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

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Beginnings
- Education
- Interest in International Affairs

Liberia, Peace Corps 1968-1969
- Graduate Studies at Johns Hopkins
- Peace Corps Training
- Situation in Liberia
- Teaching in Monrovia
- Peace Corps Elsewhere in Liberia
- Rule of President Tubman
- Interest in the Foreign Service

Newspaper Work 1970-1971
- Foreign Service Examination
- Character of Junior Foreign Service Officers
- Refugee & Migration Officer

Trinidad & Tobago, Consular Officer 1971-1974
- Prime Minister Eric Williams
- Embassy Relations with Williams
- Heavy Visa Workload
- Feelings About Consular Work

Athens, Greece, Passport Officer 1974-1975
- Turkish Invasion of Cyprus
- Crisis in American Consular Services
- Personal Assistant to Ambassador Kubisch
- Change of Ambassadors
- Greek Reaction to Cyprus Crisis
- Blaming the United States
- NATO Relationship

Split Between Consular Section & Rest of Embassy

State Department, ARA Policy Planning 1975-1978
Policy & Resource Management Documents
Policy and AID Levels
Trip Planning
Kissinger Views on Latin America
Ford-Carter Transition
Human Rights
ARA's 2nd Rate Status in the Foreign Service

State Department, Consular Bureau 1978-1979
Reorganizing Management of the Bureau
Removal of Francis Knight
Creation of Citizens' Emergency Center
Ron Sommerville Innovations
Mexican Prison Problems
Prisoner Transfer Treaties
Computers for Consular Programs
Near-Transfer of Visa Legal Office to Immigration
Power of Assistant Secretary Barbara Watson

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Consul 1979-1982
Situation in the Dominican Republic
Immigration to the United States
Relations of the Ambassador to the Visa Section
Visa Frauds
Staff Morale Problems

Industrial College of the Armed Forces 1982-1983
Reaction to Curriculum
Vietnam & the Armed Services

Montreal, Canada, Chief, Consular Section 1983-1987
Quebec Separatism
3rd Country Immigrant Visas
Installation of WANG Computer System
Bilingualism of Staff
American Services
Feelings toward Americans
Management of the Post

State Department, Chief, Citizens' Emergency Services 1987-1990
Functions of the Office
Arrests of U.S. Citizens

Bombing of PanAm 103
- Public Anger at State Dept.
- Congressional Hearings
- Lessons Learned
- Bureaucratic Reaction
Travel Advisories
- Criteria for Issuing Advisories
- Travel Information Sheets
- Interest in Advisories by Other Countries
- Growth of Citizens' Services Program
- Reaction of Travel Agencies
Hostages in Lebanon
- Situation in Lebanon
- Reagan Administration Reaction
- Iran-Contra Affair
- CIA Role
- Reaction of Hostages' Families
- U.S. Government Treatment of the Policy Issue
- Terry Anderson Case & his Sister's Activities
- Final Release of Hostages
- Personal Reaction to Pressures of this Job

State Department, Personnel 1990-1993
Counseling Consular Officers
Career Development Policy
Discipline in Assignments
Civil Service Excursion Assignments
Consular Cone System
Consular Management
Women's Class Action Suit
Assignment of Minorities
Attitudes of Minorities Toward Assignment Process
Problem of Career Leveling-Off
Functional Hierarchy in State
Personnel vs Bureaus on Assignments
Onward Assignment of Personnel Officers

Rome, Italy, Consul General 1993-1995
U.S. Agencies in Rome
Ambassador Reginald Bartholomew
Embassy-Consular Section Relations
DCM James Creagan
American Citizen Services
Immigrant Visas
Problems with Italian Bureaucracy

Consular Automation & Closing Constituent Posts
Future of ConGen Naples
Italian Political Scene
U.S.-Italian Relations
Notable Consular Cases
Relations with the Consular Bureau
Future of the Consular Function
Future of Consular Personnel

INTERVIEW

Q: Mike and I are old friends. Okay, Mike, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born, and could you tell me a little about your family.

MAHONEY: I was born in Massachusetts in June of 1944. I came from a family of six. I was the last child. I guess it was a middle-class American family. My father was in the advertising business, and we lived in a comfortable suburb of Boston.

Q: What was the name of the suburb?

MAHONEY: Newton.

Q: The Newton of the Newtons?

MAHONEY: Right, where I grew up, yes. I went to public school through the 8th grade, and to a Jesuit Catholic high school, and to a small Catholic college in Vermont.

Q: What was your impression of the Catholic high school?

MAHONEY: Oh, I think of it as, in a way, having been educated right at the very end of the Middle Ages, in the sense that I graduated in 1961, and we were required, in those days, to take four years of Latin, three years of classical Greek, and only two years of a modern language. I took only one year of science and three years of mathematics. The curriculum that my children are doing now (both of them go to Catholic schools, one of them to a Jesuit school) is completely different. This curriculum changed dramatically within five or six years of the time I graduated. It did teach you and prepare you very well for certain types of higher education, but not very much in the line of mathematics and science.

Q: Did you get any taste for international affairs at that time?

MAHONEY: Not through high school. I would say that I was almost completely unaware of it. In college, I majored in history and began to study a good deal about this, especially

European history, the origins of the first world war. By chance, I happened to read a book called Diplomat Among Warriors by Robert Murphy. That book had quite an effect on me, and I wrote a book review of it for the student newspaper. That began to generate an interest in international affairs and, in fact, in the idea of a possible diplomatic career.

Q: What was the name of the college you went to?

MAHONEY: Saint Michaels, in Burlington, Vermont.

Q: Did they, other than have a book about diplomacy, have much about diplomacy?

MAHONEY: No, I don't recall that there was ever a course, for example, in diplomatic history. But the history major there was extremely intense. Very few people took it, because it was run by a man who was extraordinarily demanding and difficult. But you certainly got, in many ways, a very intensive education. And some of that, obviously, was diplomacy. He was fixated on the origins of the first world war, and seniors all had to write papers about this. And he told you at the beginning that the minimum length of the paper he expected was 60 to 80 pages.

Q: For those days, or for any time, good God.

MAHONEY: Yes, that's when you had to type with two fingers, without word processing.

Q: In many ways, looking at the first world war is probably as concentrated a study in diplomacy as one can get.

MAHONEY: Actually, it was. This teacher saw it as the watershed event of the 20th Century; that everything ran up to it from the French Revolution, and everything flowed away from it to the Cold War. So you read very intensively in the period 1871, sometimes even before that, through 1914. A huge amount of that was diplomatic maneuvering, but at a very high level of maneuvering. It really didn't give you much idea about the life of diplomats or the day-to-day business of the career diplomat. You read a lot more about Bismarck than you did about first or second secretaries of the German Embassy in Paris.

Q: You graduated when?

MAHONEY: I graduated from college in 1966.

Q: And then what?

MAHONEY: And then I went to graduate school at the University of Wyoming, of all strange places.

Q: Why there?

MAHONEY: For one thing, it was one of the few places that would give you graduate-school money if you were only interested in an M.A. program. I was accepted at a lot of places, but I did not want to commit to doing Ph.D. work at that point. In essence, if you were a history major or an English major in one of the liberal arts fields, and you didn't really tell them that you wanted to go for a Ph.D., most of the big schools in the East were not interested in giving you money. Wyoming had been left a large pot of money by somebody to pay for fellowships in the American Studies Master's Degree program. So I needed the money, and I was able to get one of these fellowships. There, I did get to take courses in diplomatic history and a number of other things, and again the idea was a little further stimulated.

After graduate school, I went in the Peace Corps and taught school in Liberia for two years, and, there, met a lot of people who worked for the embassy, worked for USIA. And that finally decided me on the idea that that's the career I wanted to pursue.

Q: Talk about Liberia. You were there from when to when?

MAHONEY: I was there from the beginning of '68 until the end of '69.

Q: How would you characterize the Peace Corps volunteers of your era? You were probably about the third wave, after the initial Kennedy ones, weren't you?

MAHONEY: Yes. It's interesting. Almost all of them were there to avoid the draft, one has to say. That gave them, perhaps, a different impetus than the Kennedy people, who really may have thought that they were out there doing something to remake the world. I did not get that sense from most of my colleagues. They were dedicated people, they did their work, they were serious, but I felt, with almost all of them, that they had been moved to be in the Peace Corps at that time because they were avoiding the draft. Many of them were tandem couples, and the wives were there because the husbands were there. Now, certainly, for the single women volunteers, that clearly was not the main reason. But the great bulk of volunteers in those days that I encountered were men.

Q: How did you feel about the Vietnam War? This was the height of the demonstrations.

MAHONEY: I had mixed feelings about it. But I was in an unusual position, because I had a medical deferment because of poor vision. I went through the process of physical examinations, and I think that if I had been drafted, I would have gone. Not with much enthusiasm, because by 1968 it seemed to me that there was no tangible national objective in the war. I did my Master's Degree thesis in graduate school on the career of an American diplomat named John Stuart Service, who was one of the China hands and I think is actually still alive.

Q: He is.

MAHONEY: The title of that thesis was "A Study in Conspiracy Theory." And the point of it was to try to determine why it was that a large portion of American public opinion, including significant media figures, believed that there was a conspiracy about the fall of China to the Communists. And from that thesis, I came to believe that there was an immediate, direct connection between the hysteria in the United States after the fall of China and the American involvement in Vietnam; that it was much more of a domestic political matter than any kind of thing objectively related to American national interest.

On the other hand, when you looked at the draft and whether you would serve, you had to decide whether in fact the government had the authority to pass the laws that drafted you, and whether there was a very serious and moral matter of potential civil disobedience involved. And it was hard for me to come to that conclusion. I didn't think that Lyndon Johnson and Dean Rusk were war criminals on the scale of the Nazis, really perverting a complete system of government. They may have been incorrect in their policies, but the constitutional system said that Congress had the authority to pass laws to compel the draft. And if you were not able to conclude that there was a major moral imbalance here between those laws and what was going on in Vietnam, then you had to go.

So I was prepared mentally to do it, but, as I said, through no doing of my own, in going through the physical examination process for the draft, I was given a deferment.

Q: What was the training of the Peace Corps people like when you went in?

MAHONEY: It was kind of harum-scarum. We lived in a neighborhood in the South End in Boston, which was probably 70 or 80 percent black, but not scary in the way that I think that that type of neighborhood has become these days. You went around the streets with a little bit of caution, but nobody ever actually had any trouble. You took some language in an African dialect, which was a tonal language and completely incomprehensible. Then you did practice school teaching at a school in Roxbury, a black area of Boston, to prepare for school teaching in Liberia. This was sort of three months of training. And most of the training seemed to be simply designed to weed out a few people who they concluded were really just unsuited. The rest of it was sort of drop them in the well and see how high they splash.

Q: When did you get to Liberia?

MAHONEY: In February of 1968.

Q: What was the situation as you saw it, and as it was explained to you, in Liberia at that time?

MAHONEY: Liberia was a fascinating place. It was founded in the mid-19th century by freed American slaves, basically as a black colony, and it remained that way until about 1980, long after I had left. So you had this superimposition of a kind of American culture, by freed American blacks, on a native, tribal culture existing in Liberia. It was a one-party

state, and the one-party state idea probably really developed in Liberia at the end of the 19th Century. And yet it was a functioning country. It was peaceful. There were no political prisoners. It was a tremendous culture shock, because you had open sewers and an extreme, to me, level of poverty, but definitely a functioning country that was developing economically and seemed to be working.

It had a charismatic president, to me the first really charismatic black man that I ever encountered. William Tubman was his name. He had been in power since 1943 and died in office in 1971, after I had left. Tubman was a kind of medieval ruler. He went around all over the country with this huge court accompanying him. Any citizen could get in to see him, and if they had a complaint or a grievance, he took care of it immediately.

Someone would say, "The roof blew off my house."

And Tubman would say, "How much will it cost to fix it?"

He'd say, "Fifty dollars."

And Tubman would hand him $50.

So, although he represented this America Liberian elite class, in a country of at least 28 different identifiable tribal groupings, there was a feeling on the part of the tribal people in the country that if they could get in to see the president, they could get justice. He maintained that system for the 28 years or so that he was in office.

So one had a certain amount of hope that this system could somehow go on working forever. In retrospect, I think I was very naive about that.

Q: We can talk a bit about your work, where you went and how you went about it.

MAHONEY: I was a teacher in a high school in the capital city of Monrovia, run by the Episcopal Church. I taught 10th, 11th, and 12th grade high school courses in both English and in history, with the 12th grade in African history. So I had six classes a day, with about 50 students in each class. I was the only white person teaching in the school.

There was a big division among Peace Corps volunteers. The really "in" thing to do was to go out to the farthest, most remote parts of the country, live in native villages, and teach in small village schools. Most of the Peace Corps program in Liberia were school teachers.

I was assigned to teach in this school in the capital city. I asked the administrator of the Peace Corps why they put me there. And he said, "Well, this school is attended by the children of the most important people in the country. And these people want white Peace Corps teachers in this school, because they feel that they can get the best education from them. At the same time, these are very arrogant, opinionated young people. They're driven

to school every day in limousines by army drivers. In fact, in the last two or three years, they have succeeded in running out all the Peace Corps teachers who have gone there." And then the director of the Peace Corps looked at me and said, "But you seem to me to be the type of person who will be hard for them to run out. Good luck to you." And then I was sent off to this school.

Q: How did it work out?

MAHONEY: The first two or three days I was there, teaching the 12th graders, they gave me a great deal of static. Finally, I said to one of them, "You go home for two weeks, and you think about who's going to be in charge of the class. It's either going to be me or you. I want you out of here for two weeks." So he left the class.

The principal came to see me, and he said, "You can't send that fellow home. His father is the minister of labor."

I said, "We have a choice: either he goes home for two weeks or I'm leaving. Then you can decide where you're going to get your teachers from."

So the boy went home for about a week, and then came in and made an apology to me. He said, literally, in words that I've never forgotten, "A devil came and influenced me to behave this way."

I said, "That's fine. Apology is accepted, and you can return."

After that, I never had any trouble with any students in that school.

Q: You were talking about teaching the elite. What was their view of the world and how they were dealing with their country?

MAHONEY: I think many of them had mixed feelings. They knew enough to know that they were members of a class that in many ways lived by political corruption and exploitation. By that I mean particularly that the economy of the country was based on a great deal of small farming, rubber growing, and then some very significant international concessions that had been given to mining companies. Liberia was one of the richest sources of iron ore in the world in those days. A number of consortiums of American and European companies were mining that ore and paying significant royalties to the government of Liberia. In turn, these royalties were simply being sluiced out in the form of all kinds of corrupt projects -- roads that were never built, schools that were never built, hospitals that were never built -- to large proportions of the governing class. This was no secret, and I think many of these youngsters, 17, 18, 19 years old, had very ambiguous feelings about this. They knew it wasn't quite right; on the other hand, they certainly wanted to step into and enjoy the benefits of that class.

Q: Were you ever able to raise the idea of corruption?

MAHONEY: Yes, because I taught history to the same people that I taught English to, one was able to get into this issue without discussing it necessarily in terms of their own country. You could get into all kinds of old-time scandals that had occurred in other countries, and they were quite quick on the uptake to get the idea.

Peace Corps people who got into any political discussions in public, or in forums like school, about the political situation in the country of Liberia were generally removed at the request of the Liberian government very quickly. Two or three of my friends disappeared very quickly that way; they were sent back to the United States. The Peace Corps supervisors told us from the beginning that we were there to do specific jobs and not to get involved in the domestic internal politics of the country.

Q: How did you bring yourself up to snuff on African history?

MAHONEY: By reading about it a day ahead of the class, essentially. The Peace Corps had a very good library, and it was full of books on African history. I set out immediately to read as many of them as I could, as quickly as I could. It was interesting, because the students themselves knew almost no African history. They certainly hadn't studied it before I began to teach it to them.

Q: How about American history? Since Liberia came out of the American experience, did you touch on slavery and the issues that caused the creation of Liberia?

MAHONEY: I went into that at some length, actually. Although they had a certain kind of mythological view of that history, they were quite interested in hearing it from the point of view of an outsider.

Q: What were you getting from the other Peace Corps people, the ones out in the bush? How effective were they, and what were they bringing out of it?

MAHONEY: Remember, almost the entire Peace Corps program were school teachers, and most of those were elementary and secondary school teachers, a very large number of people, perhaps 200 or 300 volunteers in a small country, one of the highest per-capita representations in the world, and an extraordinarily wide range of experience.

Many people had an experience that you might come very close to calling "going native," where they took up with local women, who hardly spoke English and they hardly spoke the local language.

Some of them became very angry at the corruption that they saw in the country. People would collect money to build a school, they would hand it over to a county administrator, and then the money would disappear.

But most of them simply saw it as a kind of educational interlude in their lives, in which they would try to do something useful for the people that they worked with, and then go on about their business.

Q: What was the situation with the draft? If you were in the Peace Corps, you were out of the draft?

MAHONEY: Yes, for most people, from most American jurisdictions. The draft was a locally administered thing, by city or by county, in the United States, so that every draft board could make its own policies. The great bulk of them, from what I understood, felt that if somebody did something like the Peace Corps, they had rendered a type of national service. For many people, by the time they finished the Peace Corps, either they had become 26 years of age, in which case they were exempt, or maybe they had gotten married and had a child, in which case they were exempt, or something else. Very few former Peace Corps volunteers, although there were one or two that I knew in my group in Liberia, but very few, in the end, were ever drafted after they'd been in the Peace Corps. And you were certainly deferred while you were in the Peace Corps.

Q: When you left, you say that there were no great political developments at all?

MAHONEY: No, the place was simply going along, and it looked like it might go on that way forever.

It was very tightly buttoned up. It was a one-party state. There was no public criticism of the government. But at the same time, one did not feel the apparatus of some kind of totalitarian rule. There were virtually no political prisoners. President Tubman's greatest boast was that he had never directed or allowed to take place any execution, for any type of crime, in the 28 years that he was in office. And this was true; there were no executions in the country.

There was very little sign of disenchantment with his rule. I did not think that the people in Liberia were interested in anything that might be called a democratic system of government. With 28 tribes, there was too much suspicion of each other. And there was the ability of the America Liberians to function as an honest broker above the tribal people. That's the way Tubman worked.

Q: Did you have any contact with the American Foreign Service establishment, the embassy, or anything like that?

MAHONEY: Yes, actually I had a good deal of contact with them, because I lived in the city, and, in one way or another, you ran into them. I must say, they, in general, were not very popular with Peace Corps volunteers, because they were seen as being kind of snobby and elitist, not people who, many of them, went around the country and got their feet dirty seeing what was going on, and who lived in an opulent style. We had no access

to commissaries. We lived on about $100 a month, and about a third of that had to go for rent. And, in general, the embassy was not anxious to include us in very many activities.

Having said that, I personally got to know a number of people and found some of them to be quite interesting.

Q: Did the bug to get into the Foreign Service hit you around this time?

MAHONEY: Yes, I became quite intrigued with the idea of the Foreign Service life, the fact that it had built-in mechanisms for change; that is, you could go from one country to another, that a lot of the mechanical details of life, from getting a driver's license to shipping your goods around, were handled by this organization, and that there was so much of a possibility for variety and stimulation. It had nothing to do with money. I never discussed salary with anybody until after I was in the Foreign Service. I had no idea what people got paid, what the benefits were, or really the career structure. It simply seemed like a quite fascinating life to me.

Q: You left Liberia when?

MAHONEY: Right at the end of 1969. I was there about 22 months. After that, I went to work for the Boston Globe newspaper in Boston. I had worked for them, summers, while I was in college, writing articles and filling in for people. And I went back to work for them while I waited to take the Foreign Service exam and try to get in.

Q: Did you get any specialty in your work for the Globe?

MAHONEY: No, I did everything. I did sports reporting, political, crime, general assignment work, you name it. The last six or eight months that I was there, I worked on the copy desk, which meant editing articles, writing headlines, doing page layout. All in all, it was a fascinating interlude. I think, if I hadn't gotten into this business, I would have tried to pursue journalism.

Q: When did you apply, and how did you get into the Foreign Service?

MAHONEY: I took the test, which was a written test available to everybody. I took it once in Liberia, but then never followed up at all. I took the test to see what it was like, when it was given at the embassy. But I did pass the written test. The second time I took the written test was just before I left Liberia, in December of 1969. And in the spring in 1970, I had an oral interview. Before I went to that interview, I had a discussion with a retired Foreign Service officer in Massachusetts, and I said, "How does one handle this interview?"

He said, "Don't try to kid them. If you don't know the answer to something, just tell them you don't know."

So I went to this interview, and they asked me about the agricultural rules of the Common Market and a number of very other abstruse things. And I kept saying to them, "Gee, I don't have any idea about that."

At the end, they came out and they said, "Well, you seem like a nice fellow, but you don't seem to know anything about anything, and so we can't take you."

That was a blow. So I went on working for the Globe, and I took the test the next December, 1970. I went back for an interview, and this time, even if I didn't know anything about something, I talked about it anyway. Afterwards, they came out to me and they said, "Well, we're going to take you, because you made us laugh." I had told them a few jokes about my experience in Liberia. And they said, "You were very entertaining. Not very many people are." And that was that. So, in June of 1971, I came in.

Q: You joined a class, I guess.

MAHONEY: Right.

Q: Can you characterize them? We were still in Vietnam, but we were beginning to disengage somewhat.

MAHONEY: Yes, the period of CORDS, when people had to go to Vietnam, was over then. One of the things that struck me then, and for many years thereafter, about Foreign Service people was how little they talk about foreign policy, unless they're really at the very top. If they're not the ambassador or the deputy chief of mission (DCM), how little their interests, curiously enough, seem to revolve around those subjects. In my class, I don't recall any discussions at all about Vietnam. Most of the people seemed to me, in those days, to be very, I would say, unformed. People with very interesting backgrounds. The average age must have been 27 or 28. Some of them had been military officers, some of them had Ph.D's, but they still seemed to me to be kind of unformed. Also, as a personality trait, most of them seemed to be very, what I would call with some simplicity, other-directed. That is, they seemed very unopinionated, certainly uneccentric, very much trying to fit in, to find out what this organization was about, not wanting to rock any boats, and certainly very prepared to accept the dictates of authority, in a way that current junior officers absolutely are not.

Q: What was your first assignment?

MAHONEY: I had an odd sort of sequence. First, I was assigned to Geneva, Switzerland, as a refugee and migration officer. But before I went, that assignment was canceled, in a budget-reduction exercise. I spent about six weeks in the Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs, as it was then called, working on odd matters, because I had a time gap. And then I went to Trinidad and Tobago as a consular officer.

Q: In Trinidad and Tobago, what was the situation when you got there?

MAHONEY: It had been independent for about eight or nine years. It was run by an intellectual historian named Eric Williams, a black man who had written a very impressive, standard work about the economics of slavery in the Caribbean. Educated in the United States, but quite, I would say, skeptical and dubious of American civilization and culture, and determined to keep his country apart from us. It was a multi-political-party system, free press, but Williams had been in power for some years.

As soon as he became prime minister, he brought about the closing and removal of a large American naval base at Chaguaramas, which had been initially started in World War II as part of the destroyer-bases deal that Roosevelt did with the British. Williams, in fact, ran for office and made his initial career on the slogan: "I will break Chaguaramas, or it will break me." And he did in fact get the Americans out.

He wanted very little American presence in the country. Trinidad is the only country in the Caribbean that has oil, because it gets it from off-shore deposits. Trinidad is, geologically, an extension of Venezuela. So it had income; it had money. Williams was very skeptical of developing tourism as the central point of the economy. He said that there can be some of it, as part of a mixed economy, but he wanted to use the money from oil to industrialize and promote agriculture and a broad based economy.

The embassy, as an entity, had almost nothing to do there, because Williams was not interested in voting with the United States on UN matters, or any other matters, unless it suited him. In the entire time that I was there, which was two years, Williams refused to see the American ambassador. Never saw him. Never saw any American officials, if he could help it. Williams dealt directly with the executives of American oil companies. He never came to the embassy for social events.

So that the most significant business that the embassy did was in fact consular business, because there was a fairly significant push for visas, and a certain amount of immigration, not overwhelming. And the most important thing that everyone else in the embassy did, including the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission, was to field visa inquiries from political figures on behalf of those who had been refused visas at the embassy. So it was an interesting education.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

MAHONEY: His name was Anthony Marshall. He was a political appointee, as a stepson of a Mrs. Astor of New York. Marshall was a decent fellow, extraordinarily frustrated, because he had nothing to do there.

Q: Did the Cold War intrude at all?

MAHONEY: No. Williams insisted that he was not going to be involved in it. And he generally declined to have anything to do with American representations on this subject.

Q: Did Cuba, under Castro, have any...?

MAHONEY: No, Williams was willing to talk to the Cubans. I don't think they had any representation there in those days. He pronounced himself neutral in the Cold War. And because he had oil money, he didn't need any aid money from the United States, and refused to take any. There was no aid program there of any type, and no Peace Corps program, either. He was a very independent, feisty guy, and in some ways, I admired him greatly.

Q: Were there visa problems, consular problems, while you were there?

MAHONEY: Yes, there was a great deal of visa fraud. There were a great many people trying to go to the United States, in part because Trinidad was an heir to the old British educational system, which said that you took a test at 12 or 13; if you passed that test, you went on to go to state-subsidized schools, and your career was more or less assured. But since only five or ten percent of the people could pass those tests, that's all the positions there were. Everyone else was then expected to go to trade school or do something else. The Trinidadians were very well aware that this was not the educational system in the United States.

And because of the presence of the American base and their own personal fondness for a great deal of American culture and influence, notwithstanding Williams's personal views, they had shifted their focus of immigration from Britain, where it had been when it was a colony, to the United States. An extraordinary number of people, even people with very good positions themselves, people who had been policemen for 20 or 30 years or who had small farms or something, if they did not see opportunity for their children in that country, would come in under the guise of seeking temporary visas, and end up going to the United States for the purpose of emigrating their children, primarily because they thought that there was more opportunity, especially educationally, in the United States.

