

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

AMBASSADOR RICHARD W. MURPHY

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 6th of December, 2017 with Ambassador Richard Murphy; I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy, on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Dick, let's start at the beginning; where and when were you born?

MURPHY: It was July 1929 in Boston City Hospital. My family was already based in Manchester, New Hampshire and I spent my first seven years there where my father was managing a shoe company.

Q: What I'd like to do before we move on, take a dive a bit. First, what do you know about your father's side of the family? Where do they come from and all?

MURPHY: My father's family was of Irish origin from County Kerry. His father had come to the States as a small boy and he grew up in Natick, Massachusetts. My mother was of German-Scottish background. They were living in the neighboring towns of Natick and South Natick. His family was Catholic and hers Protestant. Hers entertained some of that community's commonly held derogatory views of the Irish. My mother's father was U.S.-born; his father came from Germany and he established a retail lumber/coal company in Wellesley, a town neighboring to South Natick.

Q: What about the education of your parents? Did they go to college or not?

MURPHY: Both did. My father went to Norwich Military Academy, just before the First World War, and he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant on graduation and went straight into the regular Army. Mother was a graduate of Wellesley College, I think she was from the class of 1917. Mother was one of four girls. My father was one of three boys and three girls.

Q: It's interesting because you and I are both the same generation; I was born in 1928. Very few of the people of that generation had parents who had more than one year of college at most.

MURPHY: He went the full four years of military academy. Norwich, if you were at a certain level in your class, you were automatically commissioned in the regular Army. It was not affiliated with West Point, but had a solid standing in the world of military education.

Q: I'm very familiar with it. What about your early years, where do the memories kick in?

MURPHY: Early years kick in in Manchester, New Hampshire – mainly the miserable winters of New Hampshire, wearing those old-fashioned galoshes with metal clasps which were hell on wheels to put on when it was snowing and your fingers were freezing. We were there for my first seven years, when the depression closed down shoe manufacturing in the northern states and my father took a job with a silver manufacturing company in Attleboro, Massachusetts. My mother had been gradually drawn into the family business in Wellesley. Her father succeeded in creating a certain sense of guilt on her part for not working at the company. He had no heir and successor and she was unofficially so designated. She resisted for years but gradually put in more and more time with the company, first commuting from Manchester and later from Attleboro.

After four years there we moved to Wellesley Hills, which was much more convenient for her to work full time at the company. It was about then that the Second World War broke out and my father enthusiastically went back into the service. He had stayed in touch with the military and was commander of the Massachusetts National Guard for several years in the 1930s. He always had enjoyed the military but felt, as so many did after the First War, that you had to go out and make a career in civilian life. He never really flourished in civilian life and was happy to get back to the army. He returned to Army service as Lieutenant-Colonel. In the course of the war he was promoted to Colonel, in charge of training troops down in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Q: How about your early years? Where did you first go to school?

MURPHY: I was in public school through the sixth grade in Wellesley. I then was enrolled in Roxbury Latin School in Roxbury, Massachusetts. It was a day school with a long-established tough academic program. You suffered memorizing dates and all the facts and figures in its history courses. Latin was on the curriculum for six years. I was there for only two years, then joined my brother who was two years older, at Phillips

Exeter in New Hampshire. With my father in the Army and my brother off at school, my mother decided it was better if I joined him up there, given her preoccupations with the family business.

Q: How did you find Phillips Exeter?

MURPHY: I loved it. It was a total break from the life that I had known. Exeter was a small town, the county capital. The school was a world unto itself. It was wartime, and there was no gasoline for families to visit. For Thanksgiving holiday in the fall we'd take a train to Boston and then on to Wellesley for the only visit in the fall semester. The school worked hard to keep you busy given the isolation from family and normal life. They made a point of starting classes early in the morning, breaking for lunch, then you'd go off for a sports program – they had a pretty big choice of sports- that was followed by another class in late afternoon. They filled your day. It was a great environment.

Q: Did you get much in the way of religion?

MURPHY: No. My father's family was Roman Catholic, and I was confirmed as a Catholic. Beyond sending me to Sunday school to get ready for confirmation, I didn't get much in terms of a Catholic upbringing. Mother was Unitarian, and those worlds were far apart from one another. At Exeter, I went to the local Catholic church for a year or so. There was a non sectarian chapel at school and I gradually drifted away from Catholicism. My father's family wasn't that insistent on tracking my development so I was pretty much on my own in terms of religious practice. His family were steady church attendees, one of his sisters was a Catholic nun in Regis College, Massachusetts.

Q: At Exeter, were the boys given supervisory responsibilities? How did that work? I went to Kent at about the same time and the sixth-formers were in charge of making sure the younger boys did their work in the morning; we had to clean our rooms and classrooms. Of course this was the time of the war and help was harder to get, and also it was run by Episcopalian monks and they didn't cotton to boys being waited on, so we waited on tables. The supervision was handed over sort of to the sixth-formers, the seniors.

MURPHY: No, we didn't have that practice. You had periodic assignment to the kitchen and as bus-boy, that sort of thing. I don't recall any supervisory role over the younger kids once I became a senior. But you were expected to keep your room clean; there was a resident faculty family or teacher in every dorm who monitored (or tried to monitor) your misbehavior of the hour, enforcing lights-out and that sort of thing.

Q: You were at Exeter during the war.

MURPHY: Right, I went there in '43 and graduated in '47.

Q: How did the war affect you in your learning process?

MURPHY: You were frozen in a time capsule; the whole emphasis was on books, classes, sports. The war was a very distant affair. That changed only in my final year when we had some post-graduate classmates coming out of the service. They were at least two years older than the seniors and they brought some awareness of what had been going on. But the war wasn't pressing on our consciousness during the period of actual combat.

Q: What subjects did you particularly like or not like?

MURPHY: I was stronger in the English classes than in math or science. I really didn't get physics. We had visiting speakers at the school's daily assemblies and one was Margaret Mead the anthropologist. She gave a stunning lecture (to a 17-year-old's ears) about her work in the South Pacific islands I went to her afterwards and said, "I think I might like to be an anthropologist." She quickly replied "Good – but don't study it as an undergraduate in college; it's not a discipline yet which is useful for an undergraduate". So I pressed, "What do you recommend I take?" She said, "Physics." I was dismayed because I had had trouble understanding the principle of the lever even when shown a film in science class of people chopping trees down and making logs which amply demonstrated the principle of the lever. I asked her, "Why physics?" and she replied "Because it's going to be very important for future anthropologists to have an understanding of isotopes."

I just memorized that and when I went to Harvard the next fall, I called on the Dean of the Anthropology Department. I said I was planning to be an anthropologist but of course I wouldn't be studying it as an undergraduate. He asked "Why not?" I said, "It's not well developed yet for an undergraduate." "So what are you going to major in?" I replied, "Physics, because the knowledge of isotopes is going to be so important in the future." He said, "Who the hell told you that?" I said, "Margaret Mead." He said, "God, I thought so. But she's half right."

Anyway, that's skipping ahead. In those years I didn't know what I wanted to do except it would probably not be working in the family business. I graduated cum laude from Exeter and had a good enough grade average. There were a very good bunch of teachers but no matter how good, they couldn't turn me on to math and the physical sciences.

Q: Did you have much of a social life in this period?

MURPHY: No. You had the dorm community and your roommate. There were no girls around. They would be imported once a year for a dance in the spring.

Q: Sounds familiar!

MURPHY: It wasn't exactly a fully balanced social life! Particularly in the years '43, '44, '45 you were locked down because of the restrictions on travel, so you'd get home for Christmas and Thanksgiving and once in the spring. The school was the center of life and really worked hard to keep you involved and engaged in studies and sports.

Q: What sports were you good at?

MURPHY: I didn't have any special aptitude. I had one season of soccer and a couple of football in the fall and winter. In spring I went to the gym and learned first to throw a shot-put and later the more exotic sport of throwing the hammer. The hammer was not exactly a key to teamwork and a broader society because you had to have the whole field to yourself. You'd whirl around and let it fly; it was wiser that everybody stayed a long distance from where you were trying to throw it because you might well not get the angle right! Sports were not for me that big a deal. I picked up tennis in the summertime.

Q: You graduated in '47? Then was Harvard your first choice?

MURPHY: It's strange looking back but for me with my suburban Boston background Harvard was just a place one usually went to. As a senior at Exeter – you had to apply to three colleges. I put Harvard down and just expected I'd go there. It was routine. It wasn't until way later, I think when I was serving in the Philippines and surrounded by families trying their darndest to get their children into Harvard – I just didn't realize it was that special a place!

Q: Looking back on it at Kent, I was in a class of about 70 and I think about six of us went to Williams. "Oh, that sounds like a nice place to go, so I'll go there!" Now people cut their throats in order to get into there.

MURPHY: We were spoiled rotten in that sense. It was no stretch to say, "Why not Williams? Why not Harvard?" and just take it for granted that you'd get in.

Q: Harvard in 1947. What was the campus like? How did it strike you?

MURPHY: In that year as I'd seen at Exeter during senior year in '46-'47, there was a flood of students coming into the freshman class from military service. The college dorms were overcrowded. Those of us who came from within a short distance from Cambridge were not given the chance to live on campus. Freshmen were traditionally in the older dorms in Harvard yard, but nothing was available. So I commuted by train for the first term. As when I was at Roxbury Latin during the war, it had been a longish commute, chopping and changing routes to spend an hour-and-a-half to get to the school. I had friends from Exeter who I stayed in touch with that freshman year, then three of us moved for our sophomore/junior/senior years into one of the houses along the river. We were joined by another guy who hadn't been at Exeter.

Harvard was a chilly place academically, chilly in the sense that there was very little contact with the professors. They really didn't have time for undergraduates and focused on the graduate students. There were some gifted teachers, some obviously brilliant researchers, but the undergraduates were lower class in every sense of the word in the faculty's eyes. I had one professor who was extraordinarily dedicated to the art of the late Middle Ages and early Italian Renaissance. On a flyer I took a seminar with him which

was really designed for graduate students. I religiously took down elaborate notes on his presentations as he waxed enthusiastic about the pulpit of the cathedral at Siena as the key example of the transition from medieval art to the Renaissance. It was supposed to be a seminar with a century long sweep in time but we ended up spending virtually the whole term on the pulpit of Siena. To this day I don't regret his focus, but I never did learn much about the Renaissance.

Q: Have you ever seen the pulpit of Siena?

MURPHY: No. I never got there but he showed us countless slides. He was a magical lecturer, vividly describing the pulpit and a few other works from the period. For a graduate student in the Fine Arts faculty, his seminar was a matter of life or death. If you didn't come out at the top of the class you put your several years as a graduate student at risk. Well, I had taken such copious notes and was so turned on by his presentations that when he gave an exam, I'm afraid I ended giving back almost his exact words. This earned me a solid A putting me ahead of the graduate students. His seminar was attended by maybe 15 students while my regular undergraduate lectures could involve classes of 200. There were a few lecturers who were known for being lively and with a sense of humor, but there were more than one whose lectures were deadly. The professor would speak from notes which at the end of the term he would put into a safety deposit vault in the local bank until the start of the next academic year.

Harvard, for the four of us in our dorm suite, was luxury living. We each had a bedroom and there was a sitting room and a couple of bathrooms on the fifth floor of Eliot House. Under the house system you were in the same quarters for three years – sophomore, junior, senior. They tried to replicate the British university, with your "House" or dormitory, being the place where you would have your social life and perhaps even your tutor if you were working on your senior thesis who would be a faculty member living in the house. It was not as tight a system as I later found it to be in the United Kingdom but the house was more the center of your life than at Exeter. They tried to support you socially and intellectually. Resident faculty members would be in the dining room.

Picking up again on the Dean of Anthropology, he had said "All right, you're not going to study anthropology. Margaret Mead is half right, it's not really for an undergraduate. I think you ought to go into History and Literature." He nudged me in that direction and that was where I took the bulk of my undergraduate classes. I focused on British history and literature for no good reason. My senior thesis was on education in Tudor England and what those who endowed schools had described as their reasons for doing so in their last wills and testaments. I titled the thesis The Godly Education of Youth, a line from one of their wills. I drudged through any number of Tudor wills of the period and worked with the president of Radcliffe College, a professor whose specialty was Tudor England. He was said to be so committed to the period that when the question of Queen Elizabeth's love life would come up in class he would make it plain, "I will not discuss such stories about the woman I love."

I did well enough in my courses. Once you'd submitted your senior thesis you had to summarize it orally and answer questions from a faculty panel. That meeting was a disaster. In the spring of senior year I had drifted away from the department and couldn't even remember a couple of names of the principle writers of the period like Spenser. I was disgraced in front of the professors one of whom told me later, "You could have graduated with a magna but we didn't award you anything because of your performance." By then I was off to Cambridge University.

Q: Given your later profession, did the outside world beyond the United States – foreign affairs – intrude in your studies or thinking?

MURPHY: It did not. I had a growing feeling that I wanted to do something that would take me beyond the family business in Wellesley. My brother was considered by our mother to be the undependable black sheep of the family and I was the good one. I was marked at least tentatively for life in the family business. That wasn't what I wanted, but what I wanted was not clear to me. I had the good luck to win a fellowship, called the Lionel de Jersey from Harvard. It was the only fellowship that Harvard awards for reasons other than academic merit. The winner attended Emmanuel College in Cambridge, where John Harvard had been a don, or tutor, before he came over in the 1620s. He later donated his library to what became known as Harvard College. The last direct descendant of John Harvard died in the First World War and shortly thereafter the two colleges, Harvard and Emmanuel, said let's try to maintain that link. So each year starting in the 1920s one Harvard College graduate would go to Emmanuel. As I was told when I was chosen, "We want you to represent the college, yes. We want you to be engaged in the life of Emmanuel College, in sports and the debating society and the like. We don't expect you to be an intellectual," which was welcome news because I had no such illusions.

That's a brief overview. Graduating from Harvard I still didn't know what career I wanted to pursue, and I was given a breath of fresh air and a chance to make up my mind. So I went off to Cambridge.

Q: You graduated in '51? The Korean War was going full-blast at that point; did that have any effect on you?

MURPHY: No. If you were enrolled in an academic institution, you registered for the draft but you would be deferred from active service until you'd finished your academic involvement. So in '51 I had this fellowship to England and the Korean War didn't weigh heavily in my thinking. I stayed in Cambridge for two years, one year beyond the fellowship period, and then came back to the Army. That coincided with the cease-fire in Korea.

Q: We'll come to that later. What about the Cold War – well, really it was the menace of the Soviet Union during your Harvard years? And the McCarthy period?

MURPHY: I was aware of them. My family background was small-town, small business,

Massachusetts Republicans. McCarthy was considered unattractive but “you know, maybe he is on to something” was commonly said. “There’s a lot of smoke there and where there’s that much smoke there’s going to be fire.” The Soviet Union was talked of as a distant threat. In a word there wasn’t great concern about national policy in my family discussions. At college also, it didn’t figure much in my discussions with fellow students.

Q: Was the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) obviously recruiting at Harvard? At Williams they were coming around and recruiting; a number of my classmates (class of '50) went into the CIA.

MURPHY: Some classmates did join a CIA program which enrolled you in one of the military branches for a year – during which you had nothing to do with CIA. You went through officer candidate school, were commissioned and served in the Army, Navy or Air Force and then went to CIA headquarters for the remainder of your three year obligation as a military officer. I was aware of it but I was off to the UK and wasn’t approached or interviewed. I had no thought of having a career with the US government.

Q: Let’s talk about Cambridge? How did it strike you? Was it really a different environment?

MURPHY: It was a wonderful experience. You were on a small pedestal as a Harvard fellow at Emmanuel College. You were expected to be active in college life, sports, dramatics, debate, and, definitely secondarily, to pursue an academic course. The British academic year was three terms of eight weeks each followed by long breaks. You were supposed to do your serious studies in those breaks, not at the college. That was where you worked at becoming a member of the civilized world and learned how to express yourself. One was assigned to a tutor whom you’d go see for an hour each week. He’d say at the end of the meeting, “all right, for next week I want you to do an essay for me on such and such a topic. Go over to the university library and in the 3rd or 4th row of the Anthropology stacks you’ll find a useful source. The one I’m thinking of has a brown cover.” It was laughable but the whole idea was go and find your own way plowing through all kinds of books with brown covers to find the one he likely had in mind and then write up an essay to bring in the following week. It was not, “For next week, read pages 117 through 190 in this book, and a chapter here and a chapter there” which had very much been my undergraduate experience back at Harvard.

When I arrived at Emmanuel in the fall of 1951, they asked what I was going to study. I said, “Well I think I’m going to be an anthropologist.” So I was sent to the anthropology department run by Professor Meyer Fortes. Fortes’ family had been involved in establishing a restaurant chain in the UK, but he had chosen academic life. He had gone to Africa as a young scholar, had contracted blackwater disease and according to hearsay was carried out of a Nigerian swamp on his wife’s back. He was a very dry, sober man. I expected to be reading anthropological texts which would range over religion, magic, the arts, and the cultural life of other peoples. None of that interested him. He said, “At

Cambridge we are going to develop Anthropology into a science. To do that we will study the slowest-changing aspects of society. Our focus will be on kinship structures.”

I spent the two years of my Cambridge classes examining various aspects of the role of mothers’ brothers in West African tribal society. It was not magical; it was not exciting. One professor, who had been one of Margaret Mead’s husbands, occasionally livened class up with stories, such as one of being with her on a field trip on the Pacific island of Samoa. “After a long day of paddling downstream we struck camp. That night another anthropologist dropped into the camp. The next morning Margaret went back up the river with him.” Well, that was a stimulating thought. But I spent two years in that department and the other students were more adept at their individual research than I was. I tended to memorize facts while they would develop their own thoughts about the texts we were reading.

After two years at Cambridge I headed back to the States in 1953. The time had come for the Army after my two years deferment. My entry coincided with the truce in Korea. After registering at Fort Devens, I was sent to Fort Dix in New Jersey for basic training, which was remarkably interesting and almost an enjoyable time, partly because of my drill sergeant. He may have had a soft spot for the Irish; he was Italian, but whatever the reason I didn’t get the heavy KP (kitchen patrol) detail which so many suffered through in our basic unit. After six or eight weeks of basic training, the time came for the Army to decide what to do with me. I went for an interview, and they said “We’ve looked at your record; we see you’ve studied anthropology and so we think the best match will be in “Mental Hygiene.” I was assigned to work with a fellow-draftee who was commissioned as a Captain because he was a qualified Psychiatrist. That was not an enjoyable experience. The case-load heavily consisted of Puerto Rican recruits with little command of English. When they didn’t understand that they were doing something their drill sergeant didn’t like, he would repeat his orders louder, getting louder with each repetition, until they either did what he was demanding or got sent off to Mental Hygiene. We had some weird cases; I remember one recruit talking of “what I saw when I went to the moon last night.” My helpfulness to the psychiatrist was limited. Part of my qualification for the job apparently was that I had had Spanish language training in college. But that was a 7:30 AM freshman course and I hadn’t retained much that was useful.

After about a month I asked for a transfer and was sent to Fort Holabird, Maryland for counterintelligence training. That was the era when Eisenhower had issued a directive that all federal employees must have their background checks recertified. The question of the day was “are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?” Much of our training consisted of teaching you how to do fieldwork in another country, how to surveil a suspicious party, et cetera. There were exercises on the Baltimore streets following each other around and trying to be invisible.

At the end of the course, I was given the option to register for assignment to complete my tour either in Germany, Japan, or Korea. Asked if I had any preferences, I said “no.” So they sent me to Washington. My most memorable assignment was being sent to the

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National cemetery on Memorial Day. The Chief Justice of the United States was scheduled to lay a wreath and I was to play an undercover role in the security detail. I reported to Arlington that morning in my standard counterintelligence uniform of a plain gray suit carrying my .38 caliber revolver. I discovered that I had to pass through two lines of troops in the full dress uniform of the Old Guard. Their commander ordered the troops to lower the cordon they were holding and let me pass through to get within sight of the Tomb. I stood around awkwardly as the ceremony proceeded. The Chief Justice came and went without incident. When I reported back to my unit near the National Defense University I asked my unit commander what he thought I could have done had there been an incident. He replied "You were there to telephone me about it, making me one of the first within the federal government to know that someone had tried to assassinate the Chief Justice." This experience in counterintelligence occurred before mobile telephones had been invented and there was no nearby payphone.

My term of service was to be 24 months. At the 21 month mark I was told that the federal budget was so tight that the enlisted people in my unit would be released early. When I had left Cambridge, I didn't know what I wanted to follow as career except not to be an anthropologist. During basic training in the Army, one of my fellow recruits urged me to take the State Department exam with him. I said that I didn't know anything about the Department but agreed to go along on that day. The exam was a two-day affair with essays and a bewildering assortment of multiple-choice questions. I passed – passing was 70 out of 100-- and I scored 73. My leaving the Army in June coincided with a shortage of junior officers at the State Department which carried out a rapid background check and I was told to report to Arlington for the A-100 orientation course in July. I didn't undergo the long waiting period between taking the entry exam and starting on the job which Department recruits have experienced over the years. There was a high demand for consular personnel at our European consulates processing visa applicants. As I recall the A-100 course was a two-month overview of how the Department functioned. When came the day for assignments, I learned that mine was to be Cairo.

Q: Dick, could you describe your impression – it was our class, it was Class One at the time. But both the personnel in it and any thoughts about the training.

MURPHY: Getting in had required the written exam the previous September, a background check, a physical exam and an oral interview. Personnel had put together a pool of candidates for the course largely in their mid-20s, most of whom like myself had just completed military service. My group came from a variety of backgrounds: one was Japanese-American, another Chinese-American. Some knew more clearly than others what they hoped to specialize in. In any case, we went through various mini courses. In my case, they included a month of French language instruction, but with no clear idea of where our first assignments would be. We were all males, a mixed bag in terms of educational backgrounds though not as mixed as my basic training unit had been in the Army. We were all college graduates. When the day came to hear about our assignments, I learned that I was to go to Cairo. About a week later I was told that I wasn't going to Cairo. They had reviewed my record and seen that I had studied anthropology with an

emphasis on West Africa. Since State was starting to develop a cadre of African specialists, I was a logical choice for a sub-Saharan post. This turned out to be Southern Rhodesia. I had been intrigued by the idea of going to Cairo, but what the heck. By then it was late August; the month when I married. By the end of September I was en route with my wife to Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia.

As a first assignment, I couldn't have had a better experience. It was a three-man Consulate General, led by Lloyd Steere, who had been minister in Bonn. He was given the rank of Minister-Consul-General, a pasted-together title to attract him to Rhodesia. The number two was Steve McClintic, an Annapolis graduate with prior Department service in Vietnam and the Caribbean.

Q: He was my neighbor in Annapolis; his father was a retired naval officer.

MURPHY: He was Navy on both sides; his or his wife's father had been very senior in the medical field. Steve McClintic and his remarkable wife Dottie were very helpful breaking in my wife Anne and myself. Steve was marvelously cynical about service procedures and personalities. He was the economic officer, and I was assigned to the admin and consular work. There were just three Americans on the staff. The consul-general didn't even have an American secretary; it was a lady from South Africa. We had an Estonian lady doing the accounts and detailed budgets. It deeply upset her if she was off by one penny in balancing the books, which was a great relief to me because I wasn't very good at that.

As things developed, Steve and Dottie were transferred early from Rhodesia to Morocco with some five months remaining in their tour. The consul-general dealt with the senior federal and state level of officials. His wife had been a colonel in the WAACs (Women's Auxiliary Army Corps). He wasn't about to do economic reporting so I took that over in addition to my consular and administrative responsibilities. Mr. Steere was pleasant enough but distant. My predecessor had cautioned me about this with the anecdote "he called me in one day to tell me, 'The toilet in the downstairs bathroom in the Residence isn't working; look into it.'" He fought with the local health authorities because he wanted to use fertilizer on the Residence lawn that contained manure from the sewage, a practice which the health department had banned as a health hazard. He pulled every string in the books and became the proud owner of an exceptionally green lawn.

Neither the Consul-General nor the Consul were active in getting to know the black Africans. Southern Rhodesia had become part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and our reporting on their thinking was rudimentary. I was told to be discreet about it but to try to get better insights into the black Rhodesian community. There was literally one trained black lawyer, Herbert Chitepo, who had qualified as a barrister in London and no black doctors. You had to be discreet because the government was wary of anyone who it suspected might seek to stir up problems with the black community. In those days, you had black house servants who were supposed to return every night to Harari, the African quarter of the city. If they stayed over, which was allowed on an

exceptional basis, they were not permitted to have their families with them. They lived in the “boys’ room” separate from your house.

A diplomat’s social life did not include moving about in Harari. Now Salisbury, then the name of the capital, has been renamed Harari. I was able to develop some contacts with those working on the local newspaper or for the Rhodesian government. They were careful and weren’t searching about in the consular corps for someone to tell their story to. Everybody was aware there were certain restrictions. But we succeeded to a limited degree in expanding our contacts.

In Rhodesia in those days, the official mantra was “We believe in racial partnership. Of course, you understand that in any partnership there’s always a senior partner and a junior partner. Those of us from Britain and South Africa have had a great deal of experience in governing so we will be the senior partner.” That prevailed for years, until the blacks got restless realizing that the ratio of black to white was on the order of 400 to 1. The fifties was not racially troubled. Some in the white population did look anxiously north at the troubles in Kenya. As one Rhodesian said to me “I know this isn’t going to last. One day when my morning tea is brought into the bedroom, there will be a “*panga*” (machete) on the tray, and that will be it. But let’s live life as it should be lived.” Among its elite the white European population had a number of retired civil servants from the former British empire. Rhodesia was recognized as that increasingly rare place where you could live very well on a pension and enjoy the perquisites of the governing class, as during the *raj*.

Q: I remember hearing the phrase that went around (I don’t know whether it’s true or not), “Kenya was for the officers and Rhodesia for other ranks.”

MURPHY: The Central African Federation also had a number of members of the Colonial Office who had been in South Asia and now were assigned to Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. They were a remarkably dedicated bunch. Highly paternalistic, but very much dedicated to laying the groundwork for the country’s future. They took seriously the idea of a partnership which would grow into something meaningful. Those who had come up from South Africa were in many cases quasi-refugees. They were more of British stock than Afrikaner, and they were finding it uncomfortable to stay in the Afrikaner-dominated society to the south. So there was a mixed picture. But clearly, it was a far more comfortable life to be white than be either colored or black. The “colored” community for the Rhodesians included those like the High Commissioners from India or Pakistan. Even they faced restrictions on their life such as at which hospital they could seek treatment. They couldn’t attend the movies on the ground floor; they had to be up in the balcony. There were signs on the benches and water-fountains in the parks that some were for whites and some were for others. So it was a scene reminiscent in some ways of the American South.

Q: I lived in Annapolis and it was very much a southern town. What about on the consular side, were there many black Africans going to the United States for education?

MURPHY: No. They were going to the UK. The main emphasis in the three territories – Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland – was on basic education. The government was investing in primary education, in health and the infrastructure. There was a deliberate process of offering training and skills to the Africans. The distinctions they drew, between the British colonial approach and the French was “The French over there in West Africa select the sons of the tribal chiefs and bring them to France for higher education and make sure they developed the skills and loyalties of being black Frenchmen.” The British Rhodesians generally speaking had a basic attitude that “yes, the blacks are going to develop and deserve better opportunities, but we will focus on what we can do to lay the foundations in health, education and infrastructure development. As for providing university training – what are they going to do with it?” I recall a Belgian colleague remarking in 1957 what a shambles Rhodesia was becoming, unlike the situation in the Congo, where “We Belgians are going to stay there. We’ve made up our minds; we will stay there for 50, maybe 100 years and carefully develop the overall society. It will be far more stable.” As you know, the Belgian Congo blew up within a decade.

Q: In '60 all hell broke loose.

MURPHY: We traveled a good deal in the Federation. I accompanied the Consul to the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia where we called on the able manager of one of the major copper companies. After discussion of the labor and export problems he was facing, he invited us to dinner. We just had our business suits with us and knew that dinners tended to be black-tie events. After hearing us out, he picked up the phone and called his wife and said “Darling, I’ve invited them to dinner. But they don’t have the right clothes.” It was exasperating having to deal with savages from the United States.

The time for the Colonial Office control and the white leadership was passing rather quickly and they were not at all sure how it would turn out. Northern Rhodesians were lucky, as the South Africans were to be with Nelson Mandela, that Kenneth Kaunda, the first leader of an independent Northern Rhodesia, Zambia, was a man of vision who led his country through a transition that was far calmer than that in Kenya or Tanzania.

Q: Could you in this period have black Africans for dinner?

MURPHY: We did. Initially we were a little apprehensive, recognizing that this was so rarely done in the local community. We had receptions where we hosted visiting American notables some of whom were black. I remember a well-known singer, William Warfield, who was sponsored by USIS who gave a recital in Salisbury. There was a prominent American black journalist whom we offered a place to stay. He was happy to accept because he couldn’t have registered at Meikles Hotel downtown. That hotel was an artifact of the early colonial period. It featured a string quartet in the dining room during dinner. Our complaint about the mattress in our room was ill-received because, as the management informed us, nobody had complained in 70 years. In any case, the journalist after spending the night at our house said “Excuse me, I’m going downtown to get myself discriminated against.”

Q: While you were there, what was happening politically? Were the colonial authorities girding their loins to deal with independence?

MURPHY: They were uneasy, hearing stories from other colonial territories which were undergoing change. The Gold Coast became Ghana; there were rumors that a prominent political exile from Nyasaland had plans to return. There was a level of anxiety in the society. But it was not at the point where they felt they would be shut out as later happened under Mugabe, who confiscated white owned farms for black veterans of the struggle for independence. The Southern Rhodesian prime minister was by origin a New Zealander, an outspoken liberal about race relations who predicted there could be a positive black-white partnership. The slogan was “Racial partnership; we’re going to work this out. It won’t be the way the Union of South Africa is going. It won’t be the way it has gone in Kenya. We’ll find a way.” In pre Federation days London described Southern Rhodesia as a “self-governing colony” a term suggesting that there were limits to what London could do to affect Rhodesian political development. The Rhodesians were largely left alone I would say by London to manage the basic relationships between blacks and whites at that time. When the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland was established, the federal prime minister was a strong personality and a former boxer. The governor-general was a remarkable man, a much respected retired British politician.

Q: During this time, had the Kenyatta war broken out in Kenya?

MURPHY: It had and Kenyatta was a warning of the problems that could lie ahead for Rhodesia. They were fatalistic about it. That remark about the machete on the breakfast tray made you wince; they knew their reign wasn’t assured but they were going to ride things out until that dark day might arrive. They were hearing uncomfortable stories about Nkrumah in the Gold Coast. Maybe I’m describing that society unfairly, but the best one word description I believe to describe it is complacency. There was a complacency about how they would manage racial partnership, they would work it all out and the British European settlers’ interests would somehow be preserved.

Q: Were you getting much interest from Washington about what was happening there? Africa was sort of on the front burner around that time; things were happening there and there was a lot of interest in the States as I recall.

MURPHY: I don’t think that there was a strong interest in what was going on in Rhodesia. Washington’s focus was on South Africa where serious problems were seen as likely to erupt. There were the explosions in East Africa. The Rhodesias had strong international business relations through Anglo-American Copper, with the Rhodesian tobacco industry. An annual auction brought auctioneers from the southern U.S. markets to run those sales. Life was quiet and comfortable. So they weren’t attracting any great concern on Washington’s part. I think Rhodesia still fit an older profile; as someone sardonically remarked, “America rediscovers Africa about every 25 years.”

Q: Was your wife Anne at all plugged into the African women’s community?

MURPHY: My recollection is no. For instance, the one lawyer was Herman Chitepo – I don't recall him bringing his wife to receptions or functions and he was invited everywhere. The African woman in Southern Rhodesia was not yet on the public stage.

Q: Is there anything more to talk about here? What about the so-called settlers? That was the white community, were the farmers mainly the community?

MURPHY: I had a good contact of South African background. After we had met at Cambridge, he qualified as a lawyer in the UK, then joined the Colonial Office where he did one or two tours. When he visited us in Salisbury, he said that he saw no future for the Colonial Office. He wanted to get into farming but didn't want to go back to South Africa. In his student days, he had been very uneasy about returning to South Africa. Later he decided Rhodesia would work; he would get some land and farm happily ever after. As time passed it wasn't that happy; it didn't take him long to decide when Mugabe came in that the future for the white settler farmer was unpromising. So he ended up in South Africa and when Mandela took over, he found it would be workable there to farm and practice the law.

The settlers we knew best had British backgrounds. They professed to see a future for themselves because their talents had made Rhodesia self-sufficient in food production. They would say "We've got something this country will continue to need." They ran big properties and worked hard. They had decent enough race relations, no brutality towards the black employee, but their workers hadn't yet been organized and were not at that stage in a mood to challenge them politically. After our tour the Rhodesian Independence movement was led by a harder-line settler element. The liberal New Zealander prime minister was out. Then the war started and the whites became more defensive about their way of life and were no longer complacent.

Q: Then where did you want to go after this? You left in '58?

MURPHY: When I left in '58 I sensed that Washington didn't seem to be paying any special attention to the problems in Rhodesia. I went to Beirut. That's where things crystallized for me in terms of career planning. As I said when I graduated from Harvard, I didn't know where I was going. When I left Cambridge, I still didn't know where I was going. When I drifted into the Foreign Service the beginning was interesting but I wasn't sure it was for me. I knew I didn't want to be back in Massachusetts with the family company. In 1956 the Suez Crisis hit the news, about a year into my first tour in the Foreign Service. I listened to Eisenhower make a powerful statement telling the Israelis, British, and French to get the hell out of Suez. That coincided with a message from Washington that the Department wanted to get moving in a more serious, organized manner on training the younger officers in the hard languages. You'd remember seeing those circulars, I'm sure. They gave a list; you could study Chinese. Well, we didn't have relations with China, and that meant you would serve in Hong Kong and Singapore. You could study Japanese; that meant you could go to Tokyo and there was one consulate as I recall at that time. If you studied Nepali; well you only had Katmandu to go to.

As I looked at the list of training courses available, I decided that maybe the Arab World would be of interest. On offer was a full two years of training at the language school in Beirut then a choice of some 10 different posts. It seemed to be an area that might continue important to Washington for a decade or so. Our oil companies were making statements about the need to develop closer relations with the oil producing countries in the Arab world. The Israelis' concern about their future was getting wide publicity. So maybe there would be enough problems to work on for 10 or 15 years in my own career. I underestimated how long its problems would continue! So I applied for the Arab language course and was accepted – by then it was '57. I was ticketed to go back for home leave and then on to Beirut in the summer of '58.

It was a mix of some good reasoning and some fuzzy ideas on my part. We went for home leave and got as far as New York City, ready to board Pan-American to Beirut when I got a call from Washington saying “You're not going. They just closed the language school; students have been assigned as liaison officers for the American community in Lebanon and there is trouble. Just come to Washington; we'll decide what to do with you as things clear up.”

That summer things degenerated quickly in Beirut. Eisenhower sent in 5000 Marines. We can talk more about that later. There was great political confusion in Lebanon and uncertainty what it would all mean for those planning to specialize in the area. Three of us who had been ticketed to go to Beirut to be part of the new class were brought to Washington and were assigned to Johns Hopkins, SAIS (School of Advanced International Studies) for a semester until things clarified. That meant cutting into the two-year training course. At SAIS there were two highly experienced professors. One was the future foreign minister of Lebanon, Elie Salem. I learned the basics of Arab World history and culture before we were finally allowed to fly to Beirut in February of '59.

Q: You hadn't had any Arabic before, had you?

MURPHY: No and in Washington those were straight history courses.

Q: Did you find when you were getting the history, was our focus on Israel much there at that time?

MURPHY: Well, yes. The War of Independence, 1948, had happened only a decade earlier. The memories of the war, the U.S. commitment and the Israeli search to find in us a fully supportive friend, that was very strong when I started in the Near East field in '58. But I didn't bring to it any sense of personal involvement in Israeli issues. I was going to study Arabic and spend some time in Arab countries after the training. The Department's view was that it would have invested some \$30,000 getting me to Beirut, paid me two years in salary and post allowances, etc. So I should expect assignments to two posts in the Arab world thereafter. While I knew that I was going to be working in the Arab world

for a few years, I didn't come to it with a special sensitivity to Arab-Israel matters. I didn't see myself as either pro-Israel or anti-Israel.

