

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

AMBASSADOR NICHOLAS PLATT

Interviewed by: Paul McCusker
Initial interview date: July 25, 1994
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INTERVIEW

[Note: This transcript was not edited by Ambassador Platt]

Q: This is Paul McCusker interviewing Ambassador Nicholas Platt in his office at 725 Park Avenue, the headquarters of the Asia Society, of which he is president. It is Monday, July 25, 1994. Mr. Ambassador, would you care to identify yourself by spelling out your name.

PLATT: N-i-c-h-o-l-a-s P-l-a-t-t.

Q: Thank you very much. Mr. Ambassador, first of all I know you were born in New York City where we are now sitting. Could you tell me the date of your birth?

PLATT: I was born on March 10, 1936.

Q: I know you came into the Foreign Service as a career back in 1959. What led you to come into the Foreign Service?

PLATT: Well, there were a number of things. One was that I was a member of an organization called the Winant Volunteers back when I was in college. This was one of those forerunners of the Peace Corps which sent people overseas, in this particular case to London--the East End of London--to rebuild the parts of the city which had been bombed out. That was the original purpose. Then, to staff boys clubs and settlement houses, etc. and I found myself in one of those jobs in the summer of 1955 when I was a nineteen year old between junior and sophomore year at college.

Q: Which college?

PLATT: I was at Harvard. I found myself representing the United States in the oldest Orthodox Jewish boys club in the world, which is smack in the middle of the East End of London. I was trying to justify and defend US policies before a very smart group of Jewish cockney boys. I liked it, but the main thing was that all of these kids I was working with made up their mind as to what they were going to do long before any of us did. It was inconceivable that a nineteen year old American didn't know what profession he was going into. So they asked me incessantly about this and I thought about it much, much earlier than most as a result. I found that I liked what I was doing, which was representing the United States and its points of view in a different culture and I wondered what kind of an analog there was in adult life, and the Foreign Service seemed to be the closest. I started thinking hard about the Foreign Service at that point.

Another influence on me was Charles Bohlen, "Chip" Bohlen, who was my father's roommate at college. When I started moving in this direction I started paying attention to him and his career. I met him a couple of times and we talked. And that moved me in this direction. I took my first set of Foreign Service exams when I was still a senior in college and failed them--not the written, but the orals. I then went to Johns Hopkins under the advice of Paul Nitze who was an important person in that school, and still is, and took them again. My sense from the Foreign Service authorities was that their doubts about me was that I was very young and they didn't really know whether I was serious about this and that it was going to take two full tries before they would be convinced. So the next year I tried again and made it.

Q: I see you promptly got a consular job in the Windsor consulate in Ontario. How did you like that as an introduction to Foreign Service work?

PLATT: The Windsor consulate was a place where lots of people started and ended their careers. Foy Kohler started his career there. And, lots of people who were not as illustrious ended their careers there. It was a very unprepossessing post. Its main job was visas. I learned a lot about visas. I had taken the consular course when I was at FSI, but I took the correspondence course again because I found myself in effect running a busy visa section. My boss was an alcoholic and a very nice man but his basic concern was that he not sign a sour visa. I could do pretty much what I liked if that was...

Q: Was it a two man post?

PLATT: It was a four man post. My immediate boss was an alcoholic and my overall boss was an incompetent, so I had a lot to do. I learned the visa laws cold because I found myself in the position of being judge and jury to people who could see the promised land over my shoulder out the windows of the consulate and who were accompanied by very smart visa lawyers who came across from the American side, and as a 25-26 year old I had better know what I was talking about. So in the end I did. I learned a lot about how to run an office, how to manage people, and how to say "no." I learned a great deal about my own country because I found myself really in the middle of the middle west and as a Yankee easterner from New York, this was a foreign country to me.

Q: I grew up in Niagara Falls, New York, which, of course, had an American consulate on the Canadian side. The consul there, who my mother knew, lived on the American side. Did you live on the American side?

PLATT: I lived on the Canadian side because I thought that was very important. One of our people did live on the American side. But the Canadians really felt strongly about it and being so close to us and so close to such a huge city and economic zone, they were enormously sensitive about their sovereignty. You had to convince them that you thought they were sovereign, and the first way to do that was to live in Windsor, itself.

Q: Now what got you onto the language training, were you particularly interested in China at that time?

PLATT: I went into the Foreign Service as an European specialist trained in German and French and well grounded in European history. I had done my thesis on the passage of the Marshall Plan through Congress, so I had a smattering of American government as well. As soon as I got into the Foreign Service I found that Europe was full up, it was full up in a lot of ways. Everybody wanted to go there. All the posts were full. You practically had to wait for someone to die before you could get a job. The jobs which you could get weren't very good. The policies had already been lined out. At that time what passed as policy formulation was really just manipulation of nuances.

I was steered in the direction of China by a number of coincidences. One, running into a friend in FSI who was taking Chinese language and who seemed to me to be an incongruous choice for such a specialty. But he convinced me that it was a ground floor from where there was nowhere to go but up. The whole region was important to us but had not really been paid much attention to. There were lots of good jobs out there and lots of responsibility. And then, of course, I looked at Bohlen's record and he had made a very good career out of picking very early on in his career a specialty that no one else had an eye on. He had decided, rightfully so, that the United States was one day going to have to have a very important relationship with Russia. He learned the language, did his homework and labored in the vineyards, and he was right and rode that elevator right up to the top. I thought that if he could do it maybe I could do it too as far as China was concerned. It was with a certain amount of romanticism that I went into it but, actually I found that the learning of the language was interesting and the ability to ultimately communicate in Chinese to the Chinese people was very satisfying to me and exciting, and I felt that the Department was giving me something that they couldn't take away. It cost \$50,000 in those days to train a China specialist. I suppose it is six or eight times that now.

Q: Of course, in those days too there were a lot of younger officers who had the same realization that you had that maybe the answer to their career prospects was to learn a hard language such as Russian, Chinese or Indonesian.

