The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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AMBASSADOR THOMAS P. SHOESMITH

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is December 9, 1991. This is an interview with Ambassador Thomas P. Shoesmith. It is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

I wonder if you could give me a little about your background. Where did you come from--where were you born, educated?

SHOESMITH: Well, I was born in Pennsylvania and attended the University of Pennsylvania. In 1943 I entered the Army as a private. In 1944, under the Army Specialized Training Program I was sent to Yale University. There I was put into a Japanese language program, which lasted approximately one year. Then, a few months

later, I was sent again to a Japanese language program under the Military Intelligence Language School at the University of Michigan. I was commissioned in 1945, sent to Japan as a Japanese language officer, and served in the G-2 Section of SCAP [Supreme Commander, Allied Powers] for two years. Then I went back to the U.S. and did graduate work at Harvard. In 1951 I entered the Department of State as a Civil Service employee in the Office of Intelligence and Research.

Q: If we could go back, I'd like to ask you a little about your experiences. Here you had studied Japanese. Now, when you got to Japan, what was the situation in Japan at the time?

SHOESMITH: It was, of course, the early part of the Occupation. I arrived in Japan in April, 1946. That was the period, from 1946 to 1948, when most of the so- called Occupation reforms were undertaken, including the introduction and passage of the new Constitution. My job in G- 2 was political intelligence and most particularly Left Wing parties and the labor unions. So it was a very formative period, the period of land reform, the breaking up of the Zaibatsu, the new Constitution.

Q: The Zaibatsu?

SHOESMITH: These were concentrations of industrial and economic power. The institution of a true trade union movement. It was a period of great, physical reconstruction, although that didn't really come until the Korean War began, and the Japanese economy began to recover.

Q: Well, now, what was the situation? Here you were in the Army and you had a very conservative leader, MacArthur. Yet here you were involved in and looking at labor unions. Labor unions are all suspect in most conservative thought. What was our attitude towards labor unions?

SHOESMITH: It is true, as you say, that MacArthur was generally known as a very conservative person, but the people that were working in SCAP at that time included many civilians. Their views were much less conservative than his were. There was an almost New Deal type of atmosphere. I think that the initial impulse was to undertake a program of political, economic, and social engineering in Japan. This didn't last too long because of the problem of communist influence. The Communist Party was free to participate in society and in politics. Communist influence in the trade union movement began to mount very quickly. In 1947 there was a call for a general strike which the Occupation Headquarters prohibited. That really marked, I think, a turning point, beginning a movement somewhat away from the very liberal types of reforms that had marked the early part of the Occupation.

Q: You were there during the general strike?

SHOESMITH: Yes, I was there in 1947 at that time.

Q: That was the military perspective, but what was your own, personal perspective of communist influence? Also, what was your feeling as the general strike gained momentum? How did you feel about it?

SHOESMITH: Well, it's hard for me to recall just how I felt about it. In retrospect, it probably was regarded as a challenge to the Occupation authorities. Occupation Headquarters had made it clear that it opposed the general strike. They probably opposed it as much for economic as for ideological reasons, because it was a very, very difficult time for Japan. I mean for the people. There was a great deal of personal hardship. The general strike only added to that. So we probably regarded it as a pragmatic rather than an ideological decision, although concern for growing communist influence in the trade union movement was very genuine for both ideological and practical reasons. At the time I think that I didn't regard this as a major turning point in the Occupation's policies. Only in retrospect does that become clear. Or did become clear to me.

Q: Well, did you have much contact with the people who were in, say, the Socialist Party, the labor unions?

SHOESMITH: Yes, I did, because that was my job. More in the Socialist Party than in the trade union movement. It was easier, perhaps, because one could contact the political leadership much more easily than the trade union leadership, as I recall. We used to meet with members of the national legislature, the Diet. We used to attend their conventions. It was rather exciting for young officers with absolutely no experience of that sort at all to be political reporters. In effect, that's what we were. There were about four or five of us, I think. Our job was to get to know these political leaders at the time. Many of them, most of them, were prewar political activists who came to the national legislature in the first elections in 1947. I can't say that we knew a lot of them. We knew a dozen or so, that we would contact regularly to find out what was going on.

Q: Was your impression at the time that these reforms were succeeding on the political side or were you somewhat dubious, you and...

SHOESMITH: No, no, I certainly didn't think at the time that these reforms were very transitory. I mean, they were so sweeping, and they covered every aspect, including education, the economy, and the social structure, giving the franchise to women, and so on. It was a rather heady period. You had a feeling of being involved in something that was rather dramatic and of real, historical significance. I think that the concern that we had--oddly enough, in retrospect, I suppose--was Japan's economic viability. This was because, looking at the tremendous destruction everywhere that you went in Japan and in all the major areas, it was very difficult to imagine that the economy could ever revive to a point where Japan would have a sustainable economy. We used to worry about, well, the long-term economic prospects of Japan. And I think that we probably underestimated the degree of coherence and the capacity of this society to mobilize itself for recovery. We probably didn't think at the time that the Japanese were really capable of that. One

talked about the likelihood that we would have to continue to provide economic assistance to Japan on a long-term basis. And, of course, we did provide considerable economic assistance in the early years. By 1950 that was pretty much phasing down. The economy began to gain strength.

Q: In 1951, then, you entered INR as a civilian. What was your field?

SHOESMITH: I was doing the same sort of thing. I mean, writing analytical reports on the Left Wing parties in Japan and on the trade union movement. One of the major assignments that I had was to write a section of the National Intelligence Survey, a large, encyclopedic effort undertaken after the war, on the Japanese trade union movement. I was simply repeating, I mean, continuing on. Understandably enough, that was the experience that I could bring.

Q: How did you feel in the early 1950's that INR fitted into the Department?

SHOESMITH: Well, we had certain contacts with the [geographic] desk and were doing some work for the desk. But I don't think that I thought very much about that. We did our reporting. We knew that the head of INR was briefing the Secretary of State on current events, and we used to brief the head of INR. So we could see that direct connection. I certainly didn't think at that time about just what the function of INR was in terms of policy formulation and implementation. You just did your job. I don't think that our supervisors ever looked at it in that context, as I recall.

Q: So, our policy toward Japan sort of continued on, particularly from your perspective, as far as the Left Wing movements were concerned. Did you see these movements as becoming more dangerous?

SHOESMITH: Obviously, the Korean War had started by this time. The Cold War was in full sway at that time. The Left Wing political parties in--I've forgotten now when it was--1949 or 1950. The Socialist Party had a brief period of coalition government with the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party. For six months the Socialist Party was in power, and it proved totally incapable of maintaining political support and effective government. It was after that that the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party came together and formed this coalition, the Liberal Democratic Party, which has ruled Japan ever since. I don't think that there was ever much concern after that bad experience which the socialists had in government--not much concern that the socialists presented much of a serious, political threat. That is, that they might gain enough electoral support to form a government. That proved to be the case from then on. However, the trade union movement, at that time, was quite strong, militant, and aggressive. There was a substantial measure of communist influence within it. I think that this situation was probably regarded with some concern because of the problems that it might cause for political stability in Japan as well as for economic recovery.

Q: So our major concern at that time was really political stability?

SHOESMITH: I think that it was both political stability and economic recovery. Of course, by, when was it, 1951 or the start of the Korean War the view began to form of the key, strategic importance that Japan had in our strategic view of East Asia, particularly Northeast Asia. Not only in security terms but in terms of Japan's potential for assisting in the economic recovery of the area. Yes, I think that those were probably the main concerns.

Q: You went to Hong Kong in 1956. Had you entered the Foreign Service by this time?

SHOESMITH: I was "Wristonized" [lateral entry into the Foreign Service under a program recommended by Henry Wriston, then Dean of Princeton] in 1955 and was assigned to Hong Kong as a consular officer. As I recall, that was something of a disappointment at the time, because other people who were working in my office in OIR [Office of Intelligence Research] and who were also Wristonized received appointments to Embassy Tokyo, doing political or economic work. I felt that I was being shunted off to Hong Kong to do consular work and, more specifically, to do citizenship and naturalization work. At that time there was a great effort being made to crack the problem of fraud in Chinese immigration. There were a great many Chinese coming to the United States. They were making application for citizenship, based on claims which had been established-- parentage claims that had been established--in the prewar period. And it was apparent that there was a great deal of fraud involved in this. Of course, the U.S. Government was involved in a number of suits where these persons had been denied citizenship. So I was assigned as a citizenship and naturalization officer to interview people who were making claims for U.S. citizenship.

Q: That was quite an operation, wasn't it? You had almost unofficial police powers.

SHOESMITH: Well, we worked very closely with the Hong Kong Police. I don't think that they worried about search warrants and things like that. They used to go in and try to get papers and documentary evidence which showed that these people were not who they claimed to be. But that was a separate unit within the Consulate. Our work was more routine: examining people who claimed to be children of somebody, or examining parents, and asking long lists of questions to try to establish kinship or establish that there wasn't kinship. I did that for a year and then was transferred to Special Consular Services, working with Americans. When I got this assignment, as I said, I was disappointed, at first. I saw myself as being a political officer in an embassy somewhere. And that would have been great. In point of fact, it proved to be a very useful experience, because I got to know a good deal about consular operations and the whole range of consular services. Sometimes the work was very difficult and even unpleasant, because of these poor people who were trying so desperately to get to the United States. And my job really was to shake their story, if I could. Because many of these stories were fraudulent. But nonetheless it was a good experience. I was also accredited to Macao. We had an American, a young guy and his family who felt they would like to defect to China. They

went to China through Macao. We were sent down there to find out what had happened. Those were interesting experiences.

Then, toward the end of that two years and in the expectation that my time in Hong Kong would be extended, I was reassigned to the Political Section. Of course, Hong Kong at that time--this was 1958--was a very important listening post. It did a lot of political work on China, about which I knew virtually nothing. But there were lots of materials available to do the kind of research and analytical work that I had done in OIR.

But I was only there for about four months when I was told that I was being reassigned to Seoul. The reason for that was that the man that I had worked for in OIR on Japan affairs was the Political Counselor in Seoul, and he asked...

Q: Who was that?

SHOESMITH: Bill Jones, William Jones. So again, I thought that--everybody asked me what I had done wrong. I mean, to go from Hong Kong to Korea. That wasn't regarded as a plum assignment. However, I went and, in point of fact, it turned out to be a wonderful assignment.

Q: Well you were there at a very exciting time.

SHOESMITH: I was there through the student revolution in 1960, the downfall of Syngman Rhee.

Q: Could you describe how you saw what the situation was in Korea and as we saw it at that time--when you arrived?

SHOESMITH: Well, economically, it was in very bad shape at that time. That wasn't the focus of my attention. My attention was focused on the politics. And again, I was assigned to the opposition parties. There was a very vigorous opposition movement. The Democratic Party of Korea had a substantial presence in the legislature. It was very easy to make contacts with that group. We in the Political Section--another officer and I had that responsibility--used to see a lot of the Korean politicians, both in Seoul and when we traveled around the country.

The situation was very clear. Syngman Rhee had been in power ever since the end of World War II. I think he came back in 1947 or 1948. There had developed around President Rhee a group which was very determined to hold onto power, despite the increasing pressure from the opposition. There was a great deal of corruption and extensive use of police power to harass the opposition. There was an election, as I recall, somewhere in the six months preceding Rhee's downfall in which there was massive manipulation of the ballots, stuffing of ballot boxes, stealing ballot boxes, and fraud. Then at some time--the dates escape me-- in the spring, probably in March or April, 1960, there were student demonstrations. One began in Masan, a port city in the southern part of

the Korean peninsula. The police used force, firing tear gas, and a number of students were hurt. Then the student protest movement just marched up the peninsula from one city to another till it arrived in Seoul in April, 1960. There was a massive student demonstration.

