved in these contracts. They left massively in the aftermath of the revolution. What they had supplied was there on the ground in warehouses. But vast amounts of it were also in warehouses in the United States where some of it presumably remains to this day, unsorted out.

Both sides recognized that resolving this problem was the biggest single issue in a future relationship. We had very good conversations, however, to try to lay the ground for the process of resolving it. General Gast had very good access to the military leaders who took over after the revolution. They had a practical problem, obviously, with the military inventory, however critical they may have been themselves of the United States to gain at least some kind of support in the maintenance of that inventory, so our working relations were reasonably good. We didn't get access, as we should have gotten early on if things

had been ideal, to the former headquarters of the military supply offices, the vast compound in the northern part of the city of Tehran, until very late in my tenure.

Indeed, it was the week before the Embassy was overrun in November, that we finally, with the cooperation of the Provisional Government and the revolutionary comité that controlled that compound after it had been overrun in February, gained physical access to it. Indeed, the fact that we had gotten that access the week before we were overrun, was probably the single most important piece of evidence that we were looking for that the provisional regime really wanted to work with us to rebuild a relationship. If they were prepared to let us into that place again, and gain access to our records to begin the process of cleaning up the files and records, with the cooperation of the revolutionary guards on the spot, that seemed to us as real support for our conclusion that things were going better.

Indeed, on my desk the day we were overrun was an eleven page unclassified cable ready for me to sign, which I didn't get signed before the roof fell in, reporting to Washington about all of this -- telling them what we had accomplished in that visit, describing the cooperation of the revolutionary guards and the military figures involved. Somewhere that piece of paper still exists, but it never got to Washington.

Q: As we were working on this military relationship was it the feeling in talking with General Gast, that essentially in order to make all this equipment and stuff that was coming you really had to have these Americans there or a substantial American presence to make the system work?

LAINGEN: No, we weren't advocating anything like that. We kept saying that we had no intentions of reestablishing a vast military presence. We knew that was behind us, but we knew that we had to have some kind of very close contact to just get to the bottom of this, to sort the contracts out. We weren't intending to come back with any kind of military training mission. That was not our intention. And they certainly did not press for it. General Gast in the months of that summer and fall had a staff of at most 15. They were working it down to the point that when the Embassy was taken it was something like 10 or 8.

The morning the Embassy was overrun, I was in the Foreign Ministry with my deputy, and with the security officer in the background, to have a conversation long planned with Iranian professionals about the diplomatic immunity status that would affect the future Military Liaison Office in my Embassy, involving at most 6 or 8 people. We had a good cooperative conversation which didn't resolve it totally. But the irony of the whole thing is that as we sat there talking about the future military diplomatic immunity status of this reduced Military Supply Office within a smaller embassy, across town one of the most egregious violations of diplomatic immunity was taking place involving the entire Embassy.

Q: Before we get to that one other question about our operations. As an old consular officer, what were we doing consularwise during your stay there?

LAINGEN: One further point on that military supply relationship; as I said, General Gast had good conversations. He and I together had a couple of very consequential meetings in the Foreign Ministry with Foreign Minister Yazdi and the Chief of Staff of the Army, talking specifically about details of the problem including this mission that I referred to where Iranians would actually go to the United States in an cooperative effort to work out the details of these contracts. Meanwhile, we were also coming near to conclusion about a limited resupply of military spare parts, particularly badly needed spare parts for the Iranian air force. There was a lot going on in the military supply field, very much needed if we were ever to get to the bottom of that.

This contributed to that atmosphere about confidence on how things were moving, because the military supply relationship, I can not emphasis too much, was such a big factor, particularly in restoring a sense of confidence on the part of the Iranians that we really meant what we said in affirming that we wanted to be cooperative in rebuilding the relationship. They refused to accept that. There was always this depth of suspicion that we really didn't mean it.

Q: How about that in the United States? Here is a revolutionary government. Weren't there people in Washington in positions of authority who were saying, "Let's drag our feet, we don't want to arm these guys because we don't know what they are going to do."?

LAINGEN: Yes, I am sure there were. Their voices, however, were not very strong. The voices mainly focused on getting out of a bad situation as cleanly and effectively and expeditiously as we could. The bulk of our military supply had been provided. It was on the ground. It was not something we could pull back. We are talking about how to resolve the existing contract situation, the bulk we knew would never result in mass amounts of stuff going to Tehran, other than spare parts, stuff on order. We weren't thinking then about thousands of tanks, or new aircraft, or anything. We just wanted to find ways to end the previous relationship, clean it up as quickly and effectively as possible to the benefit of, not least, literally hundreds if not thousands of American suppliers whose money was involved.

Q: What about the Iraq factor at that time? Iraq was certainly not our friend at the time. It was considered to have a strong relationship with the Soviets. Was this also a factor? At best Iraq and Iran are never going to be friends and even though we have a regime that we have trouble with, it still acts as a counter to Iraq. Was that a factor?

LAINGEN: Yes, it was. Islamic fundamentalism as a threat, as you said, was not then seen as pervasive throughout the region. We didn't really come to that conclusion until after the Embassy was overrun and Khomeini signaled in that way his total opposition to any kind of American presence in the region. So we didn't see it. Frankly, I don't think we talked much about Islamic "fundamentalism." That didn't figure very largely. It was

rebuilding a relationship with a different regime in Tehran. Yes, it was motivated by Islam and its strengths, but it was not a threat in that sense.

This brings me to the Iraqi situation. Iran was still seen as a place that mattered to us and that we needed in that part of the world. I was not engaged directly in our relations with Iraq at that time, except that there was and is and forever will be, a sticky relationship between Persians and Arabs, symbolized particularly in the relationship of Persian Iran with Arab Iraq. There is a lot of friction. We didn't look very favorably at Iraq in those days either. We went to the degree of actually sitting down with elements of the Provisional regime in Tehran and talking about how we saw the Iraqi "threat" to Iran. We were prepared to cooperate with them in providing them our judgment, to some degree our military intelligence estimates of Iraqi intentions and movement vis-a-vis Iran at that time. And some very, very sensitive classified conversations occurred at the level of the Prime Minister, where I talked to him and talked about how we saw Iraq as a force in the Middle East and particularly as we judged the provisional regime's concern that Iraq had malice a forethought vis-a-vis Iran.

Those conversations that we had were a deliberate effort, instrument, mechanism in our policy towards Iran in those days to try to rebuild a relationship. We went to the degree of actually sitting down with them and giving them highly classified intelligence on Iraq.

Q: What was the reaction on their part?

LAINGEN: The reaction on the part of the Prime Minister and other Ministers of the government, was very favorable. It was as important a signal as I was able to make that summer that we really meant business about rebuilding a relationship. The military supply was another one, but that was so difficult, so amorphous, and so laden with suspicion on the part of the Iranians that I can't say that I could identify it precisely as accomplishing much. But the way in which we met with the top officials of that provisional government to communicate highly classified information about Iraq was very effective, I thought at the time and I think it was with those elements, a signal that we meant business.

I can't say how the Revolutionary Council felt about it because I wasn't dealing with it. I didn't have that contact. The specifics and details of those conversations that I had with the Prime Minister on this subject are presumably still highly classified.

Q: Sounds typical when you think that these things are known really to the other side, but people who are left out of this is the American public in a way.

LAINGEN: I will always remember one particular incident in the course of one of those briefings where my delegation was accompanied by technological equipment to project on the screen some of our intelligence. It included a simple projector that throws images onto a screen or wall. We carried that from my limousine into the Prime Minister's office. I sat down and began the briefings and the damn thing wouldn't work. Actually the

Iranians had to go and find one of their own and bring it into the room. So much for American technology!

You raised the consular connection. That, of course, was an element in my mandate, my instructions, to signal our interest in resuming a normal relationship, because one of the instructions was to continue the efforts that Charlie Naas had begun guardedly early on to resume a visa issuing function, passport service, etc. The consular facilities of the mission had been overrun...they were in a separate building across the street from the Embassy compound ...during the revolution and badly damaged. We didn't reoccupy the building. So to resume a consular function, we had to find space within the compound, which we did in former apartment facilities at the rear of the compound. They were already in place in a kind of jerry-built arrangement when I got there in June. They remained there in a limited capacity of actual visa issuance until we were able to complete construction of a new visa issuing facility in a different building on the compound with all the trappings of bullet proof glass windows and that sort of thing for visa officers to sit behind and interview their candidates.

Meanwhile, of course, throughout the summer after I got there, the passion for visas on the part of Iranians was intense. It never died. It grew during the summer. I rarely had a conversation, even with Ministers, including a couple of times with the Prime Minister, when I didn't get what I called a visa push, asking me to do something to expedite the issuance of a visa for this or that person. We were doing it, of course, for people who desperately had to go, but it was still limited because we didn't have the facilities, the number of people to do that. When we finally reached the point of completing the construction of the new consular facility, we needed added personnel; we got a half dozen young Foreign Service officers, including a husband and wife team in two instances to man the facility...

Q: These were recruited from Washington?

LAINGEN: Yes, from Washington. They came there for about six weeks to two months at most. We opened the new consular facility, I think, three weeks before the Embassy was overrun. We opened and were a sellout for thousands of people on the streets surrounding the Embassy, anxious to get visas to go to the United States, or get at their previous applications which were in massive files from the time before the Embassy was overrun in February.

Q: Iranian students were always the fly in the consular ointment throughout the world. I remember in Yugoslavia I had problems with Iranian students. What was the thrust of the visas?

LAINGEN: They were almost all visitor visas. And a lot of them students, of course. I think it is fair to say that at one point Iranian students in the United States were the largest single foreign group. So there were students, parents of students already in the United States who wanted to visit them, people who simply wanted to get out. After the

revolution had occurred and it was a very uncertain future for vast numbers of Iranians as to what their lives were likely to be and they wanted to get visitor visas to go to the United States -- obviously to stay. That was their intention, really. That is the problem that confronts all visa issuing officers. How does a visa issuing officer make that judgment about the real intentions of someone at his window? I have always said no one has more power over people than a junior officer who is a visa issuing officer. He has to make that judgment. He doesn't run to the Ambassador to ask his opinion. He has to make that judgment in light of his own interpretation of laws and regulations and to the intentions of that guy evident only on his face. It is a very responsible job and very difficult job.

I remind new officers in the Foreign Service, who might be a little unhappy about their first assignment to a consular post, that they will never have anything more useful in terms of strengthening their capacity as a diplomat because a diplomat has to know how to deal with people, fundamentally, and you really learn it on the visa issuing line.

When this new facility opened it was considered, at the time, the ultimate in visa facilities where protection was essential as well. We had thousands of applicants. We had so many that we had to appeal to the police for special security. We had to close the facility down on occasion because the numbers were so considerable on the streets. We also had Iranians who wanted to make money on the process, of course; bribery on the side to get a place in line, plus all the business interests on the street set up with quick, fast food facilities outside our doors, etc. It was an absolutely remarkable scene over several weeks, and also exciting in a way. It said something to us about the readiness of the regime there to allow it to happen -- another a signal of sorts that they were prepared to have a relationship with us. It certainly said a lot, of course, about how many Iranians judged their future. This wasn't a particularly safe place for them to stay, Iran. They wanted to get out. That went on until the weekend before the Embassy was overrun.

That facility got, I suppose because it was new, as much graffiti on its wall as any during the demonstration that took place outside the Embassy walls three days before the Embassy was overrun. There was so much physical abuse of these facilities that I said, the first working day, indeed the day the Embassy was overrun, "We are going to close this place if that is the way they are going to treat us. We will close it until we get it cleaned up." That wasn't of much consequence because it got closed rather easily for other reasons!

Q: Setting this up to the elements that led to the takeover, what was your impression in October or so, of the relationship between the Provisional Government and the Revolutionary Council?

LAINGEN: That was always guarded. It was evident in the way in which the Prime Minister, Mr. Bazargan, often on television, spoke to his countrymen, pleading with them for cooperation, telling them what was going on. He was often on television in that fashion. He would also be seen and heard on television describing his frustration. He was

quite open about his frustration in getting his orders and decrees implemented and carried out, and about how other elements in the revolution were frustrating it. He was often critical of the Revolutionary Comités functioning in various sectors of society outside of the normal government, on roadblocks on the streets, etc. It was pathetic to watch him on occasion to see how difficult it was for him to carry out his purposes -- how frustrated he was in terms of accomplishing what he wanted to do. At times he was almost directly critical of the Ayatollah himself, on television.

Obviously, looking back on it, I should have read more into that than I did. I should have concluded more than we did that real power was not with him. That real power was, indeed, with revolutionary elements behind the scenes from comités on up. By comités I mean these committees, some of them ad hoc, and some of them reasonably permanent, that functioned all over the place as a kind of dual government, or separate government facility, with which Iranians had to deal -- often with the baksheesh and bribery that is endemic in Iranian society.

Q: Were these comités really taking orders from the top or were they sort of operating on their own?

LAINGEN: Many of them were operating on their own. We could never be sure where the lines of communications were. All of them asserted, and they made it clear in any direct contact with them that I, or any Iranian had, that they had the blessing of the Ayatollah. It was easy to say that and they probably knew they did have that blessing in a larger sense. In any event, the relationship between a provisional government and something else in any revolutionary scene is always, obviously, uncertain. And it certainly was in this case because presiding over all of this was the Ayatollah Khomeini. He didn't sit in on meetings of the Revolutionary Council on a regular weekly basis; he was up there in majesty on high. These other elements were down below, all claiming they had special contacts with the Ayatollah. Indeed, that revolutionary thug who headed the revolutionary guards on our compound claimed he too had a personal, special relationship with the Ayatollah. Everybody did. That made life difficult for anyone presiding over the provisional government. It certainly did for all the rest of us trying to divine where all of this was going to go.

Q: Did you have in your political section an Ayatollah watcher who was sitting there trying to figure out what was coming out of this? Did we have any way of getting any feel? The Ayatollah was making speeches wasn't he?

LAINGEN: We didn't have any particular man as an Ayatollah watcher, but we had a reasonably good political section. Three of the political officers were former Peace Corps volunteers in Iran and had thus some considerable capacity to communicate and understand. Their Farsi was good. A couple of them had fluent Farsi. These people had a lot of contact with clerics outside the provisional government at lower levels -- families of clerics and some of the leading clerical figures like Taleghani who died suddenly in September, and was at the head of a very large family in Tehran. One of my officers,

Mike Metrinko, in the political section, had some very considerable contact with the Taleghani family. So we had contacts with the lower level clerics. I would see them socially once in a while too; e.g. the meeting that we had with Beheshti.

But all that said, of course we didn't have enough contact with them, almost none when you consider what was going to happen. We should have had more. We should have seen the Ayatollah. The US government never did have direct contact with Ayatollah Khomeini, even in Paris. We stepped back from it when we came close to doing it there. When I got there it was not something that was considered wise or, for that matter, immediately essential to do. We obviously had to deal first, and build a relationship, with the provisional government to the extent that we could.

When I came back from consultations in September, I had instructions to work to find the best possible time to request an audience with the Ayatollah. We never got to that point. But I was functioning under that instruction when I got back and conceivably, with a little more time, I could have had it. In retrospect, I am convinced that even having done that, possibly even if I had seen him as the accredited Ambassador, it wouldn't have made a hell of a bit of difference. The Ayatollah Khomeini was so rigidly opposed to any kind of presence of the United States, of "West toxification" as to make it impossible for us ever to have had a relationship with him.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point.