PLATT: Well, I felt a hard language represented a kind of rudder in the Service. We were all supposed to be capable of serving anywhere but I felt the Windsor assignment really kind of tore the scales from my eyes. I mean, it wasn't what you knew it was what you could persuade the government to spend money on so that they would have to justify that assignment to Congress that would move you in the direction you wanted to go. So if you were a real cynic you would say, "Find me a hard language specialty that is expensive and interesting and work at that, make it happen and you will have a rudder in the Foreign Service." And I think it did work.

Q: Of course, you also got assigned fairly quickly to deal with China. You went to Hong Kong after Taiwan.

PLATT: I was very lucky because my predecessors at the language school, just a year or two before I graduated, all went to the Hong Kong consular section. They were very disappointed. They had all had a consular tour and felt that to go through two years of language training and then end up with another consular tour just wasn't fair, except for those who were consular specialists, who were very few. This was a very competent bunch of people including Morton Abramowitz. They bitched like hell and by the time my graduation came around the issue was so neuralgic that they decided that they would take the new China language graduates and put them in the more substantive jobs if they possibly could. I found myself given a choice of jobs either in the domestic section that dealt with Mainland domestic political affairs, or the external section which was dealing with the Sino-Soviet polemics and was the hot topic of the time. I lucked out in the sense that someone's father died and he had to leave and I could take my choice. I chose internal politics and that was greeted with some raised eyebrows.

Q: Was Marshall Green already...

PLATT: Marshall Green had left already. I inherited his tailor. But Marshall was gone and there were a number of other people who came along.

Q: Of course, Marshall came to Jakarta from the Department, but his previous post had been Hong Kong.

PLATT: Right, and he was much liked there.

Q: Jakarta didn't like him very much.

PLATT: Well, neither did Henry. Marshall was always very forthright about his views.

Q: I suppose that internal Chinese watching made you a natural for intelligence and research watching the Asian countries?

PLATT: Well, what it did was...I chose it because I wanted to use the language that I had learned and this was the job that had the most language usage. I would tell people who asked why I didn't want to go into the hotter topic, "Well, I just want to learn the names of

the players and find out what we are all reporting on. I regard the China specialty not so much a thing in itself but as an avenue to Asia and I would like to do that." And I did. For a year it was very, very mundane and I wrote dispatches that were mailed and were learned and long and about things like the Party and the youth movement, birth control, etc. But I learned the territory. Then the Cultural Revolution began about a year later and after that, that became the hot topic and I found myself the main analyst for domestic affairs on the Mainland. I was writing a cable every day and clearing it with the consul general personally. I did that for three and a half more years.

Q: When did you go to Washington?

PLATT: I went in 1968. First to the Desk and then became the head of the China watchers community. I had the great benefit of having a boss, Ed Rice, who was the consul general, who would let other people have their views. We had a basic disagreement as to what was happening in China in the Spring of 1967. He asked me to write a big long study of it which I did. It concluded that while there was chaos on the Mainland and every city was engaged in factual fighting that if Mao Zedong decided to do so, he could call the army in and quell this and bring things back under control. The point of no return had not been reached yet, although it was coming fast.

Ed Rice disagreed. He felt that the point of no return had been reached and that China was in kind of an inevitable downward spiral towards disintegration. I went through four drafts of this with him and we argued and talked about every aspect of it. In the end he said, "Well, this is a very good piece. I am not going to change your view and I think that your view should go in as it stands. But I want to append to it my own view." I said, "Great," knowing everybody would read that. And it did go in and I then went on home leave. While I was on home leave, Mao called in the military and restored law and order. So, I didn't have to say, "I told you so," I just wasn't there. Then I came back and we were on to the next thing. When they were looking for a person to take over the China watchers job in the Department, that gave me a leg up.

Q: Then you got off into what looks like administration in away, in the Executive Secretariat. Was that correct, or were you still in the China watching business?

PLATT: In 1971, I had been working on China either as a language student or an analyst for nine years. I was absolutely sick of it and sort of burned out and my gorge would rise if I heard Mao Zedong, or some of these other names. The managers of my career, such as they were, and it was basically me, felt that I was too narrow and felt that the Inspectors all felt that I had been a prisoner of the Cultural Revolution, and that I should have been doing other things. I threw myself on the mercy of the system and asked them to find me something else. I would be interested in administration, staff work, something that is different and gives me a broad view of the Foreign Service and the Department. The Secretariat is always looking for people who are competent in their fields but want to broaden out and they asked me to come and work for them, which I did very happily. I trotted around with Secretary Rogers to all of these various different events; ran the

Secretariat staffing programs for his daily work, etc. It got a look at the way the Ops Center worked, although I didn't work in it. I was working on the Line in the Secretariat Staff. I came to run it, Director of the Secretariat Staff, in due course.

The luck of it was that when Kissinger came back from China and started working on the organization of the Nixon trip, they cut down the numbers that the President took with him and the Secretary took with him. The Secretary was only allowed to take with him one person from his immediate staff, including his secretary, three interpreters, two substantive advisors and one administrative person who would run the logistics of the whole trip. Rogers was first told that the Executive Secretary is going to have to personally handle the management of all of these briefing papers--the production of them, the clearance of them, the brokerage of them with the White House, etc. The Executive Secretary was Ted Elliott at the time who was a Middle Eastern, Central Asian specialist. He said, "There is no way that I am going to do that, but Mr. Secretary I have a guy here on your staff who knows these issues cold, who knows how to put these things together and who could go with you on your trip." "Oh." Anyway, I was called into the Secretary's office for an interview. I thought he might ask if I had done anything that might embarrass him, etc. But he said, "I am looking for someone as my executive assistant for the purposes of the trip. I can't take my own one because he is a Latin American specialist. It would involve basically four or five weeks preparing the papers, three weeks for the trip itself possibly. Would you take this on?" "I would be delighted." And I never would have gotten the job if I had been in the East Asia Bureau. I was ushered to a locked room by Ted Elliott. The door was unlocked and there were all my colleagues sitting around at the Wang doing briefing papers. I was supposed to answer all the questions about how these things were supposed to look, and what they were supposed to say and what they were supposed to address.

Q: Was Marshall still Assistant Secretary?