So we had a lot of press for visas. And when visas were turned down (the visa-refusal rate was probably 50 percent), the people immediately went back to various politicians and sought to get the decisions reversed, through bringing pressure to bear in the embassy.

Q: How did it work out usually?

MAHONEY: That depended on the individual cases. But there was a great deal of tension, particularly between the Political Section in the embassy and the Consular Section. The ambassador and the deputy chief of mission were generally quite supportive, although if enough pressure was applied at a high level, they certainly, rather than turning the pressure away themselves, tended to apply it to the Consular Section.

Q: As the visa officer, you get a pretty good idea of patterns of success, failure, what have you, of immigration. During your time there, where were the Trinidadians going, what were they doing?

MAHONEY: Almost all of them went to New York. There was a large West Indian colony in New York. There had been some trickle of Trinidadian and other West Indian immigration. Many Trinidadians had relatives from Grenada, Barbados, Jamaica. Many had gone to the University of the West Indies, where they met other West Indians. So New York was where almost all of them went in those days.

Q: Were you pretty well confined to visa work during the whole time you were there?

MAHONEY: That was the major focus of the work, both immigrant and non-immigrant work. There was a very small amount of American Services work to be done. Yes, I would say, in the two years I was there, I did almost entirely visa work.

Q: When your time was up, how did you feel about the Foreign Service?

MAHONEY: I went through moments of extreme discouragement, with the thought that if I was going to have to do this sort of visa work for the next 30 years, it was not going to be a very happy life. Also, there was a very plain sense that consular officers were at the bottom of the status order, that you were not participating, in a sense, in the business of foreign policy, and that consular work was something else, but whatever it was it wasn't foreign-policy work. I went through a lot of what you might call agonizing reappraisal during the two years I was in Trinidad.

Q: When you came in, were you tagged to be in one specialty or another? We called them cones.

MAHONEY: Yes, everybody who was coming in, in those days, was assigned to a cone. I'm not quite sure how it was done, but initially, people were so happy to get into the Foreign Service that they didn't much care about it. Nor did I, until I had spent a year or two doing this work, and also getting a sense of what the social parameters of the Foreign Service were. But, yes, I was designated to the consular cone officer when I entered the Foreign Service.

Q: You left there in...

MAHONEY: I left in February of 1974.

Q: And then where did you go?

MAHONEY: Athens, which is where you and I met.

Q: How did you feel about an assignment to Athens?

MAHONEY: The only reason I went to Athens was because I had met this lady in Trinidad who was then also assigned to Greece. Although we didn't get married right away, we were talking about it. So the only reason for my going to Athens was because she was there. It happened to be a consular job, but I wasn't thinking, in any sense, in career terms in those days.

Q: I might add, just for the record, I was consul general in Athens at the time. What were you doing, at least a small part of the time you were there? What did you start doing in Athens?

MAHONEY: I started as the passport officer. And then I had a rather unusual experience. I was the passport officer for two or three months, and then there was a huge crisis that came up because the Greek military stimulated a coup in Cyprus against Archbishop Makarios.

Q: You're talking about July 15, 1974.

MAHONEY: Yes. The Turkish government, after attempting to get the Greek military to, in effect, roll back the coup, landed an expeditionary force in Cyprus. They felt that they had to protect their own people. This led to a monstrous American Services crisis. The Greek government declared a state of national mobilization. They closed the only international airport in Athens, at the height of the tourist season, which meant that Americans then in the country as tourists could not leave, because there were no airplanes out. This led thousands of them, literally thousands, to come to the American Embassy, seeking some sort of assistance. I found this event to be both stupefying and extraordinarily stimulating. I began to see what the possibilities of consular work were, and that it could be tremendously interesting and challenging.

Shortly after that, there was a change of ambassadors. A new ambassador came, and the person who was his special assistant had a personal family crisis back in the United States and had to leave. I was suddenly asked to become the assistant to the ambassador. So I moved upstairs and spent about a year as the ambassador's assistant.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

MAHONEY: Jack Kubisch was his name. He was a career diplomat, who had previously been the deputy chief of mission in Paris and in Mexico City and the assistant secretary of state for Inter-American Affairs. A very interesting guy to work for.

I spent almost a year in very close proximity to this man and to the workings of the embassy at a very high level. This gave me a totally different view of the Foreign Service and what it was all about and what one could do.

But, paradoxically, at the same time, it turned me off of a good deal of what went on, and made me more interested in and amenable to and stimulated by the idea of doing consular work. I think I really decided at this time that I would stay in consular work, although I came to realize that it was very necessary to do some other things as well, both for career purposes and also for mental stimulation.

Q: You had the Cyprus crisis and all these Americans there. How did you all deal with the problem?

MAHONEY: In a helter-skelter way, but, I think, more or less effectively. We got all the consular officers down to the embassy on Saturday morning, which is when the crisis broke, and set up a public-affairs system in the courtyard of the embassy, so that we could go out and talk en masse to people from time to time, and try to give them whatever news and information we had, and reassure them that we were doing everything we could for them. And we began a registration system, so that we could get everybody's name and address and telephone numbers and so forth, telling the people that if there was a further expansion of the crisis or some effort was going to be made by the United States government to evacuate them, we would have a method of getting in contact with them and keeping track of them. We asked, in the local American community, for volunteers to come in and answer the telephones, which were ringing off the hook around the clock. And we wrote up information sheets that we could give to these people, so that, in turn, they could pass information out to the people who were calling. Very quickly, it became clear that what we were really in, in large part, was an informational crisis.

We also set out to do two or three things. One was to stimulate the interest of the embassy management, which I must say had initially almost no interest in this huge group of people, because they were busy dealing with the Greek government in matters at the highest level. And I take the point about what they were doing, but we tried to educate them to the fact that there was this huge mass of people, and that something had to be done, at a minimum, to begin to let them leave the country, which is what they wanted to do. And that meant trying to get the Greeks in some way to open up the airport in Athens to some civilian flights and get these people out. Also, to open the banks so that people could go and get money or just simply convert travelers' checks and get cash on which to live.

Finally, after two or three days of pounding on the doors of the Political Section and the deputy chief of mission, the embassy did begin to make representations to the Greek government. After four or five days, the airport was opened, although the military action on Cyprus went on for several weeks, and people began to be able to leave. From our point of view, after about a week, the crisis disappeared.

But while it went on, it was very intense and hectic, and we were working 18- to 20-hour days, mostly trying to reassure people that we were there and would do everything we could for them, although in tangible ways, there wasn't a lot that we could do. We really

had to try to operate in a macro sense to get the Greek government to do certain things, so that the Americans could leave the country.

Q: For the record, Mike and I are consular officers and have almost a bias toward consular work. But I think this does point up a real problem, that as far as the American public and Congress and everybody else is concerned, when there's a crisis, the protection and welfare of Americans comes first. And yet embassies often aren't really ready to accept this. They get involved in their own things and don't understand that these pesky civilians have got to be dealt with.

MAHONEY: One of the things that I remember now very strikingly is that we got very few phone calls, for example, from the United States about these thousands of people. And I mean, literally, we registered 7,000 people in two or three days in Athens when this crisis started. But this was 1974, and communications were not then what they are now, so we did not get very many calls. I don't remember getting any calls from congressional offices in those days, or from relatives in the United States. We did get a huge number of local phone calls from Americans, but not the international thing. And I don't recall any American media play about these stranded citizens. And I don't recall anybody ever telling me that this got on TV back in the United States.

The difference between then and now on all of that is extraordinary, because now communication is instantaneous. I worked, later in my career, on many, many major crises: the Pan Am 103 experience, the evacuation of Americans from China after the Tiananmen Square massacre, and so forth. Nevertheless, even then, in 1974, one could see what this sort of thing might become in the future.

And it certainly was true in those days that the notion that these individual citizens had to be taken care of was alien to more senior officials. I had intense discussions with people in the Political Section of the embassy, who would say to me that going in and making an argument about opening the airport was *going to get in the way of more important matters* that we were taking up with the Greeks. I kept saying, "Look, these people are taxpayers." I also said that I believed that there was going to be trouble later if these people were not taken care of.

In fact, a small number of them, maybe 50 or so, ultimately wrote letters to members of Congress. And this generated an inquiry and an investigation by the General Accounting Office, which sent a team of people to Greece to find out why these people were complaining. The embassy management was extremely happy, at that point, to be able to produce the diplomatic notes that it had finally done (after several days of intense pressure from us) to the Greek government, asking that the airport and the banks be opened and so forth, and trying to make the case that in fact they had done everything they could for their suffering fellow citizens. It was quite a lesson and an education for me.

Q: When you have a mob (mob is the wrong term, but people who are worried and all), were you able to use some of the people from the group, who were obvious leaders, to help explain the situation?

MAHONEY: No, in that particular instance, I don't think we were sophisticated or clever enough to think of that. We did get, as I said, a lot of volunteers from the resident American community to come in and work the telephones at night and weekends and all the rest of it. But the people who were coming to the embassy, no, we did not. I take the point now, but none of us had any experience in this kind of matter before, and we were really just sort of trying to sweep the tide away all the time.

Q: Then you went up to work for the ambassador. Jack Kubisch was a very well-known, active person. How did he operate during the time you worked with him?

MAHONEY: There were two or three things that were distinctive about him that I didn't find afterwards in many Foreign Service officers. One is that he was extraordinarily meticulous about scheduling and time organizing. He had been to Harvard Business School, after World War II, when he'd been in the Navy. He was very intense on the subject of organization -- organizing his own time, his office, who he saw, who he didn't see, that sort of thing.

I do not think of him as having been a significant or forceful figure in the sense of policy analysis or formulation. I didn't think he was very intellectual. He had no prior experience with Greece before being sent there as ambassador. I think that his greatest concern, in general, was to avoid making mistakes. And he didn't make any mistakes. He was very, very careful and clever about that sort of thing. I don't think he had strong interest in any other part of the embassy beyond the Political Section. Perhaps a little bit of the Economic Section. And in that sense, he was virtually no different from every other ambassador I ever encountered. Although he knew how to manage, he was not interested in the details of managing the embassy. He could have if he wanted to, but that wasn't his priority.

He was, in many ways, formal with me, but very nice to me. He organized my onward assignment, unbidden by me; that is, he came to me one day and said, "What do you want to do next?" I gave him some ideas, and he immediately got on the phone and called somebody and got me a job. And in that sense, I think he felt that he fulfilled his part of the contract.

I had to work very long hours for him. He was very suspicious of leaks.

In those days, when Kissinger was the secretary of state, Kissinger and the people who worked with him thought nothing of sending out these flash cables and NIACT immediate cables, at all hours of the day and night, on subjects that didn't require any action. They sent a huge number of cables to the NATO collective.

And so Ambassador Kubisch said to me, "I'm sorry to do this, but I do not trust duty officers or others to read captioned traffic." (That is, NODIS material, EXDIS material.) "If these cables come in the middle of the night, you are going to have to come down and read them and decide whether action needs to be taken and whether I need to be told."

And so, over the course of the year, I would say maybe, on average, two, three, four times a week, I had to get out of bed at three or four o'clock in the morning, because of the time difference with Washington, and go down to the embassy and read traffic that had often nothing to do with Greece, never, even if it had to do with Greece, required any action, but that the ambassador did not want anybody else to see. So that although there was a duty officer, it was not the duty officer who went and read the out-of-hours traffic, it was me.

No one was aware that you could get paid overtime money. I wasn't even interested. I certainly never collected any, never asked for it. But I did this stuff. And although Ambassador Kubisch was not the type to put his arm around you and say, "You've done a wonderful job, my boy," he did, in the end, tell me that he appreciated my efforts, and sent me on my way. I didn't leave with intense, warm feelings toward him, but I had great respect his professionalism, and I thought that basically he was a decent guy.

Q: The former ambassador, who was the ambassador in the four years I was there... And I left just before this Cyprus crisis blew up, within a few days of it.

MAHONEY: Henry Tasca.

Q: Was there the feeling he'd left under a cloud?

MAHONEY: You have to recall the sequence of events here. The Cyprus crisis blew up in July of 1974. Richard Nixon resigned as president in August of 1974. And I believe that the very first appointment that Kissinger pushed through the new president, Ford, was to remove Tasca as ambassador to Greece and assign Kubisch to be there. Although Kubisch did not arrive for about two months, in very short order, a fellow named Monteagle Stearns arrived to be the DCM, and Tasca was removed. Tasca was gone; in a couple of days, Stearns arrived; and then Kubisch came about six weeks later, after getting confirmed and so forth.

But there was no question that Kissinger wanted Tasca out of there.

Tasca had Nixon's backing, supposedly because when he was ambassador to Morocco and Nixon was out of office in the '60s, Nixon had visited Morocco, and Tasca had been nice to him. Nixon remembered those things. He remembered people who were nice to him when he was on his outs, on his uppers, so to speak. And he protected Tasca.

Tasca did not have a great reputation, and he was removed immediately. As soon as Nixon was gone, the next day, so was Tasca.

Q: Did you get any feel about the Greeks' view of the embassy in this period? There was not only the Cyprus thing, but it was a tumultuous period. The generals were overthrown, and a new government came in. How did the Greeks look on the United States?

MAHONEY: I had a very distinct impression. I remember, to this day, the sequence of events about this coup in Cyprus and the development of the Greek interpretation of it. The coup took place on a Sunday or a Monday, and Archbishop Makarios made his escape from the palace in Nicosia.

For the first two or three days after the coup, when it was not yet clear that the Turks were going to intervene, there was jubilation in Greece. There was great happiness, because there was a feeling that finally Cyprus was going to be united with Greece. There was certainly no ill feeling to be seen against the Greek military dictatorship that had fomented this coup. There was no suggestion at the time that the coup was organized by the British or the Americans, or that they had anything to do with it, or any role. This was a triumph for Greece. On the sort of telephone tree that everyone in Greece was on, day and night, talking to all the other Greeks, one might think, creating the collective mythological interpretation of whatever event one wishes to think about, the standard interpretation of this was that it was a good thing and it was going to be wonderful.

Along about Thursday or Friday, it began to become clear that the Turks were going to do something if the Greeks in Cyprus did not back off.

And on Saturday, in fact, the Turks intervened.

Then there was a long pause in the Greek collective interpretation of these events. It was very difficult to get any comment from anybody about what this meant.

The first thing that happened was that the Greek military decided that it could not fight the Turks. And, therefore, their legitimacy completely evaporated. Constantine Karamanlis was called back from exile, and a civilian government was installed, to try to make some sort of deal with the Turks.

There then began to be the interpretation that the Americans could have stopped the Turks. That it was the Americans who somehow had permitted this to happen. And that it was the Americans who were to blame, because they had allegedly put the Greek military government in, in the first place, in 1967, that in 1974 had organized the coup.

In the first two or three days after the coup took place, no one, no Greek newspaper and no Greek that I ever talked to, suggested that it was a bad thing that the military government had organized the coup in Cyprus, because at that time, it looked as if the coup was going to work.

Only when it became a disaster for the Greeks did there then become this collective interpretation that it was the fault of the Americans. I have this image and this sequence of events very firmly fixed in my mind, because afterwards, it became a cornerstone of the general Greek collective mind that this was all the fault of the Americans.

This comes from a very long history, occasionally buttressed by truth, that the Greeks have of believing that whatever happens in their country, especially of a negative nature, is the fault of someone else, that it is done from outside. I do not know whether it is the educational system that sponsors a kind of conspiratorial interpretation of events, or what it is. But it's very prone, at the intellectual level... At the personal, street level, Greeks are extremely fond of Americans, and the relationships are very good. But at the level of national or international events, anything that is a negative is interpreted by a very large number, if not great majority, of Greeks as being the fault of some outside influence. It used to be the fault of the British, when they were the leading power in the world. It now is the fault of the Americans.

The coup in Cyprus and its aftermath, when the Americans did not, as the Greeks wished, stop the Turks from taking so much territory, didn't stand up to them, didn't push them out, even though the coup was run by the Greeks, has become now enshrined in the Greek collective interpretation of international events as an American responsibility.

Q: I found, after four years in Greece, people said, oh, it must have been awful to leave there, and we didn't have the coup. But I found the constant drumbeat of accusations about the United States being responsible for the colonels if things didn't go well, or whatever it was, it was always the Americans' fault, really got to you after a while. One could leave with a certain amount of relief.

MAHONEY: I felt that way myself. I was only there two years, but I did feel that way. I thought it was a beautiful country, very nice to travel and to go around in. There was no crime. At a personal level, I thought in general that the people were very pleasant and polite to Americans.

But there is something in the interpretation of events, in the unwillingness to accept responsibility for many things that they do politically, that really was very wearing psychologically. Day in and day out, whatever happened on the international level that involved Greece was suffused with conspiracy theory. And it just became very draining.

Q: Were there any major demonstrations against the United States when you were there?

MAHONEY: Oh, yes, there was at least one in which windows were broken at the embassy, and that ultimately led to the construction of a big fence that now goes around the embassy. The CIA station chief, who lived right next door to my lady friend, was murdered about ten days after I left. He was a person I knew well, had played golf with and so forth. So there were definitely anti-American manifestations at work, but again, I think, really, in a sense, at a political level. I'm not aware of an American tourist or

anyone like that who was ever set upon or attacked by Greeks. It was really seen as political activity.

Q: What was the feeling, when you were involved in the embassy, towards Greece as part of NATO? Did you get any feel for that?

MAHONEY: That was the overwhelming raison d'etre of the embassy. There was a huge military aid mission there, run by a two-star general, to oversee the sale and supply of military equipment. The Political Section, the political/military people, and the DCM were almost completely engaged in things having to do with military-base negotiations, which I think go on to this day in a sort of continuing soap opera, but most of the bases remain. The raison d'etre for American presence in Greece was this NATO military relationship. Everything else in the embassy was there essentially, I think, to support that.

Q: As the ambassador's aide, did you get a feel for the social divide between the Consular Section and the Political and, to some extent, the Economic Sections?

MAHONEY: In the sense that the ambassador and the DCM did business with the Political and Economic Sections, but really the Consular Section might have been a representation of another part of the government. It could have been the Immigration Service, it could have been the Commerce Department, it could have been the Agriculture Department. It had a function, and it was staffed by Foreign Service officers, but the interaction among the people was extremely limited.

It was quite an interesting education for me to see the difference between Trinidad, which had been a very small post with a great deal of social interaction, and Athens, which was a very large post without a great deal of social interaction among people in different sections and units.

I saw the beginning there of what I consider the dramatic social change in the Foreign Service in the last 25 years, which is that Trinidad and Athens were the end of one era, and by the time I went back overseas to the Dominican Republic in 1979, you really saw the beginning of another era, in which wives refused to entertain any more, where the notion of social interaction among people in embassies had declined dramatically, and where, except at small hardship posts where people were thrown together and had to do their socializing internally, a very atomistic situation set in.

But Ambassador Kubisch, to his credit, did have junior officers over for drinks. He made a point to get all newcomers in now and then, and so forth. But it was clear that, in what might be termed matters to be taken seriously and matters to be taken less seriously, the consular side was definitely to be taken less seriously.

I'm not sure that I say that necessarily as a criticism, after 20 years of thinking about it, but that's an observation.

Q: I always like to get the dates. You got to Athens when, and you left when?

MAHONEY: I got there in March of '74, and I left at the end of October of '75, actually about 18 months.

Q: Where did you go then?

MAHONEY: I then went to the Latin American Bureau, to the Policy Planning Office in ARA, a job which Kubisch had gotten for me. Having been in Trinidad, I was interested in doing something that had to do with the Caribbean. There were no jobs open in the actual Caribbean Office, but there was a job open in the Policy Planning Office. And so, off I went.

Q: So you were in ARA Policy Planning from when to when?

MAHONEY: From about October of 1975 until about March of 1978, almost two and a half years.

Q: What did your job consist of in ARA?

MAHONEY: It was a real grab bag of things, but very fascinating and educational. The first part of it was that ARA was attempting to have what was called a policy planning process. And that meant that, every year, the embassies would submit a document that purported to be a statement of interests and goals and objectives in the particular country, although there was no resource component. It didn't say, "And therefore we will use this much money."

Q: There had been, at one point, but I think that had been taken away.

MAHONEY: I don't recall. But I think that maybe the document was called a PARM (policy and resource management). This Policy Planning Office was the coordinating office for the management of these documents. That is, they came in from posts, we had a certain number of countries, and we were supposed to get the documents cleared and back out and so forth.

I was struck by a couple of things. One, by the fact that again these documents actually got very little discussion. The front office of the Latin American Bureau, really, no one wanted to go and sit in an office and talk about this stuff.

I had always thought that foreign policy was made by a bunch of intelligent people who sat around and decided what they wanted to do. But, in fact, foreign policy is hardly ever made that way, in my experience. It's made usually against the backdrop of some crisis, when you have to have very fast decision making. And then you get some kind of very fixed principles, like you might have about Cuba, you know, "We're not going to

recognize Castro." Those principles sit in effect for 20 or 30 years, until some external force thaws out the glacier. And you just keep repeating the same old stuff.

So these documents would come in, and they'd say, "We need to try to get more anti-narcotics efforts somewhere," or "We need to stimulate American exports," all kind of very vague general propositions that almost always you could agree with. People would tinker around with the words, and we would agree that that was it.

But that had nothing to do with the number of political officers, or the number of actual economic officers, or how much we spent on the ambassador's entertaining budget. There was no relationship between those two things. They were sort of general platitudes.

When there was an intense issue... And at that time, one of the most intense issues was the negotiation of the Panama Canal Treaty. I remember very well that a document came up from Panama that talked about the details of the treaty and whether it was going to work. That document immediately disappeared from view, and there was never any further discussion, at our level. Because that was an issue that people were really interested in, it was removed and taken away (appropriately so; I'm not criticizing). In other words, the policy about Panama was not made through that process when anybody senior was actually interested in it.

So I did that for a while, anyway.

Q: It's interesting, because ARA kept trying these things, where it wasn't done anywhere else, if I recall.

MAHONEY: Remember that ARA had an integrated bureau between AID and State. In each of the ARA offices -- Brazil, Central America -- the deputy director, and in one case, the director, was an AID officer. One of the attempts in these things was to integrate the AID program with whatever the political goals were. But again, in practice (Should the AID program be $5 million or $20 million or $30 million or $80 million?), that had nothing to do with the policy goals. It had to do, in a way, with what the AID program had been the year before and what the increment would be, a kind of bureaucratic impulse about these things.

I think ARA was always trying to do this because somebody in the '60s, some assistant secretary, had said, in effect, What is the relationship between the AID program and our anti-Communist goals? In other words, the main focus of Latin American policy in those days was anti-communism, both domestically and internationally. In other words, we were trying to get them to support us in the UN in various matters, and we were trying to prevent Castroism, or whatever you want to call it, from spreading in parts of Latin America. Remember, I went there only two years after the coup against Allende in Chile, and when there were dirty wars going on in places like Uruguay, and there was a dirty war to come in Argentina. That was the central focus of Latin American policy.

I worked on those things for a while. And then, by a sort of accident, I got involved in being a kind of trip planner for VIPs going to Latin America. This office functioned really as a staff arm for the ARA front office; it didn't have line responsibilities. Therefore, the front office of the bureau would use it to write speeches, to plan trips for the principals, and as a kind of general labor pool when it needed things done.

The assistant secretary at the time, William Rogers (not the secretary of state, but a prominent Washington attorney at a Washington law firm called Arnold and Porter), was very interested in getting Kissinger to take a trip to Latin America. And so someone came to me from the front office and said, "The regular staff aides are too busy. We need somebody to work on planning this trip for Kissinger." So I then became intensely involved in action memoranda and scheduling and meetings and all this stuff.

The trip came off all right, and then they said to me, "Now we want you to help plan a trip to Latin America for the president's wife. Mrs. Carter is going down there."

I said to somebody, "Why is Mrs. Carter going to Latin America?"

And they said, "Well, because she needs something to do. They have to give her visibility."

I said, "Why don't they send her to Europe?"

There was sort of a pause, and the answer was, "Well, you know, the issues in Europe are really a little more important and complicated than they are in Latin America."

And a very good diplomat, who I knew well in those days, said, "Latin America is the sandbox of American foreign policy. It is the place where we think we can play out our fantasies without having any actual risk of negative results to us." I hasten to say that I believe our views and our approach have matured significantly in the last 20 years.

Q: When I was with the Board of Examiners, I used to use Henry Kissinger's saying that South America was a dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica.

MAHONEY: That's right. That's right.

Q: To see how they would respond to this. Most didn't catch it. But that was the Henry Kissinger of...

MAHONEY: It's interesting, he finally began to become a lot more interested in it, near the end of his tour, when some people finally got to him about the economic implications of Latin America. He was never too interested in economics, but even he finally saw the market implications. Of course, he saw it as an important arena in the anti-Communist struggle, which I think was always the litmus against which he measured all his foreign-policy considerations.

Anyway, I planned these trips, so I had a great deal of exposure in that way to the front office of ARA, to the workings of the Department's staff secretariat, which coordinated the trips of principals. I got to go to a number of meetings in which Kissinger participated and discussed aspects of his trips. And I saw, at firsthand, which was, I think, very unusual for a person with my limited experience in foreign service, a good deal about the stagecraft of foreign policy, if you will, the person who is there behind the Wizard of Oz's curtain, making the smoke by which we try to present to the public the notion that there's a coherent play or a coherent production going on. I was backstage, seeing the people running around throwing the costumes on and off, seeing the paint being slapped on the sets, and seeing how decisions get made and how policies get formulated, in a way that I think most junior officers don't see. I saw it working from the ARA bureau up to the 7th floor and down again. The Policy Planning Office gave you the license to run around to all the different offices and ask them questions.

