

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

AMBASSADOR RICHARD B. PARKER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	
Son of US Army Officer	
Kansas State University	
US Army, WWII	
Entered the Foreign Service in 1949	
Sydney, Australia: General Services Officer	1949-1951
Environment	
Jerusalem, Palestine: Consular Officer	1951-1953
Arab language interest	
Divided city	
Duties	
Environment	
Consul General S. Roger Tyler	
West Bank	
Gaza	
State Department: FSI: Arabic language training	1953-1954
Course of study	
Beirut, Lebanon: FSI: Arabic language training	1954-1955
Localitis	
Amman, Jordan: Political Officer	1955-1956
Staff	
Gamal Abdul Nasser	
Baghdad Pact	
King Hussein	
Arab Legion	
British	
Rioting	

Health	
Ambassador Lester Mallory	
Eric Johnston Mission	
Contacts	
Palestinians	
Egyptians	
Soviets	
Israel	
State Department: Israel/Jordan Desk Officer	1956-1959
Political concerns	
Israeli Sinai invasion	
Operations	
US aid to Jordan	
East Ghor Plan	
Secretary of State Dulles	
Eisenhower Doctrine	
Nasser's popularity	
Interpreting	
Iraq Revolution	
US invasion of Lebanon	
State Department: Libya Desk Officer	1959-1961
Oil production	
Wheeler Air Force Base payments	
Bill Porter	
Beirut, Lebanon: Chief of Political Section	1961-1964
Environment	
Operations	
Presidential elections	
Ambassador Armin Meyer	
Princeton University: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs	1964-1965
Cairo, Egypt: Political Counselor	1965-1967
Ambassador Lucius Battle	
Relations	
Nasser	
PL 480 Program	
North Yemen War	
Embassy attacked	
Nasser's "Drink from the Sea" speech	
President Johnson	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arab states' anti-Nasser Mission to Yemen Nasser sends troops to Sinai Nasser's May Day speech War Soviets Egyptian threats to Israel Spain represents US David Nes Dependent evacuation Nasser orders Parker expelled Evacuation 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State Department: Country Director, United Arab Republic Affairs Egyptian Washington Interests Section Ashraf Ghorbal Egyptian students Political environment Joseph Sisco 	1967-1970
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rabat, Morocco: Deputy Chief of Mission Health Ambassador Stuart Rockwell Ambassador Robert Neumann 	1970-1974
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Algiers, Algeria: Chief of United States Interest Section US commercial interests Relations Environment Economy President Boumediane Government Contacts Charles Robinson 	1974-1977
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> United States Ambassador to Lebanon Ghassan Tuani US Speaking Tour Secretary of State Vance visits War-time environment Security Relocations Syrian military force PLO Armed Militias 	1977-1978

Jumlatt	
El Fatah	
Government system	
Religious sects	
President Sarkis	
Palestinians	
Environment	
Black September	
Refugee camps	
US assistance	
US/Syria relations	
The Gemayels	
Charles Malik	
Lebanese-Syrian conflict	
East Beirut shelled	
French legacy	
Armed population	
Israelis arms to Maronites	
Southern Lebanon	
US interests	
US/Israel	
Lebanese Americans	
American community	
Lebanese army	
Criticism of US policy	
Staff	
Assassination threats	
United States Ambassador to Morocco	1978
Relations with the King	
Polisario	
Kissinger	
Restriction of US arms	
Helicopter controversy	
Shah of Iran	
United States Air War College	1979-1980
Retirement	1980
Distinguished Service Award	
Reflections	

INTERVIEW

Q: I might add as a footnote here that Dick Parker has been my boss for the last almost a year now as he has been president for the Association for Diplomatic Studies. So he is familiar with the process, and I finally have the chance to get him into a corner and interview him now that he is leaving his post.

Dick, how did you become interested in foreign affairs?

PARKER: I had wanted to go to West Point and couldn't pass the physical, and I went instead to Kansas State to study engineering. Not terribly happy about being an engineer, but not knowing exactly what I wanted to do. In the summer of 1941, a young man named Richard Ericson, subsequently the ambassador to Iceland, with whom I had gone to high school with in Leavenworth, Kansas, came by. He was working for Philip Morris. They were going to Army posts and passing out Philip Morris free samples in chow lines. He had made up his mind. He also is another Army boy. He had wanted to go to West Point, and he couldn't pass the physical. He decided he would go into the Foreign Service. And he told me about it. It was the first time I had ever heard of it. I understood from him that one had to go Georgetown to get in. I made up my mind that at some point I would try it, that it sounded like it might be interesting.

Then the war came along. I started as an infantry officer, and I was a prisoner of war in Germany. I saw the destruction of World War II and the misery. For two months, I was what was, technically, a displaced person myself, wandering around Poland trying to get out.

I resolved that I was going to go back and try to do something about this with one part of my mind. With the other part of my mind, I was still hoping to stay in the Army. As it turned out, the Army didn't take me. I took the written examination in 1946.

Q: This is the Foreign Service written examination.

PARKER: The Foreign Service written examination in 1946 and very much to my surprise, passed it. I took the oral in '47 and flunked it. They told me to go to school for another year because I didn't know anything about economics or American history.

I then entered Foreign Service forty years ago, in 1949. In fact, today is the fortieth reunion of my entering FSO class.

Q: Could you give maybe a little description of what the background and the attitudes of the group you came in with?

PARKER: Well, we had all been in one of the services during the war. Most of us, I believe, had the same experience. We had taken the written in 1946, had passed it, and then had flunked the oral because we had to finish school, or the board thought we were

deficient in some respect. They had given us a grade high enough so that we could go back to school for a year and then come back and take the oral again.

Q: Without having to take the--

PARKER: Without having to take the written again. We were, I don't know, I was twenty-five. I was one of the younger members of the class. I think the youngest member was twenty-three.

We all, I think--well, it's interesting. We were discussing this the other day, and I find one member of the class, Bob Brewster said that he had always wanted to join the Foreign Service, and he had never thought of anything else. In my case, I looked on this as a possibility. By this time, I had become interested in languages. I had spent a lot of time on studying German. I had a choice at one point. I had to make a choice between an academic career and Foreign Service. I thought I would try the Foreign Service for two years and see what it was like. And if I didn't like it, I would go back into academia. But I went in and enjoyed it and stayed.

Q: Well, looking on this, the military service experience was something that I think almost all the people coming into the post-World War Foreign Service shared because it was predominantly male and until the cutoff of the draft really after the Vietnam War, you could count on this pretty much. Did you find that your military experience changed, warped, or did anything to you and to your fellow Foreign Service Officers that might not happen to people coming in later on?

PARKER: Well, certainly I think in my case, my military experience was a formative experience in my life. Certainly, it changed me in many ways. The most important thing it did for me was that I learned from it that I could do almost anything, within reason, that I set my mind to. I had a great variety of jobs and responsibilities. I had been able to cope more or less successfully with all of them. It had given me a greatly increased self-confidence. It did not really prepare me for any aspect of the Foreign Service. I haven't found my military experience particularly useful except in times of stress or when making observations about political military situations. But I never felt the need to go to War College, for instance, to learn how the military thought. I thought I already knew that. I think that was a useful element in someone's background.

I think I should add to that there is an element of leadership involved here. You have experience in ordering large numbers of people around. And I think this comes in very useful when you have positions of executive responsibility in the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, tell me, to get a little idea, you had a board looking at your whole group and most of you had been sent back to get a year's academic training. Do you think this is the board being a bit precious representing the old Foreign Service and didn't really like what they saw the raw material coming out and needing a little polishing, or do you think this is really justified?

PARKER: Well, I think it was very justified in my case. I didn't know anything. I mean, I had studied engineering, chemistry, and physical chemistry, and organic chemistry, and mathematics. My career in college had been interrupted at the end of my junior year. I had managed to get in the study of some German and some Spanish and public speaking, but that was about all I'd had that was relevant to the Foreign Service. I am forever grateful for them sending me back for that year because I put it to very good use.

Q: Your first assignment was to Sydney, Australia. I'd like just a quick snapshot, how did you feel at your first Foreign Service post? I mean, how did this hit you?

PARKER: Well, Sydney, I was considered very fortunate to get Sydney. Originally, I was assigned to Seoul. They changed that because we had a small child. This is in 1949. And sent us to Sydney instead. We were very pleased about that.

We found the post was a medium-sized consulate general run by a named Orson Nielsen, whose first post had been St. Petersburg before World War I. An old-fashioned, what we used to call old-line Foreign Service Officer, who was very particular about his scotch and thought of himself as a connoisseur of wine and so forth. Very frosty. Actually, I had no idea that he had any opinion at all of me, but he apparently saw possibilities in me. He was very good to me.

We had a couple of bizarre people there. I had a very bizarre officer in charge of me. I won't mention his name. He is still alive. He is somebody who was terrible rude to everybody including visitors to the consulate. He had sold a Cadillac for an enormous amount of money and had it converted into gold seal, yellow seal, dollar bills which he housed in a big Gladstone bag which he kept in a safe behind my desk. Every month, he would come and count this money because he was expecting World War III to break out at any moment, and he wanted to be sure that he had enough cash to handle the situation. He must have had, I don't know, \$15,000 back there in back of my desk. An enormous amount of money.

I was assigned to--first of all, we didn't call them that in those days--I was the general services officer. I did the pouches and files and liquor orders and got hot water heaters for the people in Canberra and so forth. Essentially administrative work. Then I was rotated to consular work and commercial work. I found it a very useful, very valuable experience.

The consul general, the crusty old consul general, left mid-way through our tour. We got a new name who was rather a S.O.B. and brought another S.O.B. with him as a hatchet man. The place deteriorated after that, and I was glad to leave.

I went from there to Jerusalem where I was the number two man in the small consulate.

Q: This was in 1951.

PARKER: 1951. I had decided that I was going to be stuck in consular and administrative work all my career unless I developed a specialty. We looked around. The obvious thing to do was--I knew I had a language aptitude--to choose a language, a hard language. My first choice would have been Russian or Japanese because I had served in Japan in the Army after the war, but they were both full. I looked at the others, and I decided that Arabic offered the most possibilities. I had had a very brief glimpse of the Arab world coming out of Europe in 1945 and stopping at Port Said. So I thought either Arabic or Turkish. I had written to the Department saying that I would like to specialize in one of those languages. I didn't know which. I would like a tour in the area to make up my mind. So they sent us to Jerusalem, which was a great post.

Q: Looking at a little at the decision making process, was the idea at this point that if you really wanted to get ahead--you were hearing this from other officers and all-- that a hard language is the way to do it, and Russian is number one, and Japanese number two, and then something else after that?

PARKER: Yes. The real road to glory was with being in Europe, but it was allegedly very hard to get to Europe, to get into EUR. You had to have something to offer. Russian certainly was the leading language.

Q: This was the days of George Kennan.

PARKER: George Kennan and so forth. This was all very exclusive, sort of ivy league and University of Chicago people. Somebody like me coming from the outback would have no chance breaking into that charmed circle. I thought.

Q: So this has helped in a way turn you towards another language. Some of the hard languages for what could be called in the old colonial terms, for other ranks.

PARKER: Yes. I had no idea really what the possibilities of Arabic were. At this point, the Middle East was still something of a backwater. Actually, I was primarily interested in North Africa which sounded like the most fun. I was interested in a place which had posts that were not too uncomfortable and which offered a range of possibilities.

I didn't want to study a language which was confined to one country. This obviously offered opportunities, but I had no idea of what the scale of those opportunities would be at that point in time.

Q: And nobody was particularly spelling this out for--

PARKER: No.

Q: --for officers. I mean, this is something you sort of have to learn in the corridors.

PARKER: Right. The Department did and does, I'm sure, continues to do and always will do, an absolutely terrible job in this respect. People in the language services are mostly non-career people anyway. They don't have any concept of the career implications of this. My experience is that you learn these things on the street, in the hall, in the latrines.

Q: Yes. Well, now, you went to Jerusalem in 1951. How did you see the situation at the time in Jerusalem and in the Arab world? How did it appear to you?

PARKER: I didn't have any idea of what it was. I had gone to see the Israeli consul in Sydney who recommended some books to me. I read several of these books. One of them was Arthur Koestler's Promise and Fulfillment. There was also a Lebanese consul there. But a man who for various reasons, principally his rather poor command of English, was not taken seriously by anybody. I did not go to see him. It never occurred to me.

I went to Jerusalem primarily with an Israeli-oriented background. I had no idea of the complications of the Palestine problem or anything else, or the history of our involvement in that area, or what our interests were. I was interested in my career and going to serve in a place that might be interesting and would have some prospect of maybe leading me to the exalted rank of class 3 or class 2 by the time I was ready to retire.

Q: Well, what was your job as the--it was the consulate general now?

PARKER: Yes.

Q: How did it fit into the system because Jerusalem has always been a--

PARKER: Independent.

Q: Independent.

PARKER: Yes. Well, we reported directly to the Department, and we were very jealous of our independent status. We didn't take any nonsense from those bastards in Tel Aviv or Amman. We thought they didn't really understand the situation. The principal officer, the consul general, was in charge of political reporting, and we had primary responsibility for reporting on the activities of the mixed armistice commissions, which were the U.N.-supervised commissions which had both Israeli and Arab officers on them which were supervising the armistice agreements concluded in 1949. There were always incidents across the border to report on. A lot of activity, very interesting activity.

Q: Let's explain a little about the borders at this point in that area.

PARKER: Well, they were the borders where the fighting stopped in '48. Jerusalem was a divided city. We had an office on the Arab side, and an office on the Israeli side. The first six months of our tour there, we lived on the Israeli side. And the remaining eighteen

months, we were on the Arab side. We had to go back and forth. We had a sort of permanent pass that would let us go back and forth through the Mandelbaum gate.

One of my principal functions was arranging temporary passes for people to go through the gates. To go from the Israel side to the Arab side and vice versa. These were tourists, officials, visitors, and so forth.

Q: Well, who was the consul general and how did he operate in this complicated situation?

PARKER: The consul general was a man named Tyler, Roger B. Tyler. No, sorry. S. Roger Tyler. He operated very well in this environment. He took things very much in his stride, moving back and forth, knowing people on both sides of the border. I think well-liked by people on both sides. He was a very poor administrator of the consulate general. I had a terrible time with him. But he was certainly, in terms of the political function, I think very good and quite well-liked, and everybody remembers him.

Q: This is a continuation of my interview with Ambassador Richard Parker. Today is April 25.

Dick, you were saying you wanted to add something about dealing with--we talked about the Mandelbaum gate--but your assignment in Jerusalem in 1951 to 1953 about the West Bank?

PARKER: Yes. Thinking over the answer I gave you afterwards, I thought I should have pointed out that at this point in 1951, the West Bank, the region between the Jordan River and the 1948 boundaries of Israel, was controlled by Jordan.

The consulate general in Jerusalem had responsibility for reporting on the West Bank. People from Amman did not get over there very much. The Jordan River was always quite a division between us. Actually, the West Bank was our consular district. We didn't issue visas, but we did passport and citizenship and notarial services for the West Bank. We also in theory had responsibility for Gaza. In other words, we had responsibility for everything that was left over from 1948: Gaza, the West Bank, and the so-called corpus separatum, the separate body of Jerusalem. We didn't recognize the sovereignty of either Jordan or Israel over their respective halves to that city. Tel Aviv did not send people up to Jerusalem without our permission.

Back in 1951, the Foreign Ministry was still down at the place called the Village--I think it was Hakiryia.

Q: This is the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

PARKER: Israeli Foreign Ministry. We saw in the Foreign Service list that the Department was showing Gaza as in our district. Nobody from Cairo had been there since

1948, apparently. One day I decided to try to find out if we could actually go to Gaza. We had special passes that permitted us to go across the border in Jerusalem, up in Galilee on the Bridge of Jacob's Daughters between Syria and Israel, and across the Lebanese border at Ras Naqurah. So why not go to Gaza with a U.N. pass? So we applied for permission to go there, and it was refused by the Egyptians.

I don't know what the people in Gaza did, but certainly we were not providing any consular services to them, nor were we reporting on that area nor was anybody else.

Q: Sort of a lacuna there. To move on now, you in 1953 sort of came a career choice and this is when you--we talked about going into Arabic. How was the Arabic training set up at the time?

PARKER: Well, the module was one year at the FSI in Washington, and one year at the FSI school that was opened in Beirut in 1953. We were the second class to go through this procedure. Harry Symmes was in the class ahead of us. My recollection is that he did not go on to Beirut, he just took one year of Arabic.

I had been studying Arabic on my own in Jerusalem at my own expense with a local tutor and had made some progress in the colloquial and a little bit of progress with reading. I had anticipated completing two years in Jerusalem and then perhaps going into Arabic training.

I had been asked to comment on my interests in Arabic training, and had said I had heard mixed views about the competence of the FSI in teaching this language, but I was confident of my ability to learn it in spite of the FSI, if that became necessary. I was pretty smart-assed. It was a famous letter in the FSI when I got back there.

Suddenly, out of the blue, after we had been in Jerusalem just eighteen months, we got a telegram saying-- this was in the beginning of March--"is Parker interested in taking Arabic? There is a class starting March 1." The class had already started.