PLATT: Yes Marshall was still Assistant Secretary at that time and I worked very closely with him. We put the things together. It was all very closely held. We would go to meetings over at the White House and talk to the likes of Al Haig and Win Lord and Henry Kissinger. Henry also ended up talking about the planning of the trip. It was absolutely fascinating. I had a great time. I went on the trip...

Q: When was that?

PLATT: It was January, 1972. That visit was an amazing visit and for someone like myself it was a real eyeopener. I remember in Hawaii, first of all, taking cables to the Secretary of State when we were stopping over just to get ourselves kind of climatized, and I found myself sitting in on a lunch involving Henry Kissinger and Marshall Green and William Rogers. It was very informal and they were talking about how to manage the substance of the trip, the briefing of the President and those kinds of things. It was interesting given the tenor of the times and the gossip of the time. Everybody thought that Rogers didn't have much of a role and that he was completely overshadowed by

Kissinger, and I think in many ways that was true, but what interested me was that during this particular lunch whenever they talked about the substance of the Shanghai Communique and the way to handle the issue between the two Chinas, etc., Kissinger did the talking and Marshall and Rogers did the listening. Whenever they talked about how to sell this to Congress, how to brief the President and how to get the President to deal with the Chinese approach to negotiation, it was Rogers who did the talking and Kissinger who did the listening, at least in the following sense. Let me give you one example. Kissinger said, "My experience with the Chinese is that they come on very strongly and they treat their strong positions as matters of principle. It is very important that you go back at them just as strong and be very tough and very forthright. They will respect a person for that. I don't think Nixon is going to do that because he is a lawyerly person. He would prefer to sort of take that on, back off and come at it again in sort of an elliptical way, come back around at it. So, Bill, when you have a chance, I hope you will raise this with the President and advise him that this is the way to deal with the Chinese." I sensed in that less of a sense of confidence on Kissinger's part as to who he was dealing with and how. And a sense of comfort on Rogers part that he was the guy who could talk about these things with Nixon.

Q: Presumably because of the common bond of the legal background perhaps?

PLATT: Oh, I think so and having a long background together. I also think that Rogers was very much more attuned to Congress, the press and that kind of thing as a Washington operator, and those were the things that he was asked to comment on and give his views on.

And I came away from my bird's eye view of this lunch feeling that wouldn't it have been better if Rogers had ended up as Nixon's Presidential Advisor in the White House and Kissinger as Secretary of State right off the bat. The answer is probably yes, but...

Q: Kissinger was Nixon's Advisor at the time wasn't he?

PLATT: Yes. And there was this intense rivalry. Of course during the trip the appointment with Mao Zedong came up very suddenly as these did given Mao's health, and Rogers wasn't around and didn't go. Kissinger didn't stop and say, "Go get Rogers," they just went and Rogers wasn't included. That was a huge lost of face for William Rogers.

Q: Marshall went didn't he?

PLATT: No, I don't think he did. I think it was only Win Lord and the President and Mao. This rankled but Rogers never let on. He was the total gent and very, very comfortable with himself, a complete grownup in every way.

It was fascinating for me to see how Zhou En-lai worked. He was in charge of the whole trip. He did everything from the makeup of the Peoples Daily, and you would see aides

bringing him the front page proofs and he would move the articles around. He would even do this at public events, at basketball games, gymnastic events, etc. But Zhou En-lai, when we were in Shanghai, completely unannounced came to call on William P. Rogers. We were in the Shanghai guest house which is a big apartment building with an elevator that went to--there was sort of one suite on each floor...I just went back there this May and I looked at the place and it has been completely redone... But the elevator door opened and there was Zhou En-lai, the Foreign Minister, and the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee which later became known as the Gang of Four. They asked if William Rogers was in and I went and knocked on his door. We were just unpacking after having gotten in from Hanchou and said, "Mr. Secretary, Premier Zhou is here." "Oh," he said, "I will be right out."

Well, you know how protocol conscious the Chinese are. Everything has to be worked out way in advance. Anyway, we went into a nice sunny room in the suite and sat down on big chairs. I looked at the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee and noticed one has very fancy leather boots. The old Foreign Minister has his long underwear peeking out from under his pants, as all good long marchers did. And Zhou had his interpreter, Nancy Tong, who later became one of Mao's oracles and suffered for it. She was a Brooklyn girl born, brought up Chinese and a native speaker of both languages. Zhou En-lai in the course of this impromptu tea went through the history of China's opening to the United States seen from the standpoint of the Chinese leadership. And he said that Mao Zedong was the first one to notice Nixon's article in the Council of Foreign Relations' Foreign Affairs magazine. He underlined the translation of this article that said that we must make an opening to China, etc., as a way of giving ourselves more flexibility. He said to read this because it was important. He then went on to tell us that yes, China had its gold waters too, people who weren't any way interested in dealing with the demon, himself. Anyway it was a very graceful and interesting performance. When Rogers and I sat around and mused afterwards as to what it was about, it was clearly him saying that he was sorry that Rogers had gotten shortchanged and this was his way of making up for that.

Q: Isn't that interesting.

PLATT: That was my interpretation and I think it was valid. Zhou was one of these people who really paid a lot of attention to detail and was a very, very careful and thorough going politician. I remember in Peking at a small dinner given for Nixon and members of the delegations by their opposite numbers and nobody from the outside, there were about 35 or 40 people all together, we were all standing around having tea ahead of time and it was the first time that all the delegations had been together, there were three delegations. Nixon and Zhou were talking about politics. Henry Kissinger and his kind of opposite number were negotiating the language of the Shanghai Communique. William Rogers and the Foreign Minister, were talking about concrete measures to follow up--consular, trade, facilitation--what to do next.

We were standing around, it was the first time we had been together and the President was over there in the corner talking, about that far away. Zhou En-lai came up to me and said, "I understand that you know Chinese and I am planning to give the toast to the President of the United States tonight and I want to do a quotation from a poem by Chairman Mao which will set forth the benefits of visits to the Great Wall. Tomorrow he will go to the Great Wall and this line says that you don't become a man until you have been to the Great Wall. I hope you think that is appropriate." I said, "Well, yes, Mr. Premier Zhou, I think that is very appropriate." At that point Henry Kissinger came bursting right between us on his way to the President who was over there. But Henry was very uncomfortable about people on his delegations talking the language of the hosts and talking to them directly, particularly their leaders and so, I sensed that there was some plan in this.