I think that everybody in the Embassy at that time was persuaded that the Rhee Government could not survive and that Rhee had to step down. Of course, we were out all of the time, watching the demonstrations. As I recall, we didn't talk to the students who were organizing the demonstrations. Ours was mostly a watching brief. We watched what was happening, trying to assess the strength of the demonstrations. It was apparent that the police, and even the Army, when it was brought in, could not control them. Our government decided at some point to try to persuade Syngman Rhee to step aside. I went with Ambassador McConaughy to the Blue House when he delivered that message.

Q: The Blue House is the...

SHOESMITH: The equivalent of our White House. He delivered that message to President Rhee. I recall coming back with the Ambassador. I was not present in the room when he delivered the message. I was seated outside. I did ride back with the ambassador in his car, through the throngs of students, all of whom were cheering the American ambassador and the United States. I think that they sensed that we--how shall I put it--that we were sympathetic to their cause.

Q: Did going out and talking to people who weren't happy transmit a signal? I mean, were we trying very hard to keep...

SHOESMITH: No, we did not. There may have been individual officers who were quite open in expressing their sympathy for the students, but I was not one of them. What we did, as I said, was simply to try to find out what was going on. But somehow--I don't know how this happened, because there were no statements from Washington expressing concern about what was going on in Korea. There may have been, but I don't recall them. But somehow, at least the students in Seoul had the impression that we were sympathetic to their dissatisfaction and discontent with the Rhee Government. They could see us. Some students--at least a few of them--could see us out talking with the students when they were marching and when they were being fired upon and so on. How this sense grew within the student movement I don't know, but it was certainly quite apparent. It was there, as I say, when Ambassador McConaughy came back from the Blue House that day.

Q: Did Ambassador McConaughy describe to you how the meeting went?

SHOESMITH: I can't recall. There were staff meetings. I think that Ambassador McConaughy initially was very sympathetic to President Rhee and his government. But I think that he realized--certainly by the spring of 1960-- that whatever the sympathy he may have had for Rhee personally, the people surrounding Rhee were driving matters in a direction which was simply not politically sustainable.

Q: Well, what happened then?

SHOESMITH: Rhee was flown out to Hawaii [chuckling], with his wife, not unlike what happened to President Marcos in the Philippines. Although there was a lot of student activity and a lot of burning of cars and so forth, the level of violence never achieved the same degree in Korea.

Q: Was there concern about the military, what they might do about...

SHOESMITH: There certainly was at that time, but the military was not brought in until the latter stages of the disorders in Seoul. Their main burden was essentially to protect the government and Syngman Rhee. Dealing with the students was largely left to the police. The Korean military, as far as I recall, expressed no views as to this situation. They were doing the job which they were asked to do, but there was no hint at that time, no hint at all, that the military might intervene actively in the situation.

Q: Well, was there concern at this time of civil disturbances throughout the country that the North Koreans might make a move?

SHOESMITH: No. There was none. I don't recall anything. No.

Q: Well, what was the feeling when Rhee left, within the Embassy?

SHOESMITH: Well, I know that it was very heady. We were on the right side. We were on the side of justice and democracy and all of those things. And we were quite elated when Rhee finally agreed to step aside and leave the country. And I think that we were very hopeful that the opposition party which came in after a brief interim, transition period would prove effective in bringing about political stability in South Korea and in getting the country on its feet. South Korea was in bad shape, politically and economically. Our aid programs were not working very well. There was a great deal of confusion and misplaced effort. There were great hopes that the new government, headed by Chang Myon, would be equal to the task. I left Korea in the early fall of 1960, by which time it was rather apparent that the Chang Government was going to have great difficulty in forming an effective cabinet. There was a great deal of squabbling within his own party.

Q: Well, I served in Korea, too. One of the things that kept being thrown in our face was that Koreans can't get together. They were said to be the Irish of the Far East and very disputatious. Therefore, it was said, no political party could do the job. You almost needed a military kind of control. At that time Park Chung Hee was riding high.

SHOESMITH: I think that when you looked at the pattern of political behavior in Korea even at that time, it was apparent, I think, that the fatal flaw was the total lack of any sense of sharing of political power between the "in's" and the "out's". Under Syngman

Rhee the opposition party was effectively shut out of any share of political decision making and everything which flows from political power, including economic advantage. It soon became apparent that when the opposition took over, they were going to follow the same pattern. The situation was unlike that in Japan, where you had a single party, the Liberal Democratic Party. It was firmly in control but did not shut the opposition out completely. It gave the opposition some role in legislation and was responsive to opposition party views to some, limited extent. This tradition, if you could call it a tradition, or this pattern, was absent in Korea. It occurred to me to devise what I called the "golden nugget" theory of political power. You had it all. And you either had it all or you had nothing. Although I'm not close to Korean politics today at all, I wouldn't be surprised but that still is the problem. That is an essential element of democratic politics that is very weak in the Korean context.

Q: Well, at the same time in Japan it is more a matter of working on a consensus. In Korea, as we have seen from Koreans who come to the United States, it is a matter of "winner takes all."

SHOESMITH: That was certainly true in Korean politics when I was there. But that wasn't the only problem for Chang Myon. His government was just not very effective. Also, it was at that time that the student movement, of course, still very close to their victory in overthrowing Rhee, were very assertive. They began to mount pressures for unification with North Korea. As I recall there was a campaign on for a "March North." The students would march across the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] and join hands with their compatriots in the North. This posed a real and very difficult problem for us and for the Chang Myon Government. They didn't want it to happen. It put them crosswise with the students that had been their supporters. I've forgotten how it was resolved, but I am pretty sure, the "March North" never occurred. And probably the government had to exert considerable pressure to ensure that...

Q: This is something that has arisen from time to time.

SHOESMITH: Yes. That's right.

Q: Well, then, you spent the next, what, two years in Japanese language training again?

SHOESMITH: No, when I was in Hong Kong, I had studied Mandarin on a part-time basis. I enjoyed the language. And I had hoped that I could go to Taichung [Dept of State language school in Taiwan] to continue the study of Chinese. I continued part-time study of Chinese in Korea. I tried to learn Korean, but it is a very difficult language. I spent a few months at it, and then gave up. However, Dick Sneider had me reassigned to the Japanese language school in Tokyo. At the time he was the Japan desk officer [in the Department of State]. He was one of these officers--and I believe that we have always had them in the Foreign Service--who are always looking at personnel matters, trying to put people in the best place, where we could use them, and so on. He had the idea that I would spend a year at the Language School and then fill in behind someone who was in

the Political Section in Tokyo. Well, I wasn't terribly disappointed by that. And in point of fact I think that it was a very sensible thing to do, because it meant refurbishing my Japanese. Whereas if I had gone to the Language School in Taichung, it would have meant starting from scratch. At that time I was 28 years old or so, and that's pretty late to start learning, really learning a language. So I went back to Tokyo and spent a year, a little less than a year, in the Language School. As I say, it was largely a matter of refurbishing my Japanese, although it was there that I really learned to read Japanese. Previously, I had not really been able to read Japanese, even after the two years' training in the Army.

Q: Well, then you ended up in the, what?

SHOESMITH: Political Section, and again working on Left Wing political parties. [Laughter].

Q: Were you known as "Mr. Left Wing"?

SHOESMITH: I don't know why it happened, although, of course, that had been my background. I knew something about the Socialist Party, the Democratic Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and so on. And so I was put in that job, again doing the same sort of thing that I had been doing.

Q: How had these Left Wing parties developed since you'd been away from them and come back? Did you see any change in either their focus or their power?

SHOESMITH: No, not really. As far as the Socialist Party was concerned, it was then, as it has been until relatively recently, very ideologically hidebound. That, combined with the fact that it had no real platform for governance if it were to gain power, meant that the Socialist Party, even with substantial trade union support, was simply not going anywhere. It could not present an effective challenge to the Liberal Democratic Party. The Democratic Socialist Party was not in much better shape. As a matter of fact, it was in worse shape because it had less support within the trade union movement. The Communist Party was still, what, 10 percent or so of the electorate. So there had been no real change in the balance of power among the political parties in Japan between 1950 and 1960, and subsequently. There was some thought in the early 1960's that the Socialist Party would be able to gain a greater measure of popular support. I think that you've interviewed Dave Osborn. He was the Political Counselor for whom I worked at this time. I think the Socialist Party may have been gaining some increased support at the polls, which led some people to think that maybe they were really going to make it to the top. But it never did.

Q: Well, how did you make your contacts in the Japanese political movement?

SHOESMITH: They were easy to make, easy to make, among the socialist parties. Among the Democratic Socialist Party and the Socialist Party, but not with the Communist Party. We had no contact with the Communist Party.

Q: Was the fact that we didn't have contact a result of orders or was it because they were less receptive?

SHOESMITH: It was the policy of the Embassy. We did not contact the Communist Party. We followed them in the press and in intelligence and other reports, but we did not contact them personally. That was still true. [Passage apparently omitted, due to turning over the tape.] ...Effective contacts, even if we had tried, because the Communist Party simply would not, I think, have been receptive to it. However, among the two socialist parties and the trade union people contacts were easy to make. They were relatively open. They would meet and talk with us, either in their offices or elsewhere. Oh, it was not difficult.

Q: Well, your ambassador was Edward Reischauer at that time?

SHOESMITH: Yes. When I first got there, MacArthur [Douglas MacArthur II, the general's nephew] was the ambassador. But that was only for, maybe, three or four months-- perhaps six months. Reischauer came, as I recall, in the late 1960's, but I'm not sure of that. Anyhow, he was there for the whole time I was there.

Q: What was his style of operation?

SHOESMITH: Well, he came with the notion that the greatest need, as far as our government and the Embassy were concerned, was to establish some sort of effective dialogue with Japanese intellectuals and journalists--opinion leaders. At that time, certainly within the Left, and to a considerable extent in the press and in academe, there was a great deal of very critical comment about the United States. Among Japanese academics, Marxist views were quite prevalent. These views probably were shared by people in journalism and among students. Therefore, the Ambassador's primary concern was to establish a dialogue with these groups. That's what I remember best about Reischauer's time there, when I was close enough to be able to see. I don't recall his being terribly concerned about the economic relationship between Japan and the United States. At that time, of course, this was not a matter of great concern. The Japanese were worried about their trade deficit with the United States. As the Vietnam War became more prominent, Japanese movements in opposition to our involvement in Vietnam became stronger. I think that the ambassador was very much concerned that confidence, trust and support for the US-Japan relationship were at a very low ebb. I recall that it was in 1960 that President Eisenhower was going to make a visit to Japan. That visit was aborted because of student and labor union demonstrations against it. As a result, the atmosphere in Japan, a sort of an overriding concern to Ambassador Reischauer, was this opposition, the strength of the opposition within Japan to the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty relationship, the U.S. posture in Vietnam, and our presence, our military presence, in Japan. In other words, our bases.

Q: Well, I remember that there was a political, almost religious movement in Japan at about this time. Forgive my pronunciation, but wasn't it called Zennikira? It was supposed to be very powerful, but it seems to have faded from view.