Q: Today is February 17, 1993. Bruce, the last thing we said on this was that we reached the point that the revolution had happened, things were in chaos, but there was some optimism that maybe might turn around. But then the problem of what to do with the deposed Shah came up. Could you explain what the problem was and how it was seen from your advantage point?

LAINGEN: This was after the revolution had occurred, that's correct? The revolution occurred in February, almost precisely 14 years ago today. I had arrived in Tehran in June of that year, three or four months after the revolution.

The Shah had moved from Tehran in January, fleeing with the Empress and a small entourage and had stopped in various places...Cairo, Morocco...and by June when I came there, he was in Mexico. It was an issue lying there on the table, if you will, in the background for some, what to do about the Shah -- the person, the leader, the head of state, for whom the United States obviously had some responsibility, given the previous relationship we had with him. It posed for President Carter a special obligation in the sense that he had reached out to him in such an open, sympathetic way, as the crisis developed in Iran, particularly at the time of the visit of President Carter and Mrs. Carter to Tehran on New Year's Eve in 1977. I was Chargé of the Embassy in Tehran beginning June, 1979. I was asked on several occasions, both on the record and by people who came to Tehran, for my views about what we do about the Shah, where he should live and should he be allowed entry into the United States?

On both occasions, on the two instances when I was asked formally by cable from Washington for my views, I responded that I felt, myself, that we had an obligation to admit the Shah into the United States, but that the timing was very significant. On both occasions, and these were sometime in late July and again in late September, I responded that his admission was inappropriate until and unless we had demonstrated our acceptance of the change in Tehran, our acceptance of the Islamic revolution, by naming an Ambassador, formally, to succeed Sullivan who had left in March, and to succeed the aborted nomination of Walter Cutler in May, and until we had seen in Tehran the completion in large part of the process of putting in place the institutions of government under the new regime. That involved in particular the election of a new majlis, a referendum on the constitution and a number of other symbolic, but very important, steps that would see the revolution put in place its own institutions of government.
Those two cables in which I reported those views were obviously received in Washington and considered, but as I think we have talked about before, a recommendation from an embassy in the field, from a Chargé in the field, from an ambassador in the field, to Washington is only one of a large inflow of views affecting policy in Washington.

Q: You said that you felt the timing was wrong until these things happened. How did you reach this conclusion? I am just trying to get a little of not only the thought process but also maybe how the Embassy worked.

LAINGEN: I reached that conclusion based on my own view and, indeed, my own participation in the events of 1953 at the time of the overthrow of Mossadegh and the flight of the Shah to Italy at that time and the actions on the part of the United States to assist elements within Iran to sustain the overthrow of Mossadegh and to permit the Shah to return to the throne from Italy in a CIA-supported effort at that time.

In 1979 at the time of the revolution and during the revolution, one of the major concerns of the revolutionaries, both nationalists and the more radical Islamic elements, was that the United States would again work behind the scenes to facilitate a return of the Shah to his throne, even after he had fled this time in the midst of that revolution. They were very apprehensive about that. There was a constant concern on the part of the revolutionaries...a greater concern in the minds of some than in others, but it was always there.

It was apparent to me that that concern was very strong and how we handled the Shah, what we did with him, the degree we seemed to be supportive of him in his ambitions, could be very decisive for our position in Tehran.

Well before I had come to Tehran in June of that year, the Embassy had sought in every way possible to say and to demonstrate to the new regime that we, despite our sense of obligation, moral, not least, to the Shah, we had no intention to facilitate his return to Iran. It was very hard to convince them of that. It was impossible to convince them of that so long as the Shah was out there moving about.

So it was for that very basic reason that I felt that anything that we did to reach out, to embrace the Shah, even in humanitarian terms, could have very considerable consequences and we needed to handle it very carefully.

Q: Would you mention what the humanitarian side might be?

LAINGEN: Well, the Shah was sick. We didn't know how sick. He wasn't well. It was apparent, I think, to my predecessors, Charlie Naas and Bill Sullivan, that the Shah was not the person that Americans had known in years before. His character seemed much stronger and his capacity for decisions was more apparent than it was in the critical months leading up to the revolution. There was also a humanitarian sense because the Shah had been our ally, our friend, had been a close friend, had been supportive of much of US policy throughout the region and in areas well beyond the Middle East. That was a sense of political obligation, but there was also that humanitarian sense of the guy being a good friend. Here he was bounced from his throne and trying to find a place to live, to put down his feet and his family. There was a very considerable sense of obligation, I think, humanitarian, political and moral, on the part of a good many Americans, well beyond government. I say well beyond government, because some of those were very influential in the decisions that were eventually taken.

Q: How did it play out?

LAINGEN: I came to Tehran in June, convinced, myself, that the revolution was there to stay. Indeed, I thought the revolution had a great deal of promise because of the way it seemed to be a genuinely populous revolution, widely supported by the people of Iran, and more importantly, by much of the establishment and the intelligentsia of the country.

So I thought the revolution was there to stay. I tried in every way to convey that impression, myself. That was among my instructions when I went to Tehran in June, to convey to the Iranians in every way I could that whatever action we took in respect to the Shah, we accepted the political change in Tehran. We were prepared to live with the Islamic revolution. Nonetheless, we felt a sense of obligation to the Shah and I said they should look at how we handled him in light of what I had tried to convey, that the United States accepted the change in Tehran and had no intentions to disestablish it.

It was very difficult to convey that. I was not asked repeatedly in every meeting I had what we were going to do about the Shah, but I sensed it was there all the time. On several occasions, when I was instructed to convey to the Foreign Office that how we handled members of his family, I said that should not be misinterpreted. Before we took the decision to admit the Shah in October, 1979, we had already admitted several of his children to attend school in the United States. Again on those occasions I was instructed, in the face of some concern expressed to me by Iranian officials, that that should be looked at in the context of our humanitarian concern for his family.

Of course, all of that culminated in the decision taken in October to admit him. I thought that was very much the wrong time to admit him because of the very sensitive political processes that were underway in Tehran.

Q: What were these processes?

LAINGEN: Particularly the referendum on the new constitution. It was expected to occur in early December, 1979, with elections to follow that.

Do you want me to go into the actual admission of the Shah?

Q: Yes.

LAINGEN: I also engaged, of course, in a good deal of exchange by correspondence, that is classified letters, and also by several cable exchanges with the Desk, that is Henry Precht and his colleagues, on how we should deal with the Shah and when we should deal with him and what it might mean. I had no doubt that the Desk and most policy implementers in Washington, both in the National Security Council and in the State Department, were supportive of my views that it was too early to admit the Shah -- that we should not do it at that time.

I think I may have mentioned before that particularly in the second of the two sensitive cables that I sent back to Washington in response to their highly classified cables, I warned that if we were to admit him before these other steps were taken...the completion of elections, etc., and before we named an ambassador...there was a risk of another assault on the Embassy like that of February, 1979 when the Embassy was occupied and held for several hours. I did not have the prescience to predict that we would be seized and held for 444 days and used in the way we were, but we at least had alerted Washington to the risk of another assault on the Embassy.

It was on October 23, 1979 that at breakfast in the Residence I got a call from the Marine guard in the Embassy telling me that there was a NIACT message that I had to see urgently. I asked him to bring it over to the Residence on the compound. So a Marine brought it over to me. That was a message informing me that the Shah was about to be admitted to the United States for medical treatment and that I should inform the government at the highest level that we were taking this step for humanitarian reasons. It spelled out in some detail where he was going to go, what our understanding was of his medical condition, that this in no way should be seen as an attempt by the United States to undermine the position of the provisional government of the revolution, with which I was dealing.

It came as a bit of a shock to all of us in the Embassy and, of course, triggered immediately steps that we were prepared to take to strengthen our security, and these were taken. My first responsibility beyond that was to get to the highest level of government and that was the sitting Prime Minister at that time, Mr. Bazargan. As I

recall, Henry Precht was in the city on a visit. We got, within a couple of hours, an appointment with the Prime Minister, Mr. Bazargan, who received us in his office along with the Foreign Minister, Mr. Yazdi, and a number of other officials including, I think, the Acting Defense Minister.

I communicated this information pursuant to those instructions with particular emphasis on our feeling that we had a responsibility in humanitarian terms to provide this kind of medical treatment to the Shah and that the Empress would be accompanying him. I did not receive in the instructions at that time how long we expected him to be there and I simply did not discuss with them or communicate to the Prime Minister any views as to how long this might entail.

Q: Did you have any information from the Department about the nature of the disease, which was cancer?

LAINGEN: I am not sure how much anybody knew about the details of his illness at that time. One of the problems in dealing with the Shah well before the revolution was that we didn't have an awareness that he had, indeed, a rather serious illness. Certain French doctors with whom he had dealings were aware of it, but we were not. This always surprised me and I don't know the real answer to that. I don't recall precisely, I think I simply informed them that the condition was such as to require immediate entry and that we would be communicating to the government as soon as we had the details of the medical problem and the treatment that he was being given.

The Prime Minister, and even more the Foreign Minister, expressed their concern. The Foreign Minister reminded me several times during that conversation that this was a very serious step that could have some very difficult consequences and that he had warned me against this kind of thing. He, in particular, pressed for participation in the medical diagnosis by Iranian designated doctors -- that they be permitted to send a doctor to the United States to participate. I couldn't give them assurance of that, although I communicated that to Washington. In response to that all the Department was prepared to do was to assure Yazdi and his government that we would inform them of the diagnosis by medical doctors in the United States.

I was instructed as well to get -- and obviously requested -- assurances from the Prime Minister that the Embassy would be provided adequate security in the event that there would be demonstrations on the streets stimulated by this decision on our part. After some considerable discussion of that, the Prime Minister said some rather fateful words that didn't seem as fateful at the time, that they would do their best to provide security. He didn't say, "We guarantee you that your Embassy will be secure." He said simply, "We will do our best." And, I think, he meant that. I have no doubt that Bazargan meant what he said, that he wanted to do what he could to assure that the Embassy was secure. But, of course, time would demonstrate that it was not secure and that he was not able to do his best.

It was a difficult conversation in the Prime Minister's office. But it was civil. I always had that kind of exchange with Bazargan because he was and is a very dignified gentleman of old Persian traditions. That is the way he conducted his business. Some of his colleagues were less so. Mr. Yazdi was a little more blunt and direct.

We left that conversation that morning and went back to the Embassy and immediately called what approximated a country team meeting where I communicated to the rest of the Embassy, the decision of Washington and the actions I had taken to emphasizing as much as I could that we had a difficult situation and that in all we did we should carry on in a fashion that would help demonstrate that we did not regard this as that consequential a step. I said business would proceed, that our relations would continue and that Washington would inform us of further details as soon as they had them.

There are some, apparently, who understood that I was instructed to simply ask the opinion of the provisional government, to seek their permission, for the admission of the Shah. But that was not the case; the instructions made it clear to me that the decision had already been taken, and I want that to be clear on the record. What I was asked to do, instructed to do, was to simply inform them that the Shah was being admitted for medical treatment -- not that I was to approach the government and seek their permission. There was no question of our changing our minds. It was clear that Washington had made up its mind and that the Shah would be admitted.

Under normal circumstances, I suppose, in the context of a relationship in a country that had gone through a revolution, the fact that we had admitted for medical treatment the previous ruler, would not and should not be necessarily of that great consequence if we had tried to demonstrate at the same time that we accepted the change in that country. But the concern about the Shah, the suspicion born of that period in 1953 when we had collaborated to return the Shah to the throne, was so strong, particularly among the nationalist elements of the revolution and also the clerical ones to some degree, that that decision with respect to the Shah proved to be very consequential and was consequential as we had earlier warned Washington it would be.

Q: Was the Iranian view of this among the Nationalists elements...

LAINGEN: I say nationalist elements in particular because it was the nationalist elements, Bazargan, himself, who were holdovers from the 1953 period.

Q: Did you have the feeling that this was going to be used as a cause to further something internal, or was this something that was so enormous that it was handing a tool to the extreme elements?

LAINGEN: I suppose it was both. As time would demonstrate, it was a tool, a peg on which the more extreme elements could act. I think the nationalist, secular elements of the revolution, Bazargan, wanted to handle this in a way that would preclude its becoming a focus for the more radical elements of the revolution, about which Bazargan

and Yazdi were themselves concerned. They were in effect competition, a threat to them as well. That is why they sought things like permission from us that an Iranian doctor could participate in this. They saw this as something they could use with the public in a PR sense to hold down the efforts on the part of the more radical elements to fire up the masses on the streets, and the media as well, of course.

The immediate reaction in the streets, in the media, on the part of what we dealt with as government, was rather moderate, in a sense surprisingly moderate. Even the reaction from Khomeini, at the outset, was restrained, much less strident than I expected. He used, particularly the expression, "Let us all hope he dies." Almost a sense of confidence that the guy was dead anyway, politically, and that this was a way to see him die medically.

The reaction among my colleagues in the Embassy varied. Some were much more concerned than others, to the point that some today say, and I think they can say with accuracy, that they were much more prescient about the consequences than I was, for example. I thought we could manage it.

Q: I interviewed Ann Swift not too long ago and she seems to feel rather strongly about this, not just on that, but the whole situation was much more dangerous, although she was not an Iranian expert by any means.

LAINGEN: Yes, I as think I indicated before, many of us, and I think broadly defined the mission as a whole, were living on hope in some of the weeks and months leading up to that period. A sense of misplaced confidence, as things had been going rather well. The security situation broadly in the country as we saw it and as it affected us and particularly in the city of Tehran, was gradually improving. You could move around more freely. People even travelled outside of Tehran on certain occasions. Indeed, Ann Swift was outside the city the weekend before the Embassy was taken. We had gotten cooperation from the government in improving the security on the compound, getting rid of the resident revolutionaries there. We had opened a new consular facility and that had gone well. It certainly had gone well in terms of the number of Iranians who were seeking visas.

So there was a sense of confidence, as it turned out; it was misplaced confidence,, given the events that followed, that we could weather this. That confidence was strengthen by what I described as the first reaction on the part of the media and the Ayatollah, himself, relatively restrained.

Q: You mentioned the media. Did we have somebody from the USA that could get our story out to the media or not?

LAINGEN: Getting the story out to the media was not easy. It never had been during the months leading up to that. Our voice wasn't heard very much. It was too soft. It didn't convey much assurance. We had a USIS staff, at the end, of only four officers. Barry Rosen was our press officer. And, of course, we made a deliberate effort after the

admission of the Shah to reiterate the message that we had delivered to government; i.e. that he was being admitted strictly for humanitarian purposes, that nothing should be read into it beyond that. That we continued to accept the revolution and were prepared to deal with it in Tehran.
That reaction didn't really change substantially in those two weeks that followed, until four or five days before the Embassy was overrun, when the Ayatollah began to speak out much more forcibly on the subject, and that stridency was then picked up by elements of the media.
Nonetheless, even then, we were not a target of any large demonstrations. There were always people or groups walking by on their way to something else that would yell anti-American slogans when they passed by the compound destined for a larger demonstration somewhere else.

Our big concern was a very large demonstration planned for support of the revolution on November 1, three days before the Embassy was overrun. That demonstration was originally scheduled to take place around the walls of the Embassy and in the immediate environs of where we were. At the last minute, indeed the night before on October 31, the word was sent around that the Ayatollah had directed that the revolutionary demonstration take place in another area further from the Embassy. The next morning, the bulk of the demonstrators did go to that other destination, but somewhere between one and two thousand demonstrators nonetheless came to the Embassy compound that morning and spent the day marching back and forth around the walls. We anticipated some of that, to the point where we had added security and the Marines were on sort of battle formation that morning.