But the important thing to me was that Zhou had read the briefings carefully enough to know that the junior most person engaged in any of these substantive exchanges, the lowest note taker, and thought it was worth going up to talking to this guy and that this might make a difference some day. It was indicative of Zhou and the way he operated and why the Chinese were genuinely sad when he died.

Q: He could see you were a comer.

PLATT: I don't know, but I did see him again when I went back, when the Liaison Office was set up. So, all of this was very much grist for my mill. The last night before the trip ended, I said to Rogers that I felt very strange because I had met Zhou and some of these people but had never met the President of the United States even though I was on his delegation. He said, "Well, you are right. Come to this meeting. We are going to have a meeting in which Marshall Green and John Holdridge will brief the President on their upcoming trip. After he leaves for Alaska tomorrow they are going to go to Japan and Korea and the Philippines, Taiwan and all of these places and tell them what happened. Why don't you come and listen in." "Oh, that would be great," I said.

Q: Who was this, Rogers?

PLATT: Yes. I had just said that I feel strange about this situation and he said that I was right and should come to the meeting. So what I remember, of course, is that I went to the meeting which was after the dinner and the Shanghai Communique had been signed and I guess we were off for America the next day. It was a great historic moment. I was a little early and only Rogers and Haldeman were there and the President. Haldeman had his crew cut on and was writing on a long legal yellow pad. Nixon was dressed in a flowered dressing gown over his shirt and trousers. In one hand he had a big cigar and in the other he had a big Scotch and soda. He was clearly enjoying the moment. John and Marshall came in and proceeded to go around the region. The interesting thing to me was that it was Nixon briefing them. He took each of the leaders and outlined an approach to the leader based on his own knowledge of the leader and the way that leader looked at these issues. When you talk to Sato in Japan I think you should emphasis the

following things because this is what his hang ups are. When you talk to Pachohé [phonetic] it is different, this is what he is worried about. Marcos, well, he really is only concerned with one thing. And it was a real tour de force. He just went right around the horn. Of course, it strengthened from my view my perception of him as the main foreign policy player. Henry Kissinger played a very important role in putting it all together and making it happen intellectually, but Nixon, himself, was no slouch.

Q: I think he showed that too with his talks with Marshall in Jakarta before he was President. They had a lot of very serious conversations about China. Now, I don't know who was briefing who because I wasn't there.

So you got to the Liaison Office and George Bush was there...

PLATT: No, George Bush was not there. I went there during the year that George Bush was not there. I went there when we first opened up. I was asked to be in the Liaison Office I guess on the strength of the fact that I had been on this trip. I was scheduled to go to Japan, having asked for Japan because I didn't think China would open up for a long time, to leave the Secretariat when I was supposed to leave in the spring of 1973 and go to Japanese language training for a year and then go to Tokyo and take the number two job in the political section. And I did that.

Well, I was called upon to go to China and be the head of the political section when the Liaison Office blew up. What I mean by that is it became an immediate reality, it suddenly blew up onto the horizon and I was asked to go. I thought it would be an historical opportunity and broke the assignment to Japan. I went and worked for a better part of a year with David Bruce. Bruce was the first of our heads of the Liaison Office.

Q: I had forgotten that.

PLATT: Yes. He was a wonderful man and totally inexperienced in China, but he was our senior most diplomat. It was a very strange office, I have to tell you, because this first year there was amazing. The way I pieced it together, Henry Kissinger told both John Holdridge and Al Jenkins that they would be the head of the Liaison Office when it was ultimately opened, and I think that he meant it. I think he perceived it as a small outfit with relatively low level leadership, just, for example, as the liaison office we are setting up in Vietnam now, is going to be. But the Chinese upped the ante by sending as head of their Liaison Office their senior most diplomat. He had been ambassador four or five times and was the one ambassador who had not been purged during the Cultural Revolution and the one ambassador who was a member of the Central Committee. So Kissinger had to respond and his response was to send our senior most diplomat who was David Bruce. But in order to somehow do right by Holdridge and Jenkins he sent them both as DCMs. We had two DCMs. We had ten officers. One chief, two deputies, three kind of heads of sections and some number twos and that was basically it. Well, it didn't work very well. The two DCMs canceled each other out. And so the counselor level people basically ran the place. But we will let that all come out in the wash.

In any case I worked through that first year. I got involved in a fatal accident which occurred in November. It was a broad daylight affair where I was driving my family to the Great Wall and a young girl, a 15 year old, pedaled in front of me. Just came right across my bow and I hit and killed her. I flagged down a truck and put her on the back of the truck, with the language I could do all of this, and took her to the hospital. It was the hospital that didn't deal with heads, only with broken limbs, so I took her to another hospital and she died there. The Chinese reacted to this in a very traditional way. After a month of investigations they found me responsible and assessed the insurance for this, damages to the family, etc. Then they called me in and said, "When a diplomat is involved in a fatal accident he or she invariably leave of their own accord." I said, "Fine, I will be gone in a month." They said, "Fine."

If I had stayed and fought about it I would have ultimately left not of my own accord. This has been a bone of contention amongst those who were working the issues, but I convinced Holdridge and all the others, and they agreed with me that this was the way to do it and that while we felt ill-used and that it was not a fair judgment that it was the right way to manage it. In subsequent years, the Germans had another similar situation in which someone who was trained as an interpreter and had absolutely no other job alternatives got involved in a fatal automobile accident and they fought it tooth and nail and in the end the person was PNGed.

So this is what we did. Kissinger was very kind to me. He was very supportive. People were all wringing their hands and saying, "Here you are our coming China guy and now you have to do something else."

Q: While you were talking I can't help remember this obituary. He must have been...

PLATT: I knew him. He was a wonderful man.

Q: He got a great write up.

PLATT: He looked as nice as his picture.

Q: He must have been involved because he was chief of protocol wasn't he?

PLATT: He ran the trip for Zhou. He was Zhou's right hand man. He was one of their top diplomats.

Q: How do you pronounce his name again?

PLATT: Han Xu.