One of the components of this office was congressional relations. And subsequently, the last year I was there, got involved in congressional relations, trying to go around and sell programs to Congress.

This was a very intense period, because it was the end of the Republican period with Ford, and the arrival of President Carter. I saw the transition period going on and new people coming in, political appointments being made, and so forth. So it was all extremely educational to me.

Q: A couple of questions. Henry Kissinger's first trip to Latin America is well-known in the Foreign Service, because he came back having seen all these American diplomats serving in Latin America, and felt they didn't know anything beyond Latin America, and got quite incensed about it and started a program called GLOP.

MAHONEY: Global Outlook Program.

Q: Did you get any feel from the repercussions of this?

MAHONEY: No. The first trip he did, he went to Mexico, I think, for an OAS meeting. The trip that I planned for him was about a year later, and it was his first visit, really, to South America. He went to Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador. By then, I think that the GLOP message had gone around, and like The Caine Mutiny, the circle of compliance, people were trying to assign a few people there. That program died as soon as he left, like so many others do. But, no, I didn't see much sign of that.

Q: When the Carter administration came in and the Ford administration went out, how did that hit? I say this because when the Reagan administration came in, taking over from the Carter administration, ARA was again the sandbox in which the congressional conservatives really spilled blood. It was a nasty time. How was ARA affected by the Ford-Carter transition?

MAHONEY: The driving impulse and the thing that we were determined to push in Latin America when Carter came in was human rights.

The initial assistant secretary of state was a black guy named Terry Todman, who only recently retired. Todman, an old-line Afro-American career Foreign Service officer who had had to fight his way up, I think, probably, against a good deal of prejudice in the old days, had really internalized a great deal of the standard Foreign Service approach to things, which is that human rights was really a secondary item in our relations with governments, that that was the business of governments domestically, that wasn't our business. I saw a fair amount of him the first year he was in office, and he had a lot of quarrels and arguments with the Carter administration, particularly over Nicaragua, where they were absolutely determined to push the human rights agenda. Todman was subsequently removed and sent to be ambassador to Spain. I'm trying to think who was put in after him. Viron P. Vaky. But certainly a more amenable cast of characters was sought to push this agenda.

Again, it was very interesting, because we would say, not me, but others would say to the Carter people, "Look, you know, you've got human rights problems in a lot of other places." And there was always another reason why, in these other places, you couldn't push that issue. There were NATO considerations in Turkey and all kinds of places. But, no, Latin America was where they thought we could really do this thing. And they certainly set out to do so.

Q: Was the old Foreign Service digging its heels in, and were the political appointees out there with whips?

MAHONEY: Oh, absolutely, yes. Absolutely. I think the secretary, Cyrus Vance, and certainly Patricia Derian, who was put in to push the human rights agenda, were quite serious about this. And President Carter himself was quite serious about it. They saw Latin American issues very much against the litmus of human rights questions, very much, I think, reflecting a certain domestic, liberal-Democratic point of view. (I use those labels not pejoratively, but simply for identification purposes.) Carter had very, very few foreign-policy statements to make when he ran for office, but one of them was about human rights. When they boiled it down, they found that in other areas of the world, there were more distinctly identifiable competing American interests, and, therefore, Latin America was where they could really push the agenda.

Also, it came from the feeling, which I think was ingrained in many ways in America, that Latin America was a kind of place you can push around. Again, I think the view is different today.

This caused a lot of friction, I think, between the career diplomats--the Latin Americanists--and the Carter people. The career diplomats wanted to push anti-Communism more than human rights. And yet, paradoxically, they ended up getting their

heads cut off anyway for being "soft on communism" when the Reagan people came in. A very interesting turn of events.

Q: You were in ARA looking at this. We've already talked about almost a social divide between the consular officers and, say, the political/economic officers in the Foreign Service. One of the things I've always felt in my time in the Foreign Service was that ARA and people who specialize there were somewhat apart. They were specialists in almost a second-class area, and once they were in there, they never were heard of again. And the real Foreign Service was mucking about in your upper Africa, Middle East, or the Far East. Did you get any feel for this split in the Foreign Service?

MAHONEY: Oh, definitely. You have to remember the book that influenced me was Robert Murphy. And what was Murphy doing? He was traveling around Europe and being political advisor to General Eisenhower. That is where the cockpit of international relations was seen to be, and, secondarily, in the Far East, because of the war with Japan and the great interest in China and so forth. Many, many people felt that they had "ended up" in Latin America, and felt badly about that.

A few people, such as Harry Shlaudeman and two or three others of my experience, began in Latin America, determined to make their careers there, and had what one would think of as extraordinarily successful careers.

But it's interesting to me to note that I do not think that any under secretary for political affairs, in my experience, ever came out of Latin America, being a Latin American specialist. The people who got to the very top jobs in the building, who became the most prestigious figures, were not Latin Americanists. And it certainly, I think, created a feeling of inferiority. In turn, it led to the fact that Latin America did not, with some exceptions, attract the best and the brightest minds. It just didn't, because that wasn't where they thought they wanted to go.

On the other hand, I think, smart people who wanted to be ambassadors and who wanted to have extremely successful careers would major in Latin America. And they often jumped to the head of the class, because there wasn't as much competition.

On the other hand, many, many people labored to great effect for years and years in Latin America, but when the ambassadorships were handed out, those who had not quite been successful in getting one in Asia or Europe were often parachuted in, with little or no prior Latin American experience. And that again tended to create, I think, a great deal of bitterness and unhappiness on the part of the Latin American specialists.

Q: You left there in...

MAHONEY: I left about March of 1978 and went to be a management analyst in the Consular Bureau, working directly for Ron Somerville, the executive director.

Q: Could you explain what was happening? You were there from when to when?

MAHONEY: I was there one year only, from March of '78 to about March of 1979. But it was a critical, formative period in the history of the consular business. And I was lucky to see incredible changes go on in those days. It was really a miracle of timing that I got to see that stuff, and to work, immediately at hand, with Somerville, who is the single most important person, in my view, in the development of the modern-day consular function.

Q: Why?

MAHONEY: You have to understand that the consular business had always been an exceptional stepchild of the State Department. One of the ways you can tell is by the command and control and resources allocated to it. The old consular business had been attached as a kind of special assistantship to the secretary of state. It was not a bureau, and it didn't have any resources, leverage, or authority of its own. There was a Visa Office, usually run by a non-consular officer. There was a tiny American Services unit that had four or five people in it. There was an Executive Office that had no executive officers, no budget staff, no planning staff, nothing. And there was a Passport Office that had run essentially completely independently of the State Department for something like 50 years. It was run by two women for a total of 55 years, completely staffed by civil servants. No Foreign Service officer ever worked in the Passport Office. Although in the most technical of senses this office reported to the secretary of state, in fact it reported to nobody.

Now Somerville became the executive director early in the 1970s and set about to...

Q: What was his background?

MAHONEY: I think he had some degree in management or business administration from some college. He had been, I think, a federal management intern, or something like that. And in some way, he got to the State Department and into the consular business. But certainly not in any sense a graduate of an elite or prestigious school, or in any other way a person that you would have said would have the incredible impact that he did.

Q: How did this operation go about?

MAHONEY: First of all, Ron was simply a genius. He was a bureaucratic operational management genius.

Now, in specific terms, what is it that happened? A conjunction of impulses began to develop at the beginning of the 1970s, which Somerville was able to take advantage of. You have to have, I think, external forces that present you with opportunities, and then you have to have people who can take advantage of the opportunities. And they don't always take advantage of them. History is not preordained. People do interact with influences and things happen, or perhaps not.

What was going on at the beginning of the '70s are the same impulses that we see today, only writ larger. First of all, there was a continuing dramatic upsurge in the demand for consular services, for visas, for American Services -- passports and for assistance to Americans abroad -- brought about in part by massive technological changes, the ability to travel overseas on jet planes, the significant expansion of discretionary income for the American middle class that made it possible to travel, the vast expansion of communications capabilities -- telephones and other types of things -- that made it easier to arrange international travel, and to communicate easily and cheaply all over the globe.

The demand for consular services began to impinge itself on a very reluctant State Department. People in the Department began to see that something was going to have to be done about this, or the functions were going to have to be sloughed off to other agencies of the government that could take care of them, because Congress was beginning to get interested in this subject. So there was a certain sort of sense, reluctantly, among the management of the State Department, that something had to be done about this, and somebody had to take care of this: "We don't want to take care of it at top levels, but somebody better handle it and keep it from causing us trouble."

Precisely at this juncture, Somerville came in as the executive director. And he came in associated with a woman named Barbara Watson, who was a political appointee, a black woman from New York, not, I think, a terribly aggressive person, but a formidable person in terms of demeanor and political background and perceived support.

How did Somerville turn this to the advantage of the consular business? He took a number of initiatives and made them happen bureaucratically that prepared the consular business for the incredibly dramatic challenges that it suddenly had to face up to. He was ready when his opportunity came. And Somerville made the Consular Bureau ready.

What did he do? First of all, he organized a coup and got rid of Frances Knight, the director of the Passport Office, and brought all the resources that that office had accumulated -- an executive staff, huge numbers of pretty well-trained people domestically in Washington -- under the control of the consular central office, so that he could make use of the personnel and the staff to do his business.

Q: How did he bring about a coup? Do you know?

MAHONEY: Yes, I do know, as a matter of fact. When the Carter administration came in, Frances Knight had been running the Passport Office for something like 28 or 29 years, and she was believed to be bureaucratically impregnable in Washington.

But there was a technicality, which she and Admiral Rickover, I believe, are about the only two people who've ever undergone, which is that she was either over 65 or 70, which was the retirement age, and at that point, a presidential waiver was required to continue people in their jobs. So when the Carter administration came in, the paperwork made its

way from Frances Knight's office along to the head office of the State Department, to request the waiver for Frances Knight.

There appeared in The Washington Post, in some gossip column or something, a statement that the Carter administration was getting ready to sign another waiver for Frances Knight. I think this was floated out there to see if there would be any reaction one way or another.

Ron Somerville had hired a political appointee who was close to a congressman named Leo Ryan, from California, later murdered in Guyana, but at this time a congressman on the appropriations subcommittee that dealt with the State Department's budget. When the Carter administration came in, all the bureaus of the State Department and elsewhere in the government were told to take a certain number of political appointees. Somebody was sent to Ron who happened to be very close to Ryan. And Ron said to this person, "I'm going to hire you. There's only one thing I want you to do, and that is, I want you to help me with this business of Frances Knight." So he sent this person to Ryan, who was a liberal Democrat and was disposed to be somewhat skeptical of Frances Knight, who had a long history of Red-baiting and using the...

Q: She was close to...

MAHONEY: Senator Eastland and to Hoover.

Q: J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI.

MAHONEY: She was known for using passports in a kind of punitive way, to keep supposed leftists from traveling overseas and all this stuff.

So this fellow was sent by Somerville to see Congressman Ryan. Ryan then sent a letter to the State Department, saying that he was thinking of holding a hearing on the question of the continued employment of Frances Knight.

This story was then leaked to the newspapers, again to see if there would be any reaction in Congress or elsewhere to the possibility that maybe Frances Knight would not be extended.

In fact, there was no reaction.

Then a further story was leaked, saying that, well, the State Department was thinking that maybe it wouldn't extend Frances and would retire her gracefully and so forth.

It was then discovered that all the people who had supported Frances Knight in the old days were basically gone, and that nobody cared about her anymore. Therefore, the State Department removed her from office.

Now what did this mean? It suddenly meant that the Passport Office, for this first time in about 50 years, was available for the State Department. It also meant that around the State Department a sort of shuddery impulse went, because it was believed that Barbara Watson, from her political position, had organized Frances Knight's removal. This was not precisely true, but people around the building believed that it was true. And it meant that during the period of the Carter administration when Barbara Watson went around the building and asked for things, people looked at her in this way. They said, "My goodness, she got rid of Frances Knight, maybe she could get rid of me." Therefore, when she wanted things, which she was generally sent out to do by Ron Somerville, most of them she got.

For example, at about this time, the Carter administration, in a fit of trying to reorganize the government, handed over the cultural-affairs function of the State Department to USIA. Off went about 100 positions to USIA, moved out of the State Department, and a huge block of physical space opened up on the 4th floor of the State Department. There was a great, intense competition for this prime space. Barbara Watson went to the management of the State Department and said, "I want that space. I am going to organize, for the first time, a coherent American Citizens' Services operation." Other people, including John Thomas, a formidable assistant secretary for administration, wanted this space. Barbara Watson went to various managers of the State Department and said, "I want this space."

They looked at Barbara, and they thought to themselves, "I'd better give her this space, because she got rid of Frances Knight."

That is my belief. Barbara Watson was seen as having real power, and she got that space.

Somerville then took a bunch of people from the overseas part of the old Passport Office and put them into this space. And he took a bunch of other people and created what was called the Citizens' Emergency Center. This unit was up and running, with all of its telephones and all the stuff in place, and inaugurated itself precisely one week before the mass suicide of 800 Americans in Guyana. The State Department was able to deal with that crisis because it had a unit of about 50 people in place who could be dedicated to doing nothing else but. Congress, despite all the subsequent inquiries and investigations, saw this as a major success for the State Department.

Q: Incidentally, Leo Ryan was...

MAHONEY: Was murdered. Was murdered.

Q: As the beginning of this whole thing.

MAHONEY: As an action that precipitated the mass suicide, a very interesting sort of circular piece of history.

So Ron got hold of the Passport Office and its resources.

Another thing he did was he created a systems staff, which then set out to do a whole series of things, to automate consular work and bring in computers and so forth to the consular business.

He invented the consular package, which became the prime device collecting statistics around the world, through which resources, positions, were gained for the consular business.

He set up an exercise to reclassify the grades of all consular positions, which meant, in practice, a significant upgrading of position grades, which opened up an enormous number of promotion opportunities for consular officers.

He used every challenge -- every congressional inquiry, every GAO investigation -- that came his way. Every time one of these things would come along, people would say, "Oh, this is terrible. They're going to..."

Ron would say, "No, this is an *opportunity* for us. We can get things from this. We can show them that we need this and that and the other thing to do our business."

Invariably, he was right.

He charmed OMB. He prepared Barbara Watson impeccably for congressional testimony. He obtained positions. He obtained space. He obtained all the resources that one needed to create a modern bureau. Therefore, when the challenges increased, the bureau was ready, and consular people were ready.

He created a sense of esprit, which meant that for the first time, some very bright people were prepared to devote their careers to consular work, realizing that they probably wouldn't get to be ambassadors, but that they would be entering into an ongoing, viable enterprise, that they would have the chance at significant promotion numbers at very high grades, and that they could have very successful careers. Once you got some very bright people into the business, you got successful activities being carried on.

Somerville created all of this stuff, and he left to his successors a working, viable, ongoing organization. He was a builder and an inventor. Other people have made major, significant contributions since then, but all of them were working off of what he set up.

Q: What were you doing the year you were with them?

MAHONEY: I had responsibility for coordinating the reception of consular packages, and then preparing the requests for position increases. I worked with a committee in Personnel that worked on job-grading classifications. I worked with the committees in FBO that looked at the design and restructuring or redo of consular sections. I debriefed

consular officers coming back from abroad, to find out what the real story was about personnel matters. A host of trouble-shooting activities that put me in intimate contact on a daily basis with Somerville and with the managers of the bureau. It was an incredible education.

Q: Did you sense a change in the people you were dealing with outside the Consular Bureau about the way they looked at consular operations?

MAHONEY: Yes, in this sense, that although no one really thought of it as serious foreign policy work, they began to see it as a part of the Department's responsibilities that if not properly handled, could jump up and really bite them.

Again, I'll give you an example. By the middle of the 1970s, there were 600 Americans in jail in Mexico, most of them for drug violations. This was the direct result of a very intense application of American pressure to the Mexicans to do something about the drug trade. The Mexicans found that the best way of doing this was not necessarily to arrest their own people, but to arrest a bunch of Americans, virtually all of whom, by the way, were certainly guilty. Four hundred of the 600 were from the State of California, most of them the children of middle- and upper-middle-class parents, kids who thought it was a lark to carry six or eight kilograms of heroin or something else, for which they'd get paid $10,000 to $20,000, and were very unhappy when they were caught at the airport or someplace else like this and put in a Mexican jail for 25 years with no chance of parole.

The miserable prison conditions that these people found themselves under, and the vocal and financial abilities of their aggrieved parents in California, led to intense pressure being brought on the State Department to "do something" about these "poor kids and their terrible sufferings."

At one point, the Appropriations Subcommittee of the House said to the Latin American Bureau, "We are going to have the assistant secretary up here to testify every month until you tell us what you're going to do about these poor kids."

Believe me, the assistant secretary for Latin America did not want to spend his time testifying before Congress on the subject of Americans in jail in Mexico, because he thought he had much more important things to do.

Out of this came the hiring of a Harvard law professor named Detlev Vagts, who drafted the first prisoner-transfer treaty. This was drafted as a way of pricking the balloon of congressional pressure in the United States about all these poor kids in jail in Mexico.

So the first treaty was drafted with Mexico, although I must say the Consular Bureau itself was extremely skeptical of this initiative. It was really pushed, directed, and financed by ARA, not by CA.

But when the treaty went through and the logistics of transferring hundreds of prisoners had to be negotiated out with the Justice Department and so forth, again the Consular Bureau was ready for this.

Then the Consular Bureau became, of course, a big proponent of doing this elsewhere, because it meant that it got people back to the country and out of the hands of consular officers and into the hands of the American judicial system domestically.

This was a tremendous innovation, stimulated by a consular problem. So the management of the Department came to see that although in general it had no interest in consular problems, consular problems had the ability to really jump up and bite them if they didn't pay attention to them and if they didn't make sure that there were people there who could manage these problems.

Q: This was the very beginning of the computer age. Did this come into...?

MAHONEY: Sure, because Ron was, at that point, just in the process of setting up a systems staff. One of the things he was successful at was in keeping this systems staff separate from the rest of the Department's systems staff. The people in the Administration Bureau did not want anyone else to have an independent systems staff. What Ron saw very clearly was that if another bureau had control of systems stuff, the Consular Bureau would be about 24th in line for resources and attention and time and all the rest of the stuff. With Barbara Watson's assistance, and his own incredibly devious bureaucratic machinations, he succeeded in creating his own systems staff, which then set out to create the automated immigrant-visa system, the automated non-immigrant-visa system, worldwide name-check capability, all of these sorts of things that I think would not have happened, or would have happened much later, if CA had not had its own systems staff. Ron fought for that and created it and got it done.

Q: I felt a little of this. I was in Seoul, Korea, from '76 to '79, and I happened to have as a DCM a man who was very interested in this, Tom Stearns. I didn't even know what was going on, but we got somebody from the Administration systems staff to help us do this. Very soon, rather than working with the Consular Section in setting up, which is the reason he came up, he drifted over toward the Political Section, for biographic retrieval and all this, which was of very minor interest, really, up there. But this was where the sex was, in a way, and our thing died aborning.

MAHONEY: One of the things that happened is that the administrative part of the Department saw the implications of automating the consular business. Most of the initial distribution of computers overseas in the early 1980s was justified budgetwise through the argument that they were going to be used for consular work. Now once you get a computer in someplace, you can hook anybody's terminal into it. That is, in effect, what happened. But the budgetary justification to Congress for much of the automated systems overseas was that they were going to go for consular stuff. In fact, they did. But the training of consular officers, the sending of teams overseas to train officers and FSNs in

the use of consular systems, the actual installation of the systems abroad, and the ability to call back to Washington and get help when your system wasn't working were only made possible because the Consular Bureau had its own systems staff. If we had had to rely on calling the Bureau of Administration when our computers went down, we'd have been dead in the water. In that sense, although others were able to piggy back on (and I don't begrudge them that), a huge amount of it was made possible because you could show specifically to Congress what you were going to do with these systems in a consular sense (we have this many cases; we need this much money), and they were willing to spend the money.

Congress has always been very good with the consular business as far as providing resources, if the Department ever comes up and asks for them. The problem is that Congress's reaction tends to be, "Fine, State Department, you need this. Take it out of your hump and give it to the consular people." Not, "We're going to increase your budget or give you, in the macro sense, more people."

That, in turn, led, I think, later on in the '80s, to a great deal of resentment not only of the consular function, but of Somerville in particular, that he had been so adept in channeling the Department's resources into the consular function.

Q: Were there any pressures, while you were dealing with this, to take the visa function away and give it to the Immigration Service?

MAHONEY: Oh, sure. The Carter administration had come into office with great plans for governmental reorganization. But, of course, the Washington bureaucracy pretty well defeated them at that, except that the State Department management (which, in my experience, is almost always prepared to go and march over a cliff in these matters) handed over first the cultural function to USIA, which took away 100 to 150 positions. Now, of course, they're talking about bringing it all back, in the circularity of Washington.

One of the initiatives that the Carter administration almost brought to fruition was to take the legal part of the Visa Office, Dick Scully's operation, and hand it over to INS. That was really a signed, sealed, and delivered deal. It included the fact that the Border Patrol was either going to go to Treasury...

Q: There was an amalgamation.

MAHONEY: They were going to amalgamate Customs and the Border Patrol. And I guess maybe it was that the Customs function was going to go to INS, or vice versa. This was all agreed to; everybody had signed off on it.

Somerville believed that if the legal part of the Visa Office went to INS, it would only be a very short matter of time before the entire visa function went to INS.

At the very last minute, and I mean it, the last minute, a letter came from George Meany, the head of the AFL-CIO, to the President of the United States, saying, "I was not consulted about this." And one of the groups, either the Border Patrol or the Customs people...

Q: I think it was Customs.

MAHONEY: Belonged to an AFL-CIO union, or maybe belonged to AFGE, I don't know. Meany said, "I was not consulted about this, and really I'm very unhappy about it. These are a lot of people in one of our unions. And I want to talk about it with you, please, Mr. President, before it goes through."

Carter, of course, was notorious for changing his mind and looking at things like an engineer. That is, if you got so much pressure on one side of the thing, you did something to let the pressure off on the other side. So he immediately suspended the implementation of this transfer, and said we have to have a group look at it. In the end, nothing ever came of it. Then he was defeated for re-election and the whole plan disappeared.

But the management of the State Department was not prepared to make any fight about this, or do anything to prevent this from going out the door.

Now there are a lot of people who wonder who it was and what it was that stimulated Mr. Meany to send this letter at the last minute to the president. I'd like to believe that maybe Somerville had something to do with it, but on that one I have no proof.

Q: This was happening while you were there?

MAHONEY: All of this went on in the year that I was there. It was, as I say, an incredible period to be in that office. I was only there 12 or 14 months, and yet I saw all of this stuff go on in that period. It was quite extraordinary.

Q: How were you received as you went around and did your job? Was there a feeling that you were an invincible knight representing a powerful realm?

MAHONEY: Yes, yes, there was. As I say, I trace all this to the fact that Barbara Watson got rid of Frances Knight, because then you were representing somebody who was perceived as having power.

I can remember, for example, a very intense struggle about the assignment of a principal officership that Barbara Watson wanted. It had often been filled by a consular officer, but the Personnel Bureau assigned a person working in Personnel to this principal officership. Harry Barnes was then the director-general of the Foreign Service, a rather formidable figure himself, but not a person with great independent political connections, a career officer. Barbara Watson went to Harry Barnes, and she said, "Harry, it isn't going to be this way."

He looked at Barbara, and he said, "I'll look at it again, Barbara."

The officer who was assigned to this principal officership did not go there, and the officer who Barbara Watson wanted did go there. That, to me, was power. And I know why Harry did that, because he didn't want to fight with Barbara.

Q: I like getting specific. Do you remember the post?

MAHONEY: It was Edinburgh, a plum position. Barbara wanted that for a consular officer, and that consular officer went there. The assignment had been made in assignments panel, or by the committee that did these things, and it was reversed a week later.

So when you went around, there was a feeling that people had to take you seriously. And so long as Barbara was in there and the Carter administration was there, they did.

Q: Where did you go from there?

MAHONEY: I then went to Santo Domingo, to run first the Immigrant-Visa Section, and then the Non-Immigrant-Visa Section.

Q: So you went there when?

MAHONEY: The summer of 1979 to the summer of 1982.

Q: What were the political and economic situations in Santo Domingo at the time you went there?

MAHONEY: This was about 14 years after the American intervention of 1965. The political situation was that, for the first time, I think, they had had a peaceful transfer of power, in an election that took place in 1978, from one party to another.

The economic situation was reasonably optimistic. It seemed to me to be a very peaceful country, poor but developing, with a lot of emphasis being given to tourism and to a tax-free manufacturing zone. But still a country that had developed a great deal of interest in immigration to the United States after the 1965 intervention.

Trujillo had been the dictator from 1930 to 1961 and had basically closed up the country. There was almost no immigration. He didn't want anybody getting out and organizing exile movements against him.

There was a period of turmoil after his death, and then the Marines went in, in 1965.

I think this stimulated, on the part of the population, a huge interest in everything American, and a tremendous amount of interest in getting out of the country. This interest, combined with a really tremendous talent on the part of many people in the Dominican Republic for forgery and for fraudulent activities, made it one of the most difficult places in the world to run the visa business.

Q: Did you get an idea of where the Dominicans went in the United States and what they were doing? I realize they were only in the first generation, but where they might be pointed toward?

MAHONEY: By 1979, when I went there, at least 100,000 of them had already gone to the United States. The great bulk of them were in New York City, lesser amounts had gone to Puerto Rico, and a smaller amount had gone to Florida, the Miami area. But the great bulk were in New York.

Q: What were they doing?

MAHONEY: A huge number of them seemed to be working in the garment trade, and others seemed to be in various kinds of laboring positions, auto-body spray painters, that sort of thing.