It was when I got to Beirut and got to know some of the staff at the American University of Beirut that I began to sense the emotional complexities of assignment to the Middle East. We took one course at the University during our language training. Language classes were conducted in the embassy. I got to know some of the younger AUB faculty whose sense of partisanship was strong. They were strongly moved by the Palestinian refugee problem. When Israel was first established, thousands of Palestinians had fled north to Lebanon and Syria. The American government was seen as a hostile player by the academics (I'm generalizing) that we got to know on the university circuit.

Otherwise, we were in a school setting in the embassy, a building that later, in 1982, was blown up by terrorists. We were told that "You're here to learn the language, not to work as a diplomat. We don't want you going out to diplomatic functions. Otherwise do anything that will improve your comfort and capabilities in the language."

We started with a class of a half-dozen that year divided into two groups. We had the exclusive attention of a native speaker of Arabic for six hours a day, five days a week. Our teacher blurted out after the first year of classes that he didn't know what was wrong with us. Any Arab child of five spoke better Arabic than we did. I volunteered on behalf of the three of us that First, we weren't Arab and, Second, we weren't five years old.

The head of the school was a Lebanese-American, Ernest McCarus, whose attitude to our training was that we could take language tapes home to listen to more drills but he didn't recommend that. He urged us to go to Arabic language movies and get a sense of the broader society. Above all to remember that we were not there as diplomats. Once in the course of your tour at the school you spent a week in his home village in south Lebanon where he arranged for relatives to host the students and speak only Arabic to them. He also arranged for the class to meet with various political leaders to discuss current events and hear their views as Maronite, Sunni, Shia or Druze political leaders. We met with Pierre Gemayel and Kamal Jumblatt among others. McCarus constantly spurred us to get us deeper into the field that we had volunteered to specialize in. My fellow students had mixed reactions to these experiences. Some didn't enjoy it. After the training period they stayed in the Middle East for only a couple of tours then moved to assignments in Latin America or Europe.

I was fortunate when the language training finished to be assigned to Aleppo. I say fortunate because it consolidated the training I'd been having. In Aleppo the first language was Arabic, the second was French, third was Armenian. Very few spoke English. The Consulate General's staffing pattern was the same as in Rhodesia: a consul-general, consul, and a vice-consul. I was the Consul, the number two

Q: Before we go there I want to go back to the language school. What was happening in Lebanon in this first stage of your language training?

MURPHY: It had fallen dramatically quiet. Eisenhower's landing of those Marines in the summer of '58 proved to be a highly effective display of American concern and conveyed the message that we were going to be there and people shouldn't misbehave. The country had been rocked by the Iraqi revolution when the King and Nuri al-Said had been killed. The sense had been that the broader region was about to see a spillover effect, falling into the hands of nationalists who would in turn fall under Communist control. Our intelligence sources were limited but our concern grew that we had to do something. Eisenhower's contribution brought instant calm to a troubled Lebanese scene. Everyone started talking as if they had no problems living with one another. It didn't last all that long but calm prevailed for the period of my studies.

Q: Did the ambassador try to use you all as people to get out and find out what was happening?

MURPHY: No. He respected the ground rules. We weren't there to be reporting officers on the country. Robert McClintock was the ambassador when we first arrived in Beirut. He was a self-confident, flamboyant figure who had a pet poodle which always accompanied him and at public ceremonies sat beside him on the platform. That was not an act which endeared him to many Arabs who had a phobia about dogs unless they were hunting dogs. But he had been very much in control of our political/diplomatic relationship in '58-'59. When he left post he dictated an end-of-tour report some 50 or 60 pages long, and initialed the document with the comment "signed without re-reading." (Laughter) He had a detailed sense of what was going on, and what to do when. In any case, he, the Marines and Eisenhower had restored a sense of calm and outsiders stopped fishing in Lebanese waters at that time.

Q: I know that when the Marines landed, I was a vice-consul in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. I was on a consular trip to issue visas in Ras Tanura. I was told "the Marines are going to land, but don't say anything" and sitting around with all these Aramco people and they were talking about what do you think's going to happen? I felt like I was really sitting on something, waiting to hear the news. I was with my wife Ellen. We were all peeking out the windows, looking for mobs and nothing happened.

MURPHY: By Eisenhower's action, we replaced France as "the country that would save Lebanon" in the eyes of those Lebanese who longed to be saved by a foreign power. That gave Americans a certain status that we perhaps hadn't experienced before. When you moved around town, you could routinely expect to be harangued about America's one-sided support of Israel ("you really shouldn't be doing that.") Then the conversation would calm down and we would be praised as friends of Lebanon. Since then I've looked at some of the interviews done with the Marines at the time of their landing. You remember the story how they were battle-ready as they came off the landing craft and waded through the surf to find their entry blocked by kids selling Chiclets, and their being watched by some attractive women in bikinis.

Q: And ice-cream vendors.

MURPHY: They came off the beach to take up positions around the city. It was a strange moment. One insightful comment by a Marine interviewed at the time in Lebanon was “This ain’t Korea, but I don’t know what the hell it is!” (Laughter) That was the most honest appraisal of Arab politics any American could have made.

Q: Getting back to the language training – what was difficult, what was easy?

MURPHY: The training emphasized colloquial, i.e. spoken Arabic. The British government ran a rival language school up in the mountains in a town called Shemlan. Those guys were really put through the wringer of classical Arabic. We studied the classical but our emphasis was on a modern dialect to enable us to discuss economic, political and social issues. The teachers were a mix of Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian. The dialect used at the school was basically Palestinian which helped me in my subsequent assignments. I could be understood even though I would have trouble understanding a Moroccan and even an Egyptian given their different dialects. Having some foundation in classical Arabic was your best passport in the Arab world. If you were fluent, and incidentally only one or two of our graduates have ever been fully fluent or bilingual in Arabic, you would get special respect often accompanied by a blank stare meaning “I didn’t quite understand you”. Classical Arabic is a world unto itself. In the local dialects the words for common items like a table, a glass or watermelon could be totally different in Lebanon from what they are in Tunisia or Algeria.

Training was intense, on the Berlitz model of hammering you “repeat, repeat, repeat.” You’d end up dreaming the standard conversational exercises. The lessons were very practical such as how to reply when somebody compliments you on your new haircut. (“*na’eeman.*”) The phrases would not get you far in a university setting where you were expected to understand the classical language or at least what is called Modern Arabic, the language of a newspaper or radio broadcaster. The Russians did a superb job in their training. Students at the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Studies had five years of training. The British did a much better job of teaching classical Arabic than we received in the embassy language school. However, we were more comfortable visiting the market and introducing ourselves into the business and political community using the colloquial dialect. The training provided a remarkably good foundation but only a foundation – you had to work on it long afterwards to become at ease. I left the school hoping to build on the training so I could go beyond checking on the market price of barley to talk about who won the election and get some understanding of the broader Arab society.

Q: Were you getting much in the way of Islamic training as far as the religion and all that?

MURPHY: No, no. In fact I had one jarring experience. For the last two months of the training my wife and I decided it would be of interest, useful, and maybe even fun to spend time in a village. So we moved the family (we had two small ones at that point) up to a village about half-an-hour into the hills of Lebanon. It was a mixed Druze-Greek Orthodox community. In Lebanon it’s very clear who you are, even the jobs you can aspire to derive from your religious community. So this was a Druze-Orthodox

community. The local schoolhouse was owned by a family who rented it out for summer tourists. We rented furniture and moved to the mountains, having packed our own effects for onward travel to Aleppo. It was there I realized I could speak with some confidence with the villagers about local goings on, the price of meat, that sort of thing. One evening, walking back from a nearby village to where we were living, however, I found my way on the path was blocked by this enormously tall, intimidating figure who I knew was the local Druze sheikh. We had not met but he had heard there were strangers living in his village. He stopped me and made plain that I would not get by him on the path without answering a question. He then asked in impeccable classical Arabic: “Where was the world before God created it?”

I froze. My training had in no way prepared me to debate theological issues. I finally stammered in my best classical Arabic, which was clearly limited, “In the hand of God?” He paused then nodded and said “Correct. You may pass.” I got home that night sharply reminded of the limits of my skills in Arabic. (Laughter)

Q: So you left there in '60?

MURPHY: The end of the summer, September 1960 we went to Aleppo.

Q: How did you feel at the time – I realize you were at some distance but it was such a pivotal election, about the election of Kennedy at the time?

MURPHY: I guess I was trying to learn more about the Arab world than American politics. JFK was an exciting figure – okay we were fellow sons of Massachusetts- but I didn't have that sense of excitement that my age-mates back in the States had about the Kennedy administration. That's the best I can say. Later when I finished in Aleppo and had gone on to Jeddah, I was duty officer the night we learned that Kennedy had been assassinated. I immediately woke up our ambassador to advise him about the tragedy but I can't say that I had had any sense of personal involvement with the events of Kennedy's administration.

Q: You were in Aleppo from when to when?

MURPHY: September of '60 to early '64, so three-and-a-half years.

Q: Okay, question for you – during the time (you've alluded to you had two children), what was Anne up to? Could you give me a little of her background.

MURPHY: Her father was in marine insurances with Marsh McLennan; her mother had not had a career, but had worked with the Red Cross during the First World War and afterwards went out with a team to entertain the troops waiting to get home from France at the end of the war. Anne went through Radcliffe, graduating in '53. She then took a job with the CIA. She recalls our meeting in college when I was a senior and she was a sophomore. To my embarrassment I do not remember that meeting; and still deny we ever met at that time. (Laughter) But she identified the specific setting so I guess she's

right. She worked at the Agency until '55 when we were married and we went overseas to Rhodesia. In Salisbury she cycled around our neighborhood until told that that was not appropriate behavior for other than blacks. In Beirut and Aleppo the kids were very small – a three and a one year old. I was a problem in Aleppo, having a series of health issues with hepatitis and pneumonia and she was fully occupied taking care of the kids and me. She made good friends in Aleppo, some of whom remain our friends today. She focused on our family, trying to keep us healthy.

The times were turning turbulent again. After our remarkably calm stay in Lebanon, we moved to Aleppo in September 1960. Syria then was still a member of the United Arab Republic (UAR), the union between Syria and Egypt, which had been established two years earlier. Initially we didn't know how bitterly this political arrangement was resented by many Syrians, particularly those in the military who felt that the Egyptians were bossing them around. It broke up in '61, pleasing Syrian business leaders, the military and politicians from Syria's pre-UAR governments. In 1962 there was a surprise attempt at a counter-coup which shook the Aleppo community. For opinion leaders of the pre-UAR regime the idea of returning to Egyptian control was anathema.

That's when I picked up my reputation for intervening in Arab politics which dogged me for years. At the direction of the Consul General I had gone down to the Aleppo police headquarters the day when the counter-coup was launched and quickly squashed. We wanted to register our concern about the security of the American community at Aleppo College and a number of citizens living in the city. My one contact in the police had been assassinated; his body lay in the office next to the one I was visiting. The police quickly sent me on my way "Go home, there will be no problem."

My appearance at the police headquarters fed quickly circulating rumors across a tense Aleppo community with variations on the theme that "Oh, yes Murphy was seen organizing the counter-coup downtown along the tramline. He was distributing photos of Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser. He was heard by hundreds of Syrians encouraging them to demonstrate for a return to Egyptian control." When those stories raced around town, people my wife had gotten to know well took the initiative to call her and said, "Don't invite us to anything because we cannot come." The generous hospitality that Aleppo had been offering us closed down very quickly.

The basis of the story was that I had in fact been seen at the consulate door about 10 days before the attempted counter-coup handing out photographs to visiting students. The fact was that these were photographs of John Glenn, our first astronaut. That fact was twisted into my distributing color photographs of Nasser and then linked to the invention that I had been seen leading a major demonstration downtown. My reputation of being a Nasserist followed me on my transfer to Jeddah six months later, a move coinciding with the 1963 seizure of power in Damascus by the Baath Party. The Aleppo press published an open-letter warning the Saudi leadership that "America is sending you an ardent Nasserist sympathizer. Be careful."

The story never died. Another version was repeated to me by the Syrian Defense minister a generation later when I visited Damascus as Assistant Secretary. He said he had been a junior army officer in Aleppo on that day. He knew all those stories were false and that I had been driving downtown when a crowd stopped my car and thrust Nasser's photographs through the window. Reputations can be made and unmade in the blink of an eye in the Levant. I've had my (laughter) Turkish bath a couple of times over in watching how rumors spread. As one Aleppan who had been one of the leading rumor mongers in repeating the 1962 story said when he came to my office a week later, "This has gotten to the point where my wife and I think we should leave Syria; can you arrange a visa?" I said, "I don't know let's look at your application." Then I asked, "How did this story about me start?" He said, "It was the truth at the moment. Personally, I never believed it, but it was fun to tell about the tramline and the photographs."

Q: Let's talk about Aleppo. What was the situation in Syria when you arrived there?

MURPHY: It was two years after the Iraqi Revolution and Syrians were saying things like, "Iraqis are savages. Did you hear about the British vice-consul who went out in Mosul to speak to the crowd in front of the Consulate? Somebody pole-axed him, killing him instantly. We Syrians would never do a thing like that." The atmosphere was uneasy in '60. The Egyptians were resented and stories proliferated such as one about a Syrian colonel being ordered about by an Egyptian captain. A dance team from Cairo at the time of the UAR performed at the Aleppo Club. One of their numbers was a tribal dance with the dancers costumed with monkey tails. My neighbor at the table said to me quietly in French, "Nos maitres (our masters), those Egyptians are just a bunch of apes." There was a sense of relief in many circles when the Egyptians were pushed out in '61. Syrians publicly expressed their determination never to let their country be taken over again by non-democratic forces. The announcer on Damascus radio that morning of the '61 coup after an introduction marked by bugles and drums said sternly "We will strike with a hand of iron all opponents of our freedom." Personal rivalries were rampant in the political elites. They sensed it had been a mistake to join the UAR but they spent their time sniping at one other politically asserting that 'I am the only one fit to be president of Syria.' The conservatives, the business community, the professional communities that had been major players in Syria before the UAR displayed decreasing political skills as time went by and never developed a following that might have influenced the Baathi leaders of the '63 military coup three years later. The Baathi coup put an end to politicking outside the ruling circle. That night when we flew to Beirut, my wife, children and I were the only passengers on the plane from Aleppo; Syrians were under lock-down as we started on our trip to Saudi Arabia.

One other vignette – Saudi Arabia wasn't originally intended to be our next assignment. I had a message from the Director General's office saying that "We've been pleased with your performance in Aleppo. It's time for you to have a post of your own." I was naturally chuffed and flattered. Where would it be? They answered, Basra. I asked How many officers do we have in Basra? and they said "Two." I thought, I don't like the way this is going. Three in Rhodesia, three in Aleppo, two in Basra. No thanks; send me

anywhere. And so they did; they sent me to Saudi Arabia. I had had no embassy experience – that was the telling argument.

Q: Do you think this would be a good place to stop?

MURPHY: Sure.

Q: Today is December 12, 2017. Dick, you were in Jeddah from when to when?

MURPHY: I was in Jeddah '63 – we left Aleppo just a week after the Baathi coup in Damascus and went straight to Jeddah staying there until June of '66.

Q: How would you say Saudi relations with the United States were when you arrived there, and what was the political situation? What was going on in Saudi Arabia when you got there?

MURPHY: The Saudis were preoccupied with the Yemeni revolution. The Egyptians had landed troops in Yemen to support the new government, rebelling against the Imam of Yemen, leader of the royalists. The Saudis were very unhappy with Egypt's intervention. Perhaps Cairo was still smarting under its expulsion from Syria in '61, two years earlier. At any rate the interpretation at that time was that Egypt found it expedient to provide military support to the Yemen revolutionaries to show that it would continue to lead and dominate the new era in the Arab world.

Q: Dick, put us back in the picture. When you say the expulsion in Syria, how did that come about?

MURPHY: It was led by the Syrian military and initially appeared to leave the door open for the older political parties to revive in Syria. Aleppo had been home base for the conservative parties in Syrian politics and they were excited by the chance to revive their fortunes, proclaiming that never again would they let outsiders dominate Syrian policies and politics. They didn't come together and ignite a revival of the good old days, and meanwhile the Baath was watching from the wings. Michel Aflaq was the pioneer thinker for the Baath; he was actually a Christian who became the symbolic leader of the new authority. He spread its message beyond Syria, particularly in Yemen and Iraq. He became an instrument of Iraqi policy in his last days. 1963 in Syria had been a relatively bloodless revolution. They moved quickly in Damascus, commanded the television and radio stations and it was a done deed. There was excitement among the conservatives in Syria that their day had come again, they could reclaim their authority – but they never did. The Baath had its internal tensions but it was in charge when the Six Day War took place. That catastrophe for Syria opened the door to power for the Syrian defense minister, Hafez al-Assad, who later took over the leadership of Syria which he held until his death in 2000.

Q: Let's go back – I just wanted to get that on the record. What was happening in Saudi Arabia at the time?

MURPHY: 1963-64 was a troubled period for the Saudis because of the civil war in Yemen. They had decent relations with the Imam of Yemen, leader of the royalist government. The challenge to the Imam by the revolution and the arrival of Egyptian troops to support had the revolution was seen as a challenge by Nasser to Saudi Arabia. Domestically, there was a quiet upheaval when King Saud was displaced by his brother Faisal in '64. That changeover was smoothly managed given broad agreement within the Royal Family that the king was an incompetent profligate and a bit of a wastrel. Various stories circulated: he was drinking heavily and was draining the Saudi treasury. So you had both a new leadership and rising concern about Yemen. We had a good relationship; Americans were steadily justifying their winning of the original oil exploration contract. This was before the big money poured in with the expansion of their oil industry. It was said that the founder of the kingdom, Abdul Aziz, had received overtures from the British Government on behalf of British Petroleum to develop oil prospects in the Eastern Province in the 1930s. He chose an American competitor because "they've proven they understand the oil business and, just as importantly, they're further away." He meant that Americans weren't going to be climbing all over us Saudis and telling us what to do, which was the image of the British behavior in the Gulf in those days.

The work of Aramco was much appreciated. It had failed in the 30's, drilling a number of dry holes and it was not until the eve of the Second World War that they had a major discovery. The war slowed things down but by the late fifties Aramco was moving at high speed. So good commercial relations and overall good feelings prevailed. Still recalled as a bilateral high point was the meeting between Abdul Aziz and Franklin Roosevelt on the *USS Quincy* in the Suez Canal when Roosevelt pledged America would be a friend of the Arabs.

I arrived in Jidda in 1963, having excused myself as politely as I could from that proposed assignment to Basra. The job was head of the political section in an embassy with 25 Americans. That was a new world after my three-officer consular assignments. There were two other officers in the political section and two in the economic section, a lean operation by today's standards. There were some awkward aspects in the Saudi-American relationship. Shortly after my arrival I was invited by the American military mission which Washington had established in the '50s to visit their office in Ta'if, the summer capital. I simply bought a ticket on a Saudi Airlines flight and flew there. Being a neophyte in Saudi culture, I trotted around Ta'if to familiarize myself with the town and then asked to pay a courtesy call on the provincial governor. When I entered his office, he said "we had no word you were coming; you are to return to the American military office and wait until a plane takes you back to Jidda." So my good will effort as a diplomat from a friendly country was flatly rebuffed. This was my first lesson on how the Saudi government was organized. The government had limited personnel, with few police and military. Authority was highly centralized and it relied on its public to act as its supplementary eyes and ears. A foreigner traveling off the beaten path was suspect. If I hadn't taken the initiative to call on the governor, it would have been brought to his attention very quickly by the ordinary citizen of the town. That system worked well for them to assure security across the country.

One officer in the embassy was impatient with the state of political affairs in the kingdom. Shortly after King Saud was deposed, Faisal made an appearance at a public ceremony in Jeddah. He was escorted in by one or two police guards to his place on the platform. Our guy said, "Look, look – they're terrified!" Well, they weren't terrified. The guards were just the symbol of authority that Faisal carried with him. He was a modest figure in public life who had kept his home in downtown Jidda that he'd had over a number of years. When he became crown prince, he refused to move into palatial quarters. They eventually had to upgrade his housing, but it was clear he was perfectly happy in the home he'd built in Jidda. That was a time when our ambassador, Parker Hart, who had known Faisal for many years, invited him to the residence for dinner one evening. I was struck by Faisal's readiness to join in a parlor game after dinner, playing Pocket Golf on the carpet. He was a good sport about it, not in accord with his formidable appearance.

Ambassador Hart was very supportive of the family's leadership and respectful of Saudi traditions. He maintained an excellent relationship with the top figures. As staff we benefited from that; the doors in the bureaucracy and the private business world were open to us. Of course people in the business community were interested in being in contact with the Americans for their own reasons, but the bureaucracy got the message from the royal leadership that contact with American officials was approved. One drawback was that to call on a minister or senior bureaucrat meant flying to Riyadh. Prince Saud Faisal, who became foreign minister after his father's assassination in '75, had a straightforward explanation why foreign embassies were in Jeddah and not in Riyadh, the capital. "Our people up there are very conservative. They will not be comfortable with a lot of foreigners as neighbors." This didn't apply just to diplomats. In the capital there was only one Aramco employee, representing the company which was the kingdom's economic mainstay.

Q: Could you have social contact with the Saudis?

MURPHY: It was pretty limited. Foreign Service tradition was you would have receptions and dinners at home. When you reached out you expected to find a man willing to bring his wife along. Well, that wasn't the practice in Saudi. While there were some exceptions in the business community, they were few. Basically, when you invited a man to a mixed dinner, he was quick to ask who else was on the guest list. If all invited were close family members or cousins, he would agree to have his wife attend. If another guest was someone well known to his family, he would consider bringing his wife. But they didn't want to be embarrassed by publicly exposing their wife to strangers or foreigners. They would come to the national day reception but that wouldn't be a mixed event and there would be no alcohol served.

Q: I know when I was in Dhahran, when no Saudis were present alcohol was served. What was the deal when you were there?

MURPHY: Similar. We did have a sympathetic Saudi official in the customs department of the port. He would call us to say “Your shipment of Italian biscuits is leaking. Please come down and clear it quickly.” But we had a rule not to offer alcohol freely.

Q: You were a political officer – how did you go about your work? What was there politically to report on?

It could be awkward introducing yourself to Saudis. Unless you were calling at the Foreign Ministry to discuss UN voting or the US-Saudi bilateral relationship “Political” seemed to be a polite word for “spy”. It was easier to be an economic or commercial officer. We thought the population in the Eastern Province where our Consulate General was located was more open in discussions with our officials. American employees of Aramco seemed to have franker exchanges with Saudis than we did at the Embassy. That said, Jidda was a more open and sophisticated society than Riyadh. Jidda had been host for centuries to pilgrims coming to fulfill their religious obligations at Mecca and Medina from all over the Islamic world. Its port handled world wide trading. All this had created greater receptivity to the outsider than was the case in the Najd Province where the capital, Riyadh, was located.

Q: Were we looking at the Palestinian presence in the country with some concern about what they might do?

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MURPHY: Palestinians in Saudi Arabia?

Q: Yes. Many of them were running things, weren't they?

MURPHY: They were. Saudis had looked to Egypt as their major source for expertise and technology. Given the tensions that developed between Nasser and the royal family leadership, the Egyptians had been largely pushed out of their role of teachers. The doors were open to the Palestinians who enjoyed a wave of sympathy. That was diminishing in the '60s but the Palestinians were still welcomed as mid-level bureaucrats, teachers and doctors. As far as the embassy or Aramco were concerned, there was no sense of concern that we were under any threat – unlike subsequent years when U.S. embassies felt besieged. An attack against the Jidda Embassy happened in the '80s but in the mid '60s nobody was demonstrating against the U.S., burning tires or marching about. The Saudi authorities were set against any such public manifestations.

Q: How about in the military?

MURPHY: In the early fifties the Saudis invited us to establish a U.S. military training mission. It had offices around the Kingdom and you probably had contact with the one in Dhahran. I mentioned that initial gaffe I made on visiting Ta'if without prior notification through the Foreign Ministry. Our military were accepted as part of the overall relationship and the Saudis even then saw the U.S. as their main weapons supplier and

trainor. I talked with the then head of the National Guard, Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, who was later to become king. He was very receptive to sending national guard personnel to the U.S. for training. I have to admit that many years of effort by our military training mission didn't create overall an effective military capability.

Q: Any political life was confined to the princely circles, wasn't it? Was the feeling that there were any political developments?

MURPHY: There was a minor rebellion within the family in the late 50's and three princes defected to Cairo. It took some time for them to be forgiven – after Nasser's death they came back but were blackballed for life from holding any public office. One of them was Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz, a brother of the King and the father of Walid bin Talal. As a political event, that was about the extent of excitement which we heard of or signs of challenge to the authority of the family. That said, there were political differences outside of the family. You could hear in the Hejaz, particularly in Jeddah and the merchant community, some disagreements over government policies. You could trace that back to the fact that the Hejaz had its own independence and its leader into the 1920s, Sharif Hussein of Mecca. His son Faisal bin Hussein, ended up as king of Iraq having been pushed out of being king of Syria by the French. This was Lawrence of Arabia times. Hijazis felt they had a better understanding of the world and of the complexities of international affairs and business than did the Najdi members of the government. They were very careful, very polite about the crown – no public sign of protests. But quietly in their own office or home there was grumbling about the way they didn't have the semi-political independence they had had before the Hijaz was taken over by Abdul Aziz. So there was a bit of friction in the relationship and people would comment on the fact the Royal Family was not deeply steeped in world affairs.

Q: What would you report? In other words, you were a reporting officer – what was there to report?

MURPHY: It was the days of writing airgrams where you were encouraged to take your time and spell out your thoughts. I did a study of the Saudi military. It ended up being 20 pages long. I had a very capable secretary to whom I would dictate reams before boiling them down to the 20-odd pages of my report. At one point she slipped a note under the door to the corridor saying, "Help! I'm being held prisoner in the political section!"

Later I heard from our new ambassador Hermann Eilts– who had read it when he was DCM (deputy chief of mission) in Cairo – that he had appreciated its insights. In retrospect I think that those insights were pretty thin but when I put them all together a rough pattern did emerge. The tribes in certain parts of the country were considered more reliable and more loyal. Recruitment to the Army and National Guard was encouraged more from those areas than elsewhere. As analysis goes it was pretty rough but apparently contributed some understanding of the Saudi scene.

I tried to get beyond our foreign ministry contacts in Jidda and with oil ministry contacts in Riyadh. The foreign ministry remained in Jeddah for the reason I've explained – they

just didn't want a lot of foreigners traipsing around Riyadh. So we got to know them pretty well. They would share their thoughts about the Kingdom's foreign relations up to a point. You had to dig hard to inspire enough confidence on their part to get what you would consider a solid report to submit back to Washington on Saudi attitudes towards Egypt, the Palestinian situation or Iraq. Towards Iran – while the shah was seen as an effective leader- the Saudis smarted under the clear sense of disdain which the Iranians felt towards the Arab world and in particular Saudi Arabians. They were held in some contempt (maybe that's too strong a word). There were quotes from our embassy in Tehran in those days where members of the shah's court would say "Poor Faisal, what can he do? The Saudis just don't have the traditions, history and culture behind them that we Iranians have." The sense of being considered country bumpkins was very irritating to the Saudis.

Q: What about Nasser? I remember going through the souk four or five years before and seeing pictures of Nasser on thermoses and all. The Saudis must have been very nervous about him.

MURPHY: Any public expression of good will towards Nasser was shut down by the time I

arrived in Saudi. There was great suspicion of Egypt and of Nasser. They considered themselves the real target of the Egyptian military presence in Yemen. There were rumors of arms drops on the Red Sea coast of Egyptian origin destined for dissident elements in the Kingdom. There was great suspicion of Egypt and of Nasser. The defection of those three princes to Cairo was a scandal felt throughout the society. The presence of Egyptians teachers was sharply and swiftly cut back. There had been a tradition of good relations between the royal family and Egypt. When Abdul Aziz was trying to organize his own government in the 30's extending from the Najd to the Eastern Province and eventually to the Hejaz, he asked Cairo for advisors to help set up a modern government. He had been a tribal leader, a rival of the clan that dominated Riyadh and realized he was facing many issues which he had never had to deal with as a younger man. The Egyptians had been very helpful. They were to say later, half-jokingly, in recalling that time "Yes, we sent some of our most experienced people to advise the new government in Saudi Arabia. Our most experienced people had been trained by the Ottomans so we recreated the Ottoman Empire through Saudi Arabia." The Ottoman Empire was an object of derision for its incredibly complex bureaucratic procedures.

Q: Were we looking for Nasserite meddling within the Saudi government?

MURPHY: I don't recall focusing on that. I'm sure the Saudi security services were on the watch for signs of Nasserist leanings but I never heard of a Saudi official described as Nasserist. When I had left Syria in '63, an editorial in the Syrian press had warned the Saudis "The Americans are sending you a Nasserist!" Prince Bandar bin Sultan, before his becoming ambassador in Washington, was sent to sound me out when I was heading to Jeddah as ambassador eighteen years later in '81 to judge how much of a Nasserist I was. That was a small sign of their watchfulness. Still, Cairo was a favorite place for the

business community and even the Royal Family to visit. They went there and could be at home in a relatively conservative environment if they wanted it. If not, they could drink and play around as they did in Lebanon.

Q: How did you and Anne find social life in Saudi Arabia?

MURPHY: You had asked in our earlier conversation what she was engaged in. She was very supportive of me – of anything the embassy tried to organize and helping newcomers to the official community find their way. I don't think that she felt with maybe two or three exceptions that she had made good friends in a Saudi family. It was easier for me in the male society. She didn't feel that she had made a breakthrough in terms of personal relationships in Saudi. It was not easy. They were friendly enough, very polite – but you were always the outsider.

Q: Where did you go after Saudi Arabia?

MURPHY: I was supposed to go back to the Department. I had gone overseas in 1955; by then it was 1966. In those days there was a rule that you were not to be abroad for more than 12 years. So I was expecting a job in Washington. I had recently heard that the political officer assigned to Jordan had a severe illness in his family but had no idea that that might involve me. Ambassador Eilts then attended a regional meeting of U.S. ambassadors where the onward assignments of various officers had been discussed. On his return he told me that he knew I had been planning to get home. "I don't think they will order you to go to Jordan but they are pressed to get someone into that position in Amman. I strongly suggest it would be in your interest to go."

Everything was packed and we were literally on the eve of departure. Anne was a very good sport about it so I said, "All right." We told the shippers to hold our goods until it was clear we were in Jordan. We went straight from Jeddah to Amman in June of '66 on a tour beginning one year before the Six Day War and lasting for another year after the war. That tour introduced me to the U.S. role in dealing with Israeli-Palestinian questions and the pressures on Jordan from the Palestinian side, not only the refugees of 1948 but those who fled across the bridges in '67.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop?

MURPHY: That's fine.

Q: Today is the 13th of December, 2017 with Dick Murphy. Dick, one question about Jeddah. You had been at small posts and wanted to get the feel for an embassy but you seemed to be at the one embassy where a political officer, it wasn't a very embassy experience?

MURPHY: How do you mean, not an embassy experience?

Q: You didn't have the contacts.

MURPHY: Oh, I see. That's right – when it came to reporting on political decisions or foreign policy decisions, unless it was an issue the foreign ministry wanted to discuss, you were really fishing in the dark. With a certain suspicion surrounding someone with the title of 'political officer'...

Q: In a way this prepared you for the Arab world, didn't it?

MURPHY: (Laughter) To report for instance about an issue involving the royal family, I quickly learned the wisdom of the saying, "If someone knows what's going on in the Family, they don't talk about it; if they don't know, they talk about it all the time." (Laughter) Throughout my two tours in Saudi Arabia, when a hot question arose about positions taken within the Family, rumors would race through the diplomatic community such as "Had you heard that the crown prince is under house arrest?" I certainly hadn't heard that one and said I didn't believe it. That observer was a fellow diplomat from one of the East Asian countries who I felt sorry for because he had absolutely no contacts. I would accompany the ambassador and we would be able to get some insights about government plans from meetings at the ministerial level. We had contacts at Aramco who were ready to share some of their insights. But they were based in Dhahran and had only one man, a very able guy, in Riyadh at that time. There were very few people you could say were well informed and ready to share their insights.

Q: Was there any international or Saudi press contact? That's often where you get your best stuff.

MURPHY: No, not in Saudi. The Saudi press itself?

Q: Saudi, or was there any foreign press?

MURPHY: There were no resident foreign press. They'd get visas to visit but nobody was resident, so the information they had was pretty limited. When they came to see us, it was pretty much one way – there were some very good reporters out there but when it came to dealing with Saudi affairs, they were asking; they didn't have much to give.

Q: Maybe we can move on to, you just moved from Saudi?

MURPHY: I'd expected to go on to a job in Washington –

Q: Oh yeah, you went to Amman.

MURPHY: I had had the intriguing prospect of a job in the Israeli-Palestinian office in NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs). Then all of a sudden this vacancy occurred in Amman and I was the only one they could find with the grade and background they wanted. I got there in '66, 18 years after independence for Israel. That was my

introduction, despite the time spent in Beirut, Aleppo, and Jeddah, to the heart of the Israeli-Arab situation. King Hussein's door was open to the American embassy as were those of his cabinet. There were recurring rumors of troubles between the king and the Palestinians, though those didn't break out in violence until after the '67 war. The former Arab Legion under their British commander, Glubb Pasha, had developed into the Jordanian army. They were still heavily East-Bank led and tribally based. Reportedly there was nothing they enjoyed more than breaking up demonstrations by Palestinians on the West Bank. They had a blunt Bedouin attitude towards the townies on the West Bank who were implying something was wrong with the way Amman was running the country. Any hint of disloyalty to the king got their blood racing very fast.

Our contacts struck me as vast – it was a revelation to me in terms of who you could meet with and what you could talk about. As happened with American diplomats in most Middle Eastern countries, we did our share of thoughtfully listening to harangues. Their theme was that they wanted a close relationship with the States, but let me tell you once again about the serious errors of your foreign policy, your subservience to Zionist opinions, et cetera. They wanted to be in touch and to share their concerns; we were welcomed into almost every setting including by the Muslim Brotherhood members in parliament. The Brotherhood were themselves not hell-raisers. You would hear questions about where the Brotherhood was heading but the Jordanian Brotherhood was in fact very “correct”, quote-unquote, in the eyes of the regime. Yasser Arafat was not much on our minds in '66.

Of course, we were a year before the war. It was one of the real surprises to the embassy and the U.S. government when Hussein suddenly, as things heated up between Egypt and Israel, flew off to Cairo to pledge that “a war on Egypt is a war on all of us.” Nasser had not considered Hussein a friend. He maintained an active intelligence operation against Hussein as the Syrians also had. About a week before the fighting started, Hussein pledged that there would be no light between them should there be a conflict. When the fighting did start, he moved tanks from the East Bank to the West Bank and put up something of a fight in the Jerusalem area. He had really surprised the Israelis who were counting on Jordan to stay out. We all assumed that, should there be a conflict, the king would expect a United Nations call early on for a cease fire, that Jordan would have kept a very low profile in the opening phase of the conflict and would have not gotten sucked into anything more. The Israelis had put their best troops on the Sinai front and on the Golan Heights. Suddenly Jordan did move and I recall the troops coming back into Amman two or three days later. The Western press was all around to interview the troops. One soldier who'd been blinded in that initial clash said “We shouldn't be fighting, we've got to have peace. That's what we want.” It was a sad atmosphere. I went down to the bridges across the Jordan River which had been blown up by the Israelis and you'd see the folks trying to escape from the West Bank and take refuge in the Jordanian East Bank. It was pathetic to watch old people, women and children struggling to cross the skeleton of the bridges left standing.

I'll just quickly cover the second year of politics. Gunnar Jarring was sent by the Security Council as an envoy to start exploring the possibility of peace talks. Washington

appointed Governor Scranton as a special envoy. He thoroughly alarmed the Israelis and elements in the American Jewish community by pledging that he would pursue an even-handed policy – “That’s Bullshit, what do you mean even-handed, Israel is our friend, what’s this talk of being even-handed between the Arabs and Israelis?” Scranton didn’t get very far in his efforts. By June of ’68 on the anniversary of the war I had come to realize how naïve I had been. I had thought a year would be ample to frame the issues and at least get serious negotiations started. Nothing had worked. My assignment to Jordan was a brief two years, and ended with my return to Washington.