But anyway I left and Kissinger said, "Well, you can have any job that you want provided that there is a China element in it, because even if you say that this is a traditional thing, I

think that the way they have handled it deprives us from your services and China experience and I don't want them to think that the way they have handled that will have that impact. So you can take any job you want but it has to have a China element." I said, "Well, how about this job in Tokyo. It is the senior job in the political section under the counselor, deals with foreign policy, covers China's policy towards Japan and vice versa as well as towards Korea, Southeast Asia, Russia, etc." He said, "Fine." So I went and just did what I was going to do minus about a half year of language training.

Q: You didn't have any language training?

PLATT: I had a half year, but I really didn't need it for the job because it as essentially a Foreign Office job and I was dealing Japanese diplomats who were much more frank to me in English than they would have been in Japanese, which is one of those true facts. I always found I was much more frank with the Chinese when I was speaking their language because I felt nobody in my language could understand what I was saying and furthermore to get down to the basics you had to cut a lot of corners. You didn't have the nice nuances that enable you to obfuscate the way we do. So the Japanese would tell me all kinds of things that they wouldn't tell in Japanese.

Q: How long were you in Tokyo?

PLATT: I was in Tokyo almost four years and I became thoroughly embedded in the US-Japanese relations and the life in Japan. I really enjoyed it and the family really enjoyed it. It was a lot easier place to live than Beijing. The Japanese were a lot easier to deal with than the Chinese. And the contrasts were so marked. It was to me so interesting to have a full hands on experience in both countries. I had wanted that long before the Liaison Office position came up. I really thoroughly enjoyed it. I found the language training a great therapy from all the difficulties we had been through in China. It was just like going out and sawing wood.

Q: Then you went back to Washington, I gather, around 1978?

PLATT: I went back to Washington in 1977 to the Japan Desk. I was lucky. They were looking for a Japan country director and there were people more senior than me who had more Japan experience. The new Assistant Secretary was Dick Holbrooke who was a younger guy who was not attracted to the older Japan hands who were served up to him as possible Japan country directors. He asked me, who he knew, I had known him for years, whether I would like the job, and I said, "Yes." I was an FSO-3 and it was an FSO-1 job, so I grabbed it. I spent a year and a half doing that. It was during Mansfield's first year. Then I spent two years working for Brzezinski on Japan and Korea on the NSC. I really spent my time persuading President Carter to leave the troops in Korea. I did that in a variety of elliptical bureaucratic ways. Then I went over to the Defense Department to work for a year for Harold Brown.

The Carter years for me were very instructive because I had a chance to deal with the same set of issues but from three different bureaucratic points of view--the State Department, the White House and Defense Department. We had a kind of round robin going in which people at the deputy assistant secretary level, all of whom knew each other, were taking these jobs one after the other. So we had a very tight coordination mechanism in which each of us were able to represent our institutions and their points of view, but not with the suspicions that came from not knowing each other and what you were dealing with. So, when Vance, Brzezinski or Brown were talking to each other about an issue that couldn't be decided at a lower level, they not only knew what they were supposed to say from their own institution's point of view, they knew what the other institutions were thinking. So it worked very well.

Q: That must have been exciting. How did you get involved in the international organization field?

PLATT: Well, that was serendipitous. What happened was, Jimmy Carter lost the election and ISA in the Defense Department was struck like a tent. That is what happens in ISA. The State Department maintains its ziggurat as do the various different service organizations in the Pentagon. But the civilian foreign policy establishment in the Pentagon is considered a major patronage institution and therefore is reshaped, taken down and put back up again every time. So I was out of a job. But the person who replaced me was Rich Armitage, who I had known a little bit, but who I got to know better. I gave him some good pointers about how to get established and get going and made a friend of him early on. But I was a senior Foreign Service officer experienced in the ways of the Department who had worked in the White House, in the Defense Department, the Secretariat...

Q: You had been around the bases, so to speak.

PLATT: I had been around the bases. I was sort of a hired gun looking for somebody who needed my services and it turned out to be Elliott Abrams who was coming on board as Assistant Secretary for International Organizations. I told him, "Look, I don't know anything about international organizations or the UN, but I do know a lot about the bureaucracy and the foreign policy establishment and how things work in Washington." He said, "As far as I am concerned, not knowing about the UN is not a drawback for us."

Q: How did you like the international field once you got into it?

PLATT: Well, I did a survey of the issues that the International Organizations Bureau worked on for Elliott, who was very bright and who I liked. He turned out to be a controversial guy, but I found him a lot of fun to work with. He needed the kind of information and knowledge that I had. He was a very young guy and Jeane Kirkpatrick was the PermRep up there. So it was a complicated job requiring all the diplomatic skills I could muster.

What I told Elliott after having looked over the field of issues that we dealt with, "In the International Organizations Bureau and the UN in general you have a wide variety of patronage jobs and a wide variety of jobs to fill and that's why it is kind of politically interesting to a political appointee. As far as creativity is concerned, doing some actual policy formulation, if that is what you are interested in, the only area in which there is potential for this is in Africa, the Namibia issue, because that is the only one which is really cooking now. The rest of the time we are sweeping up after either the Israelis or the South Africans and dispensing a fair amount of assistance here and there. So, you should get yourself involved in all of those meetings involving Chet Crocker, involving Secretary Haig and others. I will help you with the rest. You get on to Chet's team because there is a very valid IO/UN element to that whole settlement and there is a very valid African one, and this is a joint venture." And he did.

A few months later he was asked to become the new Assistant Secretary for Human Rights. He was somebody who cared deeply about those things and convinced the Reagan administration that they had to have one because the Carter administration had one and if they didn't it would look like they didn't care. So they said, "Okay, baby, you are it." And he went. And I found myself acting assistant secretary for a good seven months until they found another political appointee.

Q: Who was that?

PLATT: I will think of his name in a second. He was a young Mormon, a very nice guy who had worked in the White House scheduling office. He was very competent, very friendly, very nice. He was brand new and knew nothing about international organizations. But I got him through the process and then went on to Zambia as ambassador. I had done exactly what I told Elliott to do. Elliott had gotten himself firmly entrenched in all of the negotiations with the South Africans, the Europeans, the Angolans, the Namibians..