What was interesting to me about the immigrants from the Dominican Republic was that, in the time that I was there, there were no third-preference immigrants, for example, not a single one.

Q: Third preference being?

MAHONEY: Third preference in those days was people of high professional development -- doctors, orchestra conductors, university professors. Almost all the people who were immigrating either went as brothers and sisters of Americans, as domestic workers, or as spouses of American citizens. And a huge amount of that immigration was initially accomplished by means of fraudulent marriages.

Q: What was visa work like when you got there?

MAHONEY: It was very intense and demanding, because the Dominicans saw it as a chance to change their entire lives. The interest in the visa business ranged all way up to the highest levels of the society. It was not unusual for me to be called by the deputy foreign minister, sometimes the foreign minister, of the country, intervening in visa cases.

Q: Who was the ambassador, and how did he/she operate?

MAHONEY: The ambassador was Bob Yost, who had been the deputy inspector general before that and had come in the wake of a scandal involving a man named Bob Hurwitch, who was ambassador and had been removed and plead guilty to a felony of misuse of

embassy funds and laborers in connection with building himself a retirement beach house in the Dominican Republic.

Yost, therefore, came in on a wave of being squeaky clean. And he was pretty good about visas. He generally said that they had to be kept away from him and from the DCM. With two or three exceptions, among hundreds and hundreds of cases, I didn't feel that he ever brought to bear undue pressure about visa cases. In fact, he generally just refused to involve himself in them. He was very good that way.

Q: How big was the Visa Section?

MAHONEY: The Non-Immigrant-Visa Section had four or five officers and about eight or ten FSNs, and the Immigrant-Visa Section also had four or five officers and about 35 FSNs. It was a very big Immigrant Section. And there was also a fraud unit, which did nothing but investigate either fraudulent non-immigrant documents or fraudulent immigration-related marriages.

Q: How were you able to deal with the fraudulent marriages?

MAHONEY: Essentially, when someone came in who had recently been married to an American, usually it was a person who had never been to the United States, had only met the American for a brief period of time, and was often unable to answer very basic questions such as: What's your wife's father's name? How many bedrooms do they have in their house in the United States?

Then, normally, an investigator would be sent out in the field to go to the person's home village. And they would find that the person, although not married, was living in a relationship with a woman. This was very common in the Dominican Republic. The relationships were very stable, but often not blessed by marriage. He might have been living with the same woman for 15 or 20 years and have five or six children, and no one in the village had ever heard that the person had been married.

So this information would be accumulated and sent back to the Immigration Service, with a request that an immigrant petition be withdrawn, because it appeared to be based on fraudulent grounds.

Q: Did you have problems with your investigators? Was there a lot of money floating around?

MAHONEY: There was one serious inquiry that was made about one of the investigators. A team came down from the State Department, administered lie detector tests, and was unable to confirm the allegations. And that was the end of it.

We saw the potential for trouble, but we felt that the investigators were basically honest. The Dominican Republic was like a sieve of information, and if there had been any scent

that these people were able to be paid off or what have you, I think that information would have gone around very quickly.

Q: Were there problems of keeping the officers working and happy and not becoming overly disillusioned?

MAHONEY: That was a real challenge, because most of them were first-tour officers, and they suddenly found themselves in this confusing situation in which they received tremendous attention, often from the highest levels of Dominican society. They would find themselves invited out on yachts and invited to fancy estates for long weekends and so forth. And always at the end of this, or sometime shortly thereafter, they would be presented with some request about a visa for someone's relative. Many of them found this attention difficult to deal with.

Many were put off by the nature of our work, particularly by the immigration work, because they believed that almost all immigrant visas were issued as a result of some sort of fraud, despite everybody's best efforts to keep up with them. They felt that the system did not work, and that there was no support in the United States to make the system work, and that they were strictly operating on their own, and that whatever pressure or feedback they got from Congress or elsewhere was in favor of simply issuing these visas.

And the same was really often true from the State Department. Because if the State Department got complaints, from Congress or other interested parties, about the number of immigrant visas refused, very subtle but powerful signals would begin to come out of Washington that this was not the way things should be done, and that we really had to get these visas issued, and that we didn't want to have a backlog of refusal cases and so forth.

So that made many of the junior officers very disillusioned with consular work, and some of the mid-level officers, too, frankly.

Q: How did you feel about it?

MAHONEY: I had very mixed feelings. But my reaction was that one got up in the morning, did the best one could, and went home at the end of the day. That you had to be extremely, extremely careful about the relationships that you had with local people, and completely blunt with people about not accepting favors, accepting lunches, dinners from people. That you were paid basically to make the most honest decisions that you could. That if higher authorities who had the authority to do so took some of those decisions out of your hand, unless you had evidence that it was because of some sort of fraud at work, that that was simply something you had to live with. And that if you didn't get positive feedback from superiors and others, that was too bad, but the government was paying you a lot of money to be honest, and that was how you had to go.

Q: Did you find that you kept a rather close eye on the young officers coming in, to see that they didn't get too far out of line or succumb to temptation?

MAHONEY: Yes, it was critical to do that. I spent a lot of time with every junior officer who came in, orienting them, talking about the nature of the society they were getting into, the nature of the visa business, explaining to them what I saw were the pitfalls, and then trying very diligently to monitor their work for any signs that they were getting away from what I thought the correct work profile was.

Most of them, I thought, were honest and energetic, but had never been in a situation like his before, where they were really in a society in which there was not a true legal system. The way decisions were made about competing equity claims in the society was, I thought, entirely on the analysis of a base of calculations of the forces and influences at work among competing parties, and had nothing to do with what we would think of as a legal system. There was no one in that society who saw the subornation of the United States visa system as any kind of dishonest, illegal, or criminal act whatsoever. Nobody, from the top of the society to the bottom. There were other things that they thought were important and that they took seriously and that they thought were good and bad and right and wrong, but the visa business wasn't one of them.

And so, for junior officers, for new people coming into this, it was really like a man suddenly stepping off the end of a pier and falling into some kind of water without any bottom.

Q: Were there any crises while you were there?

MAHONEY: In the visa side?

Q: Either there or where the embassy got involved that you had to deal with.

MAHONEY: There was a terrible hurricane shortly after I arrived that caused all kinds of American Services problems. But as far as the general management of the embassy went, I didn't think so. The crisis had really been the year before I came, when the previous ambassador was removed and, as I said, plead guilty in a court in Washington to a felony. I think that the management of the embassy that came in after that was pretty serious and straightforward and, being aware of the previous problem, was determined to run the show in a proper way. So I thought the embassy was actually run in a pretty good way.

Q: You left there when, in '82?

MAHONEY: I left in the summer of 1982.

Q: Where to?

MAHONEY: I went to the Industrial College of the Armed Forces at Ft. McNair in Washington for a year.

Q: How did you find that year, as a State Department person?

MAHONEY: I found it very stimulating, mentally. There are two schools under the banner of what's called the National Defense University. One of them is the Industrial College, which has been primarily devoted to logistical and management questions, and the other is the War College, which might be said to be devoted more to strategy and theory issues of military activity. Most consular officers who were sent for senior training were sent to the Industrial College, because it was felt that somehow that logistical connection was more appropriate to consular work than the more theoretical and policy-oriented view of the War College.

The result of that, I thought, was that there were certain parts of the Industrial College program that were not so stimulating. One had to do with, for example, the logistics of military procurement, which was a six-weeks' segment that I hardly ever understood and was in no way stimulated by. Another had to do with military personnel questions, which were not particularly germane to the kind of personnel questions one had in the State Department.

Other parts of the curriculum were extremely interesting. We got to take two very good trips: one to the West Coast and one to Europe. The interaction with the military officers was extremely interesting and enlightening, and certainly left me with a great deal of respect and admiration for most of the military people that I met.

But I would say that the Industrial College, on balance, was probably about 70 percent of the possible experience that the War College might be for a State Department officer.

Q: When you were there, was Vietnam gone and forgotten?

MAHONEY: It was quite interesting, because I started in the summer of '82, seven years after the final removal from Saigon, and although I felt that that issue was there as a gigantic underlying psychological issue, the fascinating thing about it was that it was virtually never discussed or dealt with in any of the courses or the classes that I had. It was really treated as something that we have to get behind us, and that we have to get on with the future. I assume people were dealing with it in other intellectual frameworks, but, curiously enough to me, it was not a central topic. Maybe because it was such a painful subject, it got very little attention.

Q: What about the rebuilding of the Army, because the Army had almost dissolved, moralewise, toward the end of the Vietnam War.

MAHONEY: I think a fair amount of that was going on, but again, I didn't get the sense that it was going on so much in the larger classes or sessions that we attended; perhaps in smaller groups, in informal consultations, and perhaps at other places like the Army War College at Carlisle. Remember, the Industrial College and the War College are inter-service schools, and I don't think that they would have had a topic such as "How to

Rebuild the Army" that they would have been discussing at an inter-service school. It certainly was not a topic that I heard talked about very much.

On the personnel side, they did spend a great deal of time on issues of how to retain certain types of personnel, whether they were Navy petty officers or tech sergeants in the Army or what have you. They were very focused on those sorts of issues, but much more from a kind of material-managerial point of view: What incentives can we give people to stay in? How do we have to structure the size of units that have these officers in them? How many people can we send out to sea at any one time, and for how long, and still maintain family structure back on land? Those sorts of questions.

But the issue of what happened to the Army in Vietnam and how it was to be restructured didn't come up there. I thought it would, but it didn't.

Q: You left in '83.

MAHONEY: The summer of '83.

Q: Where to?

MAHONEY: I went then to Montreal, to a tandem assignment with my wife. She was a USIS officer, so in the interest of compromise, the first year in Montreal, I was the number-two person in the Consular Section, with the agreement that after one year, when the chief of section left, I would become chief of section and do the rest of my tour there in that capacity. And that's, in fact, what happened.

Q: How did you find Montreal?

MAHONEY: The post, you mean?

Q: Both the post and also the political situation.

MAHONEY: Montreal is one of the most liveable cities, I think, in the world, even though it has four or five months of very tough winter weather. It's an extremely civilized, urbane place to live.

The political situation was that, in 1980, there had been a referendum on the issue of separatism, which had been defeated by about 60 to 40 percent. The feeling, when I went to Montreal in the summer of 1983, was that separatism was a fading issue, and that, in fact, the issue had probably been settled for quite a long time. And so there was the beginning of, I felt, a great deal of optimism, even though certain indicators, such as property values (we bought a house while we lived there), were very low. Interestingly enough, by the time we left, they had gone up significantly. The separatist government had been voted out, the Liberal government in Ottawa had been voted out, and the Conservative leader, Brian Mulroney, a Quebecer, succeeded Trudeau, a Quebecer, as

prime minister. It appeared that with a Quebecer as prime minister and with a decisive majority of the Liberal Party in power in Quebec, separatism was a dead issue, and that the economic situation in Quebec was on a dramatic upswing.

Q: Did you all at the consulate general feel under the gun to be careful about what you said about Canadian separatism?

MAHONEY: Yes, we definitely did not get into it. There was a standard guidance from Washington that said, in essence (I'm paraphrasing), that the United States has always been happy with a united Canada, and that having said that, the decision about the future of Canada is up to Canadians.

We never said anything else besides that, and it was made quite plain that we were not to get into it, which, I must say, I agreed with.

Q: What did the visa work consist of?

MAHONEY: We had an odd situation in Canada, because we did a lot of immigrant visas there for non-Canadians, under a program whereby people could come up from the United States for a couple of days, who had to leave the country to apply for immigrant visas, but were not compelled to go back home. That is, if you were from Nigeria or you were from Haiti or you were from the Philippines and could not adjust status in the United States, you could get your visa in Canada and go back to the United States. And if the visa was for some reason denied, you had a letter that automatically re-admitted you to the United States, even if you were the worst kind of murderer or something else, because the Canadians would not have let these people into Canada except for the agreement that they could go back to the United States. So we did a very large number of third-country immigrant visas. And since Canadians did not need visitor visas, all our visitor visas were essentially for non-Canadians. That was the nature of the business. It was interesting, but not terribly demanding.

The most exciting thing that I did while I was there was to preside over the installation of an automated WANG computer system. I was asked, during my first year, to be the systems manager, because the admin officer was too busy with a number of other, high-profile projects. So I literally was the systems manager and oversaw the installation of a full automated system, which was a very interesting thing to do.

Q: This was sort of a trial run, wasn't it?

MAHONEY: It was one of the early posts. They began putting significant consular automated systems overseas about 1982, and this system came to Montreal in the fall of 1983. So it was one of the first posts to get, in effect, a central processor, to have everybody have a work station, to automate all the immigrant-visa files, and to put in a new non-immigrant-visa management system as well. So it was very, very exciting and

quite a good learning experience for me, since I had had no previous experience with computers.

Q: How'd you find your staff?

MAHONEY: I thought they were quite good, very capable, and an extremely interesting mix. There were several Italians, or Italo-Canadians, I guess you'd say, because Italians made up the third largest ethnic group in Montreal, after English Canadians and French Canadians. There were Anglo-Canadians. So, in a way, it sort of reflected the Province of Quebec.

One of the things I found fascinating was that everyone in that office could speak what we would think of as Quebec French. But the Anglophones could not write French or compose or anything in it. They all had learned their French, in effect, in the street or from their friends. But they couldn't do any correspondence or translating in French. So they could do the window work, the counter work, in French, and certainly converse with all of their associates, but only the Francophones could really do any translating or written work. I thought that was quite fascinating.

Q: How about the younger officers that you had there?

MAHONEY: Yes, I thought they were pretty capable. They were all in good spirits in Montreal, I thought, because, one, it's a very civilized, sophisticated city, and they were all happy to be there; two, the nature of the work was not the same as it was in the Dominican Republic, for example. There were a certain amount of immigrant cases that people were unhappy about. Some people came up from the States who were not qualified for one reason or another, but they still had to be re-admitted, even if they didn't get their immigrant visas. But by and large, I thought there was a fairly good spirit that prevailed at the post.

The thing for me was that the work, after a couple of years, was not terribly demanding or challenging. Once the automated system was installed and working, which took about a year and a half, the work just somehow became less interesting to me.

Q: What did you do? In a way, you'd kind of had enough of the visa concentration, would you say?

MAHONEY: I found that to be true, and also simply that once the automated system was in and functioning, the actual running of an operation in a place like Montreal wasn't very demanding.

Q: How about American Services? Did you get involved in that at all?

MAHONEY: Yes, there was a certain amount. But the main American Services problems were pretty routine -- issuance of passports, reports of birth, that sort of thing. Welfare

whereabouts cases or people who ran out of money were generally dealt with, because you could give someone a $7 bus ticket and send them back to New York State, to the northern county welfare systems in the State of New York. We did that occasionally with people who fell into economic problems in Montreal. But it wasn't a terribly demanding situation.

We had a certain number of dual-nationality cases, because so many people had gone to Canada and become citizens. But by the middle '80s, most of the old grounds by which people were at risk for their citizenship had been rendered invalid by court decisions. And so you could, by that time, work for a Canadian government office; you could become a Canadian citizen, as long as it was necessary for you to get a job; certainly if you had been born dual-national, that was acceptable. All of those things meant that the old kind of citizenship cases that many of us grew up with had pretty well gone away by then.

Q: How about Americans who'd left because of Vietnam, to avoid the draft?

MAHONEY: President Carter had put in an amnesty, and by the middle 1980s, certainly in Montreal, we didn't encounter any of those people. That was really a forgotten issue by then. I don't think I ever came across a case like that.

Q: Did any of the extreme Quebec separatists feel any anti-Americanism?

MAHONEY: No. There were a couple of incidents in the 1970s, with the kidnaping and murder of the Labor minister and so forth. But if you live in Quebec for a while, that sort of thing seems so out of character. I can't imagine a more civilized discussion of separatism than what goes on in Canada. Quebecers, if anything, particularly French Quebecers, were strongly, strongly pro-American, in a whole number of ways.

For example, the ones that I knew, in the summer, never would leave Quebec to vacation in other parts of Canada. They went to Cape Cod, or they went to Old Orchard Beach in Maine, but they didn't go to other parts of Canada.

Large numbers of French Canadians, from the middle of the 19th Century, had immigrated to the northern part of the United States, to Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. They felt, I thought, a very strong affinity for the United States.

And they were very well aware of Americans. I'll just give you this example. I felt that most French Canadians could speak anywhere from quite good to very serviceable English. And they could tell immediately the difference between talking to an American speaking English and an English Canadian speaking English. No matter where you were, in a store or a restaurant or a gas station or anyplace else, as soon as French Canadians recognized that you were an American, they would begin to speak English with you, and they were polite to you. Whereas, I saw them on many, many occasions, if they thought the person was an English Canadian, immediately you could see their hackles go up, and

all kinds of unpleasant social mechanisms made themselves felt, not least of which was the fact that they wouldn't speak English with the English Canadians.

So that as far as the United States was concerned, it was not the Quebecers who saw themselves so much threatened by the United States, I always felt, as it was by the English Canadians.

Q: Bill Morgan was your consul general there, wasn't he?

MAHONEY: Bill Morgan for the first two years, and Bill Maule for the last two years.

Q: How did they run the place?

MAHONEY: I thought both of them ran it well. Both of them had spent the previous, say, ten or 12 years running consular sections. But despite that, they did not attempt to run the Consular Section in Montreal on a nitpicking, day-to-day basis, which I thought was very good.

Morgan spoke very good French and was very good at outside contact work.

Maule was intensely involved in the attempt to relocate the Consular Section. It was on the first floor of a building in an office complex, and the diplomatic security people had concluded that that was essentially unsafe because of terrorist issues, although there were, in fact, no specific terrorist threats while we were in Montreal. An enormously complicated logistical problem therefore came up about trying to move the consulate. Trying to do anything like that within the context of State Department bureaucracy is extraordinarily difficult.

Maule was forced, willy-nilly, both to do that and to spend a great deal of time seeing to the repair and maintenance of the consul general's residence, which was an old but very beautiful building on one of the hills in Montreal.

So he simply had to spend a lot of time on that, and the rest of his time was largely spent, I thought, in useful and sensible outside contact work.

Montreal is the economic and cultural capital of French Canada, and, in fact, is probably the second most important city in Canada. So there was a good deal of work to be done. And I thought both of the principal officers organized themselves to do that in a sensible way.

Q: You left there in what?

MAHONEY: In 1987.

Q: Where did you go then, Mike?

MAHONEY: I came back to Washington, to run what was called the Citizens' Emergency Center, in the Office of Overseas Citizens' Services.

Q: This was from when to when?

MAHONEY: From '87 to 1990, three years.

Q: That was a major job, wasn't it?

MAHONEY: Yes, you supervised about 20 officers. The function of that office was to coordinate the provision of emergency services, on a worldwide basis, to Americans by our embassies and consulates overseas. By emergency services, one means people who get arrested; who die overseas; who fall into all kinds of medical problems, including mental health problems; who've run out of money; who disappear; who might be kidnaped; and who might find themselves involved in a variety of natural and man-made disasters, all coming under what we might call the general heading of crisis management.

Q: Let's talk about some of these in general, and then any specifics. What about arrest cases at this point? When we were in Athens together, marijuana arrests were big. This was mainly young people getting caught up in this to make a little extra money, but not professionals. How did you deal with the arrest cases in the late '80s?

MAHONEY: By the late '80s, a couple of things had happened. One is that a system had been developed to negotiate prisoner-transfer treaties with a number of other countries, particularly the ones that had the most significant proportion of Americans in jail. This meant that many, many people who were arrested on drug cases, after serving a certain period in the overseas jail, were able to come back to the United States and usually get out right away on parole. So as a political issue within the United States, that question, which loomed very big for the State Department in the early and middle 1970s, had largely disappeared.

The issues that we got into more were questions of late notification by governments when people were arrested; conditions in certain prisons, particularly in places like Thailand; complaints in certain countries, especially, I think, in Mexico, of mistreatment of people after they were arrested, and what we were going to do about that. We made frequent and persistent representations to a number of governments around the world on that sort of subject.

But the arrest issue had, in many ways, I felt, resolved itself into a fairly well-managed situation.

We had programs in place by the late '80s to provide dietary assistance to people in countries where they couldn't eat very well. We transferred money to them, through

money-transfer mechanisms, so that they could buy things that they needed while in jail, pay lawyers for their defense, and that sort of thing.

So that although occasionally, on a case-by-case basis, we had problems, the arrival of prisoner-transfer treaties let a great deal of the air out of the thing, in the political sense.

Q: Did you find yourself getting into head-on collisions with the Drug Enforcement Agency? They're pushing to get drug people arrested and get information out of them. At the same time, we're sort of like the defendants' lawyers; we have to see that they get fair treatment. Did this come up?

MAHONEY: No. In my time, I didn't have the sense that that was a particular problem or issue.

Q: What about deaths overseas? I would think probably the hardest job anywhere would be the person who sits on the phone and calls up people and says your son has just died in an airplane crash, or automobile accident.

MAHONEY: Yes, this ties up with a wider subject that I want to get to. The most, I would say, traumatic and difficult experience of my time in running this office was the bombing of Pan Am 103, which took place in December of 1988.

Q: I might say, today, President Clinton is dedicating the monument at Arlington Cemetery to this. Some of the parents are still protesting.

MAHONEY: Dedicating it among ongoing controversy. A number of parents and relatives of those victims are, in fact, boycotting the dedication today.

Q: Could you explain what it was.

MAHONEY: A Pan American plane, carrying 259 people, about 170 of whom were Americans, and many of those were university students returning home for the Christmas holidays, was blown out of the air by a bomb over Lockerbie, Scotland, on the 21st of December 1988. Everybody on that plane was killed, and the wreckage of the plane, as it fell, killed 11 people on the ground, for a total of 270 people killed.

This event, I would say, marked, certainly in my mind, if not a watershed, at least a distillation of a number of trends that had been going forward in what I would think of as American Services activities, including (and I will get to your question) the whole question of training people for how they could notify people about the deaths of relatives, and the definition of the services required to be provided by the State Department, specifically by consular officers, when things like this happen.

The Lockerbie bombing led to an intense congressional examination of State Department procedures in these cases; to a great deal of criticism by the relatives of the victims,

criticizing the State Department; to the introduction of a number of new, and in some ways still very controversial, approaches to this sort of terrible disaster.

What happened, in sort of sequential terms, was something like this.

The disaster took place about three or four o'clock in the afternoon, Eastern Standard Time, about nine o'clock in the United Kingdom. It was not clear, of course, in the first day or so, that what had happened was a bombing, only that the plane had somehow broken up in the air and everyone on board had been killed.

The Citizens' Emergency Center immediately relocated most of its personnel, as it had done in the case of other aircraft disasters in the past, to the Operations Center of the State Department, and a task force was convened to begin to see what we had to do and how we could do it.

Initially, we ran into a major problem with the airlines, because Pan American refused to give us a passenger list.

To go back a bit, for some years, the standard policy had been that when an American died abroad, a Foreign Service officer had to do one of two things. The Foreign Service officer had to undertake to notify next of kin that the death had occurred, and to advise the people of certain information that they needed pretty quickly, to work from. That is, what the local country's rules were about burial and interment; what the rules were, if the relatives wished, about returning remains to the United States; how much this would cost; how quickly it could be done; what paperwork was necessary, and so forth.

Many times, however, when Americans died overseas, they died when relatives were with them, either because they lived overseas with those relatives, although they were American citizens, or they might be in a tour group and the spouse was with them, and so forth. If that happened, the role of the State Department officer was usually not to make a notification (the relatives already knew that the person had died, and it would have been superfluous to call up and say, "By the way, I want to notify you that your relative has died"), but to answer questions and deal with issues that the people might have at the time. Normally, when people resided abroad, the only step that was undertaken by the State Department officer was the preparation of the death certificate.

So it was not always a formal requirement that the State Department officer make a notification, only that the officer be satisfied that someone had been notified and could take appropriate action.

In the Lockerbie bombing, the airlines themselves insisted on undertaking the role of notification of relatives. In fact, for the better part of a day, they withheld the passenger list from the State Department.

By the time we got the list and began to call people ourselves, to try to confirm that they knew their relative had died, everyone that we called, in fact, knew that the relative had been killed. And the people who were making the calls reported to the supervisors, including me, that they were getting very negative reactions from people, saying, "Why are you calling us? We already know this."

It was felt that this was, in essence, counterproductive, that the airline had, in fact, undertaken to do this notification, and that the airline had said that they would see to the return of all the remains to the United States at no cost to the victims. Also, they had undertaken, immediately, to fly families from the United States to Scotland, to assist and to be present as bodies were recovered and identified.

It appeared initially that the State Department's consular role in this matter was going to be fairly negligible, because the notifications had occurred and the remains were going to be returned to the United States. The State Department was certainly prepared and had people ready and on the scene in Lockerbie to prepare death certificates.

The third major issue that was raised on our side that was not initially thought of by the families was the disposition of the effects of the people who had been killed.

Normally, with a death abroad, there were a couple of possibilities. If a person died abroad and there were no relatives on the scene, the consular officer became what was called the provisional conservator of the estate of the possessions of a person. Normally, a tourist might have his wallet and some clothing and credit cards and that sort of thing. You would be immediately in touch with the relatives, the spouse or the next of kin, and they would tell you what to do with these things. And you would mail them to them or something else like this.

What happened in this case was that because the plane blew up, the effects of people were scattered all over perhaps 100 square miles of countryside. About two days after the bombing, it became clear that this was in fact a bombing and not simply an aircraft accident. The fact that it was a bombing meant that it was therefore going to be dealt with by authorities in England as a criminal case. Therefore, at least initially, all of the effects of the decedents, in fact anything that was collected from the plane, was going to be held onto by the authorities, because it might have particular implications as they tried to reconstruct the nature of the blast that apparently had destroyed the plane: Where did the blast take place? Was it explosives in a suitcase? Whose suitcase was it? All of these sorts of things.