I recall, myself, going out to the gates of the Embassy to look around that morning and at one point having the chief of police come rushing up in his jeep to take a look at the situation and assure me through the gates that things were under control, that I need not be concerned about any particular danger. They were noisy during the day. A lot of graffiti was put on the walls, on the outside. There were some tense moments late in the day when some of the more determined demonstrations were determined to keep it up and put some banners on the outside of our main gates denouncing us and putting up pictures of the Ayatollah. It caused us a rather difficult stretch late that evening requiring our security officers, particularly Alan Golacinski, to spend some very tense moments out there. We were finally able to resolve it.

Q: What type of thing are you talking about?

LAINGEN: More than I knew at the time. We were demanding that the posters be taken down, that the Ayatollah's picture be taken off the gates, and that sort of thing. At one point, apparently one of the security officers or one of the Marines may have ripped one of the posters down from the inside and taken it. That caused some of the demonstrators to demand that it be returned undamaged. Eventually we did turn it back, but not before there had been a good deal of very close physical exchanges between those on the outside and those on the inside of the gate. This was on the night of November 1, culminating a

rather difficult day, during which we had advised the bulk of the Americans who lived on the compound and those who lived in apartment houses immediately to the back of the compound behind the rear gates to spend the day up in the British compound in the hills of Tehran. And they did, so we were a skeleton presence that day, except for the beefed up Marine Security Guard patrol on actual duty. But we weathered the day and the next day was, as I recall, a relatively quiet day in the city.

We had services in an Anglican church hall. I attended those periodically. I went that morning with my security guards. The streets were relatively quiet, but evidence of the demonstrations the day before were clearly to be seen, with the vast amount of graffiti that was on the walls of the compound, particularly on the new consular facility in the rear of the compound. We made a decision that morning that when the Embassy was to be reopened on the 4th, we would keep the consular facility closed while we got the graffiti removed from that particular spot. Frankly, it was a gesture almost of defiance. We weren't going to let that stop our operations totally, we were going to clean it up and get on with it.

The night before the Embassy was taken over was the third of November. Periodically I would have welcoming parties for new arrivals and we had scheduled one that evening in the Residence where we also showed films in the large salon for the American community. At the last minute, I was unable to host that affair because I got word from the Foreign Office that there was a command performance for the entire diplomatic corps to go to the Foreign Ministry club compound where a new documentary film on the revolution was going to be shown. So I asked my secretary, Liz Fontaigne, to substitute for me as hostess, at least until I came back from that command performance.

I went to that command performance and saw the film, which was an interesting documentary on the revolution, not least because some importance footage of the film was filmed immediately outside the Embassy compound back in February showing tanks on the streets and the Embassy under a state of siege at that time as well. It was rather ironic that the night before the Embassy was to be overrun the second time I was at that command performance watching a film showing how we were affected by the revolution eight months before.

Q: Was the documentary in tone anti-American?

LAINGEN: It wasn't blatantly, but anti-American sentiment was in it, it couldn't help but be.

The next morning was our first day back at work after the events of these preceding days, the first day that the Embassy was open again. Again, the way in which we had weathered this very large demonstration on the first, three days earlier, was very much on our minds, in our senses. Here was evidence, in the way we had weathered it, that the regime meant what it said about being prepared to do its best to protect the Embassy. Contributing, if you will, to a further sense of confidence and wishful thinking that morning. In the

country team meeting that we held that morning, I don't recall specifically, but I assume that Barry Rosen and others reported on what was in the media and what had been said in terms of the Shah. At this point I don't recall the details of that.

We talked about our schedules for that day. What we intended to do. I recall particularly that we made a decision that morning to keep the flag flying around the clock and leave it on the flag pole, carefully secured and with the pole greased, as they had done before on occasions, to insure that if there was any attempt to come over the walls in any demonstration it would be difficult to get that flag down.

I recall that we agreed to keep the Marines on a state of alert, but that business would go on as usual in the Embassy. I would keep a long scheduled appointment that morning at the Foreign Ministry at 10:30, or whatever, I have forgotten precisely, to carry on discussions I was having with the Foreign Ministry about arranging for the future diplomatic immunity status of my reduced military liaison office...reduced and changed. The Office was previously a military assistance advisory group, a MAAG. We ended that because we weren't providing military assistance beyond what we had provided before, but we needed a military liaison office to maintain liaison with the Iranian military on their existing American supplied military inventory and on future military cash purchases. And working on the difficult problem which we have discussed before, I think, of what we were going to do with uncompleted orders, equipment for which the Iranians had paid but had not yet been delivered.

That military liaison office was to be a new office, a newly named office, and new, not least, in the way it was to be infinitely smaller than our previous military presence in Iran which had been numbers in scores and hundreds at one point. We were going to have a continuing office of about 8 individuals. That was what I had been communicating to the Iranians, but I wanted assurance from them that they would have full diplomatic immunity as other members of the Embassy staff did. It was difficult for them to accept that, and we were working on the details of that and trying to work it out. That was the reason I called at the Foreign Ministry that morning.

I went there with one of my security officers, Mike Howland, leaving the other security officer on duty in the Embassy -- Alan Golacinski. The two of them had radio contact on walkie talkies. Communication back and forth between Howland and the Embassy and between the Foreign Ministry parking lot and the Embassy.

I was scheduled also to be accompanied by the senior political officer in the political section, who was Ann Swift. A more senior officer, the head of the section, was Victor Tomseth, but he was also designated as acting DCM. Ann Swift was to accompany me. As it turned out she had been out of the city or at a distant place in the suburbs, and I don't recall exactly where, and wasn't able to get back to the Embassy in time to join us, although we saw her come walking into the compound as our limousine drove off.
So it was I, Victor Tomseth and Mike Howland in our group that morning that went to the Foreign Ministry.

We passed on the streets several groups of demonstrators, all of which -- as we understood before and was apparent to us -- were heading for the university compound where there were to be large demonstrations commemorating an assault on the University by the Shah's regime at an earlier time. We did not sense that they were heading towards our compound and so proceeded as planned to the Foreign Ministry.

We had a good conversation over traditional cups of tea with Iranian professional diplomats, none of whom that morning raised the issue of the Shah. Our conversation was entirely limited to the question of diplomatic immunity for the military liaison office. At the end we departed without resolving the issues, but we had not expected to. It was a reasonably productive conversation. We went down to the parking lot in the Foreign Ministry compound and there we found Mike Howland in active conversation with his counterpart in the Embassy. Mike informed me that a dustup was taking place over at the compound -- that there were demonstrators trying to come through the gates.

We got in the limousine and started off, followed by another Iranian security laden car and got only a block or two when we heard the situation was getting worse at the compound and given advise by Alan Golacinski that it would be best if we not try to come there, and we agreed that we would return to the Foreign Ministry to seek what was then needed, help from the provisional government.

We turned around and got back to the Foreign Ministry and raced up the stairs...I say raced because I recall running up those stairs, the sense of urgency was that great by that time...to see the Acting Foreign Minister because the Foreign Minister, Mr. Yazdi, had not yet returned that morning from Algiers where he had been with the Prime Minister as part of the Iranian delegation to celebrations attending the 15th or 20th anniversary of the Algerian revolution.

We talked about that before, I think, because Brzezinski was heading the American delegation and it was during these ceremonies in Algiers on November 1 that Brzezinski and Bazargan had had a conversation, the highest level conversation that had taken place yet at that time between a leader of the revolution and an American policy maker.

So we saw Mr. Kharrazi, the Acting Foreign Minister, who incidentally today is the sitting Iranian Permrep in New York at the UN. We pleaded with him, demanded of him, that he take steps immediately and provide assistance. He clearly wanted to do that, to protect the compound. He was pretty ill-informed as to what was going on. He knew less than we did at that point when we began the conversation. There ensued a number of conversations by telephone between him and elements of the government. I was getting on the telephone as well, accompanied now, however, by Mike Howland and his radio connection. So we had a continuing report of what was going on in the compound to the extent that our beleaguered colleagues over there could report on it, could see it all. All of them at that time were holed up in the Chancery itself.

An hour or so went by, I think, before Yazdi, the Foreign Minister, turned up. He had come directly from the airport to the Foreign Ministry and the conversations then continued in his office. Meanwhile the Chief of Protocol, who was clearly a friend and had done his best to facilitate improved security at the compound over the preceding months and had been a very good interlocutor, moved about wringing his hands, as concerned as we were. His secretary and other secretaries were milling about. Everybody was in a state of uncertainty, to some extent bewilderment, as to just what was happening because it wasn't visual to us. It was all by telephone and radio.

Eventually, Vic Tomseth and I ended up in the Foreign Minister's office where I repeated my demands for some action to be taken to protect the Embassy and to evict those who by now were coming over the walls in large numbers. I, having by that time established a telephone connection with Washington, with the cooperation of the Foreign Ministry, was sitting for much of the remainder of the day at the side of the Foreign Minister's desk, determined not to give up that telephone connection.

It went on that way for several hours. He trying to carry on to some degree normal business, while I was in conversation with a number of people in Washington from David Newsom on down.

Q: He was Under Secretary for Political Affairs at that time.

LAINGEN: Yes.

It became painfully clear in the course of the day that things weren't happening the way we had hoped they would happen. The Foreign Minister, Mr. Yazdi, was the man who had been the person, as the revolution had occurred in February when the Embassy was overrun then, who had acted physically on the spot to restore the Embassy to our control then. Now he was the Foreign Minister who should have been able to act to repeat what he had done then. And I think he meant to do it, wanted to do it, actually tried to do it in the course of that day. But it became increasingly apparent as we sat there that he was no longer the locus of the kind of power that he had had then.

Meanwhile, of course, the Embassy had been overrun. In conversation with the Embassy, both with Ann Swift and Alan Golacinski by telephone and by radio, because we also had a telephone connection with them in addition to the telephone connection with Washington, I had given what instructions and what orders I could from that vantage point.
Unfortunately, it evolved into a rather mixed up command and control situation. I was in the Foreign Ministry, available only by telephone and to some extent by radio. The acting DCM was with me, there was no chief, if you will, apparent in the Embassy. The chain of command involved the next senior political officer, who was Ann Swift, the incoming head of the military liaison office, Col. Scott, USA, and the senior defense attaché, Col. Shaefer, USAF. So I was in conversation with several of them at several points that day over those hours, and I confess the locus of authority there was never clear to me.

A key issue as things developed was destruction of documents and equipment. I think we may have talked about this before. We had earlier been under instructions to reduce our classified material. We had supposedly responded to that instruction. I say supposedly because it is clear in retrospect that not enough destruction had taken place, not enough return of documents had taken place to Washington. Indeed, there is some evidence that some documents had been returned from some offices in Washington to the Embassy in Tehran. We clearly had much more classified paper than we should have had and I knew we had.
We also had generally inadequate destruction equipment, older varieties. Not enough of the total mashing version, or whatever the terms are. More often it was stripping equipment.

We also that morning began the destruction too late. It did not seem, in the conversations that I was having that it was that threatening. The first impression that all of us got, both on the compound and certainly with us in the Foreign Ministry, was a kind of repeat of the February intrusion and that the intention of the students coming into the Embassy was this time to again hold it for a while as a kind of demonstration of their contempt for the United States, and more importantly their concern about the direction in which the Provisional Government had been taking the revolution and their hope that they could destablize the Provisional Government under Bazargan.

This was in any event their real intent. Their real intent was not to get the Shah back, despite the slogans that were so useful to them in that sense to get passions in the streets aroused. Their intent was to use that device to destablize and undermine the provisional government of the revolution and to facilitate a greater role for the more radical elements.

At any rate it did not seem that the situation was all that bad at the outset. In retrospect we should have begun destruction earlier. I, obviously as chief of mission, had that responsibility and today bear that responsibility for the way in which not enough of our classified documentation was destroyed. We had too much, we started too late and we had equipment that was not the best.

Q: Had anyone ever talked to you about what we had and weather we could do it or not?

LAINGEN: We had had some simulated exercises of that kind. But again, not as much as we should have. It was clear that there is a classic lesson from the overrunning of the Embassy in Tehran and that is that we have to think lean as diplomatic missions. The less paper we have the better.

Q: This was the lesson, I think had been learned for a little while after the overrun of our Embassy in Taiwan done by a mob.

LAINGEN: Human beings are pack rats. They like to pack their paper and things around them. Diplomats are not better than anyone else, I suppose, although they should be. We were able, if my understanding is correct, to destroy all the useable equipment in the

operation center. That destruction was complete. They couldn't use what we had. It couldn't be taken apart and found within it computerized boards with sensitive material. But a lot of paper did not get destroyed, including some very sensitive documents in the hands of the station chief.

Of course, a lot of the paper that did not seem to have that urgency of destruction, including unclassified biographical material, would also in time prove to be a very damaging element of the situation because lots of that stuff has Central Intelligence Agency logo stamped on it even if it is unclassified. That was enough to fire the fury of the more radical elements of the revolution, even though it was material of an unclassified, descriptive nature. That was sufficient to cause a great deal of pain and hurt to a lot of Iranians.

And that is the real pain that I have felt since. Not that our security was threatened, our strategic interests, or political interests in Iran and the region. They were not seriously effected by what was leaked. It was clear at any event at that point that our relationship with the Iranians was not going to be reestablished very soon. But the human hurt for a lot of people in Iran because of the way we were not able to destroy incriminating documentation, that is the legacy that hurts me very much today.

As we have all learned since, if you are going to be overrun by a revolutionary group at an Embassy, make sure you are overrun by groups a little less passionate in their zeal and determination than those in Tehran, because their passion, their determination, their zeal as revolutionaries was apparent in many ways in the months that followed, and not least in the way they laboriously over hours and hours, days and days, and still today probably, pieced back together a lot of the damaging paper, strip by strip.

Q: These papers were cut in very thin strips, the idea being it is easier to burn.

LAINGEN: On the other hand, most of us would assume that even if we were unable to destroy it further, no one would ever piece that together. But they did. Today, I don't know what the count is, more than 50 sets of such documentation is available in books that are on sale in book stores in Tehran.

It was a bad day in many ways, but there were many lessons learned from that day and what occurred before and since. But one certainly was that cliche, "Think lean as an Embassy, as a mission." In a computer age one would assume that one could. On the other hand, I think all of us today concede that computers and xeroxes make it possible to have even more paper.

Q: And also memories are around that people are not even aware of.

LAINGEN: That is correct.

Q: Bruce, while we are on the subject, what was your attitude and how does one use Marines? You have this trained military force, yet it is sort of a fact that if you shoot on a mob, it is pretty much the end of everything. So what good is it to have Marines? How did you feel about that at the time?

LAINGEN: Well, I am a strong admirer of the Marine Corps. I have always referred to Marine Security Guards as partners in diplomacy and am delighted to have them there. I still think it has been a good program, not least for the way in which the Marines, themselves, have a unique career choice that they can pick and enjoy. They look damn good. They are a sharp, neat image of America. For people in many countries it is the first image they get of America as they walk into an Embassy compound; there are the Marines. You can argue that any way you want, but I think from the whole it is a plus. But, Marine Security Detachments are not there in Embassy compounds to fight Custer's Last Stand operations. That is not their purpose. It can't be their purpose. They are there to buy time and, of course, in the process of buying time to protect. In the course of normal life in an embassy and a diplomatic mission, they are there to enhance and strengthen the security that attaches to our offices, to documents, etc. They are the watchdogs that guard the embassy and they play that useful role well.

