

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

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INTERVIEW

Q: I wonder if we could start off by getting a little of your background. Where did you come from before you got into foreign service.

SOBER: Well, I guess like almost all foreign service officers who came in just after the war, I had been in the military during the war--as a naval reserve officer out in the Pacific. Before that I had graduated from the City College of New York in 1939.

Q: What had you majored in at CCNY?

SOBER: I majored in French, and I had thought that maybe I would teach French. But I had decided before I got out of college, that I would not. Actually I went to Bermuda in early 1941 to work for the Army as a civilian under the destroyers-for-bases deal.

Q: This was the famous 40 destroyers for bases.

SOBER: I went into the Navy from Bermuda and then came back and took the Foreign Service Exam.

Q: So you came into the Foreign Service when?

SOBER: About August 1st, 1947.

Q: Was there a class then?

SOBER: Yes, there was. This was the result of the written exam of December of '46. I think that was the second of these exams which were restricted to people who were veterans, who had served during the war. The process was much faster then. We took the exam in December and we had orals within several months. I was of a class of forty that came in at the beginning of August 1947.

Q: Could you describe your class? Who was in your class, and how did you view what you'd be doing.

SOBER: We came from all over. Looking at the list of people who have already given you an interview, Hermann Eilts is one those. Arch Blood is another on your list. They were in my class. I am now working with several others who are also at the State Department doing some post-career work.

If there was anything that characterized us, and we certainly came from different backgrounds, and different parts of the country, I'd say that it was an idealist approach. Having been through a war and the euphoria of victory, and with a hope about how the world might be; that we might somehow contribute something positively to it.

Q: What kind of training did you get?

SOBER: There was simply an indoctrination program, orientation program. I think it lasted about three or four weeks. It mainly focused on things such as the immigration and naturalization act. Nothing really substantive on diplomacy. Nothing on international law, nothing on economics, nothing on political analysis. You were supposed to go out and pick that up on the job.

Q: Then your first assignment was a rather unusual one. I've never run across anybody assigned there. Where you assigned?

SOBER: I was assigned to Tananarive, Madagascar. I think that was perhaps the result of the effort which they used to make, asking where would you like to go. Since I had majored in French, spent my junior year of college in Paris, and knew French quite well, I put down France, and I suppose 30 to 40% of the others did too, among the three places I wanted to go. I can only think that, well they figured Madagascar is a French colony, which it was at the time, and therefore that's pretty close to France.

Q: What sort of post did you go to and what was it like?

SOBER: It was an interesting first post. Absolutely unknown to us. In fact, when at our so-called graduation ceremony, at the Foreign Service Institute, my name was announced and they said, you're for Tananarive, I wasn't quite sure where it was although I guessed that it was Madagascar. But I went quickly to the map and found it was.

It was a good place to be for a foreign service officer just beginning at that time. It was a two-man post. It was led by a consul general, an old time foreign service officer who had been alone for at least a year by the time we got there, at the end of '47. He'd been waiting a long time for an assistant. Within about two or three months of our arrival, he took off on a much delayed home leave and left us in charge of the post, which was fun for a young fledgling foreign service officer--for example to be in charge of post on the Fourth of July and have to give a welcoming talk to the people who had been invited to the consulate for the July Fourth party and things like that. But also it was a rather interesting situation in that a rebellion, a native rebellion, was in effect against the French. It started some time before we got there and went on for another number of months, making for a rather interesting political situation.

Q: Could you describe the political situation on Madagascar. It was a French colony at that time. What was the situation during the immediate post-war period, and what was the situation during the war. Because the French colonies were all sort of going in different directions.

SOBER: It was French and stayed French throughout the war. It was far away from the middle east. It wasn't the situation such as you had in the middle east. I think "colony" was not exactly the name for it by the time we got there. I think it was called an overseas territory, slightly different, but basically a colony. It was under a French high

commissioner, a man who had been a senior army officer during the war, Pierre de Chevigne, who had been fairly close to De Gaulle.