As soon as this became clear, we sent officers from the United States to Scotland, and we undertook a very close collaboration with the British authorities on the question of what would become of these effects, because we felt that although the victims' families were essentially stunned by the whole event and had not raised the issue particularly, this would become a very intense issue with them later on.

But apart from that question, we did not see that we had any particular distinctive further role to play, given what we had done in the past in a number of aircraft disasters that we felt we had managed quite well. That is, the British authorities, in conjunction with the families, were undertaking the identification of the remains, and Pan American was going to fly them back to the United States.

So this was our position. We undertook to communicate to the relatives in the United States what we understood on the particular subject of the disposition of property. Many of the relatives were in the United Kingdom and received this briefing, in any case, from British and American officials who were there. Beyond that, essentially, we did nothing.

About six weeks went by after the bombing. And then we began to hear that the relatives of the victims were extremely unhappy with the United States government.

A couple of things had come up in the meantime.

The first was that the Federal Aviation Administration, as it often did, had put out a notice, early in December, supposedly only for people who worked in counterterrorism and airline security matters, that they had received word that there was a rumor going around about the possible plan to bomb a Pan American flight sometime during the Christmas holidays. This was not unprecedented; the FAA received, in the course of a year, dozens, if not hundreds, of rumors about planned terrorist actions against American aircraft, usually by various people with a Middle Eastern agenda, but not always.

This particular alert was sent by an unclassified cable to a number of European posts, and essentially was supposed to go only to the local FAA representative, who would then pass it on to local police, who would take whatever security precautions they deemed to be appropriate.

The source of this particular rumor, as it was discovered later, was considered to be a person who was known to be a crank and who often called up and made these sorts of threats.

This particular cable, with this warning in it, for reasons that are still not clear to me, got posted on a public embassy bulletin board at the embassy in Moscow, about two weeks before the bombing of Pan Am 103.

Within about a week after the bombing, the relatives of the victims began to become aware that this warning had been posted in a public place, or at least a place available to the employees of the American Embassy in Moscow. And rumors began to circulate that a significant number of official Americans who were traveling back to the United States for the Christmas holidays had had reservations on various Pan Am flights coming from Europe, and had changed those reservations as the result of having seen this warning. This became transmuted by the families of the victims into a notion that the bureaucrats managed to get themselves off these planes, and their kids were killed on one because

they were not given this warning and given the opportunity to remove their children from this plane.

Now there were extensive investigations into this in subsequent years by members of Congress and other people who were not disposed to be sympathetic to the State Department in this matter. They were unable to find any indication of anyone who had changed a booking from a Pan Am flight back to the United States.

That, I think, did not mitigate the anguish of the families of the victims, who felt that in fact they had been entitled to this word and didn't get it.

Also, there were 30 employees of the United States government, including military people and some State Department employees, who were on the Pan Am 103 flight and who were in fact killed.

But this sequence of events -- the fact that this was murder of 270 people, that no one was arrested for this murder or even initially identified as being the perpetrator, the view that there had been a warning about this that was not given to the American public, but was given to employees of the State Department, to the bureaucracy -- began to generate, I think, a feeling of intense anger and alienation on the part of the families of these victims, particularly those who had had college-age children on this flight. This tremendous ground swell of anger began to be directed at the American government, and most particularly at the State Department.

For about six weeks after the bombing, we received no feedback of any type, no congressional inquiries, no suggestions that the service that we were providing was inappropriate or incorrect or wrong or was not what people wanted.

Then we began to hear that there was intense unhappiness on the part of the families with their treatment by the Department, and that they were then making their feelings known to members of Congress, and that a series of congressional hearings was going to loom on this entire subject.

The only specific request that I can remember in this entire period, from the relatives of the victims, was that we make available to them a list of all the other family members, so that they could form up in a group to exchange their reactions to the disaster. After some consultation about freedom of information issues, we sent a mailing to all of the relatives, saying, "A number of relatives are interested in forming a group. If you would like your name to be given to them, please let us know, or if not, not." Almost everybody agreed that their names could be given out.

And so an organization came into being, in effect called The Families of the Victims of Pan Am 103. This organization then began to seek ways to make its feelings felt.

For about the next year, starting from probably about March or April of 1989 until I left this job in the summer of 1990, I went through what I thought was probably the most painful experience that I've had in the State Department.

What happened was that a number of congressional hearings were convened, by the Foreign Affairs committees of the House and Senate, by the Transportation Committee, because it was an aircraft, and a number of other committees, at which relatives of the victims appeared and excoriated the State Department for what they considered to be insensitivity, lack of helpful service, a whole series of things.

What happened was that, I would say, perhaps ten or 12 experiences became entered into a form of almost legendary anecdotal material.

I'll give you some examples.

Traditionally, it had been the case that when people died, their passports were returned to their relatives. And someplace on the passport a canceled stamp was placed, to indicate that the passport was no longer valid. Some of the relatives received these passports, and the canceled stamp, as was not unusual, was across the face of the person in the passport photograph. In retrospect, this was not a very sensitive thing to do, but it had gone on for many, many years. The relatives felt that this was an enormously insulting thing as if life of their son or daughter had been canceled by the State Department.

I think they made a valid point. And the procedure for indicating that the passports were no longer valid was changed. A punch system is now used to punch four holes at the back, or the corners are snipped off with scissors. But the word "canceled" is not used.

In one case, a woman said that she had called the State Department and kept asking people what was the precise moment that her son died. No one could give her an answer to this question, because the plane had blown up in the air, and it was impossible to tell. But she felt that people were not sympathetic to her.

There were a number of instances of this type. In one case, someone was talking to an officer in the Citizens' Emergency Center, and the officer said, "Well, I know it's very difficult, but life has to continue, and you need to think about getting on with your life." This was considered to be an extremely insensitive statement, and people screamed this out at the congressional hearings.

In another case, a woman wanted the wedding ring of her husband to be returned to her immediately. All property and artifacts of the victims were held by the British authorities as part of the criminal investigation for several months. And so we had to tell this woman that the wedding ring could not be immediately returned. She began to scream about this. I can still see her in the congressional hearings, screaming that the State Department would not give her back her husband's wedding ring.

In another instance, a struggle developed between the parents of one of the victims and the wife of the victim over certain effects of the victim. At the congressional hearing, again we were excoriated by the wife for not returning the effects of the victim.

And so there were a number of things that frankly seemed to me to be either very minor in themselves or simply not our responsibility. This was not a case of someone saying, my relative wasn't found; my relative wasn't identified; the remains were not returned to the United States; the death certificate was improperly prepared. I think that because of the factors I've identified -- it was a murder case; no one has ever been brought to judgment for this thing -- a huge upsurge of anger occurred.

For a year, we went from congressional hearing to congressional hearing and were told by senior people in the State Department, by congressional staff, and so forth that there was no use or point in arguing or attempting in any way to rebut the specific complaints that were made about the State Department, that we could not, in a public forum, appear to be disputing their version of many of these incidents that they recounted. That would only make us appear to be more heartless and insensitive.

We finally were put in the position, a completely new phenomenon in my experience, where we had to call the relatives of the victims at least once a week, call every one of these 189 families, every week, and ask them if there was anything that they needed from us and anything that we could do for them. They were not asking us for services; we were calling them, because they had said that we didn't pay enough attention to them.

This, in turn, generated a tremendous amount of tension and pressure and stress on the consular officers working in the State Department, because invariably, when they called these people, the people would scream at them, would yell at them, would call them murderers, all kinds of terrible things, and would bring up the business about the cable that had appeared on the wall in the embassy. Many of the consular officers who had to work on this asked to be released from the duty to be transferred to other offices.

This led, in turn, and I think usefully, to a great analysis of how consular officers could begin to better manage stress, to extensive training programs that now go on, with psychiatrists and others in the State Department, about how to deal with bereaved families, about how to try to handle what appear to be, initially, really unreasonable and often inappropriate demands.

For example, one man had a brother who lived in England and was working for an American bank there and was killed on the plane. The brother had purchased, six or eight months before, a brand new and very expensive Mercedes Benz, with European specifications. This man, one day when someone called him, as we had to do every week, to say what can we do for you and so forth, said that he wanted us to arrange for the return of his brother's Mercedes to the United States. He said that he had initially inquired about it and was told that it could not be done without extensive modifications, because it didn't meet the requirements about emissions from the Environmental Protection Agency.

And he wished the State Department to take care of this problem for him with the Environmental Protection Agency.

In fact, at very high levels, we made representations to the Environmental Protection Agency and got a waiver for the return of the car, because no one wished to confront this person, perhaps understandably, about the law concerning the importation of such vehicles to the United States.

Another man said to us that he felt that there should be a monument erected on the Mall in Washington to the victims of terrorism. This launched an elaborate inquiry into whether or not this could be done.

Others felt that because these victims had been singled out and murdered as Americans, these civilians deserved to be awarded the same honors that were awarded to fallen military overseas. That is, their flag-draped coffins should be greeted by military bands and honor guards and so forth at the airport when they returned. In fact, arrangements were finally made with the National Guard around the country that in future terrorist incidents, this would be done.

So that a seemingly endless vista, in my mind, opened up of what were and were not appropriate things to be done under the heading of American Services, particularly in disaster and potential death situations. I think the Consular Bureau, and particularly the American Services side of it, is still trying to find its way in the wake of this.

Enormous changes have taken place, I think many of them for the better. There has not been a disaster of the Pan Am 103 type since then, either terrorist or otherwise, but all kinds of mechanisms are now in place, I think, to deal with that sort of situation. And extensive training has gone on. All new Foreign Service officers are now trained, with psychiatrists and other mental health people, in how to deal with bereaved relatives.

But I worry that, in fact, this is an open-ended thing, and that it reflects, not only in disaster situations, but overall, the undefinable nature of overseas American Services. There is no definition of what our job is overseas.

The job, in essence, is to deal with whatever problem an American brings to us, as best we can. In other words, unlike a Social Security agent, who can say, "My job is social security, but if somebody has kidnaped your dog, that is not my job," or the IRS agent, who can say, "My job is income taxes, but if someone has cheated you out of your airline ticket, that is not my job." But it is the job, apparently, in the mind of Americans, for the consular officer.

It is something that one can work with and manage, but, still, one should have what is called a psychological contract. I think this is really what happened with the families of the victims of Pan Am 103. They had no idea of what our job was or had traditionally been, and therefore they did not know what we were supposed to provide or not provide.

Therefore, their conclusion was that, in fact, we should provide everything that they could think of as a service. And the fact that we had not provided this in the beginning, even before they asked us for the service, was something for which we were to blame.

Q: It sounds also as if it gave them an enemy.

MAHONEY: Oh, it did. There's no question.

Q: It gave them somebody to go against, and so it kind of fed on each other, which seems to have gone, in a way, as your consular officer was chastised for saying maybe it was time to get on with it.

MAHONEY: That simply led to further charges of insensitivity and so forth. It became impossible.

We had meetings at the State Department, very extraordinarily painful meetings, with relatives of victims, in which we asked them time and again to please list any service that they had ever asked for that they felt that they hadn't received; secondly, to list for us what they thought the appropriate services should be. And I remember a specific person, a brother of one of the victims, who promised us that his group would give us a written summary, one, of all the things that they were unhappy with, and, two, of all the things that they thought we should do in the future. No such summary was ever produced. And his only answer to us in the end was, "You have to do whatever people ask you to do."

He gave this example. He said that one of the relatives who went over to Scotland was a smoker of French cigarettes, Gauloise or some brand, and not long after he arrived, he found he couldn't obtain any, so he asked the consular officer to obtain for him some Gauloise cigarettes.

He said that any request of that type should immediately be met, as a way of showing the relatives of victims that we were in sympathy with them and were anxious to do whatever it was that they needed to relieve their suffering.

You can debate the particular request, but the implications of it seem to me to be very complex indeed. But that was the answer that this man gave to us.

Q: I take it, within the bureaucracy, everybody ran for cover.

MAHONEY: Oh, completely.

Q: Including the congressional staff and everyone else.

MAHONEY: Because they, understandably, had these families in their offices, giving out incredible emotional energy.

One thing that quite fascinated me was that on the night of the bombing of Pan Am 103, when the task force was set up in the Operations Center, the European Bureau (because the incident occurred in Europe) was put in charge of the task force. But when the families came around to express their unhappiness, no one from the European Bureau could ever be found to testify on the issue on the Hill. They simply said it wasn't their issue.

The only other people from the State Department who ever testified were from the Office of Counterterrorism, who argued that their role had nothing to do with working with the families of victims and people in the Consular Bureau.

The Federal Aviation Administration had to testify, because there was a long, drawn out theological discussion about the nature of these warnings that went out. And a whole new system was put in to deal with that.

But the only agency that was seen as having to work with the families of victims was the State Department. No other domestic American agency wished to involve itself in this matter, neither Health and Human Services nor anyone else like that. We approached them, and they simply refused to become involved.

So, yes, there was an extensive attempt to shift the focus of this unhappiness around the bureaucracy, and around within the State Department, I felt, too.

At no point did any senior manager in the State Department ever come forward and say that basically they thought the consular officers had done their best.

In fact, to the contrary, people from the Counterterrorism Office, in public statements, said things along the lines of, well, we just didn't have our best people on the scene at that time, and those who were there didn't do well enough. Those were their public comments.

Q: Who was the head of Consular Affairs at that time?

MAHONEY: Joan Clark was the assistant secretary. The senior deputy was a fellow named Bob Ryan, an economic officer who had been put in and really didn't know anything about consular work. And the deputy assistant secretary for American Services was a man named Thomas Tharp, called Tad Tharp, a 30-year-old political appointee who had worked in the White House, and who also knew nothing about the business. And so, in effect, the senior person on the consular side who had to work on this issue was me.

Q: How much support did you get from the ones who at least had the rank?

MAHONEY: In terms of making people available to work on the subject and so forth, I thought they were quite good. In terms of going to hearings, Miss Clark went and took the heat and the pressure and really did very well. I admired her. Mr. Tharp was never called to testify and never did testify. Shortly after the 1988 election, he left, and there was

nobody in his job for several months. I thought, on the consular side, we got reasonable support.

What's important to understand is that in the sequence of events, it was not clear, for two or three months afterwards, that there was any unhappiness at all on the part of people. And therefore we did not expect that this sort of tidal wave of emotion was going to come down on us the way that it did.

Q: Were there any other issues, obviously not of the same caliber, but people missing or that sort of thing?

MAHONEY: I was directed by the assistant secretary for consular affairs to be the personal family contact with relatives of Americans held hostage in Lebanon. This included people who became quite well known, like Terry Anderson, the AP correspondent, others less well known. But for three years, I personally (and I was instructed not to delegate this, because it was expected that a senior officer should do this), in addition to running this office, had to be, in effect, the 24-hour available telephone contact for the relatives of hostages in Lebanon. On a pro-active basis, I was to be in touch with them generally at least once a week, all of the families, to talk to them about the situation. And that led me into an extremely interesting, complicated, frustrating situation that went on for three years, which I'll be glad to talk about further.

Q: We've already talked about Lockerbie. We'll talk about the hostage situation next time. You said there were one or two other things. I just want to get it on tape before you leave.

MAHONEY: No, no, fine. Yes, another one that came up that really began to consume us was the issue of travel advisories and warnings to American citizens overseas. What was the State Department's role in this? What were the criteria for issuing travel advisories? And most particularly, what did we do about the problem of crime overseas? Did we undertake to warn Americans about it? How did we do it? What are the political implications of putting out travel warnings when tourism is probably now the single greatest industry in the world, and a travel warning about a country can cut its American tourism immediately by 30, 50, 80 percent?

This subject, as a general theme, became probably the third critical issue that I worked on in my time in the Citizens' Emergency Center.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick up those when we get together next time.

Q: Mike, why don't we talk about the travel advisories. Basically, the travel advisories came to a head, really, didn't they, because of the Pan Am incident. Could you talk about how this was treated and the deliberations within the State Department about this.

MAHONEY: During the 1980s, there came to be more and more pressure on the State Department from the American public, and through the public's representatives in

Congress, to provide guidance and advice about conditions in countries that people were traveling to. In part, this is tied up with the fact that people began to travel absolutely to every odd corner of the world, at the same time that there were more and more local insurrections and other kinds of problems in all these obscure places.

The pressure came to be that people wanted the State Department to pronounce on whether it was safe to go to certain countries, whether it was safe to go to parts of countries, and to be prepared to pronounce on a wide range of subjects. By that I mean the general question of civil unrest or insurrection within a country; the health situation, whether there were epidemic-type problems; perhaps natural-disaster situations, was a volcano or a hurricane or something else posing risks to people.

One of the things that began to bring this to a head was the kidnaping of Americans in Lebanon, because many of the families of the people kidnaped claimed that the State Department had never warned their relatives that they should leave Lebanon. I think, in fact, that this was not correct, and that there had been a number of warnings about Lebanon well before people were kidnaped. But leaving that aside, that was one issue that drove this.

Another issue that drove it was the bombing of Pan Am 103, in the sense that Pan Am 103 caused the State Department to dramatically reexamine what might be called the double-standard policy.

I'll give you an example of what this means. Suppose there is a newsletter at an embassy, and that newsletter says embassy personnel are advised not to go to the southern part of Jordan, because there's banditry or civil unrest or what have you. The issue would immediately arise, is the official U.S. community getting a warning, a piece of advice, that isn't being put out to the general traveling public, and what is the implication of this.

You can carry this thing, in some ways, to absurdity.

For example, suppose the embassy newsletter prints a restaurant review, and in that restaurant review, the amateur cuisine critic says, "I went to Rocco's Restaurant and got a terrible case of heartburn there." Does this mean that we somehow have to publicize this information, so that if the average American tourist goes to Rocco's Restaurant and has a terrible case of heartburn, we have at least warned him about this?

It seems silly, but we got into very, very elaborate theological discussions as to what the definition in this situation was going to be.

Beyond this, you get into, as I said earlier, very complicated political problems.

If you issue, for example, a travel advisory for a country like Guatemala, which has had some kind of rural insurrection and conflict going on for the last 30 or 40 years, you run the risk immediately that tourism, not only in the affected areas of Guatemala, but the

whole country (Americans being very conservative and not wishing to take any chances when they travel), will be cut by a huge amount, which really will deal a severe blow to the economy of Guatemala. What this tends to mean is that the Guatemalan government gets involved and begins to put pressure on the American Embassy, which begins often to act as the advocate for the government to which it's accredited.

We had many, many, many very intense struggles within the Department, particularly with geographic bureaus, on the subject of issuing travel advisories. The bureaus were very reluctant to see these things get issued, feeling that they would cause political problems.

Q: You're talking about the geographic bureaus like...

MAHONEY: The European Bureau, the Latin American Bureau, the East Asian Bureau, all of them.

Part of the problem was that it was very difficult to have a level of consistency.

For example, at one period in the late '80s and early '90s, there was a whole series of bombs that were being set off in Northern Ireland. And there was a large discussion about whether a travel advisory should be issued for Northern Ireland. The Consular Bureau wished to issue an advisory, and the European Bureau did not. This went to a very high level in the State Department. And it was finally decided that the State Department would issue a press release, taking note that a lot of bombs were going off in Northern Ireland, but not in fact prescribing any specific advice for travelers, simply saying travelers should be aware that this was going on.

In other countries where bombs went off and where perhaps there was less political leverage within the State Department, travel advisories were issued. And then people would say, "Why are you issuing an advisory about my country and not about this other country?"

Further to this was the whole subject of crime, which is a worldwide problem. So how did you decide whether crime was worse in Rio de Janeiro or in Barcelona, for example? Well, you might have a few incidents of a more dramatic nature in Rio de Janeiro, but the implication that the entire city of Rio was out of control and in the hands of rampaging gangsters was not a correct image. And yet there was tremendous pressure, for several years, to issue travel advisories about certain cities on the basis of crime.

Finally, after I left this position, but I followed the subject quite closely, it was decided that in fact the State Department would produce a travel information sheet, as it's now called, about every country in the world. And it would deal with issues of health, with issues of crime, with issues of visa entrance, and anything else of an unusual nature that might affect travelers. These warnings could be highlighted if they were of a particularly urgent nature or particularly dramatic nature, such as ones saying don't go to Lebanon,

don't go to Iran, don't go to Iraq, don't go to North Korea. In other words, as a compromise, to avoid singling anybody out, we now have a system where we have a travel information sheet for every country in the world.

It's an interesting example of a program that grew up not by congressional mandate, I don't think even now that there's any congressional mandate or any legal direction to do this program, but out of a sort of topsy-like situation, we evolved a fairly elaborate program. You can now call, on an automated telephone answering system, and, by pushing various buttons on the telephone, listen to the travel information for whichever country in the world you're thinking about visiting. You can leave your number and address on an answering device and have a copy of a consular information sheet mailed out to you.

I think the present program is working fairly well. But the particular imperative to avoid any suggestion of a double standard now animates any type of advisory or warning that's thought about anyplace in the world. The Department has fully committed itself, and the U.S. government has fully committed itself, to the idea that where there is any risk, that if officials Americans are going to be warned, then the public has to be warned as well.

The difference is sort of like this. If you receive information in an embassy of a threat that applies only to an ambassador or only to members of the official community, that sort of information will not be made public. But if you receive information about an undifferentiated threat, for example, a warning or a rumor that Moslem radicals are thinking of taking some sort of action against American interests in Rome, you cannot give any sort of alert or update or warning or anything else, even of the most elementary nature, to the official American community, unless you also give this not only to the resident private American community, but to the traveling public, the man who might be thinking of coming to Rome next week.

Q: Let's say I'm the consul in Egypt, and I hear that a mob may be coming to attack the embassy library. One, there's a time problem, and, two, you can always put it in a notice back in the States, which means it's probably nothing. But the real problem is how do you inform your resident community and those tourists who are, say, sitting in hotels today.

MAHONEY: I think you have to work closely with USIA, to get information out through public distribution channels -- television, radio, newspapers. In many countries now there is a fax network that operates between the embassy, usually the Office of Diplomatic Security, and major American entities in countries -- businesses, schools, church organizations, that sort of thing. So that you can in fact put out a fairly elaborate warning now to large numbers of people very quickly. In fact, you have to be prepared to do so.

Of course, the dilemma with this is that you're liable to, shall we say, offend the sensibilities of the host government dramatically when you do this, especially if your reaction to a prospective threat is more extreme or more active than theirs.

So it's an interesting question that comes up a lot now around the world.

Q: You were involved in this from when to when?

MAHONEY: From 1987 to 1990.

Q: Were other governments coming and saying, well, you know, we've had German tourists shot in Miami and California, etc.? Did this happen, and how did we deal with that?

MAHONEY: Yes, the other countries, which so often follow the United States in all kinds of cultural, economic, and other ways, began to get interested in this question. The British had for some years, in a very low-key way, worked on travel information for their public, but, interestingly, countries like Germany and others had not traditionally done this. But by the time I left, we were in fact seeing a number of foreign diplomatic missions sending people around to our office to see how we ran this system. The Japanese came in, the Germans came in, New Zealanders came in.

I saw just recently that in fact the Germans had issued a warning to their travelers about Florida, causing tremendous unhappiness and consternation among the congressional delegation from Florida, many of whom, I suspect, were among those who were often beating up on the State Department for not issuing more vigorous warnings about travel to various countries in Latin America. But when it comes home to you, you tend to look at it in quite a different way.

So this is a coming thing now, I think, for many other countries in the world that have large numbers of tourists going overseas.

Q: When this thing started, what was your attitude? Was there a developing attitude within the Bureau, and then within the State Department?

MAHONEY: The initial reaction was to try to keep it to a minimum, because it was seen potentially as kind of a bureaucratic monster that would finally just get out of control.

As another example, if the Marine detachment protecting the embassy in a local country is told not to go down to Joe's Bar on the south side of town because all kinds of mean, bad people come in there and beat you up, is that something you then have to tell tourists, because if some tourist goes down to Joe's Bar and gets beaten up, he might get upset if he finds out that on the bulletin board of the Marine barracks there's a little notice that says, "Don't go to Joe's Bar because you can get beaten up there."

In other words, I frankly had the fear that the State Department was going to end up in the role of Arthur Frohmer or Baedeker, finally, producing huge, elaborate travel guides for every city and corner of the world, rating every hotel and motel and bar, because of this double-standard problem. I think it's still an ongoing and creeping sort of problem,

although at the moment, the device of having consular information sheets for every country seems to have stabilized the situation.

So we were hoping to keep it to a minimum, but the pressure of events, the demand from Citizens for Services, did not allow this.

It's an interesting commentary about Americans; they claim that they don't want the government in their lives, many of them, that they want to be away from governmental influence and so forth, but when they travel abroad, particularly, my sense is that they very much want the helping hand of Uncle Sam to be present. It was very often the comments and complaints of people, who would say, "Gee, we went to Kenya and we were robbed in a game park, and why isn't there any warning about the risk of robbery in game parks in Kenya?" that drove Congress to pressure the Department and, in turn, the Department's unit to deal with these things, the Citizen's Emergency Center, to create an ever-more-elaborate program.

Q: Did you find that you were also having to warn embassies and consulates to be a bit careful about the chitchat they might put in public bulletins?

MAHONEY: Definitely, definitely. We had a number of cases, as we were getting going in expanding this program at the end of the '80s, in which an embassy might send in a political reporting cable, and buried down in the cable, they would say, "Because of unrest in the southern region of the country, we've told embassy families not to travel there for tourism." And you'd have to send a rocket back to the embassy and say, "Look, if you're telling families at the embassy not to travel down there, we've got to tell the public." Then there would be an intense debate with the embassy, "Well, that isn't really what we meant. How's the host government going to react to this?" But after the experience with Pan Am 103, the very highest levels of the Department were determined not to have another embarrassing incident of that type, and they stepped on the embassies very firmly. And the political argument did not carry the day anymore, by and large.