The war itself was a six-day event. It was around the fourth day of the war that the Israeli air force appeared. Amman if you know it is built on hills. The embassy was on top of one of those hills; the Intercontinental Hotel, a favorite meeting place for local society, was on one of the opposite hills. I went out of the office on that day to look down on the Israeli air force flying down the valley between those two hills on their way to take out the Amman airport.

The refugee situation became quickly complex. The need for supplies of blankets, food, even water was acute. We saw the international community move quickly. My wife participated in a distribution center for refugee relief organized by Jordanian wives. It was a superficial involvement in relief work, but it gave us a sense of the mood in the East Bank community. They opened their doors; there was no question of holding people at the river. They were allowed to come into the refugee camps that had been established since 1948 in the Amman area as well as down in the valley. It was an impressive display of humanity on the part of the Jordanian authorities. We worked hard trying to contribute something to start thinking on the Jordanian side about negotiations. There was a very dynamic prime minister, Wasfi al-Tal, who later was assassinated in a Cairo hotel. He was considered a traitor by Palestinians for his public posture that the Arabs had to make peace. The mood was not to make peace, but to get our land back, pay the Israelis back for their brutality. It was not easy to try to see some light.

At that first anniversary I realized I’d been living in a dream world in expecting we could push ahead and get the parties together. From 1967, working for a peace treaty with Jordan was a prolonged process and for the king politically a very hard one. Palestinians were organizing under Arafat’s leadership. They criticized the king for losing. The old tensions between East Bankers and West Bankers fed into that. The attitude “we’re still second-class citizens so let’s mobilize”. That led to some violence including gunfire in Amman proper, even before we left.

Q: What were you doing? Did the outbreak of war come as a surprise? How did the embassy respond?

MURPHY: Jordanian participation came as a surprise. From our distance, Cairo looked like it was bluffing. That may have been a fact – that Nasser was challenging the Israelis and not expecting that it would blow up. He announced a blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba but never enforced it. He made that as a statement of policy and that was a sufficient casus belli for the Israelis right there. He told the United Nations (UN), “Get your

observers out of the Sinai” and the UN accepted that. All of a sudden there was no buffer between the Israelis and Egyptians. From our vantage point in Amman it seemed unlikely that it would develop into a war despite the heavy rhetoric about war coming out of Cairo. But when the fighting started, the Voice of the Arabs – Egyptian radio – started carrying reports almost immediately that the Americans were involved, the American air force was involved flying joint sorties with the Israelis. There was hell raised in a number of Arab capitals (not Amman); I recall that our consulate-general in Alexandria was attacked, consular offices in Aleppo where we’d served in the 60’s were burned. Relations were broken quickly across the Arab world. We had still a very close relationship with Hussein and his authorities and continued to get insight into their thinking. There were some ugly statements out of Damascus and Palestinian circles about Hussein not being a true Arab and not having fought. That situation blew up two months after our tour when I was back in Washington, it was called Black September. The Syrians sent troops and tanks towards the Jordanian frontier. The Jordanians blocked their border and the Israelis quickly put their air force up over the East Bank announcing that they would not tolerate Syria moving into Jordanian territory. We weren’t in touch with the PLO. But we thought we had good readouts from our own intelligence contacts with the Jordanians on what the militant Palestinians were thinking about and what operations they might stage against the Jordanian leadership.

The contrast between the press in Jordan and Saudi Arabia was stark. Some well known reporters from the Times, the Herald-Tribune, and the British press, were steady visitors. Embassy dependents were evacuated, the only family separation I had in my career. They were evacuated at the order of our very talented ambassador Findley Burns who saw trouble coming. He bluntly said, causing some hurt feelings among those staffers who were evacuated, “I want only essential people here.” When he ordered the evacuation, it was 10 days before the war and he was criticized by some of his colleagues for panicking. This changed to praise for his foresightedness when the war hit. Our ambassador in Damascus was later criticized for having delayed the evacuation of his personnel until war had broken out.

Q: Such is diplomacy!

MURPHY: Nothing like being proven right in an evacuation. It’s a no-win situation to go through at the time; you wonder is this right? At the embassy I remember a visit just before the war from a very well known woman Italian reporter. She was a veteran of wars and the Middle East. I sent her on her way across the river – she was one of the last to cross the Allenby Bridge heading to Jerusalem. She was literally the last reporter coming from an Arab country to interview the Israelis as the war began. I felt very comfortable dealing with press visitors and came to realize how mutually useful a relationship based on trust could be between US officials and the press. There were things we couldn’t share about the next diplomatic step we might take but to share views on the general situation was very helpful to our reporting. Joe Alec Morris, who was with the Herald-Tribune became a friend and with one of his colleagues moved into our apartment during the war. Joe later died in Tehran, caught in a crossfire during the Iranian Revolution.

We had travelled freely around Jordan before the war and around the East Bank after the war. I hadn't been to Israel for many years since I drove with my family from Beirut in late 1959. In those days with a diplomatic license plate and passport you could drive on the coastal road from Beirut on to Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. When we crossed from Lebanon into Israel it was late in the day. The Lebanese border guards were relaxing around a campfire, and waved us through after a cursory look at our documents. There was no sense of militancy vis-à-vis the Israelis at that time.

Except for one visit from Amman before the '67 war I hadn't been to Israel since 1959. We had a consulate operation on the Jordanian side of Jerusalem, providing consular services to West Bankers and American citizens. Our consul-general was across the line in East Jerusalem and I went there to call on him. There was a torrent of Israeli statements about peace and what the Israeli positions would be in negotiations when they ever got underway. But little was moving politically or diplomatically between Jordan and Israel before the war.

We maintained a very close exchange with the Jordanians, and operated sizeable refugee relief and development programs. Our extraordinary access to the Jordanian leadership had replaced that of the British who had sponsored the creation of Transjordan after World War I. King Hussein's father, Abdullah, who had been assassinated on a visit to Jerusalem in 1951, had been seen as a British protégé. Jordan's ties with Britain after 1948 continued to be cordial but serious diplomatic business meant dealing with Washington after '48.

To get to Arab Jerusalem from Amman before the June war was a 45 minute drive. After that we moved freely only on the East Bank. I had the experience of going on a camel expedition in Wadi Rum where "Lawrence of Arabia" had been filmed. The sense of being welcome in Jordan was strong and went down to the popular level. Arabs have always enjoyed a reputation for hospitality to guests but beyond that there was a genuine interest in things American. The leaders who had sent their kids to Oxford and Cambridge were talking of sending their kids to college in the States.

Q: When you arrived in Amman, what were you getting from your colleagues about relations with King Hussein and their evaluation of him at that time?

MURPHY: There were two points of contact; one was the ambassador and one was the intelligence channel. The king used both channels for his exchanges with Washington. I would say there was genuine respect felt both by our intelligence representative and the ambassador for the king. Our ambassador, Findley Burns, had made his career in Europe, in Bonn and London. After Jordan he went to Ecuador; he was not a Middle East specialist. After the war he came into my office one day and said, "I feel much better now. I was thinking last night about how to interpret the Hashemite political scene, and it's become clear to me it's as it was in Russia in the time of Catherine the Great." We didn't fully understand his meaning, but clearly he felt he had made a breakthrough; he suddenly felt much more at home because he could talk about rival courtiers around the king as they had operated in the time of Catherine the Great.

I don't know what to say as far as the intelligence contacts. Jack O'Connell was chief of station and had a very high regard for the king and a warm personal relationship with his counterpart in Jordanian intelligence. He felt we needed to be careful not to crowd Hussein too much on his decision-making. He saw the King a friend of the U.S. who was in a very tough situation. It wasn't a question of disloyalty to Washington or excessive loyalty to the king. He was a very acute judge of the state of mind of the Jordanian leader. I think Americans at the embassy were all pretty much supportive of the regime, anxious to see what programs we could recommend that would be helpful. We had a military assistance and educational exchange programs. We thought that this was a country with some very difficult problems to work through and we could be helpful.

Q: Was there much back and forth with Washington during this time?

MURPHY: Yes. Any conversations with the king, prime minister or foreign minister were reported in detail and I think they were carefully studied in Washington. There was a marvelous account about Ambassador Bill Macomber, Burns' successor down the road who would call a staff meeting after every session with the king. He'd say "The king said this; how do I present it?" One day after the Ambassador had gone around the table two or three times, one of the younger officers had the nerve to blurt out "Damn it, if the king said it, just say the king said it!"

Findley was succeeded by Harrison Symmes a long time observer of the Middle East who didn't have that shared experience of wartime in Jordan. He was more distant with Hussein compared to the relationship Burns had had.

Q: Did we feel there was a problem with, Jordan was really in so many aspects close to us, and yet we had this (still have it) almost innate allegiance to the plight of the Jews in Europe so supporting Israel in almost all regards. Yet they were fighting our close friend.

MURPHY: Yeah. That did impact our thinking in Amman. We followed Embassy Tel Aviv's reports on the attitudes of the Israelis towards Jordan. Often reporting on both sides showed a certain sympathy with the host government views. The intensity of feelings in Jordan and in Israel inevitably led to a degree of *localitis* in our analysis – I wouldn't deny it. We were aware of it but I think the way Burns approached the job, it didn't warp our reporting or recommendations. But there was a sympathy for the situation which is perhaps inevitable in trying to communicate accurately to Washington views from broad. I remember a later jolt I had when I served in Damascus. A group from Hadassah visited a month after our arrival in the fall of 1974. Within an hour or so of our briefing them on Syrian attitudes and I thought making plain I was sharing with them the Syrian narrative of events the leader had said to me, "I think you're suffering from localitis."

Q: What was the feeling of the embassy when Jordan joined the attack on Israel at the time?

MURPHY: We had misread the king. He was always calm and statesmanlike in his description of Jordanian strategy: if war broke out we Jordanians would keep our heads down and wait out the presumably brief time it would take for the UN to call for a ceasefire. We underestimated his streak of impulsiveness. In flying to Cairo and pledging loyalty a few days before the war started, he was reacting as a fellow Arab. Now, the cynics have said “He did this for self-preservation” and I don’t deny that probably was part of it. But I think we had underestimated the strength of his family’s relationships around the Arab world from Damascus to Cairo. Relations had often gotten badly strained with Nasser but “we Jordanians, we Hashemites are part of the family”.

Q: The king was a very engaging person, wasn't he? From all accounts.

MURPHY: Yes. To any official visitor he did his best to make himself available and spoke frankly about his country’s position. I don’t recall him unloading to visitors about Nasser after the war. The great leader turned out to have feet of clay. But Hussein wasn’t vicious in any post war comments I heard from him about Nasser.

Q: You had just come from Saudi Arabia; was there a frostiness that went back historically between the House of Saud and the Hashemite Kingdom at all?

MURPHY: There was no serious tension but it was an uncomfortable relationship. After all, his grandfather had been a prominent leader in the world of Islam as Sharif of Mecca. Hussein was in Jordan in a post-war situation of relative poverty as the Saudis were waxing ever wealthier from their oil production. The Saudis quietly provided a small annual subsidy as I recall it to the person of the king. It was not an act of great generosity and there was feeling that those who had taken over the Hejaz didn’t treat him with dignity, the all-important word in the Arab vocabulary.

Q: I shook hands with King Hussein in '57 or so when he came through Dhahran. My feeling was at the time that this kid wasn't going to last very long.

MURPHY: So he was visiting the city?

Q: Visiting Saudi Arabia, and came to Dhahran.

MURPHY: He was always extremely courteous. I didn’t have any solo meetings with him until later which I became Assistant Secretary, but watching him when I would accompany our ambassador or American visitors, he had an appealing way of explaining his thinking. There was real warmth to the man.

Q: Were we watching the two disparate groups – this is probably putting it wrongly, but the desert Arabs native to the region and then the Palestinian and ones from elsewhere who settled in Jordan?

MURPHY: There was a longstanding edginess in the Jordanian East Banker-Palestinian relationship. When we were there in the ‘60s Hussein saw himself also very much the

king of West Bankers and worked hard to reconcile the two communities. His message to the Palestinians was “We’re with you. You’re can have a Jordanian passport. We support your cause.” After 1967 and until mid 1988 he remained formally ready to negotiate for the return of the West Bank to his rule. Then he broke that commitment and said in effect “You’re on your own; I’m not going to be responsible for the area again.”

Q: Did you get into the West Bank? Before the war?

MURPHY: That was no problem. We often would drive over on the weekend to Jerusalem. We got to know the Jordanian government personalities. The head of the police was a crusty personality who had been there long enough that he could speak his mind freely to the UN and the Israelis. I recall an incident when an Israeli owned dog wandered across from the Israeli side and the UN liaison office requested its return on behalf of its owner. He said, “Just tell them it’s now a Jordanian dog!” We got to know families such as the Nuseibies who the Ottomans had entrusted with the keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, because the Christian leaders in Jerusalem of competing sects couldn’t agree who had the right to control access.

You’d pick up vignettes of how complicated life in Jerusalem was. There were accusations that the Greek Orthodox community was selling church lands to the Israelis. That was a scandal that continued for years.

Q: Did you have pretty close relations with our consulate-general in Jerusalem?

MURPHY: We’d make a point of calling on the Consul General. You had to pass through the Mandelbaum Gate to get to his office in West Jerusalem. That took some arranging. I never got back to our embassy in Tel Aviv from my earlier visit in 1960 or explore other centers in Israel when I was assigned to Jordan.

Q: How was your Arabic by this time?

MURPHY: It was pretty good, but I never had illusions about the strength of my Arabic. My comprehension would depend on the local accent as well as the subject matter. If you were in a crowd – for instance, later when I was in Mauritania with its very different colloquial dialect- if there was a Palestinian in the group, he sounded 10 times clearer than anybody else! My original teachers were a mix of Palestinian and Lebanese. With the leadership in Jordan, we spoke English. They were very at ease in English; some had been at Sandhurst or in the military or police, and others had attended British-type schooling in Jordan. I didn’t use Arabic that much compared to when I was in Aleppo and to an extent in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi, there was a very small group eloquent in English. For official exchanges there was always an interpreter around; that wasn’t the case in Jordan. My Arabic was strong enough that I felt comfortable with day-to-day exchanges about the economy, the weather, being invited to a wedding, that sort of discussion. I don’t think that the training we got was anything more than a good foundation, and you had to work at it steadily. I was lucky that going from Beirut to Aleppo consolidated the training very quickly. It fell into some disrepair in Saudi Arabia

and in traveling around Jordan there always seemed to be somebody that spoke English. Other colleagues who had been through our training program would agree that there were no more two or three officers out of the whole crowd who could honestly be rated bilingual in the course of their later careers. Hume Horan was one. I didn't serve with him but a Saudi Foreign Ministry protocol officer once exclaimed that to me that "Mr. Horan was so good in Arabic that I didn't understand him! It was so polished."

Q: How was life in Jordan as an embassy officer? How did you find the social life?

MURPHY: It was an active social life. There were many invitations from Jordanians and fellow diplomats. We entertained frequently. Our apartment was in a new building overlooking the valley, a short walk to the embassy on *Jabal Amman* (Amman Hill) looking across at the Intercontinental Hotel. It was very comfortable. We had a cook and an assistant who helped out with the cleaning. The cook was marvelous; he could turn out any Arab dish. He also produced first class doughnuts on the weekend! He was a refugee and an absolutely lovely guy.

Q: Did the refugees spend a lot of time talking about their lost homeland to you?

MURPHY: With the two helping in the house there was no reminiscing about the good old days. The cook had a number of children but we didn't get into any discussions about the good old days; maybe they weren't so good. Maybe it was just because he became economically better off in his work with American families than he had been earlier. I don't recall him talking about the right of return; he didn't even say where he had been in Palestine. He would have been a teenager when the 1948 war took place.

The Jordanians who were not of Palestinian origin would talk about their commitment to the Palestinian cause but they didn't have the personal or emotional ties to a village or city on the West Bank or in Israel.

Q: Did you have the problem of understanding the situation of so many people in Jordan who lost their homes? This cause did not seem to resonate much with Americans.

MURPHY: Few Americans had been refugees. We had put down our roots quickly after coming from the old country, Ireland or Italy or Asia. We came willingly in search of a better life except for Black Americans who had been brought here as slaves. Some of us came to escape political oppression; in the early days the Pilgrims were rebelling against the Established Church in England. But we weren't "transported" as a number of the Australians had been from the UK. The Irish came, as refugees from poverty and famine in 19th century Ireland. There wasn't a shared feeling or understanding about what it meant to be a refugee between Americans and Palestinians. The Jewish side of the story was far more vivid to us, from accounts of the Second World War and the Holocaust, from the refugee ship "Exodus" and the many other cultural accounts of what it meant to be a Jew. When the Palestinians would tell you about the brutality of their expulsion in '48-49, the Israelis would reply that they had left voluntarily at the encouragement of Arab governments who had told them "We are coming to get the Jews out, and you

should get out of the way.” You have two very different narratives there. The Israelis insisted there was no pressure on the Palestinians to become refugees. Jewish accounts also argued that if there were incidents where Palestinians were subject to force these had been “minor affairs that got out of hand.” Americans might be friendly with Arabs and sympathetic to their losses but Israeli arguments were better made.

Q: Did you find that you were accused often of overly sympathizing for the Arabs? This is one of the charges they levied against the...

MURPHY: I wasn't personally so accused. I mentioned that exchange with the Hadassah delegation but by the time I got back to Washington in the position of assistant secretary during the Reagan Administration the Israelis and the Jewish community felt they had a friend in the White House who would take care to control any anti-Israel thinking in his administration. By that time (talking about the '80s) you didn't hear the accusation that to be an Arabist was to be an enemy of the Jew, to be blind to the suffering of the Jews and addicted to wearing gold cufflinks shaped miniature daggers of Arab design. There was a book called The Arabists by Kaplan purporting to report what he saw as the State Department's addiction to the Arab cause and who criticized U.S. support for Israel. He believed that Foreign Service Officers were emotionally pro-Arab. I didn't get caught up in that.

Q: It's hard to explain. Being an Arabist was a professional choice – lots of countries to serve in. I can't remember, one of our early ambassadors in one of my oral histories said (before he had studied the language) he wrote to an ambassador, "I'm thinking of taking Arabic." The ambassador wrote to him and said "Once you learn the language, it opens the door, and the door opens on nothing!" (Laughter) Being an Arabist had career possibilities but at the same time it was a difficult place to operate.

MURPHY: I think that the feelings between those in the American Jewish community who were closely following American policy towards the region and Israel in particular became less suspicious about State Department officials as time went on. However, I remember that when George Shultz asked me to come back in 1983 to be assistant secretary he said “I want you to schedule your return by way of Israel and introduce yourself there.” He thought that this would have some importance to the American Jewish community. But I didn't encounter any serious prejudice in the latter part of my career. It was a more common problem in the '50s and '60s.

Q: That was the era that Kaplan was talking about. Were you getting much feedback from the State Department on your reporting?

MURPHY: No. There was some reaction from colleagues in the region. As for feedback from Washington, there was little direct reaction. We did our reporting and followed instructions from DC. My career was skewed in the sense that after entry in '55 I didn't return to Washington for a job in the Department until '68. When I was in charge of the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs, I don't recall giving much feedback to our posts in the early '70s. Washington's attitude in general was, “If your messages aren't always

given the weight that maybe they deserve, realize that we are having to formulate policy drawing on world wide issues back here.” It was a cold shower, being a returnee from the field where we thought every word we sent in had great significance to realize that not everybody shared that view. They weren’t saying you were misreporting or suffering *localitis*. “But we’re very busy and we have a meeting we have to go to; let’s move on.” (Laughter)

Q: It’s a learning experience.

MURPHY: That was an unpleasant aspect of learning.

Q: What about the aftermath of the Six Days War in Jordan? Was there a siege mentality? How was the king regarded?

MURPHY: In the pre war Jordanian community it depended on your identity. There were those who blamed him for losing the West Bank but they were a minority. I think he came out of the war as a leader who had been a loser, nobody denied that, but who was courageous and trying for the best possible arrangement for his people after the war.

Q: For many I would assume that the West Bank was not of critical importance. Maybe you got rid of an encumbrance?

MURPHY: You couldn’t say that because of Jerusalem. Hussein had built a residence there and walked those roads. It became ever more clear as the peace talks got underway that he had staked out being the one Muslim leader who would have a special guardianship role over the holy sites in Jerusalem. Overall, an edginess remained in the Jordanian-Palestinian relationship. I give him great credit for having smoothed that down as the years passed. But the Palestinian was not considered an equal by the East Banker. They were not comfortable with each other despite Hussein’s efforts to help build programs to demonstrate that he accepted Palestinians as full Jordanian citizens. They were hearing stories about refugees elsewhere in the Arab world and knew that they were better received in Jordan than – I wouldn’t say than anywhere else- but the contrast with Lebanon was often noted. In Lebanon they were not allowed to compete in a number of occupations and professions just because they were not Lebanese. The Syrians were more ready to let them make their way in that society. I think the sense of loyalty of Palestinians to the crown did grow over the years – it took time, but it did grow. The contrast to being a refugee in the Arabian peninsula was clear. It wasn’t hard for the Jordanians to get the message across to Palestinians that “you’ve got a pretty good deal here.”

Q: Within the king’s court, was it predominantly people from Bedouin families?

MURPHY: The military’s chief was a blood relative. There weren’t many women in the senior positions. As for the men, you didn’t get into the inner circle if there were any doubts about your loyalty. There was a value on education. There were a number in the senior bureaucracy who brought little in terms of tribal lineage or necessarily came from

the great West Bank families. He wanted capable people around him. That's the best I can say.

Q: In other words, it was not "where you're from" but "who you are?"

MURPHY: "Who you are." The business community consisted of self made entrepreneurs. They didn't prosper just because of royal favor.

Q: Did you find you were seen as a source of information about American schools? Would families come to you and ask?

MURPHY: That grew as the years passed. In Beirut, there was a very strong sense of loyalty to and interest in French education; that continued to be the case during our time in Aleppo. The instinct of those who were heading to university, was to look to France or the UK. In Saudi, we were hearing much more interest about American education than we had in Syria and Lebanon. We would get questioned about the college scene in the States and the possibility of getting a child placed there. In Jordan, there was still a strong feeling in favor of British education. The colonials did a pretty good job getting the message out that "Ours is the best way to go. We're ready to make you into a reasonable facsimile of a European."

Families did not travel to the States even from Jordan with the frequency they would go on holiday or business to Europe.

Q: Money must have been a factor.

MURPHY: Yes. There was a comfortable middle class but it wasn't highly wealthy.

Q: Today is the 15th of December, 2017 with Dick Murphy. Dick, do you remember where we stopped?

MURPHY: We were still in Jordan. I was describing the increasing threats that the agents of the Palestine Liberation Organization were posing to Hussein in Jordan. He had a very effective intelligence operation, but he came to recognize the threat was serious given the large Palestinian population that had been present in the country since '48, and the even larger group that fled from the West Bank in '67. The atmosphere was tense.

Q: Dick, what was the status of the PLO and King Hussein? Technically he was at that point the sovereign over the West Bank – was he willing at a certain point to say "It's all yours."

MURPHY: Not until 1988. Until then he was determined somehow to bring back to his control the territory of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Some Palestinians were charging him with ineptitude for having lost the West Bank in the war, and some were reasserting that he never had any right to rule over the West Bank saying that that was

wholly a British deal reached during the mandate period. Some Palestinians always resented Hashemite East Bankers ruling over them. He met with Palestinian leaders and I think there had to have been contacts between Hussein and Arafat early on but there was enmity.

Q: Was there any border dispute about where Jordan stopped and the West Bank started?

MURPHY: The East Bank meant literally the east bank of the Jordan River. Before '48, the land east of the river was called the Kingdom of Transjordan.

Q: Was the Jordan River between Palestinian state (or whatever it was at the time), or was it in the middle?

MURPHY: Glubb Pasha's training of the Arab Legion had produced an effective ground force. In the fighting during the War of Israeli Independence, in Arabic the "Catastrophe", the Jordanians secured control of the West Bank, including a divided Jerusalem.

Q: I got you off the course. Did we have any contact with the PLO at that time?

MURPHY: No. There was the Palestine Liberation Army, the PLA, and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) – Arafat was in charge of both. I don't recall that the PLA had any training or established units on the East Bank after the '67 war, but they began to establish them for Palestinian recruits in Syria and Lebanon. There were periods when Palestinian leaders talked with the king and his representatives and then went out to demonstrate and oppose him. There were some scraps even in Amman, with shootouts there as early as '68. We lost an assistant Army attaché after I had left in June of '68; he was living in a part of the capital frequented by Palestinian militants. Whether or not he was a direct target I don't recall.

Q: How about at social gatherings the king would put on? Was the PLO there?

MURPHY: There would have been meetings at the palace. During the war I had watched Israeli jets fly down the valley in Amman to take airport out of operation. To make a particular point of their unhappiness with Hussein, one of the jets fired a rocket into his palace complex. When the ambassador and I went to see him a few days later, he showed us the hole in the wall where it had come through. It didn't explode but hit close to his own office in the palace. To take out the airport with that raid, they cratered its landing strips and also eliminated a number of horses in a nearby stable. It was a well-engineered military operation, very precise in its intentions. I don't know if they intended to kill the king but they made their point dramatically.

Q: What did this all do as far as our embassy's operation?

MURPHY: We were able to stay in easy contact with the leadership and society and our

attachés had good ties with the military. In fact, we were welcomed because we were seen then as the key to regaining the territory and helping the king work out a peace agreement with the Israelis. We later learned that talks had long been taking place very privately between the king and senior Israelis, often in Aqaba. He wanted them kept secret and the Israelis largely respected that although Hussein felt that Peres was a bit loose in some of his public comments about contacts with Jordan.

Q: Was Shimon Peres the prime minister or?

MURPHY: After 1967, Peres alternated between the jobs of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Politically he was remarkably supple. Some Israelis used to say that they never fully trusted politicians like Peres and diplomats like Abba Eban because of their “silver tongues”, which were only really useful when tied to tanks. I became obsessed with how to help launch American led peace talks between the Israelis and Jordanians. We can talk about that more later.

Q: You were learning the territory.

MURPHY: I was learning the territory then and thought that we could help the parties to find compromises. “Land for peace” was our favorite slogan.

Q: I recall when I early started this oral history program talking to people involved, and they said on both sides everybody agreed what the situation was going to be – it was very solvable. Now it's gotten so the settlement problem and all has changed things so much, it would be hard to put things together.

MURPHY: There were always those in Israeli politics who were open about their determination to regain the whole land of Israel, which they would define either as “all the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River” or that plus the East Bank “taken from us by the imperialists”. Years earlier Jabotinsky in “The Iron Wall” wrote of Israeli determination to rule what was rightfully theirs. Some deplored Ben Gurion’s gradualist approach saying “We want the land of Israel and shouldn’t temporize about it.” Ben Gurion was conscious of the odds against expansion of the lands Israel had won in ’48. Jews in Palestine had been a minority relative to Arabs. His attitude was “Let’s not try to push too far, too fast.”

Q: What more should we talk about, your time in Jordan?

MURPHY: It was a time when there was considerable American optimism. We were there on the spot, hearing about a private statement of President Johnson that he thought he could find a way to satisfy Hussein’s aspirations. He reportedly said, “I’ll do whatever it takes to work out a settlement for that king.” We believed there was sympathy in the White House with Jordan’s position and were motivated to “Go find a way!”

Q: Were the French or British playing much of a role in those days?

MURPHY: Washington was confident that the U.S. was the only power that could lead the way to an overall regional peace. The British had a shrewd ambassador in Jordan but London was no longer the dominant outsider. The British embassy had long been located on the hill in Amman near to the king's palace. This became a little touchy in terms of public opinion, so the ambassador moved out and Crown Prince Hassan moved into what had been the ambassador's residence.

Q: Were you much on the circuit of Congress people – if they came to Israel, would they come to visit you, too?

MURPHY: They would. I don't remember the individuals but several representatives and senators came through. They were not as numerous as the would-be congressional peacemakers of the post '73 war period. The king would always make himself available to meet and discuss the situation with them.

Q: When did you leave there?

MURPHY: A year after the war in June of '68. It was my first tour in Washington after 13 years in the Foreign Service. I was in charge of personnel assignments for NEA in the office of the Bureau's Executive Director. That was when Personnel was more decentralized. I would meet weekly with counterparts from the Bureau of European Affairs, East Asia, Africa, Latin America, to bargain over assignments. "We'll give you so and so and in exchange..." I did that for about half of my Washington tour. There was a very experienced Front Office with Roy Atherton and Roger Davies as deputies to Joe Sisco. Roy had once been in charge of the office of Arab-Israeli affairs and at one point had mentioned the possibility of my taking over that office. That didn't work out; somebody who had had a tour in Israel was better prepared for the job and I was assigned to be country director for the Arabian Peninsula. I'd been assigned to Jeddah before Amman and traveled the area before I left, visiting Oman, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Kuwait. This was before they became players in the larger Arab world, and were much less of worldwide significance because of their financial strength. When I flew into Abu Dhabi, the plane landed on a desert strip. I had met some of the leaders like the sheikh in Abu Dhabi who was deposed by the British then still very much in power.

Q: Shakhbut?

MURPHY: You do remember.

Q: I was in Dhahran at the time.

MURPHY: Yeah it was Shakhbut. I went to call on him and the local British representative who was not at all pleased to have an American diplomat roaming around his territory. He shared some anecdotes about the problems Shakhbut was having in running the place. One was that he kept the treasury under his bed and the rats ate it! How true that was I don't know. We had a rear admiral in Bahrain before it became the command post for the Navy's 6th Fleet. His flagship in those days was a converted sea-

plane tender which I rode on down to Oman. There the flagship duly delivered honors with a 21 gun salute. We had to wait awhile for the Omani ceremonial gun reply. They had trouble coordinating the firing of the cannons used to welcome foreign dignitaries. In the mid 60's Muscat was still a walled city that only very recently had stopped locking its gates at night. It was still very much old-style living under the then Sultan of Oman before the present sultan took over. The British were running things and they replaced the sultan a couple of years later with the young man who remains Sultan of Oman today. It was a period of transition. The British announced in a new national security document that they would no longer be responsible for security "east of Suez". I recall a number of papers we wrote in ARP, the Arabian Peninsula office, as the process of Americanization was in progress. They were sent up to the assistant secretary and, suitably modified to eliminate any humorous aside, were forwarded to the secretary.

I kept on my office wall photographs of the six Gulf Cooperation Council rulers from the Peninsula – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar. I had memorized them from not-that-clear photography who was who and where at that time. It surprised visitors including some from the Congress who would come by for briefings to have somebody able to name and identify the rulers. They were not household names for our political leadership except for the Saudis.

Q: One of the things when you were wearing your personnel hat, you were certainly getting to know you might say the ranks of the bureau, which would serve you well in later years, wouldn't it?

MURPHY: Yes, it gave me a broad acquaintance of the workings of the department, about which I had no prior idea. It was then I first realized how little reporting from the field directly mattered in the turmoil of Washington. Meetings would be held and policies decided based on considerations which those out in the field weren't brought into. I think it's been a persistent trait in the Foreign Service that if you're in the field, you think "the bastards in Washington don't understand us." It was the reverse attitude in Washington – "If they in the field only realized the complexities and the importance of the business we're meeting about today, they would stop harassing us." The Washington mind-set was not that of a field officer.

Q: I've been a consular officer, so I was never even a bystander in the seats of the almighty, but one of the things I have gotten out of the oral history is how often when there's a crisis in the area, people who really knew very little about it jumped in to make their name in Washington. The geographic expert would be pushed aside. Somebody could say "There's no road between here and there" or something like that, and you'd be brushed aside by the big policymakers. Maybe this is an ego-building trip or people wanted to be in on the action.

MURPHY: I remember one occasion when I was in personnel when we had to provide staff for the Department's Operations Center stemming from a major problem in Jordan. That experience was limited; the Operations Center didn't normally pull extras from the regional bureaus. They had talented officers who were quick to react to a crisis and keep

the secretary advised about what was going on. Pressures had mounted on Jordan from Palestinian dissidents which had decided it was time to get rid of the king. There have never been warm feelings between Damascus and Amman and when they saw the resistance to Hussein grow and the possibility of his overthrow, the Syrians went beyond just making their common rhetorical threats and mobilized tank units to move towards the Jordan border. That triggered Israeli interest to preserve the situation in Jordan and avoid seeing radical Palestinian leaders gain ground. Israeli relations with Jordan were not warm but were far better than their relationships with Damascus and Cairo in the aftermath of the June war. It was an odd experience, being in the Operations Center as someone who had recently served in Jordan and was familiar with the personalities to find the air full of what I heard as baseless assertions “We must do X because of Y.” All of us wanted to assist the King in that moment but views of the field officers who had a sharper feel for influencing the complex Jordanian scene were of little interest to the assorted Washington experts.

Other specific memories of that tour? When OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) was starting to flex its muscles on pricing and decided on a price rise. The White House and the Secretary were open to the argument that it was potentially a serious threat to global stability if oil prices were to be set arbitrarily by OPEC. It was decided to have the Deputy Secretary travel to the three capitals most directly concerned in the Near East region – Tehran, Riyadh, and Kuwait. His message – which sounds quaint today – was “persuade those leaders that this is threatening global stability and western civilization”. I and another colleague, Iran Country Director Jack Miklos, went with the Deputy Secretary who was a political appointee. We went first to Tehran where the ambassador took the Deputy Secretary to see the Shah. We went from there to the Saudis then the Kuwaitis. All three hosts found, in various turns of phrase, a way to express their great affection and respect for Western civilization, but ending with “Sorry boys – the price stays.” The price was in today’s terms, even including that recent rise, amazingly low, but for us it was unacceptable that OPEC should pull off its coup within the oil world.

I remember when the Shah and the Deputy were meeting that I took up a side issue with an Iranian foreign ministry official saying “You ought to be more sensitive to the Arab world. Look at the reaction to how you appear across the Gulf in Abu Dhabi. You have militarily occupied some islands which they claim. Are they really worth having a fight over? It’s just complicating lives on both sides of the Gulf.” I was unsuccessful in affecting Iranian policy on those islands, and they’ve been a sore point between the Emirates and Tehran ever since.

In NEA terms, that was an unusual high-flown diplomatic attempt. The Arab-Israeli negotiations were a constant preoccupation to Assistant Secretary Sisco and his deputies Roy Atherton and Roger Davies. That also preoccupied the staff in the Office of Israeli-Arab Affairs, but were not on ARP’s radar for action. The Saudis were adamant in expressing their support of the Palestinian cause, but they had other problems to sort out with the United States. I don’t say Saudi demarches re Palestine were formalistic, but we were told by Saudi diplomats that any meetings involving American officials had to

include a restatement of the Saudi official position of support for the Palestinians. It was a constant in our most routine contacts with the Saudi embassy and between our embassy and Saudi officials in Riyadh.

There was the upheaval when the British moved against the Sultan in Oman and brought his son Qaboos into the office. The news reached us on a Saturday when I was at home in Virginia. Joe Sisco telephoned to ask “Is this a step forward or backwards?” I replied “Joe, it couldn’t be a step backwards,” recalling the Oman I had visited briefly and the state of affairs in the sultanate. That satisfied him for that day at least when he had to give his opinion to the Secretary about Oman.

Our office didn’t have any direct exchanges with American oil companies; they managed their interests at the level of the White House or the Secretary. It was in ’70-’71 when the oil companies came to the Department quietly after business hours to talk to the Secretary about the situation. They were very anxious not to give any appearance of colluding over price issues. They’d been burned in the public media attention in earlier years.

The atmosphere in the Arabian Peninsula Affairs office was rarely dramatic. We kept busy and had to plan for establishment of a new set of diplomatic relations as the British turned over to us their security responsibilities and the independence of the Gulf states drew closer. We submitted budget plans for opening offices in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar. It was drily academic to write memos stating that we should assign at least one officer to each new office and that that might add up to a budget perhaps of \$1,000,000 annually for the four or five new posts.

Q: Back in the late ‘50s, we covered all those places from Dhahran. We’d do a short trip and talk to the political agent and make a couple of calls and that was it!

MURPHY: You covered what became the Emirates?

Q: I covered the Trucial States and Bahrain.

MURPHY: And you did it with a pretty limited number of people because they weren’t a real concern.