Q: Well, Lusaka was the headquarters for the front line states, wasn't it?

PLATT: That's right, at that time. So Chet asked me, "Would you like to go to Lusaka as ambassador? You and I know each others moves and I would have a person who has regional clout and who knows these issues so I won't have to go there every time there is something to say. Obviously I will come for the important things, but I would like you to go there and be that as well as the bilateral ambassador." I said, "Fine." I was delighted to do that. So it was one of those Foreign Service things that happen. You trade on your experience, you find a new niche and you take it where it will lead you. Well, it led me to Zambia.

Q: It led you to Africa and the Namibia.

PLATT: I was very pleased to have that opportunity. I was around for the negotiation of withdrawal of South African from Angola, which lasted for about a year and was a

precursor to other agreements that came later. I loved working with Chet Crocker, who I think is one of the really tough, resilient people who has worked on foreign policy.

Q: I am sure you got to meet Ahti Saari?

PLATT: I knew Ahti Saari but haven't seen him since he became President of Finland. I would love to go call on him at some point.

Q: He is quite a guy. I worked with him on certain aspects of the Namibia at the UN Mission, UNTAG as we called it for years. It was all laid out in 1978 but it wasn't until several years later that it came to pass.

PLATT: I think there was almost a Namibian agreement at the time of...when was it, 1978?

Q: No, 1978 was when the Security Council resolution was adopted that set up the whole thing on the expectation that it would be implemented.

PLATT: I remember going in my capacity as Japan Desk officer going up and sitting in on conversations between Cy Vance and the Japanese leaders and talking about UNTAG. And, of course, I had UNTAG in huge quantities later on when they tried to figure out what it should be and how many people, etc. We never got to use it while I was around.

But that is why I went to Africa. I went to Africa because I went into International Organizations Affairs and I went into International Organizations Affairs because a young, raw, political appointee in that field wanted an experienced hand who was close enough to his age so there was some connection.

Q: After Zambia you went back to the Department and took over the Executive Secretariat.

PLATT: This again is one of those things that happens when... The person who put my name before George Shultz was Charles Hill. Charlie Hill was the guy who was my main help in analyzing Mainland affairs in Hong Kong in 1966. He and I were friends and had kept up with each other. We had gone on to others things and different things. But he knew me to be a bureaucrat in the positive sense of the word, in the constructive sense of the word, as well as a diplomat. Charlie Hill was both Shultz's Executive Secretary and his Executive Assistant, which is Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside simultaneously and that is really too hard even for a workaholic like Charlie. He was always after Shultz to get an Executive Secretary. Shultz said he wouldn't do it until after the election. So the minute the reelection occurred, Hill was on the phone to me and said, "Would you like to do this even though you still have another six months as ambassador? You would have to come back early." I said, "Sure, I would like to do it." That was the job I had always liked the look of. I was thoroughly familiar with the Secretariat and the way it looked. Shultz, himself, had an approach to it that was very close to my ideal of the job. And my sister

was dying. All those things were happening at the same time. So, I saw this as an opportunity of being home during a very difficult period and also a job I wanted to have. So I did it.

Q: And it seems to me you had some children who were coming along.

PLATT: Oh, they were all out of the nest and had lives of their own far away from us.

So, I went back and the deal with Shultz was you work for two years and then go on to something else. And that is the way it should be in that job where you get to work at 6:45am and go home at 8:00pm five days a week and then come in for five hours on Saturday and two hours on Sunday, and do that for two years. Then you go on to your reward.

Q: Well, you got a pretty good reward, I would say, Manila.

PLATT: Well, the job, itself, was very well worth doing, reward or no and I was very fortunate to have Shultz. He really wanted to use the Foreign Service and the State Department bureaucracy the way it was set up. The various Secretaries have had different approaches. Dulles, Baker and others brought their staffs in and wanted to have something set apart. They would use the building as needed, but basically they didn't have much confidence in the machinery as it was set up. Shultz arrived the day he came to work in 1982 with a battered professor's grip and said, "Let's go to work." He didn't even change secretaries. That was how he started and we worked out a system with him where by he got to see a lot of people each day, just for a short period of time, so that they would feel that they were plugged into the Secretary of State. Charlie Hill took care of the Mr. Inside stuff and I took care of the Mr. Outside stuff. I plugged the Secretary into the bureaucracy and Charlie made sure that the quality of what he received was really good. We worked very closely together with a lot of overlap. The people in the Department felt well used.

Q: Shultz was a pretty popular Secretary.

PLATT: In every sense of the word. When Shultz left there was an enormous outpouring. The lobby was packed. He was a rather stolid figure but he came across as somebody who really cared and who understood about ideas and understood what all these people did all day long. And they looked out for him, they protected him. They would not let things come up and bit him.

Q: You did what you were getting paid to do.

PLATT: And I think that is right. It is a lot easier with a Secretary who wants to use the machinery as constituted and will take you into his confidence...and throw you out the minute you betray him.

Q: So then off to Manila. I guess you had a particularly big issue there with the bases, which came up in your tenure didn't they?

PLATT: Yes. There were two major issues. One was the survival of the government and the other was the future of the bases. It made for a very, very complicated and difficult assignment. I arrived, presented my credentials in three days and two days later there was a major coup attempt. Gringo Honasan tried to overthrow the government. I got to know the members of the government really fast. My job was to try to make sure that Mrs. Aquino held her job without making it look like we were doing very much. And that was very hard to do. There was another big coup attempt in December in which we flew planes from Clark that were essentially a demonstration. But I went through major shell and shot in our efforts to support that government. And at the same time to fashion a bases agreement that would work and develop a constituency in the Philippines that would support it. My feeling was that in the new democracy, if you could fashion a really clear consensus in keeping that basing arrangement throughout the country that the Philippine Senate would have to obey it.

Q: They were the ones who eventually rejected it.