SHOESMITH: Umm. I'm not sure. I don't recall that, but what I recall mostly, of course, were the student movements--and, of course within the student movements there was a wide variety. There were radical students, militant students, and the trade union movement, the trade union people. And I guess that Ambassador Reischauer felt that part of this was the result of the fact that important segments of Japanese political and opinion leaders--not so much the politicians, but the academicians, the student people, journalists, and commentators of one sort or another--simply were locked into a very negative view of the United States. What he, I think, hoped to do and felt that he had achieved to some extent when he left Japan, some time in 1966, was the reestablishment of a measure of exchange and dialogue and confidence with this group.

Q: Well, did you either have instructions or were you working on trying to contact Japanese opinion leaders to explain what made the United States run?

SHOESMITH: I did not have instructions. I mean, not in that part of the Political Section where I was assigned until 1963. You see, I was only in the Embassy approximately a year, because I was in the Language School for approximately a year. That would have been up to the end of 1961 or some time in 1962. I was not Ambassador Reischauer's press counselor or USIA, or others who were involved in this sort of thing. I was not personally involved in that.

Q: Well, when you went to Fukuoka, as Consul, what was the response to you as Principal Officer there? What were you doing?

SHOESMITH: Well, in point of fact, as I recall it, we got very little guidance from the Embassy as to just what we were supposed to be doing. You pretty much decided for yourself what you were to do. At the time I went to Fukuoka, there were about four officers and myself assigned. We did the traditional range of consular functions, including visas and all of that sort of thing. We had a small economic unit. At that time there were many Japanese businessmen in the area that were interested in striking out in new ways, finding out more about the American market and so on. We helped in that. We helped in tourism and so on. A main concern, in this climate that I have already described, was the U.S. military presence in Western Japan. A large Air Force base outside Fukuoka city, a big naval installation in Sasebo, and a few smaller installations scattered about. A major focus of what we did politically was to gauge receptivity or lack of receptivity in the area to these military bases.

This was highlighted when the first U.S. nuclear- powered submarine visited Japan. I think this might have been in 1964--somewhere around in there. There had been a great deal of agitation in Japan against the arrival of this first nuclear-powered submarine, both because it was nuclear- powered and because it was seen, I presume, as another expansion

of the U.S. military presence in Japan. This focused the opposition of the students and Left Wing groups of one sort or another. We in the Consulate had the responsibility of providing political advice to the base commander in Sasebo on how to handle this first visit. We were certain that this was going to lead to very large demonstrations in Sasebo, as in fact took place. The business groups and the local government people in Sasebo were quite cooperative in seeing that the visit came off as well as possible. I mean, they helped as much as they could. We were in contact with them. We helped arrange their visits to the submarine and so on. We did that. We talked with the press and tried to explain the purpose of the visit and the safety of the vessel itself. We worked with the naval authorities in providing certain monitoring of the vessel when it came in. There were other incidents of less moment involving the bases. An airplane would crash.

Q: What bases, what were they?

SHOESMITH: The Air Force base at Itazuke, and the naval base at Sasebo. These were the two big bases. But occasionally you would have ship visits, at Kagoshima or Beppo, or something like that, which we would facilitate or try to help. These generally did not involve expressions of political opposition. But the submarine did. It went on for a long time. However, the visit came and went, and then there were later visits at Yokosuka and other places. What I'm saying is that I think that the major focus of our political activities centered around the base problems. The governor of Fukuoka Prefecture was a socialist. He was personally opposed to our base presence. Yet we needed his help from time to time. If we were trying to extend a road, or something like that, or get passage through a certain area, I would meet with him to try to get his cooperation. I was modestly successful, on some occasions. And I would imagine, though it's hard for me to recall with any precision, that the bulk of our political reporting was probably on this issue and whatever thoughts we might have had on our policy with regard to basing in Japan and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. And popular attitudes toward it. And so on. Fukuoka leaders of all groups, including journalists, students, opposition parties, or the conservative parties. They were all very open. We used to see a lot of them. We used to arrange for meetings with these leaders when people would come down from the Embassy in Tokyo, so that they could talk with them. The discussions were very lively. I don't know--I'm sure that they didn't change anyone's mind. But they were at least a very open exchange of views. There was no problem with the dialogue down there. Of course, it was a situation unlike Tokyo. Most of our work in Fukuoka had to be done in Japanese.

Q: Okay, you say that you were working in Japanese.

SHOESMITH: Very often.

Q: Now, how did you find public knowledge of the United States? Was it pretty much a Hollywood version of...

SHOESMITH: It was very limited, very limited. But attitudes among most people that I met, even people that were opposed to our base presence, were very positive. Oh, sure,

when students would demonstrate outside the Consulate, with "Yankee, Go Home," and so on, or "America, Get Out," or whatever. However, in conversation I found that there was not much antagonism. There was a great deal of interest in what was going on in the United States. We had a cultural center and a USIS [United States Information Service] program there which was very active. Programs were well attended. What more can one say? I mean, I don't think that there was a great deal of understanding of our policies, particularly with respect to Vietnam. We worked a lot on that sort of thing. But there were very strong, visceral feelings involved about the war in Vietnam.

Q: Was it seen as an Occidental race against an Asian race?

SHOESMITH: Well, I don't know that it was all that so much. There was just a feeling that this was the wrong thing for us to be doing. There was a concern that Japan might be drawn in, and so on.

Q: Was Okinawa an issue, the fact that we were basically occupying Okinawa? Well, we were occupying Okinawa, at least large parts of it. Was that a problem?

SHOESMITH: The Okinawa reversion issue began to achieve more prominence. But it was not an issue in the sense that people in Japan were terribly concerned about it. There was a good deal of pressure from the Japanese Government to move in the direction of reversion, as actually took place in 1972. But the Japanese people do not spend a great deal of time thinking about Okinawa. It wasn't something that came to our attention very much.

Q: Before we leave this, what about feeling toward the Soviet Union?

SHOESMITH: Oh, great feeling, always. You know, this is a persistent thread in Japanese thinking when they look outside Japan. There is great suspicion about the Soviet Union. And the Northern Islands issue was one that you would see from time to time. No sympathy at all. A good deal of apprehension and concern about the Soviet Union. This is still true today.

Q: Well, then, you left Fukuoka in 1966 and went to Washington. What were you doing there? You were there from 1966 to 1971.

SHOESMITH: I was assigned as the deputy on the Taiwan desk, then the Republic of China desk. I was asked to take that job, again by somebody that knew me. That's the way it used to work. It does today to some extent, I suppose. Bob Fearey asked me to come back and handle that job. I had no previous experience with respect to China/Taiwan and very limited with respect to China, except for my time in Hong Kong, which was not the kind of experience which would have been terribly helpful. But I was glad to have the job. After I was there about a year, the Country Director went off to Vietnam, and I succeeded him as Country Director for Republic of China Affairs, I think, in 1967, some time in there. I held that position until I went off to the Senior Seminar in 1971.

Q: Well, you were there in 1969, when the Nixon Administration came in. Taiwan certainly was a major focus, particularly of the Right wing of the Republican Party, which Nixon somewhat represented. What was the difference between the Johnson Administration and the Nixon Administration regarding Taiwan?

SHOESMITH: I have no clear recollection of any differences. What I do recall is that there was considerable sentiment within the Bureau of East Asian Affairs, which I shared, for relaxing the grip which the Republic of China had on our policy with respect to Mainland China. There was a feeling that we should try to move in the direction of some opening toward Mainland China. I think that it was in that time frame that the Secretary--who was it then? Rogers, I guess--made a speech somewhere to which we contributed. Secretary Rogers said something to the effect that when we are concerned with matters under the control of the people in Beijing, we will have to deal with them. Regarding matters which are under the control of Taiwan, we will have to deal with the Republic of China. And that was the first sort of crack in the door. I suspect that the Secretary had little input into what was going on in the White House in the same direction. Our concern at this time was focused on efforts to try to resolve the question of Communist China's exclusion from the U. N. There were other countries that were beginning to recognize Beijing and to cut their ties with Taiwan. There was increasing pressure in the United Nations to bring China into the United Nations. Initially, we had opposed that. However, that opposition was beginning to waver. Of course, we spent a lot of time talking with the Republic of China Embassy here, in an effort to prepare them for some change in our position on the United Nations and to get them in a more sympathetic frame of mind toward changing their own position. For example, Communist China would be in the Security Council, but we would somehow try to find a way to retain the Republic of China in the General Assembly. All of that effort, of course, just went up in smoke with the Kissinger visit to China, which came as a complete surprise to me. I don't know whether the Assistant Secretary knew anything about it. For that matter, I don't know whether Secretary of State Rogers knew anything about it. I was on leave in Pennsylvania, and there was a notice that the President was going to make some important announcement on television. I remember my son asking, "What do you suppose that's about?" I didn't have any idea. And when the President said that Henry Kissinger had visited Beijing, I couldn't believe it.

Q: This was when you were still on the desk?

SHOESMITH: I was still on the desk. This was in 1971, before I went over to the Senior Seminar.

Q: The Assistant Secretary was Marshall Green, wasn't he, at the time? He didn't know about it because he mentioned being at a staff meeting and making some remark about Kissinger saying that he had tummy trouble. He said, "It sounds as if you've gone off to China," and then all of a sudden he realized what he had said at the staff meeting and thought, "My God, you know, there might be something to this."

SHOESMITH: I recall something of this story. So, as of that point, well, everything we'd been doing for a year or more, principally with the Republic of China Embassy here in Washington had gone up in smoke. Our Embassy in Taipei was not much involved in this effort to try and get the Republic of China to save some of its position.

Q: Well, you really were looking at a two China policy...

SHOESMITH: We were, in effect, yes, looking at a two China policy.

Q: Well, how, let's say, before the Nixon shock came about, how receptive was the Republic of China's Embassy to this idea?

SHOESMITH: Oh, totally unreceptive. I mean, I used to talk mostly with the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission]. I knew him as a friend, and we had a very good relationship. He could understand what we were trying to do and he may even, himself, have been sympathetic, but he knew that his government would never countenance such a move. It would not be involved in it in any way. We tried, but to absolutely no avail. I remember particularly talking with people from the Canadian Embassy to get them to retain some sort of tie with Taiwan, as they had recognized Beijing. They were unsympathetic. So, it was a futile effort that I was engaged in.

Q: Did you feel this at the time or did you think that...

SHOESMITH: I certainly saw that it had very little chance of success, but I myself was not just going through the motions. I must have felt that it was important that Taiwan not be simply cast adrift, that there had to be some place in the international structure for Taiwan. If you could work out something in the United Nations, such as I mentioned, a place for them in the General Assembly, this would have been a good thing to do. However, looking back at the situation at the time, I have to say that I probably realized at the time that there was very little hope that this could be achieved.

Q: How did the Republic of China's Embassy work in Washington? Did they still have the "China Lobby," or a vestige of that to try to bypass the Department of State to some extent? Did they have a direct ear or a direct line to Congress?

SHOESMITH: I don't think they had much support. I mean the "China Lobby" at that time was no longer a significant factor. I think that their ambassador was a very experienced and a very effective person. He probably tried to do what he could. He could see the direction in which things were moving, particularly after Kissinger's visit. I just don't know how much of a sympathetic ear he got up on the Hill. We were sympathetic and were trying to do what we could. It was clear that we were going to be moving toward an opening to China, as we saw it and as I saw it. The task was to try to preserve some position, not only within the UN but internationally for Taiwan, for the Republic of China. For the Republic of China on Taiwan. But the position of both sides at that time--

Beijing and Taipei--was that you could not have relations with both. And so after 1970-71 more and more countries decided to make that break. Taiwan, it was clear, was going to be increasingly isolated, diplomatically and internationally. There was nothing, I think, that we were in a position to do to halt that.