Q: Usually it boiled down to me! I went to perform consular functions and would chat with a political agent. One time Matt McClellan came with me, the deputy consul-general, to the Trucial States. That was it. Every four months or so.

MURPHY: Obviously that area had not been a major concern of the U.S. government. Suddenly, we realized that we would be playing a much more central role. Our military presence was minimal. There we were with a converted seaplane tender and a rear admiral. We operated a polite and business-like set of relationships but that territory was not a pressing concern either in the Pentagon or in the White House.

Q: We had of course an airbase in Dhahran at the time.

MURPHY: Before that it had been a Strategic Air Command base. That was closed by the Saudis whose continuing concern was to avoid any appearance of dependency associated with having foreign troops on their territory. That's how I first heard the story. It had stopped being a Strategic Air Command base by your time in Dhahran.

Q: It was considered – I remember at one point we were alerted that we were going to have a major flight of whatever they were, B-52s maybe, Strategic Air Command was going to come in and they didn't have passports. We were scurrying around to get everything ready; then they didn't come. I remember our British political agent on Bahrain was saying it made him feel safe knowing he had all these combat planes lined up on the runway in Dhahran – we had a DC-3 or something!

MURPHY: That DC-3 reminds me of an incident with a DC-3 assigned to our Air attaché during my Jeddah tour in 1963-66. Our embassy used it for an inspection flight to the south at a time when the Saudis were nervous about Egypt intervention in Yemen. As the DC-3 lumbered towards the southern region, we were suddenly aware of being targeted by anti-aircraft fire. It turned out the Saudi military had identified the DC-3 as a Mig-21! We were training the Saudis, so this was embarrassing as well as dangerous. I went up to the cockpit; the air attaché had not been a combat pilot. He was a solid guy, a regular pilot but he hadn't been in a combat situation. I was certainly no expert advisor on combat flying. It was quickly decided that we should present the smallest possible target by diving at the general area where the anti-air fire was coming from. So he put the DC-3 into a dive and we flew away from the area. We landed an hour later in one of the southern airfields. As we were talking to the Saudi commander, up comes a Jeep with a man in chains. He was the anti-aircraft commander of the post; he was taken off for unpleasant treatment for mistaking a DC-3 for a Mig-21. That same plane later was carrying the ambassador over the central desert. As it gained altitude, the door fell off!

Q: I flew on that plane myself.

MURPHY: I always felt completely safe as a passenger. But its door did fall off.

Q: Can you tell me what was the thinking in the Middle East regarding Jews and women officers?

SMURPHY: Attitudes in the bureau?

Q: Yes, and in personnel.

MURPHY: Calling it a policy is probably too clear-cut a word but we would not assign an Arab-American to the Arab world; we would not assign a Jew to Israel. I don't think we had any Arab-Americans in the Arab posts, or Jews in Tel Aviv. The concern was they would be subject to extra pressure as individuals when they were to be there as diplomats serving the United States. We assumed that they would have been subject to manipulation.

Q: When I was in Dhahran, the word was that no Jewish officers would be assigned to Saudi Arabia because they wouldn't be accepted.

MURPHY: I think there were assumptions made about the Saudis that were unjustified.

Q: I think that's very much the case.

MURPHY: That continued. You'd be asked for advice by Jewish-American businessmen people about planned trips to the region. We would say you might not be admitted to Saudi Arabia because they'd guess from your name that you were Jewish— in any case, never try to go in with an Israeli visa in your passport. That was our general advice to all travelers heading for the Arab world, even travelers to what was seen as the tolerant atmosphere of Lebanon. Officials of those states would make an issue of visitors being unacceptable if they had visited the yet-to-be-accepted country of Israel.

We had women officers in the region. I don't think we had them in Saudi Arabia. The assumption was that it wouldn't work. A few years later the French assigned a female vice-consul to their embassy in Jeddah. She was able to carry out her business with the foreign ministry only after hours – in the dark of the night! The Saudis were not receptive to the idea of female foreign diplomats, but the French broke the ice with that assignment during my tour as assistant secretary in '83.

It wasn't just a Middle Eastern issue on assignments. You shouldn't assign someone of Irish descent to Ireland. It was a general assumption that diplomats should not be put in that position of being under potential pressure, of having relatives in the country, having associations that – not that the associations were criticized- but a diplomat shouldn't have to carry that extra identification on his job. It sounds quaint today, like something of the dark ages I'm sure in the eyes of many. The working assumption of I want to say of pro Israeli activists in the Jewish community in the States had been that the State Department's Near East bureau was hostile to them. That suspicion faded. I didn't encounter it at all by the time I became assistant secretary. Was it because we had been able to demonstrate we were not anti-Israeli? Or was it that the Zionist Organization, the ZOA, was comfortable with Shultz as secretary and very comfortable with Reagan as president? I recall my first meeting with Prime Minister Begin who remarked that he hoped my history of Arab World assignments would be useful to American peace efforts. He himself resigned a week later.

Q: We got to the point – it's been some time now, when Dan Kurtzer was both ambassador to Israel and Egypt.

After personnel, in the first place did you find the fact that Arabic or Hebrew were the two languages to go to NEA was off-putting to many officers? Was it a big inhibition in recruiting officers to serve there?

MURPHY: No, I think there was always a strong interest in Near Eastern service. When

you were in training you didn't get an annual efficiency report. The sense you might be risking promotion opportunities by stepping out of a regular assignment cycle as a political or economic officer was unproven and didn't check out. People weren't held back later because of having spent two years in language training. We tried in personnel to maximize the use of specialists but you could never staff an Arab world embassy entirely with those who had been trained in the Beirut field school. You'd try to assign to the political section somebody who was familiar with the culture and history before he pitched up at the post, but we could never cover even all key assignments – there simply never were enough trained people. Also I have to admit that the training which I thought was remarkably efficient at reaching its goal of getting you started in one of the hard languages was nothing more than that. Those courses were never designed to produce a bilingual officer. We had only a few people with the reputation for being able to negotiate in a foreign language. By and large the countries to which we were assigning people were getting more and more of their own English-capable officials. There was a particular esteem in the Levant for French culture and senior Lebanese or Syrian officials would have had their schooling in French or in a bilingual school. We were always on the lookout for candidates who could handle jobs in the Arab world which particularly needed language skills, but we couldn't always find them.

Q. I don't think, I don't know that the Arab community in the United States, there didn't seem to be many officers coming from that community.

Q: You were in the Arabian Peninsula office from when to when?

MURPHY: From mid-'68 to '69 in personnel, then two years in the Arabian Peninsula office.

Q: This job after personnel, what did that consist of?

MURPHY: It was covering the peninsula states. The novelty of the job was dealing with Washington officials whom I would never meet face to face. That felt odd for someone who'd spent years dealing in face-to-face conversations with all the nods and winks you could convey in direct meetings. There were people in Defense I talked with several times a week but never got to see unless there was a special interagency meeting. This limited communication I thought was a real negative, but you were too busy to do it any other way.

I think it was the Principal Deputy in the Near East Bureau, Rodger Davies, who was a very wise and experienced hand, and who died later from a stray bullet in Nicosia when he was ambassador during the fighting there, who remarked at one point that "the day was coming when the views of the Peninsula" (particularly of the Saudis) "would be as important as any other contacts in the Middle East region." Joe Sisco just scoffed at that; he was focused on the kings, the Presidents of Egypt and the prime ministers of Israel. He couldn't imagine such outliers as the Saudis gaining significant importance to American diplomacy.

Q: What was your principle focus during this time?

MURPHY: As I mentioned we were opening new offices, we were staffing up. As it turned out, we woefully underestimated the needs we would have to meet as our political and economic concerns developed. We were very short-handed in the field to provide adequate coverage. Our office developed its plan for representation in the Gulf pretty much on its own, without keeping the front office involved. Suddenly Joe had to submit a budget for the Secretary's approval in 1970 in a crash program to justify and support these new posts. Sisco never hesitated to shout and was feeling under great pressure going up to the Secretary with such an inadequate plan. We'd even put in the memo that if we had to, we could have a non-resident coverage in one or more of the newly established posts with a notice saying "Out until August." That upset Joe. He put an estimated set of costs on the paper noting why it was critically important to move with significant funding. Joe had a dramatic way of presenting issues. He jazzed up our proposal and I recall significantly increased the budget request. We were fumbling around in the dark about what our prospective offices in the United Arab Emirates or Qatar might need in terms of staffing. We hadn't thought in those terms, it was a bureaucratic issue to be faced elsewhere in the Department and with the small-minded budget people (laughter) with whom we had had no contact. It was a learning experience for everyone.

Q: Did we think in terms of military use of bases at that time? Or was that in the future?

MURPHY: We hadn't been fighting in the 1967 war despite the accusations of the Arabs that we were not just supporting Israel politically and financially but were actually flying missions and attacking Arab targets. We had played no such role. The Department focused on dealing with our own military planners and the parties in the region who wanted American arms. We engaged in an endless search for arguments to justify further arms sales. I don't think that in early '70's we were focused on our own military role. The Israelis and Arabs were going to continue disagreeing, perhaps even fighting openly with each other, but our role was more on the political and diplomatic side.

Q: Of course, things would change really with the events of the '70s with the expulsion of the shah and the turnaround in Tehran.

MURPHY: That takes you right to the end of the '70s, 1979. By that time I had moved to assignments in Mauritania and Syria and was in the Philippines. You're right, in real terms it was a very turbulent period, one when President Nixon called for a "nuclear alert" during the '73 war. We publicized our airlift of a heavy amount of equipment to the Israelis to get the message across that we guaranteed support for Israel who had been taken by surprise and to tell the Russians "You stay out of this; this is of great importance to us." By 1974 I was in the very distant corner of the Arab World, in Mauritania.

Q: Back to the time – were there any particular problems within the Gulf in establishing these posts? You had your money problems...

MURPHY: Money and personnel problems. The hosts saw our new missions as a welcome sign of their arrival on a broader world stage, part of their becoming independent states. The advice of the British continued to have a strong impact in some of the area, but we were becoming the main external support for the area's security. Our people had a good reception; I can't recall that we had any difficulties in any of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, an organization that was not formally created until a decade later in the wake of the Iranian Revolution. In the quieter period of the '70s we were gaining the image of a needed friend which was replacing a fading friend, the British.

Q: Did the British cooperate with us in this handover?

MURPHY: Yes. It was a very smooth affair. I don't recall a single meeting or document where everything suddenly shifted from UK to US responsibility. It was codified as London's "east of Suez" policy that we were coming in and they were stepping back. There was no friction between us, no disputes. When we met in Washington. it was very cordial.

Q: How about the Saudis? Were they disliked, or paying much attention to the Gulf?

MURPHY: The Saudis always had a comfortable sense of being the biggest and most important player in the peninsula. There was a time we had sponsored inter-state military exercises; this was a plan drawn up in the Pentagon where you would schedule war games between the members of the GCC. I recall an earlier attempt where the Saudi sense of self-importance intruded on the planning. They drew lots on who was going to be the enemy and who the defender in these games. The Saudis drew a small state, I think it was Qatar. The instant Saudi reaction was to reject the results of the lottery because "They're not worthy of being an enemy of us Saudis." There was a comfortable sense of superiority.

On the British side the one memory I had, I was participating in a conference on Middle East issues which I guess was in the UK and one of the British diplomats said, "We used to consider ourselves the best-informed Western diplomatic presence in the Arab world; we are that no longer. The Americans are serious in their training and their studies in the area, and they have answers we no longer have to the problems." This was a painful statement for the guy to be making. It was a compliment.

Q: Absolutely. There used to be the saying, "If you get in trouble, go to the British embassy." Particularly as a consular officer dealing with people in trouble, we were pretty damn good.

MURPHY: Yep. I recall one incident in Saudi Arabia; there was a serious marital disagreement with one of the personnel assigned to our military training mission, and it ended up in a shoot-out where his wife shot him. The Saudis were very cooperative at getting her out of the country without the normal insistence on carrying out an

investigation and prosecuting an affair like that on their territory. They didn't want that kind of incident becoming an object of public contention.

Q: While you were dealing with peninsula affairs, did you have any high-level visits out there? Secretary or vice-president or president?

MURPHY: No. It was an event for a deputy secretary to be going on that mission about oil prices in 1970. As for presidential or even secretary of State visit, I don't recall such trips.

Q: Joe Sisco was what at that point?

MURPHY: He was assistant secretary.

Q: How did you find dealing with him? He had quite a reputation for being difficult.

MURPHY: Well, yeah – which he cherished. He saw that as a way of getting results; keep punching the bureaucrats. I'm sure it was a conscious use of anger as a technique for managing. Junior officers self included at that time were very apprehensive in his presence of triggering his anger. There was a human side; I remember him talking about his daughter's successes at tennis; he was terrifically proud of his family. But generally he was totally focused on the issues of the moments. He was a hard charging, very decisive guy. Those senior to me in the bureau regarded him with bemusement. One of them always referred to him (not in his presence) as "Black Yusef" (Yusef being Joe in Arabic). You could trigger his anger very easily. But he was proud to be assistant secretary. He had come from IO, from the Bureau for International Organizations, the office dealing with the UN affairs. He was very pleased when later (after my time in ARP) he was promoted to under secretary. The job went to Joe after the '73 war and he was succeeded by Phil Habib. He was a proud man, a difficult one. But he was effective.

Q: Again, as a good Foreign Service officer you learn how to deal with this.

MURPHY: It was part of the training we went through sure; it was a ritual.

Q: Today is the 18th of December, 2017 with Dick Murphy. Dick, I'll let you pick it up.

MURPHY: All right. I have some stuff to add about the Washington tour. Why don't we start with getting nominated to Mauritania. That was 1971. It started very strangely. I got a call from our executive director in NEA to come by and see him; it was on a Thursday I remember. He said, "The director-general's office called and they want to see you tomorrow." I said, "Why?" I'd never been up there. He said, "You'll find out."

So on that Friday, I went up. I don't think it was the director-general himself, it was his deputy. He said straight off, "We want to send your name forward to the White House as a candidate for the position of ambassador to Mauritania."

I was totally taken by surprise. Mauritania was a distant unknown for me. I said, “I need some time to decide.” He said, “You come back on Monday; your answer better be yes.”

So I went home and my wife and I talked about it over the weekend, and we thought, “Why not?” I was at that point in my career, 42 years old and I’d been in a three-year tour in Washington. I had no idea of any onward assignment and was wondering if I was in the right business after all. So, we agreed I’d go back and say yes. I went in on Monday, said yes and the whole process started. I was told shortly after I had agreed to be nominated for the position that hearings would be expedited; my name would go forward and hearings would be scheduled. I learned some time later that I had been the fifth officer who had been offered the position.

Mauritania was one of the Arab countries that had cut relations with us in 1967. It was always quick to assert its Arab character as a member of the Arab League but it was also a Saharan country with a sizeable Black African element in its population. It was a middle ground. Its connections with Cairo and the eastern Arab capitals were thin, but it was very proud of its Arab identity and was anxious to demonstrate its role in the Arab League. It had cut relations with the U.S. four years earlier at the time of the June War.

I went back to the job of being country director of ARP, and within a few weeks had a call that the Senate hearing would be on such and such a day. I went for the hearing – I’d never been to a nomination hearing at Congress. There were three of us; one was a political appointee going to Sweden, one was a colleague going to Upper Volta, and myself. There were two senators present; the chairman was Fulbright and the other one was Aiken.

They started questioning the candidate for Sweden. It was a pretty cursory affair. Fulbright remarked, “It’s admirable that you’re taking this on because it does mean giving up a profitable business career; we appreciate that.” It was a bit of a swipe, a sardonic comment from the chair. That part of the hearing was polite, but brief.

Then he turned to the candidate for Upper Volta and said, “I don’t know much about Upper Volta. Give me a brief introduction to the country.” My colleague said, “It’s a vital national interest of the United States that we have a solid relationship with Upper Volta.” That was the wrong button to push with Fulbright. He had been in a brawl with LBJ over Vietnam, challenging assumptions of what were in America’s vital interest around the world. He reacted instantly; “Well, that’s very interesting. My constituents down in Arkansas are always very interested how countries achieve the status of being an American national interest. Perhaps you could expand on that?” He continued pushing my colleague pretty hard. It was like bear-baiting Fulbright to take a position based on the “vital national interests of the United States.”

Finally, Fulbright turned to me and said, “Mr. Murphy, I see that Mauritania has only one party running the government, no opposition. My people in Arkansas” (I could see trouble was coming) “are always very interested how the State Department makes the

distinction between ‘good’ one-people’s party and ‘bad’ one-people’s party. Perhaps you would like to describe which Mauritania is?” I said, “I really don’t want to get into that.”

Whereupon Senator Aiken said, “Chairman, I don’t think we have to pursue this. The good people of Vermont have seen fit to return me unopposed to office for the last three elections and I don’t consider it abnormal in the case of Mauritania.” Fulbright bridled but let it pass adding only “Well, one thing I can guarantee you; you won’t be troubled by Congressional visitors in Mauritania.” Which turned out to be prophetic; we had none.

After that I shortly met the Mauritanian president, who was visiting Washington and had met with President Nixon. We met at the White House. It was a nice way to get started; we hadn’t even begun to pack for the country but the White House fitted me into his program.

There was a family scene about the assignment, because when we looked at the post report – our three children were then aged 14, 12 (two girls) and our son was five years old---we saw that there was going to be thin pickings educationally particularly for the oldest. She decided in a very determined way she would stay at the school she was attending (Sacred Heart in Maryland) as a day student, and she would work out living arrangements with friends of ours in Washington. She was not going to Mauritania! She was very determined and in this case her judgement was right. So she stayed behind and we took off with our younger daughter and our son.

There was no direct flight from Washington. We arrived via Pan American to Dakar, and then drove from Dakar north to reach Mauritania crossing the Senegalese river on a ferry. The embassy driver had come down to pick us up. It was quite an experience, being back in an Arab country but one which was made up with a large black minority and an Arab majority which was equally or more comfortable speaking Berber. On the way north we stopped to have lunch at a small restaurant, a place visited by the French author of The Little Prince.

Q: Oh yes, Saint-Exupery.

MURPHY: He had been a pilot; the restaurant displayed a propeller it claimed he had used. He was the local notable who had put this particular spot on the map and was lost eventually in an air accident during the Second World War.

Q: He also wrote a book, Wind, Sand and Stars.

MURPHY: Right. This was now mid-’71. The decision was made by the Mauritians to re-establish diplomatic ties and our embassy had reopened several months earlier. I was the first ambassador to be there since ’67. One of my predecessors had amused himself by growing a maze built of camel thorn in the rear of the embassy compound. Since camel thorn bushes grow slowly, and had lacked watering during the period of the cut in diplomatic relations, the maze was a bedraggled affair.

The foreign minister, the remarkably gifted and outgoing Hamdi Ould Mouknass, greeted me warmly. He died young, a few years after my tour in Nouakchott and really helped Mauritania build a position for itself in Arab circles and in the African Union. Its foreign relations were limited and it didn't offer much in the way of investment possibilities. There were two French companies, one mining for iron and the other for copper. Both of those commodities at that point in the early '70s were a drag on the world market, so the economy was sluggish. They had very fertile fishing grounds but factory ships from as far afield as China were off-shore catching the main harvest just beyond the territorial limits. The Mauritians had one specialty which was supplying sun dried fish eggs which were shipped put in a wax matting and was reportedly much enjoyed in Paris. It wasn't caviar as we knew it from the Caspian, but it was considered a delicacy in some circles. Beyond that, you had to scratch your head to find out how Mauritians made a living,

Q: Were they getting any money off of the fishing?

MURPHY: They were getting some, but the big money was being made by the factory ships from Europe and Asia. Nothing seemed to produce much money. It was a tiny population, under 1,000,000 in an area the size of Texas plus California. They had suffered a major drought while we were there which prevailed for nine years in that part of the African Sahel. We began a program of sending in grain for the cattle, sheep and goats. I remember a French official saying at the time, "It's all very nice and you can congratulate yourself for relieving a drought of near-famine conditions. But what your program has done is allow the herds to stay stable or even increase slightly, while the ground cover continues to deteriorate. It was a vicious cycle and you (he eloquently declaimed) are actually hurting the people with your foreign aid." When the facilities of the port in Dakar became choked, we started airlifting our grain for a period using C-130s. We'll come back to that.

I found that my Arabic training was not much help. When Paris divided up French West Africa, Mauritania was the last to be set up as an individual country. The French drew the borders of Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta, and that great piece of the Sahara Desert which remained left over which became Mauritania. That's a simplistic reading of its history, but in any case the area attracted little international interest.

During my tour, the Mauritanian regime was tempted by the possibility of gaining some territory to its north from what was known as the Spanish Sahara. The *Polisario* was the political organization in the territory which the Moroccan government was determined to get recognized as part of southern Morocco. The foreign minister explained to me that his mother was still living up there in a tent following the traditional life of a Bedouin family. Mauritania's interest in expanding was resisted both by the Moroccans and the Algerians. That didn't seriously heat up during my tour but the seeds were there for conflict. The Mauritians later decided that they didn't want bad relations with Morocco and were uncomfortable being crossways with the Algerians. The Algerian position was not necessarily to absorb that territory as part of Algeria but to keep the Moroccans from gaining further territory; tension has long existed between those two North African states.

Many of our third world adversaries maintained embassies in Mauritania. The Chinese were there, the North Koreans – it was an odd diplomatic community where as an American you weren't speaking to a large chunk of the local diplomats. The French was the senior member and the French ambassador was dean. He was a gracious guy and we became good friends with a member of his staff who was representing the French economic assistance agency.

Our amusements were pretty much self-made. You drove to the nearby beaches, all unspoiled with an endless sweep of white sand. Further north was a transit corridor for birds crossing from Europe in the winter and a permanent flock of flamingos. That was a popular destination for a several hour long trip up the coast. It was a little tricky and you had to navigate it at certain times of day. When you got close to where the bird reserve was the hard beach narrowed between the high dunes and the ocean. The tide would sweep in and a driver unsure of where he was could mis-time the trip and get swamped.

Schooling was not easy. Our daughter at age 10 was in the Mauritanian Girls School and felt most unwelcome. She was the only non speaker of French and her classes were made up of children of French business and government families working in Mauritania and Mauritanian families who wanted their kids to learn French. The curriculum followed the strict programming of the French baccalaureate system. But that system was in transition; the decision had been taken to nationalize the curriculum. The teachers from France were heavily burdened trying to adapt material from the classical bac program that you could take anywhere in the world, to Mauritanian demands. Our daughter felt welcome only in the one hour daily class where English was taught, where she could be a model of how to recite the lesson in English. Otherwise when the class membership was read out by teachers in other subjects they never mentioned her name; she was treated as a non-person. That lasted only a year and we found a school in England for her to go to the equivalent of the sixth grade.

Our son wrote a memorable letter from first grade to his sister back in the States, telling her “This school sucks. The master carries a whip and uses it to beat the students.” (It was actually a stick with thongs attached and used only on Mauritanian boys.) Recess was in held in a sandy area with plentiful broken-glass and tin cans. He recalled later that arriving as an absolutely a blank page from his Virginia public school, “all I needed to know in French when it came time for rugby was *“start and stop.”* A steadily large number of kids enjoyed coming over to our swimming pool. He learned solid French during our three year tour. We went on holiday to Ireland and recruited a young Irishman to come out and help him in sports and keep an eye on him when we were out on our diplomatic rounds.

The staff was small, a DCM and a vice consul. The administrative work was done by a talented French expatriate woman. We had full consular services with minimum people on the ground. I got one NIACT (night action) message from Washington during my tour which I was transcribing when our cable machine suddenly shut down because of a heavy sandstorm. It was only three days later that I was able to read the whole message. It told

me that Mrs. Nixon was going to come on a goodwill visit to the drought-affected areas of Africa and to begin immediate preparations. Sometime during those three days the plan had changed; Mrs. Nixon was not going to be coming to Africa so the sandstorm didn't interrupt U.S. government planning.

My work relationships were with only with a few people in the government. President Ahmed Ould Daddah was from a prominent tribal family. I mentioned earlier that one difference I had found between the British and French colonial systems in Africa was that the French focused more intensely in the societies they governed on men from traditional leading families. They sent these young men to France for their education where they were indoctrinated at an impressionable age about French values, French history and culture. They got to know the railway system of France at their schools, in courses like those our son attended in Nouakchott. Those from politically important families would get extra polishing in a university and became "Black Frenchmen." That was part of Ould Daddah's background. He had married a French lady whom the local French community described as an "intellectuelle de la gauche" (a leftist). She was said to be acid about Western imperialism and to disdain America. That was a side she never showed during the few conversations which I had with her.

There were occasional state visits. The diplomatic corps was always happy with such visits because the government would send a crew to clear the road from the center of Nouakchott to the airport to clear the sand dunes which constant winds had formed across the road. It took a major plowing job to get the road ready for ceremonial visits. Qadhafi visited from Libya. At the state dinner in his honor, which was served outdoors at the presidential palace, he refused to make a statement after Ould Daddah's greeting. Instead, he had a member of his party get up and recite a poem in classical Arabic. This left many in his audience baffled that he wasn't playing the familiar role of a visiting guest of honor. They assumed that he came as part of his campaign to build his claim to the title of being "King of Africa."

We had no Congressional visits; even senior State Department people didn't come through. The president of Notre Dame came as part of an international mission. I met him plane side and picked up his bag. He said "Careful, that's a Mass in there" putting me in my place as a not very observant Catholic.

Our main public event was preparing for the international convention on the solar eclipse; Mauritania had been identified as one of the best sites for viewing the solar eclipse of '73. We were told there were going to be a number of elderly scientists coming through "So you better be ready." Medically we were not well covered. The admin officer said "Well, we have the freezer in the commissary and keep that in reserve for one elderly scientist." It turned out that solar eclipse travelers are a tough, hardy lot and none died on the job.

The National Geographic sent out their principle photographer. He took some great photos of the event where everyone was given little strips of Mylar to hold up in front of their eyes to protect their eyesight from getting destroyed. We were out in the desert

where the Bedouins were all given strips of Mylar and gazed with great appreciation at the eclipse. Otherwise I don't think we had any cultural experiences to report on.

Our relationship grew thanks to the AID program and the desire of the Mauritians for stronger ties. I remember being on a trip on a C-130 out in the eastern desert monitoring our emergency grain deliveries and being called on the plane's radio that Ould Daddah wanted to see me as soon as I landed. On arrival, I drove the short distance to the president's office to hear him say in his usual calm manner that as I knew, "There was trouble between Israel and the Palestinians. The prospect is for a war. I wanted you to know that we value the relationship with your country, but if your country takes Israel's side, as it was reported to have done in '67, we will be obliged again to cut diplomatic relations."

I immediately reported his words but I doubt they had any impact. Nixon had already raised the nuclear alert and we were heavily engaged in air-shipping arms to Israel which had been taken by surprise by the Syrian and Egyptian actions. Nothing happened as far as Mauritania was concerned; they didn't feel obliged to cut relations as they had six years earlier. That was the one time when the Arab-Israeli situation burst into the calm of Mauritanian-American relations.

Q: In Saudi Arabia, the Israeli situation was brought up in every conversation. You had to go thru the spiel about how awful it was. Did you go through that in Mauritania?

MURPHY: Not really. Their position was explicit – full support for the Palestinian cause. But they didn't hammer it. They were interested in how the United States could be of some help to Mauritania as it tried to develop. It was very polite when it came to discussions of Arab-Israeli issues. We knew their position, but neither side indulged in extended discussions.

The orientation of Mauritania's foreign policy was heavily French. They had excellent ties with Senegal; Leopold Senghor was the long-time president of Senegal and I understand was considered to be among the finest leaders of post-independence Africa. He would vacation in Mauritania to enjoy the desert atmosphere and write his poetry.

I never heard Mauritians discuss sub-Saharan African politics. They had their own racial problems. They had a substantial black African population and had formally abolished slavery only a few years earlier. They abolished it again during my tour, and that wasn't the last time they did so. A French lady, who had been married to a Mauritanian, told us about her son's visit to his family in Mauritania during the summer vacation. When he returned to France for school and was asked what he had been doing, he matter of factly replied "I freed my slaves." There were no riots, no demonstrations, but there was an edginess in racial relations. The Arab-Berber community was the top dog, and the blacks were definitely former slaves – and that in recent memory.

They were trying to improve their race relations. Official rhetoric was searching to reach across from Arabs to Blacks; "We are all Mauritians", et cetera. But the feeling was

clear that some Mauritians were better than others. The speaker in the parliament was black. But my contacts were mostly foreign ministry and businessmen. Since Americans didn't have stakes in the copper or iron mines or in fishing, the commercial contacts were minimal. We were a presence, an ornament to diplomatic society in the eyes of the Mauritians. We were not full partners in any single endeavor, except the relief program during the worst of the drought.

Q: What was happening with the Sahel? Was it moving and taking over more territory?

MURPHY: You were in the Sahara if you were in Mauritania. Up north there was a town called Chinguetti, which was known as the Seventh Holiest City of Islam. That derived from its having once upon a time a large library on religious issues. It had a name in Islamic history as a center of learning. When we visited Chinguetti, the desert had moved in and it was largely covered. The Sahara was constantly moving north; it was said that the wind force was such that the sand you walked on in Nouakchott today would be on the Mediterranean tomorrow.

Q: Was there any hope to reverse it, by forestation or anything like that?

MURPHY: There was talk of that, but no serious project ever developed. We drove once across Mauritania to Bamako in Mali. That was a three-day trip by Land Rover. Stopping one night in a Bedouin camp we listened to their situation. They had had cattle, then the cows died. They had had sheep, then the sheep died. "There are a few goats left, and God is generous." The tenets of their faith fed stoicism and they were remarkably courageous. Planning projects and development seemed to be against their faith; they relied on what God wanted. They did not talk about making the desert green.

The government had encouraged foreign companies to explore for oil, but nothing significant was found until after my time. I haven't been back since '74 so I don't know what it looks like today. Much more money came in thanks to oil production but the basics of the country I don't think have changed much. The market for iron and copper has fluctuated over the years.

Q: Were the Soviets or North Koreans or Chinese really active there, or just representational?

MURPHY: I think they were there to support their claim of third world leadership. In later years major Chinese companies would invest in roads and railways; we didn't see anything like that. They were present more as ornaments to Communism. Ould Daddah certainly was not a Communist but the Soviets, Chinese and North Koreans rated him among the progressives of the world. There were friendly relations, nothing big on the ground.

Q: Was there anything of military significance there? It's position or anything?

MURPHY: The port of Nouadhibou to the north had been a minor naval facility for the

French. It was the main port for the country, distant from the capital. We were on the Senegalese border, a couple of hours drive to the south. Between us and Nouadhibou there was virtually no road network. Only one highway went north. Nouakchott was on the Atlantic but had not developed its port for major cargo deliveries. I never felt Mauritania was targeted by Moscow or Beijing for a major effort to promote Communism. It was a name on the map where they found it expedient to be represented.

Q: Did you have any relations with any of the Communist countries there?

MURPHY: With the Russians it was cordial. The ambassador was not physically well. He had heart problems and advocated drinking vodka in which onions had long marinated as an extraordinarily good way to forestall heart disease. He followed the Russian tradition of endless toasts and made plain if the toast was to world peace, you had to drink to that. If it was world friendship, you had to drink to that. (Laughter) That brought on near physical collapse on the part of some of his guests. He was genial. I remember inviting him and his wife to lunch, setting a date two to three weeks away. He said, "I will come but on that day my wife will be sick", meaning he didn't want particularly close ties.

I regret that in that one party Parliament, I never got to know members below the level of the speaker. France was the main foreign player in Mauritania. They had an active student exchange program and cultural efforts under the French ministry of education. During my tour, there was still a tie to the lycée curriculum. No-one seemed to be making an effort to dominate Mauritanian policy, to infiltrate the ministry or influence the Mauritanian vote at the UN; it wasn't an active diplomatic scene in that way.

Q: How did you keep your staff happy?

MURPHY: I was lucky. We didn't have staff problems in terms of discontent; they kept busy with the small round of activities that we could offer and there was friendly feeling. Steve and Hala Buck were there when we arrived. Another couple on the admin side we've followed over the years since then and stayed in touch with them in Carolina. They were tough and they were resourceful. They were able to have fun at the beaches. They didn't travel that much and seemed to make their friends largely within the expat community. We were cheek by jowl in the compound, living in each other's pockets and there were no miserable members of the staff. Nouakchott was always known to be a hardship post and those assigned came with their eyes open.

Q: I take it you weren't exactly deluged with visitors there?

MURPHY: No. Fulbright had been prophetic about that. Congressmen saw no benefit to themselves to travel in the Sahara.

Q: What was AID doing? Were they doing anything there?

MURPHY: Not beyond the drought relief through the grain shipments. I take that back; we had one young recent college graduate came out as an AID representative. He was assigned to the poultry program in the ministry of agriculture. About six months later the foreign minister called me to say that the representative was having some problems and better he not stay in the country. I asked the guy to come in for a talk. It turned out he had uncovered corruption in the poultry office. That deeply shocked him and he was (as he saw it) cleaning up the problem. Of course, he was quickly alienating whoever was running the poultry office and making himself a target for expulsion. It didn't reach that point but he left with a year remaining in his assignment. That was the only AID presence we had. When I say AID, he may have been from the Peace Corps.

Q: Were they doing anything about it?

MURPHY: They did later, not during my tour. He was the single representative. Some five years later there was a substantial AID presence in Nouakchott. The program developed after my time.

Q: Today is the 2nd of January, 2018 with Dick Murphy. Dick, where are we?

MURPHY: I think we had discussed my being nominated for the ambassadorship to Mauritania; that would have been in 1971.

Q: You were the first one of our class to get an ambassadorial assignment!

MURPHY: I didn't realize that. I don't know if I mentioned during the last part of our conversation the other day about the mini-drama of being called to the director-general's office and being told they would like to send my name to the White House to be nominated as ambassador to Mauritania, and that they wanted an answer from me by Monday and "the answer better be yes". A year or so later, somebody noted that I was not the first one to be nominated for the post when we were resuming diplomatic relations; in fact they thought I was the fourth or fifth, the others had quietly rejected the prospect. I went home, talked it over with my wife and we said, "Let's try it." I had been country director for about a year-and-a-half in the Arabian Peninsula office and I didn't know what might be ahead in the career; it didn't look very interesting to stay around in that job. So we decided to try it.

Q: You better explain to people who will be reading this where Mauritania is and a little of its background.

MURPHY: Mauritania sits on the Atlantic coast. Much of it is part of the Sahara Desert. It's just below Morocco and north of Senegal. When you were traveling to Mauritania you flew to Dakar. Pan-American had flights once or twice a week to Dakar. And then you made your way as I did by car to Nouakchott, the capital, crossing a river. I think I did mention we stopped on the way in a little café which had been visited by the author of The Little Prince.

We had already met the president who was on a visit to the UN, President Ould Daddah, and had been invited by President Nixon to meet on the occasion of renewing diplomatic relations. I was still assigned to the post in NEA and paid a courtesy call on him. Then of course once we arrived in Nouakchott I soon called on the foreign minister, Hamdi Ould Mouknass. The ceremony for presenting credentials was quickly arranged. It was a very small post; I had a deputy and a vice-consul and for a period our administrative affairs was filled by a foreign national, a lady of French background. It was a compound with a residence for the ambassador and a small apartment block for the others. The office block was just feet away from our front door.

One of the highpoints of Ould Daddah's presidency was his proclamation liberating the slaves. That apparently didn't fully take because they were liberated for a second time a few years after my tour. There was tension, not violence in the society but it was definitely better to be a light skinned Moor than a black Mauritanian in the local society.

MURPHY: A harsh drought had gone on for eight or nine years by the time we arrived. The people had impressive resilience. They would explain their situation, saying the cattle they had had died and the sheep had died; the goats were still surviving. The conversation would end with a simple statement, "God is kind, God is generous." They had this straightforward faith that they were in good hands. The government wasn't able to do much to alleviate the drought. We were asked for some help, and we did fly in grain, principally barley, for the herds that were surviving to preserve them during a very difficult period.

It was a curious country in that its commitment was very strong to the Arab cause. It was a member of the Arab League. I say "curious" because the Arabs had done practically nothing for Mauritania, but it was a form of identification that the Mauritanian leadership were determined to feature. The foreign minister was a steady resource, helping me understand the politics and domestic developments in the country. I knew the speaker of the ruling party. It was, as I think we discussed, one-party rule. We never developed a real relationship with members of the party.