Q: A traditional dilemma in the State Department, going back to the earliest days, has always been: When does the American ambassador tell Americans in the country to get out because of unrest? This is usually because of acute civil war, disaster, or something like this. And this often is a political thing, because once you order the evacuation, it can destabilize the government. The fall of Saigon was a case in point, where an ambassador held on far too long.

MAHONEY: You're right, it's not a new problem, at least conceptually, only the degree to which we have been pressed now to provide information.

We at one point had a travel advisory for Colombia that must have been five or six pages long, that got into virtually a province-by-province, city-by-city discussion of conditions, because Colombia was such a smorgasbord of guerrillas, terrorists, narcotic traffickers,

out-of-control government troops that there were 50 different potential risks points in the country.

On the other hand, if you want to look at some of these things in a cosmic sense, you can always put out the most general of warnings, saying, "Look, don't go places that are suffering from civil unrest, use your head, ask your travel agent," and all that kind of stuff, without getting into this line-by-line account. But it seemed to us, increasingly, that that was what the traveling public was demanding.

Q: What was the role of travel agencies in this? Did they get involved?

MAHONEY: The travel agencies got involved, I felt, more in the sense of feeling that the State Department and the government were overreacting. I think the travel industry had very mixed feelings about this program, because many travel agencies specialize in tours to different areas, and if you're a person, for example, specializing in tours to Kenya, and we put out a travel advisory saying that Americans have recently been shot to death in game parks... Now this is not a significant number of people. Approximately 600,000 people were going to Kenya a year by the end of the 1980s, and perhaps one or two a year were the victims of serious violent crime. That's a lot less of a violent-crime problem than in American cities. But the families of those victims raised a tremendous rumpus in Congress, saying that they should have been warned that there was the risk that you could get killed in a game park. If you were a travel agency booking to game parks, and the State Department put out an advisory, several legal questions immediately came up. People who had prepaid tickets that were not supposed to be refundable would go back to the travel agencies and say, "The State Department is warning about travel to Kenya. I want my money back." People took travel agencies to court on the basis that the United States government had given them an out from these things. A travel agent could see a potential tour cut from 300 people to 50 people in a day, and who was going to pay for all this stuff? So that I think their concern was much more a feeling that in general the U.S. government was overreacting.

Q: The other major issue was the hostages in Lebanon. Could you first give some background, for somebody who wouldn't be familiar with what we're talking about.

MAHONEY: At the end of the 1970s and the first part of the 1980s, the political stability of Lebanon began to fly apart under all kinds of both internal and external pressures. A primary division was among Christians and Muslims in Lebanon. The Muslims themselves were split. Syria was playing very elaborate and complicated games among, particularly, the Muslim groups in Lebanon. Israel had established a security zone in the south and had its interests in play. And the United States, from time to time, to various degrees, attempted to influence the situation.

Lebanon, in the middle 1980s, finally broke up, for a while, into what you might think of as medieval feudal entities that did not answer to the central government, answered only

to their own warlords, and engaged in an endless series of struggles for terrain and prestige.

In the middle of this, there had been a fairly significant American community in Lebanon, engaged in business and education and missionary work.

As the 1980s developed, various internal groups in Lebanon began to kidnap and/or occasionally assassinate prominent Americans for a variety of political purposes, most of which have now become completely obscure.

It began to become clear that there was no central entity in Lebanon that could protect foreigners. Some of the ethnic groups in Lebanon, particularly certain radical Muslim elements, in fact had as their agenda the expulsion of foreign influence from the country.

So in the middle 1980s, '83, '84, 85, the State Department issued a series of warnings advising Americans to leave Lebanon, to get out, and telling Americans who weren't there not to go there.

A number of Americans, for one reason or another, chose to ignore these warnings, believing either that perhaps a local militia could protect them or that because they were engaged in charitable work, educational work, they would not be the targets of potential kidnapping. Some Americans had converted to Islam and were married to Lebanese women and believed that this would protect them. In the event, it proved not to protect them.

Finally, in 1982 or '83, there were bombings of several embassies in Kuwait. The French Embassy was blown up, the American Embassy was blown up. And a number of radical Islamic terrorists were captured in Kuwait and put in jail, under the threat that they would be ultimately tried for murder.

One of these people who was in jail in Kuwait was the brother-in-law of the head of the security apparatus for Hezbollah, which was the radical Muslim fundamentalist group in Lebanon. So this man and his associates decided that the way to try to get his brother-in-law and a number of other people out of jail in Kuwait was to kidnap a number of prominent Americans in Lebanon and basically hold them as hostages, trying to pressure the United States government to pressure the Kuwaiti government to let these people go.

So in 1984, '85, and '86, a number of Americans were kidnapped and held hostage in Lebanon. And the only public demand that was ever made in connection with these hostage takings was for the release of people held in jail in Kuwait.

The American families of these hostages began to bring strong pressure to bear, through television, through the media, through public meetings, on members of Congress and on the Executive Branch of the government.

President Reagan had made a big deal, when he was running in 1980, about how President Carter had not been able to do anything about American hostages in Iran. And I think that within the Reagan administration, there was a fear, particularly as the 1986 congressional elections approached, that the appearance of impotence, the appearance of not being able to do anything about these Americans held hostage in Lebanon, was going to rebound politically against the administration. I also think that the president was genuinely moved when the families of these hostages were able to get in to see him and present him with a good deal of what can best be described as raw emotion.

And so, for a number of reasons, he set in motion, through the CIA director, Casey, and through the famous Oliver North, a program to attempt to get these hostages rescued. It became known as the Iran-Contra program. It blew up in the administration's face. It came very close, in my opinion, to leading to the impeachment of the president. But his subordinates held firm, they did not talk, they did not implicate him directly, and so he managed to survive.

At this point, the U.S. government adopted a policy of saying, "Absolutely no deals, no concessions, no trade-offs whatever with these hostage-holders."

That was just about the point at which I came in, to work on this issue. The families of the hostages, particularly Terry Anderson's sister, Peggy Say, were very adept at maneuvering the media and presenting this as an issue in which certainly the government... I can remember Mrs. Say always explaining that with all the brilliant people in Washington, and you could send a rocket to the moon and all this stuff, why couldn't you solve this problem of seven or ten Americans held hostage in Lebanon.

The fact is that no one could solve the problem, because what the hostage-holders wanted no one was prepared to give them, and because of the anarchic situation in the country, it wasn't possible to identify where they were being held, and even if that had been possible, it's unlikely that the U.S. government would have taken the risk of getting them killed as part of a military rescue operation.

So for the entire three years that I had this job, I had to call the families of hostages every week and, in essence, explain to them why nothing could be done, and also explain to them that, in essence, we had no information whatever about where they were being held, that is, specifically, what they were eating, what their conditions were. I don't think that the American intelligence network ever found out anything tangible. The security situation of those holding the hostages was really impeccable, and nothing ever leaked out.

I think that the American public had very much of a split view. They were very sympathetic to these hostages, to their plight, but after the Iran-Contra imbroglio, there was in fact no inclination on the part of the public to trade anything for them.

Q: You better explain what the Iran-Contra thing was.

MAHONEY: What happened was that I think the president was very anxious to try to get these people released, and he set Colonel North and CIA Director Casey on a course of trying to find some sort of device, some method, to secure their release.

It was generally believed that the financial and intellectual and religious stimulation and support for the hostage-holders in Lebanon came from radical Islamic elements in Iran. And therefore a notion came up that the key to getting hostages released was to arrive at some accommodation with Iran, who could then, in turn, pressure the people in Lebanon to let hostages go. And so, through a series of tortuous and elaborate contacts with very devious and dubious intermediaries, Colonel North became involved in a deal to ship anti-aircraft missiles, defense missiles, and other sorts of armament to Iran, in return for which Iran would pay money that Colonel North would then somehow funnel off to the guerrillas in Nicaragua fighting against the Sandinistas, and that the Iranians would bring pressure to bear for the release of hostages.

Q: It might be mentioned that at that point, we did not have, and still don't have, any relations with Iran at all.

MAHONEY: We've had no diplomatic relations with them since 1979. But there were various ways of getting in contact with them, and we did so.

And so shipments of weapons began to go off to Iran, and as they did, in fact, a couple of hostages were released. This led to the notion that perhaps all of them would be released.

In fact, what happened was that as some hostages were released, new people began to be kidnapped. And so it was sort of like a bank account: you spent some money here, and then you deposited some more over there. In fact, one could argue that the Iran-Contra thing only led to the belief that if you kidnapped people, you would get a reward for it, and that if you kept getting rewarded, then the idea was to kidnap more people and get more reward.

Finally, the story of this deal made its way out into the news media and, of course, caused a sensation in the United States -- vast congressional hearings; several people were put on trial; Reagan had to fire his National Security advisor, Admiral Poindexter; and in general, it was considered a terrible blow and defeat for President Reagan's administration. In fact, I believe that if Admiral Poindexter had not stood up and said, in effect, "No, this all ended with me, and the president didn't know anything about it," I think the president might very well have been impeached.

So it obviously, thereafter, created an intense sentiment on the part of the government not to give the slightest indication that any sort of deal could be made.

Q: And that's when you came in.

MAHONEY: That's when I came in, at that point.

Q: Did you get any feel for the role of the CIA at this time?

MAHONEY: I had contacts with them, and I talked to them, and my firm belief is that certainly they knew who the prime hostage-holder was, but beyond that, I think they had almost no intelligence on this subject. Their own station chief had been kidnapped and murdered in Lebanon, William Buckley, and I think their own apparatus was pretty well plowed up and destroyed, if there had been such, and they had no useful intelligence at all.

Q: What was the reaction of the families as you would call up and give them no news?

MAHONEY: Oh, it was terribly frustrating. We had a working group in the State Department that met twice a week, to try to exchange information, to talk about the general political situation, and really to try to find any useful nuggets of analysis or information that you could give them.

But as literally years went by (some of these people were held hostage three, four, five years; Terry Anderson for, I think, almost six years), it was an exceptionally, for me, painful process to call people every week and, in essence, after you boiled everything down, to have no news for them.

And that would often be their reaction. You'd have a long conversation, and at the end, they'd say, "So there's nothing new today."

And you'd have to say, "Well, not beyond what I've been able to tell you."

So it was a very frustrating experience.

Q: How did they react toward you, this contact week after week after week -- hostility, bonding, mixed, or what?

MAHONEY: It depended on the particular family. Some of them I got to know quite well, and I think they felt very much bonded with me. Others saw me as an obstacle.

After the experience with President Reagan and Iran-Contra, one of the policy decisions was that it was not a good idea to have the hostage issue publicized in a high-profile way in the United States, because this would give encouragement to the people holding the hostages to think that if the highest level of the American government was engaged, then maybe something was going to happen, and that therefore it was in their interest to hold on to these people, because if they were just patient enough, they would get what they wanted.

The fact, therefore, that the families of hostages could not get in to see the president or the vice president or the secretary of state or other senior members of the government was taken by the families to mean that somehow the hostages had been devalued in the mind of the government and had been simply cast off, and that there was no longer any interest in them.

This was, of course, not true, in terms of the number of people who worked on the issue. Regular reports were sent to the White House, to the secretary of state. Everybody wanted to know about this and paid very close attention to it. But the government decided, as a matter of policy, that the subject was not going to be treated in any kind of publicly high-profile way.

This, in fact, in many ways, made me the villain, because family members, from time to time, would say they wanted to see the president, they wanted to see this one, they wanted to see the other one, and it was my job to tell them that, unfortunately, they couldn't. So some of them became quite angry with me and felt that the policy, in a way, was my doing, since I was the person talking to them. So it often made for some difficult exchanges.

Q: You mentioned Terry Anderson. You might talk a bit about who Terry Anderson was, so one would get the idea, and then also, if you'd care to, about Peggy Say, his sister, who seemed to epitomize some of the problems. It must have been a terrible burden for you.

MAHONEY: Terry Anderson was the Associated Press correspondent in Lebanon. He was kidnapped in June of 1985, and not released until perhaps the spring of 1991, almost six years.

His kidnapping precipitated the involvement of his sister, Peggy Say, who up until that time had had a very, I think one would say, quiet, non-public life. It's a very interesting sort of psychological thing, that somehow people can go along their whole lives, and then some event will occur that galvanizes them and puts them on a completely different sort of plane. Mrs. Say had been living in Florida, getting a degree, I think, in sociology, in her early middle forties, doing some kind of volunteer social work. Within days of her brother's kidnapping, she left Florida, returned to the family hometown of Batavia, New York, and launched herself into a public campaign on behalf of her brother.

Now because Terry was the Associated Press correspondent, the resources of that organization, in many ways, were made available to Mrs. Say. That is, they paid for her travel bills, her immense telephone bills, correspondence, what have you, because the Associated Press felt that it had to do everything that it could for its employee, and I understand that. And they did not, frankly, want Mrs. Say running around expressing the view that they were not doing everything. And so they bankrolled her to the limit.

She proved to be a formidable user of the media, a formidable manipulator of arguments and themes involved in a hostage issue, and, I would say, more than anyone else, was the ultimate stimulus of the Iran-Contra event.

You see, she never had to define a program. Her only role was to say, "Why can't this government that collects $500 billion a year in taxes do something to get seven Americans out of Lebanon? We have aircraft carriers, we have this, we have that, we have the other thing." This argument rang a certain sort of sympathy with the American people, as long as you didn't actually have to define what it was you were going to do. All you had to do was point out an appearance of incompetence or failure on the part of the government.

I often think of General Grant, sitting around Galena, Illinois, in 1860, out of work, out of a job, drinking too much, and suddenly, along comes the Civil War, the great event, and there he is, he's ready for it, he steps in, and off he goes. And to a lesser extent, this is what happened with Mrs. Say.

She was a woman of immense energy, with great latent talents that had somehow never found an outlet. This event just propelled her into the international scene. Soon she was going around visiting with Yasser Arafat and the British prime minister, and everybody was seeing her. And tremendous publicity. She was a master of television sound bytes, and the media dealt with her at length for all the remaining years of Terry's incarceration.

Q: Was she the person you called?

MAHONEY: She was the person I called. I had to learn to be very careful in dealing with her, because I would call her up, and she would say, "Is there anything new today?" And if I said to her, "Well, there isn't really anything new," in two minutes, she would call CBS and ABC, and she'd say, "The State Department has nothing to tell me about my brother. They're not doing anything." So Peggy and I developed almost these formulistic phone conversations, in which I would call her, and she would say, "Is there anything new today?"

And I'd say, "Well, you know, we're doing everything we can, Peggy. We're in touch with a wide range of governments around the world, international organizations. We're talking to the UN every week."

It was almost the same conversation, so that she could not, in fact, go to the media and say, "The State Department tells me they have nothing to say."

She would turn any phrase, any commentary that you made, if it appeared to make the government look incompetent or uncaring, and immediately run to the media with this, as a way of trying to bring pressure on you to do something.

I really believe that her entire view was that if you had to saw off the eastern half of Long Island, float it over to Lebanon, and anchor it in the port of Beirut to get her brother released, then that's what should be done. Perhaps, from the point of view of someone's sister, that is the right view. I don't say that one shouldn't do the best one can for one's family.

But she was prepared to go to the absolute end, including all kinds of forms of intellectual deception and trickery, because her definition of the situation was that the road to her brother's release was through the United States government, that that was the only way it was going to happen.

Q: Did you ever go out to Lebanon?

MAHONEY: No, no. No, no. No one was allowed to go to Lebanon. No, no.

But many times the families came to Washington. I organized meetings for them with officials from the State Department and other government agencies. They got elaborate briefings several times a year. We tried, in whatever way we could, to fulfill whatever desires they had. But it was very frustrating.

Q: When you left, where did the situation stand?

MAHONEY: When I left, of the nine hostages that I spent most of time dealing with, three or four had finally been released. What had finally happened was that when the initial seizure of the American Embassy in Iran took place in 1979, the United States government had seized a large bunch of bank accounts and other resources that the Iranians had in the United States and at branches of American banks overseas, several billion dollars. This was held against claims by American companies and others in Iran for expropriated property. And a tribunal was set up at The Hague to pass on individual cases. The money was in an escrow account, in essence, but the U.S. escrowees had to agree as money was released. This process had been going on very slowly for about eight or ten years.

Finally, I think the United States government agreed, let us say, that payment of this money, particularly the claims that the Iranian government itself seemed to legitimately have for oil money and some return of money that they'd paid for arms that were never delivered and so forth, should be made, in an expeditious way, to the Iranians. This led, in 1991, to the final release of all the hostages. This was done in a very indirect, low-key, understated way, so that it did not appear to the public that the taking of these hostages was being rewarded.

When the Iraqis invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990, the people who had been held in jail all this time for the bombing of the embassies were in some way released, and made their way home, I believe. That took away the final and most intense reason to hold on to the hostages in Lebanon. That is, that the brother-in-law of the Shiite security leader in

Hezbollah, in Lebanon, was in fact released, not by any pressure of the United States government, but as a consequence or as a little sub-theme of the Iraqi conquest of Kuwait.

Q: Although you were gone at the time, I assume you kept some track. What happened with Mrs. Say and Terry Anderson?

MAHONEY: After an initial, highly enthusiastic reunion, they soon came to emotional blows. And the last time I heard, there was no communication between them.

Q: Does that pretty well cover the major things that you did at this time?

MAHONEY: In the Citizens' Emergency Center, yes.

Q: Mike, what you've been telling me is that you were held for three years doing highly charged, high-profile, but also extremely debilitating, I would think, emotional work. In the normal course of events, a good administrator would not let anybody do that for too long. Obviously, you were doing it all right, or you wouldn't have been doing it. But why hadn't you been relieved of some of this, and what was the toll on you?

MAHONEY: There's no question I made a mistake. The normal tour of duty would have been two years. I extended in the job for a third year, which in retrospect, was a mistake. It was too draining and too wearing and too demanding.

The chain of command in the Consular Bureau was such that my immediate supervisor was a political appointee, a young man in his early thirties who had come over from the White House, and who, I think, although a person of goodwill and great fundamental human decency and good manners and so forth, was not a very good manager, and who, I think, had no idea really what was involved in this work.

Above him in the Consular Bureau was a senior deputy assistant secretary of state, who was not a consular officer but in fact first a political and then an economic officer, who again, I think, had no tangible idea of what was involved in the work.

And above him was Joan Clark, the assistant secretary, who I found to be a very decent, serious, honest, somewhat shy, but fundamentally nice person, who had a number of other management problems that she had to focus on, one being the Passport Office and another being the Visa Office.

I don't blame anybody for this. As I say, it was my own, I think, bad decision to stay for a third year in that job. But I was exhausted when I left.

Q: Just looking at the system as such, the State Department Consular Bureau or what have you, did you feel you got due recognition for what you did, or was this something people wanted to brush aside?

MAHONEY: It's a very complicated question. I got two years of senior performance pay, so that is a form of recognition.

Q: That's extra pay for dealing with...

MAHONEY: Well, for unusually meritorious work, is the theory. Not many consular officers tend to get this.

There's a general ethic in the State Department that just says, you know, "I don't want to hear about your problems." And that doesn't only apply to consular work. The Department, I think, has never been very good at thinking about what the morale state is of its employees, unlike, I think, the CIA, which realizes that it better have good morale or people are liable to run around spilling its beans. The State Department, in general, has a kind of, you know, "everybody just better suck it up" attitude. It doesn't only apply to consular work, but it certainly does apply to consular work.

Q: Your wife, Sarah, this must have impacted on her at home, too, didn't it?

MAHONEY: I think she found it difficult, because, for example, I often was called out to work on task forces in the middle of the night, on disaster situations. With the hostages in Lebanon, I was literally available to them on the telephone 24 hours a day, and very often I was called on Saturday nights, Sunday nights, because they'd heard news bulletins or had other things they wanted to ask about.

Some of the hostages had wives living in Lebanon. In one case, the family here was trying to get in touch with the wife of the hostage in Lebanon, and they couldn't get the wife, and they called me, and what was I going to do about this problem, where was this person? If you think of it, there I was in Bethesda, Maryland, and given the time difference, it was five A.M. in Lebanon, and the fact that they couldn't get someone on the phone in Lebanon, how was I to solve that problem at five A.M.? But in effect, they expected me to.

It was midnight American time on Saturday night when I was dealing with this issue. I think my wife found that a little bit draining.

Q: From this, where did you go?

MAHONEY: From there, I went to Personnel and directed the Office of Career Counseling and Assignments for all mid-level consular officers, about 600 officers, which meant that we worked each year through the assignment cycle with about 200 officers from grade 03 through 01, trying to match...

Q: 03 through 01 is approximately major up through colonel?

MAHONEY: Right, about major through colonel in the military.

...attempting to match vacancies in the assignment system with officers due to transfer into new jobs. You have an open bidding system, which means all the jobs are advertised and people can bid on them. And then you attempt to fulfill the career aspirations and other inputs of the officer, matching those with the demands of the system, which is trying to get the best person into every job. That was, in one way, a very different kind of work than what I had been doing before, but in some ways, very similar, because I was again involved in a kind of client-service situation.

Q: Back in earlier history, I had more or less the same job. The system changes, but it doesn't change. Could you give me any observations you had on the counseling and talking to the people who were in this. These were now people who knew what the system was about, they were, in the true sense, professionals, yet the onward assignment is probably their most important dealing with the Department of State. How did you find the reactions, the outlook, of the people you were talking to?

MAHONEY: There were a couple of very interesting tensions that one could see.

What you might call the central personnel system of the Department, in part reflecting the stated goals, interests, wishes, demands of the rest of the management of the Department, was always focused on the idea of trying to develop people, bring them through the system and develop them for senior responsibilities. Therefore, the notion of the central system was that people should go into a series of assignments, depending on whatever definition there was at the time. When I went in, the definition was "multi-functionality," which meant that you were trying to get people brought along who could administer and manage things and also do policy formulation and analysis work; in a sense, people who could be both political and administrative officers by the time they got up at a high level in their career. That was the stated goal of the Department. In other words, to produce foreign-policy people who could also manage things, could direct operations.

The individual officers coming along seeking assignments, by and large, I felt, had not the slightest interest in that sort of definition, except that you had to punch certain multi-functional tickets to get promoted. At any given time, I found, when an officer was thinking about an assignment, the notion that that assignment was one step on the way to something ten years from now was a very difficult thing to sell, and he didn't want to hear about it.

When the officer was up for a particular assignment, at a particular time, there was a set of factors at work. First, the great majority of them, if they were going overseas, wanted to go to what would be considered a nice place. Second, they had to accommodate family interests: educational questions for their children; often medical issues for themselves, their spouses, or their children. Increasingly, to a significant extent, you had to accommodate tandem assignments, where both people were officers, or, simply, circumstances where the spouse might have some opportunity to work even though they

weren't a tandem couple. These sorts of issues were vastly more paramount in the minds of the officers than any notion, I felt, of what one might refer to as career development.

Now, many times, officers wanted specific jobs, because they thought that those jobs, at that particular point in their career, might help them to get promoted. That didn't necessarily mean that that job was going to help to fill out their personal development in a way that would make them superior managers later on as they got to high levels of the Department.

So that was what struck me.

Further to the issue was that many, many people in the Department talked about the need for discipline, the notion that you had to tell officers where they were going to be assigned, and that they were being much too mollycoddled, and too much time was given to the assignment process, too much dickering and discussing and negotiating went on, and it was just time to tell so and so that he was going to Nigeria, or to Port au Prince, or to Guinea-Bissau.

My own view of that is that we are now in a period when that does not work. That if you, in the end, attempt to force-assign people to places that they and their families absolutely do not want to go, that will not work.

I saw, time and again, people attempt to do this. And what was the result? You would send somebody off to Sierra Leone, and in two or three weeks, that person would exhibit the symptoms of a mental breakdown and would have to be returned to the United States. And then you had to begin again to try to find someone who was actually willing to go; that is, someone who was willing to buy into the assignment. If the officer didn't have the mental breakdown, the wife had the mental breakdown, or the child had the mental breakdown or developed an intestinal blockage, or an unsuspected learning disability suddenly appeared. In other words, a way was always found to frustrate the assignment, if, in the end, the officer was determined not to go.

From a management point of view, what does this mean? It doesn't make sense to pay to ship someone's household effects and their automobile, and pay for their airline tickets, if after six months or three months, they are objectively going to break down and not be functional and have to come out, and you have to assign someone else.

What this meant to me was that it was very definitely worth the time and the effort to try to get the round pegs into the round holes, so that people went into assignments with some degree of enthusiasm, and therefore could produce and do something in the job that they were in. And that those people who believed that in the end you can just force-assign someone to a terrible place are not realistic.

Q: Was your experience duplicated in, say, people putting in economic, administrative, political officers and all?

MAHONEY: Oh, definitely. Frankly, I thought consular people, in many ways, were much more adaptable and pragmatic about these things, and were often attracted by the 25 percent differential or the danger pay or what have you. On the consular side, I don't think we ever made a forced overseas assignment. But I saw them try to do it on the economic side and the political side, and by and large, those things did not work out.

Q: Did you see any change in attitude in the upper reaches?

MAHONEY: I think the attitude in the upper reaches is to get tough and be more hard-nosed about it. I don't think that works, but I think that's the way they want to go.

Q: Let's say you've got somebody who's going to Sierra Leone; it's a river bank in Africa. What inducement do you have? Here you are, trying to get Stu Kennedy (your interrogator) to take an assignment to be the consular officer in Sierra Leone.