The French were in charge and that was it. They ran everything and were in charge of everything. The French colonists, who had been there for years, were really the power brokers among the civilian elements. The Malagasy, even among the most evolved, the Hova group, were definitely in the back seat. Although there was this rebellion, the rebellion was not noticeable in Tananarive. It was out in the bush country especially, in the eastern part of the country. The French were rather harsh and eventually effective in putting it down.

So you had really a colonial situation, where you could not hear the voice of the Malagasy.

Q: I just interviewed yesterday a man who was assigned just about this time to the Gold Coast, now Ghana. He said that they were under instructions, don't report on the political situation and don't contact the natives, the blacks, at all outside that of the servant/master relationship. What were your instructions?

SOBER: The instructions were nil. That was rather nice. Maybe it would have been helpful, but I don't recall that we ever got any substantial guideline from the department or from Paris. We reported, in a way, to Embassy Paris, although our messages went directly to Washington, with copies to Paris. There was some interest in the rebellion, but it was far away from the United States and I don't recall much interest. A few times, they said, yes, that's interesting, what you're reporting. The interest was largely commercial: cloves, vanilla, some coffee came from Madagascar. Some mica was exported from there. It was not very important, except for the few companies who had a stake, especially in the spices area. Maybe that led up to a situation where it was deemed necessary to have an outpost, that far away, but I got the impression that people really didn't pay much attention to want to worry about what we were doing. We were left pretty well alone, which may reflect that they were satisfied with what we did, but more or less, didn't care very much.

Q: It still seems to be pretty much the case.

SOBER: As for Madagascar, well I don't know. Of course they had a big change. About 1960 they became independent. I have not followed it closely. It is well off the main stream of global events.

Q: Then you moved to some place which was much more in the main stream. You were in Tananarive from 1947-49 and then you were transferred to Prague.

SOBER: It was a direct transfer, and we arrived in the spring of '49. That was somewhat more than a year after the communists had taken over in Prague. It was difficult and fascinating. It was a time when the communists were tightening the screws in all aspects

of the scene. It was virtually impossible to strike up any sort of social acquaintance with any of the Czechs because of their concern of police supervision. There was lots of talk about being sent to the uranium mines that they were said to be developing.

Q: As a sort of Siberia.

SOBER: Within Czechoslovakia, that's right. People had their properties taken over, of course. All the businesses were being nationalized. And if you met someone at some sort of a diplomatic or state occasion, a Czech, it was not possible to say, come to my house, not possible from the point of view of their safety. So that once in a while you would arrange to meet someone at a corner downtown, join up and walk along the street, hoping that the man you were with would not be identified and would not be followed. It was a real police state that was tightening the screws all the time. On the other hand, there was a great deal of interest back in the United States at what was happening as part of the clamp down of Eastern Europe. It was a very interesting place to be.

Q: What sort of work were you doing?

SOBER: I was still a young, junior foreign service officer so that I had a series of rotational jobs. I started out with consular work and that was very interesting in a way because one of the things I was doing was reviewing visa applications from Czechs who were anxious to get out, and then there were questions as to whether they had collaborated during the war or things like that. Later on when I saw Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Consul*, it brought home to me some of the terror.

I did some administrative work and then I did some economic work, a variety of things.

Q: Your ambassador at that time was Ellis Briggs, for most of the time?

SOBER: Ellis came while we were there. Our first ambassador was Joseph Jacobs. He was transferred to Rome, not as ambassador, and he was replaced by Ellis Briggs.

Q: Ellis Briggs, is one of the more interesting characters in the foreign service. His son is an ambassador now, but this was Ellis O. Briggs?

SOBER: Yes, that's right.

Q: How would you describe his method of operation?