Q: Well, as you looked at it, could you see the situation which has more or less developed today? There is really a very vigorous, economic power on Formosa or Taiwan, just sitting out there, without diplomatic clout. However, it really doesn't make a lot of difference.

SHOESMITH: No, I don't think I foresaw that. I think views about the Republic of China at that time were very much affected by the rather negative impression we had of Chiang Kai-shek and of the KMT [Kuomintang] regime in Taiwan. They had martial law. It was very ineffective, I mean, politically. Of course, we did have important bases there. It was one of the safe havens for the families of people serving in our Mission in Vietnam. And the Republic of China was very cooperative in allowing us to use their bases in support of our activities in Vietnam. We had that, but as to the future, I mean, what would happen to Taiwan, it was not a very bright picture. I don't think anyone anticipated either the economic or the political evolution of Taiwan, which has occurred over the last decade. Particularly politically, within the past five or six years. I certainly wouldn't have anticipated that. The successor to Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo, gave no signs that he was a man with the breadth of vision that he subsequently demonstrated.

Q: He was basically not only the son of Chiang Kai-shek but the head of the police and all, wasn't he?

SHOESMITH: That's right. He had been, yes.

Q: Well, you went to the Senior Seminar for, what, a year?

SHOESMITH: A year--really, nine months.

Q: And then you went as Deputy Chief of Mission to Tokyo, where you served for almost five years. That's a long time. How did you get the job?

SHOESMITH: Marshall Green asked me to take it. There was a new ambassador, Robert Ingersoll. Although he had had a certain amount of experience in Japan through his business connections, senior Department officers obviously felt that they needed somebody in the DCM slot, a professional who knew the Department and knew how an Embassy ought to run and had some experience in Japan. I don't know why Marshall Green asked me to do the job, except that we had worked together in Korea, when he was DCM in Korea and I was in the Political Section. We were friends. I was succeeding Dick Sneider. Dick was a very effective operator in the bureaucratic structure and very knowledgeable about the Northeast Asian area. He was very effective in his dealings with the Japanese Government, particularly on the question of Okinawa reversion, and the

prospective home porting of an aircraft carrier, which was one of the issues that was up at that time. So I accepted. I mean, you don't turn down positions like that. I accepted the assignment with some trepidation because I'd never had a management job as large as that. I remember Ambassador Brown, who was the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary at that time said to me, "This is being the Chief Executive Officer of a large corporation, and that's what your job is going to be out there." And most Foreign Service Officers--I suspect even today--when they get into positions like that, have very little management experience.

Q: Could you provide some idea of what this management job involved? I mean, the Embassy in Tokyo is obviously a major embassy. What were some of the management areas and problems you had to deal with?

SHOESMITH: Well, I think that the largest problem is simply one of defining the priorities of the Embassy, what we ought to be trying to do, within the broad framework of the policies that are outlined in Washington. Our relations with the host government. When you have as large an Embassy as that, with so many different parts, and including the attached agencies, you need to make sure, as best you can, that they are all at least aware of what each other is doing and that they're all more or less working on the same track. Then there's the problem with all of these people that you've got--I think that the American contingent, including the attached agencies, was something over 250, maybe 300 people. You need to try to create within the Embassy the best climate for them to do their job, to give them a sense that you regard what they're doing as important and that you are concerned to see that they get what they need to do their job, insofar as possible. More generally, you need to keep up a congenial, collegiate atmosphere within the Embassy, through one device or another, whether through staff meetings, meeting individually with these people, and so on. I think that those are the general parameters within which I worked as...

Q: Did you have any problems with any of the other governmental agencies, in the sense of "free wheeling" or striking out on their own?

SHOESMITH: Not particularly. There would occasionally be times when you had that, but no particular incident comes to mind right now. Of course, there must have been such times. However, I found that most people, and particularly most of the heads of the attached agencies, were anxious for me to know what they were doing. They wanted to be part of the Country Team. I took the concept of the Country Team very seriously. I think that most people--if they were persuaded that you took them seriously-- were quite ready to work as part of a team, rather than as independent operators. It worked that way, as far as I could see. There was also the problem in Tokyo that when you have consulates, as we have in Hokkaido, Osaka and Fukuoka, you need to keep them truly a part of the operation. However, that took less time.

Q: Well, your first ambassador was Robert Ingersoll. What was his background and how did he work?

SHOESMITH: He's a businessman from Chicago. He had a family business which, among other things, used to manufacture automobile transmissions. They had good business contacts in Japan to buy transmissions for automobiles. And maybe for a lot of other things. He had a businessman's background and relationship with Japan. He was a first class person and very quickly was able to attract the admiration and respect of everybody in the Embassy. He made very, very good use of his staff, across the board. His contacts, where it was most natural and easiest for him, were in the Japanese business community. He did a lot of work in that community. He was always available, if we felt that he ought to meet with a political leader, or journalist, or whatever. He was always very effective in such meetings.

Q: How were relations with the Japanese Government? They were just going through the aftermath of the trauma of the opening to China and all that. The Japanese had not been informed and felt very unhappy about this.

SHOESMITH: Well, they certainly did feel unhappy about it. While you would encounter constant reminders of the "Nixon shock," I don't think that really posed a serious problem in the relationship, although it probably underscored the view of many Japanese, then and perhaps even now, that we did not give them full, what would you call it, partnership status. They believed that we were prepared to do things affecting their interests, without consulting them properly, and particularly not consulting them in advance. That was true then, and it's true now. The economic relationship in the early 1970's was beginning to become quite troublesome, particularly with the surge in Japanese exports, including television sets, textiles, and other items. And we were beginning to run a deficit in our trade at that time. It was negligible, compared to now. Maybe $4 or $5 billion annually. However, we were very much concerned about that. There was the continuing problem of the base presence and Vietnam, even though we were standing down in Vietnam in the early 1970's. There was still considerable, public opposition to our continued presence in Vietnam and to our base structure in Japan. One of the principal efforts of the Embassy was to try to accommodate to some of those pressures by consolidating bases. For that purpose we needed support from the Japanese Government. We spent a lot of time on those subjects.

Q: How did you find the American military? I mean, did they try to dig in their heels as much as possible?

SHOESMITH: Well, yes. I suppose that is to be expected. However, there was very good leadership from the top. General Persley, a very sophisticated man, was the commander of U.S. Forces/Japan for most of the time I was there. General Snowden, a marvelous Marine Corps officer, was his deputy. They were people of very, very broad scope. While we did encounter problems with individual base commanders, we had lots of support in trying, for example, in the context of developing a consolidation plan, to close down some of the bases and consolidate them in various places, thereby reducing our exposure, to some extent. I had very good support from them. As we moved in the mid 1970's to try

to--what would be the word--to try to put more of the base structure under the Japan-U.S. security arrangement that would give the Japanese a better sense of cooperation with the Headquarters of U.S. Forces-Japan. Together with us, the two commanders were able to work very closely and very effectively with civilians, particularly Japanese civilians in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which had the lead, much of the time.

Q: How did you find the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

SHOESMITH: Well, increasingly sophisticated. We were able to work very effectively with them. They were well informed, they were very effective, working within their own ministry. As you know, perhaps to a greater degree than is true within the Department of State, much of the actual policy formulation comes from below in Japan. It moves up the chain to the minister and the vice minister. So these were important people to deal with. And we worked very well with them on all the base problems. I can't speak so much for the economic side of things, because I was not as directly involved in those matters, as I was with base issues.

Q: Well, what about the issue that kept--and keeps--coming up: nuclear weapons on board American ships?

SHOESMITH: Oh, that was a very sensitive issue.

Q: Never to confirm or deny.

SHOESMITH: Never to confirm or deny.

Q: But anybody knows that if you have a large aircraft carrier coming in...

SHOESMITH: Again, the Japanese Government relied on a statement that was worked out, I think, in the 1960's, some time, I think it was when U. Alexis Johnson was Ambassador. The statement said, in effect, that under the terms of the security treaty arrangement, if the United States wished to undertake--I've forgotten the exact wording--any major change in the disposition of its forces, this would have to be in consultation with and in agreement with the Japanese Government. And the Japanese Government explained that that would cover such things as the positioning of nuclear weapons in Japan, or even the transit of nuclear weapons in Japan. And since they had never had any such approach from the U.S. Government, they assumed that this was not taking place. And that was it.

Q: [Laughing] In other words, that didn't quiet the critics. Obviously, we're not talking about anything classified. To anybody knowledgeable, it was pretty obvious that we couldn't denude an aircraft carrier...

SHOESMITH: Couldn't offload the nuclear weapons, no.

Q: But if you didn't say things specifically, then there was an agreed upon ambiguity.

SHOESMITH: I think that puts it very well. There was an agreed upon ambiguity, which proved to be sustainable. That is to say, the Japanese Government never felt so pressed by critics of its policy that it felt it had to clarify the ambiguity, as, for example, was the case in the Philippines. Under their new Philippine constitution, I think that this matter is explicitly dealt with. There shall not be positioning of nuclear weapons in the Philippines. Or as, for example, happened in New Zealand, where, under--I've forgotten his name --the prime minister [David Lange] insisted that we either confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons on our ships before they came in. The Japanese Government never felt under pressure to that extent. So this agreed upon ambiguity, as you put it--I think quite rightly--proved sustainable. It did not answer all the criticism, but it was there. Now, there have been times when some people have felt, on the American side, that this is a dodge that allows the Japanese Government-- if, for example, something should ever come to the surface that was irrefutable--to place all of the responsibility on us for having violated the so-called agreements. At one point Ambassador Reischauer got quite upset about this. He wanted to make it clear what had happened. He wasn't very keen about leaving it ambiguous. However, it has worked. So far as I know, it is not now an issue.

Q: Well, James Hodgson came up with a labor background.

SHOESMITH: I think he had been Secretary of Labor. I've forgotten under which administration. At the time he was nominated as ambassador to Japan he was, I believe, a vice president, a senior executive in Lockheed for labor relations, This must have been some time, like, 1973 or early 1974-- somewhere in there. His confirmation was held up for nine months by Senator Symington, I believe it was. There was competition in Japan for aircraft sales, military aircraft sales, between Lockheed and McDonnell-Douglas. I think McDonnell-Douglas is in Missouri. And Senator Symington felt that having an ex-Lockheed man there--I guess this is what he felt, this is what I heard--would give Lockheed an advantage. So he sat on this as a matter of personal privilege for nine months. But finally Ambassador Hodgson was cleared.

Q: Well, what were his strengths and weaknesses?

SHOESMITH: Again, his most natural area of contact was in the business world. He was a good administrator. He probably took a more active role in the management of the Embassy than Ambassador Ingersoll had done. However, like Ingersoll, he relied very much on the staff.

Q: What about the evolving relationship with the People's Republic of China? Did you spend much time trying to explain where we were going?

SHOESMITH: No, I did not. If it came up, it must have been a peripheral issue, but I can't remember talking about it at any time at all. You know, in Japan the focus on the relationship with the U.S. is overwhelming. And almost nothing else comes up. I can't

recall the correct chronology. I believe, yes, the Japanese did move ahead of us in reestablishing relations with China. I believe that's the case. Prime Minister Tanaka visited China. This must have been in the mid 1970's, whereas we didn't normalize relations until 1979. The Japanese kept us very well informed on what they were doing.