I said, "Yes," and left as soon as I could which was about two weeks leaving my wife and family to pay, pack, and follow in the best traditions of the Service. I came home two weeks late for the class, but I was still ahead of the other people who were in it.

It was a small class of five people, of whom four survived for the full two years. Two of us were CIA, two of us were Department of State. I thought the training was very good. I profited a lot from it. There were certain things I would have done differently. I would have taught more classical Arabic and less colloquial. But I came out of that course with, I think, an S-3 R-3 rating, but it was--

Q: For the record, S-3 R-3 means speaking and reading.

PARKER: Knowledge. Good enough for work. Actually, it's not good enough. You have to have an S-4 R-4 to be of any real utility in the Foreign Service. I eventually got up to that level after having a refresher course.

But I found it, as I say, I liked the FSI technique. The constant drills and rote learning process which I think is the only way to learn that language, any language, and it is still with me.

Q: Well, now, then you went to Beirut to complete your training?

PARKER: The second year was in Beirut, yes.

Q: Now, how was that different?

PARKER: Well, it was not as tightly run as things were at the FSI in Beirut. There, we were the minority, and the Lebanese and the other Arabs were the majority. It was sort of hard to dragoon them into the kind of sweaty work you really have to do for memorization. I mean, it was, well, relaxed. The problem with Beirut is that everybody there speaks English. It was very difficult to get Lebanese to speak Arabic to you unless you really spoke it well.

Q: I would like you at this point to comment a bit--it's a question I ask everybody who has concentrated in the Arab world--how you viewed at that time and your colleagues, how they viewed the Arab world? Was there a mind-set? Because this is often a statement made about all Arabists feel so- and-so and all of this. Looking at it in the perspective of the time, what kind of people were you?

PARKER: Well, we were young officers who were interesting in getting ahead in our career, and we became interested in this area. It became for me an intellectual interest, which has continued down to the present day.

If you are going to operate in an area like this, if you are going to be effective, you've got to have a certain empathy for the people in the area, some understanding of them and an ability to relate to them. I think it is inevitable that people who work in the Arab world or any other place, except possibly the Soviet Union, where everybody is supposed to be our implacable enemy, where there is some possibility of cultivating people and making friends, you tend to make friends, and you tend to sympathize with their point of view. I know that localitis is a problem throughout this area. We have had many officers who have gotten thoroughly identified with the Arab point of view. I always tried to maintain a perspective. I always thought of myself as taking a pro-American point of view, and seeing that we had interests that were being sacrificed in the Middle East because of our over-identification with Israel, an over-identification which has become much stronger since 1967, and which has prevented us from making decisions in many instances in the best interests of the United States.

I have known a few nuts--I mean, a few people who have gotten fanatic about it, but most people I think have maintained a degree of balance. Bill Brewer used to say that it was a mistake to think of the Arabists as being pro-Arab because having to work with them and being frustrated by them, they were probably more cynical about them than anybody else.

Q: I must say, my two and a half year exposure in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia did not endear me to the machinations of that world. Why did we not develop the equivalent--have you noticed--of Arabists, of Israelists?

PARKER: We have trained some people in Hebrew. There are a number of officers who have spent two, or perhaps three, tours in Israel, but, you know, making a career out of Israel is pretty limiting in terms of your choice of jobs and places to go and so forth. Very little geographic scope. If you become an Israeli specialist, you are hardly persona grata across the line in the Arab countries. So it has not been something that has appealed a great deal to people.

Q: Well, now, turning to your first assignment in the Arab world, you went to Amman from 1955 to 1956. Could you explain a little of what your job was and what the situation was there at that time?

PARKER: I was the political officer. That is, the political officer. We had a one-man political section. Myself and two local employees who did the press translation and functioned as general translators. We had one economic officer, a DCM and ambassador. We had two secretaries and a code clerk in the pool in the back of the building. We had a small CIA shop. And that was it. Plus a consular section with one officer, and an administrative section with three officers. We didn't really feel we were particularly short of staff.

It turned out to be a very critical time in the history of Jordan. While we were there, things erupted in a way not unlike what's happened this last week in Jordan, with the demonstrations against the price increases imposed by the Prime Minister. This was at the time of great Arab nationalist agitation. The leader of which was Gamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt.

The United States at the same time was pushing the Baghdad Pact, which started out as the, I think, Iran-Turkey Pact. Then it was a Pakistan-Iran-Turkey Pact, and then Iraq joined it. Well, Iraq joining it was regarded as an effort to split the Arab world and to distract the Arabs from the real problem which was Israel and try to realign them against the Soviets. This is a recurring theme in our efforts in this area as seen by the Arabs. An attempt to distract the Arabs from the real problem.

This came at a time when King Hussein was still a very young man. He ascended the throne in 1953 when he came of age, I think at age eighteen. In 1955, he was twenty-one. He had just married his first wife. He was anxious to do something about the state of his army which was then called the Arab Legion. It had been British-formed and British-

trained and British-financed. The British subsidy to Jordan for the Arab Legion was ten million pounds sterling a year which is, you know, absolutely nothing today.

We did not belong to the Baghdad Pact, but the British did. They joined it. They were anxious to get the Jordanians to come along in order to lessen Iraq's isolation. They sent General Templar, who had been the hero of Malaya, to Amman. He had subdued the leftist insurrection in Malaya. He came with an offer to the king of something like equipping an armored brigade. The king was very tempted by this. He was seriously considering joining the Baghdad pact.

Well, the Egyptians got wind of this, and they got everybody agitated, and before we knew it, people were out in the street rioting. We had two series of riots about a month apart. Jordan almost came apart in the second series. The mobs were down in the main streets of Amman about to start looting and breaking into stores when the army finally intervened and stopped them.

I think the king learned certain lessons from that that he's been applying recently. And that is to respond quickly with overwhelming force when you've got a civil disturbance.

The follow-on to this was that Hussein sacked Glubb, the British brigadier, John Bagot Glubb, who had been the organizer and the commander of the Arab Legion. He sacked him, sent him off on twenty-four-hours notice. We all thought it was ironic. Glubb was getting on the plane, and the Royal Chamberlain, Bahjat Talhuni arrived, carrying a present from the king. It was an autographed photograph in a silver frame. We thought, you know, he just sacked Glubb without a pension or anything else, and he was going off into exile. We thought it was a little cruel of the king to send him that picture.

There followed a period of considerable political agitation, and then came the Suez crisis. I didn't get to see the end of the Suez crisis because I came down with hepatitis in July of '56. There was no decent doctor in Amman. The first couple of weeks, nobody was able to diagnose me. Suddenly, we got a new doctor, a Circassian, who had just been to medical school in the United States and England, and was very competent. He diagnosed me. He was there for about two weeks, and then was going off to a medical conference somewhere, and he said, "I can't leave you here with all these quacks." He shipped me off to Beirut to the American University Hospital where I spent another month. My family, again, joined me. We got on a ship and came home.

Q: How did you operate in Amman while you were there? I mean, could you describe how one goes about getting the information for the reporting that you did?

PARKER: Well, I don't know. Nobody ever told me how to do the political reporting.

Q: Well, I'm asking you so you could--

PARKER: I never had any--well, I am going to tell you--I never had any lessons or exposure to this. In Jerusalem I had done a weekly press review which nobody read. And I got to Amman. We had as an ambassador, Lester Mallory, who was an old agricultural attaché, a very down to earth fellow, who had a good feeling for the political atmosphere of third world countries. He pushed me out and made me, you know, feel that he had confidence in me. And whatever I wanted to do was all right with him, within reason.

The requirements of the job, I think of any political officer job, almost immediately impel you into a certain involvement with the government and the people of the country in which you are located.

The first weekend I was there, we got a urgent telegram from the Department regarding the Eric Johnston mission, which was the mission to develop the waters of the Jordan River basin. This telegram had to be delivered to the Prime Minister immediately, and there was nobody else in Amman but me. Everybody was off somewhere. So I had the job of finding the Prime Minister, Said Pasha al-Mufti, who recently died - to find him and deliver this message, which had come in in telegram form, in English. And Said Pasha didn't speak any English. So I called on him at his home and explained to him in Arabic that I had this message to deliver. He sat me down on the porch, and I started going through it in the colloquial which I had been taught. I got about three lines through it, and was reading it quite competently, translating as I went. He stopped me and said, "Wait a minute. That's too important for us to do it this way, i.e in colloquial." He brought his son out and had his son do the translating. Anyway, from that point on, I had a friendship with the Said Pasha. I had entrée to him.

There were similar things that came up all the time requiring you to go see the governor, the mayor or somebody and ask him a specific question, "What are you going to do about this or do you want that?" Or to go to the Foreign Ministry. You also find yourself thrown into contact with the press.

I think the most important thing you have to do is to be open to the idea of contact. And be willing to sit and talk with anybody. Sometimes to suffer fools gladly. Particularly in the third world, and the I think the rules are quite different from what they are in Paris - but in the third world, to let people realize that you are not looking down on them, that you are interested in them and their culture and their language, and you are interested in what they have to say, and you are open to their ideas. As soon as they feel that you are talking down to them, they will shut up, and you won't hear anything from them. But if you are sympathetic, I think you can get a lot out of people. And that you have a much better understanding of what is going on in the country.

Q: Well, what sort of things were you trying to get out, reporting on Jordan?

PARKER: Well, we were interested in, first of all, the general question of political attitudes, attitudes towards the king. We were interested in trying to change perceptions of the United States and perceptions of our role in the Baghdad Pact and so forth. We are

always interested anywhere, I think, in any country, in knowing what does the man on the street really think about the government. What are the risks that something is going to happen to turn the situation upside down.

[End Tape 1, Side 1. Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Q: Where there any concerns about talking to Palestinian leaders at that time, or were the Palestinians sort of an open group to deal with?

PARKER: Well, in the first place, I would say at least fifty percent of the elite in Amman were Palestinians even including the Prime Minister, Rifai. The Rifais, including the Prime Minister who has just resigned, are Palestinians from Safad.

We had very good relations with the British. When I arrived there in 1955, the British were running internal security. The chief of the internal security was a British brigadier named Sir Patrick Coghill. He was one of the first people I called on, and we had a very good liaison relationship with them. They didn't mind our going to see anybody. There was no restriction from their point of view on my seeing more radical people as long as they weren't in jail. The problem was that these radicals really didn't want to be seen talking to the Americans. That was rather difficult. The people I have in mind were all Palestinians with one exception.

I don't think I did a particularly good job of talking to those people. I had one conversation with a man named Suleiman Nabulsi who was supposed to be the leading nationalist in Amman. By his name, he comes from Nablus in Palestine. Suleiman - I think we called him Suleiman Pasha-- pasha was a Turkish title that was held over and given to certain leading figures when they became Prime Minister, and he had been Prime Minister once. Nabulsi turned out to be a very weak character, but he was very personable. But I never got much out of him.

And I never got much out of any other political figures. There were no political parties in Amman. I could go and talk to the speaker of the parliament. I could go and talk to any government official, but they would all give me the government line.

Q: How did we view Nasser? I'm talking about you and the embassy in Amman view Nasser, who was a major figure at that time in the Arab world.

PARKER: Well, I think we undoubtedly were influenced by the reporting from other places such as Libya where it was perceived that Nasser was working away to undermine American interests there. Certainly his attitude towards Baghdad and the Baghdad Pact was very unhelpful. We had good personal relations with the personnel of the Egyptian Embassy, but we had no illusions that their attitude towards us was particularly benevolent. They saw themselves as engaged in a struggle for the soul of Jordan.

And we saw the Egyptians, we saw Nasser, I think generally, as something of the villain. A villain that was an honest villain. He was somebody that you could do business with. You had to count your fingers carefully after you shook hands and so forth, but it was somebody who represented an important and valid stream of Arab nationalist thought and with whom we would have to get along whether we liked it or not.

Q: Now, how about the Soviet Union? This is the height of the Cold War and looking at it, again, from our embassy in Jordan, did the Soviet Union and the threat of international communism play any role in our concerns there?

PARKER: We were always concerned that social inequalities and the lack of political freedoms would encourage communist agitation in Jordan. And there were a few local communists who were apparently very hard core. The leaders were in prison most of the time.

My recollection is that the Soviets did not yet have an embassy in Amman at that point. They were not major players on the board. There was no question of the king getting arms from the Soviets. We didn't see the Soviets as somebody who was at the door waiting to get in into Jordan. You must remember that until 1955 and the arms deal with Egypt, the Soviets had not really been involved in the Middle East. It had not been an area of priority for them. They had looked with great suspicion on Arab nationalist movements as being antithetical to communism.

Q: Now how did you, again, from the Amman point of view, our embassy, view Israel and how about, on a more personal side, how did you view the reporting that was coming out of Tel Aviv? Did you feel you were reporting on the same climate or was there a difference?

PARKER: Tel Aviv naturally tended to report things from an Israeli perspective. That was the perspective that they saw down there. Just as I think we tended to report things from a Jordanian perspective. We always thought they were terribly pro-Israeli, and they always thought we were terribly pro-Arab.

What was the first part of the question?

Q: How did we view Israel? One was the reporting and the other was the--

PARKER: Yes. I think we saw Israel as a considerable liability in the area. We realized that it was no escaping our identification with it given the political realities at that point. But we were concerned that this friend of ours was something that was really out of control in terms of its activities towards its neighbors. I arrived in Amman just after the Gaza raids in 1955 in which the Israelis went over in force in Gaza and killed a large number of people, attacking Egyptian police posts and so forth. A well-documented story and something that Israelis are still arguing about and something that led directly to the Egyptian press for arms from the Soviets. After the Gaza raid, they turned to us for arms,

and we imposed conditions which they thought were unacceptable, and so they turned to the Soviets. And that became the Soviet entry into the area. Well, we saw this sort of action by the Israelis as the vector of Soviet penetration in the area.

Q: Is there anything else you think we should cover then, or should we move on?

PARKER: Well, I can tell you a lot of stories about Amman, but--

Q: Are there any ones that maybe bring some things to life? How ambassador dealt with things, or how you dealt, in any of these stories?

PARKER: Oh, I don't think anything that is worth taking the time to do now.

Q: Okay. We can always add. You then came back to Washington to the Department in 1957 where you were the Jordanian, Israeli and Iraqi desk officer?

PARKER: Yes. I came back. As I said earlier, I was evacuated with hepatitis. My home leave was due. I had come home for home leave, and a vacancy opened up on the Israel-Jordan desk. They asked me if I would like to take it, and I said, "Yes." So we stayed in Washington, and I didn't go back to Amman.

Every one of my Foreign Service moves up to this one had been screwed up somehow. We had been separated from our effects and somebody else had had to pack them and so forth.

At that time the Office of Near Eastern Affairs was organized along the lines of an Iraq-Arabian Peninsula desk, which in those days was under Dave Newsom, an Egyptian-Sudan desk, a Lebanon-Syria desk, and an Israel-Jordan desk. I was on Israel-Jordan desk under Don Bergus. There were two of us on the desk, and we dealt with both sides of the line. I did that until somewhere in 1958.

After the formation of the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria and the Arab union between Iraq and Jordan, we reorganized to have a UAR desk--the United Arab Republic desk, Egypt and Syria; an Iraq-Jordan desk--the Arab Union desk; and-- let's see what did we do with, I forget what we did now with Lebanon. I guess we put Lebanon together with Israel. And we had an Arabian Peninsula desk.

Q: What were your prime concerns?

PARKER: Well, let me go back and finish this story. In 1959, I left after two years in NEA into the newly-formed Africa Bureau to be the Libyan desk officer in the Office of North African Affairs. I did that for two years. So that explains why I served on all three of those countries, actually four.

Q: Looking at it, did you find the perspective different in looking at, particularly you had been in Amman but all of a sudden you had responsibility or joint responsibility for Israel, too. In your eyes, did you see or have a different perspective?

PARKER: Well, obviously. I mean, instead of just having Arabs calling--of course, the Arabs were not really represented very effectively in Washington at that time; you didn't hear much from them--but you did hear a lot from American Jews and from Israelis. They were all over the place, and you had to respond to them, and you had to take into account their view of the universe. So, yes, I think it's obviously a balancing experience.

We had a division of labor where Bergus handled most of the Israeli side, and I handled the Jordanian side.

Q: This is, again, the relatively early years after the creation of Israel. Did anybody ever sit down with you in the higher reaches of the State Department to talk about what was our real interest in Israel, or in the Arab world, other than political considerations in the United States?

PARKER: Well, certainly nobody higher up did. This was something we talked about among ourselves in the Office of Near Eastern Affairs. We had pretty full and frank discussions about it, but it was always understood that in the upper reaches, this was a political issue. And whatever the area experts or specialists might think of it, that in the final analysis, the political reaction was going to be decisive. This was not to say that the government was not prepared, particularly under Eisenhower, to confront the Israelis because we did - over Suez and over the evacuation of Sinai.

I was there in this bureau at a very interesting time in terms of our relationships with the Israelis. They were very unhappy with the pressures we were talking about putting on them to get them to withdraw from Sinai in 1957. The Israeli invasion occurred just as I got to Washington in the fall of 1956, and I lived with the consequences of that pretty intensively for two years.

Q: How did this play out? What were you doing and what were your impressions of the situation?