SOBER: Ellis was a delightful person. We didn't get to know him that well because we only stayed at that post about a year. We got caught up during Ellis' tenure in the very tight squeeze by the Czech government during which, within a couple of weeks, the embassy was reduced by two-thirds and slightly later by another fraction. It was cut down very sharply. Thus we didn't really get to know him very well. On the other hand, because I knew French well, he had me come along on a couple of introductory calls on

ambassadors where French was going to be the medium of discussion and he asked me, for example, because I'd picked up a few words of Czech, to accompany our public affairs officer, Joe Kolarek, to the border when Joe was declared persona non grata, and had to leave in haste. We got enough of a feel for Ellis Briggs although we did not get to know him at all intimately. I must say he was my ideal of what an ambassador should be and was. He was very concerned about his staff which was all to the good. He was a professional in every way and he knew when to be tough and to be satirical towards the regime, and I think when to play a more tactful role when it was something that he wanted to do. I think, we, my small group of junior officers and I think the embassy, at large, looked up to him as a very fine fellow.

Q: Were you there during the attack on South Korea, and the development of NATO?

SOBER: We were there at the beginning of NATO but not as long as June 1950 and South Korea. At that time, we had already left, had to go out with the two-thirds efflux from the embassy as a result of the clamp down by the Czechs who made the demand that we reduce.

Q: How did you feel about the "Soviet" menace. Was there the feeling that you were on the wrong side of an imminent attack on western Europe.

SOBER: No, I don't think so. This was 1949-50 and obviously the Cold War was in effect. Czechoslovakia had been one of the first steps of the communization of eastern Europe. We knew there was a problem and we felt it in the limitations on the way we could operate and the contacts and all that, as I've mentioned. But I think at that time the supremacy of the United States in terms of military prowess as well as political and economic strength was such that I don't recall ever being concerned that there was going to be an attack through Czechoslovakia on to West Germany.

Q: Then after two rather isolated posts, you got another. You went to Iceland, Reykjavik, where you were from 1950 to 1952. Was the direct transfer a result from this clamp down in Czechoslovakia?

SOBER: It was a direct transfer, punctuated by home leave. But it was a transfer that had been unexpected in as much as we stayed in Czechoslovakia only for about a year, for the reasons we mentioned.

I drove our car from Prague to Paris while my wife stayed behind with our two very young children. The Briggs' put them up for a week before they joined me in Paris. It was in Paris that we got the word that we were transferred to Iceland, which was somewhat of a shock. I had been persuaded by our association with Ellis Briggs, that Latin America would be a good place to be because that's where he'd spent much of his career. And I think when we were evacuated from Czechoslovakia and we were asked where we'd like to go, as I recall it although it might not be in the correct order, for where I'd like to go I

put Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago de Chile. So when we were told we were going to Iceland, it was a bit of an abrupt shock.

But we went. And that too, yes, was isolated in a way but quite different. After all, it was part of NATO, and was western Europe, although geographically isolated. To me it was a very interesting professional challenge. I was sent there as an economic officer, but for the two years that I was there, a good part of the second year, I was doing political work. I was still quite a junior officer, and lo and behold, for a couple of periods but at least for a month at one time, I was elevated to be Chargé d'affaires. It was then a legation; it had not yet been raised to an embassy. For a young officer, that was interesting. For example, I was Chargé at a time when our air base at Keflavik was reactivated in 1952.

Q: This had been a base during World War II, a very important base as far as the ferrying of aircraft to England and also anti-submarine patrols. But it had fallen into what?

SOBER: It had been a civilian airport but we negotiated a bilateral agreement with the Icelandic government which was a member of NATO although it did not have, and still does not have, any military force of its own. It was exhilarating, if you will, for a young and inexperienced foreign service officer to go in the legation's car, with the American flag flying, down to Keflavik to greet the Air Force General who was coming in to open the base.

It was very interesting to be there. Then, and to some extent now, it had an interesting political situation in that about 20% of the popular vote in the national elections went communist. Within the NATO context, that was a pretty interesting situation.

Q: What was the political situation in Iceland at the time?