All of that was evident to us in Tehran. The first assault on the Embassy in February, in the middle of the revolution, had been a very dangerous state of affairs where the Marines at that point were stationed in several places on the far perimeters of the compound, in effect defending a 27 acre compound with a Marine Security Detachment at that time, I suppose, of 15 or 20. I wasn't there so I can't say precisely how many were there, but it never got over that number that I know of and wasn't over that number when we got overrun in November. At that time I think we had 16, several of whom were out of the country on leave.

But in February the Marines had engaged in some rather difficult one-on-one situations. The standing instructions for Marine Security Guards in all embassies is that they do not fire on their own initiative unless or until they are in danger of immediate bodily risk themselves; otherwise they fire only on instructions of the senior officer present, who normally would be the ambassador or chargé. That was the situation in Tehran and that was the situation in February when the Embassy was first overrun, but because some of the Marines were at distant points around the compound, that need to make a decision on their own fell on them. Some of them had to face some very difficult situations.

There is today, still some uncertainty as to the number of Iranians that were killed in that incident that day, but one or two we know were killed. At least one, I believe, as a consequence of Marine firing. One Marine was held by those revolutionaries in February and taken off somewhere for a time. His escapades have been written up publicly. I wasn't there, but it was a very dicey situation for about 24 hours before we got him back.

All of that is background for the situation which I faced when I came up against that problem on November 4, 1979. At no time did I order the Marines to fire. At no time did

they fire. I did instruct them to use tear gas as needed, fairly early on, although I think we probably should have used it even earlier. But we didn't use it when the actual intrusion into the compound began. At that time their battle stations were all within the Chancery, itself.
One problem, by the way, that morning was that some of the Marines were in the Marine House immediately behind the Embassy compound, across the street from the outer walls. They had to get back into the compound when the alarm bells began to ring. One or two of them were captured in the Marine House, itself, complicating the situation when the decision was made as to whether we should surrender. We did eventually use tear gas...again I am speaking from my vantage point in the Foreign Ministry on the other side of town. I wasn't there so the specifics of how things went from minute to minute, from hour to hour, have to be provided by someone else. But my understanding is, based on telephone and radio conversations, that one or two of the Marines actually did not make it back into the Chancery and into that kind of protection.

In any event, the Chancery was eventually surrounded by hundreds of these demonstrators, armed with a variety of things...some with banners, some with protest slogans, some with actual guns, some with equipment to pry open a rear window of the basement slightly below ground floor of the Chancery. That is where they forced entry into the building and as they came in were deterred to some degree by tear gas, but not sufficient to stop them. The Marines retreated back up to the first floor and eventually up to the second floor behind the steel door there.

As time went on the question developed as to what we should do, having been forced into that kind of fortress on the second floor of the Chancery. Eventually at one point, Alan Golacinski, went out into the compound, down the stairs, to attempt to negotiate with those who were leading the demonstrations. He was captured and held himself. I was informed of that. I don't recall that I was aware of another thing that developed at that time, although I am aware of it now directly from John Limbert, one of the political officers in the Embassy, the most fluent Farsi speaker we had and who at one point made the decision to open that second floor door. To what degree the decision to do so was coordinated among those of my staff in charge or who had taken charge in the hallway, is not entirely clear to me. In any event, he went out as well, and was captured. I was informed at one point that smoke was coming through under the second floor door suggesting that they were trying to burn the place down even though it was a metal door.

That and other reports from the Embassy indicated that there was no possible way to defend the Chancery, that we had made sufficient progress in destroying what I understood to be the bulk of the classified gear, and I ordered them to surrender when they thought they had no alternative to doing so. And they eventually did. The rest of the story is better told by those who were there on the second floor.

The demonstrators then stormed through the open door, bound all the staff loosely, hands in particular, and blindfolded them, forcing them to sit down on the floor. At the outset the classified code room was held a little bit longer, but eventually that too was

surrendered, when they had completed the destruction of the equipment there. After I had given the order to surrender and the second floor was occupied, obviously my contact ended. Radio and telephone links were cut off.

The three of us, Victor Tomseth, Mike Howland and I were left to ourselves and the horrible sense that something, not totally unexpected, but serious event had transpired. I say not totally unexpected because we still had the feeling that this was probably going to be something like what happened in February.

Q: This is the way things are done. We have had problems before and they all worked out within a day or two.

LAINGEN: Well, they did then, but they didn't this time.

I continued into the evening, until late that evening, approaching midnight eventually, sitting at the desk of the Foreign Minister, still in telephone conversation with Washington -- he in telephone conversation with a number of people around the city. He at one point said to me, as he told me that he had to go off to a cabinet meeting, "What are you going to do?" I said to him, "You tell me what I am going to do, because you have the responsibility to provide me security and my colleagues' security. I can't go out on the streets. I am not going to go back to the compound now and be taken."

There was some discussion earlier on whether it would be a good idea for me to try to return. That idea was rejected rather quickly because of the way things were developing. It was better that I and my two colleagues stay where we were to see if we couldn't work things out from the government end.

I told him that it was his responsibility to tell me what I should do. I said that I could not go out and try to make some other embassy in town responsible for me and my colleagues. And there was some risk of my being picked up in any event.

So he said, "Well, look, you better stay here. We will work this out by morning." He took me down personally to one of the diplomatic reception rooms, I and my two colleagues at that point having not eaten anything to speak of during the day, except for tea and some cookies and some Algerian dates that Yazdi had brought back as a gift from the Independence Day celebrations there. He arranged for us to get something to eat from the kitchen of the Foreign Ministry. This was roughly just before midnight -- he going off to a cabinet meeting.

So we made ourselves as comfortable as we could in this rather splendid room, full of pseudo-French furniture. We took turns trying to sleep during the night on those uncomfortable sofas. It was a very painful time. And yet, a time when we were still determined to convince ourselves that we would work this out. We really believed it -- or told ourselves we believed it.

Q: And, of course, this was what all common sense and experience had taught one, that these things didn't keep going.

LAINGEN: The next morning came around. We had been on the phone all night with Washington. We were on the phone also with elements of the Foreign Ministry that were friendly with us. We had telephone contacts occasionally with Kate Koob, who along with Bill Royer, were still two not taken hostages. They were running the American Cultural Center in another part of town and were not to be taken hostages until later, the second day. We had visits from the Chief of Protocol; friendly kitchen force people; we were on phones to other ambassadors in the city, all of which was being facilitated by the Foreign Minister's office. The Foreign Minister, himself, came down to see us once on the second day. We talked to the Deputy Foreign Minister once or twice.

As all of this was happening, Washington, with whom we were in contact, were constantly asking us for our opinion of how things stood and our own judgment of the scene and giving us their own judgment of the scene from back there. President Carter eventually weighed into action, himself, in deciding to send several messages to Khomeini. He decided to send Ramsey Clark, the former Attorney General, and William Miller, a retired Foreign Service officer who had served in Iran earlier and who had a lot of contacts, particularly with the nationalist secular elements of the revolutionary leadership. The idea was to send them to Tehran for conversations directly with the Ayatollah to work the thing out.

Then we got involved as a kind of sitting foreign Embassy within the Foreign Ministry in trying to work out the landing rights for the aircraft to come in. We were facilitated in this fashion by the Foreign Ministry to continue to operate "normally" as Chargé with my deputy and security officer. Incidentally we also had in the same room with us the driver of my car, an Armenian-Iranian employee of the Embassy who had been driving for American Ambassadors in Tehran for years and years. He was held hostage, too, if you will, for the first week or so, when he eventually was allowed to slip out of the Foreign Ministry.

The Clark-Miller mission, of course, never arrived, despite full cooperation of the Foreign Ministry, carefully laid out landing arrangements, etc., because eventually the Ayatollah said no. And if the Ayatollah said no to something, that was the end of it. He was determined not to have any conversation with the Carter regime. So the Clark-Miller mission got as far as Ankara or Istanbul. They waited there for as long as a week, I believe...someone like Bill Miller should be interviewed to get his view. He is here in the city. He is President of an American/Russian group focusing on that relationship (later named as ambassador to Ukraine).

So that was the Clark-Miller mission to which the three of us in the Ministry had a great deal of hope. Here was an opportunity at the highest level to get through to this regime, led by two people who the Iranian revolutionaries regarded, we assumed, and I think rightly so, as friends of the revolution. Ramsey Clark was a clear friend. He had been to

Tehran in mid-summer of that year, shortly after I arrived in Tehran, on a visit. He was known as a friend of the revolution. He was a friend of many elements in it, particularly the secular side. And Bill Miller was as well. So we attached a lot of hope and confidence in that effort. That hope was dashed, of course, with the denial of their entry by the Ayatollah.

Meanwhile, the three of us in the Foreign Ministry maintained contact around the clock with Washington for two or three days. Eventually that ended, although for some time thereafter we had daily contact, and for several months thereafter until February, we had use of the telex facilities of the Foreign Ministry to communicate with Washington. This was done obviously in carefully guarded correspondence which wasn't very sensitive, because it was sent by means of Iranian facilities. But it gave us a way of talking to Washington. It gave the three of us a sense of participation. It was great for our morale. We could answer questions and get it on the record with the cooperation of the Foreign Ministry about our judgment of the mood in Tehran, the scene in Tehran.

Q: Obviously you were isolated. Where were you, in one room?

LAINGEN: At the outset we were a kind of Embassy in exile, in isolation in the Foreign Ministry in the diplomatic reception room.

Q: Were you able to talk to people coming in or out to find out what was happening?

LAINGEN: We were able to get information of a relatively limited nature. We couldn't go out into the streets and get a gallup poll of the mood on the street. But we could watch from the windows at what the sentiment was like out there. The Chief of Protocol came to see us, almost daily at the outset. I had long conversations with him, which on his part were obviously guarded. He was clearly sympathetic. He was old school Persian -- a typical Chief of Protocol who wanted to cooperate in every way in a protocol sense, and I have no doubt he, being a professional diplomat himself, was deeply troubled by what had happened. But what he had to say had to be carefully guarded. But we could read through lines in conversations with him.

We talked to the kitchen force, who also were friendly. Shortly after we were taken, Army guards began to appear who would remain our guards throughout the process until we were taken off to prison, late in the affair. We could converse with them.

But, most importantly, we had visits from foreign ambassadors once in a while. A few were allowed in to see us. The British came in to see us once or twice. We could talk on the phone with them the first few days. The Canadian Ambassador got in to see us. The German, the Turkish.

And we had access to radio and to Iranian TV. Victor Tomseth speaks fluent enough Persian so that he could watch television and inform me. I didn't know Persian that well.

From all of those hearing points we could say something to Washington as to what the situation was like; what we judged the mood to be; ideas that we might have for media coverage, public relations handling. We couldn't get into sensitive material except to the point we could communicate sensitive views and suggestions to these visiting ambassadors who would then leave and themselves report back to Washington.

A lot of that went on and it developed over the months into a rather sustained channel, although not always regular. The Swiss Ambassador came in to see us periodically and, when we broke relations with Iran in April of that year, his embassy became our protecting power in Tehran. He got in to see us sometimes weekly, not always that often, but reasonably often so that we could send messages through him that we wrote out ourselves, and passed to him reasonably surreptitiously, although we were not watched that closely when we were talking to him. We would pass him a piece of paper and he would put it on his wires. So there is a file of classified cables from Laingen in the archives of the Department. Scores of them and some quite sensitive. Some, I would like to believe, reasonably helpful to Washington as that crisis wore on over the next 444 days.

Q: Did the action on the part of the United States to freeze assets have any effect?
LAINGEN: I regarded Carter's action in freezing those assets as the smartest things he ever did in this crisis.

Q: I do too.

LAINGEN: As it turned out, it became a powerful tool in our hands, as freezing of assets can be in certain situations.

Q: Particularly the way the Iranian situation is set up.

LAINGEN: That is right, when they are as large as that. We saw it as the right thing to do. I don't recall sensing at that time that it was going to be as consequential as it was. In terms of PR, yes it was also a useful thing that made it clear to the Iranians that Jimmy Carter could be tough, at least in that area, and that was something that I thought was a good thing to do. I am often asked whether I disagree with policies that Jimmy Carter followed in the hostage situation in Tehran and my stock answer, usually over simplified admittedly, is that I don't think he had many other options than those he chose, including the seizing of the assets, which any President would have done.

He, however, put reliance not on the use of force, but on a sustained process of applying pressure through diplomacy, eventually through economic sanctions, through diplomatic isolation, and using and probing for channels of communications in every way he conceivably could. He did, in fact, warn, in classified communications with Tehran, and we became aware of that, that if the hostages were put on trial then no holds were barred. That he was prepared to use force if necessary...if any kind of physical action was taken against us.

Q: That was a constant threat was it?

LAINGEN: It was implied, and also expressed on several occasions in a classified, secret sense. It wasn't blatantly touted from Washington every morning. One can make a good case today that had Jimmy Carter resorted to actual force from day one, regarded what had happened in Tehran as an act of war, as Ronald Reagan described it, the situation might have developed differently. Probably would have developed differently, if he had used force. I did not, sitting there, think the use of force was a good idea. I got swept up, if you will, in the sense that we can work this out over time through negotiations and discussions and diplomacy and pressure...diplomatic and economic pressure. I really believed that that was the preferred course of action. In part because I thought the use of force, the threat, say, we are going to bomb Kharg island everyday if you don't release the hostages immediately, was a slippery slope that would have been very difficult to handle because I thought the passion in Tehran at the time was such that they would respond with force equally against the hostages. If you do that we will kill three hostages tomorrow. We will put them on trial and condemn them as spies next week. Maybe those threats would have been proven false, I don't know. We can't replay it. At the time I believed that the passion was such that Khomeini's vindictiveness, determination and rigidity was such as to make it impossible to see him back down.

Q: One looks at events later in those places...Iran-Iraq war, etc....and the resilience of fanaticism. It doesn't respond well to threats to the economy, etc.

LAINGEN: That's right. That is the second consideration on the part of the revolutionaries. Their goals and their zeal come first. One can interpret what I said as sort of a soft reaction that you would expect from somebody fearful of his own life or fearful of the life of my staff. Yeah, I was fearful for the lives of my staff. I wanted to see them get out of that situation alive. I believed that over time we could get out of that situation alive, in good part because I had known Iranians from a previous time and had a perspective of how Iranians behave and was convinced that they didn't intend at any point to kill us deliberately. I think I can say with integrity, with honesty, that I believed that was right, not because I wanted to get out of there alive, but because it was right for our long term interests in that region.

Q: I felt this outrage and let's do something at the time. But in the long run you all got out and we didn't end up killing a lot of people which we would have done with this force, and it is very problematic that a revolutionary regime would respond to what essentially would be a very limited type of thing that we could do. We could blow up a lot of things, but that is about it.

LAINGEN: That's right. I came out of this affair and have had that belief strengthened by the way in which I have watched our government deal with terrorism since. Military force in dealing with terrorists is a very difficult option that doesn't usually work. Ronald Reagan, on the arrival of the hostages on the south lawn on the day of our return to

freedom, warned that there would be swift retribution if something like this were to happen again...presumably anywhere. Despite that, Ronald Reagan, when he was confronted with the first such crisis in his Presidency, the TWA hijacking in Beirut, didn't use force. A number of Americans were held hostages for a time. He ended up "negotiating" or at least trying to work it out without the application of force.

The only two times that force has really been effective in dealing with terrorism in my view is the bombing of Tripoli by Reagan...and you can argue how effective that was...it seemed to have some effect on Qadhafi. The other singularly successful one, where everything was in place and worked right, was the Achille Lauro cruise ship incident, where we were able to use force to pick up the terrorists involved.