PARKER: I was doing the sort of things that all desk officers do. It is just like being a political officer with all these things that suddenly turn up. Anything the Department of State does, actually does I mean, as opposed to talking about it, comes down to the desk officer. He is the only person in the Department of State as far as I'm concerned who really does any work. There are a lot of people who sit around and talk about what's got to be done, but the desk officer is just like the platoon or maybe the company commander. He is the man who has to go out and do the actual digging and writing and putting of things together. Somebody else clears it or changes it or disapproves his draft, but then it comes back to him to redo. Except on such occasions as when you've got somebody like Foster Dulles deciding that he is the desk officer, and he's doing the work, and he's

writing it, it's the desk officer who does it. There isn't anybody in between. None of the assistant secretaries or office directors do any writing of their own if they can avoid it. And the work of the Department is largely writing. You've got to formulate things in a memorandum that people approve and that becomes the document that authorizes expenditure of money and so forth.

I think the most important thing I did there and one of the few positive accomplishments I can record in my career was that I was the action officer for something called the East Ghor, G-H-O-R, project. To make a very long story short, the Eric Johnston effort to have a unified development of the Jordan Valley failed. The Arabs agreed technically, but they did not agree politically. And so as a substitute, in an effort to do something to help Jordan which was in desperate state--after having kicked out Glubb and lost the British subsidy in exchange for a promised subsidy from the Egyptians, Syrians, and Saudis which they didn't pay, and after the activities of nationalists like this man Suleiman Nabulsi and others were obviously leading Jordan into a situation where the king was going to be sacrificed, the king called on us and asked for help. This was in the spring of 1957. We then began a program of aiding Jordan. And our present involvement in that country dates back to that point. A serious involvement.

We were searching desperately for something to do to help Jordan. Jordan had no resources except phosphates. There is a little water in the Jordan Valley, not a great deal. And water in the Yarmuk, one of the tributaries of the Jordan. And an idea that had been floated some ten years before but then been abandoned because of the Johnston plan was to dam the Yarmuk and use that water to irrigate upper terraces of the Jordan Valley, the so-called East Ghor.

I had responsibility for fighting this project through the bureaucracy which took me a long time. I can't remember how many signatures. The last signature I got was that of the then Under Secretary Douglas Dillon. I can't tell you what a feeling of accomplishment that was for me to have this paper with his initials on it in my hand, authorizing us to go ahead and give the Jordanians--I think the initial sum was ten million dollars--to start this project, this diversion project.

It has really transformed that area of Jordan which was a howling desert into a fertile, well-watered oasis. To see the water gushing down that central conduit and going out into the fields is really very rewarding. It's about the only material thing that I can point to.

Q: What is probably almost unique is that there aren't many of these.

PARKER: No.

Q: Back to the repercussions of the '56 Suez War, what sort of involvement did you have with our policy which was relatively hard-nosed as far as the Israelis?

PARKER: I didn't have any. It was in the hands of Mr. Dulles. My maximum involvement was one day I took the Israeli ambassador, Abba Eban, to see Dulles and took the notes of the conversation. Dulles was calling all the shots, and we just followed his orders.

Q: How did a relatively junior officer and your fellow junior officers at Near Eastern Affairs evaluate Dulles in your lunchroom conversations?

PARKER: Well, we thought Dulles was sort of an S.O.B. We were terribly unhappy about his Presbyterian conscience and his attitude that neutrality was immoral. We thought he was unnecessarily hard-line with the Arabs.

You know, we made a serious effort to bring down Nasser in those days. We were looking for people to support. If we could have found somebody to have a coup d'état, we would have. This was under the Eisenhower doctrine, which followed the Suez affair. It is ironic that first of all, we are on the side of the angels at Suez. We stopped the British and the French and the Israelis. We get the Israelis out of Sinai. But at the same time, we own something called the Eisenhower doctrine under which we appropriated two-hundred million dollars to support any governments in the area which were threatened by regimes dominated by international communism, for which read Egypt. We saw Nasser as a Soviet puppet. I mean, our government did. And we on the working level thought that was wrong.

Q: I was going to ask--I mean, here is one of these assumptions. Was this a real assumption or was this just a justification to support the pressure from the Jewish lobby and the Israelis or was this really--

PARKER: No, I think the Israelis may have helped with this, and it was something that was popular with Jewish groups, but I think it was a conviction on the part of Dulles as well as Eisenhower that Nasser was no gentleman. That we could not do business with him, and we really ought to get rid of him.

I very much liken this attitude to that Reagan has and I guess Bush does as well towards Qadhafi. Qadhafi is an outlaw, therefore, you can do anything you want to him. It doesn't make any difference. The difference between Qadhafi and Nasser is, however, that Nasser had enormous support throughout the Arab world. He was the only Arab leader who has for many years had any support outside his own country.

Q: I can recall in 1958 going into the marketplace in Saudi Arabia and seeing nothing but pictures of Nasser at every booth.

PARKER: Yes, that's right. He was all over. He was a hero to farmer and industrial worker and government official alike. At the time I left Jordan, the pro-Nasser feeling was very high. It changed afterwards when Hussein realized that he was going to be a sacrificial victim of this surge of Arab nationalism.

But to get back to your question about Dulles. We saw Dulles as a very remote figure who really didn't know anything about the details of what was going on in the Department. He treated the Foreign Service sort of like a public convenience. I once interpreted for Dulles during the visit of King Saud in 1957. I was one of the team of interpreters. One night I found myself interpreting for Dulles and a Saudi who was a very short prince named Musaid Bin Abdul Rahman, who was the chief of the diwan of complaints, he was the ombudsman for Saudi Arabia.

Q: That's D-E-W-A-N?

PARKER: D-I-W-A-N.

Q: D-I-W-A-N.

PARKER: It's a Turkish word. It means a hall where the minister sits and receives supplicants.

Dulles came into this dinner. We were seated at dinner. I forget whose dinner it was, it wasn't Dulles' dinner, it was somebody else's. This was a state visit. I guess it was King Saud's dinner for us. It was the Mayflower Hotel or some place like that. Dulles came in, sat down, said, "Good evening," to me. And he said, "Good night," when he left. These were the only words he spoke to me all evening. We were there for about two hours. I was constantly interpreting. I obviously wasn't an Arab. I'm blond and freckled and don't look at all like an Arab. Never any question about how I learned Arabic or who I was or anything else. I could have been a telephone instrument in his hand as far as that was concerned. I am not allowed to eat either, of course. I am sitting just behind and between these two gentlemen.

By contrast, I also interpreted for then Vice President Nixon the first night of the visit when President Eisenhower entertained the king. My man was pretty high in the Saudi pecking order, so I was up at the head table. I was interpreting between him and Vice President Nixon. Nixon immediately wanted to know who I was and how I spoke Arabic. Afterwards, during one of the intermissions on another occasion, he made a point of coming up and talking to all of us. Sort of politicking, but expressing some personal interest in who we were, and he was pleased that we had people in the Foreign Service who could interpret like this, this difficult language.

Dulles was just a hopelessly remote figure. We respected and admired his abilities as a lawyer, as a drafter, as a politician. But as a human being, he didn't have much appeal to us.

Q: How did you view the July 1958 landings in Lebanon?

PARKER: We all thought it was going to be a disaster. We thought the Lebanese--our hearts sank when we heard this decision had been taken. I will never forget it. I was the Iraqi desk officer that day. This thing started in Baghdad on the fourteenth--

Q: Of July.

PARKER: Fourteen of July with this Iraqi revolution. We had been monitoring the situation in Jordan which was looking very shaky. An ex-military attaché was plotting a coup attempt, and we were monitoring that very closely. By we, I mean the CIA and the British and the Jordanians and the Iraqis. The Iraqis had just sent over a delegation of generals to help the Jordanians deal with this problem.

I got a call from the telegram duty officer. We didn't have an operations center in those days. Calling about six o'clock, and he said, "Mr. Parker, there's been a revolution in Baghdad."

I said, "You mean, Amman."

He said, "No, Baghdad."

I got dressed and went into the department immediately. The officer-in-charge of Iraq-Jordan, Bill Lakeland, was off on leave. I was all alone. Stuff started coming in from everywhere. The dimensions of this thing gradually became clear to us, we realized what a terrible disaster it had been for American and British policy in the area. Jordan was crying for help. The king felt threatened. President Chamoun of Lebanon cashed the blank check we had given him earlier under the Eisenhower doctrine. He was fighting a small scale rebellion in his country. A rebellion which we had helped arrange by helping him rig the election the previous year in a scandalous way. This was all coming apart and something had to be done. That is, the situation in Lebanon was coming apart. We thought; Chamoun thought.

The initial reaction was that this was--and I've seen Allan Dulles' briefing paper which is now unclassified, what he told the White House. There was a meeting in the White House of the NSC. He said, "This is a Nasserist coup, and the question is what to do about it." Well, the situation was too far gone to do anything in Baghdad. So they decided that we would land troops in Lebanon, and the British would send troops to Jordan, to Amman, over-flying Israel in spite of Israel's objections.

We got this word. It was late in the day on the fourteenth. There had been this meeting all afternoon. Stuart Rockwell, who was then the Director of Near Eastern Affairs, to my recollection it was about six-thirty, told us that a decision has been taken to land the Marines in Lebanon. I said, "Oh, my God." I was sick. I went home that night considerably later, much depressed. And it worked. This just goes to show you how wrong your students of the area can be. It had no business working, but it did.

Q: I was in Saudi Arabia at the time, and our general impression was all hell was going to break loose here. We all were confined to the city to our compound. We wouldn't go into town. The only agitation came through one of the shopkeepers of the town saying, you know, "Where are all the American buyers?"

PARKER: It was remarkable the way they were greeted. We performed very effectively. It was unfortunate in my view.

I always maintained that you can draw a straight line from Lebanon to our involvement in the Dominican Republic and in Vietnam. That this was a classic case of limited warfare. The doctrine of limited warfare. Fight on the ground and see how well it worked. Because it worked in Lebanon, you follow the same rules and you can do it elsewhere. Well, obviously, it was not a precedent for other places.

There are some lessons to be learned from it. One of them is to get in and get out quickly and not get involved in shooting people.

Q: Yes.

PARKER: But you've got to have certain requirements which fortunately were there in the form of somebody waiting in the wings: the army commander who could take over as president and restore peace. If you tried to do the same thing today, you would have great difficulty I think finding anybody in Lebanon who would be widely acceptable as president.

Q: Moving from this area to your time as a desk officer for Libya, and we are talking about 1959 to '61.

PARKER: Right.

Q: What were our prime concerns in Libya at that time?

PARKER: Well, this was also fortuitous. I had arranged a switch. Dayton Mak had been the Libyan desk officer. He was going up to the NEA front office. A job he wanted up there. So I asked for and got his job. It was wonderful because nobody knew anything about Libya, and nobody cared very much. I was left very much on my own.

But almost at the same time that I took over, about a month before that, Esso brought in its first major well in Cyrenaica, Zelten 2, I believe it was called. I forget what it was - 25,000 barrels a day or 35,000. Anyway, it was a big well. And the oil rush was on, and it continued for many years thereafter.

We immediately had to consider what would be the consequences of this for the U.S. position in Libya. At that time, we had an air base, Wheelus Field, outside Tripoli which we had had since World War II, thanks to the then desk officer, whoever that was at the

end of the war. The Air Force didn't have any interest in that base, and they were trying to turn it over to somebody, to the British I guess. The Department said, you know, you may want that later. Nobody is asking for it. Let's hold on to it for a while. And in time, it became an installation which the Air Force said was vital to our state of readiness in Europe. What it was used for was training. People would come down there from Europe. Planes would land and take off every minute, jets all day long. They would go out to bombing ranges in the desert and make all sorts of training flights. The weather there was sunny 360 days of the year. No place in Europe could you have that sort of weather. The Air Force continually said that they could not maintain the readiness of forces in Europe if they did not have Wheelus. So it was very important to us.

Now we were paying the Libyans something like six million dollars a year as a subsidy. We wouldn't call it rent for Wheelus, but that's what it was. And the question was: What was this oil discovery going to mean for our tenure at Wheelus?

Q: It will raise the rent.

PARKER: It will raise the rent. Well, in the Office of North African Affairs, we argued. The office was presided over by Bill Porter, William J. Porter, who died last year, who was the most skillful bureaucrat I ever knew. He was really wonderful at manipulating the bureaucracy. He would give me sort of general instructions as to what to do. But he agreed that we really had to get the Air Force to pay rent, to up the ante and really pay rent. We had to have some sort of contract for this base. We were going to have this base for X number of years, and we are going to pay you a million dollars for it.

This is back in the days of the Operations Coordinating Board and the Planning Council-- is it Planning Council or Planning Staff? The group that went up to the National Security Council. I had to have a paper. This is my second paper chase. It took a year to get a paper all the way through the bureaucracy up to the National Security Council setting forth the policy eventually approved by the President that we would pay rent for Wheelus, dragging the Air Force kicking and screaming all the way.

Q: There is always a tendency to try to do it on the cheap.

PARKER: That's right.

Q: And for short term gains there.

PARKER: Well, the Air Force position was this is Libya's contribution to the defense of the free world. And we are defending Libya and the rest of the free world, and they should do this for their own sake. We don't mind helping Libya, but we think it's a very bad precedent to establish that we pay rent for these places. It's a matter of principle.

I argued that if you don't agree to do this, you are going to lose your air base. They kept it for ten more years, largely because they finally agreed to pay rent. They would have lost it within five years.

In the course of this--one of the things I would like to go back to. Another little success I had was in the second stage of this paper arguing before the planning staff just below the NSC. And that's as far as I could go in participation. After that, it had to be the assistant secretary who took the paper to the National Security Council.

Arguing with a man named Robert Amory with CIA, much senior to me and a very intelligent and capable man, who said in effect that my predictions as to what Libyan oil revenues would be was wildly inaccurate. It was not going to be any where near the six-hundred million that I was predicting. Well, the six-hundred million wasn't my figure. It was a figure I had gotten after talking to a lot of oil people, sort of averaging out their estimates. He said, "They won't get anything like that. They might get three-hundred million and that's all", or something like that.

I don't know that it would have made much difference to a people who up to that point had a GNP of maybe, if you were lucky, maybe they had fifty million dollars a year. Well, the thing is, of course, that my six-hundred million estimate was far short of the mark. I think that was at the end of five years. At the end of five years, I think they had something like a billion dollars a year. And it went on from there to twenty or thirty billion, I think, in 1980.

You know, there are not many times in a career when you can point to something where you have really been right, and the other fellow was wrong.

Q: Yes. Any career of that reflection. I mean, there really are remarkably few. Should we move on?

PARKER: Sure, let's move on. We are taking a lot of time.

Q: Yes. Your next assignment was as a political officer to Lebanon.

PARKER: Yes.

Q: From 1961 to '64. What were you doing, and what was the situation there at that time?

PARKER: Well, this was part of the Golden Age of Lebanon. Beirut was a wonderful place to be. Very open society. You got to know everybody. You spent most of your time trying to fend off people who were trying to tell you things. The problem was never one of not enough information, but of too much information. We were trying to decide what was true and what was false and what was worth reporting. The Lebanese have always tended to take their politics too seriously. Something that is not shared by our people.

I had, again, two officers in the section. Myself and one other. I had a couple of other people attached to me. We had a geographic attaché and a U.N. Relief and Works Administration for Palestine Refugees attaché and the Dhahran liaison group, which was responsible for evacuation plans.

Q: Evacuation plans, yes.

PARKER: Had been moved to Beirut and that man was attached to my section. And I had a couple of local employees who did translating.

My job was to stay in touch with the politicians, the members of parliament, with people in general and find out what was going on which, as I say, was very easy. A lot of parties. A lot of late nights. Long lunches. Very hard on the liver. Three cocktail parties a night. Three cocktail parties and a dinner was sort of standard, five nights a week.

Q: Well, I don't know if this is reflected of this, but I can honestly say at this point I can't remember whom I asked, but somebody who worked in Washington was also one of your Arabists who was in NEA at one point or another who said . . . I asked him about how he evaluated the reporting from the different posts. He said, "Well, they are mostly very sound except for Lebanon, of course."

PARKER: That was Harry Symmes. I heard that. Harry's attitude unfortunately was typical of the Department in general and posts in the area. They didn't take Lebanon seriously. And I can understand why this would be the case. And I must say, in effect, to go from Lebanon to Egypt as I did makes you realize how petty Lebanese political concerns were. And it's true that we had a number of ambassadors in Lebanon who weren't particularly--I would not put them in the category of particularly insightful in their reporting. Still, I like to think my reporting was good.

The only thing of any great moment was the upcoming presidential elections which people had been running for three years in advance and which took place in 1964. There is a great story there of American involvement in that process.

Q: Dick, you were talking about the election in Lebanon and your reporting.

PARKER: Yes. In 1958, we had sent Robert Murphy out right after the Marines landed. He had sort of acted as the deus ex machina to facilitate the election of General Fuad Chehab, the army commander, as the president to succeed Camille Chamoun. Chehab, C-H-E-H-A-B, had been rather successful as president, although not as successful as a lot of people today think. There were many warts on him. The most important of which was that he was a minimalist. He didn't believe in really doing anything, but perhaps that's the best way to rule Lebanon.