SOBER: Basically, you had conservatives who had been in charge almost all of the time. But you had some social democrats, some agricultural elements and the communist elements all vying for power. A very literate society. Illiteracy was totally unknown. We used to be told at the time, I think perhaps it was true, that Iceland had the highest book purchasing per capita in the world. It was extremely clean. My wife never had to worry about any dirt around our two infants. The water was very clean. Everything was spotless. It was a little tough to get used to the very short days in the winter and a little difficult to get around, outside Iceland, of course. But from a professional point of view, the types of things I had to do and the political situation were of interest. And after the base was reopened, the concerns that the Icelanders had, not to have their social system, their culture, diluted in any way by having too much outside exposure, was pretty obvious to us in the embassy. The Icelanders were very concerned about the number of GIs who would be allowed to come to Reykjavik, about twenty miles away, how many GIs should be allowed to come into Reykjavik at any one time. We had to have negotiations with them to make sure not too many would come at any one time.

Q: Was this a problem with the Air Force?

SOBER: No, they understood very well. Certainly it was not a problem with any of the leaders that I experienced. I think they understood that they had an interest in being there and surely they had an interest in seeing that their men had a chance at some decent liberty time. But they were quite sensitive to the concerns of Icelanders. I think there were incidents, once or twice, but never were they blown up into anything serious.

Q: How about dealing with Icelandic government? Were they difficult to deal with.

SOBER: No, they were very open. The base question was the major political issue we had to deal with them on. They were careful in protecting their rights. But they were not difficult to deal with. In terms of economic information, there weren't many secrets that they would be concerned about. Their major concern was fish and their major problem during the time we were there was the so called cod war, with the British, in particular with the British trawlers coming too close to their land. They were worried about over fishing and there was a little political dust-up but this didn't affect the United States very much because we didn't have any fishing boats up along those waters.

Q: How would you characterize the communist party as you saw it in Iceland?

SOBER: Literate, not extremist, or fanatic. Certainly did not go in for violence. They tried to play a rather sophisticated advanced type of political game. They had a paper which was read pretty widely. I remember having conversations with some of the communist leaders from time to time. You could have a rational conversation with them, not in terms of getting them to change their minds, but in terms of their sometimes legitimate concerns and grievances over some of the problems there. But they played within the rules as far as I could see.

Q: So, even though this was at the height of the McCarthy Period, this wasn't a disruptive element.

SOBER: McCarthy peaked a little bit after we were there. We left in August of 1952. Well, there was a concern. It was a country in NATO, and obviously, should the communists have come to power it would have been a serious problem. They never did come to power while we were there. They did form an alliance later on but they never had power. It was a legitimate concern but it didn't cause any frantic worries.

Q: You left there in 1952 and you went and had some university training.

SOBER: Yes, I was assigned to Northwestern University for economic training.

Q: Had you decided that that was your bag?

SOBER: I worked into it. There was nothing like the cone system that we have now. You were not assigned to any particular functional area, as I recall. But I had done economic work; I had done some in Prague, a good deal in Iceland. The way it worked was, the personnel people in Washington decided that it seemed like a good thing, and they proposed, somewhat unexpectedly to me, that I go back and take advanced economic training at Northwestern. I was somewhat uncertain about that, but I agreed, and we had a very pleasant year.

Q: Then you were assigned from 1953 to 1956 in Ankara, Turkey. Was that at your request.

SOBER: No. I don't recall what I had requested. Well, I take it back. At Northwestern, I did a paper or two relating to eastern Europe, and as I recall it, my memory may not serve me right, I had the idea of going back there. As it turned out there was a job in Helsinki as a senior economic officer, and I thought maybe I would go there. This was the McCarthy period. Fortunately I was not involved with that but there were delays all over, and I was assigned to Ankara. Again this was one of those things where the headquarters people in their overall wisdom had decided what was good.

I had no complaint about that. In fact, we looked forward to our stay in Turkey, and we enjoyed our stay there.

Q: Could you explain how the embassy worked at that time? How Avra Warren, the ambassador, operated at that time?

SOBER: Avra Warren was a very experienced foreign service officer, knowing in the ways of working abroad. I don't think Warren ever had a senior job in Washington, but he came from Pakistan to Turkey and went to Finland, later on.