But normally things aren't neatly in place, things don't work right, and there is inevitably all manner of risks, and God knows we certainly came to appreciate that in a subsequent hostage crisis that went on for years and that was Beirut. We never ever felt we could wade into Beirut with military force and get at those bastards. I use that word advisedly. They were assuredly bastards and needed to be clobbered. But we couldn't find a way to do it. We couldn't be assured of where they were and, of course, we could not be assured at all about what would happen to the hostages if we tried it.

Q: What were you getting from the people you talked to in Washington...I suppose it was the Desk and David Newsom and others? Was it sort of "Keep you chin up, we are doing everything we can?"

LAINGEN: Oh, yeah. They did everything they could from Washington for all of us. They kept assuring the three of us they were doing everything they could. As I suggested we were kept informed, reasonably, obviously not totally. We didn't know everything. We knew a lot about what Washington was trying to do. We knew about the efforts through the UN with the Secretary General to get a UN panel of inquiry in there. That was front page news here and a front page element of American policy for the months of late December and January and into February. We knew enough about that to be concerned about it.

The three of us were deeply concerned that we seemed to be prepared to make some kind of deal with the Iranian regime in terms of that panel of inquiry and in the process extend a kind of "apology" to the Iranians. We thought this would be counterproductive to our interests in the long run and we though it would subvert the commitment the three of us and our colleagues over in the compound had made to the very principle of diplomatic immunity. To depart from that in any way we thought would be wrong. We believed that to the point of being prepared, I think I can say again with conviction, for some risk. We thought it better to take some risk than concede that point to the Iranians. We were very nervous about that UN business.

Eventually it was undermined anyway because of the Ayatollah's determination not to make a deal at that point. His refusal to make any concession at that time frustrated that

process and it died. Indeed we sensed that it was dying as the panel of inquiry was airborne from New York. While that flight was underway, we knew sitting there in Tehran from newscasts in Tehran that the Ayatollah had said that the issue would be resolved by the majlis, which wasn't even elected at that point. The election was several months away. As it turned out, the decision on the issue was six or seven months away. We knew from our perspective in Tehran how much of what the Ayatollah said was in concrete from the moment he said it. We were convinced, having heard that, that this panel of inquiry process was fruitless from day one. And we were proven right.

I should add that as all of this was going on there were changes in the role of the Foreign Minister. Mr. Yazdi, of course, lost office as did Prime Minister Bazargan when his provisional government resigned within 36 hours after the seizure of the Embassy, and that saw accomplish one of the central purposes on the part of the more radical elements of the revolutionary regime. That was to oust that government that appeared to them to be prepared to let the revolution drift back into a relationship with the United States. They wanted to stop that. They were able to stop that with the seizure of the Embassy. So Yazdi and Bazargan and their government fell within 36 hours, and power then centered in the Revolutionary Council that had been functioning before but from behind the scenes. Now power was centered in that Revolutionary Council and, of course, centered ultimately in the hands of the Ayatollah.

The incoming Foreign Minister was Bani Sadr, who had been known to us as a kind of intellectual in the revolution during the months preceding the seizure of the Embassy, but whom we had never regarded as a heavyweight in any sense. The only contact we had had with him was a call that I asked the Economic Counselor to make on him back in September, I think it was, 1979. He came back from that conversation with a report, given added credence to me ever since, that he was a fuzzy headed intellectual, a revolutionary type who didn't really know how to handle power. And his role as Foreign Minister and eventually as President of the Islamic Republic, demonstrated that to me in spades.

He became Foreign Minister immediately after the departure of Yazdi. At one point he was about to go off on a mission to the UN in late November and early December of that year. That was frustrated as well by the Ayatollah.

Bani Sadr was then removed from office and Mr. Ghotbzadeh took his place in early December. One of his first public statements was to the effect that Laingen and the other two hostages in the Foreign Ministry were free to leave. That got on the wires very quickly, particularly back in Washington. Within hours we were given instructions that got to us through some source to be indeed ready to leave. Ghotbzadeh, however, had made it clear that we were free only to leave the Ministry. He could not guarantee our security after we left the building. So his assurance of our being free to leave proved hollow from the beginning.

There is a myth around that I refused to leave at that point because I didn't want to leave before my staff in the Embassy were permitted to leave. That is myth. That is not fact. I

didn't leave because I couldn't be assured that I would be free to leave. If I had been free to leave in the total sense, to leave the country, I guess I would have left, particularly since Washington expected me to leave. I can assure you that I would not have been happy to leave because I thought still at that point, and this is only a month after we had been taken hostage, that we could work it out and I didn't want to leave my colleagues in the lurch.

In any event, I didn't leave. I could not leave. Meanwhile the students, over in the compound, on occasion would clamor periodically with the Ayatollah and with others for our heads. They wanted the "super Satans" as we were called, the three of us. That happened three, four, five times in the course of the next several months. Sometimes the demand got louder than other times. At one point early on, the first few days of the seizure, they were reported at the doors of the Foreign Ministry, physically ready to take us. In each case, when the decision was eventually his, the Ayatollah decided not to let them get at us. Just why, I will never know. I guess I have to conclude that it was one gesture symbolic to some degree, however slight, of their respect for diplomatic status and immunity and something they could point to for world public opinion as demonstrating their "respect" for diplomatic immunity.

Q: Did you have any contact with Ghotbzadeh at all?

LAINGEN: I had contact with Ghotbzadeh twice. Once was when he summoned me to his office in February in the height of the process involving the UN panel of inquiry and the expectation then that part of that process would see the hostages in the compound turned over physically to the control of the government, not the students. The idea was that they would be moved physically from the compound to the Foreign Ministry and into the same diplomatic reception rooms where we were. There were three very large rooms there. They were to be moved there and held in one room. Indeed, they moved 50 cots in there and 50 small steel wall cabinets for hostages to keep their clothes.

He called me to his office, on the same floor where I was held, to tell us this and to ask for my cooperation in insuring that there would be no attempt to escape from there at that point. The theory was that eventually the government would have enough control that they would be able to release the hostages themselves. It didn't happen.

Then I saw him one other time when he came down into that room and talked to us seeking cooperation from Victor Tomseth in some kind of testimony for a trial that they were envisaging of a counterrevolutionary that they had captured. I had strong distaste for Ghotbzadeh at the beginning because of the way in which he maligned the United States' image and purposes in Iran when he was head of what was called the "Voice and Vision of Iran." That was the propaganda office. He had that office during the months when I was Chargé in a free Embassy. He had not been very helpful. So I didn't like the guy.

I didn't like him at the outset for the role he played as Foreign Minister, but I sensed as time went on over those months, that he came to the conclusion, himself, fairly early, that

this hostage business was counterproductive to the revolution and that it needed to be ended. I think he genuinely wanted to end it and was prepared to make some concessions to do that. And he stuck his neck out to do that. He showed some guts. I regret the fact that eventually he was executed. I thought he was one of those Iranians in the revolutionary arena that could, over time, have put a more rational and more moderate direction to that revolution. But he took too many risks with the more radical elements to the point where he eventually was accused, rightly or wrongly, who can say, of conspiring to kill the Ayatollah himself. So were the charges.

The Ayatollah eventually allowed him to be executed even though Ghotbzadeh supposedly had one of the closest relationships of anyone in the revolutionary regime with the Ayatollah.

Q: I take it that the Ayatollah was looming over everything all the time.

LAINGEN: Of course, it was the Ayatollah's revolution. It was his revolution to lose. We had no doubt of that. During the time the provisional government was functioning and we were dealing with it, we knew. And Bazargan, the Provisional Prime Minister knew better than anyone else that the decision making power was not his on fundamental issues, but was the Ayatollah's. He used the expression in a celebrated public interview once that he was like a knife without a blade. He didn't have real power.

The Ayatollah was a looming presence. We watched him a lot on television, particularly when we were hostages. We could watch television, usually, in the guards' room next to our room. The army guards would allow us to do that. Endless, almost daily, lectures, homilies, sermons, preachments by the Ayatollah to the faithful. We got sick and tired of it, but I can assure you we never lost our "respect" for his capacity to control that place by the power of his words, the power of his ideas, his physical presence and his pivotal role, of course, of bringing on the revolution.

The 44 days became 444 days. I think my comments earlier suggest that I and my two colleagues, and I suspect most of my staff over in the compound, believed that it would work out. That this would be another one of these things that we had gone through in February. Maybe in a day or two we could work this thing out. When 14 of our colleagues were released...the blacks and women, except for two women and one black...that was further indication to us that maybe the pressure of international opinion was beginning to work and the Ayatollah would bring this thing to a head and conclude it. In other words, we lived on hope, grasping at straws and signals. As it turned out we gave much too much credence to every one of them.

In a situation like that you live on hope. That is as much as you've got. So you tell yourself, "Hey, by Thanksgiving, they will let us go." "Christmas? They wouldn't hold 53 Americans hostages through Christmas and thus demonstrate to world opinion how heartless a regime this is." Well, Thanksgiving and Christmas came, New Year's came, St. Patrick's came, birthdays came. Second Thanksgiving, second Christmas even. We

lived on hope and I am sure my colleagues in far worse straits than I was over in that compound lived on that same kind of hope.

Q: Were you aware of the Americans who were with the Canadians?

LAINGEN: We were very aware of those six Americans who were around town and hadn't been caught because we were in telephone conversation with them. We got into contact with them. We were able to find them with help particularly from Kate Koob and Bill Royer who weren't taken hostage for the first 24 hours. Victor Tomseth was the one who handled that most. He was on the telephone with the six several times, giving them advice to where they should go as they moved around town from one spot to another, including a time in Tomseth's own apartment where his Thai cook still lived and for a time became quite celebrated for harboring those six.
After being in the British compound for a while, they got in touch with the Canadians. The first conversation was with the Canadian Minister, the number two, Mr. Sheardon, who said in those celebrated words, "My God, where have you been? Why didn't you call us before?" I get emotional on the subject because of what the Canadians did. For the next three months, roughly, those six lived in the homes of those two Canadians...the Minister and the Ambassador. Except for one, the Agricultural Attaché, who spent several weeks in the Swedish Embassy in hiding.

Yes, we were aware of them. Indeed, we told the Desk Officer of the Foreign Ministry who handled American affairs on the second day that those six were still around and we needed the Ministry's help in getting them out of the country. They responded by saying, "Look, we have enough trouble with you all, coping with the ones we've got. Let's worry about these six later." They never divulged the fact that they were there. They knew it, but kept it secret and I give them credit for that.

The Canadian Ambassador got in to see us and eventually he told us that they were with him. It was he who told us that. They weren't in telephone contact with us then. Over those three months, the Canadian Ambassador got in several times. He kept us informed to a degree about what was being done to get them out. We would pace up and down the central floor of that diplomatic reception room, he and I, making sure we were out of earshot of anybody while he briefed me about what they were doing in terms of fraudulent passports, etc.

Suddenly, one day we learned that not only had the six left, but the Canadian Ambassador, himself, had left and closed his Embassy and taken his entire staff with him. That was a very good day because it gave us such enormous satisfaction that here at least was one success. We had fooled them. We had played a marvelous game with them and gotten them out. And, of course, it was a success back here, the way in which the image of Canada became for a time so splendid among the American public.

The next morning, I learned about this later, a member of the American press corps in Tehran, who hadn't been kicked out yet, went to the gates of the Embassy and told the

student who was on guard on the other side of the gate what had happened; i.e. that six Americans had been spirited out of the country with the help of the Canadian Embassy. And he responded, according to this story, "But that is illegal." We thought that was one of the funniest expressions we had heard the whole time. That he could say that standing there, having stolen an entire embassy.

Q: Today is May 27, 1993 and this is a continuing interview with Bruce Laingen. Bruce, talk quickly, a bit, about your perception of what happened in Washington. To me it is a little bit late in wondering how things played out, but I would have thought that at a certain point we would have interned the Iranian diplomats at the Greenbriar or whatever one does as we did with the Germans and Italians and Japanese and an exchange would be made. You can say they are hostages. But that is exactly the case when you have an exchange. Did you have any feeling then or afterwards about how we dealt with the Iranian diplomats.

LAINGEN: I don't know if that concept of an exchange was ever discussed, or even considered. It often would
boggle our mind thinking about it, that the three of us were sitting in the Ministry and our Iranian counterparts in Washington were allowed to function freely until early April, 1980. The fact that the Embassy in Washington was allowed to remain open was a product, of course, of Carter policy, broadly defined. That is, to keep every option open, to keep probing, to leave every avenue possible available so that if some contacts that hadn't been considered, could be, and I guess Carter just felt that the Iranian Embassy in Washington was a possible liaison to something with somebody.

It bothered me and I can assure you it bothered our families, not least my wife. I may have mentioned earlier that there developed a tradition of prayer vigils across the street from that embassy, begun by members of my parish in Washington, All Saints Church. These people eventually recruited a fairly large number of regulars who always appeared on Sunday night for a prayer vigil and sing along across the street from that embassy. The "Battle Hymn of the Republic" became the theme song of that group and was sung every Sunday night. Hopefully, my wife would say, within the hearing of those who occupied that chancery.

On at least one occasion they knocked on its door, went in and presented a petition. But the fact of that Embassy remaining open while we were kept hostage was troublesome. It was a curious aspect of that whole affair.

Q: What were other developments? You had heard that the Canadians had gotten six American out.

LAINGEN: From the time of the visit of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Waldheim, in January, until the break of relations finally on April 6, 1980, was a time of rather high maneuver and activity on the part of the Carter administration using the

United Nations. Using that avenue as a possible means of developing contacts and encouraging some degree of response from the regime in Tehran.

The Secretary General's visit to Tehran was a bit of a disaster because he got not only inhibited, but I think frightened physically, by the way in which carefully constructed demonstrations were mounted against him in his sight and in his presence, hostile to the United Nations and to him personally.

But his visit and his departure in January did not end the effort through the United Nations because then there began a long process that extended a couple of months to try to develop some kind of a panel of inquiry under the Secretary General's auspices. In its final evolution it was to be a panel that would come to Tehran -- and a panel eventually did -- and listen to the grievances of the Iranians, hear what the USG had to say and, ideally, would also sit down and hear from the hostages themselves about how they felt about the situation. [static on tape]

The three of us sitting in a corner -- it was destined to failure from the beginning, because Ayatollah Khomeini announced actually on the day that the panel was enroute to Tehran that the hostage issue would be resolved by the majlis, the parliament. But we sensed, our knowing Khomeini's policies and attitudes as we did, and he having said that the issue would be decided by the majlis, that the panel of inquiry was destined to be a failure as it was, even though they got there. Even though Ghotbzadeh, the Foreign Minister, representing the somewhat pragmatic side of the situation in Tehran in those months, was able to work out an arrangement that he thought he had in the bag.

It would have seen the panel come, hear all of this, then depart with among other things what would be construed as a kind of American apology. Meanwhile the hostages held in the Embassy compound would be moved physically to the Foreign Ministry and put under the custody of the government rather than the students. The government would then be in a position to work out a release schedule appropriate to a saving of face. As I said earlier, the Foreign Minister asked my cooperation in assuring that the hostages, when removed to the Foreign Ministry, would be kept in order, would not escape. We were so delighted to know of that kind of development that we assured him, of course, that we had no such intention of plotting an escape. Cots were moved into the large room adjacent to the one we were in. Steel lockers were brought in for 50 hostages. Those cots and lockers were never occupied because the process failed. The panel of inquiry eventually departed in frustration.