The event of the final year was the international focus on the solar eclipse which brought a number of American scientists to a point midway between Nouakchott and Nouadhibou which provided the best viewing of that eclipse. We were told to prepare for some deaths since a number of the scientists were elderly. They were not only elderly; they were extremely tough! No-one died and had to be refrigerated in our small commissary. We had body-bags for the contingency which fortunately were not put to use.

Q: One doesn't think about these things in normal circumstances. The commissary has its uses!

MURPHY: Yes, indeed. I mentioned the very limited economic interests. There were suggestions that it might have a prosperous future from oil. A couple of companies had sent teams to reconnoiter the area but there was no development at that time of either oil

or gas. I gather the country has made economic progress from what was a low level of economic development since my time.

Q: Was there any way that Mauritania could benefit by the fishing of its waters?

MURPHY: I don't have statistics but I think they were getting some benefit from awarding fishing licenses to international enterprises. There were factory fishing ships that mined the resources of the Atlantic in that area. I have to assume the main profits went to them, not to the Mauritanian state.

Q: Did Israel come up all the time? Was that a topic?

MURPHY: No. There was an official commitment to the Palestinians and support for the Arab cause in Palestine, but it was not on the average Mauritanian's radar. Daily existence was the issue. It was a tough life. The few businessmen in town who were non-Mauritanian were largely French. There was a small French community; we had a friend who was a French surgeon in the hospitable who said "Stay well; if we have to do surgery on you or members of your family, I can assure you we keep the operating area sterile but I can't guarantee anything outside that area. We want our patients to head home directly from the surgical theater." There were good people who could provide basic medical needs, but health services were otherwise pretty primitive.

Q: I imagine Mauritania wasn't high on the tourist circuit; did you get any American tourists?

MURPHY: No. The only group of Americans who came during that tour were the solar eclipse specialists. We did have one visit – Tippi Hedren the actress, who came as part of her tour promoting conservation. We didn't have that much to conserve in wildlife. As far as wildlife goes, I remember we were presented with the haunch of a wild boar; we came home one night and the haunch was on the table in the kitchen, jet-black and hairy. It took a few days to tenderize it enough to be edible. That was our contact with the wildlife of Mauritania.

Q: Had Morocco when you were in Mauritania caused any problems?

MURPHY: No. They asserted their claim against the Polisario and were building the "berm", the sand-barrier to demarcate their eastern border in "southern Morocco" but that step hadn't involved the Mauritanians. The foreign minister remarked to me that his own mother was living in a Bedouin village in the area where Morocco was confronting the Polisario. The Mauritanians attempted at one point to assert their claim against both the Moroccans and the Polisario. This irritated the Algerians and Nouakchott didn't assert its claim for long once the potential for Algerian trouble making in Mauritania became evident.

Q: Did the Tuareg, the men in blue, were they a factor in Mauritania?

MURPHY: They were part of the tribal scene in the eastern part, deep in the interior. I don't recall any conflict between the Tuaregs and the Mauritanian army. They were more a factor in Mali's political tensions in those days.

Q: Where did you go after this?

MURPHY: I came back on home leave at the end of the tour in 1974 and contacted NEA. I had no onward assignment but heard that there was going to be an opening when Syria agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations. That turned out to be the case. Nixon had gone out on a tour of the 1973 conflict countries in May/June of '74. In the course of that he met with Hafez al-Assad and they agreed to restore relations. We'd had an Interest Section in Damascus since January of '74, three months after the war, under Tom Scotes, and filling the ambassadorship was on Atherton's mind. He had become Assistant Secretary for NEA after Joe Sisco was named Undersecretary for Political Affairs. He asked if I would be interested and I said absolutely. Then I hounded the secretary in the NEA front office daily during my leave to follow progress. Kissinger interviewed me but was noncommittal. I knew there were three of us in the running. It worked out that I was the choice and September 1974 we went to Damascus.

Q: You were in Damascus from when to when?

MURPHY: September of '74 to June of '78.

Q: How did your hearings go?

MURPHY: They were unmemorable. Very straightforward. Fulbright was not there at that time; I don't recall who ran the hearing but it was routine. We were going to reestablish relations cut in '67 and there were hopes – how high those hopes were in the Congress, I don't know. Syria was to be a part of our peacemaking effort that was already off to a racing start with Egypt. Kissinger saw Syria as an essential participant in regional peacemaking. In those months after the opening of the Interest Section in Damascus, and before we established diplomatic relations, he had negotiated a disengagement agreement of Syrian and Israeli forces on the Golan Heights, shuttling between Israel and Syria for a month. He recalled to me at one point, "I got to know every damn rock and bush on the Golan Heights." The Syrians I would say were reasonably hopeful that we would keep moving in the peace process and that first disengagement would be followed by a second and a third. Assad reportedly was not in a hurry but wanted to develop a relationship with the States and regain all the territories he had lost in '73, plus those that Syria had lost in the Six Day War. Israel had moved fairly deeply into the Heights during the '73 war. Kissinger negotiated, or mediated, the Israeli return to the earlier line of '67. They pulled back, but never beyond where they had been since '67.

There was curiosity about Syria in Washington; we didn't know the Syrians, the Syrian government and society, all that well. We'd been shut out very firmly for seven years. My job was to start trying to rebuild. There had been an embassy for many years in Damascus. There had been one notorious effort at playing the local game of political

chairs when we picked a prime minister in the '50s. It was not a success. We were suspect in the eyes of Baath Party leadership that was highly doctrinaire about the liberation of Syria from Imperialism and was always guarded about their country's diplomatic relations with us. We knew that it would be slow, and it was very slow, to build any level of confidence. Kissinger had built a good personal relationship with Assad. He was always welcomed on his visits and Assad dedicated any amount of time Kissinger needed to their meetings. Their relationship was the one clear opening we had at the time I arrived in September.

Q: How were you received?

MURPHY: Very cordially by the government; not by the party. The party kept itself apart. In my whole tour I was never able to call on the head of the Baath's Regional Command. I would meet Party members in Damascus, and in Aleppo and Latakia traveling around the country but never really got to know the National leadership below Hafez unless they occupied government posts such as the Foreign Ministry. The president was always accessible. Normally I would call on him in the afternoons. When I was instructed to raise an issue with him, I would call the secretary of his private office and the President always promptly received me. He didn't delegate meetings to the foreign minister.

Hafez had a photographic memory and command of detail. My many dealings with him were first as ambassador and later in the 80's as assistant secretary. Once when I visited Damascus in the '80s he was discussing a problem and paused saying, "But we've covered this before. You were sitting over there", pointing to the opposite side of his office. It was true; the side of the room we normally met in was being repainted and we were seated against the other wall. I would never have remembered that. But that was part of his power; he had great recall and control over his immediate world. As many as a dozen separate intelligence services monitoring domestic and foreign affairs reported directly to him.

There were three principle players with whom I dealt at the senior level: the president, the foreign minister, Abdul-Halim Khaddam, and the Minister of National Economy Dr. Mohammad Al Imady, an English-speaking NYU graduate. He was the one most familiar with economic principles and comfortable with market economy thinking. The many strong-willed Baathi doctrinaires in the government knew Imady was there because of the president's support but did their best to outmaneuver him.

My tour from September of '74 through the early summer of '78 was a time of intense activity for our embassies in Israel and Egypt interacting with their host governments. Often I felt like a lonely kibitzer sitting in Damascus; the Syrians were not ready to engage in the peace process as month after month passed. I would send in my best appreciation to Washington of where the Syrians were and what it would take to get them moving, but nothing clicked in a major way. We had long conversations with Assad; my personal record was one meeting which lasted for six hours. He was never rushed and often indulged in long monologues about his hopes for his country and what we might do

to help it develop. We launched an AID program, a small one starting with rebuilding the main road from Damascus to the Jordanian border. We never finished the project because Congressional suspicions of Syria always ran high and funding was limited. In contrast to Mauritania we received a flood of congressional visitors. Many congressmen and senators arrived with their hope that they could be the one to arrange the break through and convince the Syrians to engage with Israel where Kissinger, and later Vance, and the State Department had failed. It made for a curious set of visitors. One from Brooklyn, Congressman Steve Solarz, was red-hot to help the Syrian Jewish community.

Q: He got involved with the Jewish brides...

MURPHY: That's right, how did you know about that?

Q: I interviewed Steve.

MURPHY: His initial point when he talked to the president or any member of the government was that it was no secret young Syrian Jewish men had been departing the country secretly and illicitly over the years, slipping over the borders of Lebanon or Turkey. Young Syrian Jewish women, however, were nervous about leaving Syria that way. Wouldn't it be possible to work out some way these young women could get out, find someone to marry and have a normal life? Steve argued that opening the borders for young Syrian Jewish women to leave would have a strong and favorable impact on US congressional attitudes towards Syria.

Q: He was from Brooklyn and had a Jewish community...

MURPHY: For many in his constituency that was a central concern. But he had larger ambitions. He was one of the most active travelers from the House Foreign Affairs Committee and delved into the bilateral issues wherever they might be. His focus in Syria was on Syrian Jewry, Jewish women. He was puzzled that Assad hung back. From Assad's standpoint, when he heard that note of concern he knew he had an issue that could be worked to his advantage. He was very reluctant to contemplate the wholesale exodus of the Syrian Jewish community even though its numbers had been greatly reduced over the years. Also, while he did not draw the connection in his own replies to Solarz, or to our demarches on the subject, he valued his reputation as the leader of Syria which proudly characterized itself as a secular state, a core tenet of Baathism. Protecting Syrian minorities was a role that appealed to him as an Alawite, a small minority community in a largely Sunni Muslim state. Finally he did not want to be seen as in any way acting to benefit the Israelis. When the issue was reduced to the issue of helping out young unmarried Jewish women, the latter seemed a far-fetched concern, but it was a real one on his part.

When President Carter and Assad met in Geneva, Carter was apparently convinced he had Assad's commitment to permit a steady exodus of Syrian Jewish women to the United States but Assad balked at that interpretation for several more years.

Q: You were really not talking about a hell of a lot of women.

MURPHY: No, no you were not. But Carter succeeded only in getting the release of 13 young women to go to the United States. It was some years later when the ban on travel was lifted entirely, but the 13 Syrian virgins were a highpoint in the frustrating process of persuading Assad they would be going to the U.S. and would be no threat to the Syrian military.

Q: Did they all get married?

MURPHY: Almost. It was a great day for Syria when one of the 13 said “I’m going home, I don’t like it here” and came back to Syria. The others all married and stayed and are members of the Syrian Jewish community in the New York area today.

Q: One of the great successes of American diplomacy.

MURPHY: Yep. It got me an award, a fine piece of Roman pottery excavated in Syria, from the Conference of Jewish organizations in the States for having helped on the Syrian Jewish issue. It was an obsession for Steve and for several U.S. politicians who visited. They were aware of the restrictions and hoped to work out some way to end them.

Q: You are one of the few ambassadors who was a go-between in essentially a mating situation!

MURPHY: (Laughter) There is one more story to relate. It was Solarz going to the head of the community, an elderly fellow who wanted to assemble a number of the community to speak with Steve. Steve was always in a hurry, it was business all the way. The Syrian host was not fluent in English. He said, “We want you to meet my friends in the community but we must sit now and have a meal.” Steve said, “No I don’t have time, I have a very tight schedule.” “No, no, Mr. Solarz – we’re Arab; you must realize, you have to sit down and have a meal!” I don’t know how that was translated to Steve but it was a frank statement that “We’re part of a culture where hospitality is important to us.” It got reduced to the phrase “We’re Arab!”

Steve was one of my first visitors in the fall of ’74. I went out to the airport to meet him at planeside, which surprised him. To me that was part of the job, but he was touched by that and he stayed with us whenever he was in Damascus. One visit came just at Christmas-time. He went out into the garden and picked a fruit, something that grew in Syria in the winter season, and brought it in saying “Here’s your Christmas present!” My children were not amused, they being much more materialistic. Steve’s dedication was extraordinary. It was admirable to watch him as he worked throughout his career. He died much too young of a heart condition.

There’s a lot to say about the Syrian experience. Maybe we should call it a break now.

Q: You were there from when to when?

MURPHY: The fall of '71 to the summer of '74. Came back on home leave without an assignment and had every reason to believe that would be my last assignment in the Foreign Service. The policy was you either had an onward assignment within a certain period of time (typically some job in Washington but no guarantees), or you might end up in early retirement. I was 45 and my future was unclear. I remember calling on Roy Atherton who was the assistant secretary of State for NEA. Roy asked if I would be interested in being considered for the job of ambassador to Syria, and I said "Good Lord, yes." That summer was an anxious few weeks waiting for a decision that Kissinger was to make from a short list of three. I felt very lucky that I was chosen for that job.

Q: Did you have any contact with Kissinger prior to that?

MURPHY: No. When I went to Mauritania, it was Secretary Rogers on whom I made a courtesy call. I didn't meet Kissinger who was over at the NSC. When I came back, Rogers had left the Administration and Kissinger was serving both as Secretary of State and as National Security Adviser. So I saw him then in meetings before the formal assignment decision was taken.

The Syrian Foreign Minister, Abdul Halim Khaddam, visited Washington that summer. Nixon and Kissinger had toured the Middle East in June '74 – Cairo, Israel, Jordan and Syria. It was after their meeting with Hafez al-Assad in Damascus that the public announcement was made that diplomatic relations between the United States and Syria would be restored. When the foreign minister arrived, Kissinger had me sit in on his meeting. I was supposed to interpret, given my skills in Arabic. (Laughter) Those skills were quickly shown to be rusty so Kissinger switched to French for the rest of their meeting held in the West Wing of the White House. I escorted Khaddam from the White House back to his hotel. On the way we passed a sign with a bicycle symbol saying "Begin here". Khaddam was startled thinking the reference was to the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

In Mauritania we had contacts with the Syrian Embassy personnel, even though we didn't have diplomatic relations. Our children, particularly our son, had a good friend in one of the Syrian Embassy families. We had to rely on a third party to transport our children back and forth given the protocol restrictions.

The news of returning to Syria was welcomed my family. There was a sense of excitement that Syria might be ready to join in a general peace effort in the Middle East. It had always been stand-offish but Kissinger wanted to see what could be done. By mid-summer I had been designated as ambassador and a letter of credence was signed by President Nixon to Hafez al-Assad. I have the rare chance to possess Nixon's original letter because within days of his signing it, the president resigned and flew off to San Clemente. The Syrians sent word that they had to have a letter from the "real president", and so one was drawn up for President Ford's signature. The original letter from President Nixon occupies a place of honor in my study.

Q: Should we move to Syria or should we do that another time?

MURPHY: That will be a more complicated story; maybe we should start fresh on that.

Q: Take it over.

MURPHY: September 1974 was my first visit to Syria since the Baathi takeover in '63. The period had been a troubled one in the region. During the '67 war, Syria had cut its diplomatic relations with Washington and there were no regular exchanges until we opened an Interest Section in Damascus in January '74. Tom Scopes was Chargé d'Affaires and had done fine spadework, establishing contacts in the foreign ministry and a couple of the other ministries. Kissinger had shuttled for a month between Syria and Israel until concluding the so-called First Disengagement Agreement which returned the Israelis to the line where they had been militarily since '67. They had penetrated more deeply beyond that line on the Golan Heights in the course of the fighting in '73.

It was a time when the Syrians and many Americans thought it might be possible to continue further negotiations for a Syrian-Israeli peace. I don't know what Kissinger personally felt were the chances for diplomatic progress between Israel and Syria. America's attention had shifted dramatically to the Israeli-Egyptian relationship. Sadat reportedly wanted not only to recover all the territory Egypt had lost in '73 but signaled that he might be ready to go further and reach a peace agreement with Israel. Hafez Assad had been committed to good relations with Egypt as they worked out their war plans for October '73 and he had been shaken by Sadat's decision to accept an early cease-fire. He felt let down, even betrayed I would say at that time. His suspicions deepened over Egypt's eagerness to enter into the post-war talks, which we had organized to start at Geneva in December '73. Kissinger was fond of telling the story where he had arrived in Damascus to meet Assad on the last of his calls prior to Geneva to describe what he hoped the Geneva conference might trigger.

He said (this was December '73) that he informed Assad "There is a plan to have a discussion between all of the combatants".

Assad nodded, "Yes, I've heard of that."

Kissinger said, "We intend to have an early meeting, perhaps in December."

"Yes."

"It would take place in Geneva."

"Yes."

Kissinger said the atmosphere was so agreeable that he finally said to Assad, "I'm curious Mr. President. Everywhere else I have been – Cairo, Amman, Israel, preparing

the parties for this conference, they said ‘You’re going to have a difficult time with Assad.’ But you understood about the conference and timing and the place?”

Assad said, “Yes but I didn’t say I was coming.”

That took Kissinger aback. He had thought he was getting it all sewed up. Syria eventually was represented at Geneva; I believe within the overall Arab delegation. It arrived suspicious of what might be unfolding and gradually elaborated its position over the next few years into what it called its leadership of the “Steadfastness Front”. Egypt had capitulated by its agreement to negotiate and reach compromises with Israel. Syria would not do that; it would firmly hold to its principles.

Assad was always pleased to receive Kissinger who made probably four visits in my first year in Damascus. He shared some of his insights into the regional scene and indulged in minor gossip about the personalities he was dealing with in Israel. At one point he asked Assad, “Have you ever noticed the way Mrs. Meir carries her purse?” Assad, somewhat taken aback, said “No.” Kissinger said, “Like a tommy-gun.” That momentarily warmed up the atmosphere in the American-Syrian dialogue.

Assad rarely traveled. In my tour I think the only trip he made outside of the country was to meet in ’77 with President Carter in Geneva. That event was staged very carefully. Carter had invited Assad to Washington and Assad politely declined. His counter proposal was to split the difference in distance between Washington and Damascus and meet in Switzerland. Small points of protocol were important to him. He sat in Damascus and expected the world to come to him. He would sit there and render his decisions as the leader of the Steadfastness Front.

He was always ready to meet at our request. Kissinger worked hard to keep the channel open, and it remained open. Assad was ready for discussions. As for decisions, he reserved his position constantly.

Q: Before you went out there, had you talked to Kissinger on what he wanted of you?

MURPHY: Yes, we met. As I recall it was in his office at the National Security Council. He said, “I think it’s going to be slow and deliberate but there are prospects for an opening. Stay alert to any sign of where the Syrians would be interested in pursuing talks.” Kissinger was very controlling. At one point early on, I made a proposal about how he might address one aspect of the dialogue. He never replied but friends in his delegation who flew in shortly thereafter said “Be careful, he has his own plan on how to proceed. Don’t suggest different approaches.” That was early on in my assignment. It was the only moment where I encountered irritation with how I had been conducting myself.

Q: When he came, did you run into a problem whether would you attend the meetings or not?

MURPHY: There was never any question about being excluded from his meetings with Assad. He might at the very end of a long session – these meetings went on for three or four hours -- ask for a few words at the end in private with Assad, and we would all step out. But otherwise I felt fully involved in his visits. On one of his visits, we had received word that his departure from Cairo coming to Damascus had been delayed due to a security problem. It turned out that one of the security officers with him had placed a side-arm in an overhead compartment of the plane which went off! I got the news before leaving for the airport which was a half-hour away from our downtown embassy and delayed my own departure. But I over-delayed. I came out at high speed on the airport road only to see the vehicle carrying him and the foreign minister, zooming by me on the way into town. He apparently looked for me when he landed and commented to the foreign minister, “Apparently, my ambassador has cut diplomatic relations with me.”

The foreign minister Abdul-Halim Khaddam was a feisty fellow. He had very clear blue eyes and was known around the diplomatic circuit as “Pretty-Boy Floyd”, referring to the days of Chicago gangsters. A Sunni from the coastal city of Tartous, he enjoyed jousting, always insisting on having the last word. On one occasion when we were waiting together for Kissinger’s plane I asked whether he agreed that the worst discovery of modern times was the airplane. He quickly retorted, “No. The worst discovery of our time was the United States of America.” Politics in Damascus could be a dangerous occupation. At one point he was ambushed just outside of the capital by a dissident element who fired on his convoy. My wife and I called on them in the hospital where we found them side-by-side in hospital beds, all bandaged up.

Khaddam never tried to insert himself between me and the president. If I said I had a message from Kissinger, he didn’t ask to be briefed on it first – I would go straight to the president with it. I may have been given certain privileges as the American ambassador, showing the degree they hoped to develop a better relationship.

Q: When you arrived there and within a few months, had you figured out where things should go in your own mind?

MURPHY: I assumed that our policy was to push-ahead and reach a further disengagement of forces on the Golan, however much time it would take. Assad asked at one point how many Israelis were on the Golan Heights. Although Israel had quickly moved to establish a civilian presence there, it still was not a large number of people. When I gave him an estimated number, he said “That’s only several busloads. Their evacuation from the Heights can be worked out.”

Syrians felt badly misunderstood. Assad would recount stories of the period between ’67 and ’73 which he said illustrated his belief that the Israelis deliberately sent armored tractors through the Jordan valley below the Heights to draw Syrian fire. I mentioned that to one of our early visitors, a delegation from the Hadassah organization. The head of that group snorted and said, “I think you’re a victim of *localitis*, Mr. Ambassador.” I replied, “That’s their view of history; I’m just telling you that they see themselves as being steadily provoked.”

My assumption was that we would welcome any opportunity to move ahead. In retrospect, I'm not so sure. Washington was fully preoccupied in the details of the Israeli-Egyptian talks. Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban reportedly said at one point "We are interested in peace with the party which can make war." In their view that meant Egypt, not Syria. There was never any give that I recall in the period '74 until I left in '78 in Israel's determination simply to stand firm on the lines where they were at the end of the first disengagement. We found opportunities to cooperate with Syria. The Syrians confidently used us as a channel when fighting broke out in Lebanon between Palestinian forces near Zahle and the Maronite forces. The president of Lebanon asked the Syrians to help push the Palestinians back. Assad directed his Army chief of staff, General Hikmat Shihabi, to work closely with us to keep the Israelis advised of his planning. He had been asked to come in to stop the fighting and he agreed to observe certain restrictions, the so-called "Red Lines". He ordered his own military to move towards the border along the main Damascus-Beirut road, and paused at the Syrian side of the border. A day or so later, he sent a small force across the border, then a larger force. He accepted the Israeli position against Syrian over-flights of southern Lebanon. He agreed on restrictions of the type of equipment the Syrians would bring with them.

They helped to quiet the situation in Lebanon at that point, the early days of the fifteen year Lebanese revolution. It showed his confidence that we would handle communications straightforwardly and help keep his forces coming into Lebanon from sparking a broader conflict between Israel and Syria.

Q: Aside from the Israeli-Syria problem, did we have any Syrian-American problems that you had to deal with?

MURPHY: Assad was interested in having a U.S. aid program; I don't think he had exaggerated expectations as to what we might do. We opened a small AID (U.S. Agency for International Development) office and signed up to rebuild the main highway from Damascus to the Jordanian border. We never committed a great deal of money and it moved pretty slowly. Eventually, after my time when relations worsened, we stopped the project.

We had cultural exchanges. An American modern dance group came to perform at a Syrian theater with a program which included a retelling of the Othello story. A senior Baath Party member sat in the front row and said that he had enjoyed it but he knew the story and they "didn't retell accurately the part about the handkerchief!" The cinemas in Syria had always been allowed to show "non-political" American films such as our Westerns. So the door was never fully closed. There were numbers of Syrian-Americans who had emigrated to the States in the early days of the 20th century. There was a sense in Syria that "We know you, we know about you, and we regret that we can't have a better relationship because of your policies on the Palestinians and your one-sided support of Israel." You'd get that presentation not at Assad's level, but as a ritual part of conversation with Syrians be they businessmen or mid-level civil servants. "We'd like

better relations, but you Americans make it very hard.” The idea that “we Syrians” could make it easier was not in their minds.

Q: Was your USIA (United States Information Agency) section active?

MURPHY: Yes. They managed the small cultural program that we got going. We had one American scholar early in the days of the USIA presence who wanted to come to Damascus and research the history of a certain period which would require access to the official Syrian archives. I said, “I don’t think the Syrians are ready for that” but the PAO (public affairs officer) was Kenton Keith and argued successfully with me to approve the visit of this man who is now a professor at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and the chairman of the American University Beirut board of trustees. I thought that asking approval for him to spend several weeks in the Syrian government archives might excite Syrian suspicions, but they gave permission and it worked out well.

As the ‘70s went on, tensions between Egypt and Syria grew and there were sabotage attempts at the Jordanian and Egyptian embassies. These were officially described as being accidental explosions of cooking-gas cylinders but they were apparently devices set off by from militant Palestinian factions protesting Jordanian and Egyptian moves towards closer relations with Israel.

We didn’t have such incidents against our embassy. I would walk the short distance on the streets where our residence was to the office every morning. I only heard later how unhappy I had made our security officer by doing that. But I never had a sense of being targeted in Syria. The embassies were pretty much concentrated in the Abu Romani district of Damascus. Our office was there; the Egyptians were across the street. The Turks, Jordanians, everybody was within shouting distance so we were quickly aware of troubles that any of our colleagues would be having. Demonstrators came by the office. If they kept going by, we knew they were heading to the Jordanians; if they paused it was to demonstrate anger with Egyptian policies. At that time we weren’t targeted ourselves.

Q: Were these demonstrations orchestrated?

MURPHY: Oh, yes. Assad wasn’t about to have demonstrations which were not controllable. Did he incite them? In some cases, probably yes. Was there uneasiness in the Palestinian community in Damascus with the way things were going? Yes. Was the government tempted to whip up popular enthusiasm for its causes? Syria was a police state and has remained one over the years. We just assumed that we were watching a game in which the Syrian intelligence and security officers were involved.

Q: By the way, was there any residue of the Syrian brides? The Jewish brides?

MURPHY: That didn’t get a focus until late in the Ford administration. Then President Carter picked it up as a project which he wanted to see carried out. There were a number of exchanges and messages between the White House and Syrian authorities about that; we had a series of visits by Steve Solarz who would always bring it up. It was seen as one

of the early requests for winning a concession from the Syrian authorities and they handled it as having more importance than they should have. Eventually one of them said that their real concern was that “we not be seen as aiding and abetting the Israelis in any way. Those who left may well have ended up in Israel contributing to the Israeli intelligence effort against our country.” Paranoia was rampant in all aspects of Syrian-Israeli issues. Then it was decided to grant exit permits for 13 unmarried young Syrian Jewish women. Our argument was that their marriage prospects were dwindling steadily because the young men were gone and the Syrians shouldn’t want to stand in the way of the effort of a young unmarried woman to have a family. When you put it on those grounds, Syrians would fall silent because it was too embarrassing to say they were against marriage. The 13 left on the understanding given to the Syrians authorities that they were going not to Israel or even to Europe, but only to the States; this was a concession given to the Americans. The happiest news for Syria from their departure was when one of the teen agers said she didn’t like it and came home, back to Syria. The Jewish community had greatly shrunken. In my earlier service in Aleppo people talked of the wholesale departure of the Syrian Jewish community from the northeast, and they had largely departed from Aleppo. By the time I came back as ambassador, it was down to a few hundred in Damascus. They worried about losing their rabbi to hold services. They were active in manufacturing and trading jewelry and fine quality products. There were some prosperous members. But I don’t think they ever felt entirely secure in their own life in Syria. They knew they were under steady surveillance but they carried on and lived a very quiet life. The doors were not open to the community’s overall departure until some point in the early ‘90s; I was not involved in that during my period in Damascus.

Q: How was life for your officers and other personnel at the embassy?

MURPHY: There were morale issues which I hadn’t had with our tiny group in Mauritania in that very harsh climate and isolation. From Damascus, Americans easily were able to visit Beirut for shopping and a change of scenery. But some on the staff found it too tough psychologically. They were nervous and we had a few requests for early transfers by those who couldn’t adjust to the atmosphere. The Syrians had a peculiar approach when they would talk with an American official. They would blast America at the beginning of a conversation. They would ease up as the minutes passed and eventually they would say something about “you know our position; you understand it”. So they had a knack of boring in on you and then making you feel good that you understood them. Hospitality which is characteristic in the region was always in Syria. “Come in, have a coffee, sit down, don’t be rushed.” Making you feel welcome. But some Americans were uneasy and felt that given the political surveillance and pressures to which we were all exposed, they didn’t want to stay around. The group did have a bit of a fortress mentality about being watched. When I would travel out of the city, the Syrians assigned “for your protection” a security officer to ride in the car. I remember stopping in Homs for lunch on our way up north, and striking up a casual conversation with someone at a neighboring table. I heard later he had been taken off for interrogation – “What did you tell the American?” That sort of thing. I paid a call on the retired governor of Aleppo from our times there in the early ‘60s; he and his wife received my wife and me in Latakia. I was dismayed to hear after our friendly social call that he too

had been summoned for interrogation. Mine was just a courtesy call, recalling the days we had been together in Aleppo, absolutely nonpolitical. But in the eyes of the regime that was impossible; everything was politicized.

Official controls over their people were extensive. My contacts in the business community would allude to difficulties they had in carrying out business with foreigners but they were careful not to go into any specifics. The regime's message was constant: "You are a victim of Israeli pressures and policies; we stand firm in your defense; don't get out of line."

Q: Did you find that you were completely inhibited as far as moving ahead? Did you have projects you wanted to do that you couldn't?

MURPHY: I was very aware there were certain sectors where we were not welcome. One was the Baath party leadership. The head of the party below Assad was very much a public figure but wouldn't meet with us. You had no business as a diplomat reaching out to the political party that was running the show – an odd attitude, but that was it. We were suspect for even trying to talk to these officials. They would appear at public functions but I don't think they ever came to the embassy, even on our National Day. They were closed off.

We had good relations in the local medical scene. There were some American-trained specialists with a good range of medical skills, including a fine pediatrician. We didn't feel we had to go routinely to Beirut to the American University hospital. At one point we did have a crisis with our son who developed a seriously high fever and had to be rushed for treatment in Beirut at the advice of our Syrian pediatrician.

Our son attended the community school which was privately funded by fees from families of the attendees. The principal was a gifted Palestinian woman, and one or two American teachers joined the faculty. As a sign of our own paranoia, we told our son that if when riding his bike to school he was stopped and asked by the police "Who are you? Where are you going?" he was to reply that he was French. He had enough French from his time in Mauritania to pull that off. We were conscious that there were some strong feelings about Americans in the community and we didn't want to take a chance with our kid. Nothing ever happened. My wife did have one incident. She was driving our car in an area where there was the office of a senior Army officer and had the bad luck to dent another car. The police immediately said, "You must come to the station; this is the car of general so-and-so." She knew general so-and-so; after telling our embassy security officer that she was being detained after a minor accident, she asked the police officer "Can I talk to the general?" She talked her way out of that.

It was an edgy society; you had to be observant, be conscious of the constant focus on you as a foreigner and particularly as an American diplomat.

Q: How about emigration? Was that going on?

MURPHY: The visa office was busy. There were no special restrictions on Syrians traveling to the States. We had a small educational scholarship program run by USIS. Visa applicants were in the main relatives of Syrians who had emigrated over the previous three generations and were going on visits to them. Our pediatrician had been shocked when he returned from his practice in the Washington area. His own training had been in a Washington hospital where he did rounds with his professor to learn the technique of examining a patient. In Damascus he was asked to give a course at the university on treating small children. "I walked into a big lecture hall with 200 students; there was a mother holding a baby and I was supposed to demonstrate how to examine that baby." He said it was impossible; he had come back to care for aging parents but in the end lasted only about five years before returning to his practice in the States.

Q: How about relations between Syria and Turkey?

MURPHY: There was no major issue between them at that time. The Turkish ambassador was the grandson of the last Ottoman governor of Syria. He was in our neighborhood; as I walked from our residence I would pass the Turkish embassy on my right and the North Koreans on the left. There was an annual holiday where the government would send helicopters over the city and drop bags of candy on parachutes to show its good will towards the population. One parachute (tiny parachutes) came down near the North Koreans' office. Our son was tracking the fall of the parachute when it landed on the street where there was a police post. He was upset the parachute had disappeared. My wife took him to the police post and asked if the policeman had seen a parachute, and if he had it could he give it up? The policeman told her, "I'm sure the American ambassador's son has plenty of candy." She said, "you don't understand – he wanted the parachute." So the guard happily gave him the parachute! That cemented American-Syrian police relationships for that day.

Q: How were things with Jordan?

MURPHY: Mutually suspicious. I recall from my days in Aleppo a visit by a Syrian government sponsored group that included a vaudeville routine; one scene had the Jordanian king appear on a leash held by the Imperialists, jumping around as if he were a trained monkey or dog. The official ill will towards the Jordanians was constant. The Syrians were not tempted to do anything militarily against the Jordanians until later, during the unstable atmosphere of Black September in Jordan when things turned ugly. Generally relations were restrained, cool and unfriendly. We made no bones about the friendship we felt towards the Jordanian authorities. This was well understood by the Syrians; I think we contributed somewhat to the restraint they showed in their overall dealings with Jordan.

The Syrians saw themselves as the Arab World leader; others were weak because they had capitulated to outside powers. In that connection Assad told me that when Sadat made his rounds of Arab capitals before going to Jerusalem in '78, a Syrian military delegation had called on him to ask his permission to assassinate Sadat. He told them no. This concept of Syria as being the center of Arab leadership was a self delusion; they

couldn't even control events in Beirut. They could alternate between opposing and supporting the Palestinian Liberation Organization and did so in the early stage of the Lebanon's revolution. But they never enjoyed anywhere near the position in the Arab World of respect and leadership that they claimed.

They distrusted the Iraqis as rivals and worked to reinforce their own self-image as uniquely positioned to lead the Arab world. Baghdad was a fellow Baathist regime but Syrians felt little in common with the Iraqi Baath Party leaders other than sharing the Party's name and doctrines. Both claimed to be friends of the small workers and farmers, socialist regimes with equal justice for all. In reality the Baathis in Baghdad were seen as in another universe. Assad publicly displayed his antipathy when he supported Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, and later when he authorized a Syrian unit to join the forces which George H. W. Bush organized to repulse the Iraqis' presence in Kuwait.

Q: Any nostalgia for the United Arab Republic, when Syria and Egypt were joined together?

MURPHY: Memories of irritation with being under Egypt never faded. In Aleppo, some argued a year after the split from the United Arab Republic that the two countries should find a way to get back together. However, they were quickly shut up. The Baathi take over in '63 extinguished any thought of returning Syria to an inferior position where an Egyptian captain could tell a Syrian colonel what to do. In a word there was no nostalgia about the good old days of the UAR.

They worked secretly with Egypt to prepare for the '73 war, and managed to surprise the Israelis. The Egyptians and Syrians made dramatic gains in the first week of that war, but were quickly crushed militarily by the Israelis.

Q: What about the United Nations? Did that come up? Were you able to get anywhere on getting votes from Syria?

MURPHY: They welcomed the setting-up of the UN observation mission on the Golan and Lebanon. The first commander of the UN forces, an Austrian, was well received. The Syrian military cooperated with the UN which was seen as a helpful stabilizing element on the scene. However, when I would go to Khaddam with a request from Washington for support in the Security Council on a variety of issues, not Syrian-American ones but of general international concern, I never got anywhere. Syrians took pride in affirming they were free of US pressure and petitions and indeed of all foreign influence. I remember complaining to Assad near the end of the tour, saying "I tried repeatedly to get your support for..." and would run through a short list ending "and you never accepted any of our ideas." He replied with his sardonic sense of humor, "That's because you never had any good ones." They were not cooperative on issues which might be important to others and others in New York's UN debates. I'm not referring to Arab-Israeli issues, but other concerns of global policy.

Q: Did Assad ever say on any issue, “Can you explain why you crazy Americans are doing this?” Show puzzlement about the stands we would take? Did he ever say, “I don’t understand why you Americans are doing this; please explain?” In other words trying to explain to a foreigner on what Americans were doing on, I don’t know, gun policy or abortion or anything else?

MURPHY: His focus in speaking to me was on the U.S.-Syrian bilateral relationship and overall Arab-Israeli continued antagonism and hostilities. Nothing else was of importance compared to this.

Q: It’s a pretty open question! Americans, our internal politics sometimes are beyond explanation.