He was very much in charge. He knew what was going on. I've seen this in recent years even more than then, in terms of how he had run the embassy in Pakistan, through work that I've been doing, reviewing documents for the Foreign Relations of the United States series covering the time he was ambassador in Pakistan.

Very much in charge. When he was in Turkey, one of the interesting things that happened was the development of our collective security network in Asia. Turkey was already in NATO and we had established a close relationship with Turkey. During the time we were there you had the Turco-Iraqi Pact in 1955 which developed into the Baghdad Pact, to which Iran, Pakistan and the United Kingdom adhered. Turkey was a key element in that collective security network because it was the link between the collective security system eastward toward Asia and westward toward NATO. So we had a very deep interest in Turkey, a close relationship, and a large aid program which was not without troubles, because the Turks were always running into some serious problems and always wanted more aid than we were able or willing to provide.

But Warren was much in charge of what was going on.

Q: You were an economic officer. Was there someone above you.

SOBER: Yes, the economic section followed a line that was different from the norm, but it was a line that was being pushed at that time, very shortly after we arrived. (We and the Warrens arrived at just about the same time; in fact we crossed over by ship with Mrs. Warren, and Warren came along soon after). It was decided that the economic section of the embassy would merge with the economic aid mission, which was not AID at the time, but ICA or something. The economic counselor, Owen Jones, who was my immediate boss, was made the deputy economic aid mission director. We were housed in the economic aid building rather than the new embassy chancery itself.

Now we were part of the embassy. We attended embassy staff meetings. Nevertheless there was something of a link through the aid mission. I think that was all right. Some of it was justified. Some of us were a little uneasy and thought we were being pushed aside a little more than was called for. But I don't recall that it inhibited the reporting that I was doing. I was doing economic and financial reporting, had good contacts, and I never had any undue pressure from anyone from the aid mission to tailor my reporting along the lines that they would have liked. I don't think it made that much difference one way or another.

Q: How did you go about doing this economic and political reporting. What were you interested in and why?

SOBER: Well, on the financial side, they were running into financial problems. They had large arrears in paying their bills and that was a serious political issue and caused some heartburn. They felt that the United States was being unduly negative in giving in to their desires. We, for example, insisted that they take on some policy reforms to improve their situation.

The nature of the arrears and what they were doing in their domestic situation obviously impacted on their external situation. I had great contacts at their treasury department, the finance ministry, and used to get a lot of information and report it. That was of continuing interest.

And we dealt in other things. Their investment law, petroleum exploration and things like that. We did try to coordinate with the people in the aid mission who were obviously interested in macroeconomic things, and complemented what they did and benefited from some of the information that they were getting also.

Q: How did we view, from your perspective, the Turkish government at the time?

SOBER: The Turkish government was under Adnan Menderes, the Prime Minister. He was the leader of the Democratic Party which had come into office in 1950 when the

Republican Party under General Ismet Inonu was defeated. Inonu stayed as the major opposition leader.

Menderes was a strong man with very strong ideas. He very much supported Turkey's membership in NATO, very much valued and depended upon the relationship with the United States. Of course it was a very strong point in US/Turkish relations, although we had some troubles with him and President Celal Bayar, on the question on economic assistance. They thought we were being miserly, and we thought we were being realistic and helpful by insisting that certain things be done. By and large the relationship was cooperative.

Now there were some uneasy developments in terms of Menderes' desire to stay in power. I left in 1956 and it was about three or four years later that he was overthrown by the army and later executed for his internal political excesses. That was several years after we left but there were signs even when we were there that serious troubles were possible. He was too hard a political infighter and tried to make sure that the opposition did not have a fair chance. There were signs of this. But I would say until the time we left, in the middle of 1956, these concerns were not very severe.

Q: How did you view Turkey. Did you think that it was always going to need assistance or were we going to be able to turn it into a strong self-sufficient country?

SOBER: I'm trying to recall my state of mind at that time, 34 years ago. Turkey was somewhat an undeveloped country but clearly was looking towards the west in terms of its economic outlook. I'm not talking about social systems in the bush where people were sometimes subsistence farmers, but by and large, the national outlook, such as it was, was towards the west.