MAHONEY: Well, in fact, you often didn't have an inducement. Many times what the Consular Bureau did was it recruited civil servants for excursion tours, because it had plenty of civil servants working in the Consular Bureau. Those people had an incentive to go, because some of them were interested in trying to work through a mustang program or some other personnel mechanism to get themselves into the Foreign Service when they couldn't get in through the regular route. For some of them, it was just simply that they wanted an exotic adventure. The could get 25 percent extra pay while they were there, and they thought that it would make them more effective and useful and perhaps even promotable in their domestic position later on.

But political people and economic people and admin. people were not in the same position of being able to recruit civil servants for excursion tours.

Another way that you did it was you could define certain positions as being only one-year assignments, if you couldn't get any bidders for them, or you tried to find a tandem couple that needed a job, or what have you. But it meant a great deal more work in going around trying to recruit and find people to go to these jobs.

Q: Could you explain what a tandem couple is.

MAHONEY: Tandem couple means that both of the people are Foreign Service officers, and you're trying to assign them together, to reasonably useful jobs, at the same post. It's more difficult, in some ways, to assign tandem couples to smaller posts, because there aren't that many jobs. On the other hand, places like London and Paris have a lot of jobs, but also attract huge amounts of bidders, people who want to go to those places.

Q: I know one of the problems I wrestled with, when I was in the consular-assignments process, was to avoid getting too many people that I considered of marginal promotability, of marginal competence. They might be able to work on a visa line, but

they were ex-couriers, ex-secretaries, ex-personnel officers, coming up from the ranks, with, to be very blunt about it, less education, less interest, than you would have with a normal FSO. They would tend to go toward the consular ranks. The consular ranks would take these people in, promote them slightly, and they would be the middle level of management. And being of limited intellectual competence, they would often turn off the younger officers who were being supervised. How did you deal with that problem?

MAHONEY: You have to remember that after your time in Personnel, what was called the staff corps system was eliminated. The cone system, as it presently exists and has existed since the early '70s, had the effect, by and large, of producing a cadre of pretty capable consular officers. The side entry from couriers and admin. people was no longer there. You basically had to go through the exam route. Maybe two or three or four people a year might get in through a mustang program, but they had to have done a job and gotten very good reports.

I think the cone system was really, in a macro sense, the thing that revolutionized the consular business. The cone system's critical effect is that it reserves promotion numbers, and in so doing, it provides an incentive. It's not as many numbers as political or economic people get, but it is a real number. And by reserving these numbers, all the way up through senior ranks, it provides an incentive for bright people, capable people, to remain in the consular business through their careers, because the bright people know that they can get some reward from it. The less-bright people might not get rewarded as fast, but there are numbers there for them, too.

By and large, I was satisfied with the quality of consular officers. I felt there were no more turkeys (or as we called them in Personnel, "low-flying eagles") among consular people, as a percentage, than among the other cones.

And that's why I vastly hope that the discussions about, for example, combining the cones now and having an admin/consular cone will not come to pass, because the present cone system has the effect, by guaranteeing promotion numbers, of stimulating sufficient numbers of capable people. There are plenty of people who want to be consular officers, I think. And even though they're turned off a bit in the beginning by visa lines and so forth, the bright ones can see that there are other things out there for them. But what they want to know is that they have the opportunity to get ahead. Everybody wants to get promoted. You need money, and you want the opportunity to get up into more serious senior supervisory positions. And the promotion numbers have to be there for that.

Q: Did you find, as the new Foreign Service Act came in, in 1986, that more emphasis was put on people having management experience in order to get promoted? The one thing a consular officer does, by the time he reaches mid-level, is get management experience, whereas the normal political or economic officer doesn't. Did you, in your position, have problems with economic and political officers trying to sort of poach on your preserve in order to get their management tickets punched?

MAHONEY: No. There was a great emphasis on management, but what happened, unfortunately, was that management came to be defined to be just what people had always done anyway, but now they called it management. By that I mean that if you were a deputy office director in ARA, supervising an officer and a secretary, that was called management. If you were a watch officer in the Operations Center, standing watch, that was called management. Even if you didn't supervise anybody, that was management. So that although I thought a great deal of bowing and scraping was done before the idol of management, in fact, by and large, the political and economic cones managed to avoid doing anything to change.

What was useful was that a great many consular officers were in fact able to do policy work. Because so many officers are brought in at the bottom to do the line work, there aren't enough mid-level consular jobs for these people. So that, for example, in assigning 01s every year, two-thirds of the 01s I assigned every year had to be assigned to non-consular positions. But the jobs were available; they could get desk jobs, they could work in functional bureaus like IO, Refugees, Humanitarian Affairs, doing policy work and having an opportunity to, in effect, produce themselves as well-rounded officers.

This, in turn, led to...I don't want to say huge numbers, but increasing numbers of consular officers, those who wanted to, being principal officers, being DCMs, being office directors in geographic bureaus, deputy office directors. Not many ambassadorships, two or three in any given year at the most. But an opportunity to have a wide ranging, intellectually stimulating career, and to get to the top grades of our business and get the financial and other prestigious rewards attendant on those.

So I think the system has worked fairly well for consular officers over the years.

I don't think, frankly, that it has produced the sort of ideal executive that the Department management hoped to produce by combining the notions of management and policy, because, in fact, the people who have come in as political and economic officers have, by and large, managed to avoid (and I don't make it as a matter of blame on them) what I think the Department managers wanted.

Q: You were in Personnel from when to when?

MAHONEY: From 1990 to '93, three years.

Q: What about the problems that had already arisen, but continued to still be boiling, that is, the role of women in assignments, sexual discrimination and racial discrimination, that type of thing?

MAHONEY: There's no question that a huge amount of what one might think of as special pleading came into the assignment process. I was there as the women's class-action suit remedies were being implemented, and they're still being implemented. And

what that meant was that many women who I really believe had no justification whatever attached themselves to the women's class-action suit.

Q: Could you explain what the women's class-action suit was.

MAHONEY: In the middle 1970s, a number of women brought a lawsuit against the Department, arguing that their opportunities for promotion were, in effect, stunted by the personnel assignment policies of the Department. That because they couldn't get certain critical stepping-stone jobs, they couldn't, in turn, get up to positions like DCM or become an ambassador or get to the senior ranks of the Foreign Service.

This suit was started in the middle '70s and finally, in effect, settled, or at least the Department gave in, in the late 80s. It went on for a long time, and most of the original people who brought the suit were gone by then from the State Department.

But in effect, because it was a class-action suit, any woman who felt that somehow she had been the victim of negative practices could get attached to the suit. And remedies were made available in the way of assignments, to help them get on their way in their careers.

I found many women who had, as far as one could tell, gotten earlier the jobs that they had bid on, but who still claimed that they had somehow been the victim of the personnel system of the Department.

Once they were attached to the suit, the remedy was, in essence, that they had to get certain types of jobs that they wanted, and although it could be from among a group of such jobs, that they had to get a DCM position or they had to get a principal-officer position or they had to get an out-of-cone position. In many cases, these were simply used to get positions in London or Paris or Rome, where the people wanted to go anyway, or to be the principal officer at some nice place, where, sure, anybody would want to be principal officer.

This remedy, of course, had the effect of preventing other people from getting these jobs. But, nevertheless, this was one group of people that was definitely being attended to.

I sat in on pre-screening sessions for assignments of DCMs and principal officers. And at all of those sessions, it was made quite clear that minority candidates had to be included when you got to the final cut, when the committee upstairs had actually made the decision after the thing had been winnowed from 50 applicants to six. That every minority applicant had to be identified, and there had to be a clear reason if that minority person did not get the job. And in any case where the minority applicant had at least minimal credentials, that person was going to make the final cut, particularly for principal officerships. Department management was a little bit less willing to force-assign DCMs on ambassadors. It was felt that that relationship was too delicate to really try to force very often on ambassadors people that they didn't want. But as far as principal officers

were concerned, there was no hesitation to assign women or minorities, who had not even worked in an area before, to these positions, because the Department felt that it had to.

Now if you look at the macro picture of American society, I think that the Department was reacting to external pressures that many other institutions in society have to react to.

One, I suppose, can argue that the only way, in the end, that some additional racial and sexual equality is going to arrive at in our society is if a certain amount of force-feeding is done, using people who have relatively decent credentials, even if you have other people who have superior credentials.

One of the things about the State Department is that for a lot of jobs, it may be nice to put geniuses in them, but a lot of them can be filled by people who are much less than geniuses. You can certainly be a principal officer and get along at posts overseas without being the Wizard of Avis. Even though you might be better off, if you have the Wizard of Avis, to put him or her there. I saw many, many minority officers, who I felt were not the most attractive candidates, go into jobs, and they did okay in them, they did fine.

If the Department is going to...I hesitate to use this buzz word, but is going to reflect American diversity, one way or another it is going to have to get more blacks and more women and more of other minorities up into senior positions. That is going to mean that fewer white men are going to be in those positions. That, I guess, is the price of history.

But if it doesn't happen, not only in the State Department, but in other elements of American society, I do not see how, in the end, you are going to bring along, get a stake-in-society from minority segments of the society. That's a price that we're paying in the modern era. And I believe certainly that the personnel system of the Department is doing this. But I think that as a price exacted by American history it is right to do so.

Q: When we're talking about minorities, this can be translated in a number of ways. What were we talking about in real terms, at the period you're talking about?

MAHONEY: You mean numbers of people?

Q: No, no, I mean ethnic.

MAHONEY: Asian Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, black Americans, and women in general. And most of these people are self-defined. That is, you report to an office in the Department, and you say that you are this minority and you wish to be so considered such. Now there were, in fact, minority officers who did not do this, who said that they did not want to be identified as minorities and that they certainly did not want to get assignments or be promoted on the basis of being minorities. Not many, but some. And there were many women who did not attach themselves to the women's class-action suit.

Q: As a practical measure, at the period of time you're talking about, were there many Asian Americans?

MAHONEY: Oh, yes, Asian Americans are definitely coming forward in the State Department, and a number of Asian American women. They are present in increasing numbers.

Q: How did the system react when you were, say, taking an Asian American woman or a black male or something and trying to put them into a principal officership in an area in which they had no particular experience?

MAHONEY: Well, remember who is the system that's doing this. There's a committee that assigns principal officers. That committee is composed approximately (it may have changed a bit) of the director-general of the Foreign Service, the under secretary for Political Affairs, the number-two person in Personnel, perhaps the executive secretary of the State Department. When those people make an assignment to a principal officership, it will be done. That is the management of the State Department. Now you would get ambassadors who would complain about this, but as I said earlier, principal officerships in particular were treated as a place where the minority demands of the system could be fulfilled. And in effect, ambassadors, even political ambassadors, were told, "This is the way it's going to be."

Now in other sorts of positions, you had a very interesting split. Most assignments are made as a result of an agreement between the individual and a bureau. I would say, in no more than five to ten percent of the cases does the central system try, through the assignment-panel process, to assign somebody to a position when a bureau really doesn't want that person. DCMs are assigned, of course, again, by the senior executive committee of the Department.

Now very often a geographic bureau would resist intensely when a candidate, sometimes a minority, but not always, that it didn't want was about to be pushed at it.

And so you had the classic definition of the struggle between the particular interest, that is, this job that I have here in my bureau right now, and the general interest, which is the Department as a whole saying, "Look, only two percent of the officers in the European Bureau are black. Eighteen percent of the officers in the African Bureau are black. We must have more black officers in the European Bureau. And you are going to take X and Y and Z." Sometimes they took them, sometimes they didn't. Sometimes they were able to resist.

Certainly at more senior positions -- deputy assistant secretary, DCM -- minorities are still grossly underrepresented. But little by little, the pressure was brought to bear.

In certain cases, ambassadors (generally career people, not political ambassadors) would be called on the telephone by the director-general, maybe by the under secretary for

Political Affairs, by the assistant secretary for the regional bureau, and told, "Look, we know that you want X to be the DCM, but, unfortunately, we must place Y. And I'm asking you, as a favor to me..." Always with the implication that the system would remember this later (which is not very much of a promise, frankly). From time to time, an ambassador could be prevailed upon to take a minority candidate or a woman, and then sometimes they proved to be very happy with it, frankly. But often a pretty fair amount of arm-twisting had to be done. And if, in the end, the ambassador said, "No, I cannot do this," the attempt would then be made to present two or three different candidates, one of whom finally might fill the bill, at least have some minimal qualification. But even then, in the end, if the ambassador resisted, usually the Department was not willing to force-assign a DCM.

Q: Did you see any of these forced marriages between an ambassador and a DCM, who was either a woman or a minority, where it proved to be a disaster?

MAHONEY: Well, when you say disaster...I very clearly saw cases where it didn't prove productive, but the ambassadors got the message that they were to do everything to prevent what might be called an open rupture or a break or a recall or anything like that. You had cases where the ambassador just worked around, isolated, or did not involve the DCM, and where it was not a useful experience, but there were other cases where it was. After all, even in regular DCM assignments, where presumably the ambassador began by getting somebody who was his or her friend, 50 percent of them supposedly didn't work out anyway.

Q: There is an attitude, which is suspected anyway, of people who are given "protected" status (we're talking now about minorities or women or something). That this develops a not overly productive sense in the person. In other words, they feel they deserve the assignment and therefore don't give it their all. I'm putting this forward not that I advocate this, but I've heard this expressed. From your perspective, did you find this to be a problem?

MAHONEY: No, I don't think that's true. What I found, not only with minorities, but with many other people, too, was that they went into the Foreign Service with a huge, inflated idea of their own abilities. And if you combined that with a lack of understanding about how the system actually works, you got the sense that many people felt they were entitled to assignments that by most outside objective criteria, they were not entitled to. And then, if they didn't get the assignment, they thought this was the result of some kind of plot against them, some kind of conspiracy theory. It was the only way, because I'm so wonderful, how could I not get this job except that somebody is a racist or a sexist or something else like this.

But, no, I didn't get any sense about minorities or anybody else that they didn't try to produce at about the same level as other people. Sometimes it worked out, and sometimes it didn't.

I do think that many of the minorities that came into the Department were less well prepared for what the Department wanted. That their intellectual skills had not been developed (not that they didn't have the potential, but that they had not been developed). The writing, the analytical skills, all this kind of stuff were just not as well developed.

I used to say to people, "Remember what Freud said, `Sometimes my cigar is a sex symbol, but sometimes it's just a cigar.'" The point being that sometimes you don't get the assignment because you're not the best candidate, not because of racism or sexism. That if you run everything through the racist or the sexist filter, then you are going to be engaged in an interpretation of reality that is not correct. And that in fact I found the Department full of people bending over backwards to try to find qualified minorities and women, because of the pressure that was brought to bear to find qualified minorities and women.

But many people, and not limited to minorities and women, were always convinced that they didn't get what they wanted because of some elaborate plot out there. But once they got into jobs, they did the best they could.

Q: I've heard horror stories (and, granted, being out of the business, you just hear the horror stories), about either women or minorities, of people who really were considered by their supervisor (and I'm hearing from the supervisor, grant you) to be incompetent or they didn't do stuff, but everybody was afraid to touch them because they belonged to one of these privileged classes. Did you find this any of a problem, or not?

MAHONEY: The State Department is notorious for not writing honest efficiency reports, which is the way you deal with performance problems, along with counseling and training. The number of white male Americans who made their way up in the State Department who I thought were wildly incompetent didn't seem to me to be any more egregious than minorities or women.

Yes, there were a number of minority officers who were wildly incompetent and about whom people were afraid to write honest efficiency reports. But there were others about whom in fact very blunt and honest efficiency reports were written. So I don't see that. I think that that's just the tendency, on the part of people sometimes, to generalize from an unpleasant experience. It's heightened by the fact that it was a minority that might have been forced upon them, and so they see it as a thing. But, no, I didn't.

Q: Can you talk a bit about something I used to find difficult when I was doing somewhat the same job, of counseling somebody whom you realize, after you look at their record, was a good journeyman person perhaps, but they had reached their peak, and they really weren't going anywhere, if the system was an efficient one. Was this a problem, of getting the person to be realistic?

MAHONEY: Yes and no. I found consular people, in general, to be much more realistic than what I came to understand about political and economic officers. I didn't find consular officers, generally, a few yes, but generally, unrealistic about their prospects.

Many of them quite clearly understood, and if they didn't, it was made plain to them, that there were certain trade-offs in one's career. That if you kept shuttling between Paris and Rome and London, instead of spending time in places like the Dominican Republic and the Philippines, you were much less likely to get promoted and therefore to get the rewards and so forth of the system.

But, yes, there are always a few people who absolutely can't seem to develop any self-knowledge at all. You did the best you could with them. There's no magic formula.

Q: As you know, Mike, I'm a generation ahead of you, and I come from a different generation of consular officers. My group came up in a way that was perhaps comparable to minorities or women, where we had to sort of fight in order to maintain status within the ranks of the Foreign Service, political officers being top; economic officers off to one side, but kind of with political officers; and then consular officers were ranked with admin. In the British Service, they would say we were considered "other" officers in "other" ranks. It was somewhat of that attitude. But you're coming at it at a different time, and you're looking at it in really the early '90s. How did you find it at that time?

MAHONEY: My view of the State Department is that the State Department is an entity whose dominant culture is the culture of political reporting, analysis, relations between nations, and that that kind of work is the dominant value of the State Department, and that the greatest rewards are given to people who are considered to be good in those lines of endeavor, not people who are good in terms of program management or anything like that.

Having said that, the cone system, as I said before, had the effect of providing, I believe, a sufficient amount of reward for other ranks, as you might say, to stimulate fair numbers of very talented people to go into that kind of work.

But there's no question that in terms of status, the political element is first, the economic element is second, and admin and consular are somewhere else. I think status is one thing, but if you provide sufficient other types of rewards, you can take care of people. And there's plenty of opportunity for consular cone officers who want to do non-consular work, if they have the energy and the brains to do it, given the multi-functional system. And there are multi-functional promotion numbers to reward you for going out of cone.

So I think that that's still there, and I think that it suddenly pops out and regresses occasionally, when you see proposals such as that to combine admin and consular, and the various other ways that occasionally come up to in fact try to put more promotion numbers over on the political/economic side of the pie, and the fact that the ultimate rewards -- ambassadorships and very senior policy positions -- don't go to consular officers. And if you're going to be a consular officer, you'd better realize that fairly early on. I think most people do. The ones who really want to get out of consular work are able to do so. So I think, from that point of view, it's a lot better.

Q: Did the political process intrude at all at these mid-level ranks? Were you called up and told that you had to place the secretary of Senator So and So in a nice consular post in Paris?

MAHONEY: No, I didn't see anything like that. I just don't think that's very common.

What's more interesting is how the dynamics of the assignment process work in terms of the relationship between Central Personnel and the rest of the State Department, and the sort of constant struggle as to who, as Humpty Dumpty said, is going to be master. As I said before, in the personnel system, most assignments are the ratification of an agreement that's already taken place between the individual and the bureau that person is going to.

Now the central system had certain goals that it, at different times, was trying to fulfill. For example, people who went to senior training were supposed to get preference for assignments and to be assigned ahead of the regular cycle, that sort of thing. But often the bureaus did not want those people when they were brought up for these jobs they were going to be assigned to.

But, no, externally, in terms of political pressure outside the Department, I don't think there was a lot of that going on, especially at middle- and lower-level assignments.

But I do think that the way to look at the personnel system is to think of it as a feudal system, in which the director-general of the Foreign Service, although having a distinctive title and therefore the implication of some greater authority and power, is one player among many in the assignment process.

Q: Sort of like a king with a lot of dukes and counts and all.

MAHONEY: Not even a king. The king of the State Department is the secretary of state, and the earl is the deputy secretary. Then you have a lot of barons, and they're always maneuvering one another in this constellation of force. And the director-general is one kind of baron. But the director-general, and the director-general's immediate people, also realize that they have to get assignments later, and they want to go here and there, and they have to maintain relationships with all these other barons. so, you have a whole series of rules of assignments and all this stuff. But the first rule of assignment is that the director-general can make any assignment. And so a lot of strange assignments get made, there's no question of that.

Q: It's always been very interesting to me that, normally, personnel in most organizations is basically a clerical job off to one side. Here, we have people highly recruited, many people with advanced degrees. And although it's an ugly term, it's true, it is an elite organization. And yet you and I both have been in Personnel. What is there about Personnel that will attract officers to take this?

MAHONEY: Certainly from a consular officer's point of view, it's the same impulse that brings you into the consular business to begin with, which is that you have an opportunity to perform a genuine service to people. You advise them about the system, help them get assignments, in some cases go to the Assignments Panel and argue in shootouts and get them assignments that they want. It's a legitimate service function. And I found that it provided tremendous satisfaction at the end of the day. You had specific tasks you had to do, a certain number of people to get assigned, and very clear-cut results to your efforts. So I found it very stimulating.

I think the sad thing about the way the Department runs it is that it's constantly, especially at the top, run by people who have no experience at it, and it therefore constantly has to be reinventing itself and stepping over its own feet and getting itself in all kinds of terrible problems.

But I found it to be very satisfying work.

Q: As far as onward assignments, did being in Personnel generally mean that you had a pretty good chance of...

MAHONEY: Well, yes. But again, the reason for that was because the people in Personnel have to work with the client bureaus that they're dealing with. And because onward assignments are largely in the purview of the bureaus, that is where you have the opportunity. It's not being in Personnel, it's the contact and the ability to, over a year or two of work, please the bureaus that you're dealing with that are of much greater assistance.

I was working on the assignment of consular officers. I worked intensely with the Consular Bureau on those assignments, and I obviously got a decent reward, since I went off to Rome at the end of it. If the Consular Bureau had not liked me, I certainly wouldn't have gone to Rome. And I could not have been forced into it by Central Personnel.

Q: Mike, you were in Rome from when to when?

MAHONEY: I was in Rome from November of 1993 until June of 1995.

Q: Can you describe the embassy, as it was constituted at that time, and a bit about the atmosphere there?

MAHONEY: It's a very, very big embassy. There are a large number of agencies that have located regional offices in Rome. For example, I was surprised that there were so many branches of the Justice Department present there. There was a regular FBI office in Rome. Then there was another special Justice Department office to deal with organized crime. The Immigration and Naturalization Service, which is a division of the Justice Department, has a regional office there. The Federal Aviation Administration has three

different units operating in Rome, each of them basically operating independently. There is significant military presence, because of NATO. The Agriculture Department is there. The Commerce Department is there. I think, in total, there are about 25 or 30 different entities of the United States government there. And these entities, by far, dwarf the actual State Department presence. So it's a very big, in effect, world-size embassy.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

MAHONEY: The ambassador was Reginald Bartholomew, who actually is a career government employee. I think he was the first career employee to go there since probably the end of World War II. And the view is that he was sent there because the Italian political system, I would say, not the social or economic system, but the political structure was going through a major crisis. Huge bribery and corruption scandals had erupted in the early '90s, and a very significant part of the group of people that had governed Italy on and off since the end of the war was thrown into disgrace. And I think the American government concluded that it really needed a professional diplomat there to be present. It wasn't so much a question of risk for Italian-American relations, but still, one just had to be very careful how one stepped through this very delicate situation.

Q: He had a considerable reputation. He had been in other posts, and he had been in Lebanon, too, hadn't he, during the difficult period?

MAHONEY: He was ambassador in Lebanon when the embassy was blown up, and was injured in that bombing, as a matter of fact.

Q: How did he operate, from your perspective?

MAHONEY: He had also been ambassador to Spain. He had an extensive political-military background. He came up, originally, through the Pentagon, as a policy analyst there, and then came into the State Department at a very high level in policy planning and was assistant secretary for politico-military affairs. And before he went to Italy, he was under secretary for international security affairs.

I found him to be an extremely energetic guy, who was knowledgeable on every possible foreign-policy subject, and particularly on European security affairs. He spoke quite good Italian, and he, by dint of extreme energy and a willingness to entertain and go out all the time, ensconced himself, I think, at the highest levels of Italian social and political activity, and spent a huge amount of time cultivating, I thought, very useful contacts.

So I think his strategy was really externally oriented. He paid attention to the management of the embassy when various issues came up that he felt had to be attended to, but I just don't think that his interest was in sort of sitting down and saying, okay, we have budget problems, and we have to look at the 20 different places our money goes and how we can economize, restructure, and that sort of thing. Maybe that wasn't the thing that he should be doing anyway.

But I thought he was an extremely effective ambassador in external work with Italy. He was very vigorous, for example, in pursuing American business interests, and worked at the highest levels of the Italian government when there were American corporations trying to get things done, and I think quite successfully. I thought he was a very, very capable person.

Q: I always think, when you're in the Foreign Service at a post, if you've got a highly effective chief of mission, it does things for how you work, too, doesn't it?

MAHONEY: On the consular side, in terms of business stuff, we had very little contact or need to use the ambassador's office.

And this goes into some of the sort of cosmic changes, I suppose, that have taken place in the consular business.

I did get to go to his morning staff meeting, which was, I have to say, one of the most educational experiences that one could have in life, because he tended to give long analyses of the political scene in Italy, interspersed with his own understanding of the political scene in the United States and elsewhere in Europe. He was an extremely interesting guy to listen to.

But on the specific consular side, a number of the things that might have engaged ambassadors in other years were not present.

For example, the visa waiver had entered into effect in Italy, as well as in most of Western Europe. And this meant that, with very limited exceptions, such as students and exchange visitors and so forth, Italians do not need visas to go to the United States. So the whole question of other parts of the embassy getting involved in visa activities essentially was not present in Italy.

The major part of the work that we did, and the most important part, was American Services work. But we had extremely good contacts that had been cultivated for years with the Italian authorities that we needed to deal with.

So, I would say, the front office of the embassy, with very, very limited exceptions, did not get involved in the consular business, nor we with their activities.

Q: Who was the deputy chief of mission?

MAHONEY: The deputy chief of mission was a Jim Creagan, who was also a career diplomat. I think this was his third or fourth tour in Italy.

Q: He was my political officer in Naples, and I found him a highly effective political officer. A bit nervous, but certainly he was well versed. It sounds like a very strong team.