PLATT: Right. And I was successful in creating that consensus. We traveled all over the country and opened schools, etc. and I felt like a domestic politician. I was kissing babies and doing all those things. And I liked it. I thought it was interesting. It was dangerous, but interesting. I was on the top of the New Peoples Army hit list, and the Right didn't like me either. So security was always an element of concern. And the government was wobbly and there were a lot of natural disasters. It was a time that Job was born to deal with. So we dealt with it. When I left 3 years and 11 months later, which is the record for an American ambassadorship in the Philippines...I was longer there than anybody, including Hank Byroade who was there for 3 years and 8 months. I am the holder of that record, enviable or not. When I left we did have an agreement, which was subsequently rejected by the Philippine Senate. And I dare say in the context of the Cold War ending and 80 American bases being closed in the United States the following year, our own Senate would have had trouble with it too. But that was then and this is now. I felt that the most important indication that my ambassadorship had meant something...it really didn't occur until after I had been gone for over a year...was when she handed over to a duly elected successor. Then I could say to myself, "This trip was worthwhile."

Q: Why didn't she want to run again?

PLATT: She never wanted to run again. She felt that she had an historical duty to lead her country through the transition from a dictatorship to democracy. She felt that she had no choice, that this was the legacy of her husband's assassination, that there was really nobody else who could do it. She had this sense of divine calling as far as that was concerned. She was not good at governing. She was very good at hanging in. She was very brave and tough. She performed best when she was under fire. But when she wasn't under fire and there was this or that particular bill to be gotten through congress or

decision to be brokered through the various agencies, it wasn't easy for her. She wasn't able to show the gratitude that one would have expected one to show to a foreign government. You would have expected that her government would have been much less equivocal about bases negotiations, etc., but the fact of the matter was that our help and our support and our being there during earthquakes and volcanoes, etc. just made it harder for them. It put them under more pressure to show that they were not being taken for granted and standing up to the Yankees, etc.

Q: Did you go from Manila directly to Pakistan?

PLATT: Yes, directly.

Q: How long were you there?

PLATT: About a year and a month.

Q: Well then Benazir was out when you got there.

PLATT: Yes, Benazir was out when I got there. I think I was picked for the job because I had a proven track record as a person who could deal successfully with inexperienced women heads of government in new democracies. I am serious. There is no other reason they would have thought of me for Pakistan. I am not a Muslim specialist, although I have China connections and that is one of their strong peripheral relationships. So, in terms of size of mission it was fine but I think the connection in somebody's mind was the qualifications that had been established in Manila, which were not area qualifications. But, by the time I got there it was an all male orchestra, which was fine. I enjoyed Pakistan a lot. I didn't change anything. I may have improved the tone of our relationship a little bit, but that was something that was going to happen with the passage of time. We didn't make any progress on the nuclear issues, we didn't make any progress on really any issues, as far as I could tell. We dealt with the cut off in aid, we tried to make the best of a difficult situation.

Q: Is aid still cut off?

PLATT: Aid is still cut off, but there are certain kinds of aid that we can provide. But it was valuable to me because I got a look at another part of Asia and got an introduction to South Asia that really interested me. I spent quite a lot of time traveling in Pakistan. I got around to all the various parts of Pakistan.

Q: Did you get to Kashmir?

PLATT: Well, I got to the part of Kashmir that the Pakistanis administer. And I got all over the country. I thought it extremely interesting and exotic. It was the year that the Soviet Union broke up and the Afghanistan war ended and the mujahideen left Peshawar and went back to Afghanistan and started fighting against each other. But it was a kind of

watershed year. It was a very good place to be watching from. I literally saw the Soviet Union collapse in front of our eyes. The war come to an end and start up again in a new form. We were the ones who were providing all of the assistance for Afghanistan. We were in effect the embassy for Afghanistan, if you wanted to call it that.

Q: Embassy for a government in exile?

PLATT: Right, we saw a lot of them. More than that the rulers of the various Central Asian republics who suddenly came to power as the head of sovereign states totally unexpected from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan suddenly appeared on our doorstep blinking like moles coming out into the sunlight. We, as diplomats, would be called to the tarmac, usually at very short notice, to meet another of these leaders and listen to another totally unknown national anthem being butchered by the local bands, and here these guys came. They all looked like kind of Mongols in Eastern European suits, which in effect they were. They were Tartars with Russian tailors.

Q: There are a few broad questions I would like to ask. One of them is what do you think was your most significant accomplishment in your career?

PLATT: I always liked history and I always thought going into the Foreign Service gave a person a crack at history either to be a fly on the wall or an actual actor in a history relationship in a country. By those lights, my time in the Philippines was the most significant aspect of what I did. In the since that I was able to make decisions and bring to bare its influence which I think kept democracy on an even keel during a very difficult period in that country. I am not saying I did it single handed, I am just saying that I was there to help a government that was having a very, very difficult time. There were so many near things that I think if I hadn't played the role that I had they might have succumbed to a banana republic's fate or something like that. I would not toot my horn that way in public, but I would say it to you.

I think in terms of world history significance, what I witnessed in China was much more important. I feel that I have had at various strategic points a role in the US relations with China. First as an analyst as to what was going on. Then in Washington where what we did was to lay the analytical groundwork for the opening. In other words, explained what it was the Chinese were doing in response to the Russians in 1969, which led to the gestures that they took vis-a-vis the Nixon administration and led ultimately to the opening. I am saying that we recognized what others recognized and identified it. So I had a little piece of that action and a tiny piece of trip action, tiny piece of action in the Liaison Office. And then in the Defense Department while I was there I spent a lot of time that particular year docking for the first time since the Korean War the US and the Chinese military establishments. So taken as a kind of sweep, I felt that I was lucky to be participating in that very, I think, important retooling of a major relationship. But I didn't have a major role in it. I had a major role in a much lesser arena in the Philippines.

Q: What do you think will happen, with Taiwan and China both applying for membership in GATT, which will shortly be the World Trade Organization? How do you see that developing? I don't see how we are going to have a two China policy in reality.

PLATT: I think both of them will join the GATT, or the WTO. Taiwan will have been there earlier and China will get in. Perhaps not this time but some of their behavior and trade policy are not up to standard. But they will ultimately get in. Taiwan and China are members of a lot of international organizations together...the IGU, the Asian Development Bank, etc. So they should be able to solve the situation.