Geographically they might be in the Middle East, but tied to NATO, they considered themselves part of Europe only a small piece of land, where Istanbul is, is in Europe. But they were looking that way.

Q: This is reflective of Ataturk's attitude, isn't it?

SOBER: Sure, he was a great reformer who had done, to my mind, some marvelous things under the circumstances he faced. They were rather modernistic in their outward approach, although they had an enormous distance to go. They were producing good amounts of food. They could feed themselves. And they had intelligent people and they were very trainable people. I could see that they had a long way to go and that they would not be a major world economic power but they could make it themselves, at a low, but an increasingly good, level of subsistence for their people.

Q: I served in Greece 15 years later and everything seemed to center around the terrible Turk. How much did Greeks enter into the Turkish psyche.

SOBER: Much less than Turkey figured in the Greek psyche. Much less. That's a factor of difference in size. Turkey was and is more confident of itself and its great concerns are other than its relations with Greece. Although that's a serious problem, sometimes a serious irritant.

When we were there there were some terrible incidents of violence against Greek communities both in Istanbul and Izmir. That was 1955 as I recall. Basically this was over Cyprus. I remember the slogan of the day was, Kibris Turketur ("Cyprus is Turk"). So you did have that problem, and there were very unfortunate incidents in the mid fifties. But by and large that was not something Turkey was mainly worried about.

I could see the difference in Greece. Afterward I worked back in the Department on this area. I was there at the time of the Colonels Revolt, and I was in regional affairs.

The Greeks, by their size, have much more to be concerned about with Turkey, than Turkey, with its size, has to be concerned with Greece.

Q: One last question on this. How did you find the relationship between the embassy and the consulate general?

SOBER: I don't remember any disputes, or serious differences of any type, between what we were doing in Istanbul and in Ankara. I went to visit Istanbul every now and again. I remember, coming back to this question about Greece that you mentioned, going down in September of '55 to the annual meeting of the IMF and World Bank which happened to be held, that year, in Istanbul. It was very soon after these very mean events had taken place. I remember going to the university where the bank fund meetings were going to be held and the outside circle was ringed with tanks because there was sort of a martial law situation.

I went down and collaborated with our people in Istanbul. If there were any troubles between us, they never came to my attention.

Q: You left Ankara in 1956 and you went to INR, Intelligence and Research, and you were there from 1956 to 60. That's a fairly solid stint. What were your concerns?

SOBER: They varied. First of all, Wristonization had occurred.

Q: Could you explain what that was?

SOBER: There was a man, I believe he was president of Brown University, Henry Wriston. He was called in by John Foster Dulles to examine the organization of the State Department, and he focused on the division between foreign service and civil service in the State Department in the organization of personnel. As a result of his investigations, a program called Wristonization was put into effect, which sought to diminish very strongly the division between foreign service and civil service, so that many jobs in Washington,

in the State Department, which had been held by civil service people were designated as foreign service positions, to be filled by foreign service people. And civil service officers within the department were given the option of joining the foreign service, which they were allowed to do, at equivalent salaries, going over into foreign service categories and titles, or staying on but being told that if they stayed on in the civil service, their chances of promotion to any more important jobs were going to be very seriously reduced.

As this happened there was a need to fill many of the jobs in Washington that had been filled always by civil service people, not foreign service people. And when I was ripe to come home from Turkey, there was a fairly large move of foreign service people into jobs, such as in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which had been almost entirely been filled by civil service people. So that's how that particular job happened.

Q: I served in INR about five years later. It seems to me that if there is one place where a civil servant would be better than a foreign service officer it would be INR. Some one who really knows the country rather than someone who sort of pops in and they may bring in experience from the field which may be important on the desk, but in INR you want depth of knowledge. Did you find this?

SOBER: Sure, and this is underlined by the assignment I was given, when I first got to INR. I was assigned to be the person dealing with economic work in the Northeast Asia part of INR.

Q: That's Japan and Korea.

SOBER: Yes, Japan and Korea. I had been to Japan on my destroyer at the end of the war.