MAHONEY: Ambassador Bartholomew was an extraordinarily quick study. Creagan provided, I suppose one would say, the kind of in-depth detail that was very useful in filling out the ambassador's picture. Creagan knew where every Italian politician had been for the last 20 years and what their perambulations through the Italian system had been and so forth. And he was always able to add very useful information to fill out the picture.

But the ambassador certainly was quite prepared, a great deal of the time, to go his own way, and do so very successfully.

Q: When you say your main job was American Services, what were some of the major things that you were dealing with?

MAHONEY: Hundreds of thousands of American tourists come to Italy every year, and they get themselves into an extraordinarily wide range of problems, apart from people actually being arrested, mostly for drug-related business.

For example, in Rome alone, in a given year, we have close to 1,000 lost or stolen passports. Rome probably has some of the most sophisticated pickpockets in the world (a great many of them non-Italian, incidentally; a lot of them are Latin Americans). So there were always Americans who had fallen into some sort of distress.

A lot of people come to Italy for religious reasons, in some cases for what one might think of as religiously psychotic reasons. Rome is, of course, the headquarters of one of the great world religions. So it attracts, I think, a fair number of people who are, in some ways, prone to losing their grip almost, in the case of religious hysteria.

Q: In diplomatic terms, we call them religious nuts.

MAHONEY: Yes, something like that. I haven't talked much specific-case stuff in this thing, but I'll give a very quick example.

We had a fellow who came over who had, I think, graduated summa cum laude from a great American university. He wanted to do, he said, some sort of research on something in the Vatican library. But he really hadn't gone through the scholarly chain to get himself into that library and to get access to its resources. We got a call one day that he had been arrested literally getting into a brawl with the Swiss Guards at the Vatican, trying to force his way into the library. And this was a fellow of apparently great, certainly in an undergraduate way, intellectual distinction. But he had flipped out in Italy at the Vatican.

A lot of people came to Rome with terminal illnesses, hoping to find some sort of miracle cure.

So we spent a lot of time on this kind of stuff.

Q: If an American was arrested on a drug charge, what was the procedure?

MAHONEY: The Italians were pretty good about contacting us. Even if you were carrying a fairly significant amount of narcotics, the sentences usually were not more than about five or six years. The conditions in the Italian prisons, I thought, were fairly benign. You couldn't get out, but people didn't seem to be unhappy to be in jail in Italy in the way that I've known them to be in places like Mexico. I found the Italians generally very cooperative. We would go and visit the prisoners. They usually all, as far as I could tell, appeared to be quite guilty, caught with the goods. I thought we had a very good working relationship.

Q: Even though a person had a five-year sentence, did the Italians, from time to time, as is done in some countries, just sort of basically kick them out after two or three years?

MAHONEY: Sometimes they would do that. If the people had any kind of good story.

We had a woman who left the United States, went, I guess, to Colombia, and was flying through Rome somewhere, and they caught her with two or three kilograms of cocaine. She had left an 11- or 12-year-old daughter (this is a one-parent family) back in the United States, in New York. And basically the daughter fell into the hands, then, of the New York Social Services Agency. We presented this situation to the Italian court, and although the woman was sentenced to seven years in jail, after about five months they let her go. She went back to the United States.

Q: Did Rome issue immigrant visas?

MAHONEY: No, the immigrant visas in Italy are issued only in Naples. By the time I arrived, the number of visas had declined to something on the order of about 1,800 a year, and of those only about 1,200 were actually issued to Italians. So that you could see that there had been a kind of astonishing change in these, considering that at the end of the nineteenth century, millions of Italians immigrated to the United States. Even after World War II, I think it's safe to say, hundreds of thousands immigrated. Now, it's almost a nonexistent industry.

Q: Were there any problems with Italian Americans coming back to the homeland and wanting to settle down, and they find that they either get in trouble or have problems?

MAHONEY: I would say really only with sort of horrible bureaucratic disputes. Italy is a country that is incredibly bureaucratized.

If you want to get an Italian driver's license, you have to go through a process that can take you days, if not weeks, involving dozens of steps between various agencies of the Italian government. And this drove [no pun intended] some Americans, including Italian Americans, crazy. So what you found often was that there were many, many people living in Italy who simply spent ten, 15 years driving around on American driver's licenses.

Some of them had imported cars from the United States, and they drove those cars around with American license plates for ten or 15 years. And every now and then, one of them would suddenly fall into the hands of the Italian authorities and find themselves in a nightmarish labyrinth from which it was almost impossible to emerge.

Some people got into property disputes of an unbelievable nature. They would buy a piece of property and then find out that 15 other people had claims to it, and that these claims went back to 1820, and sorting this thing out became almost impossible.

I wouldn't say there were a myriad of these cases, but there were enough of them to keep things interesting.

Q: During the time you were there, there was a tremendous unraveling of this almost enshrined corruption that grew up after World War II, with the Christian Democrats sort of leading the way. Did the corruption problem, in any form, get the Consular Section involved?

MAHONEY: No, as I say, in part because the visa business had really gone away, you didn't see that except as a kind of general interesting intellectual backdrop to what was going on in the country.

The Italian Socialist Party, incidentally, really ceased to exist. It's gone now; there's no such thing anymore as what one thought of as the Italian Socialist Party.

What interested me about the consular business in Italy was the change in overall approach to the work.

The consulate in Rome, for example, had implemented the use of the machine-readable-visa system, as had the consulate in Naples and the consulate in Milan. We also had the automated passport-issuance system in effect. These were certainly wave-of-the-future items that were major steps in the automation revolution that's been going on in the consular business almost since I came in.

At the same time, the forces of consolidation were dramatically at work. In the last ten years in Italy, they've closed posts at Turin, at Palermo, and at Genoa. And the Department had made a decision to close the post in Florence, but there may have been a last-minute reprieve. In fact, they are really beginning to nibble around the edges of the idea of closing in Naples.

This is a trend present not only in Italy, but in many other countries where historically we've had large numbers of constituent posts, and where one of the arguments for the constituent posts has been the need for consular services. Because of budgetary problems and because of the advantages of modern communications -- fax and so forth -- the trend is increasingly toward consolidating consular operations at one post in a country, even

large countries, perhaps maximum, two posts. You could certainly see that tendency at work in Italy, and I think it'll be going further.

The use of the machine-readable-visa is one of the more controversial developments among consular officers in the last ten years. But so much has been invested in it, and it's so necessary for the anti-fraud profile of the Department, that I certainly think that sort of thing is here to stay, and that, in fact, it will be expanded on in various ways.

So those kinds of trends and issues were what I found really interesting about the work in Italy.

I was the consul-general in Rome, with the responsibility of being the reviewing officer for ratings of chief consular officers at other posts. So I had, through that role, influence and leverage on consular operations elsewhere in Italy.

Q: I was consul-general in Naples, '79 to '81. Naples has traditionally been sort of the entrepot for the United States for immigrant visas. Even when I was there, it was down to maybe 3,000, which was rather small potatoes compared to posts such as Manila or Seoul. Were you being asked to say whether we needed Naples as a consular post?

MAHONEY: By the time I got to Rome, Naples had shrunk to a post that had two consular officers only, eight Foreign Service nationals, a political/economic officer, a principal officer, an admin officer, and a USIS officer. That was the whole operation.

As you will recall, the consulate is lodged in this huge building on the oceanfront in Naples. The consulate building is now full of empty space, and there was a real question as to whether that building was necessary, whether it needed to be maintained, whether other government tenants could be got into that building, and whether, in fact, the services were necessary.

Now people argued, well, you had to have the consular services there because of the military base. But then people said, look, they closed the consulate in Palermo where there are military bases in Sicily, and life went on.

And then there was the issue: Did you need to have separate political reporting from Naples? Did you really need a separate USIS office in Naples? If you got down to having a post with two or three officers, in this huge building that required a lot of maintenance and upkeep, what was the point?

I, and others, argued that it was very necessary to have representation in the southern half of Italy.

Really the main case for that, on the consular side, is that outside of the Western Hemisphere, Italy has the largest number of Social Security beneficiaries in the world, and half of those are in Naples and to the south in Italy. That is, there are 40,000

beneficiaries in Italy, 20,000 in Naples and going south, and that those people needed to be serviced. There were ten Foreign Service nationals in Naples whose job it was to do federal-benefits work, and that they needed to be there, and that that presence was required. And that was the most certainly compelling argument from the consular side.

Q: I, even when I was there, which was a decade before, thought that Naples, for anything but the Social Security, could be closed. But there was the other problem, and I think a very serious political problem, of closing down a post that traditionally had been a source of great Italian migration to the United States.

Incidentally, when everybody says they came from Naples to the United States, nobody ever lived in Naples. (The Neapolitans didn't go to the United States; Neapolitans are a different breed of cat.) But they went through Naples, and they may have lived nearby, and they said they were from Naples, but I think you'll find very few were true Neapolitans. They have their own life.

Going back to these meetings you had. You were the new boy on the block, which is always an interesting period, because you're absorbing these things, you're politically aware and all. What was the feeling that you were getting from listening to the ambassador, talking to officers, and just being in Italy? Italy was going through a very traumatic period, as it continues to do. What was your impression of the Italian political scene and what it was doing at that time?

MAHONEY: In fact, it was going through a tremendous upheaval. I would say maybe a third to a half of the people who had been in the Italian parliament, let's say, in 1991 or '92 not only were gone by 1993 and '94, but most of them might have been in jail or under arrest. All kinds of former prime ministers. Craxi, who had been prime minister many times, had, in effect, taken himself off to exile in Tunisia. Andreotti, even now, as we talk, is on trial in Sicily for alleged Mafia-related association.

A completely new political party was founded by a man named Silvio Berlusconi, a big television and media magnate from northern Italy. Berlusconi was elected to parliament and became prime minister in the spring of 1994, with a completely new political movement. The real question was whether this sort of new impulse was going to, in effect, win out or whether it would end up being diluted and basically transformed by the old nature of Italian politics.

Berlusconi was forced out after seven months in office, and a complete cabinet (maybe this could only happen in Italy) of people who were not members of parliament, non-elected people, was put in, in a sense, kind of as a government of good managers. And that government remains in office today. Even though it was seen as a government that was only going to last a few months, it's already been in about a year, and may continue for a while.

So it's like the line in the poem, "Slouching toward Bethlehem to be born." The thing is trying to be born, but whether, in fact, it will be born is a question. But the individuals who represented the old order have definitely been disgraced and are gone.

On the other hand, as to whether the nature of Italian politics, and the way Italians do their politics, is going to change, there were many people around the embassy who were very skeptical about that.

Q: Was there a line that the embassy was taking on this whole thing?

MAHONEY: The ambassador's point all the time was that our job was to manage the Italian-American relationship through this period of very high seas and storm on the Italian political scene. That we were not taking sides behind any particular faction, but that at the end of the day, we wanted to be assured that the relationship between the United States and Italy remained intact, and that we really did not make mistakes or get ourselves cast into the wrong kind of role as that process went forward. And I think he was very careful and sensible about how he did that.

The Italians, certainly, since the end of World War II, seemed to have very strong expectations that the United States somehow would intervene in their politics. And the point that the ambassador was making was that we were not going to intervene or interfere in any way in their politics, but that we wished to maintain good relationships with the political players, and that it was for the Italians themselves to sort out.

For example, the post-Fascist movement that had managed four or five percent of the vote in Italy since the end of World War II...

Q: MSD or something?

MAHONEY: MSI, which rather transformed itself, got a new leader, and put in a new constitution of its own that really finally abjured Fascism and spoke in terms of democracy. And for the first time since World War II, in the summer of 1994, the leader of the MSI was invited to the 4th of July reception, as was, by the way, the leader of the far-left Communists. This was seen as a statement by the embassy that all of these political players now had their role, and that we were going to be in communication with all of them. And I think that was a sensible and healthy thing to do.

Q: Were there any great consular cases that you had to deal with that gave you lots of trouble?

MAHONEY: There were one or two that were very illuminating, I thought, in a way, of Italy.

In one case, a family -- a father, a mother, a seven-year-old boy, and a five-year-old girl -- were traveling at night in southern Italy to get the ferry to Sicily. And as they went down the road south of Naples, a couple of people tried to stop their car and rob them.

Although there was very little violent confrontational crime in Italy, and even direct holdups in the streets were very unusual, there were occasional incidents on the highway south of Naples.

When the family tried to drive away, the would-be robbers fired a shot at the car. The shot penetrated the trunk of the car and struck the head of the seven-year-old boy, who was sleeping in the back seat. The parents did not realize this initially. They drove down the road until they came to a sign that said "POLICE," and they pulled in and said that this incident had happened. Then they noticed that the seven-year-old was not stirring, and finally discovered the bullet wound. The child died in a hospital about 12 hours later.

The parents decided to donate a number of organs from the boy to Italian children -- kidneys, parts of the eye, other things.

Italy is a country that has probably the lowest rate of organ donation in Europe. Italians are famous for going all over the European Community, trying to get organs, because they can't get them in Italy. There are a number, I guess, of cultural and religious historical reasons for this.

The fact that the Americans were willing to do this had a tremendous impact on Italians, such that within a couple of days, the three remaining members of this family were brought to Rome, and on very short notice I was told to organize a call for them on both the president of Italy and the prime minister of Italy, which I did, and accompanied them to these meetings.

The prime minister, Berlusconi, to his great credit, had no media present, took no photographs, and treated it as an extremely dignified occasion, after which he made available the prime minister's jet, to return this family to their home in California, at no expense to them, and provided, separately, an Italian military jet to fly the coffin of the child back to the United States.

Throughout Italy, for months afterwards, playgrounds, schools, shopping centers, streets were being named after this child. And the embassy got a constant stream of communication from memorials, from all over Italy, to be forwarded to this family, which we undertook to do. So we obviously had a tremendous amount of work to do.

The family came back to Italy about eight months later, and were taken, in sort of triumphant procession, all over the country, honored and speechified and so forth.

I couldn't imagine a similar phenomenon in the United States, but something about which the Italians, once they got into this kind of thing, had no limits, in a sense. It was quite a fantastic phenomenon.

One other case that was quite interesting was a major child-custody case involving a very well-known American modern artist, named Jeffrey Koons, who works in New York and makes things like rabbits, huge, large, as-big-as-people rabbits, out of aluminum that he sells to museums for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

He married an Italian woman named Ilona Staler, whose public pseudonym was Chichalina. She had been an Italian pornographic film star, subsequently elected to the Italian parliament, where she became notorious for all kinds of striptease activities in public while a member of parliament. Mr. Koons met Ms. Staler, and although each hardly spoke the other's language, they got married and produced a child, who they named Ludwig Maximillian Koons.

They were living in a 17-room apartment in Manhattan, when, I guess, Mrs. Koons became disillusioned with the situation and, without notice, took the child to Italy, where, two or three months later, the father came and managed to get his hands on the child for a few hours, and spirited the child out of the country, back to the United States, to begin divorce and custody proceedings.

The wife went to New York. Since they were still married, the court found that she was entitled to live in the apartment. The artist, Mr. Koons, provided a bodyguard for the child while his wife was there. One day, after the court case had been going on for about six months, Mrs. Staler said they were out of bread and milk and so forth, and asked the bodyguard if he would go to a convenience store, which was just located about 100 feet from the entrance to the apartment. The bodyguard agreed, and he went down to the convenience store.

In the two or three minutes he was gone, a car pulled up in front of the apartment, and Mrs. Staler spirited the child out to the car, subsequently out of the United States, and back to Italy, where Mr. Koons, shortly thereafter, arrived.

And a huge, contentious legal battle commenced in Italy, which I think is still going on, involving the spending of huge sums of money. Mr. Koons's attorney is Theodore F. Sorensen, who was at one time the counsel to President John F. Kennedy. So it gives you an idea of the level of activity. And that was still going on when I left.

So there were very interesting consular events that went on in Italy.

Q: What are sort of the rules of engagement for a consular officer when you get between, say, the native-born mother in a county, or native-born father, and the American who is trying to get the child, when it's all happening on your turf?

MAHONEY: The rules of engagement simply are that one gives as much attention as possible to the American party, tries to follow the case as closely as possible through the local legal system, and if it appears that the child is being in any way mistreated, works through social welfare authorities in the host country to check on the child's situation and see what's happening. That really is about all that we can do. We're not in a position, with a country like Italy, to argue that they don't have a functioning legal system. But it's a very delicate and difficult situation, because, obviously, the American parent is in a very aggrieved situation.

The whole issue of child custody wasn't a significant issue in Italy; there weren't many cases. But it's become one of the major growth industries of the consular business in the last ten or 15 years. There are now an estimated 3,000 or 4,000 cases worldwide. And with certain countries, particularly in the Middle East, it's a subject that has reached the highest levels of intergovernmental relations.

Q: You had been sort of a Washington hand for quite a while. Did you feel the hand of Consular Affairs in the Department of State coming in and trying to get you to do things you didn't want to do, or just getting involved?

MAHONEY: I would say not very much in Italy. I just don't think Italy was a country with very significant consular problems. The workload was going down, not up. A number of posts were closing. The number of personnel was declining. I myself had very, very infrequent communications with the Department, and they with me. It wasn't a post that drew a lot of interest, I don't think.

Q: Well, Mike, as a wrap-up on this, you've been involved in consular management much more than many other people, and we're both old consular hands, where do you see the consular situation going today?

MAHONEY: There are a couple of things. One is that we face a period of either static or declining resources. That is, the old agenda, which existed from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, where the consular function put in, year in and year out, its requests for additional positions based on increasing workloads and those positions were simply granted, is gone now.

So how does one cope? There are several strategies. One is to try to get permission to retain certain sorts of consular fees, particularly fees that are received from foreigners and therefore are not a tax or a charge to American citizens.

Q: You're talking about the fees going directly to consular expenses as opposed to going into, as they usually do, the general U.S. fund.

MAHONEY: Right. Exactly. In the last couple of years, the Consular Bureau got permission to levy a fee on machine-readable visas, and to keep that money for increasing automation, anti-fraud, and what we refer to as border management. So far, they've gotten

permission to retain $107 million, which is a pretty big piece of change. But that permission was given on a temporary basis, and the consular function and the Department itself, I think, are interested in trying to make that permanent.

And then the issue is: How would you apply that money, if you're not going to be able to apply it to pay additional positions, which I don't think you're going to be able to do?

There are a lot of revolutionary possibilities in automation. I'll give you an example.

Imagine that we put in, for example, a series of kiosks at ten or 15 places in London, which is a post where we still do several hundred thousand visas a year, even though not so many, specifically, of British citizens. A person can come up to one of these kiosks, which, like an automated teller machine, functions 24 hours a day, punch in their name, and then a questionnaire will come up on the screen, asking them their date of birth, their type of employment, the number of years they've been employed, do they have credit cards, a whole series of questions that a visa interviewer would normally ask, or that a Foreign Service national would have to make sure were filled in on a form. After the person answers all these questions, they push a button, and the information goes off the screen. The computer has a series of profiles, by nationality, by age, by income, whatever, that it immediately does a sort on, based on the information that's given at the kiosk. And then a message comes up on the screen that says, for instance, "Please come to the embassy," (or some other processing point) "one week from today at 9:30 in the morning, for further processing of your visa." In the meantime, that information is printed out back at the embassy, or wherever, and it's looked at again by an American officer. It's already been transferred into the visa-lookout system, and the lookout has been done. And a decision is basically made whether to issue that visa or not, based on the profile.

Think of all the work that this can save and the convenience to the applicant. And imagine putting this sort of system at the 100 largest visa-issuing posts around the world.

That's one sort of thing that you can do if you have resources.

On the personnel side, there is no longer any requirement for a consular commission, to issue a visa, to visit an American in jail. And they're about to amend the regulations so that passports can be issued and notarials done by people that do not have consular commissions. And what this means is that, I think, a significant number of people, mostly American family members, are going to be doing a large part of the functional work that has been done in recent years by consular officers, by people with commissions.

There is an intense argument that goes on all the time on this subject as to what this is going to lead to and whether it's going to produce a parallel personnel system that ultimately is going to crash and burn, because we will be making the equivalent of appointments without having a competitive process.

But for the moment, this is very definitely a program that's in train.

All these people who are called consular associates or have other labels have to take the consular course at FSI. But there are a lot of people doing that work now, and there will be more doing it in the future. And this is seen as basically a resource saver.

I think the use of consular agents is going to increase. The justification for the existence of many posts around the world now is that they provide emergency services to Americans. But that can be done by consular agents, who are people that are hired basically on contract, local residents, usually Americans, but not necessarily so, who can be there if the American is arrested, if the American has to go for emergency medical treatment. They can receive passport applications and send them off by courier service to a central processing point to do passports for Americans resident in their district.

I see consolidation of consular work at perhaps one post in every country as a future thing. They've already, in the United States, instituted huge consolidated operations for both passports and visa processing, in New Hampshire on the site of the former Pease Air Force Base. I think more of that is coming.

To produce these computer programs, to field-test them, to distribute them, this is what you use the money for that you get from fee retention, so that you have a reliable stream of income to do innovative stuff with the consular business.

Q: Your last job in Washington was as a personnel officer. It's seems like you're cutting off the consular training of young officers and all that. How will that affect it, do you think?

MAHONEY: All junior officers still have to do a consular tour. But even with them doing that, there are not enough people to do the work. And so the issue is: Do you bring in more junior officers to try to do this or not? And they're not going to. In fact, because they're shrinking the size of the Foreign Service, they're bringing in fewer junior officers. So I think everybody is still going to be exposed to consular work. And I think that has been very salutary in the last five or ten years. But at the working level, at what we would call the consular line level, there simply have to be other solutions found than junior officers. But I don't think that those officers coming in are, in effect, going to miss out on that experience.

I think that if you are able to eliminate more and more of what I would think of as the routine work -- the filling in of forms, the asking of the same million questions to everybody -- that will help to reduce the disillusion that many junior officers feel at the factory-like aspects of consular work, especially at large, busy, Third-World posts. That will, in turn, enable these officers to do more work with the most complicated and interesting cases, and enable them to see that consular work is not (which it really isn't) a lifetime of line-interviewing activity.

So I don't think they will miss the experience, but I think the experience can be changed for them. And I think that more of the better and brighter incoming officers can be stimulated to do consular work. Although it is still true, even under this new, kind of very strange coning system that they have, that a number of very capable people that I saw coming in were still opting to do consular work.

Q: Again, we're talking about a certain generational thing. I left before the major impact of these things, which happened really in the last decade, and the pressures. But I do go back to my experience of having essentially the same job you had in Personnel, dealing with consular people, back about '67, '69ish. And I was involved with Loren Lawrence in, in a sense, disassembling an old consular thing that had been using staff officers, and bringing in people not through the exam, but either the spouses, couriers, secretaries, people who essentially couldn't pass the Foreign Service exam, bringing them in just to do what we would call the line work. This had been going on for years. However, what had happened was that if somebody had done well and put in their time, eventually they got a commission, and eventually they moved up to the mid grade of consular operations. Today, it would be about the FS2 or 1 thing. And these people were limited. They resented the young officers. The young officers didn't care for these people who rose there, because, frankly, for the most part, with very honorable exceptions, they were rather bureaucratic, had limited interest in foreign affairs, and were just a completely different breed of cat than the younger officer coming in. But they had achieved this middle-rank thing, where they were both rating officers and running a lot of things. And this is what had sort of poisoned the well of consular work. And so I was involved in trying to get rid of these people and turn it into something else. I realize what is happening now, and it's a different thing, but my concern would be that creep from being the wife of a Foreign Service political officer, who does consular work, and everybody loves good old Joe or good old Suzy, and she or he gets a commission. But Joe or Suzy is not of the same caliber as somebody selected by a highly competitive thing. Do you see this as a problem?

MAHONEY: Oh, I do, and I've made this argument for the last several years. But the dilemma is that the way the argument is now presented, what is the alternative? The work is there, the officers are not going to be brought in to do the work. At the same time, on the other side, there is tremendous pressure, shall we say, to enrich the experience of people's spouses and other family members who go overseas accompanying the principal. And there seems to be an immediate blend between the two. Many, many of the spouses that I've seen are very energetic, intelligent, capable people.

The issue that you raise, of creep, and what I call equity, which is that if a spouse does this work for a couple of years, and has a security clearance, which is portable to the next post, in fact, in some cases, I think they are going to begin making assignments in Washington, not through post selection of PITS, but in Washington...

Q: PITS being...

MAHONEY: A part-time, intermittent, temporary person who is not a permanent employee. In general, those positions have been filled through applications and the decision of a committee at the post after people have arrived. Now, they're talking about making Foreign Service Associate (or whatever the label is) assignments to these positions in Washington, as part of the principal's assignment to a post.

So someone does this for two years, or does it for four years, or six years, gets good efficiency reports, and, in effect, in the most tangible terms, does precisely the same kind of work as an officer, they then begin to say, "Why don't I get paid the same amount of money as the officer? What about retirement benefits? What about the thrift savings plan? What about everything that goes with being a permanent employee?" I see that definitely as a problem down the road.

But the answer for management (and I see where they're coming from, too) is, "That's later. We have to live now."

So this is coming; there's no question about it. And the issue then is going to be: How best is it going to be managed?

But you're exactly right. The difference is that we're not talking about taking people who had already been employed in other aspects of the State Department, permanent employees, and shifting them over to another category of permanent employment. So far, no one speaks of doing that. There's not a notion that you're going to take the diplomatic courier or the computer technician or what have you and put them out there doing this work, because the initial notion of doing this work is that it is not work done by permanent employees.

Q: Is there anything else we might discuss?

MAHONEY: No, I think that covers it pretty well, except to say that I enjoyed my time in the Foreign Service, that it was lots of fun, and I basically got out of it everything that I had hoped to.

Q: Good. Well, thank you.

End of interview