We have a series of annual policy planning discussions with the Japanese, with the participation of people from the Bureau [of East Asian Affairs] and from the Policy Planning Staff in the Department. Also participating are people from the Department of Defense and maybe some of the other agencies and their counterparts at the assistant secretary level or below. In that context questions of where we were going on China policy and where Japan was going on China policy were discussed. For example, draft papers on the recognition issue were prepared for these meetings during the late 1960's and early 1970's. At a typical meeting of this kind--which covered 2 ½ days--there was a general review of matters concerning the Soviet Union, Southeast Asia, and so on. At that level, a good exchange took place, even though only once a year. However, they had established contacts that could be drawn upon subsequently in the intervals between the meetings, by people coming to Washington and meeting with the people that they had met on the Policy Planning Staff. Also, under the Security Treaty, there were two levels: an assistant secretary level for security consultations and then the annual meetings at the top, participated in by ambassadors, CINCPAC, and so on. And there you would have similar discussions going on. These meetings were not limited solely to the security treaty relationship but would deal with the context of the relationship, the strategic context of the relationship. As a result, you would again have discussions about our policy in such areas as China and the Soviet Union. As a result, on an ongoing basis there was a good deal of exchange on policy matters between Japan and the United States. What did happen, of course, was that sometimes when we would reach a decision, we did not always inform the Japanese.

Q: Was that a real problem, since it was almost impossible to inform the top level of the Japanese Government without all of this getting out?

SHOESMITH: Yes, there was. There certainly was. That was true. That was a concern frequently expressed on the American side. However, I always felt that it was a somewhat a case of the pot calling the kettle black, because Washington is a great place for leaks. I don't think that Tokyo was any worse than Washington, if as bad.

Q: How did you feel that Henry Kissinger, who was the dominant person during almost all of the time that you were there, related to the Japanese? You always think of him as focusing on China and on the Soviet Union and lots of things involving the Middle East. But I never get a feel for him on Japan.

SHOESMITH: Well, he himself, after he left office as Secretary of State, has acknowledged on a number of occasions that he really never quite understood Japan and never felt very comfortable in dealing with it. At least, not in the early stages.

I mean, in the latter part of his time as Secretary of State, he may have understood them better, but he did not, he simply did not understand Japan, and he, I think, had a suspicion that Japan was holding something back because how could you be, by the 1970's, a burgeoning economic power and not be willing to assume responsibilities as he would like to have them do? As, for example, in the Mid East crisis of-- I've forgotten which 7-day war this was, maybe...

Q: 1973 was the October War, the Yom Kippur War.

SHOESMITH: As I recall it, Mr. Kissinger went to the Middle East and got some sort of agreement between the Arabs and Israelis at least to enter into some sort of discussions. He didn't want to prejudice these discussions, he didn't want countries lining up on one side or the other. The Arabs, of course, had instituted a boycott...

Q: Of oil.

SHOESMITH: And the Japanese were terribly concerned about their position, their access to Middle East oil. After he had been in the Middle East, he went to China and then he came to Japan. And he met with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. In those meetings he was very anxious that Japan not take any step which would seem to place them on the side of the Arabs in the conflict. The Japanese concern was that they couldn't go out too far because, look, they are dependent on Middle Eastern oil, and if they are denied that access, the consequences at home will be quite serious. I remember one remark that Kissinger made, I think to the Foreign Minister that, well, it wouldn't be the first time in history when a country made a decision on the basis of short-term advantage at the sacrifice of longer term interest. I think that he was just very impatient with the Japanese. Of course, they were not nearly as successful as, I presume, Zhou En-lai was in explaining his views. Also, I think that Kissinger's own words speak eloquently of the problem he had. He says, "I did not understand them." I think that that was very apparent. And he used to get terribly upset when the Japanese press would criticize him, as they did very frequently. All sorts of bells would ring in the Department whenever that happened. Then bells would ring in Tokyo. Of course, we couldn't do anything about it. We didn't take it all that seriously.

Q: Well, what about the problem of Vietnam? You were there at that time. Was this a difficult period for us because so much of our policy was based on the idea that in time of trouble, the United States will be there. And here we were, pulling out of it.

SHOESMITH: Well, the one thing I do recall very clearly was that in academic and intellectual circles in Japan there was a good deal of speculation as to what our defeat, as they saw it, our withdrawal from Vietnam, meant for U.S. policy in East Asia. Was the U.S. going to continue to maintain an active, an important presence, in East Asia? Or were we going to be sort of withdrawing from the Western Pacific? There was a lot of speculation like that. What would the strategic implications of this be, if the United States actually did that? I mean that, apparently, there must have been a sufficient measure of

ambiguity in our own public statements to keep this sort of speculation alive. And by the period 1976-77 there was a good deal of this, and we used to be concerned about that in the Embassy and tried to do what we could to provide assurance that we were not withdrawing from the Western Pacific. So that, I think, was certainly one consequence of our withdrawal from Vietnam that I do recall, which we had to deal with. The other side must have been a certain amount of relief on the part of the Japanese that we were no longer engaged in a war in which they had absolutely no confidence. They felt that it was the wrong place for us to be in, that it was draining away resources that we could better devote to other purposes, and that it was damaging our position, not only in Japan, but throughout the region. So there must have been some sense of relief about that. However, I don't remember that. What I remember is this concern that this might mark a major shift in U.S. policy with respect to East Asia. In point of fact, those concerns continued into the 1980's.

Q: Yes, while I was in Korea--I went there in 1976, and, obviously, this was a major concern in Korea. The more so, because they were really on the front line.

SHOESMITH: That's right.

Q: Well, now, just one last question on this period and then we might wrap this up and I can come another time. I have a picture in my mind of President Ford coming on a visit, wearing pants that were too short. In other words, the wrong outfit. It almost personifies something really going wrong. How did the Ford visit...

SHOESMITH: It went off very well. His pants were too short. I understand why they were too short. This was evidently morning clothes that he had had for many years. And his waist, probably, increased in girth. When that happens, your trousers go up. That was a story that was kicking around, and I heard it because I was at the detached palace where he was staying. I spent a lot of time there.

I suppose that I might just interject here, to say one thing about presidential, secretarial, and congressional visits. It was my experience that the best embassy in the world, doing superbly on all functions of an embassy, if you had a major screw-up on a presidential or a congressional or a secretary's visit, you had a blot against your embassy that was very difficult to overcome. So I spent a great deal of time on those visits in organizing them, making sure that we had everything nailed down, as best we could. We did that with the Ford visit. The visit, I thought, went off quite well, as that sort of thing goes. It was the first presidential visit to Japan.

Q: Really? I hadn't realized. Nixon never made it?

SHOESMITH: No. And Eisenhower never made it.

Q: Eisenhower didn't. Why didn't Nixon? He was traveling all over. Was there any particular reason?

SHOESMITH: I don't know. I don't have any idea. President Grant made it, but only after he left office...

Q: On his world tour.

SHOESMITH: So there never had been a presidential visit until Ford's. I don't recall anything about the visit except there was a tremendous amount of work that was involved. I don't recall anything that went...

Q: No, it's just that one picture that sticks out in one's mind.

SHOESMITH: I think that it went off reasonably well. It was a good one. I know that they went to Kyoto as well and did the usual sort of things down there. But substantively, I don't recall that it did anything at all. I think that the Japanese were very anxious to have a presidential visit, obviously.

Q: Particularly after the abortive Eisenhower visit.

SHOESMITH: Yes, that's right. But I don't think that there were any substantive issues that were resolved or surfaced to any great extent. We must have had trade problems at that time, but I don't remember them. I mean, I don't remember any in particular.

Q: Well, before we leave this and close off this interview, are there any other issues that we missed?

SHOESMITH: No, there was a MiG-25, I think it was, that defected to Japan during this period.

Q: Flew into Hokkaido.

SHOESMITH: Flew into Hokkaido. It was the first time that that aircraft ever came within our grasp. And so there was a great deal of anxiety in Washington to get hold of it as quickly as possible. The [U.S.] Air Force had the notion of flying something over to Japan and wrapping this thing up and taking it back to Wright-Patterson [Field] so that they could really examine it. No point in going into all of the details, but the Japanese had to handle this in their way. It was very time consuming. They had to have some concern for the Soviet reaction. Yet, they wanted to cooperate fully with the United States, but it was bureaucratically confused. We couldn't get to it as quickly as we wished. Comments and complaints surfaced about just how good is this security treaty, really, the arrangement that we had with Japan. It surfaced in some rather high places in Washington, much to my distress. We were absolutely confident, and not only our Embassy but U.S. Forces/Japan were absolutely confident that at some point we would get full access to that aircraft in Japan, as much as we wanted. That actually did happen, but it took weeks. I mention the incident only because, despite the growing effectiveness

of this security treaty relationship or of this relationship as a whole, over time, doubts about Japan's commitment and sincerity and so on and so forth kept surfacing very quickly, depending on an incident like this, as it did. Actually, the present Prime Minister was Foreign Minister at the time and was very helpful in working out this problem. But it was bureaucratically complicated. In Japan the initial Japanese reaction was that this had been a customs violation. It was in the hands of the police and customs. So it sounds ridiculous. It was perfectly understandable, if you have some understanding of how things work in Japan. The worrisome part was, as I mentioned, how quickly criticism of Japan surfaced, under those circumstances.

Continuation of Interview: January 30, 1992

Q: Last time we ended the interview after you had left Tokyo. You had been the Deputy Chief of Mission for about five years and you had received an assignment to be Consul General in Hong Kong. You served in Hong Kong from 1977 to 1981. How did that assignment come about?

SHOESMITH: Well, I had been in Tokyo for five years and I guess they were looking for a place for me to go. Hong Kong opened up and the then senior Deputy Assistant Secretary, Ambassador Gleysteen, or subsequently Ambassador Gleysteen, called me one day and asked me if I would like to go to Hong Kong as Consul General. And that's how it happened.

Q: Well, what was the situation in Hong Kong. At one point it was our preeminent China listening and watching post.

SHOESMITH: It still was in 1977.

Q: Why?

SHOESMITH: Well, because our Liaison Office--this was before normalization--in Beijing was small, and it was the only presence we had in China at the time. There was the Consulate General in Hong Kong. It had a very large complement, both economic, political, and intelligence. Both the CIA and military intelligence. It was a very good collection point for information about the Mainland. There were many people that went back and forth. Publications were available in Hong Kong from the Mainland, and the Consulate General at that time was still doing translations from the Mainland press. So there were many resources available in Hong Kong for China watching. That was true even after normalization for a time. It is probably less true now.

Q: Did you also serve, in a way, as the consular post for Guangzhou?

SHOESMITH: No, Guangzhou was not opened until 1979, I believe it was. We had no official contact with the Mainland at all until normalization of diplomatic relations. We assisted the opening of the Consulate in Guangzhou. This was the first.

Q: Well, did you travel or go into China?

SHOESMITH: No. Not until after normalization.

Q: I mean, was it media policy to keep up this quasi relationship or was it on the part of the Chinese to show that we...

SHOESMITH: Well, travel to China by official Americans was very limited at that time. There was no particular need for us to go, and we couldn't do political and economic reporting. We could do it better in Hong Kong than by being in China itself because your movements were so restricted.