Q: Doing what you could to destroy the Japanese economy beforehand.

SOBER: But I had never been there before in any professional work. And I found myself having to learn, and I had zero to begin with. Well, I stayed there a year and a half. I was given a trip of about a month, going to Korea and Japan. I worked hard at it and I think I learned something. But your point is absolutely right. I had no depth, no historical perspective. I'm sure there was a loss there. However, I didn't mind it very much. It was out of the mainstream but it was interesting to me. After about a year and a half, as I recall it, the effective head of INR, not the top man, but the man in charge of research activity, Alan Evans, asked me, to my great surprise, if I would like to shift from Northeast Asia to become the branch chief for South Asia. Well, I had never considered that and I said, give me a day to think about it, and then I thought about it and talked about it with my wife. And I said, okay.

Well, that was a turning point in my life.

Q: Could you explain what South Asia was in State Department terms?

SOBER: South Asia is a term of ours which geographically could be better defined as South Central Asia. It refers to what we call the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, going from Afghanistan in the west through what is now Bangladesh and the eastern-most parts of India on the east, from Nepal and Kashmir in the north to Sri Lanka and the Maldives in the south.

I said that was a turning point in my career and life. I did accept the job, because although I knew virtually nothing about India, it did seem like an interesting place, and I've never ever regretted it. Alan Evans is no longer with us but he certainly changed our lives, because my career, to a large extent, turned then to South Asia. To the extent I still have a career, I am still deeply involved with it.

Q: What was our interest in that area. We're talking about the time you were in INR in the late fifties.

SOBER: As always, since World War II and only coming to an end now, our major interest was the Cold War. I had mentioned earlier the formation of the Baghdad Pact that included Pakistan, and by the time I started working, in 1957, on South Asia, the Baghdad Pact was going. We had a very important relationship, for that area, with Pakistan both in military and economic terms. Vis-a-vis India, our concern more than anything at that particular time, was its nonalignment policy and growing relationship with the USSR. The Soviets had rather effectively come through a window of opportunity that had been opened by our allying with Pakistan. And so there was a concern, whither India and which way was Mr. Nehru going to go, and it was an interesting time. You had problems everywhere from the middle east across the whole swath of southern Asia into Southeast Asia. You had a growing American interest. It was not vital at the time, but it was of growing importance in the context of the Cold War.

Q: As you saw it then, what was the Eisenhower policy?

SOBER: I must say that in addition to the work I did then, I have the added perspective I've got by having had to review major documentation on the area which has been published in the Foreign Relations of the United States in the Volume for 1955-57 which came out last year. The Eisenhower view of the area was in the Cold War context - How is this area going to figure in this confrontation that we had with the Soviet Union and its friends including at that time Communist China.

The Baghdad Pact was there. In early 1957, you had the Eisenhower Doctrine, a joint resolution going through Congress which said that we had a very high interest in the Middle East region and that we would use any means necessary, including force, in cooperating with countries of the region who were threatened by countries controlled by international communism. It was the Cold War that was the ruling directive for our concerns in the whole area.

Q: How did we view Pakistan as being a member of CENTO. There's talk that the British brought them in in order to get us involved.

SOBER: I don't think that's true. It's true that our outlook, the northern tier concept, we did develop in collaboration with the British. Of course Pakistan was part of the old British empire of India. India was known to the British far better than it was to us. But by the time this was taking place, we're talking 1954, 55, 56, the British influence was not nearly what it had been. We were playing an increasing and what became the major role in that area, too.

Pakistan. We didn't have to bring Pakistan in. Pakistan was very glad to come in. They had a bit of concern, but they were glad to come in. Basically Pakistan wanted to have some very powerful friends and the American superpower would be number one to help Pakistan build itself against what it saw as its primary foreign threat. And that was India. It was not the Soviet Union or Communist China, which were the great threats which the northern tier concept and the Baghdad Pact and the collective security across Asia were concerned about.