Q: Did anyone talk to you from the panel?

LAINGEN: No, they never got in to see us, even though that was the plan. We did see the Secretary General of the United Nations back in January and some of his colleagues who came in with him.

The collapse of that United Nations effort essentially ended the diplomatic phase that Carter had pursued so actively in the first six months roughly. There were continuing efforts through the French and Argentine lawyer types and others who would pop up occasionally. And there was an exchange of letters that became very celebrated involving one to Khomeini from Carter. It's authenticity was never fully determined, at least not by us, but eventually Jimmy Carter in Washington realized that the diplomatic process had been played out, and on April 6 he broke relations, and the Chargé in Washington and his remaining staff, which was very small at that time, were ordered to leave within 72 hours.

That order of departure involved, as presumably history will record elsewhere, the celebrated comments by Henry Precht, then the Country Director for Iran, who was the officer asked to bring the Chargé, Mr. Ali Agah, to the Department to receive his departure notice. Henry Precht received him at the entrance to the State Department, took the elevator and in the process of moving from the lobby to the sixth floor where he was to get his departure notice, Henry and the Chargé got into a conversation in which Agah alleged, as his government had repeatedly alleged in Tehran, that the hostages were being treated in a humanitarian fashion.

Henry Precht at that point was so frustrated that he expressed his celebrated response, "That's bull shit." That made Agah so angry that he refused to go on further into the office and went back to his Embassy. Eventually the departure notice had to be taken to his Embassy and he left as ordered.

In any event, that was the end of that process. The next big event was the failed rescue mission at the end of April, April 25 by our counting, April 26 back here. That day -- for all the hostages, I think, surely it was for me -- remains of the most poignant memories of that entire crisis. Not so much that the rescue mission failed, but that eight men died in its failure.

The three of us in the Foreign Ministry knew nothing about the planning. We all assumed that planning of that kind was going on back in Washington and had been going on since day one of the hostage crisis. We had been encouraged, admonished, by Mike Howland, the security officer, to always have at our cot sides in that room where we were held, a few essentials in a small plastic bag so that if a rescue mission were to take place, and the rescuers should suddenly bolt into our room, we would have that ready to go with us.

We learned of the rescue mission almost immediately because at that point we had access to a short wave radio. So we knew about it, I think, before the guards who were watching us in the room adjacent to us were aware of it. It was a very dark day, one that grew worse as we learned from a later broadcast that eight men had died.

The result in Tehran, among other things, was that all of the hostages to my knowledge in the compound, all 50 of them, were moved physically. Some simply around the city, some in the compound, but most of them to other cities in the country. Moved

blindfolded, bound in the back of vans at great risk, with injuries to some of them because of a traffic accident.

The whole process was designed to insure that Washington would never try another rescue mission because of the difficulty of trying to find all of the hostages in that many places around the country.

They remained scattered around the country for much of the remaining time, although all of them were back in Tehran by, I would say, November of that year. We expected to be moved as well, the three of us in the Foreign Ministry. But while security was greatly tightened in the room in which we were held, and some of our "perks" were taken away, otherwise we were not affected.

I have the highest respect for those who went on that rescue mission. For that matter, I have an enormous respect for those who planned it, however much today with benefit of hindsight it is obvious that there were many mistakes in the process of that planning. And, of course, I have undying regard and respect for the eight men, and in particular, for their families, who died in that process. We have tried to express that on the anniversary, April 26, here in Washington, when there is annually a ceremony at Arlington Cemetery at the monument for all of them -- and a grave site for three of them -- to remember what they had sacrificed. The ceremony is put on by an organization called, "No Greater Love," which is a private non-profit group here in Washington that has been active since the Vietnam War in reaching out to families and children of people held in such circumstances.

After the failure of the rescue mission in late April, the whole process, as far as we were concern, and I think as far as Washington was concerned, went into pretty much a stalemate for the next five months, roughly, when it was clear that there was no further hope, or likely progress, in the diplomatic process of probing for openings that the Carter administration had been following up to that time.

It was essentially a time of watching the new majlis in Tehran come into being so that they could be responsive to the Ayatollah's directive that the hostage issue would be resolved by that body. All of that we took with a grain of salt. We knew full well that the majlis would not agree on anything that the Ayatollah, himself, didn't approve of, or for that matter, that the students, the terrorists, didn't approve of, their voice being that consequential in any action in respect to the hostages.

One celebrated event that took place that summer was when former Attorney General Ramsey Clark came to Tehran. He had been to Tehran once before, while I was still functioning as Chargé d'Affaires in the Chancery in the summer of 1979. At that time he had been very helpful to us in coming there, talking to our Marines, in effect reaching out to them and strengthening their morale. He had been a Marine, I think, himself, or at least had some service. In other words, we had considerable respect for him.

He came this time in June, 1980 to participate as an American delegate to something called "The Crimes of America Conference," put on by the regime in Tehran, to publicize and to highlight what they alleged were the kinds of crimes and criminal offenses and political wrongs that governments in Washington had committed against Iran over many, many years. There were many delegations from many countries. All of them, of course, supportive of the Tehran regime. Ramsay Clark came there, as he insisted, to make the point that whatever grievances the Tehran regime might have against the United States, it was wrong to hold hostages, and to seek revenge, if you will, in that fashion. I respected him for that stated purpose. Nonetheless, it struck me as highly inappropriate for someone of that stature to come there to participate in that kind of a conference with that kind of theme...crimes against Iran by the United States. So my regard for Ramsey Clark dropped a bit after that affair.

It was a long hot summer for us sitting in the Ministry, and I am sure much worse for my colleagues over in the compound. It does get hot in Tehran in the summer. Nothing really of consequence happened until late September of that year when the Iran-Iraq war began with Iraq's obvious, clear cut act of aggression across Iranian borders, in the south, particularly around Khorramshahr. Clearly an act of aggression, however much the two sides, including Iran, had been engaged for over a month or more before that in a lot of border skirmishing, reflecting the problems between the two countries at that time. But this was a massive offensive across borders designed by Saddam Hussein in Baghdad to take and hold areas of the south of Iran, oil producing areas, and, of course, in the process strengthen Baghdad's access to the Gulf, which in normal times is only a very narrow strip of land.

A larger purpose, as well, in launching that war in Saddam's mind, was to take advantage of what he sensed was Iran's discombobulation and isolation on the international scene as a consequence of the hostage crisis to try to topple the regime in Tehran, to undermine the Ayatollah, believing as well that he would have support from the Arab minority in the south of Iran.

That didn't work out, of course, and as we all know the result was an eight year war of enormous consequence and lose to both countries, neither of which to this day, 1993, has fully recovered. Indeed, there remain today tens of thousands, to my knowledge, of POWs held by both countries now for many years. And it still is in a state of cease fire. The war has not been resolved beyond a cease fire engineered by the United Nations in 1988.

The result of that aggression was not discombobulation of the Tehran regime, not to topple that regime, but in the immediate sense to strengthen that regime. It doesn't take much to get Iranians exercised about the wrongs of Arabs, particularly Iraqi Arabs, and this was a clear wrong as they saw it. As a consequence there was a great surge of nationalist furor in Tehran in particular.

The three of us in the Foreign Ministry became what we described as hostages having a window on a war, because from the third floor of the Ministry we could watch from our

windows in the early days in particular and more easily at night because there was a total blackout of the city, and we could open our windows and look out onto a city supposedly being bombed by the Iraqis. I say supposedly because much of the time the air raid sirens would go off and there was no threat of any kind. It was simply a reaction to the emotional state that saw Tehran at that time react to anything that looked suspicious.

At one point there was a celebrated affair where an Iranian jet fighter, an F-14, was trying to land at Tehran airport, and nervous anti-aircraft units on the ground began firing at this image. We heard on the radio how announcers kept appealing to the anti-aircraft batteries to stop firing as it was one of their own aircraft.

There wasn't much damage done to Tehran at that time; it was mostly psychological in terms of what the Iraqis were able to do in flying without much challenge over the city. At one point one afternoon the three of us were able to watch an Iraqi MiG-21 bomber, I think it was, fly virtually at eye level, or it looked eye level to us, at least, across the Ministry gardens and through the heart of the government district simply flaunting Iraq's power in that fashion with little return from anti-aircraft batteries. We used to joke among ourselves, that by the time the air raid sirens went off, we could be assured that the Iraqi bombers were well on their way back to Baghdad because of the slowness in getting Tehran's air defense system to respond.

The outbreak of that war worried us and I am sure it worried Washington. This was not only a worry because of the tragedy, the futility and dangers of that war in a larger sense, but also because of the way in which our immediate response and concern was that there would be a further and very considerable delay in getting at the hostage issue. That was indeed the immediate result; things were set aside for a time. The majlis at that time was finally beginning to get its act in order and actually beginning about early September to consider the hostage crisis and what to do about it.

We could sense and see from our windows the way in which a nationalist fervor among the Iranians was strengthening the regime to cope with this threat from Iraq. We could hear it as a matter of fact from lamp posts around the Foreign Ministry where loudspeakers blared out martial patriotic music. The music was often from John Philip Sousa; "The Stars and Stripes Forever", the "Washington Post March", and things like that. I learned later that similar music was played in Baghdad in the midst of that war. It is a very martial kind of music and obviously worldwide in its orientation.

By late September and early October, the Iranians were beginning to appreciate -- not least because of the Iraqi aggression -- that they needed to get on with this hostage situation and get it resolved. Iran was hurting by that time rather considerably from the economic sanctions, however incomplete they were. And hurting in the way the Iraqi aggression, clear as it was, produced almost no sympathetic response from the rest of the world in support of Tehran...realizing clearly more than they had realized before at any time in that crisis how isolated Iran was in international public opinion because of this crisis.

And, of course, by this time, September, October, the Iranians had done with us. They had finished the use of us in the sense that a major purpose in the beginning in taking the hostages was not simply to undermine the provisional government of the revolution, get rid of Bazargan, to get a more radical government in place, but also to get a majlis and a constitution in place, a referendum completed and all of the process of legitimatizing a more radical government by using the hostages as pawns in that political process to fire up the passion of the masses. By September, much of this had been accomplished. Virtually all of it had been accomplished. A majlis was in place, dominated by radical elements, dominated by clerics. They didn't need us anymore. It was possible to begin thinking, from their point of view, of ending the crisis, getting rid of the hostages. We were becoming a kind of burden.

I don't have the dates immediately in mind. I wasn't aware of its happening, of course, but one of the Deputy Prime Ministers of the regime, Mr. Tabatabai was sent to Bonn to convey to the Germans and through the Germans to us in Washington the conditions, the requirements that the Iranians were demanding that had to be accomplished to end the crisis. And that had been preceded by a celebrated speech by the Ayatollah in September in which he spelled out four specific conditions. The three of us in the Foreign Ministry hearing that speech and reading it didn't sense as we should have, I think, that these four conditions were as important as they were. To us in large part they sounded like more of the same. But there was enough difference in them, there were enough things left out of previous demands, to make Washington appreciate better than we did that these conditions were newly phrased and more negotiable. And the fact that Tabatabai went to Bonn to convey these conditions in that fashion was even more important. It was that trip by Tabatabai to Bonn with those conditions, obviously blessed by Khomeini, that set in motion the process that eventually saw the crisis end. That was in September-October. It didn't end until January 20. It took that long.

It also required at one point, rather early in this process. that the Iranians needed a different interlocutor, hence the Algerians. They concluded the Algerians would be a better vehicle at that time. The Algerians were highly regarded because they had accomplished a revolution and overcome their problems of colonial status with France. They were seen as a revolutionary regime.

So the Iranians turned to the Algerians, and as far as Washington was concerned Algeria met some essential requirements as well. It was non-aligned and we had reasonable relations with Algeria. Those began the process of getting agreement -- the money hassle began -- involving endless time, energy, thought and intelligence to determine how the issue of the frozen assets were to be dealt with. Eventually they were dealt with, in a remarkable process of diplomacy. There were many ups and downs. Some of them so far down that we worried and I know Washington worried, that the issue simply could not be resolved, because of its complexity and because of Iran's demands, before the end of the Carter administration. Of course it did go down to the wire to the last minute, almost to the last second, before it could be done.

It was done, thanks to a remarkable group of Americans. Thanks to the skill of the Algerians as well. We came to know, we, that is our government, how useful a non-aligned country could be for us at that time, particularly one with the professional diplomatic skill, highly French oriented, that the Algerians could bring to bear. The Algiers Accord -- eventually worked out in the waning minutes of the Carter administration -- saw us released. Part of that Accord is the Hague Tribunal today sitting 14 years later in the Hague still resolving economic, commercial, governmental claims against Iran and Iran against us. The Accord and Tribunal have been a boon to lawyers and will be for years. But the Algiers Accord and particularly the Hague Tribunal represent in many ways a remarkable, as Christopher himself said, who was the prime player in that process, "a classic example of diplomacy." That is what it was, with a lot of skill and innovative approaches applied to a settlement affecting something like $12 billion in frozen assets, which Mr. Carter had wisely, early on, frozen.

Q: Apparently that was quite a shock to the Iranians. It hadn't really occurred to them that someone might do that.

LAINGEN: Well, it was a shock in the sense that we acted early enough to prevent them from realizing it was a possibility.

The assets did not, of course, all go back to Tehran. Indeed, after American banks had been provided for in terms of interest claims they had in loans outstanding and given particularly the way a good bulk of it was reserved for an account in the Hague to make possible this process of resolving economic and commercial claims, only a small part of the assets actually went back to Tehran.

As I said before all hostages were back in Tehran by December and we were still sitting in the Ministry. All along the three of us had far more knowledge, of course, than the others did. Never total knowledge, never complete awareness of the facts, but very considerable. By late December all of us were pretty well informed including the 49 other hostages, Richard Queen having departed in mid-summer, were aware of what the Algerians were up to...that they were the interlocutors, that they were the middlemen. And at Christmas time in 1980, the Algerians in Tehran were able to come in and meet all of the hostages, to my knowledge, and tell them essentially where things stood. The three of us in the Foreign Ministry suddenly on December 23, were given notice that we were to be taken from the Foreign Ministry that night. The notice came to us around 7:00 that evening. We were told that we would be taken to join our colleagues. I think that was the intention that evening of those who eventually did take us. But that evening the process failed and we were not moved. I protested. I said, "Why are we being moved now?" I protested to the Chief of Protocol and tried to get word to the Swiss Ambassador, who had been our benefactor on so many occasions. I was unable to get through to him.

Approaching midnight that night on December 23, the room was entered by a large group of people, including clearly members of the student terrorist group over in the compound, but also members of the Foreign Ministry and a couple of representatives of the Prime

Minister's Office. After a good deal of discussion took place, we demanded to know why we were being moved and demanded that we have access to the Swiss Ambassador, the three of us were taken down into the courtyard of the Foreign Ministry. There we were ordered to get into a van.

At that point, sensing that we were also to be blindfolded and bound, restrictions that we had been assured were not going to be imposed on us when we were talking up on the third floor, we got into a bit of a contest -- triggered by Mike Howland having been pushed into the van and reacting by saying, "You can't push me" and fighting back giving a well placed kick at the student terrorist who was trying to push him into the van.

That saw us almost at sword's point and eventually my two colleagues were ordered up into the room above and I as well, but I had lingered a while to protest and I was then ordered by gun point at my head to leave and tell my colleagues that if they tried anything like this again there would be real trouble.