There was a lot of jockeying for position among the various candidates, Maronite candidates. Every Maronite Christian in Lebanon, male, is a potential president. And they were all moving around and all trying to get the American endorsement which was considered to be very important. You had to get the French endorsement and the American endorsement. The American was more important than the French. Everybody looking for signs that we favored this person or that person. It was rather tricky business.

Armin Meyer, the ambassador, got into trouble a couple of times because of innocent remarks that were taken out of context and misinterpreted. People were, on the one hand, very sensitive about the idea of American interference. And on the other hand, desperately anxious to have it. This resulted in a very interesting political ballet which we all danced around pretending one thing and looking the candidates over and not saying anything about them. But Armin Meyer has a very interesting story to tell about this, and I'll let him tell it on his tape.

Q: He is being interviewed by one of our volunteers.

PARKER: By Dayton Mak I believe. I hope he will tell the full story.

This was a very pleasant tour. It was a wonderful place to watch what was going on in the area. And I look back with considerable nostalgia on this as that really in many respects the nicest post we ever had.

Q: Well, now to, I guess, quite a different assignment. And that was after a year in area studies at Princeton--

PARKER: No, no. I was a mid-career fellow at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton. That was my senior training. It was a wonderful year in which I really didn't study anything about the area. I studied all sorts of other things that I wish I had the chance to study when I was in college.

Q: Well, then you went to Cairo as the political counselor. Is that right?

PARKER: That's right.

Q: From 1965 to '67.

PARKER: Yes.

Q: Could you explain what the situation was at the time and how our embassy was run? Was it an embassy at that time?

PARKER: Oh, yes. It was a big embassy.

Q: This is just before the 1967 war?

PARKER: Not nearly as big as it is today but big enough. I was political counselor. In effect, I was the number three in the embassy. Things started popping as soon as I got there, and they never stopped until I left. As opposed to Lebanon, where you are talking about little petty political preoccupations, we are talking sort of life and death matters. War in the Yemen, and war with Israel. People starving. Million dollar, billion dollar projects and so forth.

It was a much bigger country. Ten times the size of Lebanon's population. And much more important.

Q: Well, first, let's talk a little about the embassy. Who was the ambassador at the time?

PARKER: The ambassador was Lucius Battle.

Q: Could you describe how he operated?

PARKER: Well, he had a lot of experience at upper levels of the Department. He knew everybody. He was personable. He operated very much along a warm human basis. He left me pretty much alone as far as reporting was concerned. There were certain things that I did under this general direction. But by and large, I was left alone. He left the daily running of the embassy to his deputy chief of mission, who was at that time David Nes. And I think it was a rather well-run embassy.

We had a lot of problems there. It was a very difficult country. The Egyptians were very suspicious of us. After trying to bring Nasser down under Eisenhower in '57 and '58, we had gradually in the last year of the Eisenhower administration, begun to be a little more sophisticated about Egypt. Under Kennedy, we had embarked on a massive program of PL 480 commodities as aid to Egypt hoping to divert Egypt's attention from foreign ventures into building of a viable Egyptian economy. It didn't work. Unfortunately, after about three years, it began to come apart. I mean, the whole idea did because of the Egyptian involvement in the Yemen which was seen a threat to our friend, the Saudis. The real crisis came with the Stanleyville rescue operation. Stanleyville--

Q: Could you explain about how this--

PARKER: Well, this is '64, in the early fall of '64. There was a group of Europeans and Americans who are being held hostage in Stanleyville in the Congo. We flew in Belgian paratroopers to rescue the hostages. There was a great uproar about this among Africans who charged that this was foreign interference in internal affairs in African countries. And in Cairo, there was a demonstration against the embassy in which a great deal of damage was done. The Marine house and the USIA library were burned down. The yard was full of flowerpots that the mob threw at the building and broke all the windows. A lot of damage. The Egyptians never did come around and apologize.

Shortly thereafter, the Egyptian minister of supply asked our ambassador what he was going to do about supplying more wheat. And the ambassador said, "Well, you haven't said you are sorry yet." And as soon as Nasser heard this, he got up and made his famous "drink from the sea" speech at Suez in December of '64 which said, in effect, you know, you can take your aid and stuff it if you don't like what we are doing.

Well, there was nothing better calculated to turn Lyndon Baines Johnson off than a remark like that. From that point on, we were in trouble. We were back into a position where Nasser was a bad boy, and we really had given up more or less the idea that we were going to be able to do business with him.

We continued aid, but we tried to be fine-tune it, I think is the phrase that somebody used. Instead of promising a year's supply at a time, we promised three months or six months with the understanding that if they did something nasty to us in the Yemen or some place, the next three months would not be coming. It was an attempt to use aid as a political weapon. And it didn't work. It didn't work in this case. A classic example of not working.

Nasser eventually convinced himself that we were trying to assassinate him. Our communications were terrible. It was this lack of communications between us and Nasser's paranoia about our intentions which were fed by Johnson's paranoia. The two men were very similar in this respect. Both of them were suffering from what I learned since is called narcissistic rage.

Then the crisis came in May of 1967 that led to the June war, we had no credibility in Cairo. There are still senior Egyptians, serious people, who will argue that the 1967 war was an American-Israeli trap. I just had the Egyptian ambassador here saying to me, "Well, isn't it true you people were trying to bring down Nasser at this point?"

Q: Before we come to what happened there. At this time, when things were getting bad, did you find at the embassy you--and I'm talking about the embassy as a whole--particularly you and the ambassador were trying in whatever way you could to bridge this gap of misunderstanding between the two, or was this a lost cause?

PARKER: Well, we were trying very hard. I never did give up. You know, who was it, Adlai Stevenson who said, "Optimism is to a diplomat as courage is to a soldier." You have to keep looking for the positive elements of the situation that you can exploit. I kept hoping that one way or another, we would get over this obstacle or that. But, you know, it's like Sisyphus pushing that boulder up the hill in Hell. Every time you got to the top of the hill, and you thought you got this thing tied down, whatever it was would come apart because either Nasser or Johnson would say something or do something that was calculated to infuriate the other.

Q: So you are really talking about two very large egos more than national interests guiding this relationship at that time.

PARKER: I think so, yes. I think it was very personal.

Q: And so in many ways, the Israeli factor was not as much as a factor in this--

PARKER: No, no. The Israelis and the Lebanese and the Libyans and the Jordanians and the Saudis, particularly the Saudis--King Faisal, who once had been an ally of Nasser's against Jordan, now was violently anti-Nasser-- these people and our ambassadors in those places were all urging us to do something to restrain Nasser. The favorite Arab expression for this was "turn off the faucet, manipulate the faucet" in order to put pressure on. The Israelis were in this--it was not a cabal because they weren't all together--but they were arguing the same thing. They were making common cause with the Saudis.

But the Arab-Israel question, the Palestine issue, actually was, by agreement with the Egyptians, on the back burner. We kept talking about it being in the ice box.

Q: I take it part of the problem was the Yemen war.

PARKER: Yes.

Q: I mean, this is a war that is often forgotten. Could you tell a little about the Yemen war and how we interpreted it at that time?

PARKER: Well, the Yemen which is one of the more backward countries--and I'm speaking now of what we call North Yemen today or the Yemen Arab Republic--Yemen had been one of the more backward Arab countries. Someone once said it was rushing headlong into the fifteenth century. It had a ruler called an Imam, I-M-A-M, just like the Imam Khomeini. It means Muslim leader.

He was overthrown in an army revolution/coup d'état in 1962. The Egyptians immediately came to the aid of this revolution and began sending troops down there. Eventually, the Egyptians were, in effect, running North Yemen. They were in control, and they were more or less like the Syrians in Lebanon. They were an army of occupation much resented by the Yemenis.

I have to talk about my rescue mission down there in a minute, but I will come back to this point.

The Saudis supported the royal family which, somewhat to everybody's surprise and uncharacteristic of Middle Eastern coup d'états, organized a fairly effective guerrilla campaign against the revolutionaries and the Yemeni army and the Egyptians. And they kept up the fight in Northern Yemen. Occasionally, the Egyptians would come over and bomb places in Saudi Arabia. At one point, they tried dropping weapons to purported insurgents inside Saudi Arabia. This really infuriated the Saudis.

There were a lot of efforts to resolve the problem. We were engaged in one. Ambassador Bunker and Talcott Seelye were engaged in an effort. There was a U.N. effort to try to reach some sort of a cease-fire and a truce. They all fell apart sooner or later. The war was still going on at a rather--what we would call--a low intensity level of conflict when the war came in 1967.

The Yemen affair, more than anything else, soured our relations with Nasser. Various ambassadors would say to Nasser, or Nasser would say to us, "Our problems are not bilateral. Our problems all concern third countries." In this case, the contest for our affections was between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. And Saudi Arabia won, primarily because of the oil, I think.

To illustrate the degree of Egyptian involvement there. About Easter in 1967, there was an attack on a Yemeni army post at Taiz in the southern capital, where we had a branch embassy and where our aid mission was. This was in the middle of the night. Somebody with a bazooka or bazookas attacked this Yemeni army post. And the Yemenis, at Egyptian prodding, accused two AID Americans, one of whom was an Alexandrian Greek and spoke Arabic, of perpetrating this attack. A mob very quickly formed and sacked the AID offices. And President Sallal, S-A-L-L-A-L, ordered the withdrawal of the AID mission, and we sent everybody out to Asmara over in Eritrea.

In Asmara, the AID mission director, a man named Robert Hamer, said sort of incidentally, "There are some classified and compromising papers in the safe behind my desk." The place had been sacked and stormed by a mob at the lunch hour when everybody was out of the building, and the Americans had never gotten back in. He said, "You really ought to try to see if you can get those back." Well, we began trying to get entry back into the building. The building had been sealed by the Yemenis at Egyptian direction. The Egyptians were in there. Our people could see them at night with a welding torch trying to cut their way into the safe. It was a little safe. A two-drawer safe. And the ground--well, I can't quote from that, this is a family record. But you could see the traces of this thing all throughout the building. The asbestos lining of it had come out as they had taken it from one place to another and tried hitting it with sledge hammers. They finally carted it away, and they got it open somehow. We never saw that safe again.

Eventually, Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, negotiated an agreement by telegram with Abdul Hakim Amir the commander of the Egyptian Armed Forces, to send a team down to retrieve our classified papers inside this building. There was a lot of talk about the right of legation. Rusk kept referring to the right of legation and how sacred it was.

So I was sent down to the Yemen with a team of three other officers: Gordon Brown, who is now DCM in Tunis, Nat Howell, who is ambassador in Kuwait, and a security technician named Don Hackel--I don't know where he is now. We were taken down there on a UAR, a military aircraft in the middle of the night. Sequestered so we couldn't talk to anybody on the aircraft. And taken to Sanaa and then taken in the Egyptian commander's airplane down to Taiz where my team was allowed into the building. As I

say, we never found the little safe behind Hamer's desk. But we did get into the strong room. They had a strong room there where the files were.

It was the most horrific security violation I have ever seen. Those people down there--we didn't have a xerox machine in those days--they used a thing called a thermofax, which made a rather fuzzy copy of things. Because everybody in NEA repeated telegrams all around the lot, to all the NEA posts, we routinely sent telegrams about anything important happening in Cairo, to Taiz and to Sanaa. The little embassy office in Taiz would send a copy over a block away to the AID office where, contrary to all regulations, they were making copies. There must have been half a dozen filing cabinets, four-drawer filing cabinets, full of classified telegrams up to and including Top Secret, all of which had been copied in violation of security regulations.

These cabinets had all been left open. The file clerk had gone off to lunch. Fortunately, she had closed the outer door. As far as we could tell, nobody had gotten in there. Things were not disturbed. They were in chronological order and so forth. I just think it would have been beyond Egyptian or any police abilities to do that without disturbing things, to go through them. And anyway, they would have taken them away, they wouldn't have put them back. You can't copy a thermofax copy.

So we put this stuff in big pouches and hauled it back up to the embassy branch office which had a tiny little incinerator, and we burned for forty-eight hours.

Meanwhile, these two Americans, Liapis and Hartman, L-I-A-P-I-S and H-A-R-T-M-A-N, were being held in detention in a little house up the hill. I would go call on them every day to see how they were--

Q: These were the AID people who had been accused of---?

PARKER: Attacking the Yemeni post. We subsequently learned that the attack had been carried out by a guerrilla group supported by the British. The British were responsible for this. Americans had nothing to do with it.

I would go every day to see Liapis and Hartman and hold their hands and see how they were getting along. After we finished burning the papers, I was ready to go home. I went to see them on the last day. As I was there, the governor of Taiz came in and read off a notification that they were being charged with--I forget what it was--sedition or something. Anyway, it was a capital offense, and they would be taken to Sanaa, to the capital, to be tried. I was told by the Department that I would have to stay with them. I told the Department that I wanted to come home, and I got a message back saying, "You go with them. You stay with Liapis and Hartman."

So I went up to Sanaa with them. Lee Dinsmore, our chargé, worked out a deal with the Yemen authorities whereby he put up two (or ten?) thousand dollars in cash out of his

evacuation fund for bail. And we took off with them with the understanding that we would bring them back for trial, but everybody knew we never would.

And I flew out to Asmara with them and got back to Cairo on about the fifteenth or sixteenth of May at which point the crisis which led to the June war was in--what shall I say--full swing. Nasser had alerted his forces, had sent troops into Sinai and had or was about to call for the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force.

Q: Did you have any--I mean, this June war was coming. I mean, was this something that Nasser expected? How did we read it before the fact?

PARKER: It's something that nobody expected. I am at the moment trying to research the chronology of this thing, and it's remarkable how there was no indication. When I went off to Sanaa on about the first of May, there was no hint. We knew we were in for a difficult summer because in his May Day speech, Nasser had concentrated on the United States and how it was going to frustrate the Arab revolution. We knew something was likely to happen, but nobody was thinking in terms of war, including the Egyptians.

Q: Briefly, just to put people in the picture who are reading this transcript, how did this work out? I mean, what did Nasser do?

PARKER: Well, the story very briefly is the Soviets and the Syrians--I believe, this is not clear yet, the Soviets certainly--told the Egyptians that the Israelis were massing troops on the Syrian border. There had been a lot of tension between Syria and Israel. This report was untrue, but the Egyptians chose to take it seriously and to disregard all of our denials and Israeli denials and U.N. denials. And this is when our lack of communications were a real problem, a real handicap.

Nasser, apparently convinced that his army was ready to take on Israel, requested the withdrawal of the United Nations Forces along the border between Israel and Egypt. And he closed the Strait of Tiran which leads into the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping. This was threatening the Israeli oil life line, which came by tanker from Iran. This is a long and complicated story, but the Israelis--as everybody had expected, once he closed the Strait which was clearly going to be taken as a cause for war--the Israelis attacked ten days later and destroyed the Egyptian air force on the ground and routed the Egyptian army from Sinai.

Q: Now, how did the embassy--what were you all doing during this period?

PARKER: Well, we pretty damn busy I can tell you that. In the first place, Battle, the ambassador, had gone home. He left on, I think, St. Patrick's Day. Nolte, the new ambassador, a political appointee, a protégé of the Under Secretary, Katzenbach, had come out. A man who was a student of the area. A lifetime grants man, he had spent most of his time going from one grant to another. But a very--

Q: You say foundation grant?

PARKER: Yes. Very knowledgeable about the area. He had lived in Egypt before and well-regarded, but absolutely no government or Foreign Service experience at all. And it was sort of like sending Hanson W. Baldwin out to command a division in Vietnam.

Q: Hanson Baldwin being a--

PARKER: A military commentator.

Q: A military commentator for the New York Times.

PARKER: Right. Highly respected for his military knowledge, but without any really relevant experience or training for this sort of combat job he was suddenly thrust into. What this meant was that an enormous load fell upon David Nes and myself to try to keep things together.

It became clear to us from various statements of the parties that this thing was headed towards war. We evacuated our dependents on the twenty-sixth of May, and we began buttoning down. We began burning papers. We couldn't burn them fast enough. And I discovered there, something I wish our people in Tehran had known, and that is that the defense attachés and the CIA people have enormous quantities of paper that they will lie and cheat about rather than destroy. And getting them to burn their stuff is really difficult. We have this fixation on paper that I wish something could be done about.

Anyway, when the war came, the first day we still had a lot of paper to burn, and we went up on the roof, we had this chemical that you use in barrels. It burns with great speed, but it is explosive if it's confined. They had this barrel full of papers, and they put the chemical in it, and they put the lid on it, and it exploded. This lid went two or three-hundred feet in the air and a great column of fire went up. The fire department was there in a matter of minutes. They thought the embassy had been hit, and the war was on. The Israelis were bombing, and everybody thought we had taken a hit of some sort.

The first day was full of communiqués about how many Israeli planes the Egyptians had shot down, when in fact, they hadn't shot more than a handful, if any. The next day we woke up--I still remember this, it was a nightmare for me--to the UAR television announcing that the Americans and British had participated in the Israeli attack on Egypt. This was the sixth. They broke relations that night and ordered the evacuation of everybody except the small team that was to remain behind.