Q: Well, here you have a large staff and you were reporting on conditions in China. How did you get your information?

SHOESMITH: Well, as I say, a lot of it was from open sources--periodicals, newspapers. A good bit of it was interviewing people who came from the Mainland. Or listening to or monitoring radio broadcasts. In that fashion. That had been going on for years, so it was a very well developed system. I think it was very productive.

Q: Well, you must have had an extensive file...

SHOESMITH: Oh, of course, and the people we had on the staff, for the most part they were China experts. They had lots of background on China. Many of them in INR.

Q: That's Intelligence and Research. How about cooperation with some of the other countries--particularly the British who were...

SHOESMITH: Well, there was a certain amount of that, and both the military and the CIA had good contacts with their counterparts in the Hong Kong Government. Those were the primary sources, I believe, within the Hong Kong Government. Apart from that, I mean, there were very few, other organizations. There were private research groups in Hong Kong- -a variety of research groups that we kept in contact with that had their own sources and resources, analytical groups that we would contact. These were mostly private groups that were China watchers as well. There were journalists. Occasionally, journalists were able to go in and out of China.

Q: Well, the reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese control...

SHOESMITH: That is scheduled for 1997, but that agreement that was reached between the British and the Chinese Governments did not occur until after I had left. So reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese control in those years when I was there was not regarded as a near term matter. It was regarded as a remote possibility. It did not seriously affect Hong

Kong itself or the way in which it operated politically or economically. It was only after 1981 that this began to gather steam, culminating in the agreement, whenever that was.

Q: Was your Consular Section feeling any pressure on people looking ahead to whatever might be...

SHOESMITH: No. Not at all.

Q: Trying to get visas...

SHOESMITH: No. I'm sure there was some of that but it was not an appreciable problem. It was not an appreciable trend at that time. Again, this only began to happen well into the 1980's.

Q: What about Americans? We had a lot of trouble earlier on. I think you've mentioned Americans who get on the outs, drift into Chinese waters and are picked up. Were relationships such that this was no longer...

SHOESMITH: There were no incidents in the four years that I was there. I can't recall how much, if any, American travel there was into China at that time from Hong Kong. If there was any, I suspect it was very limited. But there were no incidents like that at the time. Maybe people were more careful, maybe the Chinese were less strict. But there wasn't any problem.

Q: Were you only watching China or were you also watching Vietnam?

SHOESMITH: We had a small Southeast Asia-Vietnam brief with one officer that followed events in Vietnam. For the most part, it was pretty marginal. The information available to us in Hong Kong about developments in Indochina was very limited. A few of the other consulates general had relations with Vietnam, and occasionally we'd see some of their people when they came into Hong Kong. Some of the press occasionally visited there. We had one officer, full-time, in that area. But it was, I think, pretty marginal.

Q: Well, there must have been the problem of boat people coming out of Vietnam.

SHOESMITH: Well, that started in 1979. But the boat people were not significant sources of intelligence. I mean, they were all farmers and fishermen and people of that sort and, as a source of intelligence on Vietnam, not very great, although some effort was made to exploit that resource. When the boat people began to arrive in Hong Kong in 1979, as they did in other parts of Southeast Asia, that became a major responsibility of the Consulate because we were involved in the processing of these people to identify those who might be able to come to the United States.

Q: Were you getting pressure from Washington, then, to try to get the British and the Hong Kong authorities to take more people and not just leave it to us to...

SHOESMITH: No, because the understanding at that time in 1979, I think it followed an international conference on refugees in 1979, was that if the various countries, such as Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia would accept these refugees and give them what was called "first asylum," the other, major countries made a commitment to resettle the refugees. At that time, at the start of these programs, it was generally considered by our government that anybody that fled Vietnam was a political refugee, under the terms of our legislation at that time. Not everyone agreed with that, either in the United States or elsewhere. With that assurance that they would be resettled, the British Government, or the Hong Kong Government, at very considerable expense, and at some political cost, began to receive the refugees and to house them. They developed, for some of the refugees, a system whereby they could go into the community and work and return to the camps at night. I said, "some political cost," because, at the same time as the Hong Kong Government was receiving these refugees, giving them first asylum, they were returning people who fled the mainland of China into Hong Kong. They would be rounded up from time to time...

Q: These would be Chinese?

SHOESMITH: And sent back to the Mainland. Of course, some of those people who came in had relatives in Hong Kong. So the relatives and other persons who were sympathetic to that position took exception to the fact that the Hong Kong Government was giving this asylum and receiving these refugees, while it was turning away the people coming in from China. The difference, of course, was that the Hong Kong Government had a commitment that these refugees would not be permanent residents in Hong Kong. They would be resettled, whereas those who came in from the Mainland were seeking permanent residence.

Q: Did you have a problem with the way the United States Government was responding? I mean, these boat people would come in. We made commitments to the Hong Kong authorities. We and other refugee-receiving countries would get them out...

SHOESMITH: No, up until 1981 we in the United States were taking substantial numbers of refugees from Hong Kong and elsewhere. The United States, Australia, and Canada were the main resettlement countries. Although there was some concern in INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Dept of Justice], for example, as to whether these were genuine refugees or whether they were political refugees.

Q: You mean economic refugees.

SHOESMITH: I mean economic refugees. That didn't become a serious problem while I was there. It did subsequently.

Q: Well, tell me. During your tour there, it sounds like a line right through it. The Carter Administration came in and in 1979 China was recognized. We sort of derecognized the Republic of China on Taiwan. How was this received in Hong Kong by the Chinese community in Hong Kong, and did it make any change in your work?

SHOESMITH: Well, I don't have any recollection of how it was received by the people in Hong Kong. Well, I would imagine that it was received, for the most part, pretty well. We were one of the last countries to recognize China--among the last major countries. And it was felt that this was coming. It was only a question of time. So I don't think that our recognition of China or the establishment of diplomatic relations with China caused any surprise or any concern in Hong Kong. It didn't in the two years remaining that I was there. It did not, to any significant degree, alter the kind of work or the amount of work that we did, or the size of the Consulate. I think we opened Shanghai in those two years that I was there. I'm pretty sure of that. Yes, we did. So we had only two consular posts--Guangzhou and Shanghai--and Beijing. And we attempted to work out, with some success, with [the Embassy in] Beijing, reporting responsibilities--things that we could still do that they could not handle as well, either in Shanghai or Guangzhou, or in Beijing. Apart from that, the work and the size of the Consulate [in Hong Kong] continued very much the same. Of course, I should say that the Consulate included a number of agencies that were doing regional work. I mean the [U.S.] Customs and Treasury people, and that wasn't affected at all. The focus of the Consulate General as China watchers remained constant for the time I was there. Until I left in 1981 there had been no change.

Q: To get a feel for how the Foreign Service was operating, did there seem to you to be a healthy program for developing "China hands"?

SHOESMITH: Oh, yes, there was. It was a very large program. It had been going on for a substantial number of years. My impression was that it was larger than the Japanese language program, partly because Chinese language officers could be assigned elsewhere in Asia, where there was a need for the Chinese language in the Chinese communities in all of Southeast Asia. There were some "China watcher" posts as, for example, in India, where they had a Chinese language officer. There were more opportunities for assigning and moving Chinese language officers around, than there were for assigning Japanese language officers in Japan. Certainly, you couldn't use them outside of Japan as language officers. The Chinese language program was very well established. There were lots of Chinese language officers. When normalization came, as far as I was aware, there was no problem at all in finding Chinese speaking officers for assignments in China as we began to open up posts and expand the Embassy.

Q: Had you had any dealings with the Republic of China Consulate and all that? Did this relationship end in Hong Kong?

SHOESMITH: There was no Republic of China Consulate in Hong Kong. The Republic of China maintained a very low key presence in Hong Kong, an unofficial presence. They

did no official business at all. We had no contact with them, or it wasn't of any consequence. They had no official presence in Hong Kong.

Q: Did you sense, both from your soundings of the staff, of a warming of relations when the Carter Administration came into office and made these gestures? I mean, the Nixon Administration had already made the initial jump, but then the Carter Administration came in and...Did you feel that it had an effect on the whole relationship?

SHOESMITH: Oh, I would say it was, in essence. When the new [Chinese] leadership came in, and this was in 1979, I think--1978 or 1979--and the new leadership seemed at that time to be embarking on a course of opening China to the outside and was interested in expanding a relationship with the United States. So the whole atmosphere of the relationship was considerably more positive after 1979, as one would expect, with normalization. But that in particular did not affect our work, except that after normalization we began to have contact in Hong Kong with representatives of the Chinese Government, in NCNA [New China News Agency]. The head of NCNA was China's unofficial, I guess--actually official representative in Hong Kong, and was so regarded by the Hong Kong Government. And by everyone else. And by 1980 or so, we had contact with them. They would accept invitations, they extended invitations to us to be at certain things. I got to know, slightly--well, no, more than slightly, the head of NCNA.

Q: NCNA?

SHOESMITH: New China News Agency. That's their main wire service. And on one occasion he arranged part of a visit that my wife and I made to China, to one particular place that he was familiar with. That was a very definite change. Prior to normalization, we had no contact at all with the NCNA people or their trade representatives. And so on. Afterwards, those contacts began to open up.

Q: Well, when you left Hong Kong in 1981, and you came back to become a Deputy Assistant Secretary in East Asian Affairs, where you served from 1981 to 1983, the Reagan Administration was just getting in, and all administrations--sometimes the transition can be a little bit difficult. The Reagan Administration came from a different part of the--from the Right wing of the American political spectrum. Carter was kind of from the Left. Did you find any discontinuity or any problems in East Asian affairs because of the transition?

SHOESMITH: Well, it's probably something of an oversimplification to say that the Reagan approach to China, the Reagan Administration approach to China, was less unambiguous and somewhat less positive--certainly more conservative- -than it had been under the Carter Administration. The Reagan Administration had a very sympathetic and somewhat protective attitude toward Taiwan, even though, by that time, we no longer had official, diplomatic relations with Taiwan. But they were much more solicitous of Taiwan's interests or Taiwan's concerns than perhaps the Carter Administration was. Of

course, President Reagan was regarded as particularly solicitous of Taiwan. So there was, to some extent, a change. That had some effect on the management of the relationship with Taiwan, or rather with the Mainland, as well as with Taiwan. We still had the unofficial relationship with Taiwan, through the American Institute on Taiwan, and the counterpart, the Taiwan representation in Washington. This, I suppose, came to a head at the time when the Administration began to consider foreign military assistance to Taiwan.

I've forgotten now. There was legislation in Congress at the time of our recognition of China, which, as I believe--I'm very vague on this--but there was a Congressional mandate to be concerned with continuing support for Taiwan's security. In late 1981, I guess, and into 1982 we began to try to work with both Taiwan and the Mainland to develop a framework, within which we could continue an arrangement for continuing to support Taiwan's military establishment. And that proved very contentious.

Q: Did Mainland China have any appreciation of the political need for having something like this, or...

SHOESMITH: Well, they simply denied the need, and they felt that we were going back on the Shanghai Communique, as well as the arrangements that were made at the time of normalization. They felt that we were trying to maintain and prop up Taiwan through the back door. But eventually, we worked out an agreement with the Mainland, with Beijing. It was a very long and sometimes very contentious process. It must have taken the better part of eight or nine months and was concluded, I think, in the latter part of 1982. It had strong support, of course, in the White House. But they remained concerned about the relationship with the People's Republic of China. There was no sense at all of ignoring the interests we had there. But, at the same time, it was felt that we--and there were strong Congressional voices--that we had an obligation to ensure that Taiwan was not left completely defenseless. That it had the resources and that we should assist, to the extent that we could, in providing the resources for them to maintain an adequate defense of the island.