Q: Okay, let me ask you a question that I ask all the Foreign Service career people I have interviewed. It is a sensitive subject, really, the relationship between the State Department and the Foreign Service on the one hand and the Central Intelligence Agency on the other. I must say my own experience in the Foreign Service led me to have a very low opinion of the product of the CIA from what I could see. I wasn't in political work but I never thought they came up with very much. The record was replete with disasters on the part of the CIA, including the over estimates of the strength of the former Soviet Union. I am not talking about them all and the Ames case, but one wonders if this might not, I am sure you have experienced this in your career...I have found going around as an American, former Foreign Service, years with the UN, always in an international atmosphere, but talking, of course, to a lot of Americans, the CIA was a millstone around our neck. I never understood why the name wasn't changed fifteen or twenty years ago. Today I don't understand why there isn't a strong move on part of the administration to just shut it down. I realize there are a lot of Foreign Service people who think that there are some good things that they do in the Agency. But I don't know. My own feeling is that we certainly would be better off to at least change the name and cut it way back. Would you have any feelings that you would like to express on this subject?

PLATT: I always worked very closely with people in the Agency. I worked starting off in Hong Kong where we were all in the same business, which was essentially analyzing what was going on in China. We fought like cats and dogs about analytical conclusions, etc. We were just as right as they were if not righter.

Q: That is my impression.

PLATT: But the main thing that they did for us was to provide a whole range of technical means of checking out our own conclusions, and what we did for them was to provide them with a lot of human intelligence in addition to cover for what they were doing. Now, I felt that there was a role there, but it was more of a coordinating role throughout the entire intelligence community. It was very important that there be a center of gravity. I got a very much better sense of the Agency's value when I was ambassador in the Philippines because they really basically kept me safe.

Q: You mean personal security?

PLATT: Right. Intelligence is an enormously important element in a dicey security situation. These guys were very sophisticated about surveillance. They had people who watched the watchers. These guys would check you out from time to time to see if you were being surveiled. They could tell just like that. They also had big networks of people who had infiltrated the other institution, the Communist Party. So they could tell me, "You are on the top of the list but they are not looking at you right now because you are too hard a target." The way we dealt with personal safety was never to give them a schedule that they could operate with and never to give them an opportunity to make a hit without getting involved in a fire fight. The good thing about Filipino terrorists is they are extremely expert and very deft, they like to have the whole thing so planned out that they can go and shoot their person down in the marketplace and then go home and watch the basketball game. They are much easier to deal with as a result than the people who feel that dying while shooting you is going to send them to heaven. So we would hear through the network that they are looking for you now, be particular careful not to be doing anything the same time in a given week, etc. Then I would go down to the range and shoot off a pistol and some shotguns and some uzis, just so it would get around that even if they penetrated all these other things, that I knew what I was doing with firearms. This was just to add another deterrent purely for show. I never could have fired one of those things in a car and still kept my hearing, there was just no way one could do that.

Anyway, I worked very closely with the Agency and they were extremely good at this. I think you have to have an intelligence agency to stay safe as a nation, including as an individual. And I think you get into trouble when it gets too big and too public.

Q: Isn't that the situation we are in now?

PLATT: I think that is right. I think you would find amongst the most dedicated. There is this division in the house, there are three divisions. One is the analysts, and their analysts are no better than anybody else and in some ways they are worse because they don't move. State Department analysts can be moved and have a flow through system so that when, as happens in a lot of academic institutions, the disagreements over policy and analysis become hatreds you can change that by getting rid of everybody and sending them off to London or Mogadishu, etc. They couldn't do that at the Agency so they had a bunch of analysts who were cross with each other and the DEA and State. These guys spend more time in arguments with them than they would in dealing with the issues, themselves. But that happens in every intelligence community. If you read Le Carré carefully all this stuff rings true.

Q: The only person who was ever important in the British consulate general in Hamburg was John Le Carré and I never met him. He was there part of the time I was there.

PLATT: Well, I was never in Hamburg, but I do know him from subsequent reincarnations that have nothing to do with work.

Q: Well, you probably saw the op-ed piece in the Times a couple of days ago by some former CIA staff member who recommends using the British model which is to have two separate agencies, one for analysis and one for operations. Making two agencies strikes me as going in the wrong direction. In other words I do wish they would at least change the name of the CIA because everywhere you go this is all you hear in any country, "It is the doing of the CIA." Now, you and I know that isn't true. But it has been true often enough so that is the general impression. I think we suffer for it. I think our image suffers for it.

PLATT: But it would have anyway. It came from a period when CIA was a very important operating arm in the fifties and sixties period. It was the OSS in new clothing, the same guys. I think it needs to be recast. Whatever name you gave it or cover you gave it, it ultimately would get out and that would be blamed whatever it was called. But I think you have to have some covert collection techniques in order to stay safe. You have to supplement your normal diplomatic intelligence with covert intelligence to keep that capability. It is just a fact of life. It is something that countries have always found necessary. Ever since there have been entities who cared about their safety you have had people who acted in secret to find out what was going on amongst the people who they dealt with. Then you had overt people who did that too in the form of envoys. You have to have it. Now, there is a whole new element that has been added and that is the technological side. The technological role in the intelligence world is very, very important to our ability to make policy and stay safe. And it has got to be run by somebody.

Q: I haven't been terribly impressed by the quality of people who have been running it so far.

PLATT: Yes, but the quality of the information that comes out of those channels is very, very high.

Q: Technological channels you mean.

PLATT: Yes.

Q: I have seen a lot of NSA product that I didn't think was worth the paper it was written on.

PLATT: But that is the analysts.

Q: No, I am talking about telephone conversation intercepts, basically. That is the stuff I think we are spending an awful lot of money for which I don't think is worth it.

PLATT: I don't think that you or I are going to succeed in dismantling this. But I did get a good look at its strengths and its weaknesses and I think that there are weaknesses and I think there are things that can be cut and reduced. But I think you have to have an

intelligence component to your national security apparatus. I am happy that the Department of State doesn't get blamed for all these bad things.

Q: Well, Mr. Ambassador, I think we have taxed your patience long enough and unless you have some other comments that you would like to volunteer, I will be happy to say that we have reached the end of the interview. I appreciate it very much.

PLATT: Thank you.

End of interview