I will never forget the three colonels from the Egyptian Ministry of Interior coming to the embassy about eight o'clock, just as we were getting ready to leave, saying, "We have here the names and addresses of all the Americans living in Egypt. We want to sit down with your consular officer and go over the list, and arrange to notify all of these people and assemble them tonight to leave. They all must be assembled in assembly areas

tonight." That was sort of comic. Our consular section had been going over its records and refining them very carefully the preceding two weeks and had a pretty up-to-date list. They found that the Egyptian list was totally inaccurate. It was wild. What happened is our consular officers--I think there were three of them--went around with the Egyptians with our list, knocking on doors in the middle of the night. This went on all night. We concentrated all these people in a couple hotels. They were eventually shipped out. They included one woman down at Aswan who had been there since 1916 and whose passport was one of the original--the document was one of the, you know, the open folding--

Q: Folding type.

PARKER: Yes. Not in a book, but a piece of paper.

Well, I was designated to be left in charge of this contingent that was to stay behind. I spent a lot of time at the Foreign Ministry trying to work out the details of how many people we could have and who they were and so forth. And it had been agreed that I was going to remain behind with five other people. The others were all going to leave on Friday night, the tenth.

At seven-thirty, Nasser came on the air and read his resignation speech. Seven-thirty on the tenth, or seven o'clock. We were having a farewell dinner at the ambassador's residence, Nolte and Nes and the Public Affairs Officer, Bob Bauer, and I, and we were drinking a bottle of champagne and eating up a couple of filets mignons that were in the refrigerator, when Nasser came on and made this speech which was a surprise to everybody. Suddenly, there was an enormous outpouring of people into the street and a great roar and shooting and God know's what was happening.

Just at that point, the Spanish ambassador called. The Spanish had taken charge of our interests. The Spanish ambassador called and said, "Mr. Parker, I have orders that you are to leave with the others tonight."

And I said, "That's impossible." I hadn't been home for five days. I left my residence and my dog, my silver, my clothes, my everything on June 5.. I hadn't been back home the whole week. We lived out in Maadi which is a suburb south of Cairo. I said, "I can't leave now."

He said, "Well, I'm afraid you will have to."

We tried some calling. Our CIA man went out to see the Director of Intelligence, and he said there was no ifs. The order came from Nasser himself. We all left on the train. There were detectives on the train to see that I specifically was on that train. No explanation given.

Many years later, twenty years later, I learned that it was because Nasser thought I was the chief of station.

Q: The head of the CIA.

PARKER: The head of the CIA. But in fact, the man they left in charge was the chief of station.

Q: So much for Egyptian intelligence.

PARKER: Yes, so much for Egyptian intelligence.

So I came back. Well, we had a hell of a time. A terrible time going up to Alexandria and spending the day there waiting for a Greek ship to come in and pick us up. It was an inter-island ferry that had never been further away from Athens than Crete. They burst a boiler getting to Alexandria. But we got everybody on that ship eventually and got back to Athens.

Again, at this point, I had long been due for home leave at that point. I was to have two tours in Egypt. I had been there two years, and I had home leave orders. Everybody else was staying in Athens.

I found out that the deputy chief of mission, Dave Nes, on the trip, which had taken a couple of days, made some very frank comments to a Baltimore journalist. Nes was from Baltimore, and he once worked for the Sun papers. And there was a Sun reporter named Franklin Fenton--I think it was Franklin. Fenton at any rate, on the ship. To whom Nes, who was really sore about the great gap between Battle's departure in the middle of March and Nolte's arrival two months later, apparently with no sense of urgency. And the way that the Department had been treating Cairo anyway. He just let himself go. He said some very frank things, and they were quite true, of course. I think the Department was really pretty stupid, not to say incompetent, in the way it handled this affair. But things had really hit the fan in Washington. Fenton had reported this as soon as he got off the boat. Or maybe he was still on the boat. I've got the chronology mixed up by now. But anyway, Nes had gotten off the boat and gotten the first plane out.

I spent one night in Athens, and the next morning, I got this news about the Nes revelations. I thought I better get back there because there were going to be a lot of questions about this. So I got a plane out that afternoon. My family had already been evacuated, and they were at Lake Champlain in Vermont. I went to Washington and then went back up and joined them.

There wasn't anything for me to do, but what transpired during the summer was that Don Bergus, my former chief in Israel-Jordan affairs, whom I had succeeded in Cairo, had been the political counselor before me, had gone back to be the Country Director for UAR affairs, and was sent back out to Cairo to succeed me. I mean, he took my job as the chief of the U.S. interest section. And I took his job in Washington. We kept going around in these ever decreasing circles.

Q: I wanted to ask what happened to Nes?

PARKER: Nes came back, and he had a hearing before Senator Fulbright, who said, "I want to be sure this man gets a job commensurate with his rank and importance." They gave him an office up in the sixth or seventh floor of old New State. The old building of New State, the original New State.

Q: The old War Department building.

PARKER: No, well, yes, that's right. And it was a paneled office. The paneling wasn't real. It looked like plywood that had been painted. I don't know what it had ever been used for. I had no idea this office existed. It was off in a very strange location, very hard to get to. There was a secretary in the outer office, but the office had no function. His name was on the payroll, but he had nothing to do. They had given him an office, and he couldn't complain because he had a wood-paneled office. He was left there to sort of die on the vine. He retired shortly thereafter.

Q: Well, here you were with an abysmal situation as you can between the relations between two countries. Everybody is kicked out except a small section. Were you able to put things back together? You were in charge of--

PARKER: Well, I wouldn't say I was able to put things back together. But I really was very sore at the Egyptians when I came back. I felt sorry for them for their defeat of their army and so forth. A terrible catastrophe for Egypt. But I thought Nasser had behaved very badly, and I personally had been terribly bruised by it, and I didn't have much sympathy to spare.

Actually, we in the absence of relations worked out a fairly satisfactory working relationship with these interest sections. Both sides very quickly abandoned the pretense that the sponsoring power would have to escort the representative when he called on the Foreign Minister.

Q: Now, in your case, it would be the Spanish--

PARKER: It's the Spanish in Cairo and Indians here. And we began receiving the Egyptians directly. The Egyptians sent in early '68, Ashraf Ghorbal, A-S-H-R-A-F G-H-O-R-B-A-L, as the chief of their interest section. Both sections were limited to the number of people--something on the order of eight to begin with, and we gradually raised it, I think, to eighteen.

We had no particular interest left in Egypt. All the Americans had been kicked out. But there were many Egyptian students here. Something like fifteen-hundred of them. And the Egyptians wanted to keep the students here, wanted them to finish their studies. So they

needed people here to run that program because these people were all here on government scholarships.

Ghorbal proved to be I think the most effective of all the Arab representatives in Washington. He was Harvard-educated. He understood something about America. He had a sense of humor. He knew he was starting from zero, and he was ready to learn. And I took him in hand and taught him the ropes as far as I knew them on how to operate in Washington. He was a very apt pupil, far surpassing me in his capabilities in this respect. He eventually was the first ambassador here after the restoration of relations in '73 or '74 - I forget which year that was. Even before that, he was remarkably effective. Similarly, I think Bergus was very effective in Cairo. He certainly had a lot more influence than the Spanish ambassador or any other ambassador there. He was in very well until he came a cropper over a memorandum he was supposed to have written. He should tell that story, not I.

I did that for three years. A very frustrating job. Very hard to get anybody to pay any attention to Egypt. Very hard to get anybody to take Egypt seriously. I remember Secretary of State William Rogers at one point saying he had lots of the milk of human kindness, but he had none at all for Gamal Abdel Nasser. That was the attitude. It was not until 1973 and the crossing of the canal that people began to take Egypt seriously. Everybody in those days - Israelis, Americans - believed that they had no military capabilities.

Q: I remember the story that what does it take to be an effective military force. And the reply was, "Well, in the first place, fight the Egyptians."

PARKER: Yes.

Q: This was the type of story that went around.

PARKER: Yes. Well, the Egyptians were very poorly served in '67. I think they have since shown that they have some military capabilities.

At the end of three years, I was ready to get out. And I was very disturbed because I discovered that Joe Sisco, the Assistant Secretary, was working on a draft peace proposal involving Egypt without consulting me. He was not somebody I enjoyed working for anyway, and I was tired of the climate and lack of support from him and from everybody else in NEA. I wanted to get out. Stuart Rockwell, then the Deputy Assistant Secretary, was appointed as ambassador to Morocco, and he asked me if I would like to come and be his deputy Chief of Mission. I had always wanted to go to Morocco, and I said, "Sure," and we left in the summer of 1970.

Q: Could you tell me a little about Joseph Sisco, his operating style, how he was viewed by people in NEA?

PARKER: Well, Joe was a hard charging Calabrian bandit. He reputedly had a sign-- instead of having one of those IBM signs that says, "Think," he had one that said, "Scheme," in his office. I crossed swords with him on a number of occasions. I did not like working for him and very few of my colleagues did.

In his defense, I would say he was a very forceful administrator. He was very effective in making NEA the center of attention. Getting things for us that milder and nicer people had not done. A very effective bureaucrat. A very hard in- fighter. Somebody with a real instinct for the jugular. Not somebody that you want to take lightly. Not somebody that I would ever care to work for.

Q: Well, we have already had an interview with Ambassador Rockwell on Morocco, but I would like sort of the viewpoint of what you were doing and how you saw the situation when you were in Rabat and how you operated as deputy Chief of Mission. We are talking about the period from 1970 to '74.

PARKER: Stuart Rockwell was perhaps the most competent Foreign Service Officer I have ever known in terms of his drafting skill and his understanding of diplomacy and so forth. When he was ambassador, I had very little to do as deputy Chief of Mission except to sort of run the embassy. He did everything else. I was rather bored by it in fact. But I was thankful to be there at a place where not too much was demanded of me because in the middle of my second year, in December of 1971, I had to come back to the States for open heart surgery. I was very glad to go back to an essentially restful place for the rest of my tour there.

He left in 1973 and was succeeded by Robert Neumann, who was a political appointee. A very different sort of person. One of the most highly disorganized people I have ever worked for. It was a lot of fun working for him because I felt that if I weren't there to pick up the pieces that he scattered as we went along, everything would fall apart. I felt much more important under him than I did under Rockwell.

Q: Well, I would like to move on then to your first appointment as an ambassador which was to Algeria. How did this come about?

PARKER: Well, I was set back by this heart operation. I would have gone to Nouakchott as ambassador in 1971 if it hadn't been for that.

Q: This is to--

PARKER: Mauritania.

Q: Mauritania, yes.

PARKER: I sort of despaired at getting an ambassadorial post in 1974. Henry Tasca, our ambassador in Athens, asked for me as deputy Chief of Mission. I always wanted to go to

Athens. I said, "All right." This was a senior DCM post. I was all set to go when, well to make a very long and complicated story short, my orders were changed, and I was sent to Algiers instead to be chief of the interest section there.

The Algerians had also broken relations with us in 1967. I was sent with the understanding that I would be the first ambassador when relations were renewed, which came to pass about four months after I got there. I went out just at the time of Nixon's resignation. So I was appointed by President Ford.

Q: What was the situation in Algeria when you went out there?

PARKER: Well, a very difficult situation in the sense that although American companies were very active there, the political environment was hostile. They had enormous contracts. Two-billion dollars worth of contracts, which was quite a bit of money in 1974. They were building installations for the oil industry.

We had good economic relations, but our political relations were at best cool. It was a very difficult climate. The Algerians are very suspicious of us, and nobody would tell us anything. A very tough environment in which to work. Terrible housing problems and shortages. We were dependent on food orders from Denmark, and people flying in cheese from Paris and so forth. There was nothing to eat in Algeria. I mean, aside from bread. They were even importing potatoes and eggs. Algeria was the largest egg importer in the world in the 1970s. And this is in a country which could be the market garden of Europe.

My principal problem was trying to do something about the morale of my staff. They all felt under siege. They all felt the Algerians were the enemy. I had great work persuading people to be more patient and understanding and to try to see the Algerian side of it and accentuate the positive and so forth.

I also had to sort of start from scratch in terms of relations with Algeria. I really had no opposite number here in Washington. They didn't send anybody senior here to represent them. I worked very hard at this.

I had a good relationship with President Boumedienne, B-O-U- M-E-D-I-E-N-N-E, largely because I spoke Arabic to him. This became a point of honor between us. We never needed an interpreter, and he and I would sit and talk Arabic. When I left to go to Lebanon in '77, he expressed appreciation for this. One time he reportedly told his cabinet, "If the American Ambassador can speak Arabic, so can you." Realize that the Algerians had been brought up by the French to be illiterate in all languages. Very few of them could speak correct Arabic.

Q: Could you give your evaluation of Boumedienne?

PARKER: Well, he was not nearly as dour a figure as everybody thought. He certainly took his ideological commitments very serious, but he had a sense of humor. He would occasionally joke with me about something. Had a twinkle in his eye. I liked him.

He was direct. He would give you a straight answer as opposed to Morocco where you never get a straight answer. The Algerians would come right out and tell you, "No, I'm not going to do it." The Moroccans would normally say, "Well, yes, we will think about that," or "We'll try to do it," or "Yes, of course," when they have no intentions of doing it. With the Algerians, the answer is usually no, but at least you know where you stand.

I had a lot of sympathy for what Boumedienne was trying to do. I thought he made a lot of mistakes in terms of economic planning. I didn't have any luck trying to tell this to the Algerians. But he was overly ambitious, I think, in what he was hoping to do for Algeria.

Q: Did you have anything outside of private American investment, any tools at hand?

PARKER: No, no.

Q: No aid.

PARKER: No aid program or nothing. Nothing but personal contacts.

Q: Were they particularly interested in the United States?

PARKER: Yes, they are very interested in U.S. policy. But you see, in most international fora, we and the Algerians would be on opposite sides of the line. But no, they were not interested in U.S. aid. We couldn't give them anything.

I worked very hard to try to get a medical exchange started. I had personal interest in doing something to improve the quality of medical services in Algeria since I was dependent on them. I worked very hard, both on the American end and on the Algerian end, to get an exchange of physicians started. It got started just as I left and then, I don't know why, it stopped after several years.

Q: Well, why--again looking at it at that time--what was the analysis of the embassy and your staff and yourself of why things didn't work in Algeria? I mean, here it was an immensely rich country.

PARKER: Because of socialism. The idea of socialized agriculture is, you know, a non-starter. Peasants are paid whether they work or not. And their pay consists largely of chips which they can only use at the company store which doesn't have anything in it except fly spray and laundry starch. The motivation for working harder and producing more is not there. People simply didn't work. Agriculture was the principal disaster area, but throughout industry, the same thing was true. When you have a group of bureaucrats who

are making decisions as to where money is to be invested in what without really much regard to what their economic realities are.

Q: Well, did you find that you were sort of an almost onlooker as opposed to say to some other ambassadors? How about the French or the Soviet ambassadors?

PARKER: No. Nobody had any entrée, any influence there. Least of all, the Soviet who couldn't speak any language except Russian.

Q: So you didn't really feel that--I mean, this was a home-brewed problem as far as . . . This was not the Soviets--

PARKER: No, no.

Q: Pushing them or-

PARKER: No. The only foreigners who had any entrée at all there were the Cubans and perhaps the North Koreans. For some reason, Boumedienne, like Sadat at one point, thought highly of Kim Il-Sung. He would keep telling me what a mistake we were making in not cozying up to Kim Il-Sung.

I had better access to the Algerian government than the Soviet Ambassador. Certainly than any of the bloc ambassadors except if you count Cuba and North Korea in that category. They didn't have anything to offer.

We worked with very simple things. I gave Boumedienne a moon rock. He liked that. He liked things to do with space.

Q: A moon rock being a rock that came back from our first trips to the moon.

PARKER: Yes. I went to someone like the Minister of Agriculture with a picture, one of these Mars pictures that we had taken. There is this rocky landscape, and I handed it off to him, and I said, "Where do you think that is taken?"

He would say, "Oh, this town," and he would name some place in the desert.

And I said, "No, that comes from Mars." It really impressed them.

When you work at it, these personal contacts are terribly important, and they can be effective when you want to get something done. You have got access.

I made a vow--I didn't make a vow--I made a decision to--I was determined that I was going to call on every cabinet minister. I forget how many there were. What happened is that all requests for calls had to go through the Foreign Ministry. The Foreign Ministry would make one appointment and return the note and that would be the end of it. You

know, you would ask for three or four at a time, you would only get one. My other colleagues, after going through this a couple of times, just gave up. Well, I kept at it. It took me nineteen months to call on all the ministers. But I was the only ambassador who had done it.

One time I am meeting with the Minister of Post, Telegraph, and Telephone. He said, "Mr. Parker, I want you to know that we all appreciate your patience." You eventually build up a reputation in a place like Algiers. Everybody knows that Parker has made this effort, and everybody in the cabinet has met him. He persevered, and he's understood our problems. It's not that we are hostile or inhospitable, we are just not very well organized. We would like to see him, and we enjoy talking to him. That's the sort of level you are reduced to. We didn't have anything to offer, anything material they wanted except some help occasionally with contractors. I was called in a couple of times involved in disputes with contractors, trying to straighten that out and trying to help American contractors understand better the environment in which they were working.

Q: Was there much interest from Washington, from the Department of State?