That incident in the presence of members of the government, the Foreign Ministry staff and the Prime Minister's Office, obviously embarrassed everybody concerned, including the student terrorists who were frustrated in their efforts. We spent the rest of that night wondering what the hell was going to happen to us the next day or later that same night. Nothing did happen and we were able to spend Christmas in that room.

One of the Algerians came in to see us. The Papal Nuncio came in to see us. We had a ceremony. We had in effect a kind of party. We began to think that we were secure in the position we had before, but in fact we were eventually moved on January 3, I think it was, when a group of terrorist students returned and this time were clearly determined to get us. We were ordered into vans with the clear cooperation of the Foreign Ministry and taken that night not to join our colleagues but to solitary confinement in some prison somewhere in Tehran. This was contrary to the assurances given us again that we would in fact be taken to join our colleagues.

We were put into prison, I think, clearly as an act of retribution for the dustup we had gotten into during the first attempt to move us. So we spent the next several weeks in solitary confinement until a few nights before we were released on January 20. On the night of January 19 we were suddenly ordered to go to another room in the building where everybody else at that point was being held for physical examinations. It turned out that the doctors examining us were Algerians and it was pretty clear to us then that something conclusive was about to happen.

We had our physical examinations and that night we were also invited to make a statement on Iranian television. Some of us did, some of us did not. They were clearly hoping by the nature of their questions that we would say things that were useful to them to confirm their continuing allegations and insistence that we had been treated in a humanitarian fashion. None of us cooperated in that fashion to my knowledge. I did not. I don't think any of that was used very effectively on television.

The next day nothing happened until late in the afternoon. Then we were given copies of Tehran's English language newspaper, the Tehran Times, replete with headlines that the crisis was over, that an agreement had been worked out, and that the US had supposedly conceded on every condition posed by Iran -- which of course we would later learn was far from the truth. About five in the afternoon we were told that we would be leaving for the airport in twenty minutes and that we could each take a small tote bag of whatever personal possessions we had. Those twenty minutes became several hours, but late in the evening we were ordered to put on blindfolds and led down into a cold courtyard where we could hear buses lined up and ready to go. On the way down the stairs we were told we could not, despite the earlier statement, carry our tote bags, but that they would be on the plane when we got there. I resisted, saying a promise was a promise, and that I didn't think they would be true to their word. This went on for several minutes, with my guard finally saying as he pulled the bag away: "Don't you trust us?" To that I could only laugh.

On the buses we were ordered to sit without talking, keeping our blindfolds on. I followed orders, as did my colleagues. It was a very tense time, and I remembered what Mike Howland had often said, and that was that the trip to the airport, if and when it came, could well be the most dangerous time of all, since there could well be elements determined to frustrate any agreement.

At the airport, and by now it must have been close to midnight, we were pushed off the buses, the blindfolds ripped off, and forced to walk and run a gauntlet of shouting and pushing militants, determined to have their last word of abuse of the hostages. But there was the ramp, leading up to a plane, one of two Algerian aircraft, and there in that plane assembled 52 wildly happy Americans, embracing each other, moving up and down the aisle, talking, laughing, shouting, unable to sit more than a few moments, a scene almost incredible, except that it was real, very real.

As we entered the cabin, however, the first person to greet us was the Swiss Ambassador, Erik Lang, who with one of his staff was meticulously recording the name of each and every one of us as we appeared -- the Swiss determined not to leave the plane until they were absolutely sure we were all accounted for. On board too was the Algerian Ambassador to Washington, the Governor of the Algerian Central Bank, and of course a full staff of air attendants and the pilots -- all of whom equally excited and all determined to reach out to us in every way they conceivably could...It was bedlam and it was noisy and yet there was a perceptible uncertainty still in the air, the plane sitting there for some time before we were finally told, ordered might be a better word, since we were up and down all over the place, to sit and calm down so that the plane could be airborne.

Well, to describe it all would take a book, or perhaps a movie...there were uproarious cheers as we cleared the runway, more when champagne was broken out when we crossed the Turkish border, and then the beginning of a flight to freedom we can never forget...nor can we forget the constant hospitality of that Algerian aircraft's crew. What beautiful people they were.

Q: Well, let me just go back a bit. During all these negotiations going on, were you still in contact with Washington?
LAINGEN: Yes and no. As a general rule our ability to have some contact with Washington continued until late October, early November. The Swiss, after we broke relations, were able sometimes to get in to see us and bring us mail. We had far more mail than our colleagues did in the compound even though the Swiss delivered a lot of mail there but always without any assurance of its reaching the hostages. When the Swiss came in we were able to send Washington our thoughts on bits of paper that we handed over to the Swiss in a way that did not attract attention by the guards, although the guards didn't really watch us very closely. In fact most of the time they closed the door and left us in the room. So those messages eventually reached Washington. I don't remember how many we sent. There were probably dozens of them. They were classified by the Swiss when they sent them over their channel and sent on from Bern to Washington.

We also had periodic telephone contact. All of that ended in late October, early November, when I got a telephone call. The telephone rang early one morning in the room. We couldn't call out, but telephone messages would come in once in a while. The telephone rang early that morning, and I answered it and it turned out to be a radio station in Seattle, Washington asking for an interview. I said that I was not in a position to give an interview. He tried again and called me back. This time the telephone operator in the Ministry said, "Are you finished?" I said, "Yes, I am finished." I was worried that anything I said could be misinterpreted and be harmful, especially for those on the compound. But when the phone rang a third time I decided I'd take the risk and say something about the sensitivity of the negotiations going on and the need for the American public to keep their cool. Those comments, brief though they were, were immediately picked up by the media all over the country and abroad, and of course the militants heard them too, and this time got the Ministry to cut the phones for good. I suspect the reason the call got through, and kept coming through that morning was that the telephone operator in the Ministry, having been told that an occasional call from Washington DC could be put through, heard the word "Washington" and concluded it was from Washington, DC.

Up to that point we periodically had calls allowed in to us from the Department. Their timing varied; sometimes denied us for several weeks; sometimes allowed weekly; sometimes for only a few minutes; sometimes for as long as a half hour; and sometimes we were "patched" to our wives. We were very fortunate that way. The conversations with Washington had to be guarded; we assumed the calls were being taped by the Iranians. But we found ways to get our views across, and we vented our frustrations, great for our morale.

Let me make some comments about those who guarded us in the Ministry. They were army men, not the student militants; the latter got their hands on us only for the last several weeks. Some of the soldiers were zealous revolutionary types, but most were pretty bored with the whole thing. Some were anxious to practice their English and talked

at every opportunity they had. Some we liked very much. We were cared for in terms of food and toilet access by the regulars in the Ministry kitchen on that floor, and these were older Iranians, long on duty in the building, and most were fed up with the revolution. They became our friends, and I look back on some of them with real affection.

I remember too the other chiefs of mission in Tehran who got in to see us occasionally, especially the Papal Nuncio, the Vatican's ambassador in the city. He was allowed in to see us on both Christmases and on Easter. He was the embodiment of the best in Christian virtue and humility and comradeship and, not least, faith -- faith in our future, faith in prayer and hope and optimism. He was magnificent. We felt his love and faith more than that from anyone else on the outside. I will always remember him with affection. Unfortunately he died after we came home and before any of us could convey to him personally how grateful we all were.

And of course there were my two cellmates -- Victor Tomseth and Michael Howland. My respect for them is deep indeed. I could not have been kept in such close quarters with better companions. Mike -- always reminding me, and Vic, of the importance of keeping physically fit and always alert to any opportunity to escape, however hopeless it seemed. And Vic -- who had been my deputy in the embassy and knew Iran better than any of us. Fortunately he knew Persian and listened to the TV in the guards' room adjacent to ours and kept Mike and me informed. Vic had a deep and sensitive understanding of the Iranian psyche which served us in very good stead.

I should note also the two women hostages, Ann Swift and Kate Koob, who clearly handled themselves with distinction and courage. Indeed all of my colleagues, in my view, endured that crisis with distinction and stood tall, with only one or two occasional exceptions. Nothing pained me more than to watch on TV on those occasions when the militants trotted out one or more hostages for some purpose. But only rarely did the hostages allow themselves to be used by the militants; indeed only one, Army Sergeant Joseph Subic, did anything of a serious nature that seemed to jeopardize his colleagues and our interests, and he will have to decide how he can live with the memory of that today.

And I must concede, living in better conditions in the Ministry than were my colleagues in the compound, that making judgments was not and is not easy about the conduct of my staff, under the pressures they faced...In a general sense they were a remarkable good and courageous group of human beings. Given the kind of treatment they suffered with, the way they survived and coped with that atmosphere, with the isolation, with the way they were bound and particularly at the beginning the way they were denied the right to talk to each other, didn't have enough food most of the time, their performance was remarkable. They fully deserved and earned the award for valor that each of them received. I think that spirit and high degree of performance and high professionalism was also evident in the way they have conducted themselves since their release. There has never been any divisiveness within this group of 53 Americans of different personalities. Among the 53, plus the six who escaped with the Canadians...there was no backbiting, no complaining,

no second guessing made public. Some may have felt that way, but rarely if ever has that ever been expressed publicly in any divisive way.

One of the points I tried to convey to my colleagues on that Algerian aircraft as we flew from Tehran to Algiers that night and on to Weisbaden, was the considerable impression I had of how we were regarded in the States among the public as rather an impressive group of Americans who had conducted themselves pretty well under stress. I told my colleagues, using the loudspeaker system on that aircraft, what I knew about things that they couldn't possibly have known. I did what I could to remind them that, "Look, we've got to sustain our image when we get back. We've got a pretty good image at home. Everything we do, every step we take, everything we say is going to impact on that image." "Keep in mind," I said, "as you do your interviews, as you get home, as you get off this aircraft, keep that image in mind and remember that you are speaking for and reflecting the American Foreign Service, the American diplomatic service, the strength of Americans in stress, and do what you can to sustain that." And I think they have been remarkable in the way that they have done so.

Q: I think so too. One last question about sort of the end game when you were in the Foreign Ministry. Was there any following of the election between Carter and Reagan?

LAINGEN: ...of course all of this was being conducted or played out in the middle of a Presidential election campaign.

Q: And a very left/right campaign compared to some.

LAINGEN: That's right. It mattered to the 53 of us, all of us having our own political views. Eventually all of the 50 others knew something about what was going on in the outside world. It got better towards the end. The three of us in the Ministry knew a lot, and we followed the election reasonably closely. Indeed, we heard one of the debates. I think the general feeling among us was that it seemed unlikely that Reagan could win. This actor from California, granted he had been Governor of California for eight years, it still seemed somewhat unusual and unlikely to us sitting there that this person might conceivably become President of the United States. We were aware of some of the electoral campaign as it dealt with the hostage issue, but not all of it. We had the general impression that Reagan was talking tough on that issue as well as on a lot of other things.

I don't know how much I can say about how the Iranians felt at the time. They were contemptuous of Carter, had been from the beginning and I think for that reason, not least, hoped that he would lose to further discredit him and disgrace him...as evidence that God was on their side in this respect too. That God would see that Carter would lose. But generally speaking they were apprehensive about the possibility of Reagan being elected, and there is the whole issue of the October surprise.

Q: Could you explain what it was and....?

LAINGEN: Well, the term October surprise comes from the Republican concern during the election campaign that Carter might be successful enough in discussions then underway to enable the hostages to be released before the election in November and thus pull off an "October surprise", which could have greatly increased his chances of winning. I think most people felt that if the hostage crisis could be resolved before the election, Carter's chances of reelection would certainly be enhanced, if not confirmed. It was a very emotional issue.

Q: Each news account that the hostages had been in so many days was at the end of some of the major news broadcasts.

LAINGEN: Exactly. So the Republican concern was not surprising that an October surprise might be pulled off. That concern allegedly caused Mr. Casey...

Q: William Casey?

LAINGEN: That's right, and with others in the election campaign, to engage in discussions of some degree with Iranians -- allegedly designed to frustrate an October surprise by getting the Iranians to agree not to release the hostages until after the elections in return for assurances from the incoming Republican administration of arms deliveries to restore some of the shortcomings in the Iranian military inventory. This was said to have proceeded to the point where Mr. Casey and others had actually met with Iranians in various places, not least, of course, in Madrid, but also in London and Paris, to work this out.

Those who allege that there was a conspiracy in this fashion on the part of the Republicans feel that their concern is also justified by the way in which we were released within a half hour after the inauguration of Mr. Reagan and that there were, in fact, arms deliveries through Israel that began shortly after the beginning of the Republican administration.

Those allegations have been, as we now know, very considerably deflated by the reports of committees put in place by both Houses of Congress to look into these allegations. Both committees have reported that they have found no credible evidence to support those charges. However, it is obvious that the issue will never die, not least because Mr. Casey is not around and they could not conceivably be fully resolved unless Mr. Casey is resurrected from the dead. I am, myself, satisfied, particularly with the report of the two committees of Congress that delved into this in enormous detail. The reports are inches thick that came out of this process. For that matter, I was never prepared to believe that any such activity on the part of Mr. Casey took place, or at least not to believe such activity was carried to the point of an actual deal. The fact that Mr. Carter was working assiduously in October, up to the day before the election, to resolve the crisis, that is true. And that is not surprising and is fact. Of course he would want to do that. Of course he would want to do it for political reasons, but he had wanted to do it every day of his

administration from November 4, 1979 on. He didn't want that crisis to continue a day longer than it did, as burdensome as it was for his administration in Washington.

I wasn't prepared to accept that this kind of activity took place, carried to that point, for a number of reasons. Not least, in my view, granted that old Casey probably did have contact of one kind or another with the Iranians, because it would have been so stupid, politically, to run the risk of such a deal, in leaky Washington in the middle of a Presidential campaign in October in Washington, becoming public. It would have destroyed the Republican chances in the campaign. I may be naive, but also refuse to believe that any American, in or out of office, would indulge in any kind of activity that would see American citizens, particularly American government officials, held prisoners so much as a day longer than necessary.

For that kind of position I was accused of being naive by the audience on a Phil Donahue Show in the height of public agitation over the October surprise business. But I continue to feel that way, not least because of the conclusions of the Congressional committees that there is no credible evidence to support the allegations.

The Iranians, as I said, had no regard for Mr. Carter, evident in one of their favorite expressions, particularly on the part of the students, that "Carter can do nothing", that God was on their side. Carter was maligned and disliked by the revolutionaries, particularly the more radical of them, for the way which they identified him with the Shah and the Empress personally, highlighted by the controversial visit of the Carters to celebrate New Year's Eve in 1977 with the Shah and the Empress in the palace in the north of Tehran, where he expressed that remarkable judgment that the Shah was beloved of his people and remarkable in his rule. They never forgot that and wished him ill at every opportunity. They did not like Reagan either They were apprehensive about him. The fact that we were released a half hour into the administration of Ronald Reagan, I think reflects that apprehension. They didn't want to run the risk an hour longer than necessary of dealing with the Reagan administration, because if the issue had gone on into the Reagan administration, at best it could have meant that the crisis would have taken several more months to resolve, and at worse it could have seen the Reagan administration physically clobber them in some use of force.

Q: There was still a very difficult war and it wouldn't take much to tip things.

LAINGEN: Exactly. The war with Iraq was still going on. In any event, by that time the hostage settlement process had begun in September and October, with the Germans first and the Algerians later. It involved, particularly, the frozen assets, because that was an issue that had to be resolved. It had reached the point late that year where it was resolvable, was about to be concluded. They didn't want to jeopardize that by seeing it go on into the next administration. So they, I think, were quite prepared to sign quickly, at that point. To get it over with and get on with it.