Q: Was there anything resembling the "China Lobby" in Congress and all of that?

SHOESMITH: No, there were individual senators and congressmen who were very interested, very concerned to see that what they regarded as an appropriate level of support for Taiwan's defense be maintained. But there was no group which you could characterize as a "China Lobby."

Q: What about Secretary of State Alexander Haig and then Secretary Shultz? You had both of them at the time. Did they focus much on China, or was this left pretty much to the Bureau?

SHOESMITH: Well, Secretary Haig was very much involved in these negotiations on trying to work out this arrangement for continuing to support Taiwan with military equipment. But there were other things that were occupying Haig's mind, and I wouldn't

say that he was himself greatly focused on China. He visited there once, as I recall, during the time when he was Secretary of State. I'm not sure of that. But his focus was much more on Europe, compared with Shultz. Haig's focus was much more on Europe than on Asia, whereas Shultz, I think, had a very large interest in Asia as a whole, including China, of course.

Q: Well, you were the Deputy Assistant Secretary. John Holdridge was the Assistant Secretary...

SHOESMITH: For most of the time, until late 1982, I think it was, when Paul Wolfowitz took over.

Q: Well, what was your particular area?

SHOESMITH: I was the senior deputy, with responsibility for Japan, China, and Korea. These long, extended, and convoluted negotiations that I have been talking about on China and Taiwan took up so much time that, unfortunately, I think, I was not able to give the attention to Japan, much less Korea, that I probably should have. Although in neither case were there serious problems during those two years when I was...There were problems. There are always problems when dealing with Japan. And, to some lesser extent, in dealing with Korea. But they weren't of a magnitude that took up a great deal of my time. And I really had just so much time. I think I must have spent 60 percent of my time on China and Taiwan.

Q: Well, you spent time on Taiwan. Technically, Taiwan has this extracurricular, whatever you want to call it, relationship where it has an institute representing it. But essentially, how does that fit into the State Dept?

SHOESMITH: Well, there was a Taiwan desk. My recollection is a little hazy. I think it was a part of the China Division. But there was a Taiwan desk. The ground rules were that we were not to have, on either side, official contact. What that finally came down to was that our people in Taipei did not meet with officials of the Republic of China in their offices. They met them outside, somewhere. And the situation here was similar. The office in the State Dept, however, worked with the American Institute on Taiwan or in Washington on some aspect of our government relations, such as transfer of certain military equipment, or whatever. We saw their representatives outside of offices, in their homes or whatever. The relationship has worked well, I think. As a matter of fact it's worked so well that other governments have adopted that system for maintaining relationships with Taiwan. But we were the first. The Japanese have it now. The Australians, the Canadians, the French, and many other governments have established similar, unofficial representations in Taiwan.

Q: It sounds like ancient history now, but during this period what was the view of the Soviet threat or Soviet influence in Vietnam, or elsewhere?

SHOESMITH: I really can't comment on that in any meaningful way. I was not concerned with that. I would just have to say that it was in the background. Of course, you're aware of it, and I, as senior deputy, had to keep track of what was going on in the whole region. But I can't say anything meaningful about that. Let me put it another way. I have no particular insights into it.

Q: Well, did you get a feel that there might be a rapprochement between China and the Soviet Union to our detriment? Was this in the cards at all?

SHOESMITH: Oh, there was speculation about that. The possibility of a warming of China- Soviet relations, but at that time it seemed very remote. I mean, as of 1981-1983, the Cambodian issue was still very hot, as well as Afghanistan. On both of those issues the Chinese and the Soviets were at loggerheads. There were still problems along their own border. The Soviets were building up their military presence in East Asia. None of these things seemed to augur any improvement in Sino-Soviet relations. On the contrary, although it was regarded as a possibility, if not a near term probability, those who thought it was a possibility would always add the caveat that it will never get back to where it was prior to 1960, at the time of the Sino- Soviet split. That both countries--and particularly China itself--had moved to a degree that any sort of full rapprochement was unlikely. There would still be suspicions on the Chinese side. There would still be conflicts of interest between the two. I think that what has happened has pretty well matched that caveat. That what has happened since Gorbachev and since the Soviet pullout from Afghanistan. And the apparent modification of its position in support of Vietnam and the Heng Samrin Government in Cambodia.

Q: Did you get involved in commercial problems with Japan? I mean this has been a sort of sub-theme, certainly over the last decade or so, the concern over the imbalance of trade.

SHOESMITH: I really cannot recall that we had. Let me put it this way. Coming back from Hong Kong and coming here in 1981, since I had spent a lot of time on Japan, I was impressed by the extent to which the quality of the relationship seemed to have deteriorated, as of 1981 or 1982. And although I cannot recall with any degree of detail, I presume it must have been over trade problems and the rising deficit. Because the deficit was rising, did rise throughout almost all of the 1980's. But, as I say, I cannot recall being involved in those problems during those two years, to any significant degree. I presume that they were there, I'm sure I was talking to people in the Department of Commerce and USTR [Office of the U.S. Trade Representative] about Japan. But it was not, as I look back on it, it does not stand out as a major preoccupation. We did have a problem with Korea that took up a lot of time on rice imports--not with Japan, but with Korea. But this was a problem that arose out of a decision by the Korean Government to diversify its rice purchases among American suppliers. At that time Korea was importing rice. It had for many years--one group of rice producers in California had a virtual monopoly on the Korean market. And the Koreans sought to break that monopoly. And our involvement in that in trying to support a decision by the Korean Government. We felt that the Korean

Government should be able to make this decision on its own. They should not be forced to buy from any one particular producer or group of producers. This got us into a great deal of difficulty with the Hill [Congress]. There were certain people up on the Hill who sought to represent this one group of rice producers, and to frustrate the efforts of the Korean Government to diversify sources of supply. That, I remember vividly, because it took up an awful lot of time. And it was very contentious for a while. Certain members of Congress sought to bring heavy pressure to bear on the State Dept and on the Dept of Agriculture.

Q: How did they bring heavy pressure on the State Dept?

SHOESMITH: Oh, by threats to investigate via allegations that we were somehow in cahoots with the competition, and so on. They can make it very uncomfortable for you.

Q: Well, you left that job and was nominated to be Ambassador to Malaysia, where you served from 1983 to 1987.

SHOESMITH: Right.

Q: How did that assignment come about?

SHOESMITH: [Chuckles] Well, I had served two years as senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, which is about the usual length of time, although there is no hard and fast rule. I had been a DCM, I'd been a Consul General, I'd been senior deputy, and, although I wasn't pressing for an ambassadorial assignment, I think that there were some people who felt that we should find some place for Shoesmith. You know, he's paid his way, punched all the tickets, and all that sort of thing. Also, there was a new Assistant Secretary, Mr. Wolfowitz. And he was rather anxious to restructure the place [Bureau of East Asian Affairs] and bring in some other people. So you put all of these things together. When posts open up, and three of them opened up in 1983--Malaysia, Singapore, and Burma--Paul Wolfowitz asked me whether I would be interested in going to any one of these. Which one would you like to go to? I was given a choice. One of the other deputy assistant secretaries was in pretty much the same position as I. He had been there three years instead of two. He was also offered one of these posts. So it came about that way. I guess as a senior officer, and I was a Career Minister, as of that time, it was felt, at least by my Bureau, that, maybe I qualified for an ambassadorial post if one was open. So there was that, plus restructuring the personnel at the top level of the Bureau, under a new Assistant Secretary. So it came about. A conjunction of those things.

Q: Well, when you got to Malaysia in 1983, what did you see as American interests in Malaysia?

SHOESMITH: Well, I knew that they were very limited. There was a growing, commercial interest in Malaysia, that is, a gentle rise in American business interest in investing in Malaysia. On the Malaysian side, there was a rise in attracting, not only

American investment, but in developing the U.S. market for Malaysia's exports. We have some specific interests in Malaysia as a major commodity producer, particularly of rubber and tin, both of them products that we stockpiled, at one time. So we had that sort of a connection. Also, in 1981 Malaysia began to send students to the U.S. It had previously sent students overseas to Great Britain and Australia. But in 1983 it began to direct students to the United States. That increased in very substantial numbers, went up very quickly. So that's about where it was, when I got there. Of course, Malaysia has never bulked very large on our scope, our interests in Southeast Asia. Partly for historical reasons, because it was a British colony, and British influence was very strong in Malaysia, even after independence in 1957. But that was waning by the beginning of the 1980's, and under the new Prime Minister. We had a very small and very quiet, military interest in Malaysia. I said "small." Perhaps that isn't saying enough. Malaysia's geographic position on the Straits of Malacca made it of considerable interest to us. We had a very, very small military assistance program covering international military education and training [IMET], worth about $1 million per year. That amounted to some contact with the Malaysian military. But, as of 1983 it was quite limited. Malaysia had procured a considerable amount of equipment from the United States, particularly aircraft. In 1983-1987, very gradually, the range of contacts between the American military and Malaysian military expanded to include some joint exercises in air and naval operations. In 1986 we began to try to work this out further, to put this relationship in a framework which, in other countries, you might call a Status of Forces agreement. For one thing, to regularize the contact between our military, to provide for intelligence exchanges, and so on. I don't know what happened to that after 1987. But it was growing.

Q: Well, when you have military exercises and all, you pretty well have to have an enemy in mind. The Soviets, the Chinese, the Vietnamese--I mean what was considered the potential threat as far as Malaysia was concerned?

SHOESMITH: Well, I don't know that there ever was a very keen sense of threat, from anywhere, in Malaysia. Of course, during the period of the insurgency, from 1948 to 1960, the Communist insurgency in Malaysia was given strong, rhetorical support and some material support by China. This was during the period when China was supporting "wars of national liberation." That experience, and the fact that there were Chinese Malaysians who were in the insurgency movement, and the fact that Malays tend to think of Chinese as having their first loyalty to their homeland--these factors, this historical experience, taken together, probably account for the fact that if Malaysians were looking for a threat, China was the most likely source. There were possibilities for territorial conflicts with the Chinese in the Spratly Island group and some of those little islands [in the South China Sea], where Malaysia also has some claim.

The Soviet Union was not regarded as a threat by Malaysia. On the other hand the Malaysians--certainly the Malaysian military--were well aware that Soviet warships, and particularly submarines, transited the Straits of Malacca regularly and were also involved, to some extent, in the South China Sea. As military observers, they would not discount entirely that possibility. Vietnam was not regarded as a serious threat to Malaysia. There

was a possibility of border conflicts with the Thai and the Indonesians, and of course, in the 1960's, Indonesia, under Sukarno, had actually launched small forays against Malaysian territory, both on the Malaysian peninsula [Western Malaysia] and in Borneo [Eastern Malaysia]. So there was a need for security against a possibility that there might be border disputes. All of these things. There was enough of a context so that, without specifying who the threat was, we could exercise with the Malaysians quite well.

Q: What about the commercial field? Was there any concern on the part of the Malaysians of too much influence by the Japanese commercially in their...