PARKER: Yes, a lot of interest because the Algerians were up to all sorts of trouble. They were behind the big debate, the north-south dialogue about the sharing of technology and capital and so forth. They were really in our hair all over the place. The people in Washington were very irritated and very interested.

Q: But how did this play out as far as you were concerned?

PARKER: Well, I would simply go over to the Foreign Ministry and say, "All right now, you've taken this position, and it's wrong. You ought to change." Try to persuade people that they ought to be more reasonable about accepting our point of view. And they would give me theirs back, and I would send it off to Washington and nothing much would happen. Neither side would change.

Eventually, Kissinger moved Tom Enders out of the economic job and put Charles Robinson in it and told him to take a more positive attitude towards this north-south dialogue, which Robinson did. Robinson came out and made a couple of visits to Algiers and this greatly improved the atmosphere. We were at least willing to listen to them seriously and enter into a dialogue with them which we had not been willing to do when Enders was Under Secretary for Economic Affairs.

Q: Were there any other matters that concerned you there particularly?

PARKER: Oh, lots of matters. There was a time when every morning I would get up, and I would say, "I don't mind if they send me out of here today." I would get called to the Presidency in the middle of the night. I would be taking my shower usually when the telephone rang. "Get over here to the Presidency." There were terrible demands made on us by the environment there.

But I look back on it now as one place where I think I was successful. I think American-Algerian relations were considerably better when I left than they had been when I came. I think I deserve a good deal of the credit for it. With very little to work with.

Q: Well, should we--

PARKER: I think we should call it a halt now.

[May 2, 1989]

Q: Dick, we had finished our last interview where you had left Algiers. I would like to ask you, how did you get the appointment to be ambassador to Lebanon? And, let's see, that was in 1977.

PARKER: I went back to Washington at Christmas time in 1976 just after the election because I wanted to spend Christmas with our family, and our oldest son was getting married the day after Christmas.

Q: This was the election in which Carter was elected.

PARKER: Carter had just been elected president.

I came back and routinely called on the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, who at that point was Phil Habib. I went to see him. Phil just gave me hell. He was a terrible bully about things like this. He accused me of coming back, contrary to instructions that had been sent to all posts in the field, that nobody, no ambassador was to return to the United States during the transition period because they didn't want people shopping around for jobs. He said I was here shopping around for jobs. Well, that was nonsense. I told him why I had come back, and he was very cynical about that. He browbeat me for a while.

Then I went off and called on somebody in the Secretary's office--I forget who it was now, whether it was the Deputy Secretary or what--but I was sitting in the reception area outside the Secretary's office when Ghassan Tueni, the Lebanese newspaper editor who has always been involved in foreign affairs--

Q: How do you spell his name?

PARKER: G-H-A-S-S-A-N T-U-E-N-I. Who was functioning as sort of a special emissary for the new government in Lebanon led by President Sarkis, coming to ask us to send them an ambassador. The last ambassador, Francis Meloy, had been assassinated in June. We had seriously debated closing the post, but in the end decided to keep it open with a chargé and a small staff for the time being. By the end of the year, the Syrians had moved in and had restored a certain degree of order. The Lebanese were saying, "Well,

now we need a sign of confidence on the part of the United States so that we can start the reconstruction process. So send us an ambassador."

Tueni had called on the Secretary. He came out of the Secretary's office with I think Roy Atherton and somebody else, and he spotted me out there, and we are old friends. We had a brief conversation. He went off. I'm sure that Tueni suggested because he knew me well, that I would be a good choice for the job.

Well, we went off. We went out to San Francisco which was my home leave address to see my mother and my brother. And then I began a tour across the United States from San Francisco and ending up in Boston, passing by, let's see, San Francisco, Houston, Chicago, New York, Boston.

Q: The direct route.

PARKER: The direct route. I was on a speaking tour. I was speaking to American firms doing business in Algeria talking to them about the problems of doing business there, and giving them some ideas I had that might make their path a little easier.

In particular, I thought that they should be doing something about orienting people, giving them a couple of weeks of exposure to some information about this country before they went to it because it was a very difficult environment in which to work. I was very disappointed by the performance of American companies in this respect. They just hired any damn engineer off the street and sent him to Algiers without giving him any idea of what he was getting into. It must have been one of the most difficult places in the world to work. As the Czech Ambassador, who was dean of the corps, used to say, "This is not a school of patience, this is a university." The Algerian bureaucracy was maddeningly difficult to work with. I was counseling patience and some sophistication and some learning.

Before going off on this trip, before leaving Washington, I had seen Carol Laise, who was the Director General, and she had asked me what my plans were. I said I was going back to Algiers.

She said, "Are you sure?"

I said, Yes. That's my plan."

She said, "Well, you better go talk to Roy Atherton," who was the Assistant Secretary.

Roy told me that my name was among those who had been put forward to the White House as a candidate for Beirut. I said I didn't want to go to Beirut and get shot at. I had had enough danger in my life. He said he didn't enjoy recommending friends to go to a place like that, but he thought with the Syrians there, it would be secure.

I went off, and I forgot about this. I was in Houston. I was in the office of a senior executive of a company that has since gone broke--the name of which I cannot remember. Sitting in his richly furnished office. The telephone rang, and it was Roy Atherton, and he said that, "The President had decided to send you to Beirut as his first ambassador."

And I said, "Oh, shit." That's just how I felt. Well, I continued the trip and then came back and had a very suspenseful wait for the Senate to have their confirmation hearings because the Department wanted me to get out there before the Secretary got there. The Secretary was arriving on something like the seventeenth of February. Secretary Vance. As it happened, we had time. We originally thought we were going to have this hearing the second week in January. We had prepared for it for a given day, for a Thursday. We were going to go have lunch afterwards with Dayton Mak in Georgetown. Lunch or dinner, I can't remember which. And then take the plane to Algiers.

Q: To Beirut.

PARKER: No, I had to go to Algiers to say goodbye and pack and then go on to Beirut. Well, that hearing was never held that day and so instead of staying for lunch or dinner or whatever it was, we had to move in with the Mak's for a week, because we had already moved out of Columbia Plaza and couldn't get back in. The poor Mak's had to put us up for an extra week before we finally got off.

I had three days in Algiers to say goodbye. I didn't have time to get sworn in Washington. I got sworn in by our consular officer, Jim Ledesma, in the lobby of the embassy in Algiers. Then I went off to Beirut.

I arrived there the thirteenth. I presented my credentials on the fourteenth. The Secretary arrived on the fifteenth or seventeenth--I forget which.

Q: What was the Secretary doing on that trip?

PARKER: This was his first visit to the area. The area was obviously one of high priority, and he wanted to come out and see what was going on and get a feel for the situation. The administration was considering--I'm not sure whether they were considering at that point--but they knew about this study done by the Brookings Institution on a comprehensive Arab- Israel settlement. They were very interested in trying to do something about it. In contrast to the Ford Administration which had concentrated on this little step-by-step approach.

Vance came out with a large entourage and made a quick trip. Had lunch with the president. Came in the morning, left that evening. Didn't spend the night. Everybody was scared that, you know, somebody was going to take a shot at him. I must say Beirut in these days was a very hairy place.

Very heavy security precautions. I had a minimum team when we moved off. When my wife and I and our guards went some place visiting, there were thirteen people in three cars. People carrying Uzis and sawed-off shotguns and big shotguns and any weapon you can think of. Eventually, I had three American guards as well as my Lebanese guards.

We lived, first of all, in an apartment down in town near the embassy. We had the Marines in there. The Marines were under instructions to be with us all the time. About the only place we could be without the Marines standing around watching us was in the bathroom or the bedroom. In fact, they were in the bedroom next to ours sleeping there. Absolutely no privacy.

That was relaxed a little bit after a while. We moved up to the residence on the hill, which is at Yarze which is still being occupied by the ambassador although it has been hit a number of times by shells.

We moved out in the late summer of 1978 after a very difficult night in which one of our American bodyguards almost got killed by a shot outside our bedroom door. One of the Marines was out in the garden, and a mortar shell landed there and knocked him down. He was in a state of shock all evening. He came bursting into our bedroom and ordered my wife and me to get up and get out and to put on our gas masks and go downstairs to the wine cellar. We didn't have a shelter. But on the first floor, there was one room with no windows where we kept wine and food. I told him to take it easy and at least let me get my clothes on, which I did.

The next morning, the security officer came and said, "You know, you really can't stay up here. It's not fair to your staff to have them running back and forth between town and here through all these dangers with messages and so forth."

I said, "You are right." We moved down into an apartment in the embassy and stayed there until we left.

It was a very exciting post. Everything since Beirut has been anti-climax.

Q: Well, could you describe the political situation? We are talking about when--

PARKER: 1977. February of 1977.

Q: February of 1977. What was the political situation in Lebanon at that time?

PARKER: Well, there was the so-called Arab deterrent force which was largely Syrian. About thirty- thousand troops which were, in effect, in occupation of the country in parts of it, not all of it, maintaining order. You had the PLO enclave.

Q: PLO is the--

PARKER: Palestine Liberation Organization enclave in the south. They controlled south Lebanon practically up to the Israeli border.

You had a number of militias heavily armed who had been involved in the fighting in '75 and '76 which had been very heavy at times. They had equipment up to and including heavy artillery and tanks. You had, first of all, what became the Lebanese forces, the Maronite, the Christian force. Perhaps eight or ten-thousand men armed with weapons supplied by various places including the Israelis. The Israelis had had a liaison arrangement with these people for almost thirty years at that point. That was the only Christian militia.

On the Moslem side, you had Kamal Jumblatt, the leader of the Druze, who was assassinated shortly after I arrived and succeeded by his son, Walid. That's Jumblatt, J-U-M-B-L-A-T-T, Kamal, K-A-M-A-L, and Walid, W-A-L-I-D. All right. Kamal Jumblatt led this force of Druze warriors that owed feudal loyalty to him. I don't know, there were somewhere between five and ten-thousand men. They were mostly up in the Shuf mountains.

In the town of Beirut, you had a Moslem militia. They called them murabitun which was very small and ill-formed in West Beirut. You had very heavy Palestine Liberation forces of various factions including Saiqa, S-A-I-Q-A, which was controlled by the Syrians. And what we called El Fatah. The real name was Fath, F-A-T-H, but everybody spells it F-A-T-A-H. Saiqa and Fatah were the two strongest Palestinian forces.

The Shia at that point had a very small, embryonic militia which was not of any importance on the local scene.

It was a terrifying site to drive around Beirut. You would see these young, fourteen, fifteen-year-old boys with AK- 47s and bandoleers of ammunition around their shoulders, obviously ready to shoot at anybody.

The Lebanese have always liked to shoot. You see sometimes in the television news a fighter standing out in the street, and he's got this submachine gun and just is pointing it off in the general direction of somebody and pulling the trigger. He's not aiming at anyone. They were highly inaccurate. You would see the side of a building that had been largely destroyed, pock-marked with holes coming from automatic weapons, a machine gun of some sort. Just hundreds and hundreds of them across the wall, nothing apparently going through the window. Of course, it wouldn't leave any mark if it had. Wildly inaccurate shooting.

Q: You know, just a practical question. Ammunition is expensive. It's very expensive.

PARKER: Yes.

Q: Where does this come from?

PARKER: These people were all subsidized. Subsidized by the Israelis, by wealthy American Maronites, by wealthy Moslems, by the PLO, by the Iraqis, by the Syrians, by the Saudis, by the Kuwaitis. I don't know. This was an industry, being a fighter. I mean, one of the principal sources of employment. People got paid a pretty good wage by Lebanese standards for this. I forget what it was, but it was quite respectable. You could support a family on this. The danger was not all that great. Most of the casualties were civilians. The military casualties were very limited.

Q: What was causing this? I hesitate to open this particular can of worms, but I think you have to explain what were some of the forces that were going on with them.

PARKER: Well, that's a question of discussing the political dynamics of Lebanon which is something that really needs a whole interview. But very briefly, Lebanon existed under a very delicate balance which was based on a gentlemen's agreement which itself was based on a legal fiction that the Christians were a majority. All jobs and influence were distributed on the basis what was called the dosage. Dosage is spelled D-O-S-A-G-E, it's a French term meaning the dose. That is, what was the percentage of people of a given sect in the population. The legal fiction was that everything should be divided on the basis of six Christians to five Moslems. The parliament, for instance, always has to be a multiple of nine. I'm sorry, of eleven. You have to have six Christian seats and five Moslem seats.

There are sixteen recognized sects, Christian and Moslem. Each sect, down to and including the Protestants, is entitled to some representation in parliament and in jobs throughout the bureaucracy, which are handed out on the basis of this sectarian affiliation. Confessionalisme is the French word for it.

The President of the Republic is always Maronite. The Speaker of the House, which would be the second ranking position in terms of protocol, is a Shia, S-H-I-A or S-H-I-I. And the Prime Minister is Sunni, S-U-N-N-I, Moslem. Somebody who by virtue of his position is behind the president in power. The president has extraordinary powers including the ability to legislate by decree. He can decree a law. And if the parliament doesn't overturn it within a fixed period--I think it's sixty days--it becomes law. What Ronny Reagan couldn't have done with that.

This system worked pretty well. It was held together by the tension between these sects which prevented any one of them from really dominating the others. I mean, the Maronites were first. They had more power than the others, but it wasn't all that much more. But they were balanced off by the other sects in any event. That's sects, S-E-C-T-S, not S-E-X. They governed by what I called Draconian gimmick. You didn't pass legislation or pass laws to do directly what you wanted. You imposed some sort of a penalty.

I remember once going to the president with a delegation from the World Bank, and we had a proposal for some low cost housing which was very much needed in Beirut. The American government and the World Bank were prepared to support it. And President Sarkis, S-A-R-K-I-S, said he didn't want to have anything to do with it. He wasn't going to make a decision as to who was going to get these houses. However he made the decision, it would be challenged, and people would fight about it.

It was much better just to let the neutral forces of the market determine who was going to get what house. What you do is you set interest rates. You made money available in the form of funds for loans. You gave cheap loans, and you let people come and borrow money. Those who could would, and they would put up houses, and if they weren't going to live in it themselves, they would rent it to somebody else who could afford it. This would all work out in the end. Much more satisfactory than if the government tried to say, "Okay, everybody with income of less than five-thousand pounds is going to be eligible for one of these houses, and we are going to start doing this on an alphabetical basis," or whatever. However they chose to do it, they would be in trouble. So they always looked for some neutral way to do this.

When they wanted to, as opposed to giving out rewards, when they wanted to impose penalties, they would have to have some way that was non-political of doing this. Everybody was related to a member of parliament. Any attempt to give anybody a ticket was always sort of futile because nobody would pay it.

Q: This is a traffic ticket.

PARKER: A traffic ticket. So what they did was you have the system that we have here in Washington, D.C. at the moment. The policeman would note down your number, and he wouldn't even bother to give you a piece of paper. He would just file this away. At the end of the day, he would say, "Well, this car, this number, went through a red light at one-fifteen p.m.," and that would be put against your plate. And when it came time to renew that plate, you couldn't renew it unless you paid off these fines.

Same thing with taxes. No tax collector would go out. They wouldn't take you to court about it, but you would find that if you hadn't paid your taxes--and everybody evaded taxes to the maximum possible extent--that if you hadn't paid your taxes and you wanted a license to import something, you couldn't get it until you paid off the tax bill.

A system which was full of holes. In many respects, worked very badly, and in other respects, worked very well. It was a crazy sort of place in which you could do anything. Buy anything. Any kind of sex you wanted, any kind of drug, any kind of food, any kind of car, any kind of entertainment, any kind of house. You could live better in Beirut than you could any place in the world as far as I was concerned. It was really a swinging town. We had been there in the early sixties as I said earlier and enjoyed it greatly.

Well, this wonderful, bizarre mechanism had come apart under the weight of, first of all, the Palestinian armed presence. When King Hussein finally moved against the PLO in Jordan in 1970--

Q: This was Black September.

PARKER: Black September. Something that Harry Symmes has described in his oral history.

The people moved to Lebanon and set up this state within a state in southern Lebanon which became the nearest thing they had to a homeland. They would attack the Israelis. And the Israelis would come over and bomb the Lebanese. This became an intolerable situation for the Lebanese. The Israelis were trying to force them into doing something about the Palestinians, but they couldn't because the Palestinians were primarily Moslem. This became a matter of religious solidarity between Lebanese Moslems and Palestinians. Lebanese Moslems, in general, supported the Palestinians. The Maronites in particular opposed them. And the army being divided between Christians and Moslems was unreliable. They weren't going to shoot at fellow Moslems. And so the army couldn't be used. The state was unable to cope with this.

This problem was aggravated by the economic and social inequalities that had built up in this country. Particularly between the north and the south. The Shia in the south were neglected and very little was done for them. They were behind everybody else in terms of literacy and education and wealth and property and in any way you want to look at it. Social graces and so forth. But they were the most prolific part of the population, and they were by the mid-1970s, probably the largest Moslem sect in the country. They were crowded into what was called the Belt of Poverty around Beirut. A collection of lower class housing, poor sanitation, and so forth. Sort of amalgamated with these three refugee camps of Tall Za'tar, Sabra and Shatila, S-H-A-T-I-L-A. To western observers, a constant potential source of trouble. They indeed provided a majority of the fighters in the Moslem militias.