Q: Speaking about getting on, when you got back to Washington, was the initial reception pretty difficult?

LAINGEN: I don't recall that there was anything difficult. Stu, I can only remember the joy of it, the relief of it, the incredible embrace of affection we had from every American. Of course from our colleagues in the Foreign Service and the military services and the government here in Washington, but the embrace was from everybody. That made the reentry very comfortable, very pleasant, very easy. We had not been trained as public figures on the public stage, having been in "isolation" for 444 days; it wasn't all that easy to suddenly take a position very much on a national stage. But I think all of my colleagues handled that challenge remarkably well. Some of my colleagues made a judgment, made a decision, as they were coming home, anticipating it in all those months of isolation, that when they came home to freedom they were going to disappear. They were going to get out of the public limelight as fast as they possibly could. Some succeeded in that respect. Some welcomed the publicity. Some took advantage of it to write books, give interviews, performing, I think, remarkably ably in every instance that I know of.

Personally, I didn't think I could have faded into the shadows, and I chose not to. In any event I thought somebody had to speak for this group and I anticipated that obligation well before the release. I knew I would have to do that. I turned over in my mind countless times in Tehran what kind of position I was going to take publicly when I got home. What was I going to say? What I would say in effect in defense of the bind we had gotten into. I was apprehensive a little bit about the possibility that we would be roundly criticized after the euphoria of our return had passed.

But as it turned out, that criticism was rarely expressed. Not that criticism wasn't warranted, but I think generally speaking there was a sentiment in Washington at that time, not least because there was a new administration, but generally because there was a feeling of let's get this damn thing behind us. Let's get it over with. We have all been burdened with an unfortunate affair. We have all been hostage long enough. Let's get it behind us and get on with things.

There wasn't much focus of what we might have learned from the crisis. There were a few Congressional hearings, nothing sustained. To some degree that is regrettable from our vantage point. We benefitted from it in the sense we weren't criticized and deeply questioned. I think our posture as hostages in most respects had been perfectly defensible and honorable. I think that feeling was also broadly felt by the public and to some degree by government as well. I think the general feeling was that both the public and the government wanted to get it behind us. The new administration apparently did not want to dwell on it.

Q: I am sure in the back of your mind you must have been thinking about the "who lost China?" thing that had come out..."who lost Iran?" This can't help but be in the back of the mind of everybody in the Foreign Service when they see a country where you serve and things change.

LAINGEN: Sure, it is there. Iran is there as an example. As I mentioned earlier we made a lot of mistakes, from the President on down to those of us in Tehran in what contributed to that crisis. I guess what I am saying generally to underpin all that is, I don't think we made any mistakes in terms of the way in which 53 human beings coped on the ground after it happened. And my colleagues performed honorably and nobly on their release. Sure there were plenty of things, with hindsight, that should have been done differently in the years leading up to the crisis. But you didn't hear much of that possible line...who lost Iran?
Q: It didn't become a political issue.

LAINGEN: It didn't become one like China. Partly, I think, simply because everyone had made mistakes and everyone wanted to get it behind us. More fundamentally, I think, certainly from my viewpoint, it wasn't our country to lose. The Shah lost Iran. His inner circle lost Iran. Yeah, there were things with hindsight that we should have done in terms of trying to council the Shah to have done this or that. But even that assumes we can tell any government or leader, particularly an autocratic leader of that kind, what to do and when and expect it to be followed.

Q: That didn't stop the China business. There, of course, it went Communist. Iran went radical Muslim, but at that time it didn't turn Communist.

LAINGEN: Happily that didn't enter the foray.

I think there are things that should have been examined more carefully and in more depth at the time; not least, for that matter...here were 53 guinea pigs...this was early on in hostage taking and terrorism...there should have been a more sustained psychological, medical, physical watch on us over the years, or at least a year or two. That wasn't done.

I go back to the point you were making, I think there is in the minds of certainly those of us in that generation of Foreign Service officers in service today a sort of button one could press that recalls the mistakes we make. That recalls in particular my favorite cliche from that period..."Always challenge conventional wisdom." We did not adequately challenge conventional wisdom in the decades leading up to the taking of the Embassy, certainly not in the decade of the seventies when conventional wisdom proclaimed that while the Shah was despotic and autocratic he was nevertheless presiding over a remarkable revolution of his own.

We did get too comfortable with the Shah, but it didn't begin with Jimmy Carter. It began earlier than that, and we paid for it in time by inadequately challenging conventional wisdom; in an inadequate perception of an idea that was developing in that country that Iran was being taken in the wrong direction -- a feeling that could be exploited and used politically by clever political leaders. The Ayatollah Khomeini proved to be a remarkably clever political leader, in addition to being the cleric that he was.

Then there are a number of smaller lessons related to that. How we, and at that time in particular, protect and defend against terrorists. What kind of defense to maintain. What kind of security to have. The use of Marines. The staffing of an embassy. We have talked about the kind of security that affects our paper holdings in an embassy, our capacity to destroy when the crunch comes.

I want to mention in particular and reemphasize, perhaps I may have mentioned it, that I think the Marine Security Guards in Tehran performed the way they are expected to perform. They were not there to fight Custer's last stand operations. That is not the purpose of the Marine Security Guards. They are there to buy time, to provide security within an embassy against isolated terrorist incidents perhaps, and to use fire power if necessary to protect life and limb. But not to mount a defense against a large mass of people. That only produces more problems.

We learned one major lesson in terms of all of this, and that is that however secure your embassies and homes may be against terrorist attack, against any kind of security intrusion, if you don't have assurance from the government to which you are accredited that they will come to your protection with force when the crunch comes, then all of that security is useless.

Q: One of the rationales behind this whole Oral History Program, at least on my part, is that unlike the American military we don't seem to examine when things go right or go wrong in a methodical way. We sort of move on to the next thing. It is like Vietnam. We don't look at it. I am hoping from these oral histories we will create something which eventually can be used by people to look at the practice of American diplomacy, good and bad, and maybe to pass on some very hard earned knowledge to the next generation. It is spotty. I think what we are doing has at least the germ of a program which might be used to learn lessons.

LAINGEN: You are absolutely right, particularly your analogy with the military. They are much better at that. I suppose you can say they are better equipped to do it. In any event, they do it after all engagements that I know of and they go at in great depth to find out what they can learn from the process. Not simply to identify what's right and what's wrong, but what they can learn from the process. We didn't really dig into the Iranian affair that way.

But we learned something in the context of that general cliche that I used about challenging conventional wisdom. I think that encompasses a great deal in terms of what we are there to do. That's what diplomats do. We are there to find out how people are thinking and why they are thinking that way and behaving that way. And if we get too comfortable in believing something that sort of fits our purposes, well, we are in hellish trouble.

We learned a lot of small things along the way in the context in Tehran. Certainly dealing with terrorism. Certainly protecting an embassy. Certainly relying on assurances from

governments. Certainly dealing with classified paper. Certainly the staffing of an embassy. But it is all in the context of that larger political issue and there we didn't look at it very deeply.

Q: When you came back after the initial wave of emotion ...and it was a worldwide wave of emotion too...was there a problem about hating Iranians or Iranian students among you and your colleagues? I would think there would be tremendous bitterness.

LAINGEN: No. I don't think any of my colleagues came back feeling bitter about Iranians as such. Some came back in the immediate return with feelings about mistakes on the part of our government. Some of those concerns were expressed to Jimmy Carter, when he met us in Weisbaden. Put rather bluntly to him by several of my colleagues, but also in a atmosphere of respect. We were talking to the man who was just hours earlier the President of the United States and still carried the mantle of the Presidency about him. But as far as Iranians were concerned, I don't think my colleagues felt that way. We had a lot of problems with individual Iranians, particularly those who held us. I know my colleagues over in the compound have some very strong views about a few of them. One of them, incidentally, today is the Iranian Ambassador in Sudan, a country where Iranian money and ideology, revolutionary and fundamentalist ideology is rampant and causing others, not least the Egyptians, some problems. The Iranian representative in Khartoum is a graduate of the Tehran school of terrorists. He went from there to become in the first instance Chargé in Lebanon and was very instrumental in the growing strength of the Islamic Jihad there in the eighties. Now he has been promoted to being ambassador to Khartoum. We are not very happy about that.

Personally I hope that our visa files are sufficiently accurate to preclude and prevent any of those who held us hostage ever to come to the United States as either residents or visitors. I will carry my distaste for them to that point. Beyond that, however, I have no brief to carry out against them. They have to live with what I regard as their mistake, a mistake that I think they will realize in the final analysis was of great cost to them and their country.

I am troubled by a concern that America's anger, the public's anger over what had been done in Tehran, would see Iranians in this country maligned in response. I worried at the time that Iranian students, who were here at that time in large number, would suffer. And some of them did, granted that some of them deserved some of this.

Q: Some of them were demonstrators.

LAINGEN: Some demonstrated and brought it on themselves. That didn't help their cause.

Today we are the second largest Persian speaking country in the world, given the number of Iranians who live here among us. Large numbers have come since the revolution. Some students who were here at the time stayed on, of course. Iranians in the United States still

bear some degree of stigma of distaste because of all that happened 14 years ago. That is unfortunate because they are living among us today. Most are highly decent people, able people. I don't think any of them have yet gotten to the point where they are represented in the Congress, but I suspect they will some day.

I do whatever I can to remind the public that it is not worthy of us, and I said that from the beginning, to take it out on the Iranians who live here. For that matter I look back on my first tour in Tehran in the fifties with some fond memories, and I hope someday to go back to Tehran, however difficult it still is. I could go today, I guess, but I don't know if I would get a visa. Others go, a few go, but not all that many.

In any event, the hostage crisis, if you will, is still with us, now 14 years after the taking of the Embassy. Still with us in the sense that we don't have now after all those years a relationship with Iran. In many ways that is unnatural. The place matters out there, because it is astride an area that is of great consequence to some important American interests. It matters, not least, because we have all those Iranians living among us. It is still with us in the sense that the hostage issue, that crisis, the Iranian regime's continued use of terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy, continued for years after we were released. And that burden is a very large one in terms of how our government today looks at Iran and, not least, how the American public looks at Iran.

It will be very difficult for Washington, even when the time comes to try to reestablish a relationship, to deal with this public distaste out there among the American public. It is a burden on the future and is going to require some very deft handling on the part of Washington to overcome. Both we and Iran, both governments today, will be bringing a lot of emotional, political baggage to the negotiating table when we sit down eventually and try to talk. I think this is overdue. We should be talking to put this business behind us.

Q: Where did you go when you came back?

LAINGEN: When I came back, all of us were given time off. None of us was pressed to get back to work tomorrow. Some of the signs that graced the highway as we drove into Washington reminded us of reality, including one special one..."the IRS welcomes you back." We were given a lot of freedom, time off, to get our act in order, to do our welcoming ceremonies in our home towns all over the country. They were incredible. This euphoria lasted quite a long time. It's still there in the sense that people either recognize you or you identify yourself and its seems to bring back in the minds of almost all Americans the whole damn business.

Q: It's an identifier. One says, "So-and-so was a hostage."

LAINGEN: Many Americans still remember where you were when our bunch came home. So it's still there. I guess I have sustained it myself in the sense that I have done an awful lot of public speaking since I came back. I have had incredible opportunities to

speak to hundreds of audiences. A lot of young people audiences, which I enjoy very much, because I think I have something to say to them that might remind them of a few things. When I speak to young people about the problems in our country today, I remind them that when one looks at this country from a distant vantage point we don't look so bad. We look very special from a hostage cell. And that is a message that I try to express, as well as the whole business of challenging conventional wisdom and dealing with change in the field of diplomacy and in the developing world.

When I came home I guess I could have had almost any assignment that I wanted. There was talk of sending me to Norway as ambassador. I didn't take it up because my family and I concluded that it was time for us to stay home for a time. We had a teenage son who needed to have a father around. I think that was the right decision.

Instead of going overseas I became Vice President of the National Defense University, a position that is held traditionally by a senior diplomat in the Foreign Service. The President of the University is always a General or Admiral. The point being to emphasize in that way and in other ways that institution that diplomacy and military power go together. That military power, not least, is an important instrument of diplomacy.

The National Defense University is located at Fort McNair in Washington, a kind of Shangri La on the Potomac where the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers come together. Shangri La in the sense that it is a highly attractive place both physically and educationally, but one that most Washingtonians don't even know exists. It includes the National War College, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, the Armed Forces Staff College, the Information Management College, the Institute for Strategic Studies. All of these things make up the university.

Students at these places are a mix of officers, at the colonel, captain, USN level, and civilian officers in government, the largest number coming from the Department of State. An experience in the year that a student is assigned there is highly beneficial, not simply in terms of what you learn in terms of facts and figures, themes and concepts, but in the way in which that year of interface, of mixing with your colleagues from all around government, including the military, gives you a vantage point that you didn't have before. That institution, the National Defense University and its colleges, as well as the other military colleges around the country run by each individual service, are a remarkable medium to strengthen that tie between the diplomacy and military power.

I served there for five years as Vice President, having been a student there at the National War College back in 1968. Remaining there for five years, I think was too long. I think it affected my opportunities to serve abroad in another mission. That didn't come. I was nominated by the Department to go to Canada as ambassador in 1984, but when that nomination reached the White House they made a different choice. So I didn't go there. I think to some degree I carry some burden of the hostage crisis. I am too identified as "that hostage" in the minds of some, perhaps, not least in the Republican administration of

President Reagan. That may or may not be true, but I think it may have affected my opportunities for another post abroad.

I retired from the Foreign Service in 1987, having reached the maximum age limit. I look back on those 38 years of service with great regard, respect, affection, pride and with the convinction that if I had the opportunity to make the decision again as to what I was going to do 38 years ago, I would still make the choice that I did. I have had a great adventure in the Foreign Service. I have had remarkable opportunities. I have had opportunities, not least, to get to know my country from afar and I have had a particular opportunity to learn about my country as a consequence of the hostage crisis, because of the role I played in that and the role that I chose when I got back to spend a lot of time talking about it.

I left the Foreign Service and became the Executive Director of the National Commission on the Public Service in 1987. A Commission chaired by Paul Volcker, he having just stepped down from his role as Chairman of the Federal Reserve. The commission was born out of the concern of a group of private Americans at Paul Volcker's level that there were some things that needed to be done to deal with what they felt was a "quiet crisis" where the quality of government service at the Federal level was declining. So the Commission spent three years studying that issue coming up with a report that we made to President Bush in 1989-90. We think we made a useful contribution that others can now draw on, including now Vice President Gore in the Clinton administration who is chairing a National Performance Review.

Q: It is also at this point challenging conventional wisdom?

LAINGEN: Yes, that's right. I guess what I am saying there is that there is a sentiment around town these days that the wheel needs to be reinvented, that government needs to be reinvented. This is not the first administration that has looked at government and felt something needed to be done. His study will be useful and I wish him well, but one should also draw on where we have been.

Having left the National Commission on the Public Service, I serve today on one of its follow on organizations called the National Commission on the State and Local Public Service, which is another private outfit looking at government at that lower level, which is where most of government is in this country and where most American citizens get their best impression of what government does or doesn't do. And that Commission is about to make its report next month.

I currently serve as President of the American Academy of Diplomacy.

Q: Well, Bruce I want to thank you very much. This has been a long, long session, but it has been very fruitful from a lot of points of view. I appreciate it.

LAINGEN: Thank you, Stu.

End of interview