SHOESMITH: Yes, certainly. The Japanese were heavily--they were the number one foreign investor in Malaysia during the years when I was there. We were number two. And as, I think, is true in many of the countries in Southeast Asia, attitudes toward the Japanese economic presence are ambivalent. On the one hand there is a recognition of the importance of Japanese investment and trade with Japan to the economic development of a country. On the other hand there is a concern, a sort of visceral feeling of unease about the Japanese presence and long range intentions toward the area--at least there has been. I think, really, that this is fading. I think it's been fading for some time, but it was present. And Japanese business behavior in some of these countries was subject to some criticism. They didn't bring local people into management positions quickly enough. Or they didn't invest enough in "downstream" activity for developing the economy, or whatever. But in Malaysia, at any rate, that was somewhat offset by the fact that Prime Minister Mahathir publicly expressed the view that Japan's economic development was, in many respects, a more suitable model for Malaysia's economic development than Western countries, including the United States. He was inclined to admire the notion of "Japan, Inc," the close relationship between government and business. He was inclined to admire and he certainly, many times, complimented the Japanese on the work ethic and the discipline of their society, the amicable relationship between business and labor. All of these appealed to him. He did not feel that the sort of "no holds barred, free enterprise capitalism" was appropriate to his culture or his society.

To some extent, I think, Japan has suffered since World War II, as we did in Europe, from the image of the "ugly American." There was a certain amount of envy. Here was this country that was the aggressor in World War II, and look at it now. Just as you hear echoes of that, and sometimes more than echoes of that in the United States, so in Asian countries.

Q: Particularly where they had felt the heavy hand of the Japanese...

SHOESMITH: As they did in Malaysia. But there again, it was the Chinese who felt the heavy hand of Japan during the occupation, more than the Malays. Because the Chinese were in the resistance. The Malays, for the most part, were not. That was the resistance that evolved into the insurgency.

Q: Well, were there any major problems you had to deal with while you were ambassador there?

SHOESMITH: Well, Malaysia is, of course, a predominantly Muslim country. A constant characteristic in the orientation of Malaysia's foreign policy gives a very special place to the Arab countries. Of course, Malaysia has no diplomatic relations with Israel. Regarding Middle East problems, we would approach the Malaysians on U.S. initiatives on things that were happening in the United Nations. If it was a Middle East issue and we tried to obtain the understanding or the support of the Malaysian Government, it would be very difficult. This was also true on matters of terrorism, since the Malaysians, the Malaysian Government was inclined to look at some terrorists as people who were fighting for national liberation, and not just going around, terrorizing people. So we often had problems in that respect.

Also, Malaysia, in its foreign policy orientation, certainly under [Prime Minister] Mahathir, had a very decided, "Third World" outlook. So, not only is the prime minister frequently critical of U.S. policies, and particularly economic assistance and trade policies and is critical of what the U.S. is doing in those areas, with respect to Third World countries. He also feels that we are exploiting them and trying to establish a neo-colonial relationship. He is publicly critical of the United States. Not constantly, but when the occasion arises. This would always raise hackles in certain parts of the United States, in the Congress in Washington. The Malaysian Government, perhaps in 1985, launched an initiative in the United Nations to declare Antarctica the heritage of all mankind. It advocated taking it out of the regime that's managed by the signatory states and put it under the United Nations. It had echoes of the old Law of the Sea controversy. We found that unacceptable. So there was that kind of controversy in the United Nations. These were generally the areas. On the other side of the coin we had very good cooperation up until 1987 with Malaysia on refugee and narcotics issues and on dealing with Cambodia. Even on trade issues, while we had conflicts of interest, it was relatively easy to negotiate those out with the Malaysians, whether it was textiles or protection of intellectual property--even the very sensitive issue of commodities, where we would be releasing materials from our rubber stockpile, with the possibility that that might affect world commodity prices. For the most part we were able to negotiate these out, with relatively little difficulty. Because the asymmetry between the economies and the political influence of the two countries is so obvious. You know, Malaysia, even a strongly minded and strong willed prime minister such as Mahathir, cannot be entirely ignorant of the realities. But it was, for me, a fascinating experience.

Q: Did you get much of a chance to talk to the prime minister? You're shaking your head. Did you talk mainly with the foreign minister?

SHOESMITH: Yes. I dealt mainly with the foreign minister. I personally found it very uncomfortable, dealing with the prime minister. There were very few occasions when I felt it was necessary. He is not a very approachable person. The United States has no special position in Malaysia at all. In other words, very little. That was one of the

interesting things for me, because I had always served in countries where the United States was number one. Korea or Japan, even Hong Kong, or Taiwan. In Malaysia, we're not number one. And there is a sensitivity in Malaysia that extends beyond the prime minister to suggestions of pressure from the United States. So my attitude toward the prime minister was to keep a very low profile. If a matter had to go to the prime minister, I would not have hesitated to do that, but I didn't seek opportunities to meet with him, as some of my diplomatic colleagues did, from time to time. I saw no profit in raising matters with him, oddly enough.

Q: Well, did you have any problems? Here you have a strong willed prime minister and the United States. The world and Malaysia did not revolve around American policy. This is not always easy to translate back in Washington. I take it the Bureau of East Asian Affairs understood the situation, and your ties to the East Asian Bureau. I mean that there wasn't a problem in letting them know that you're not going to get these people to jump through the hoop on matters such as voting in support of Israel and other things like this.

SHOESMITH: Yes. No problem. I never felt I had a problem with the Bureau. And since Malaysia is, as I've already said, pretty far off the scope, a problem with Malaysia seldom approached the point where it got Congressional attention. I recall one occasion. The New York Philharmonic was coming to Malaysia. I think this was in 1985, and it was not handled by the State Dept or USIS. It was privately arranged. In any event, the promoters in Malaysia at one point published the program which the New York Philharmonic was going to play. On the program there was a composition by a musician named Bloch. And the piece was a cello piece, "Shlomo," which was identified as a Hebrew rhapsody, a Hebrew melody. When some of the more extreme Islamic elements saw that in Malaysia, they raised just a terrible fuss. In an interview or a press encounter with the minister of public information this issue was raised. He said that it was the policy of Malaysia not to permit any Jewish work to be performed in Malaysia. In fact, I think that there was no such policy. That might have been their inclination, but, as it happened, they played other compositions by Jews. In any event the minister said that unless the New York Philharmonic took that off the program, they couldn't come. Although the New York Philharmonic at first indicated that they were willing to take that off the program, that got into the press in New York, and there was a big scream. They had to put it back on, and the Malaysian Government was committed to this position and couldn't move. Well, that caused all sorts of hell, and it got people in the State Dept very upset and it got some people in Congress very upset. The Embassy was under pressure to do something about it. We tried, but we finally had to explain that the concert just wasn't going to take place. The Secretary of State sent a personal letter to the prime minister, who happened to be out of the country when this all blew up. To no avail. So that was one of the few times. Now, subsequently, the refugee issue...

Q: Just quickly. I take it that the symphony orchestra didn't come to Malaysia.

SHOESMITH: Yes, it didn't come. It was all too bad. In point of fact, I could never get anybody in the Foreign Ministry, at any rate, to acknowledge that there was such a policy, such as the minister of information had announced. It was an example of how vulnerable the Malaysian Government is, although, as an Islamic, or the government of a country with a heavy Islamic cast, it's a modern society and takes modern positions. But it's very vulnerable to pressures from extremist, Islamic elements. I mean, Malaysia's position was understood, and the relationship during those years was moving along very nicely, expanding somewhat. The American economic presence and the number of students was rising. We were developing a scientific and technological relationship with Malaysia. It was going on very nicely.

Q: So for essentially a relatively small country, the fact that the students were switching from going to England to going to the United States, in some numbers, this is really a very major change which augurs well for the future.

SHOESMITH: Well, I thought so, although that switch was partly a reflection of the prime minister's pique or his anger at the British. I guess, in 1982 or so, the British raised the tuition rates for overseas students. But that was only part of it. I think there was a recognition that the United States offered a greater breadth and, in some cases, better educational opportunities for the kinds of things that Malaysia was interested in. This effort was concentrated on its students, Malay, rather than Chinese students. In business management, computer sciences, engineering, we offered a greater range of useful educational opportunities. As you suggest, I think, over time, that may already have begun to leaven, somewhat, the sort of philosophical or ideological bias, which was to our disadvantage in Malaysia. I mean this Third World attitude. They are hardly Third World today in economic terms.

Q: You were mentioning the boat people. Was that a factor?

SHOESMITH: Well, it wasn't what I was thinking about, because by the time I left the number of boat people in Malaysia had gone down to something like 8,000. When I arrived, it may have been around 12 or 15,000, but not only were we continuing to take them off, so were the Australians and the Canadians and, to some much smaller extent, the British. By 1986 it was evident that, not only in Western Europe, but in the United States as well, and in Australia, there was growing resistance to continue to take refugees. This whole issue of whether you were a genuine, political refugee or an economic refugee began to bulk larger and larger in the discussions about handling refugees. By the time I left they were down to 8,000 or so. Within a short period of time the numbers began to go up again, reflecting a lowered off take. This continued until 1989, by which time Malaysia may have had 14-16,000, at which point, in 1989, they began to refuse to take any more. The boats would come up on the shore or approach the shore, they would be examined to see the condition of the boat and of the people. They would be given provisions, the boat would be repaired, if necessary, and they would be turned away. Most of them went to Indonesia. That caused quite a bit of anguish in the State Dept, in the White House, and in the Congress. And very bitter exchanges, I understand. In any

event, a resolution was introduced in Congress--I've forgotten but I think it was in the Senate--and passed which cut off the only form of government aid or assistance to Malaysia that we had. That is, the IMET, the program I referred to earlier, of a million dollars. That was cut off. There was some talk of removing Malaysia from the list of countries to which GSP [General and Specialized Preference] tariffs were applied. That didn't pass the House of Representatives. However, I presume that's a threat, although now I understand that the outflow of refugees from Vietnam has fallen off considerably, so presumably there are fewer refugees coming to Malaysia. But I am very sympathetic with the Malaysians' position. When we originally talked about refugees, as I said, in 1979, the deal was, "you give them first asylum and then we'll see that they do not become a permanent charge." In 1989 the Malaysians began to feel that that wasn't happening. All we could promise was that if you continue to take them, we'll work with you to do something about the problem. They could see the handwriting on the wall, just as the British did in Hong Kong. I suspect that if things continue to go well with Cambodia, it may have already happened that Malaysia, and perhaps Indonesia as well, are going to be talking to the Vietnamese about sending these people back, as the British have done and begun to do.

Q: Well, you left there and retired.

SHOESMITH: Yes, in 1987.

Q: Just for the record, what did you do after you retired?

SHOESMITH: I retired [laughing].

Q: So many people end up, particularly if they've been involved in one area, by working on something dealing with that area.

SHOESMITH: Well, I became involved with the Japan- America Society here, and I've devoted a fair amount of time to that. I'm now the president of this society. It's a large society. In 1987 I also agreed to take over the presidency of the Malaysian-America Society, but that's very small. Takes almost no time. So I have done those things. But I have not gone into consulting or teaching. I did entertain some hopes, when I came back, thinking about things I'd like to do. I thought I might like to get involved, somehow, at the secondary school level on matters of foreign affairs, and I offered the Fairfax School System, to the head of the Dept of Social Studies, to come at any time if any of their teachers wanted a resource person on foreign affairs, the Foreign Service, or whatever. I'd be glad to do it. I got a nice letter back, thanking me, but I have had no calls.

Q: Thank you very much. I really appreciate this.

SHOESMITH: No, I thank you.

End of interview