Well, this was a very unstable situation. The Syrians had decided--correctly in my view--that the only way you were going to bring this situation under control was to disarm the militias. Every family in Lebanon had an automatic weapon. The Syrians were going to go out and collect them. They were going to start with two refugee camps, Sabra and Shatila, in Beirut which were strongly fortified by the Palestinians.

Q: This was, we are talking about when?

PARKER: I am talking about when I arrived in Beirut on the thirteenth of February.

Q: So, I mean, they hadn't started this yet.

PARKER: No, they hadn't started yet. They were moving tanks up, and they were going to move, I believe, the next day. The fourteenth or fifteenth I guess it was. Vance was arriving the seventeenth. They were going to move in the camps on the fifteenth, or something like that.

We urged them to delay this for a week because we knew that there would be serious fighting when this happened, and we didn't want it to ruin Vance's visit. We wanted to get him in and out of Beirut before this happened. So we put pressure on them. The French did. The Lebanese did. The PLO did. They postponed it for a week, and they never did it. They lost momentum, and it never got done. These militias have never been disarmed, and until they are, you will have no peace in Lebanon.

My mission in this place was sort of, you know, nobody ever told me what the hell to do. It was to go out there and be the ambassador.

Q: This is something that as we have worked on these oral histories, it's a question I ask every ambassador. What were your instructions? And I usually get either a very blank look or say, "Well, you just go out and be an ambassador."

PARKER: That's right. No, what they said was, "We are behind you all the way. Get out there and see what you can do to bring this place together." I saw my function as helping to bind up the wounds of war. When I arrived, I made a noble statement about the period of reconstruction had arrived now. And conciliation. And it was time for everybody to work together to put Lebanon back on the road.

Well, we worked on this very hard. AID came in and put up some warehouses down in the port to replace those that had been destroyed in the fighting. We got the port operating again.

We were making progress in a lot of fields: Economically, training the army, bringing in military equipment. I could bring in anything I wanted to for the army, anything they could absorb, anything they wanted, I should say. I had sort of *carte blanche* in terms of requesting support in that respect if in my judgment they could use it. I could not, on the other hand, give one single cartridge to the police because of this terrible State of Siege law coming out of the Yves Montand movie.

Q: We are referring now to what?

PARKER: To the State of Siege.

Q: Well, yes, I know, but just for the record, it was a movie--

PARKER: It was a movie starring Yves Montand called State of Siege, and it was about Uruguay and the guerrillas in Uruguay.

Q: The Tupamaros.

PARKER: The Tupamaros and police torture. This was supposedly taught to these South Americans by AID and CIA. As though we could teach those people anything about torture. There was a great revulsion against our aid to police forces because of this and legislation was passed--I don't know what it was called, but we all called it the state of siege law which, in effect, prevented us from giving any aid to the police.

Well, the Lebanese internal security forces were police forces. They had two types of police. They had the police who were town police, and they had the gendarmerie who were countryside police. And the gendarmerie in particular was the principal force for order in that country. Unless you had a gendarme in the village, you would have no control over it. But if you did have a gendarme, you could have a certain degree of order.

Well, we couldn't do anything at all for the gendarmerie, which was too bad, because that was a force that could have done something concrete towards restoring order. And would not have been troubled by the confessional problems, the religious problems that you had in the army because you are talking about much smaller, infinitesimally smaller units. And you have a Moslem gendarme in a Moslem village. And there was no problem. A Christian in a Christian village.

We were making progress, as I said. President Sarkis said on one occasion, "For every two steps forwards, we are making one backwards, but at least we are making that progress." This lasted for about a year.

Q: Before we move to that, I want to go back right to the beginning. You said that because of Vance's visit, you put pressure on the Syrians--

PARKER: Yes.

Q: Not to launch this attack to get the weapons. Now, you said Vance came in. I can understand your position, but do you think this is--I mean, here we have the Secretary of State who hasn't been to the area comes in essentially for a lunch. Flies out again. We tell the Syrians to stop something which may have actually had a significant affect on it. I mean, were there other factors or was the Vance visit, which sounds like in the greater scale of things, a pretty puny event to stop a major action.

PARKER: Yes, we would have been better off to postpone the Vance visit. To postpone everything. We didn't realize that the Syrians couldn't postpone it for a week, that they would lose momentum.

Q: Okay, well it was--

PARKER: This was a miscalculation.

Q: I was just going to--

PARKER: But the Vance visit, the concern was security. Before he arrived, I was getting all sorts of messages sort of saying, "On your head be it if anything happens to Vance." Or, "Do you think the situation is safe for him?"

Q: Were there pressures on you to get Vance in there? Or did you want to have him come in?

PARKER: Well, yes, sure I wanted to have him come in. It would be a big boost to me in terms of starting out my tour there and would be very helpful for me and the Secretary to sit down and talk to the president. Sort of establish that I was in good standing in Washington and would give the Secretary a firsthand view of what was going on there which is more much important actually than my status. I think the educational impact on him was what I would consider the most important. Unfortunately, he didn't see much, and he didn't really get much of an earful or eyeful. He came back once more during my tour for a similar visit with similar results.

Q: Were we even talking to the Syrians? I mean, were we able to have any influence with the Syrians?

PARKER: Yes, we had relatively good relations with the Syrians at that point. We had an aid program in Syria. Dick Murphy had access. He was the ambassador in Damascus. He could see senior officials, and they would listen to him. We had tacitly accepted entry into Lebanon in 1976. We had acted, in effect, as intermediaries between them and the Israelis about this move in. Sort of getting Israeli acquiescence. We stood in pretty good odor with them at that point.

Q: I'm sorry to interrupt. You were back saying that the situation where you were working lasted about a year.

PARKER: Yes. And then the Maronite militia, the Lebanese Forces which is simply an enlarged Phalanges, P-H-A-L- A-N-G-E-S, which was a neo-fascist organization founded by Pierre Gemayel, G-E-M-A-Y-E-L, the father of the Bashir, B-A-S-H-I-R, and Amin, A-M-I-N, Gemayel, the two successive presidents of Lebanon.

The Lebanese forces were commanded by Bashir Gemayel, who looked like a pussycat, but was a ruthless cutthroat, completely immoral in terms of attaining his political objectives. He was bent on becoming president of Lebanon. He came to see me at my residence in December of '77 and said he was about to move on the presidential palace which was about two-hundred yards down the road from us. And he was going to take over. I told him not to be a damn fool. We weren't going to support that, and neither would anybody else. That this was no time to be engaging in foolishness of this sort. He was very disappointed, and he went away.

Q: He thought that you would give support to him?

PARKER: Yes, he had because he had been misled I think by Charles Malik, who had kept coming back here and seeing Vance and other people and going back to Lebanon and saying, "Parker doesn't know what he is talking about. Parker is pro-Syrian--Vance is with us--".

Q: Charles Malik.

PARKER: Charles Malik was a former Lebanese Foreign Minister, former permanent representative to the United Nations. Perhaps one of the best known Lebanese statesman, who died fairly recently. A Greek Orthodox from northern Lebanon. A man of great intellect and even greater ego who was, I found, a very destructive influence in Lebanon in the time I was there. Where were we?

Q: Well, I was asking why Gemayel thought he could move his troops and why we would give him support.

PARKER: Okay, that's right. A couple months later in February--

Q: '78.

PARKER: February of '78. Suddenly, there was a skirmish at the Lebanese military academy which was just over the hill from us on the Damascus Road at a place called Fayadiyah, F-A-Y-A-D-I-Y-A-H. A number of Syrian soldiers, who had maintained a roadblock on the Damascus Road near the school, were shot and killed. The Lebanese then went on a rampage killing Syrians. The Syrians were losing something like three men a day, and they couldn't take that sitting down. They responded by shelling Beirut. Much as they were shelling it a couple weeks ago.

Q: You are talking about in 1989.

PARKER: Yes. Shelling indiscriminately. I mean, shelling a particular part, the Christian part of Beirut. In plain daylight. We had a visiting American military team when I had half the senior officers in the Lebanese army up for lunch. The Ministry of Defense was just up the hill from us. They came down the hill for lunch. We all stood out on the terrace of the residence and watched a Syrian rocket battery down at Sinn Al-Fil from the other side of Damascus highway. Sinn Al-Fil, S-I-N-N A-L hyphen F-I-L. We watched this battery constantly firing at Ashrafiyah, the Christian section. These Lebanese officers were besides themselves with frustration because they couldn't stop them.

The Syrians theoretically were under the command of President Sarkis, under the command of the Lebanese. But the Lebanese had no authority over them. They were throwing their weight around, and they showed no sophistication, no discrimination

between doing nothing and then shooting everybody in sight. They didn't have any sort of middle ground.

The situation then began going downhill. And it has been going downhill ever since with a few respites of shorter or longer duration.

Q: One of the questions that I think anybody who looks at Lebanon ask, is this because of the very unique elements within this society that this place has become the closest thing to hell that one can think of. I mean, unrelenting war that has gone on with no solution in sight. Or is it really a tie to the Middle East and the Middle East problem, or is it unique?

PARKER: Well, it's unique in the sense that the Lebanese have always enjoyed a certain degree of anarchy. Mount Lebanon was a refuge area difficult to get to. The tribes that sought refuge up there were able to maintain a degree of independence that other people in the Middle East were not. The exception to that is the Kurds. To a certain extent, the Armenians. Kurds and the Lebanese--the mountain people were able--like mountaineers in most places--because of the terrain were hard to get at; it's fairly easy for them to escape from a pursuer--there is a long tradition of mountaineering independence. And these people who are fighting today are mountaineers who have come down from the hills, and they are living on the plain now, but they think they are a bunch of mountain boys.

It is complicated by the fact that, as I've said earlier, nobody takes Lebanon seriously. Just about everybody has dabbled in Lebanese politics to a greater or lesser extent including ourselves, the Israelis, the Soviets, the British, the French, the Saudis, the Turks, the Iraqis. Everybody who has any interest in that area has got some clients in Lebanon. The Lebanese love this. They love to have somebody protecting them, and they feel they can go out and do whatever they like and get away with it. And there are certain people who consider themselves to be our clients. This is to a certain extent a hangover from the period of the capitulations, of extraterritorial status which the citizens of western powers enjoyed under the Turkish, under the Ottoman Empire.

Q: The protégés.

PARKER: Protégé, yes.

Q: Protective people.

PARKER: Yes. If they don't have a protecting power, they will go out and seek one. As long as people were not armed, this was fairly benign. It was considered funny that nobody was paying much attention to the laws. There were certain basic laws. Laws relating to business crime were very strict. You had to keep your word in a business transaction. This was a commercial society.

Q: This is the Levant.

PARKER: Yes, this is the Levant. This is glorious free private enterprise carried to its logical conclusion. If you were a merchant, your word was your bond. But if you were a politician or a lawyer or something else, you could get away with just about anything. Let's see, where was I?

When the French came in, they did what they did every place in North Africa and elsewhere. They prohibited rifled weapons. Couldn't own a rifled weapon. R-I-F-L-E-D. That is, a weapon which put a spin on the bullets so that they will go a longer distance.

Q: Basically, allowing the hunter to have his shotgun to shoot rabbits.

PARKER: He could have a shotgun to shoot rabbits, but he couldn't have anything with long range. So that you couldn't sit on top of your mountain and kill people in the valley down below. People had shotguns, and they had very little ammunition for them. Every Lebanese worth his salt had a pistol, but he couldn't hit anything with it. It was, you know, no bigger than a thirty-eight at the most. The amount of trouble that could be caused was limited. But by 1975-76, people were heavily armed, heavily supplied with ammunition, and the possibilities for trouble were enormous. And they greatly outnumbered the army in numbers and in fire power.

Q: From your position and from the State Department position, were we doing anything to stop other people from arming them? I mean, particularly our clients state, Israel.

PARKER: No. We were, in fact, we sort of connived at this because at one point the Christians came to us and said, "We are running out of ammunition. If you and the Israelis don't do something quickly, we are going to be slaughtered by Jumblatt. We, in effect, connived that the Israelis resupply the Maronites.

Q: I have something in looking up a newspaper and seeing in August of '77 that the United States admits that Israel was using U.S. arms to help Christians.

PARKER: Right.

Q: Was that coming out at your request, or was that coming out of the State Department?

PARKER: You mean that statement?

Q: No, I mean, how this happened. Did somebody come to you from the Christian community and say, "We are out of arms," and you relayed it to Washington?

PARKER: Well, no, this happened in '76. I forget who they came to, our chargé or Dean Brown or whoever was there at the time. I think possibly Dean Brown, or maybe they were making representations here. They have all sorts of would-be diplomats, official and otherwise in Washington. They had exchanges with the Israelis about this. Kissinger was

involved. This was Kissinger's decision that we should agree to this resupply, and if necessary, assist with it. At this point, I forget the details of what we did. But I know that we were in accord.

Q: So it really surfaced while you were there, but the fact is that we had done it before.

PARKER: Yes, well, no. We had done it before. In '77, the Israelis were still supplying arms to the Maronites. You know, at any given time--I don't know what this particular declaration is referring to, I would have to look up the telegrams--but probably I can imagine it's the arrival of a shipload of old Sherman tanks that they are turning over to the Maronites. And this had been picked up by the press or somebody, and somebody is making an issue of it.

Q: How did you view our embassy and our relations with Israel as from your observation point?

PARKER: Well, I had a very--what shall I say-- difficult time. There was the usual problem that we and Tel Aviv didn't see things the same way. Sam Lewis and I had quite different views of the situation.

Q: He was our ambassador.

PARKER: He was our ambassador in Tel Aviv. And that's sort of normal. In this case, I was particularly disturbed that we were, in effect, acquiescing in Israeli hegemony over southern Lebanon. And part of our saying that we--and we said this repeatedly--that we support the territorial integrity of Lebanon, and we fully support the central government. We were not willing to say, "No," to the Israelis to get the hell out of south Lebanon. And they were supporting this renegade down there, Major Haddad, who had armed a little strip of Maronite villages along the border that he had organized against the Shia and against the Palestinians in a sort of a village defense effort. I can sympathize with that, but what it meant was that--I mean, the way to deal with that problem was not to arm the villagers, but to get the Lebanese army down there and get in control of this area so it could police and defend it against the Palestinians which I think it would have done. But between the Israelis and the reluctance of the Lebanese to really take any strong measures in this respect, Lebanon lost control of southern Lebanon, and it's been a continuing source of problems.

Q: It sounds like we've had quite a bit of influence for good or for bad in Lebanon.

PARKER: We have enormous influence in Lebanon.

Q: What are our interests? As you saw them at the time, what were our interests as far as--

PARKER: Well, we have no strategic or material interest in Lebanon. There is an American university there with a first-class hospital that's very important. But it's important really to Lebanon and to the area, it's not of any great intrinsic importance to the United States. It makes us feel good to support it. We think we are doing something positive. It's the one positive thing we are doing in Lebanon. I mean, that we can point to. And this seems to have worked. We have tried a lot of other things, but none of them seem to have worked very well.

I personally feel that the area has been rather successful in quarantining Lebanon and isolating this illness, but we are never going to bring the terrorism problem under control until there is peace in Lebanon. As long as the terrorists can move in and out of there at will as they do, there is going to be no way of getting them. The only way you are going to control the terrorists in the end is by having responsible governments that will suppress and control them.

Q: Would you say our policy at the time you were there maybe somewhat indirectly but as a moving force was our relations with Israel as regards to Lebanon--I mean, was everything predicated in what does this mean to Israel?

PARKER: Well, not so much that as we simply weren't going to cross the Israelis. It wasn't worth it. The Israelis had too much support in our Congress. If the Lebanese had been more resolute and better organized, and we had some chance of showing some positive accomplishment if we could get the Israelis to withdraw, I think we would have acted differently. But the Lebanese were such wimps that we weren't going to take the risk of confronting Israel and a hostile Congress. I mean, this is in a period when the Israelis controlled seventy-six senators, and we weren't going to take them on.

Q: What about Lebanese-Americans? There is a sizable group of Lebanese and always has been in the United States. Did they play much of a role in our policy?

PARKER: I would say a largely destructive role.

Q: Destructive?

PARKER: Destructive. The Lebanese have brought their feuds with them to the United States. They have been badly divided by the same religious divisions that divide them in Lebanon. The Maronites are interested in the Maronites, and the Druze in the Druze, and so forth, quite naturally. Each one has sought to push the interests of its own sect. The Maronites have been the most effective in this. Some day I think some of these people are going to have a lot to answer for if the real history of this era is ever written.

Q: I am speaking now maybe a little bit nuts and bolts, but did you ever get involved in major consular problems there because it would strike me that this would be a place where you would have a lot of--if not just straight Americans, Lebanese-Americans--who have gotten in trouble in a difficult place in getting them out?

PARKER: We had a lot of problems. In '76 I believe, '75 or '76, we moved our consular operations out of Beirut during the first phase of the civil war. We moved the files to various places, and Lebanese would have to go to Athens or Cyprus or I think maybe they could go to Damascus or Amman to get visas and passport services. We just sort of reconstituted the consular section when I got there. We built it up and began performing consular functions. We gradually brought the files back. This was part of the reconstruction effort. I don't know what we are doing today. I imagine we have moved them back out again.