MURPHY: He felt he understood the depth of Israeli-American relations and the power of the Israeli lobby; he talked quite freely about that. At one point almost in envy, he said “I wish that we could have such a relationship with the United States.” But he made no moves to build our relationship to anything approaching what we had with Israel. After I had heard the presentation about the Israeli lobby once too often I said “In American politics, the Israeli lobby is powerful but not the most powerful.” Momentarily off balance he asked who was and I said “The NRA”. He found that intriguing but he didn’t give up his basic view of American political sensitivity to Israeli influence.

Q: Did he ever receive any Jewish delegations? Would they go to Israel and then come there at all? Did he welcome them?

He received no Israeli nationals but he was happy to receive an American senator or congressman who was Jewish. I think he saw their visits as an opportunity to score some points. I recall one senator opening their conversation with “Mr. President I should tell you right off that I am Jewish.” Assad responded, “I know. But you’re here as an American senator.”

Journalists always got careful scrutiny before they could get a visa. American businessmen, politicians and officials were very welcome. Anyone who raised with Assad the issue of Syria joining in a general peace process was always heard out, but his standard reply was that the time was not ripe.

Q: Do you think he had any appreciation of the Israeli problem? Did he seem to understand what the pressures of Israeli politics were? Did he understand the workings within Israel?

MURPHY: I don’t think so. Visitors like Kissinger provided him with insights into Israeli politics. He would listen attentively, seemingly ready to be persuaded that what they had to say might change his views of Israel. He was not a well-traveled leader. He enjoyed sitting in his office and having the world come to him. As a young military officer he had been to Cairo for training. Some said he’d been to the UK at one point but I never confirmed that. He would sit in his office in Damascus and never seemed hurried.

Meetings with him could stretch on; I think I held the meeting record at one point of some six hours. People ask, “How could you talk for six hours? What did you accomplish in six hours?” Hard to recall.

He had near photographic memory for documents and recollected events in extraordinary detail. When I came back on a visit as Assistant Secretary in the ‘80s, at one point he said “I explained this to you once before! We were renovating this office and you were sitting over there.” He was right – I had been on the opposite side of the room, the couches had been moved to accommodate the painters.

Q: I’m running out of questions. Were there any incidents that flared up or accidents or problems that absorbed you at the time? Any issues that we may not have covered on Syria?

MURPHY: We did cover the way he approached his intervention in Lebanon, listening carefully to our reading of Israeli “red lines”. He relied on this issue on General Shihabi who was an able guy, one of the few in the Syrian army who had had some exposure to U.S. military training. He had attended a course at Fort Leavenworth I believe. Lebanon constantly came up in our meetings. Syria was host to a large number of Lebanese refugees who came over in the early years of the Lebanese Revolution. It irritated their Syrian hosts when they would say “We want to go home, there’s nothing interesting about life in Damascus.” Even if they would risk being blown up if they went back across the border, their refrain was “Beirut is much more alive!” They were not gracious guests. There were occasional meetings between Syrian and Lebanese officials about defining an international boundary between Lebanon and Syria. There were lines on the map but no full set of precise coordinates was ever worked out. In the ‘80s the Syrians were increasingly well established politically and militarily in Lebanon and overall did not treat Lebanese concerns with seriousness.

Q: Did the religious side of things – I know the Baath Party in Syria was anti-clerical, wasn’t it?

MURPHY: It was. However, you would hear from the Syrian Christian community genuine expressions of appreciation that the Baath was non-sectarian. There were genuine expressions from the Christian church hierarchy about how well they were treated in comparison to earlier periods. Some in the majority Sunni community would share their doubts that Assad’s policy was non-sectarian. They saw him as cleverly playing off one community against another in order to protect the interests of his own, the Alawites. That community had broken off from Sunni Islam years centuries earlier. He would appear at major official occasions like the Feast of the Sacrifice in Ramadan at the main mosque. It was said he wasn’t fully at ease, but I wasn’t knowledgeable enough about the small signs which might distinguish an Alawite in prayer from a Sunni. During my early days in Aleppo I had witnessed the low status of the Alawites in Syria. They would send their children off to work for Sunni and Christian families in Aleppo on ten year contracts. They would carry the young master’s books to school and sleep in a cubby hole over the kitchen. It was ugly. Occasionally in later years there were anti regime

actions carried out by the Muslim Brotherhood which eventually provoked Assad to authorize destruction of the center of the city of Hama. Assad lived with full awareness of the tensions between the communities but the official line was always very simple: we do not favor any one community over another.

Q: Seeing what's happening in Syria which is almost beyond comprehension, the civil war that's been going on there for I don't know how many years.

MURPHY: The current war started in 2011.

Q: Assad really was doing a good job of balancing off what could be hatreds.

MURPHY: Hatreds were there. You're right, he was a master at managing the hatreds, the currents of ill-will which would threaten overall stability and his leadership. He kept himself very well informed about domestic issues. They used to say his mornings were dedicated to receiving reports from the many intelligence services who reported directly to his office. The afternoons were for more general discussions with foreign visitors, diplomats, whatever. He maintained control through assiduous attention to detail.

Q: At the embassy, were you – you knew of the tensions; did you keep a daily watch to figure out whether there might be an uprising? Or did you feel this was not going to happen?

MURPHY: Our embassy at that time saw that the volatile element was the Palestinian community. They were front and center in any public demonstrations. There were stories about unhappiness among the Kurds in the north who wanted (as they still do) greater autonomy if not independence from Syria; they felt under-represented and disrespected in Damascus. There were tribal leaders who had misgivings about Assad's authority but they didn't pose challenges. We were aware of the many strands that made up Syria but I don't say we had the full intelligence on what held Syria together.

Q: How well did you feel you were informed by INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) and CIA and other things from Washington about what was going on? Was it useful?

MURPHY: Always useful. I felt that between our conversations with Assad and Khaddam, we had a good reading of where their policies were coming from. Did we have a particularly rich reading of their critics' thinking? No. And we were not publicly in touch with many of the critics because that would only have raised suspicions on the regime's part. I don't believe that the Agency representatives contributed a great deal to Washington's understanding of Syria. I recall being troubled when I was in Aleppo in the early 60's by some of the reporting of the local Agency representative who shared his reports with me. I discussed this with our ambassador in Damascus who shrugged and said he'd always found the reports you didn't have to pay for better than those you did. He represented a common view attitude of the traditionalists in the Foreign Service.

Q: You'd get stories on both accounts. I've heard many say that in these interviews. Particularly in Vietnam where we were paying for all sorts of information. Some was good, some was bad. It's a crap-shoot.

MURPHY: Yes. The military attaché tried hard but couldn't get very deep into the thinking of the Syrian military. They were highly on guard, if you will. To be a commercial officer in Syria or Saudi Arabia was a much easier job than being a political officer or a military attaché.

Q: Speaking of which, being a political officer in a one-party state has always struck me as a hard row to till. How did you find you could use your political officers?

MURPHY: How did I use them?

Q: Could they really go out and get much that you couldn't read from the newspapers, since everything was pretty well controlled?

MURPHY: Syria society was highly controlled and people were correspondingly careful about what they said. After my tour as Ambassador the Muslim Brotherhood turned violent and was harshly suppressed. My first visit as Assistant Secretary was in '83. No-one volunteered to talk about what had happened in Hama in '82. Was that out of fear of appearing sympathetic to the opponents of the regime? Probably in part. Mostly it was probably considered dangerous to express your opinions about the regime to foreign officials. There was a blanket of silence about the Hama crisis of just a year earlier. When I raised it once with Assad he replied, "What happened in Hama had to happen because the Brotherhood had been doing things such as seizing young women, cutting their skulls open and nailing their brains to the city walls." He didn't expand on that.

Q: What sort of political section did you have?

MURPHY: It was a small embassy in '74-78. We had the usual sections; political would have had two officers, economic two or three. The AID office was somewhat larger and had frequent temporary duty personnel preparing projects. The overall complement was probably a dozen officers. Everyone kept busy. They all had their social circles and some could get the Syrians to talk about their attitudes towards the government. Most such information would come indirectly. An American businessman interested in winning a contract would have to deal with so-and-so and we would hear the implication that a pay-off would be needed at some point to get a contract approved. I don't want to exaggerate the insights we gained from such transactions; the American businessmen based in Beirut or coming from the States were not greatly interested in pursuing prospects in Syria. You'd get tidbits which you'd try to piece together to draw a meaningful overall conclusion about the state of the economy. We would pick up gossip about who was rumored to be trying to become a member of the regional command of the Baath Party. I said that we had some morale difficulties; I wouldn't want to exaggerate those because I think most people assigned to the newly reopened embassy enjoyed the challenge, feeling

that they were in the Wild West and the Indians were circling the fort. The country had real attractions in its archaeology and its cultural scene. Most of our people were pretty happy there and felt they were dealing with a tough but important customer.

Q: Dick, I've kept you at this quite some time now. Is there anything more we should discuss about Syria?

MURPHY: No, I think that's pretty complete. The uncertainty of being an ambassador in the Foreign Service manifested itself near the end of my Syrian tour. I had no successor named but it had been three-and-a-half years and I knew my tour was drawing short. I experienced another period of doubt wondering whether this would be my last assignment. Then I had a telephone call from the Director-General's office one evening. His message was simple: they would like me to come back and then take David Newsom's position. I had known David in Washington. My current news of him was only that he had recently been transferred from Indonesia to the Philippines. I blurted out displaying the depth of my knowledge of the Philippines, that "I don't speak Spanish." Turns out not that many people do speak Spanish in the Philippines these days; English had largely taken over beginning in 1900.

Q: The language is Tagalog anyways, isn't it?

MURPHY: (Laughter) It was '78 and the man on the phone said only "they want you to get back as soon as possible, have your hearings and get to that place, without naming it, because the vice-president is going to be paying a visit. I said, "I'll come back" which I did, and that started a new chapter.

Q: We'll pick this up when you left Damascus.

Q: Today is the 4th of January, 2018. Dick, we were going to leave Syria but do you have any further thoughts on Syria?

MURPHY: I would add that our government always seemed hopeful that Hafez would join in the peace process which we were vigorously pursuing with the Egyptians and Israelis. I probably did get touched by *localitis*, arguing that Washington should push harder to include Syria. There were a series of visitors from the new administration of Jimmy Carter who came to Damascus including an early one by Cy Vance. I learned that while there was concern to keep Syria involved it never really developed into devising specific approaches, a step-by-step "look at this and do that and we can try the next step." That was very much the pattern working with the Israelis and Egyptians but we never spoke that precisely with the Syrians. I nourished the hope that we could produce something. But Washington had other preoccupations and it just never got moving ahead.

It was in the '90s after I had retired that Assad began to make statements to the press about his interest in and support for a "peace of the brave." Now, that doesn't sound like much but seeing how slowly and carefully he studied his every possible move, that showed that the man had moved and that there was an opportunity – at least a new

concern among the Syrians not to be left behind. I made the point to you in our last conversation that the Syrians loved to assert the centrality of their country in regional affairs and their claims of the influence that they could exercise over Arab world opinion. I don't think they ever had that kind of following. Off-and-on, the Saudis and others were interested in the country. But the prime movers, no. The Egyptians still nursed a grudge at having been pushed out, abandoned in the days of the United Arab Republic. I interpreted the move they made in landing their forces in Yemen to help the Yemen revolution as a call for the region to regroup behind the Egyptian revolutionary banner. Their leadership role had been challenged and they replied by getting mixed up in Yemen which didn't help either Yemen or Egypt in the longer run.

Q: So much of what we were doing was driven by Israeli interests. Were the Israelis as interested in settling the Golan Heights as they were in other parts of the old conflict? Was it a priority with them?

MURPHY: They were determined to settle the Golan Heights, but are you asking if they wanted to have it on the table as a political issue to be resolved with the Syrians?

Q: In the overall Palestinian problem, was the Golan Heights a key element from the Israeli point of view?

MURPHY: I don't think so. I think the Golan was seen as a geographic point of vulnerability which had increased the appetite of the Syrians to strike against Israel in '73. No, I don't think it was ever seen as a tradable occupation. They were not going to give that piece of territory up. They moved to formally annex the Heights at some point in the '80s.

Q: Given that, probably the pressure on the Americans from the State Department perspective was not as strong regarding Syria as the Palestinian situation itself.

MURPHY: Certainly not as strong as on the Egyptian front. In the eyes of the Israelis as best I could judge from Damascus, the Israelis regarded Syria as genuinely hostile and while willing to consider accommodations, I don't think the Israelis themselves offered any. The mind-set in Israel was not disposed to engage with the Syrians. They had a full plate to work on with the Egyptians. The Palestinian situation was confused. The Israelis deeply suspected Arafat as a leader. When he talked about his long-running goal of independence they were absolutely sure he meant the re-taking of all of Israel. There was no substantial Israeli interest in my opinion in the Palestinian or Syrian situation. Jordan? Yes. That looked promising to the Israelis as a country with a leadership that could lead its people and control the country. That made it attractive. Israelis perhaps thought that Jordan could manage to play the role of controlling the West Bank and if not, the East Bank – Trans-Jordan – might well become the Palestinian state. They supported exploring that idea in their contacts with the Jordanians which were kept secretive. They saw potential in the Jordanian relationship, but they saw real promise with Egypt; in comparison Syria offered nothing but fierce resistance to Israel's interests. Did Assad

sincerely believe Syria could be the Arab leader? That I don't know. But you could certainly interpret his rhetoric that way: "We are the leader of steadfastness."

Q: Then you're going back to Washington?

MURPHY: I went back to Washington on a rapid transfer to meet someone's goal who was planning a trip by Vice-President Mondale which would include a stop in the Philippines. David Newsom told me he had looked forward to staying in Manila as his retirement post; for him it was a return to a country he had followed over the years and was very fond of. Then Vance asked him to be the Under Secretary for political affairs. Suddenly there was an unanticipated vacancy. The story I heard but never pinned down was that there were a number of East Asia hands in the department, senior officers, for whom assignment as ambassador to the Philippines was a special attraction. The problem was that each had his loyal followers in the senior ranks of the service and fought each other to a stand-still. Then the question was, how about somebody from outside? As I understand it, Bob Oakley who I had known in Washington went to Dick Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary for East Asia and said, "What about Murphy? He's due for a new job." Suddenly there was an unexpected contender for the job which was kind of a relief to those who hoped their candidate would get it but saw that the odds were for paralysis in decision making. So there was no opposition to this outsider coming into what was considered a very high-priority job in the administration. It was inhouse politics, you might say.

I was told when I got to Washington that one thing in my favor was that I had managed my relationships well over the years with our military. In fact I hadn't had any major relationships with our military but that issue was very much on people's minds. One of the officers who had failed to secure the nomination had great qualities but had been critical of Vietnam policy. He was not looked on by the Pentagon as one to rely on to uphold America's position in the region even though the Vietnam War had ended. We had our bases at Subic Bay for the Navy and Clark for the Air Force. It was considered an essential part of American strategy to maintain very good relations with the Philippines so there would be no challenge to our continued presence in that country with our major military bases. They didn't see anything in my record that spelled hostility to the military.

Q: In these interviews, what we are picking up is the interplay of politics and assignments with officers who may have nothing to do with it but others are juggling things around.

Did you go to the Philippines first after leaving Syria?

MURPHY: No, I went to Washington first. As it turned out, Mondale canceled his stop over in the Philippines and the urgency of getting the new ambassador in place wasn't there by the time I returned for consultations. I called on Holbrooke. We had met several years earlier when he was then running the Peace Corps unit in Morocco and I was in Mauritania. It had been a brief meeting but he knew me and that helped.

Q: When you got back, was it pretty well firmed up that you were going to go to the Philippines.

MURPHY: Yes. The die was cast by the time I showed up in Washington. Agrément was no problem; I remember making calls on the Hill, among them Senator Javits from New York and Inoue from Hawaii. Both were advocates for strong U.S.-Marcos relationship. As Senator Javits said, “When you get out there, remember he has good friends here in the Senate.” Which was his way of saying “don’t try to push our boy around.”

Q: You want then to talk about what the situation was in the Philippines when you were going there, and what you were getting from Washington at the same time?

MURPHY: Just before I got there, Mrs. Marcos had come to Washington and, talking to a friendly Senator, said she felt her country and her husband’s leadership was being wrongly viewed in American circles, and she wanted to testify to Congress. Her friends on the Hill said that’s not a good idea; if you testify you open yourself up to some direct and perhaps unpleasant public criticisms. We can arrange some off the record private meetings for you. She didn’t listen. She was confident of her ability to control the situation. She did testify, and just as her friends had cautioned, she got hit with some nasty assertions about the state of Human Rights and governance in the Philippines. Almost immediately thereafter there were youth demonstrations in Manila against the American embassy, against the bases, against Imperialism, etc. She had been insulted, the Philippines had been insulted, and she struck back.

Anyway, demonstrations took place. They weren’t violent but they were enough to stall the base talks which we had hoped to wrap up quickly. Washington accepted that the cost for our military presence would rise but we would be able to secure the basis for our continued presence for the next decade. There was a very capable Air Force Lieutenant-General who was running the talks whom I relied on heavily. He knew all of the details and disputes that were delaying the signing of the new agreement. I had met Senator Inouye during my consultations and he expressed his interest in maintaining a good relationship. He admired Marcos and knew of his guerrilla exploits as a resistance leader against the Japanese. I had asked the Senator (who was going to be traveling in the area) to please make sure he booked himself into Manila because it would be very helpful to have an acknowledged friend of the Philippines and a man who knew Marcos well to urge wrapping up the negotiations. He was happy to do that. He came and told Marcos to beware of pressing too hard. He said that he did not believe the Senate would go along with a rise in the financial side of the deal beyond that which our negotiators had already offered.

Q: Do you want to explain what the situation was in the Philippines? How had it developed before you went there?

MURPHY: By 1978, it had been under martial law since the mid-‘60s. That had ended its reputation as a Wild-West cowboy town where contending forces would shoot rather than

talk. Marcos had succeeded in stabilizing the situation, dominating it, and being a very clever politician had secured his presidency. There certainly were those who criticized him, who wanted to see an end to martial law and were ready to propose alternative candidates. He finally announced the ending of martial law and promised a free election. The contenders were unable to persuade the public that they could easily and efficiently replace Marcos himself.

Q: My knowledge of developments there – when was Mr. Aquino killed?

MURPHY: Just after my tour in 1983. He had been in jail and when he was released came to the States for a spell. His end was highly publicized: when the plane bringing him back to Manila landed, there were security types waiting who took him straight off of the plane and he was dead within hours. He was seen as a serious political threat to Marcos. In Aquino's absence, Marcos faced no challenger. Who was responsible for his killing? Was Mrs. Marcos directly involved? The rumor mill ran overtime and some among the president's supporters such as General Ver were talked of as having counseled his killing without Marcos directly authorizing it. The fact remained that Aquino was knocked off before he could revive his political career.

Another long standing question beyond the future of the Marcos' leadership was activities of the Moro National Liberation Front in Mindanao. The Muslim population had long felt dispossessed, dominated by Christian settlers coming down from the north over the previous few generations who had appropriated some of the best lands. The Muslim rebellion reminded me of the Palestinians' reaction towards Israelis. Rebellion wasn't evident on the streets of Manila; the hot-spots were in Mindanao. The government kept a close eye on the situation but never succeeded in resolving tensions in the southern sector of Mindanao.

Q: From the beginning in 1898 or so we found ourselves involved in the same problems.

MURPHY: At that time we went head-to-head with the nationalists but it didn't have a religious connotation. We were the imperial force which the nationalists bitterly fought. Our troops, particularly the Marines, overwhelmed the nationalists in the late 1890s. I found it curious remembering our brutality in that period that Filipinos came to regard us so highly. Filipino friends would say "If you want to understand us, think of the Philippine Islands being dragged across the Pacific toward Mexico. Think of us as a country that spent 300 years in a Spanish convent and 50 years on Broadway before we became independent." There was an almost giddy appreciation of Americans when I arrived in the late '70s. We had delayed independence with the onset of the Second World War, but committed ourselves to fostering independence in the Philippines as soon as that conflict was over. We carried through on our commitment which Filipinos would remind me was made in the time when Frank Murphy was the first Commissioner General in the thirties. General Douglas MacArthur was a hero in Philippine history. When you'd visit small towns in the Philippines likely as not there would be a small bust of General MacArthur in the town square commemorating his having freed the Philippines from Japanese occupation. One of our friends was the only survivor of her

family who had all been bayoneted to death. There were many bitter memories. It was said that Marcos had been so nauseated on his first visit to post war Japan, I guess that was in the '70s, that he had to cut his visit short.

My own introduction to the country was jarring. We had flown Pan-American to Hawaii. Arriving in Manila I was asked for an interview to a journalist waiting on the tarmac. His first question was "Please explain why your government continues to try to destabilize our country?" Taken aback I said "There is no such effort." That stimulated a flood of articles in the Filipino press by journalists writing stories of constant American interference. One cartoon showed me riding in a row boat with a Filipino who looked puzzled as I explained we were not trying to destabilize the country. The cartoonist drew a reporter underwater boring a hole to sink the rowboat illustrating what was really going on between our two countries. I'd faced both guarded and rough criticisms of America over the years in the Arab world. In contrast, Filipinos would tell their stories of American interference in their affairs with great good humor.

One of my first comments to my wife after our arrival in the Philippines was that we'd left a part of the world, the Arab world, where people wore dark suits, dark robes, and here we are in a tropical garden. The flowers, the colors of the clothes, the extravagant turns of phrase, the way the rich openly described themselves as 'we're well to do and we're working hard to get even wealthier.' There was a dominant fiesta mentality. Any chance to throw a party was welcomed even by those who could economically ill afford it.

The Roman Catholic church was headed by Cardinal Sin who made a standing joke of his family name. He would say when I called on him "Welcome to the house of Sin." He was an outspoken critic of the Marcoses, of Mrs. Marcos in particular. She cordially disliked him. It was a political scene with which I was not at all familiar. I brought no understanding of the underlying movements and church-state tensions in the country. The Catholic church was dominant in the north and central Philippines. It was a time of the liberation priests in Latin America and their teachings were starting to circulate in the Philippines.

Q: Liberation theology?

MURPHY: Liberation theology. Didn't it at first catch everyone's notice in Latin America? There were members in the priesthood who dwelt on the needs of the people. Cardinal Sin was not one of them but was regarded with suspicion by the regime in the Philippines as not being one whom they could count on to be a loyal supporter.

I tried to be a fast learner; found in my own American staff a split between those who thought the Marcos regime was doing a solid job and deserved our support, and those who were highly critical of it. They would bring up their differences in our staff meetings. I had arrived with an understanding that this was a relationship which we wanted to preserve, that was valuable to American interests not only in the Philippines but in East Asia. That thinking grew from the reliance we had developed on our military

facilities over the years. Marcos a couple of times referred to his talks with LBJ, saying “Be very careful not to get dragged into a ground war in Asia.”

I took very seriously the view that we needed the Philippines. There was a good basis for our relationship from the work we had done building the school system which the Spanish had not done much to improve in their period, in building roads, the health system. That all contributed to this aura of good feeling between the two peoples. Also, there were a number – a few million – of Filipinos already resident in the U.S. by that date. They maintained close family ties and the money they would send back was a major support for families living in poverty in the countryside.

Q: How did you start out? Here you were new to the area and had an embassy that was divided – how did you sort out your staff?

MURPHY: There were no bars in our internal discussions; I wanted to hear the different points of view. I kept in mind my marching orders from the department and administration of wanting to maintain a good relationship. Going back to the military base talks, these concluded within a very few months of my arrival. Carlos P. Romulo was the foreign minister and he presided over the signing of the final agreement after Senator Inoue had had his input and the American-Filipino teams had negotiated for months. Romulo was adept at flattering his audience and said at that occasion, “And now we have the American ambassador here to sign for his government. This was an agreement that would never have been reached without him.” That was utterly untrue! But I appreciated it. A personal recollection of that evening: I had developed hemorrhoids in the days before the ceremony and it was a scene of some discomfort to sit there patiently waiting for the statements to end and the signatures to be affixed to the agreement. Altogether it was a memorable evening.

Q: Tell me, what was your initial impression of Marcos and Imelda Marcos?

MURPHY: The ceremony of presentation of credentials was arranged quickly so I met the president and that same day called on him. He spoke solemnly and warmly of the official relationship between our countries and urged me to contact him at any time that I felt was necessary. Imelda was out of the country when I arrived. I had heard her described by others as a rather mysterious figure, surrounded by a group called the Blue Ladies. That term came from the color of their dresses when they accompanied her on her tours of the country including the presidential campaigns. She was spoken of with some awe and a degree of fear about the vindictiveness with which she pressured regime critics through taxation and investigations. She seemed to get more of the blame for such actions than the President did.

She came back a few weeks from a world tour which had included Moscow. She immediately presented to me a heavy cut glass bowl filled with caviar and brushed aside my hesitation and my thanks. She was good at sizing people up. She picked one of her circle, astutely matching up one of her closest supporters with my wife to be her guide to Philippine society. The lady was a salt-of-the-earth type and not addicted to couture

dressing. It was Imelda's way not only of being helpful but ensuring that she had a steady reading of where we were going and who else we were seeing.

This reminds me of another anecdote about my being chosen for the Philippines. When Holbrooke interviewed me, he said "We have sent different types of officers to the Philippines to represent the country; we felt this time we needed a plain couple". He added that we want you to get along with the Marcoses but not fit in their pocket.

We did get along. I was not a dancer who could do the latest steps and join in sing-alongs. I was always a little bit embarrassed by that side of life in the Philippines. She had restructured the top floor of the palace to contain a miniature ballroom where the latest dance steps would be trotted out along with little accoutrements like smoke which would come in jets momentarily covering the floor like a fog. I imagine that this was copied from café society at the time to add a touch of glamour. Then she would be asked to sing. She was a performer, and she was tough. Rather she is tough – she survives to this day. I never forget the phone call I had from Holbrooke then in Geneva, trying to work out a way for the East Asian region and beyond to accommodate the surge of boat people from Vietnam. He called me and said, "Get to Marcos and see if the Philippines would accept a transit center for the refugees." He had heard, I think directly from Marcos, that Marcos felt the Philippines had done its part in dealing with earlier evacuations from Vietnam and simply didn't want more refugees in the country. Holbrooke said "This time it's not for settling; there'll be a condition – no settling. But they're to be provided trades and education and languages to make them attractive to other countries."

I went to Mrs. Marcos first with that message that there would be no permanent settlement of Vietnamese. I added the thought that this would be much appreciated by the American government and would be very good public relations. I didn't make a point of underlining that she had some rough days in American public opinion circles; I didn't have to stress that. I had a phone call the next morning from Marcos saying he understood I'd been talking with his "telephone girl" as he put it, and on the understanding the center would not be at the expense of the Philippine government and it would be a transient population, he agreed.

That was a breakthrough which led to pledging by many countries who had not wanted to deal with Vietnamese refugees, to offer those that succeeded in language training and trade skills, to take them in and make them welcome as immigrants to their countries. A very wide group did take them in, everyone except the Japanese who were generous with funding but said the Vietnamese would not understand Japanese culture and would find it uncomfortable to be in Japan. I recall that at this length as a tribute to the Marcoses. It would be advantageous to the Philippine and Marcos image, but it was immensely useful at that point in helping out the boat people from Vietnam.

Q: How did the system work while you were there? Were we able to pass people on?

MURPHY: It worked, yes. The camp opened only briefly before my tour ended, but for

the several years that it operated it did prepare the refugees for new lives. The Filipinos got the credit for it and the refugees got a fresh start. It had been a paralyzed situation until that moment when the Philippines broke the ice. Not a major point in refugee history but a significant one for the Vietnamese exodus at that period.

Q: Did the fact that we had lost the war in Vietnam and pulled out have an effect on the Filipinos – Marcos and all – in thinking, “Can we depend on these guys?”

MURPHY: I don't think so. By that time in his political career, he was confident of not having to depend on the Americans for his continuation as president. He campaigned on the slogan of “free elections” in 1980-81 and won overwhelmingly. We were in no way involved in that election in favoring his candidacy. He had built his machine and his image and was very confident. His reign didn't last much longer; the death of Aquino brought to the surface a lot of the latent antagonisms to his governance, “people's power” was suddenly flooding the streets of Manila and he was on an American helicopter being evacuated to Hawaii. I didn't foresee that happening when I left in '81.

Life in Manila as a diplomat, to quote a colleague, was like “drowning in a strawberry ice cream soda.” It was very sweet. When we'd visit in the provinces, the standard opening by the mayor would be, “We have with us no less than the American ambassador and the First Lady of the American Embassy. We're extremely proud to welcome you to our community.” Not a hint of troubles between Washington and Manila, not a hint of the darker days in our history. We had done some remarkable things as a government from the time that the fight with the nationalists ended through the period of the Commonwealth in the 1930s. We hadn't stood in anybody's way to block their move to independence. Historians among the Filipinos, those who had studied the history of the colonial period, were skeptical. The press had its skeptics, and you could suddenly get hit by a wave of gossip about American policy which would be highly colored and critical. But my memories are basically about how easy it seemed to be representing the United States in that country. Not to deny, not overlook the facts of brutal poverty that the vast numbers of Filipinos lived in. It was before the drug scene became so pervasive. I never met Duterte – my tour was even before he was mayor in Davao.

The Peace Corps had sent some 400 Peace Corps volunteers who worked on the many islands of the archipelago, in very isolated conditions. They were a very popular group in the Philippines and at that point it may have been the largest contingent of volunteers we had in the world.

There were never any problems of personal safety and, probably as many have said about the Peace Corps, the American volunteers got more benefits from their assignment than the Filipino recipients. We had a robust AID mission and the naval commander at Subic Bay was only a brief helicopter ride away from my weekly staff meetings. At least as seen from my cocoon as ambassador, we still retained the admiration and even the affection of the people.

Q: What were we doing if anything regarding this small war going on in the Philippines down in the south?

MURPHY: It was far away. It was not something that was fought on the streets of Manila. There was concern about it and we exchanged intelligence briefs with Filipino counterparts. I don't recall training efforts by our military in the south; that came a bit later. I remember going to Mindanao to the capital where Blackjack Pershing had his command post when he was assigned to the Philippines. The mementoes were all there; the photographs of khaki-clad officers and the pressed-metal ceilings in the rooms. Not memorable, not glamorous but this was the Pershing who went on to be a great leader in the European theater of the First World War.

The Muslim leadership in the south flirted with the authorities in Manila, but talks never had much dynamism. Was it because the government was unready to confront those of its citizens who had settled in Mindanao from the north? Or was there some genuine revolutionary leadership in Mindanao determined to drive the northerners out and restore traditional Muslim leadership in the south? In any case, talks went on and never seemed to get anywhere. I went back some years after my tour – in fact it was after my retirement– as part of an effort to mediate a new start in the talks. We didn't get anywhere. The Mindanao situation was on people's minds but not seen as a major threat to life in the rest of the country.

Q: It must have been a very difficult country – it and Indonesia – to rule, with all these islands all over the place.

MURPHY: Countless islands, countless linguistic subgroups. They picked a local dialect, Tagalog, to be the “national language”. Tagalog was not the national language of Visaya or Mindanao. People following a government career worked hard on their English. Tagalog was taught in the school system but it was a papering over the persistent differences in local culture. How the country was governed I will never really understand. There were a few thousand islands, some were tiny and uninhabitable atolls, but they all had to operate as members of the Philippine Republic. They did collect taxes, they did run schools, had health clinics, some better than others. It was always best to be resident in Manila in terms of the care and treatment you could get. But there were national programs which the authorities tried to extend over the whole country. It was a very mixed bag. In any case, I think that building on the foundation laid by the Americans in the colonial period, experiences of the Second World War and the excitement of independence, the Filipinos forged a national spirit. Filipinos who had gone to the States would come home to retire, generally speaking with favorable memories of their time in the States. They contributed to the local economies; they built homes with money they'd been making in the U.S. and sent back over the years. There was a degree of suspicion in the educated business community about the Chinese and their intentions towards the Philippines. That said many of the most prominent Filipino businessmen were in fact Chinese-Filipino. They were a dynamic element in the business community. You would hear apprehension about the future when China would “come into its own”, and how it would treat the Philippines.

Q: What was happening in China as regards the Philippines while you were there?

MURPHY: While I was in Manila, our ambassadors throughout the region were given a strict time-frame to meet with the chief of state to advise that we were about to open diplomatic ties with Beijing. It came as no surprise to Marcos. I never visited China. The Chinese were encouraging tourism and business contacts and making investments. As I say some of the most successful figures in the Philippines' business world were themselves of Chinese origin but without any sense of belonging to the new generation in China. They predated the Communist takeover in their exodus from China. There was no sign of China's exercising its ambitions about the South China Sea. There had been a long local conflict over islands between Malaysia and the Philippines, or I guess it was Indonesia. Activists were dismissed as pirates in those days by the Philippine authorities; they were not seen as a serious threat to Manila's running the country. There was certainly a sense that changes were coming in China. It was developing as a power, and Filipinos were apprehensive about what it would mean.

Q: Did you have any problems with Congress? Particularly the Philippines as we had with Nicaragua at one point – senators and congressman who identified with another country, the Philippines.

MURPHY: There certainly were both admirers and critics in Congress of the political regime in the Philippines. In the Carter administration the single figure most distrusted by the Filipino political leadership was Patricia Derian, the first Assistant Secretary for Human Rights. The reaction to some of her public comments about the Philippines was "how dare she look down on us?" Mrs. Marcos added in her inimitable way "I am just as fair and just as tall as she is." There was always a suspicion that people around the world would "look down on us" and criticize the Philippines' human rights practices. When congressional delegations would come through, they received red-carpet treatment. One House delegation came under its long term chairman. The luncheon in its honor was gracious, delightful and lavish. A choir was brought in at the end of the lunch to sing Randall Thompson's "Alleluia." The only words it had was "hallelujah". They sang the delegation out to their waiting cars. That was well remembered by the congressman; "Did you hear how they were praising us? 'Hallelujah, hallelujah!'" Filipinos were adept at public relations.

Q: With Imelda Marcos, sometimes she would have these parties and people would be overwhelmed at the thing.

MURPHY: Yeah. Coming as I did from a background of Protestant celebrations in New England, the dancing parties in the palace were a little too rich. One of my security guards who was sent by the palace to accompany me wherever I went later spoke admiringly of Mike Armacost, my successor in Manila. He said, "You know, Mr. Armacost really knew how to boogie"; there was some regret that I didn't! (Laughter) Yeah, there was a giddiness in their mind set. It was a country where certain landlords dating from Spanish times had long established their unquestionable authority in parts of

the country. They enjoyed a good life with private aircraft and lavish homes, while there were desperate situations in downtown Manila and the other cities.

Q: Was there any attempt by the government to do something about it?

MURPHY: In parts of the government. There were some good government programs but these were never enough to speed up the economic and social developments in the countryside. The birthrate was always high. Some Filipino medical specialists – it was a population well educated in the public school system and the universities – brought their skills to jobs in the countryside. Filipino nurses are famous for the skills they show in caring for their patients. But their future was mostly spent abroad and their goal was to send money back.

Q: I'm living in an Episcopalian retirement home with Philippine nurses there; they are outstanding.

MURPHY: In that field, they were unmatched. I have seen the skills of for instance of nursing graduates from the American University hospital in Beirut. It has a rigorous training program for nurses. Lebanese nurses are respected for their skills. But they don't bring that quality of loving the sick that the Filipina nurses exuded. You felt that this person at your retirement center?

Q: We have some Filipinos and some from Africa. They're very good with older people.

MURPHY: They are very caring within their own families for the older generation. None of this placing them on the iceberg and floating them out to quietly die off. They take good care of their own.

Q: Did you feel there was much oversight of you? The Philippines were ours at one time; was there any people coming in to see how our "little brown brothers" were doing?

MURPHY: AID had inspectors. You'd hear that accusation with a certain amount of wincing about the days when we did freely call them "little brown brothers." I didn't sense that arrogance in any visitors or inspectors who came out from Washington. That era was remembered and mostly shrugged off as a piece of history when we were in charge. We had done some good things they liked to talk about – public schools, transport built under American supervision. When an American would talk of that period, it wasn't wistfully or with arrogance, but I suppose there was a certain condescension. "When we were in charge, we did a better job."

Q: Did you feel somewhat neglected, having been in Syria where the secretary of State or the national security advisor was coming all the time?

MURPHY: We had Assistant Secretary Holbrooke visit a couple of times. He managed his discussions with Marcos and Mrs. Marcos skillfully. The only secretarial visit I think was by Haig to attend a conference during the year he was Secretary. I had heard he was

a dedicated tennis player so I proposed before he arrived that we set aside some time before the business day for tennis. I got a flat “no, he’ll be much too busy.” Then I got a follow up message to organize something. So I got two Filipino friends that I’d been playing with over the previous couple of years and opportunistically arranged that the stronger partner would be Haig’s. No-one would be the wiser. The plan was in full bloom when we got to the court that morning. The stronger one, Haig’s partner, took me aside to say he’d had an accident and his shoulder wasn’t right. He wanted to apologize in advance. I said to myself, “Oh my God!” I sat with Haig in his car after his side decisively lost the match. Driving with him back to his hotel I told him of the Manila Club downtown dedicated to the memory of General MacArthur. It had a quote from MacArthur above its front door saying: “It matters not whether you won or lost, but how you played the game.” He just looked straight ahead and growled, “MacArthur didn’t believe that either.” (Laughter)

Haig was committed to being a respectful visitor. Let’s see – I got there in ’78, left in ’81. So Reagan was elected and Haig was an early visitor. An ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) conference brought Haig out. Then Vice President George H. W. Bush came after the end of martial law and the election which Marco won. He gave a flowery toast praising the Philippines for its display of Democracy in that election. I saw Filipinos looking at each other a bit sideways; it was an eloquent expression by a visiting dignitary but it rang hollow. They had just finished an election that was not at all seen as that free. Anyway, the vice-president departed that afternoon ahead of schedule citing “bad weather over the Pacific.” He and Mrs. Bush had been great guests. She was outfitted by Imelda’s favorite dressmaker with a traditional Filipino dress for the state dinner in their honor. We were in the waiting room outside their suite in the palace, and she said with marvelous irreverence “Come on in! You’ve never seen a size 16 getting outfitted before!” (Laughter) She was down to earth and they were both sensitive to the history of the relationship so it was a good visit.

Q: Did you get involved with visas and all that? Or was that something you could kind of duck?

MURPHY: Filipinos were convinced that you had to have a backer who would let it be known, however privately, that they were a good friend and you deserved a visa. There was a lot of trafficking in visas by Filipinos themselves. There’d be a line outside the consulate on a daily basis. If you had a good place in the line, you might auction it off to somebody with a less good place. A common story of visa applicants, according to one of our consuls, was “I’m going to get married in the States; that’s why I need a visa. If you have any question about it, here’s my engagement ring.” The consul said he had seen that very distinctive ring innumerable times. It was a bit of a game. The desire to travel to the States be you of the elite or an ordinary Filipino citizen was strong. They wanted to travel, they wanted to see America, they’d heard so much about what Broadway had to offer. Even I would get visa requests, one for instance from the widow of a former president of the Philippines – “could I put in a good word?” She didn’t need a good word; her status guaranteed her ability to pay her way and back and she met all other usual requirements. But she was uneasy about appearing and being turned down for a visa. The

assumption was if you had a friend in the American embassy, that was a big plus if not an absolute prerequisite to get a visa. Our consul-general was a good Mormon and not interested in playing any games with the rules. His was a well-run operation but we were always aware of pressures to make an exception in the case of X or Y.

Q: It's one of the great difficult posts. We had a number of consuls-general there who had to leave under dubious circumstances over time.

MURPHY: Also Filipinos were not above planting derogatory stories if they didn't get a visa, alleging misconduct on the part of the American official involved. Stories of sexual harassment were dropped like confetti, if somebody had not gotten the treatment they felt they deserved. There was no libel law, leave it at that! I had to discharge a fine retired military employee who was the custodian of our embassy property up in the Baguio mountains. It was alleged that he had propositioned the daughter of a cabinet minister. To this day I don't think it was true but the accusation was made. You couldn't prove it wasn't true and we had to let him go. It could be a vicious society.

Q: I'm told some of the people like the Aquinos, all the people had very large estates out in the country where they lived like little lords.

MURPHY: That was true. There were family names which came down over the generations of the well-to-do landowners, the powers behind the throne be it the Spanish throne or the Commonwealth or independence. The oligarchs were seen as the prime movers of governmental policy. Yes, they lived very well. Doesn't mean they were all grasping, but there was a clear assumption that "if I've got the money and the land, who's to say I shouldn't be dictating the way life should be lived by my tenant farmers or by my associates in the community?" There was no sense of guilt about their notoriety and the reasons how they got the land, how they behaved as members of the elite. They were a law unto themselves.

Q: Did you have problems with your officers succumbing to the good things that could be produced by these very wealthy people?

MURPHY: I don't recall any incidents where bribes or whatever were offered or special favors were sought and granted. I think we ran a clean shop. There were differences of opinion about the government within our official community which I was happy to listen to but I had no cases brought up to me of "watch out, this guy is benefiting in an unusual way from his contacts with the well-to-do in society." I can't say there weren't wrongdoings, but they weren't of a magnitude that they came to my attention.

Q: I was consul-general in Seoul which had much of the same problems. We ran I think a pretty clean shop with the officers. With the Korean staff, we had problems.

MURPHY: They were getting offers to influence the Americans?

Q: Oh, yes. It's a difficult business.

Q: Today is the 5th of January, 2018. You're leaving the Philippines; did you have anything you wanted to fill in before we move on?

MURPHY: Just one reflection. Being at a long distance from the Middle East at that point and not read-in to any of the daily traffic, when the revolution hit in Iran I realized how much I wished I was involved in those problems. We had serious questions to deal with in the Philippines, but somehow, having lived all those years in the Middle East, I was nostalgic to get back and felt much out of the mainstream. I was asked to give a talk at our local church about the situation in Iran and the hostage taking but it all seemed so distant. I was wondering how I might get back. I had been looking at the transfers within the new Reagan administration and I couldn't see any opening in the area, either in South Asia as well as the Arab world. The opportunity suddenly came in another of those late night phone calls from Washington. They wanted me to go to Saudi Arabia, I said "but our man is new there". Ambassador Neumann had just gotten there. They said, "we'll explain. Just come back, we need to talk to you. Be prepared to move on."

So I came back and learned that Neumann had criticized Secretary Haig's Middle East policy in the course of his calls to Congress. He'd been in Saudi Arabia for about six weeks when he was called back to lobby on the Hill for the sale of AWACS (airborne early warning and control system), aircraft to Saudi Arabia. One of the senators had asked him what he thought of the Secretary's approach to Middle East issues. Neumann, who'd been ambassador to Afghanistan and Morocco and a distinguished scholar in his own right, was quoted to me as having said Haig's policies on the Middle East made him want to vomit. Accompanying him on those calls to the Hill was one of Haig's personal staff; he flashed back a report of the comment and Neumann was out.

Haig was anxious that this not be misinterpreted as suggesting a problem in U.S.-Saudi relations. It was important that I travel there as quickly as possible to contact the foreign minister and present credentials to the king within the next couple of weeks. I had to have had some sort of Senate hearing, but it was all very rushed and everything went smoothly. I was launched.

Returned to Jeddah – this was before the embassy moved to Riyadh – and found myself on the compound which was near the end of a road which they had named the Palestine Road, laying that problem so to speak at our front door. It got the message across that you've got a problem, it's yours, you've got to do something about it. That was the way we interpreted it in any case. Where back in '63-'66 when I had been political officer we'd lived in a small house off the compound. Nothing much had changed. They had opened the compound's sports area which was a miniature golf course with two or three holes, and four or five tennis courts to the American community beyond embassy personnel.

The meeting with Prince Saud bin Faisal, the foreign minister, occurred within a day or two of my arrival. I explained why we had pressed for early presentation of credentials. He understood; he made no comment about the rapid exit of Ambassador Neumann but

made clear that there was no serious problem in U.S.-Saudi relations. I then presented credentials to King Khalid who had succeeded Faisal after the latter was assassinated in '75 by one of his nephews. Khalid was a quiet personality who was much happier away from the court routine. He enjoyed raising his horses and lived closer to the traditional life of a Saudi tribal leader.

The foreign ministry remained in Jeddah. The old reasoning still prevailed: Riyadh and the conservative Saudi community in Riyadh were not ready for an invasion by foreign diplomats and the changes that might bring. We stayed in Jeddah until all embassies were directed by the Saudis to move up to Riyadh. This was a couple of years after my tour ended.

It was a short tour, two years. The main concern that worried King Khalid, and his successor Fahd, were two-fold, both related to the situation in Lebanon. First, the Israeli military had moved into the south of the country and Israel was setting up its artillery on the hills around Beirut to put an end to the Palestinian political leadership and its base of operations. Washington worked out the evacuation of Yasser Arafat and his circle from Beirut by ship to Tunis where he based himself for a few years. The Saudis were anxious that no harm come to the leadership that they felt was and should remain a key player in establishing a broader regional peace. Secondly, Lebanon was by then into the sixth year of what turned out to be a 15-year revolution of its own. The Palestinian presence had aggravated tensions within Lebanon and the newly elected Lebanese president had been almost immediately assassinated, it was presumed to have been done at Syrian instigation. He was the older brother of his replacement, Amin Gemayel, whom I was to work with later when I became assistant secretary. The Lebanese situation preoccupied King Fahd. He was distressed watching Lebanon tear itself to pieces. He had urged the Americans to get involved and was himself involved using as an intermediary Rafik Hariri, a prominent businessman of Lebanese origin in Saudi Arabia who traveled constantly back and forth between Saudi Arabia, Beirut and Damascus trying to get peace talks started. Nothing useful developed. He appreciated the briefings we gave him on how we saw the situation and how we might contribute to a more stable scene. We had a number of meetings about it; the King was anxious to have Saudi Arabia play a practical and positive role in bringing about peace in Lebanon.

Returning to the embassy after an absence of 15 years, I had left in '66 and now it was '81, I could see that Jeddah had been greatly renovated. The improvement of the roads, the money spent on housing and government buildings made a visible change in the city's atmosphere. This was two years after the Iranian Revolution, two years after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and two years after the traumatic experience when a group led by a conservative Saudi Islamist seized control of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Those three events shook the Saudi leadership. They had no time for Communism. Its invasion of Afghanistan struck them as an evil. The Saudi view of Iran had long been dominated by fear; they resented how condescending the Iranians had been towards Saudi Arabia in the days of the Shah. This was mixed with cultural resentment, the Saudis making it plain before the Shah's fall that they felt they were the natural leaders of the region. America had said our interests were based on a three-legged stool. We said that our ties with Iran,

Saudi Arabia, and our own military presence were key to peace in the Gulf and more broadly benefited Iraq and Syria.

Most of all, the occupation of the mosque in Mecca was a bitter challenge to the authority and authenticity of Saudi leadership of Islam, a theme they had been advancing for many years. Here, their main jewel, Mecca itself, was snatched away from their control. The Saudi forces, police and military, weren't making progress in retaking the mosque which had been seized by a fanatically conservative group issuing statements about Saudi corruption and unfitness for Islamic leadership. They finally (though the story was never fully confirmed) turned to the French who brought in Muslim forces from Africa to retake the mosque. The leaders were captured and executed.

That led to a decision to return – this is how the Saudis described it – to return to familiar conservative practices of worship and social relations. Word was out that women's dress should be fully conservative in any public setting. All women should wear the long robe, the abaya. Foreign women were expected to conform as well. That was a point of some tension when that came to our own community. My wife never veiled, never fully covered. But she and the other ladies in the embassy felt uncomfortable downtown if they were not pretty much covered down to the wrist and by a skirt down at least halfway between the knee and ankle. A heaviness had come over the city which made social relations more difficult. It was never easy in Saudi Arabia for the foreigner to make breakthroughs with the Saudis. The business community yes, you could meet pretty easily with them but we didn't know the clergy, we didn't know the educators. Reportedly the message went out from the court to princes who had been indulging in European fleshpots and gambling dens to come home. Saudi wealth was becoming talked of as something perverse, immoral, degenerate etc. so get yourself back here now. I don't think all the royals obeyed, but there was a sense of the need for greater propriety in public appearances.

This was uncomfortable for staff who had not had prior experience in the Arab world, much less in the earlier period of Saudi Arabia. I had a secretary who came in to the Foreign Service in her middle age, and she was a devout Christian who apparently had no idea of what the religious climate was in Jeddah. She came in the office the first day and asked where the churches were. Well, there were no churches and there was no public practice permitted of Christianity. She was uncomfortable. She decided she would improve local understandings of Christianity and organized readings of the Koran and the Bible in her apartment on the compound. Some eyebrows went up in our community. Then she decided to dress as a man wearing the males *thobe* to go downtown. The Saudi scene was not for her, and she was transferred.

By and large our people adjusted. Socially they lived within the broader diplomatic community. There were a few Saudis who were ready to become casual social friends. But when we would organize a dinner for a prominent visitor, the Saudis we invited would come but always asked before they accepted who else was going to be there. They were concerned that if it was to be a mixed dinner and they brought their wife, the wives of other Saudis might not be present. They were comfortable only if you could say there

was some family connection between them and other invitees before they would accept the invitation. Some also had the habit, if we tried to organize a formal dinner a week or so in advance, of replying, “I don’t know if I’m going to be hungry on that day.”

Q: It must have put a tremendous burden on someone in the embassy to draw family charts and who was who, in order to come up with acceptable lists. You had to have rather intricate family tables of who was who.

MURPHY: Some families were more complicated than others. My predecessors in the days when I was a political officer, knew the older generation of some of the families very well. Mohammed bin Laden, who was Osama’s father, was a frequent guest at the embassy.

(short break)

MURPHY: You were asking whether there was any careful study made diagramming out relationships?

Q: In other words, if somebody wanted to know who was going to attend your dinner party, you had to anticipate that beforehand and know whom they would like to have?

MURPHY: Yes. You knew who you would like to have to have a good discussion. But if you insisted on inviting couples, that’s when it became difficult. It wasn’t polite to get into family structures, so to speak, to be inquiring about the ties that bind of so and so. That was considered intrusive and impolite. The atmosphere inclined you to follow their ways and not have mixed gatherings. There were some couples who were accustomed enough to Western social ways, but there were very few that moved easily as families out in public. So there were men’s dinners and women’s teas. You fell into the Saudi pattern.

Q: What about with Anne and others in your embassy, the women, the wives there? Were the Saudi wives a good source for political or other information, or not?

MURPHY: No. I don’t recall any in our community having special relationships in Saudi female society that got you behind the curtain, understanding some of the social forces at work. I remember having a rare conversation with someone who ran the marriage palace; that was where couples with limited means would be afforded the chance to have a large gathering of friends and relatives say for their son’s or daughter’s marriage. The descriptions by American women who were invited to such events gave us a rare and limited glimpse into a Saudi woman’s life in society. We didn’t have female officers who were going downtown or calling in government offices. The French government broke the mold first by having a lady vice-consul but when she would go to the foreign ministry, it was by the side door and after office hours. The Saudis were apprehensive about women playing a public role at that time. Things are changing quickly but they hadn’t changed much by the time we were there in the early ‘80s. I was surprised when an officer of the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce told me that about 30% of the companies

registered with the Chamber were female owned. The usual arrangement was to have a male relative front for you while you held the financial power backstage.

Q: What was happening with the AWACS? You might explain what an AWACS is.

MURPHY: It's an observation platform. It's not a 747 –

Q: I think it's a Constellation, isn't it?

MURPHY: I forget, it was one particular brand. It was outfitted for 12-hour flights and loaded up with technology to be part of the country's defense system.

Q: It was a radar platform, an airplane.

MURPHY: That's true. The Saudis were very interested in getting them, and this was fiercely opposed by the Israelis. I'm talking '81, when Israel ranked Saudi Arabia as one of its most determined enemies. Their argument was that by making such a sale to an Arab power, "you are threatening our very existence." It got very hyper in discussions; arms sales to Arab states were always sensitive for Israel but Washington didn't agree with Israel in this case. The administration viewed the Saudis in the wake of the Iranian Revolution as having a justifiable need for an AWACS platform for their defense. We didn't view the Saudis as gearing up for a campaign against Israel.

In the early months of my assignment in '81, that issue was on high boil. Got a lot of press attention and the Israelis were outspoken against it. They had organized their supporters in the United States and in Congress. A Congressional delegation visited Saudi Arabia towards the end of the year. One member, a senator, said he accepted the administration's reasoning but he had to walk a very critical and sensitive path in the debate about the sale of AWACS. He confided that he had quietly promised the president he would have his vote if it was needed in the final determination but meanwhile he would play his role as a critic of the sale and question the wisdom of providing AWACS to Saudi Arabia. I guess that as the headcount went on in Washington, more than one member of the Senate held that same position. Out in the field, it was a very jumpy time as we waited for the vote to be taken. The Saudis were all over us about when we were going to decide arguing they had a right to the system and they needed it.

That was in the first three months of my tour. The vote was taken authorizing the sale to Saudi Arabia. Pending delivery and training they would continue to have the benefit of U.S. Air Force AWACS with American crews watching their eastern front. The Iranians didn't make a move at that time, though soon after there was a flight perceived to be an Iranian military aircraft heading towards Saudi Arabia; I think that plane was shot down. Things didn't boil over; the hostility that became such a feature of the landscape these past few years was then more subdued, but they were nervous about the Iranians.

Q: Yes, AWACS wasn't a prestige thing, it was an instrument that was quite necessary because Saudi Arabia, particularly the Eastern Province oil fields, were very much available –

MURPHY: Very exposed.

Q: - yes, very exposed.

MURPHY: I think it's fair to say it was perceived both as an essential item to Saudi defenses, and it was also a matter of pride to get them. They wanted access to the best and latest technology. Our military was very proud of AWACS capabilities, and their contacts with our military helped persuade them that it was a must. The Saudi market has long attracted our sales people, but in this case I don't think the administration overall wavered.

Q: What was your attaché's impression of the effect on Saudi military capabilities?

MURPHY: The attaché was able through contacts with his American colleagues to have a good appraisal of Saudi interests, concerns, and capabilities. However, the extent he could move around and have soldier-to-soldier conversations was limited. The Saudis were very guarded talking about their military, even though much of the equipment was inoperable without extensive American involvement. A military attaché operating in the Arab World was generally assumed to be a spy. When we'd been in Damascus earlier, the attaché had to be very careful about where he traveled. He knew that he was deeply suspect by the Syrians. It wasn't the same mindset for the Saudis, but it was pretty thin pickings to be an attaché. Our military training mission had good access; they'd been in the country since the '50s, operating as small teams in the defense ministry, in the Eastern Province and in the Hejaz.

Q: How did you use the consulate-general in Dhahran?

MURPHY: All in all, the consulate-general was a solid source for insights into oil issues, the basis for Saudi wealth and power. The consulate-general was invaluable for its closeness to Aramco and for information Aramco would share on oil production and planning. However, my reading was that when it became a fully Saudi directed operation Aramco was always careful not to appear as if it was still an American company where foreigners made all the decisions and had full access to its operations. Since the early days of exploration and development of the fields, they were careful to restrict knowledge about the reserves. The question was tantalizing. Were we getting enough information to make an accurate estimate of Saudi reserves and progress in planning?

Q: Were we concerned about Shia or Iranian influence in the Eastern Province?

MURPHY: Generally speaking, I'd say we were not highly concerned, but the Saudis always saw that as worrisome. Certain communities and towns in the Eastern Province had a heavy if not majority Shiite population. The Shia were not to be found in the senior

ranks of the Saudi government. Certainly not in security or military fields. They were suspect. This was before the Khobar incident later in the '80s when there was a major sabotage in the Eastern Province and military barracks were blown up. I'm trying to keep the perspective on the early '80s; the Shiites were regarded with suspicion even before the Iranian Revolution. There were limits on you as a Shiite Saudi in terms of government service and training that would get you into the security area.

Q: Were there any – I remember I asked before when you were a political officer, but was there any political development or dynamics within the country while you were there? Any changes?

MURPHY: Change always was ponderously slow in Saudi Arabia. The shock which exposed their vulnerabilities in the case of the mosque in Mecca stimulated a tightening of security practices. Obviously no political parties were tolerated. You saw the already considerable number of Saudi youth going abroad to the States and elsewhere for higher education and had to wonder how Saudi Arabia would absorb its own who came home after four or five years on a foreign campus. They might be a source of threat to established ways of thinking and doing business. But it never seemed to develop in that direction. You could count the number of visas issued and the fact that most of the students who went got a bachelor's degree (a small number would get doctorates). But they didn't return aiming to overturn the established order. They were not on our radar as agents likely to bring about substantial change in the way the country was governed.

Q: How stood Saudi Arabia with some of its neighbors at that time? Let's say Egypt.

MURPHY: They'd been through a rocky time with Nasser. He'd been blunt that the Royal Family did not have Egypt's full support. The relationship showed strains when I got there first in the '60s. The number of Egyptians in education, teaching in primary and secondary schools was enormous. But that soured with the overall deterioration of the political relationship, and the teaching force shifted within a decade towards a more heavily Palestinian presence. Lebanese, Palestinian, even Syrian teachers were more welcome than Egyptians. In that earlier period there had been the "three revolutionary princes", as they were called, who had left the kingdom to live in Cairo. One of whom was Talal, the father of Walid bin Talal who became one of the most successful businessmen in the kingdom and ended up in detention in the Ritz-Carlton in recent days. The three self exiles were allowed to come home but never filled any public position in the kingdom after their "defection" to Nasser.

Q: One of the things I've heard said is that the Saudi princes made a – I won't say 'unholy' but maybe a 'holy' alliance with the clergy, that education would be heavily under religious supervision and an awful lot of the bright young people spent their days learning the Koran rather than physics or other things.

MURPHY: That's true. I visited some of the public schools and listened to their directors describe the curriculum. Arabic language was fundamental of course; Arabic history;

then religious studies. Those would chew up 60%-plus of the curriculum at that time and dominated your early years in the primary grades. There were a couple of schools for boys (and one for girls that my daughter attended for one year in Jeddah) which did push the study of mathematics and basic sciences, but they were the exceptions. King Faisal was very interested in education. He made sure that his sons like Saud and Turki, who became head of intelligence services and ambassador in Washington and London, had strong Western-style educations. He opened the doors to the girls going to school which initially caused considerable negative reactions. He's quoted as saying, "I'm not telling you that you have to send your daughters to school. I'm saying the schools are there and I'm providing the security for those schools so the girls can carry out their studies. You're not compelled to send them but I want them to have that chance." He had been opposed by arch-conservatives about the introduction of television in the kingdom. He rebuked them pointing out that his plans included TV programming hours each day for the reading of the Koran over the television – "Are you telling me that's the sign of devils at work in our cultural programs?" I recall one of the early television shows, a class in cooking where the camera never showed the woman's face, only her hands preparing the dishes. The government was conscious of its reliance on the loyalty of conservative forces in the clergy, but it did needle them to move in a more open direction. Progress in social change was very slow. There was no wave of liberal thinking sweeping the kingdom but official thinking was that we must work for a better educated public and at the same time show we value and will preserve support for the clergy. The government handsomely rewarded the clergy by funding religious missions sent abroad and printing millions of copies of the Koran for distribution worldwide.

Q: Did we have the opportunity and did we monitor what the madrasa (religious schools) system the Saudis were financing throughout the world including in the United States, what they were teaching?

MURPHY: No, that was not our concern at that point in time. Remember Washington was cultivating the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan and among the groups we supported was one led by Osama bin Laden. We were not worried about the *madrasas* but we were aware that Saudi funding of madrasas in the Muslim world and even in the States was growing. We had limited access to the clergy. One of my successors as ambassador, Hume Horan, who was one of the most successful students of the Arabic language, reached out to make contacts with some of the senior clergy. This made the Royal Family leadership nervous. They believed that an American ambassador had no business frequenting the clergy. I don't know if any Saudi ever spelled it out to him, but eventually reached the point where Fahd, who had succeeded Khalid as king, said he wouldn't receive Hume. We were free to leave him there as ambassador, but he would not be dealing with the king. We decided that we had to transfer him from the kingdom.

So they were solicitous of their support base among the clergy. The population in the Najd north of Riyadh enjoyed extra respect for their loyalty and their conservative thinking. Maintaining control included favoring the central part of the kingdom. *Nejd*is compared favorably in official eyes to that "mixed" population in the Eastern Province which included Shia and also compared to the Hijaz where the pilgrim traffic over the

centuries had introduced different cultures and a level of sophistication uncharacteristic of the Najd heartland. This didn't mean you couldn't expect a government career if you were Hijazi but you were looked at more carefully than a Najdi.

Abdul Aziz the founder had been a brilliant leader, uniting disparate communities into what became the kingdom. The Hijaz had been a separate emirate with a distinctive identity. They did not trumpet it about but Hijazi families and particularly those in Jeddah who had some power and money could be a little cutting about "those people up in Riyadh."

Q: Were we concerned that the Saudis – they had an ever-increasing population; it's quite impressive how the population has grown – that there was any possibility to develop as say in Thailand or Taiwan or Malaysia, an entrée to the electronics field?

MURPHY: Let me answer by recounting one anecdote from my first tour in the '60s. Our PAO was a Palestinian-American with many years experience broadcasting for the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). He came to the States, became an American citizen and joined USIA. He told me that when he came to Saudi Arabia in 1961, he interviewed the first group of Saudis going as students to the States for their college education. After asking what each was planning to do, he stopped and said "Interesting; I don't hear any of you talking about training for instance to be a doctor or surgeon." One of them blurted out, "Well no! They work with their hands. We don't do that." He was a reliable witness to Saudi society. He felt very comfortable serving there and made a good friend of the younger Prince Fahd who became king. He was of course bilingual, Arabic and English, and able to pick up nuance at a level which FSI graduates rarely achieved. I think that group whom he had interviewed would have regarded a career in electronics with scorn.

Q: The name escapes me but I know him, I worked with him.

MURPHY: Issa Sabbagh?

Q: Yes. I was able to interview him.

MURPHY: He was a remarkable man and a treasure to have around. He was used to the hilt by Kissinger as his interpreter after the '73 war who would shout his name across a crowded room. "Eessa" (Kissinger never got his first name quite right), "come over here." Isa was sensitive to being called a translator: "I'm not a translator, I interpret. I will not say word-for-word what's being said, I will tell you what is meant." And he did. He was a great asset to the U.S. government. You did an oral history with him?

Q: Yes. It was a long time ago; I haven't looked at it recently. He was a remarkable person.

MURPHY: He was. He died in Jidda where had gone back on a visit. He was always recognized because his voice was distinctive and he'd done quite a lot of television by

then. When he went to the marketplace in Jeddah, an admiring crowd would gather around.

I haven't talked about our personnel in the field. I was really fortunate with the deputies I had starting with Steve Buck in Mauritania; Bob Pelletreau in Damascus; Rocky Suddath in Jeddah; and a real rock, Jim Rosenthal, earlier in the Philippines. I couldn't have had a more helpful and capable bunch to work with and I relied heavily on them. One of my shortcomings was in writing efficiency reports. Knowing how hard all on the staff were working, I hated to record derogatory comments. Seemingly we were always in one difficult situation after another and people worked their heads off to do the best possible job they could. When you're given that report form where you're supposed to define exactly where to place officers among their peers, I would turn to my deputies to be more candid than I wanted to be.

My time in Saudi was short. We had a number of senior visitors come through from the American business community. There were sellers of major aircraft and defense equipment. Washington decided that for one major sale we would not contest the British competition. The Brits won the contract for reasons I think were understood by our manufacturers but they were unhappy not to have the usual full backing by the American government. We saw prominent business representatives from our country except for those from one category. I never sensed that the executives from the American oil world looked to the embassy in those days as a prime source of advice. They managed their own affairs directly with Saudi authorities where they were well respected and well received.

Q: How did you feel about your time in Saudi Arabia this time? Were there particular problems we were concerned about? Was the House of Saud immune to takeover by what we would consider hostile forces?

MURPHY: Domestic forces? Threats were external, in particular Iranian. No domestic challenger to the House of Saud appeared in the wake of the 1979 attack. One of the princes summed up for me the Family's attitude towards domestic Saudi critics of the regime: "I don't feel I owe any deference to critics of the Family today. My grandfather got up off his ass, organized and worked hard to get the tribes together and build the country. We have done so much to build this country, the critics have contributed nothing."

Q: I think as Americans we view a kingdom as being vulnerable, in our DNA. Saudi Arabia had its huge princely reservoir of potential rulers that seemed to make it pretty immune.

MURPHY: We were realistic about the thousands of princes. They were not all winners, nor were they all leaders by any means. The young nephew who assassinated Faisal in 1975 had a history of drug abuse from when he'd been in the States. He resented that his brother had been arrested at one point for "seditious talk" and took revenge by killing the King. I wasn't there at the time but understood that the shock over this event ran through

Saudi society. They couldn't believe that a leader would be so hated that anyone (particularly a member of his own family) would resort to assassination. Occasionally you'd hear stories of family members being disciplined. One, in the 50's was involved in a drinking party in Jeddah, had gone wild and killed a British diplomat ; it was still talked about.

Q: I recall back in the '50s when I was in Dhahran that this was a story that circulated.

MURPHY: Wasn't there a film about the death of a princess who defied the Family and ran off with a non-royal? She was executed, by firing squad I think, in the '70s. Individual violations of law and order by members of the family did occur, but publicity about it was rare.

Q: It's amazing how well it's been through difficult times through the years, particularly Nasser.

MURPHY: They were not immune to temptations to break with their own family, but the cases were few. There was an elaborate system of allowances for all royals. The closer you were to the main line, the larger the allowance you were given. Even distant members would get a few thousand dollars a month just for being of the blood. The money was big if you were the son or grandson of Abdul Aziz who had had some 50 sons.

Q: Is there anything more to discuss? For example, did you find anybody you could talk to who was interested in what was happening in Israel?

MURPHY: The Saudis saw Israeli through the eyes of the Palestinians and other Arab leaders. They were not curious about what made Israel tick. They were much less interested than the Syrians and Jordanians were in the inner workings of the Israeli government and military. It was taken for granted that Israel was an enemy. Israelis seemed to regard Saudis with contempt. At one point a couple of Israeli fighter aircraft over flew the northern district and dropped toilet paper on a Saudi airbase near the Gulf of Aqaba.

I didn't sense from my contacts that they saw themselves arming for war with Israel. The army units they had pledged to contribute in '67 never got to their northern border quickly enough to participate in that war. The '73 conflict was secretly organized between Cairo and Damascus and did not involve the kingdom. We pressed them to be more financially supportive of Palestinian refugees, but in the early days their response was basically that "You created the problem, you pay for it." At one point an annual donation of \$10,000 of kerosene and related products was the extent of their contributions. They wished in general for a better life for the Palestinians but didn't see themselves as obliged to contribute. That changed over the years, and they became more generous.

Q: Did you find yourself being charged by Washington with asking for money from the Saudis to contribute to a number of things?

MURPHY: We did target them for contributions to various UN agencies. They didn't operate with a sense of being so wealthy that they should be expected to spend a lot of money on other global issues. They had their own development priorities, primarily projects in the Muslim world. They built the headquarters for the Muslim World Alliance in Riyadh. The government claimed Islamic leadership as the Guardian of Mecca and Medina. The King adopted this title for himself as part of the Saudi response to Tehran's challenges to Saudi legitimacy after the Iranian revolution. Their religious training centers do not rank as serious competitors of Al Azhar in Cairo or those in Pakistan. Their aid programs have been primarily directed first of all to the Arab world and then the world of Islam as far afield as Indonesia and Africa. But their main concerns have been the security of the Saudi regime and Saudi society.

Q: Was Iraq a problem when you were there, in Saudi Arabia?

MURPHY: They never saw Saddam as a friend. There was a heritage of ill will between the Baath in Iraq, certainly of Saddam as its leader, and the House of Saud. The Iran-Iraq War helped him cast himself as a leader who deserved the support of the Arab World. The Saudis were explicit: given the choice between Iraq and Iran, they favored Iraq. They did help Iraq out financially during that conflict and, in company with several other Arab states, petitioned Washington to do the same. I heard well after that war from then Crown Prince Abdullah who had been commander of the National Guard that he had argued at the time of our 2003 invasion of Iraq that we should not try to change the regime, just take out Saddam. He saw him as a dangerous and untrustworthy leader. "Surely you Americans with your special forces could have found a way to take him out and left the country alone." Abdullah was not excited by the prospect of transforming Iraq which became our general goal. The Iraqis, when their war with Iran finally ended, lived up to Saudi expectations by invading Kuwait and threatening the Saudis.

Q: How about Yemen?

MURPHY: From the first days of the Yemen revolution in the sixties, Nasser supported the takeover led by Sallal. The Saudis considered Sallal a wild card, a leader who had to be faced down. They supported the Yemeni royalists but were unable to maintain the Yemeni royalist effort to fight Sallal. The royalist leaders retired from politics and some ended up in England. The Saudis kept their eyes on Yemen. Defense minister, Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, held the Yemen portfolio. They distrusted its government but didn't take it seriously as an enemy or a challenger. Yemeni workers were spread across the Kingdom. They were useful as a workforce. They dug the wells and built the roads but were never treated as equals by Saudis. At one point the Saudi government, irritated by Yemeni policies, cancelled all Yemeni work permits and sent the Yemenis home. When it soon became evident there was no one else to repair the potholes and dig the wells, that ban was lifted.

Q: What about the Gulf? Did that play much of a role in the time you were there?

MURPHY: The royal family saw itself as the first among equals, by far the first among equals. They saw themselves as the natural leader of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a political organization designed as the member states' answer to the Iranian Revolution. "Let's pull together, let's unify our defenses" was the guiding slogan as they laid out a timetable in '81. It proved to be a slow process.

We tried to engage the GCC countries in war games for which you by drew your "enemy" by lot. One year the Saudis drew Qatar and refused to play because they didn't consider Qatar to be a worthy opponent. Also, they were constantly irritated by the Qatari based *al Jazeera* television broadcasts which carried talk shows where participants bluntly criticized the kingdom. The Saudi foreign minister commented to me that Qatar was to Saudi Arabia what a mosquito was to an elephant. When the mosquito bit the elephant it was very proud of itself but the elephant never felt the bite. (In fact the Saudis withdrew their Ambassador to Qatar for several years in the 70's in response to *al Jazeera*'s provocative broadcasts.)

Q: Today is the 29th of January, 2018 with Dick Murphy. We're trying something new, a different type of recording; we'll see how this works. Dick, do you remember where we left off?

MURPHY: Had we finished with Saudi Arabia?

Q: I think we had finished with it and you were off to the State Department, weren't you?

MURPHY: That would have been 1983. I first met George Shultz before he became Secretary of State when he was visiting Riyadh for Bechtel. We talked about the situation in the kingdom. I don't recall exactly when I got the message that I should plan to be back in Washington at the two-year mark of my Saudi tour to start work as his Assistant Secretary for NEA. I was very pleased with the offer.

When I returned I was hit by the brawling going on all over the Middle East. Lebanon happily seemed to have settled down somewhat after our successful evacuation of the PLO leadership from Beirut. The Saudis had been concerned that the leadership of the PLO might be wiped out. After the evacuation we had agreed to return our Marines to help maintain calm. I got back and within a matter of days – it was a rainy Saturday in Washington – I was called by the Department Watch Officer at an early hour to come down because of a major problem in Beirut. That turned out to be the blowing up of the Marine barracks at their beach headquarters near the Beirut airport. Days later, I was on a plane with George Shultz and some others from the department, going to Paris for consultations on next steps in Beirut. The French had lost a number of their troops in a related operation on the same day as our own Marines were killed. We lost some 240 Marines in that massive explosion carried out by operatives who believed that they were fighting an American-French effort to intervene in Lebanese affairs.

Lebanon figured heavily among the issues I was involved in during my six year tour. NEA in those days covered this tremendous arc from Morocco in the west through the Arab world, Afghanistan, South Asia – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The bulk of my own attention was focused on the Levant, including the Arab-Israeli peace process. I had a solid deputy on South Asia, Howie Schaffer, who well covered for me on those issues when there was a question of Congressional testimony or preparing statements on U.S. policy towards South Asia. I traveled during the next six years as Assistant Secretary it seemed almost every month focusing on the Levant, Israel, Egypt and the Gulf. I made several stops in Baghdad.

I recall being called in after my retirement to speak to the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) about their ongoing investigation of Irangate. It encapsulated my experience in Washington. The interview started with the agent showing me a memo sent by me to the seventh floor, directed to the Secretary and asked “Did you sign this?”