My experiences is the worst problems are not with the foreign-born Americans, not with the Lebanese-Americans in Lebanon. It's with the American-Americans in Lebanon who have been there too long. Those are the people who end up as hostages. Those are the people who don't have enough sense to leave the country when they are told to. And they are the ones who are conspicuous and who get robbed and lose their passports and so forth. The Lebanese-Americans, in my experience, were pretty self-reliant. Most of the American-Americans had shipped out in '76. There were very few of them left there when we got there. There had been a large American community. Very few of them remained. Those that did were by and large pretty self-reliant. We had exported most of the consular problems by then.

We were giving special status to Lebanese visa applicants. They were all sort of automatically eligible for asylum for a period there. At other Foreign Service posts other than Beirut we issued a great many visas. That also cleared up a lot of problems that we might otherwise have had. We had taken care of a good part of the demand. We didn't have the long lines that we've had in the past.

Q: How about from the desk now? I mean, without really any instructions, were you getting mixed signals? Was there a clear policy? This is the Carter administration. The time of Camp David getting underway and all that. Did Lebanon play any role really in sort of Middle East considerations or was this considered too difficult to deal with, you were left with the problem yourself?

PARKER: Well, the issue really got critical in '82, well after I had left, four years after I had left, when we tied progress in Lebanon to progress on the Arab-Israel question.

At the time I was there, there was a certain amount of polite attention paid to Lebanon, but it was not regarded as a player of any influence. When there was talk of a Geneva conference which preceded and precipitated Sadat's trip to Jerusalem, the Lebanese were very anxious to be invited to Geneva. They felt they had an interest in this, and they wanted to take part in it. And we said, "Of course, you will be invited." But we didn't really see that they were going to play a major role in it. I think that the interests of other parties, notably Syria and Israel, really took precedence in the minds of the United States over those of Lebanon.

Well, you know, you said earlier that we didn't want to cross the Israelis. We also didn't want to cross the Syrians. Of course, we thought, I thought that the Syrian presence there was essential to maintaining security. I thought, the Foreign Minister thought, the President of Lebanon thought that if you pull the Syrians out, we are going to have chaos here. The fighting is going to resume immediately. It's the only police force we've got. The only reasonable substitute for it is a reconstituted Lebanese army. I don't know how much ink has been spilled on that over the years and how many visits and promises and oaths and so forth have been made and exchanged and given, but we are no closer today than we were when we started in 1977 in having an effective Lebanese army.

Q: So in a way, almost all parties kind of wanted to keep Lebanon isolated from--

PARKER: Yes. Nobody knew what to do about it. They just wanted to make sure it didn't spread to their doorstep.

Q: You are reporting on this very complex situation, which reminds me, except it's lethal, of some of the permutations of battalion politics, but you would report to Washington. Would anybody, I mean other than the man or woman who had to read the reports, I mean really be able to do anything except, "My God, it's a complicated situation"? Or did they just concentrate on the Israeli problem dealing with the other Arab states?

PARKER: Well, I think a lot of people felt sorry for me, but I have always been known for my telegraphic style. My telegrams were always read by people. They were always looking for the hidden joke in it. I think it was Harold Nicholson said, "One way to ensure that your telegrams are read is to have a sense of humor, but it's less likely to ensure that they are going to be taken seriously."

At one point, I know that the Deputy Secretary, Mr. Christopher, had concluded that I really wasn't a serious person, and he was very upset by some of the things I had said in my telegrams. But at this point, I felt that I really didn't care. I was in that country risking my life every day. I was going to engage in all the gallows humor I wanted to. I was going to say things that I had on my chest and to hell with what anybody else thought. My staff was instructed to stop me if I went too far. And some of them are better at that than others. I've since read a number of these telegrams in the Department, and I put an awful lot of words is all I can say. There is a great historical record there for somebody, but they are going to have to dig through a mountain of verbiage.

Q: But it does point out one thing. You know, when talking to senior Foreign Service retired people and ask, "What makes a good Foreign Service Officer?" Really right at the top or almost equal to analytical ability is a sense of humor for the most part. Otherwise, I mean, this gets you through a lot of situations and gives you a certain amount of objectivity, don't you think?

PARKER: Yes. I was guided by Eisenhower's dictum that, "Always take your job but never yourself seriously." But, of course, the obverse of that is that if you don't take

yourself seriously, nobody else will. But I tried to maintain sort of a, you know, philosophical view of what was going on and to see the absurdity of what was being said and what was being done.

There wasn't much the Department could do. A. The only thing I can fault them for really was this toleration of the Israeli incursions into Lebanon. We were very wimpish about that, particularly in 1978, when we made a real effort to try to send Lebanese troops to the south, and we were balked by the Israelis, and Washington just did nothing about it. It really was very disappointing to me.

Q: Before we move on to your last assignment, could you talk a little about the staff at the embassy?

PARKER: In Beirut?

Q: In Beirut. How good were they? Bad? Problems?

PARKER: We had a lot of problems. Beirut was a volunteer post because it was dangerous. We couldn't be all that choosy. I had a couple of real doozies on my staff. People that in any normal service should have been selected out. One of them at least I heard was subsequently. People who were, you know, trying to get away from their wives. They said it was because they needed the money to buy special education for their child or something like that. But what it really was they wanted to go and live with a mama-san in Beirut or some place like that.

Q: You are describing the staff in Saigon in many cases.

PARKER: Yes, well, I think so.

Q: War does this.

PARKER: I asked for an officer to replace one that was leaving, and the only officer that they could come up with the qualifications was somebody who had been there before and whose purpose in coming we realized after he had got there was to take up with a Lebanese girlfriend leaving a wife and family back here in the United States. He got in trouble with my successor very quickly. He was moved on.

We had some very good people, some very good administrative people. I had the best security people I've ever had. This is sort of a rare bird in the security field, but I had a very good security team. I had an administrative officer, a couple of administrative officers who were first- class.

Q: Who are these, the administrative officers?

PARKER: Well, the first one was Chuck Baquet. The other was Robert Waska. Had a very good aid officer who was very hard working and effective.

I had a defense attaché whom I liked very much. I was very fond of him personally but who was forever putting his foot into it with the Lebanese. The Foreign Minister was always complaining about things that he had said. And I was always having to defend him, and the Foreign Minister didn't understand the context and so forth. He was a source of difficulty.

I had a good deputy Chief of Mission, George Lane, who went on to be ambassador to Yemen. He was a very solid and reassuring sort of fellow to have.

Q: Do you think it would make sense now to move to--

PARKER: Yes. Well, let's just explain the story of my departure. When I went out to Beirut, I said I would go for eighteen months, and at the end of eighteen months, I wanted the option of deciding whether or not I wanted to leave. It was very stressful. As a cardiac patient, I felt I didn't know how long I was going to last in this situation.

Toward the end of fifteen months in April or May, the people we thought killed Meloy, my predecessor, said that they were gunning for me. In spite of the security precautions, anybody who really wanted to get me could. If they really had the intelligence and the determination, they could get at me. The Secretary was very concerned about security, my security, and so were the security people. I had a very high profile. I was every where, and I was on the radio, and I was in the press, and on the television, and so forth. It was sort of diplomacy as theater, sort of an act.

I came home myself on consultation in May of 1978 and said that I would like to move on. I didn't want to leave at the end of eighteen months, but I thought two years which would be February of 1979 would be about the right time. Harry Barnes, the Director General, asked me if I was serious. I said, "Yes." So then I was asked where I would like to go. I said, "Where can I go?"

They said, "Any where you like."

I said, "I would like to go some place in Europe."

"Well, there is nothing open in Europe. There are two posts coming open, Rabat and Tunis."

I said, "Well, I have been to Rabat. I would much rather go to Tunis."

But the Department, in its wisdom, decided to send me to Rabat thinking they were doing me a favor. I left to go back to Beirut from consultation thinking I was going to Tunis in the following spring.

What happened was the Department pulled me out and sent me to Rabat in October. Sooner than I was ready to go and quite unwillingly. I didn't like the way the king treated ambassadors. Rabat is not an interesting town. I didn't want to go back. I didn't really know that I was the man for the job, and I wasn't because it turned out very badly. The king, after initially giving agrément, apparently didn't realize that I had been there during the two previous coup d'état attempts in which he suspected the Americans had some role. I think he became convinced that I had been sent by Jimmy Carter to pull the plug out from under him as he thought Jimmy Carter had done with the Shah.

Q: This is the Shah of Iran.

PARKER: Shah of Iran, yes.

Q: Just about that time.

PARKER: Yes, in early 1979, he arrived in Rabat essentially as a refugee. To make a long story short, in effect, the king asked for my recall, and I left there in June of '78--

Q: '79.

PARKER: '79 after eight months. And that was, in effect, the end of my career.

Q: Was this such a short time or were there any themes we should try to develop while you were there?

PARKER: Well, it's an interesting case study in what happens to an area specialist in a place like this.

The big issue when I got there was arms. People in the Department, the Assistant Secretary Hal Saunders and my predecessor in Rabat, Bob Anderson, thought they had settled it in a conversation with the king during the summer. The question was arms for use in the Sahara.

When I was talking about Algeria, I should have mentioned the move of the Moroccans into the western Sahara in 1975. The Algerians opposed this and began supporting the Polisario guerrilla against the Moroccans, and the Moroccans found themselves bogged down in a guerrilla war which was getting nastier and nastier and quite serious by 1978. They had gone in the Sahara, I am convinced, with encouragement from Kissinger. I think the historical record will show that some day.

The Carter administration came in. Vance came in. We got a regional approach as opposed to Kissinger's global approach. The regionalists in the Bureau of African Affairs were very concerned because the African countries were concerned about this Moroccan expansionism into the western Sahara. They opposed the use of American arms--and we'd

long had an arms supply arrangement with Morocco. They opposed the use of these arms in the Sahara.

The legal advisor of the Department, Herb Hansell, who has been a member of my board in the Association for Diplomatic Studies, issued what I call a fatwa or decree; F-A-T-W-A, it is what a mufti issues, M-U-F-T-I. It was a decree saying, in effect, arms we supplied under our military assistance program for the defense of Morocco could not be used in the Sahara because we did not recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara yet because there had been an act of self-determination for the Saharan people.

I had no idea this rain cloud was gathering when I went to Morocco. But it burst almost as soon as I got there over an issue of helicopters ordered from Augusta Bell, the Italian helicopter company that manufactures helicopters under license from Bell U.S.A. And because they are under license from an American company, our munitions control people still had a veto over their final export. The Department, in its wisdom, had informed the Italians that these helicopters could not be exported to Morocco unless the Moroccans gave us the commitment they would not be used in the Sahara.

This made the king very unhappy. At one point, he summoned me and the Italian Ambassador to Marrakech. Pretending he was talking to the Italian Ambassador--the two of us in the same room with him, sitting on the same couch--but actually talking to me saying in effect, if the Americans didn't give him these helicopters, they could forget about any kind of military cooperation with Morocco.

Although I had earlier opposed the Moroccan move into the Sahara, I thought it had been a mistake and I thought we should have opposed it. I knew Secretary Vance--because I had heard him say it--like Secretary Kissinger, thought that the creation of another mini-state there would be a mistake. And I felt, as long as I'm working for the Secretary, I've got to support his position. I am going to be a good soldier about this. After this conversation with King Hassan I sent a telegram saying, "You know, you people are expecting the Moroccans to do this and that for you. You are expecting them to send troops to Zaire to support Mobutu. You are expecting them to give security advice and training to people in the Persian Gulf area. You want some limited facilities out of them. You expect continued cooperation in terms of intelligence. If you want those things, the price of them is these helicopters. And you are going to have to release them."

Well, the Department changed its view and released the helicopters which I got credit from the Moroccan military but not from the King thanks in part to the country director in the Department who told the Moroccan Ambassador about it before telling me. So the Moroccan Ambassador could report it as though it was his accomplishment rather than mine. When I went to tell the Foreign Minister in the morning that we received the telegram, he said, "Well, I have just heard this from Ali Benjelloun, the ambassador." Ali Benjelloun, A-L-I B-E-N-J-E-L- L-O-U-N. He thought that Ali Benjelloun had pulled this off, he didn't realize that I had.

Shortly thereafter, the Shah arrived. He told the king that he had been dropped like an old slipper by the Americans. I think the king, perhaps provoked into this by the Minister of Interior, Driss Basri, D-R-I-S-S B-A-S-R-I, one of the more sinister people I have know in my career, and there were press reports and so forth indicating that Carter was anti-monarchical, he concluded that I had been sent--that I must have been involved in these earlier coup attempts--and that I had been sent to get rid of him. One of his complaints about me was that I knew too many people. He said ambassadors are not supposed to know that many people. They should be more discreet.

So that was the end of my Foreign Service career at that point. I left in June and came back. I was the advisor to the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base for a year while looking around for something else to do. I left in 1980.

Q: Let me ask a question here that concerns the Foreign Service as a career. Here you are a senior man having been ambassador in three places and been around. You come back, obviously you had been given a rough time by a monarch, could be the chief of state. I mean, this has happened to other people. You say it's a small group. That Harry Simms is one. King Hussein.

PARKER: And Hume Horan and myself.

Q: Hume Horan, King--

PARKER: Fahd of Saudi Arabia. All three of us were well-known Arabists.

Q: Did you feel any sort of rallying around and saying, "Boy, you have been given a rough deal, let's do something nice for you." Or was it sort of you have been touched with the equivalent of Foreign Service leprosy, and there was the sort of general idea of, you know, I hope you just fade away. Did you feel this or not?

PARKER: Well, my friends at NEA were supportive in the sense that they arranged to give me a medal. I was given the Distinguished Service Award to show the Moroccans that I was highly regarded. They took their time about sending a replacement out for me who was Angie Duke. They decided not to send a career officer there for the time being, and they haven't so far. That's ten years now.

The Director General was not very helpful. Largely because the Under Secretary, Mr. Christopher, was not helpful. I am told that--I don't know how true this is--but I am told by somebody who is in the position to know that Mr. Christopher had vetoed me for several places that had been suggested.

Actually, in all fairness to the Department, I was offered several jobs that would have been interesting. I was offered the economic and social ambassadorship at New York. I didn't take it because at that point, I really was exhausted. I just didn't want to take the stress. I had had a medical problem of vertigo brought on by stress which I have been

fighting for seven years. I just didn't want to put up with it. I wanted to go off to some place restful for a while and think about it, which is why I agreed to go to Maxwell Air Force Base.

I was offered an NIO job, a National Intelligence Officer job, by Stansfield Turner at the CIA which would have been fun, but I would have been cutoff at the knees when Casey came in.

I'm quite sure that if I had wanted to hang in there, I would have gotten another post eventually. I just had to go have a cooling off period, a decontamination period some where. I couldn't ever consider going to an Arab monarchy, but I didn't particularly want to anyway. And there wasn't any Arab post I was interested in serving at anymore. I mean, I was tired of the Arab world. I wanted to get out for a while and there were a lot of other things that I wanted to do. I really wasn't very interested. I felt it was demeaning to go around trying to wiggle my way into places as some of my colleagues have done. I just wasn't interested in that. I was concerned for my self-respect as well as for my health. We had been abroad for almost ten years, and I really didn't want to go back. I wanted to be with my family. For a whole bunch of reasons, I decided that I had had it. I had done everything that I had ever set out to do in my career and more. I thought it was time to let somebody else take on.

Q: I can echo. Fair enough. Dick, actually you helped set up, in fact you set up, some of the basic questions for the Association for Diplomatic Studies. So at this point is where I ask what things of greatest significance do you feel that you have accomplished. You already mentioned two. One was your work in Jordan concerning the water.

PARKER: Yes.

Q: And the other one was you felt that you really did put relations with Algeria back on a solid basis. Would those stand would you say, or is there anything else that you would like to add?

PARKER: Well, no, you know, it's sort of hard to point to real milestones of accomplishment. On the strictly personal side, in some respects my greatest accomplishment other than these two was that I was the first non-Arab to get an S-4 R-4 rating in Arabic. I set out to try to establish myself as something of an authority on the Arab world, and I succeeded in that to a degree that I am able today to practice as a pundit of the third-class in Washington. I am able to pontificate on Near Eastern matters in the media from time to time.

It was a very satisfying career. I can't think of anything I would have rather have done. I have no nostalgia to go back and do any of it again. It was great while it lasted. My wife keeps saying that the most fun was when I was a political officer. But when I got above the rank of political counselor, then I had to start worrying about morale and entertaining people that I really wasn't interested in.

Q: My best job was chief of the consular section in Belgrade.

PARKER: Yes.

Q: Well, the last question. A young man or a young woman comes to you today and says, "What about the Foreign Service as a career?" How would you advise them today?

PARKER: I get this question frequently. I say to them what I have just said to you. I can't think of anything I would have enjoyed better. I never had a dull moment. I was never bored. There was always something new. Always something interesting. If someone is interested in travel and possibly adventure and is interested in other people in other regions and is reasonably bright, I recommend it. I recommend it highly. It's not for everybody. But certainly I can't think of any other career that I know of that I would have found as satisfying.

Q: Well, Dick, I want to thank you very much.

PARKER: My pleasure.

End of interview