I looked at the memo and seeing my usual initial said, “Yes.” They wanted to discuss what the context was at that time and I said, “Look, I’m sorry. I initialed maybe 20 memos a day like that and sent them along.” We made a steady effort to keep the seventh floor advised on what was going on, and to suggest what moves we might make on the range of issues across the Middle East and South Asia. They then asked me to bring in any notes about my conversations and my comings-and-goings in that period. I looked around our house and found a couple of spiral notebooks I had kept with me when I left the Department (I took nothing else with me). When I presented those notebooks to the agent for review I said that I regretted my handwriting was at best indecipherable. I would record a meeting trying to take as full notes as possible filling a page then scribbling further along its edge and top. The agent passed the notebooks back to me rather quickly and that ended FBI interest in me as an Irangate witness.

The pace was intense during those six years. Crises were endless. Without recalling the exact timings, they stretched from the attempted assassination of King Hassan of Morocco, bread riots in Cairo, American hostages in Lebanon and increasing tensions over Iran. We made commitments to cut off arms and military supplies to Iran. We had been encouraged after the fighting had started between Iran and Iraq to support the Iraqis. Virtually every Arab government knocked on our door and asked that we pledge our support for Baghdad. Against the backdrop of the Iranian Revolution of ’79, the hostage-taking of American embassy personnel and the acts of sabotage and subversion in the Middle East which we were tracking coming out of Tehran, that was an easy choice. Not the easiest of choices because Saddam’s record in Iraq was ugly to start with; the way he ran the country eliminating any challengers or doubters of his wisdom and authority. But the choice was easy for Americans; in that contest, he was the preferred one. We were getting ‘don’t worry messages’. “We Arabs have had our difficulties with Saddam over the years, but he is going to be a changed man when this fight with Iran is over. He will dedicate himself to the economic development of his country. You won’t have any problems, he will be playing a constructive role in the future.” These came from leaders such as Fahd and the Kuwaiti *amir* who were uneasy about Iraqi pressures on their regimes, but were convinced that Saddam must not lose the war with Iran.

Never having visited Baghdad before becoming Assistant Secretary, I was to have several meetings with Tariq Aziz, the foreign minister, the only senior Iraqi except for the Iraqi Ambassador to Washington, Nizar Hamdoon, with whom I had steady exchanges. My wife and I invited Tariq Aziz when he came to Washington at one point with his family to visit Mount Vernon for a picnic. He was an attractive personality and told no insider stories about Iraqi politics that Saddam wouldn't have approved of. What he told you more often than not turned out to be the truth. He was very relaxed at the picnic until he realized his driver had forgotten to bring his usual bottle of Johnny Walker Black; the driver was immediately dispatched back to Washington to return with a couple of bottles. He was a Chaldean Christian, a rarity in the top ranks of the Saddam administration.

Baghdad was a dreary city. There had been the "war of the cities" involving an exchange of missiles between Baghdad and Tehran. Socially it was tough for our team in Baghdad to mix with Iraqis. The Iraqis didn't want to raise suspicions in their own government about dealing with foreigners despite our being there with their government's approval to reestablish a long-dormant relationship. In 1984 Baghdad became the last Arab capital to resume diplomatic relations with the U.S. after the '67 war. We'd had an interest section for a year or two before that.

I didn't meet Saddam early on. He reportedly had a policy of receiving foreign visitors such as myself once in their tour. He had other better things to do than meeting assistant secretaries and foreign ministers passing through Baghdad and delegated these to Tariq Aziz. The one meeting I had was to deliver a letter from President Reagan restating our support for Baghdad and sketching out our efforts to block military supplies from reaching Iran. We were dealing toughly with some suppliers in Western Europe who were evading their own government's agreement to stop arms deliveries to Iran. It deeply embarrassed the Reagan administration when it later turned out that we ourselves had engaged in trafficking arms to Iran.

Iran Contra was one of the best-kept secrets in its early days. Personalities such as Ollie North were trying by every means conceivable, and by some inconceivable, to get our hostages released in Lebanon. That was a strong personal interest of President Reagan. I recall asking my Principal Deputy, the resourceful Arnie Raphael, about an odd story concerning an aircraft having to make an emergency landing in Turkey coming from Iran. There were few details out in public but the story seemed to involve American contact with Iran. The morning when I'd seen that report, I asked "Arnie, what's going on? Did you know anything about this?" Arnie cryptically replied that "You don't want to know" and we turned to other matters. He later told me that a good contact of his at the Pentagon on a strictly "for your personal information only" basis had told him that there had been some deliveries of American arms through Israel. Stories started to come out about Bud McFarlane's traveling on a hostage-related effort with a team to Tehran.

My own meeting with Saddam was before that news had broken. His manner was stiff and he displayed none of the charisma which I had heard about. His reaction to Reagan's letter was curt. He said, "You say you are doing a lot. You could do more." He went on

to say the memorable: “America treats the third world like an Iraqi peasant treats his new wife.” He fell silent and I remained silent. How could one reply to that? He then continued, “Yes, the Iraqi peasant feeds his new wife three days of bread and honey and then it’s off to the fields for life.” Tariq Aziz burst out laughing, clearly reacting to one of the finest presidential jokes ever told. Our meeting was at night in one of Saddam’s palaces. It had a slightly creepy feeling to it. The only others present were our ambassador, Tariq Aziz and Saddam’s personal interpreter who was fantastic. I’ve never heard anyone perform more fluently at simultaneous interpreting.

Saddam’s comparison of American handling of the third world and Iraqi peasant customs showed his cynicism. He saw the games of the Great Powers as predictable. He could see through them even if there wasn’t much he could do about them. He knew that the great powers had their own interests in his country and just didn’t want them to think that they could pull anything over his eyes.

On hostage issues, we had White House attention. Ollie came to the Department for a general exchange on the prospects of getting the hostages out. They eventually did come out though not in a group. One of them, I think the longest-held prisoner in Lebanon, stayed hostage to Hezbollah for over five years.

I traveled frequently to Lebanon. The foreign minister, Elie Salem, had been a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, where I had taken a course before going to Beirut in 1959. He had been dean of the faculty at the American University of Beirut and later headed a university in north Lebanon. Amine Gemayel was president of Lebanon, the son of Pierre Gemayel the head of Lebanese Forces, among the toughest and most brutal militias in the Lebanese civil war. That war had been underway since ’75.

Travel was a challenge. We’d go in when possible directly by a small U.S. Air Force plane. Six passengers as I recall. If it was not possible to fly in, we would travel by helicopter from Israel or Cyprus, in the latter case flying uncomfortably close to the waves below. The pilot was under instructions to fly at minimal altitude so as not to appear on the radar of whoever might be interested in downing a plane. They were superb pilots; on those flights from Larnaca to Beirut I was as close as I’ve ever been in an aircraft to the ocean.

It had its comic moments. At one of our landings we found the usual vehicles waiting to convoy us out of the landing area which was near the Palestinian refugee camp which had been the site of the bombing of a bus carrying Palestinians in ’75 and had triggered the opening of the civil war. Our Lebanese escort officer proudly showed me a new defense for our convoy; it was a closed van with a large hole cut in the roof. Asked what it did, he replied “We’ve got a gun in there capable of knocking out tanks.” Well, various combatants had tanks moving around Beirut every day. Checking I learned that the gun, could be elevated through the hole in the roof when we drove through a chancy area. The only shortcoming was that its angle of fire was fixed. This meant that it could do great

damage to a tank but only if the tank was on the first floor balcony of the buildings we were driving by, an improbable scenario.

Most of my time in Lebanon was concerned in dealing with Gemayel and various efforts to lower the political temperature. I recall one bizarre night time call on Gemayel in his presidential compound at Yarze. It was a makeshift office in a building in which there was an indoor tennis court whose roof had been punctured by shrapnel. As we reviewed recent events, I was drawn to the flickering light of a television set behind the President. Its sound had been turned off as the Royal Ballet performed “Sleeping Beauty”.

It turned out we really didn't accomplish that much to restore normalcy to Lebanon. It was not until the end of the '80s (I had just retired), when the Lebanese leadership of various factions accepted a Saudi invitation to meet in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia. By then the parliament had not had an election in 14 years and the presidency had been vacated when Amine Gemayel's term ran out. We had tried to convince the Syrians who were controlling the overall scene to support holding a presidential election in Lebanon in 1988 in accordance with the timetable of the Lebanese constitution. We'd had experience of dealing with an earlier Lebanese president trying to overstay his term, as when Eisenhower's representative, Robert Murphy, was sent to calm things down back in '58. But times had changed. The Syrians, who had been invited in in '76, eventually settled in and largely controlled the Lebanese political scene. Checkpoints throughout the country could be either Syrian or Lebanese soldiers; you never knew which you'd encounter.

The Syrians were disdainful of Lebanese politicians. They professed to see no need for a president of Lebanon. As Khaddam put it at one point, “Just put a flag on the table; that's enough to represent the state.” Our argument was, “The parliament is paralyzed; the military is blocked by the various militias. If there isn't a president, there's no-one in a position to make major political decisions and bring an end to this civil war.” His immediate question was, “Well, who's the American candidate?” My reply that we didn't have one didn't convince him. It clearly was unthinkable to him that the United States would go through all this without having an idea about who should run the country. I replied that there had been at least 15 candidates, all good Maronites, respectable figures in Lebanese political life, who had visited Damascus to present their candidacy. Under the constitution, it had to be a Maronite.

Khaddam came back after meeting with Hafez al-Assad to say that Syria had no objection to their being an election on the understanding there would be only one candidate. This was blatant interference. I called a recess to consult with my team. Some members advised that we should stop our efforts and go home. However, I had been working the election issue so long that I couldn't just go home. I returned to the meeting and asked who that candidate would be. Khaddam said it was Mikhail Daher a candidate from a constituency in the Beqaa Valley near the Syrian border. I said that he was saying the Lebanese have a choice between Daher or chaos. He said no. Do not say there's a choice because the Lebanese will choose chaos. So, counter to the advice of some of my team, I went to Beirut to present this Syrian position. The election was due in September and the date was inflexible.

A catch-phrase summing up that final meeting with the Lebanese has dogged me ever since. It was said that I had told the Lebanese that “now is decision time; either Mikhail Daher will be your president or there will be chaos.” Word spread that I had flatly dictated “Daher or chaos.” What I had reported to the Lebanese was a distillation of what we’d talked about for hours in Damascus. I made clear that I saw this was a Syrian position and that the Syrian message was “you can have an election Syrian-style, not Lebanese-style.”

The negotiations came to an end. There was no election. The Syrians continued to bombard the military headquarters where the commander of the army, Michel Aoun, was pinned down. Eventually, when things settled in the next month or so, Aoun left for self-exile in Paris. I recall him publicly saying the presidents of Lebanon served only six years while the liberator of Lebanon appeared only once in a century. He was above politics at that stage of his career; he’s now president of Lebanon.

The Iraq-Iran War grew more intense as time passed and the American involvement grew correspondingly. One closer than I to the Pentagon said that our advisors were doing everything up to the point of strapping Iraqi pilots into their seats in the air campaign against Iran. The military representatives I talked to were always very conscious of the limitations on the dialogue imposed by their Iraqi counterparts. Their advice was welcome on overall strategy but the decisions were firmly in the hands of the Iraqis themselves. During the war we had had a tough moment with the Iraqis when they shot up one of our destroyers in the Gulf, claiming that the destroyer had been east of that point in the Gulf where we had advised them that we would be. In answer to Congressional inquiries of who was responsible, I could only say that it was in all probability a mistake by the Iraqi pilot. Baghdad was benefitting so much from cooperation with us to have authorized it.

The post war transformation which Arab leaders predicted for Saddam was quickly exposed to be poor prophecy.

Q: Dick, I was wondering. Dealing with the Lebanese, what caused them to be so difficult? Were they a particular breed of cat politically or not? Did you see a real difference between them and other groups you’ve had to deal with?

MURPHY: Other nationalities, you mean? How did they differ in dealings with us?

Q: Yes. In the first place, would they tell the truth? Or was everything layered? Were promises any good with each other?

MURPHY: That’s a fair question. Let me restate it though. Were the Lebanese in dealing with us making promises on which they did (or didn’t) deliver? Were they different from promises or commitments we would get from other countries in the neighborhood?

Q: Yes.

MURPHY: I think at that point in their history, the Lebanese politicians had run out of ideas. Amine Gemayel wasn't politically strong enough in his own hierarchy to make major commitments. I don't recall being toyed with or promised something which was obviously false by the Lebanese. They were suffering economically, politically, militarily, psychologically and trying to find a way out of their misery. We didn't feel that they were being deceitful. They really didn't know what to do. We had a certain faith that to help stabilize political life, it would be very desirable to have a president elected. Perhaps that reflected a peculiarly American faith in elections. Elections in Lebanon as I'd been told back in the early '60s were never free and a lot of money changed hands in the course of an election. But a Lebanon without a president, without an effective parliament or military, was in an appalling state. We focused on getting an election agreed to, making plain that we didn't have a preferred candidate. That was to be a Lebanese decision. The Syrians didn't believe that. Although Gemayel never suggested another candidate he said in the end that he'd be willing to extend temporarily while something was worked out. That came too late and Lebanon fell into chaos for another two years. Whether an election would have advanced the timing of the political deal that the meetings in Ta'if finally produced I don't know.

Let me compare the Lebanese to King Hussein's government in Jordan. The King always seemed straightforward in his dealings with us. Shultz was convinced that the way ahead was to start direct Jordanian-Israeli negotiations. We couldn't get there. We persuaded the leaders of the American Jewish community and Israel that if for the moment it was unfeasible to start face-to-face talks, then all concerned should focus on improving the welfare of the Palestinian community in Israel and the West Bank. The Jewish leadership in the U.S. and Israelis agreed that a better deal for the Palestinians economically could be helpful politically. For Israelis the question remained open about how much they would be prepared to do politically once direct talks had started. There were steady tensions between Likud and Labor. Begin had resigned his office shortly after I came back to Washington in '83. One of the charges against him was that he had sacrificed too many Israeli soldiers in Lebanon. I met frequently with Peres, Shamir and Rabin in their shifting capacities as prime minister, foreign minister and defense minister. At one point the Israeli side reached a deal internally that Shamir and Peres would alternate terms as prime minister and foreign minister. There was a limit to how effective that could be but it kept a surface calm in Israeli politics. If you didn't like Likud, well there was Peres to speak out on what Israel was prepared to do. If you didn't trust Peres, then Shamir was standing by waiting his turn as prime minister.

The Israelis were having a problem negotiating full withdrawal from Sinai with the Egyptians. They finally agreed to lose the argument over whose sovereignty would prevail in the corner of the Sinai called Taba. It was a tiny bit of territory that the Israelis said had never been part of Egypt. They tracked Admiralty reports back to the early 1900s extrapolating how many miles in the heat of Sinai summer a camel, carrying a surveyor laying out the boundary stones, could have walked. We heard that a sharp Israeli international lawyer finally told her colleagues, "We haven't got a case". They gave in to the Egyptian position and Taba was restored to Egyptian sovereignty.

Peres was very hopeful of reaching a deal with Hussein. Shultz hesitated to signal full support for Peres. There was constant turmoil in Israeli politics and he did not want to take sides. This was something that had to be worked out by Israelis for Israel, and there were sharply different points of view between Shamir and Peres about land for peace. Peres was unhappy with this stand. He had apparently reached some understanding with Hussein through their contacts in London in the mid '80s which we refrained from endorsing. We did not put our thumb on the scale.

Were our dealings with the Israelis dealing with an untrustworthy group? No. But there were deep differences in what they wanted for their country. When Shamir finally retired from politics, he made a statement to his supporters: "I promised that I would never return the lands we have occupied and I didn't return one single meter." That was not Peres' approach.

Rabin, who was defense minister during the first intifada, issued an order: "If you have to break bones to restore order, break them." Soon after that an American television team caught on camera an Israeli unit beating up a Palestinian demonstrator and trying to break his arm. They were unable to break his arm but it was an embarrassment to Israel. Rabin eventually became a spokesman for making a deal. Soon after my term in office he and Arafat finally met and had their famous handshake at the White House.

Israel has always been a complicated political scene. We steadily evaluated how much of the political hierarchy might support a given position. But the overall guidance that Shultz gave us was that there are things we can't do and which the Israelis must do them for themselves.

What did I think of the consistency in the political positionings of the various regional parties? If we came to the Saudis, Emiratis and Omanis they would speak frankly about their interests in a given problem and didn't try to mislead us. If we proposed a specific approach and they didn't agree they would say so. We had our disagreements in the Gulf with Arabian Peninsula governments, but I don't think we've been misled by them.

To the best I could tell we had a straightforward relationship with Mubarak. He was scornful of Qadhafi and warned "Don't be misled by him." There was no evidence that he misled us about Egypt's goals and positions in the '80s.

Q: Were we concerned about his rule within Egypt? Was that a concern of ours or not?

MURPHY: I'd say no. He was an authoritarian. We considered him (we, the U.S. government writ large) a stern figure who would get his way but without using the brutality prevalent in Baghdad and even in Damascus whose brutality was better concealed. Hafez al-Assad was not a merciful figure in dealing with his critics. That's as good an answer as I can give you.

Q: During this time did you have any problems – obviously you had problems, but how did you feel about Qadhafi?

MURPHY: I never met him. The views of others – Mubarak in Egypt, Hassan in Morocco – more or less shaped our thinking about Qadhafi. I went there later when I was with the Council on Foreign Relations; still didn't meet him but did talk to some senior Libyans. I attended a conference on the anniversary of the revolution in a southern Libyan town where he was on the platform. His ruthlessness was coupled with incompetence in governing. The Tunisians and Algerians spoke guardedly about Qadhafi but were never very specific. He was not esteemed as a leader by fellow Arabs. He styled himself "the king of Africa" and was a self aggrandizing figure. Washington appreciated his turning over his nuclear capabilities but his relationship with Washington was always tenuous.

Q: During your time Dick, how were relations with Algeria?

MURPHY: They were cool. I visited there only twice. I remember staying in the hotel where Eisenhower reportedly had stayed just after the second war. The leadership was distant in its dealings with our embassy. I didn't meet with the top figures. The leadership had been through hell during their revolution, a savage affair that destroyed many lives. I assume they regarded us with caution as friends of the French. There were bitter memories towards the outside world and they were secretive in managing their affairs.

The Cold War was still very much in play, and as we surveyed the area our constant question was are we losing or are we gaining? We had gained massively in Egypt after their peace treaty with Israel. Our Ambassador had arrived in Cairo to reopen diplomatic relations within a few weeks of the end of the '73 war. He helped engineer a remarkably fast change in Egyptian policy away from the Soviets. It reached the point where Soviet diplomats were literally unable to comment on the state of affairs in Egypt. They would say "go talk with the Americans".

The Arabian peninsula countries were staunchly anti-Communist and it was after my time that the Saudis accepted their first embassy from Moscow. But our relations with that part of the world had their complexities. The Saudis dispatched Prince Bandar, their ambassador to Washington, on a secret mission to Beijing to buy missiles. That was an unpleasant shock for Washington first because the Saudis were dealings with Beijing, second, because the missiles were designed to carry nuclear warheads and, third, because the whole arrangement including constructing the batteries in the kingdom had escaped our surveillance. The Saudis explained that they were not getting nuclear warheads. They said they thought they had to do everything possible to defend their own country and saw the Chinese weapon would be an essential addition to their arsenal confronting Tehran.

Cold War competition was there through the '80s. I was sent late in the administration with the mission to brief London, Paris, NATO, Moscow and Rome on new approaches to the peace process. I remember the call in Moscow with Shevardnadze. We met in a small conference room near his office. Never having met him or had that many dealings

with Soviet diplomats in the field, I awkwardly opened our conversation with what I thought was a joke by noting in one corner of the room a statue of Rodin's "The Thinker" and in another corner "Laocoon and His Sons", being attacked by serpents.

Q: They were being dragged back in the water by serpents.

MURPHY: I asked him which represented the main current of thinking in the Soviet foreign ministry. He paused, mildly surprised, and merely said "Molotov installed them." I quickly dropped any attempt at humor and presented my briefing. The last stop on that tour was Rome for a call on foreign minister Andreotti. He was popularly known as "the Fox" and was a legendary political figure in the country. Arriving in Rome in the evening directly from Moscow I was taken to meet him in his apartment. He had a bad back and was propped up in an easy chair. The apartment was darkish with Persian carpets hanging on the walls. He had always had a particular interest in the Middle East and for some reason in Syria. He interjected early on in our conversation, "Hafez al-Assad spoke well of you, saying that you were one of the few that understood Syrian policy."

I said, "Thank you sir but it would be no help to me in Washington for you to repeat that view." (Laughter) He took the point. However, shortly afterwards, he repeated the same comment. This time I said, "What if after this meeting I were to go out in the street and repeat Shevardnadze's comment to me in our Moscow meeting that he considered you the 'best foreign minister in Europe'?" (Shevardnadze had said just that.) Andreotti merely smiled and said, "In Rome, the Tiber carries everything away." ("A Roma il Tevere porta __ tutto")

Q: What did you think of our leadership? Secretaries of State and presidents in this time you were dealing with the Middle East?

MURPHY: We were never able to communicate that we had positive intentions towards the region. Saddam made plain he knew that we would be pursuing American interests while professing that we were trying to be a positive force. In Lebanon when the Marine barracks were blown up and we had that heavy loss of life, I thought we had been making our policy clear that we had been working to save lives and help lower the political temperature in Lebanon so they could work out their own deals. But we were seen by the young *Hezbollah is* and by Iran, their teacher at the time and until today, as an evil force interfering in the political affairs of their country and the region. With the best of intentions in Lebanon we became the target of endless suspicions that we had some evil plan in mind. Was that because U.S.-Israeli relations overhung our every action? Not entirely; it was in the background that we generally worked on behalf of Israel. It was more a basic suspicion that we had evil purposes in mind and should be blocked.

Q: There's always that saying about the two scorpions in the middle of the Nile and saying this is the Middle East. Rumors of plots are endemic to the Middle East.

MURPHY: That's true. In my period as assistant secretary, we had the image of a country that was not only powerful and rich but one that was liable to do something

disadvantageous to the countries of the area. On many occasions I felt my interlocutor was saying to himself “Murphy just doesn’t understand that somewhere in the White House or in the bowels of the CIA they plotting against my country day and night.”

Q: You were supported quite well by – who were your secretaries of State?

MURPHY: Kissinger, Vance and Shultz. When I was Assistant Secretary it was George Shultz. I continued for a few weeks when Baker came on but I had been awarded a fellowship in the UK for three months of touring British universities to talk about U.S. policy in the Middle East. Baker asked if I would like to be considered for another embassy, but I said no I thought the time had come to retire. I was aged 60 and it was time to move on. I had an offer from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) to join it as their Middle East hand in New York and moved out a few weeks after the Bush administration began.

Q: With George Shultz – he was well-versed from his business experience in the Middle East, wasn’t he?

MURPHY: He was. In fact, he told me he had thought before he was named Secretary that it was unlikely he would be chosen to be Secretary of State, because he would be considered biased towards the Arab side from his time with the Bechtel company. He never showed any bias in dealing with the Middle East. I’m a great admirer of what he did as secretary. I’m an admirer of the way he always kept an open door for all of us at the assistant secretary level; we had weekly staff meetings with him. If you had a problem that you needed his guidance on, he was ready to meet. He would ask, “Tell me what you think I can do about it?” He had a great anecdote about working at the State Department. He recalled when he had been Secretary of the Treasury and would meet with his senior staff to discuss a problem, he would take a decision which would be passed down and implemented. When he came to the State Department, he’d meet with his senior advisers, take a decision who would pass the decision down and routinely it would bounce back up! That was not the way things worked at the Treasury. It showed his appreciation of the messiness of dealing with world affairs. There are so many constituencies battling with each other, your views don’t always immediately find acceptance. He was bemused by this, but he coped with it. Under his leadership Department morale was excellent. He was leading a major federal department and obviously there were contending views in that department, but he treated the job with great seriousness and kept an open door.

Q: Dick, I’d like to do one more session where you talk about your experiences after retirement – what you’ve been doing and your thoughts on various things. Can we do that?

MURPHY: Yes.

Q: Today is April 18th, 2018 with Dick Murphy. Dick, we left with your retirement from the Foreign Service. But I know you've been called upon from time to time to do all sorts of things, so can we talk about those?

MURPHY: When I left in February of '89, I was still on the department rolls but had a three month Fulbright fellowship based in London at Chatham House. The point was to discuss American Middle East policy with audiences around the UK. It involved steady traveling by rail to Wales, Scotland, and various colleges in England. That was delightful and it was decompressing after the pretty intense final six year tour in Washington. There had been a lot of travel abroad and a lot of late nights at the office in a bureau which prided itself (probably to excess) in working longer hours than any other in the State Department. As I looked back on an almost unending series of crises – something was always going wrong somewhere in the bureau. Our responsibilities stretched from Morocco to Bangladesh.

I came back to the U.S., checked out with the Deputy Secretary's office and almost immediately started work as a senior fellow for the Middle East at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. I was disregarding the advice of my family in earlier years that whatever I was going to do, don't do it in New York. As far as Bostonians were concerned, New York was a dangerous, dirty and, worst of all, a glitzy city. Well, it was perhaps more dangerous then than it is today, cleaner now than it was then but it was and is a wonderfully glitzy city which we have greatly enjoyed ever since. Our apartment was within walking distance to the council, which was a great luxury in New York City.

Being out of government made possible my contacts with individuals and organizations we were not dealing with officially. One was Yasser Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization. We had been edging towards a dialogue with the PLO and in the last days of my service opened talks officially once he made a statement at a session of the General Assembly held in Geneva acknowledging Israel's right to exist and forswearing terrorism. But I had never met him. So it was a new experience when I traveled to Tunis with a small group in late '89 for a session with some of his senior people. Their establishment in Tunis had started years earlier when we helped evacuate the leadership and PLO army militia from Beirut. We met one evening in Tunis when, suddenly about 11:30, he popped up from behind the door as we walked in materializing out of nowhere. It was a prolonged session with some of us traveling from the CFR and other organizations trying to get to know him.

I was still in touch with Rafic Hariri who was still in private life having worked hard to bring the Lebanese civil war to its long-anticipated end. I was scheduled to see him in Paris after talking to Arafat and share with him where I thought the PLO relationship with Lebanon and with the United States was going. Had a moment of panic in Tunis when I discovered that I didn't have my passport to travel from Tunis to Paris. I turned the hotel room upside down thinking it had been lost or stolen. It wasn't until I tracked it down through the Tunisian foreign ministry. The group's passports had been held by Tunisian security when we arrived. Finally took off late, got to Paris to meet Hariri and gave him my best understanding of where the PLO was heading.

The meetings with the PLO and Arafat continued for a decade until they finally broke down just as Clinton's term was ending. Several years of efforts to activate the peace process began with the Madrid peace conference; I was in retirement so I didn't participate in anything to do with that. I remember being invited by National Public Radio to comment on the White House ceremony where Rabin and Arafat shook hands and began their negotiations for a peace agreement. I was commenting live from the White House grounds. It was an emotional moment for me having looked forward to this start up for several years. The veteran NPR correspondent Daniel Schorr sitting next me covered his microphone leaned over and said "Don't get too excited about this; you're watching two individuals getting married whose families hate each other. Work that into your thinking." It was good advice. The long PLO-Israeli engagement never led to marriage.

I attended various meetings to probe the possibilities of an American-Iranian agreement. Those were all without Washington's authorization. One session I remember was scheduled to last two days in Beirut in '92 or '93. The Lebanese were aware of it. We were provided the names of the Iranian attendees but the Iranians never showed up. They found it too risky I guess to engage with the United States, however unofficially. There was a similar reaction from Hezbollah in Lebanon when I later participated in a group which former Assistant Secretary of State Hal Saunders had organized. The Hezbollah representative was extremely nervous about being in the same room with me. My alleged hostility towards Hezbollah and Iran took years to fade. This derived I suppose from my several public appearances before US Congressional committees. Those appearances where you sat at a table looking up at the committee members created an odd sense of guilt on my part.

I ran the Middle East program for several years for the CFR in New York. The Council's practice was to provide a two or three year berth for academics taking a break to write the book they never had time to do or for just retired government officials who wanted time to think a bit and write their memoirs. In my case my tenure at CFR lasted 15 years as a senior fellow and I never did write 'the book'. I did some articles, one for the New York Times on developments in our Iranian policy. I worked on a study of the Carter Administration's policy of Dual Containment which involved Brzezinski and Schlesinger, which was great fun. We traveled to the area, had sessions with Turki bin Faisal who was then head of Saudi intelligence and with the UAE leader, Zayed bin Nahyan, in Abu Dhabi. We were delayed in Zaid's outer office for a couple of hours waiting to meet him. My companions were disgruntled, being unused to being kept waiting for their appointments. They ended up being captivated by him. He had his usual very sensible comments about the Gulf relationships with the United States and with the problems they were experiencing with Tehran in that period in the mid-'90s.

After retirement I frequently visited NEA but never again worked at the Department. One exception was serving as member of a small group studying how the Department had dealt with the situation in El Salvador at the height of the fighting between rebels and

regime. Congress had asked for an analysis whether the embassy had kept the department fully informed on what its contacts were during the fighting.

I was nostalgic during the early years of retirement and missed the daily contacts at State with some really fine people particularly those working with me in the bureau. It was a matter of recalling for some new members of the bureau how we had handled past events. There were questions such as how we had persuaded the Air Force to support my trips made in and out of Lebanon during the civil war. One question was which organization paid for the trips. I think State at that time avoided footing the bills.

At CFR I directed a number of meetings and study groups on issues, normally focusing on the Arab world or Arab-Israel. Our exchanges were less intense than those in government service. You had to wonder from time to time if producing studies and passing them to members of the government made much if any impact on policy makers. But there was a strong motivation to provide alternative views and interpretations of what was going on. I left CFR in 2004 and became an unaffiliated specialist in Middle Eastern affairs. I am still invited to comment during various crises on radio and television and meet with academicians who want to check on specific points and issues that I'd been involved with.

Q: Starting with the time you were in England, did you find that foreigners, that you were getting different types of questions from students and all than you were getting in the States? Different focus?

MURPHY: I remember the reaction of some UK academics, particularly an exchange in Oxford, where they found my comments to be much more cautious than those of British specialists. I've never quite put my finger on what their complaint was. I thought I was telling it like it had been but perhaps I was still uneasy discussing some of the issues they wanted to air. That was '89; the Lebanese civil war still going on, Arab-Israel still on the boil.

Q: Did you see a change in Arafat over the time, from meetings you'd had with him? A mellowing or a change?

MURPHY: He was tortured – throughout the contacts I had with him-- about how to reach a deal on the right of return. The Israelis never gave an inch on that issue, saying that for them that was existential and there was no right of return. Some would go further and maintain they never pushed the Palestinians out; the refugees were self-created. They simply removed themselves so Arab armies could expel Israelis.

Arafat was never ready to deal with a compromise position, to negotiate something which might have worked in the early '90s. After the Madrid conference, the parties met constantly but just never got very far. Clinton made a final push in the last days of his administration but Arafat wasn't there to deal with. He was nervous about selling a settlement that would not satisfy his constituency.

Q: Did you sense a change in the American Jewish community? They've always been split. At one point it was really almost I would say a group of no compromise. Was it more nuanced?

MURPHY: We were aware that with the passage of time and the generational change, the nature of the involvement of the American Jewish community started to shift. It was very worrisome to the Israelis and to the older generation of Jewish Americans that they didn't sense enthusiasm among the younger generation to support unquestioningly all positions of the Israeli government. They were beginning to disengage. They didn't want to see anything go badly for the Israelis and they would express support for a settlement which could bring peace to the region, but you could sense a shift towards indifference (one way to put it); they were growing up dealing with the problems of being Americans and with the economic and political issues of American citizens. Their focus on U.S.-Israel became less intense. The younger generation was increasingly indifferent, that's probably the best word I can use. They had their lives to live even though the excitement of there being a Jewish state was still alive. It worried the Israelis that the speed with which assimilation had been growing over the years was taking a toll on the support they felt they had to have from the American Jewish community. When George Shultz was Secretary, he had argued for a position which was very much welcomed by the American Jewish community: the need to find ways to improve the economic condition of the Palestinians. That was enthusiastically supported by leaders such as Shimon Peres and very much by the American Jewish leaders who met with Shultz. If the economic quality of life changed, economic and social development could create possibilities for peace overall. Yet, it didn't. Peace still was elusive in terms of reaching any overall formal agreements beyond the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the peace treaty with Jordan in '94.

That process is still underway. You've seen the growth of activists in the Jewish community working for a more – groups such as J Street-- a more pronounced liberal approach to Israeli-Palestinian relations. There is more pointed talk of justice for the Palestinians from the New Israel Fund. The American community still supports Israel but has less emotional involvement in Middle East issues.

Q: Generationally, the Holocaust doesn't have the same reaction today as it did then, this is a generation behind.

MURPHY: I think that's fair. It was not "our Holocaust"; grandfather had suffered, father had remembered but it was becoming fuzzy for the new generation. As I say, their involvement in American problems – such as racial problems – had grown. There was a strong commitment from the Jewish community for racial justice in the United States. They put considerable efforts into liberal political causes.

Q: Are you writing a memoir or anything like that? Any book in the making?

MURPHY: (laughter) No, there isn't. Phil Habib was my model. He said he wasn't going to write his memoir because he had taken an oath of silence. But it really was that he was

just too busy doing other things than writing. In my case, the big change was that when I worked in the Near East bureau I was surrounded by writers pushing ideas up in the bureaucracy that I would be passing judgment on rather than creating new approaches on my own. All of a sudden, there I was as a senior fellow for the Middle East at the Council in New York and I never felt ready to sit down and write. I hadn't taken any records with me out of the Service.

Q: I assume that with television – the Middle East, there is always something happening. Having been in charge of Middle East policy for a while, you must have found yourself on call to explain what the hell happened yesterday.

MURPHY: That's true and I continue to this day – on the gas attacks in Syria I was being interviewed on programs such as CNBC asking questions about what was going on and what was the effect likely to be on the markets. I hadn't got a clue what the effect was likely to be on the markets, but I would make a few comments and they would graciously pass on to other speakers. I've remained particularly concerned about the two countries where I spent the most time – six years in Syria and six in Saudi Arabia. Those tended to dominate my memories plus the civil war in Lebanon and the situation with the PLO. I have been tracking as closely as possible the upheavals in Saudi Arabia, the approaches of the new crown prince – and his vigorous, impressive display of effort to change his country more quickly. I despair about the situation in Syria where the opposition never has been able to pull together and become anything more than individual critics or uncoordinated militias unable to prevail in the struggle with the regime. Those issues have continued to pull me back into the world of press and TV commentary. It's turned out that my original instinct to study Arabic and get involved in the area was well founded. I thought then – back in the late '50s – that maybe 10 or 15 years involvement might make a rewarding career and it would continue to be a region of importance to the U.S. Now, it's been a half-century or more and remains of great interest. Just where we're going is not at all clear; the countries involved struggle with some of the same issues they had 50-60 years ago.

Q: Yeah. Dick, I guess we can wrap this up.

MURPHY: I guess so. I can sum up what's been going on with the post-career period. We've got many friends from the region with whom my wife and I stay in contact. One of the members of my family went into banking and education in the Middle East. My ties continue with the board of trustees of the American University of Beirut (AUB). That institution to my mind constitutes the best involvement and our most useful contribution to the region over the years.

Q: I assume it's recovered – at the time it was basically under siege.

MURPHY: It was, but it never closed its doors. It was treated as kind of an oasis, not under direct attack with the exception of the assassination of its young president Malcolm Kerr back in '84. The classes went on; the various religious communities happily sent

their children there. It's made a remarkable contribution to the development of a healthier Lebanese society and AUB graduates can be found all over the world.

Q: It really is a remarkable institution.

MURPHY: I agree. They now have their first Lebanese-American president. So it's a respected and useful institution which is more than can be said of many of our associations in the region. It stayed out of politics; of course. That was essential.

Q: We'll close off now. Once again Dick, it's nice talking to you after all these years. Except my two years in Dhahran, I never really was a Middle East hand.

MURPHY: That was probably wise if you wanted a sense of solid accomplishment in your career!

End of interview