So we and Pakistan had different views about the primary threat. However it served the purposes of both countries to have an alliance. (Actually our only formal alliance was through the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization of which we were both members; we never officially joined the Baghdad Pact). But we looked on Pakistan as an important element in this collective security system, in that it was a fairly large country, believed to have a good military tradition, and willing to sign up, if you will, on the western, free world, side. That was good enough for us.

At the same time, for Pakistan, I'm not suggesting that they liked the Communists, but that was not their major concern. Their major concern was India. And it served their purpose, very clearly, to receive American military equipment and political support.

Q: How did you view Nehru and India at that time.

SOBER: It's hard for me to talk about "at that time." We have worked on the region for such a long time. We had a chance to meet Nehru, briefly, when we were living in India. And read a lot of stuff about him before and since that time. I may not be able to say just how I viewed him in the late fifties, before we went to live in south Asia for the first time.

One of the good things about INR, coming to South Asia as I had from Northeast Asia, without any academic or other background--one of the great things about INR, and I would say that this is still true for foreign service people, is that since you're divorced from the hubbub of overnight operational traffic, and rush deadlines on everything, you do have time to do some reading. I did do a great deal of reading over the period of several years. And I read things that Nehru had written, speeches, books. And I must say I had come to a very considerable admiration for the man's intellectual ability. And I'll tell you now, that I still think he's one of the great statesmen of the 20th century although, like others, he didn't do everything quite right.

He was certainly the leading statesman of South Asia. A man who had projected himself on the world scene and made an impact. A man who founded, with Tito and Nasser, the nonaligned movement. A man who had a certain self-respect for himself and his country, who demanded India be given a position to which he believed, because of its ancient civilization and culture, and its size, it was entitled. Now that type of attitude brought some troubles in his relationship with the United States. Because we had not yet found ourselves able to deal with these far-away people who wanted to be seen as self-confident and respectable and able to get equal treatment from us.

I think this is still a major problem in India/US relationships. Sometimes when I'm lecturing to my students, I call this the Rodney Dangerfield syndrome. The Indians want respect and don't think the US gives it to them.

Q: Foster Dulles seemed to have the attitude, if you're not for us, you're against us. And particularly with this non aligned movement. Did this permeate INR and other places or did you feel that those dealing with those places were saying, well yes but... there are other things to be considered and you might pay lip service to this idea. Or were you pretty much on board with Dulles at the time.

SOBER: I don't recall the sense that we were taken over by Dulles or by anyone else. It's more complicated than that. Dulles was expressing opinions that were not peculiar only to Dulles. It was a Cold War and there was the feeling that the United States was somewhat threatened. There was the feeling that we'd like people to at least be friendly to us if not allies. There was a concern about India.

If I can jump ahead, I think that still is a problem. In my experience throughout the years, I found a lot of people in the government and the United States at large, who look upon India with askance at their foreign connections and their trends in their thinking of where they are in the world. So it was not just a question of Dulles. As you said, yes at one point, Dulles did feel what you said, if you're not with us, you're against us. But I think we have matured well beyond that point to respecting a different view which does not necessarily say that they're "agin" us.

No, in INR, certainly when I became the chief of the South Asia branch, there was no bias against India because of Dulles. There may have been some feelings that India was not doing everything that we thought it should be doing for ultimately its own good. But no, I don't think there was any bias. On the contrary, and this is what INR should be doing, we tried to provide a rather independent, and objective, and if you will, impartial (given the fact that we are Americans), view of events and analyses and outlook to policy people. I would say that we did not do too badly. I think that there was a recognition that the American Cold War approach in that part of the world, as in the northern tier, with the alliance and the strong military supply relationship with Pakistan, had alienated India and Nehru because they quite properly saw what Pakistan's main concern was. It was India and not the Soviet threat. The Indians warned us and complained to us about this and it led to, as I mentioned before, a window of opportunity for the Soviets which they seized

and have used very astutely since the mid-fifties toward what is today a very strong military supply relationship with India. I think in INR we recognized that and we were aware of what Pakistan's main interest was, although in the Cold War context, our major policy leaders were not concerned with regional events as much as global events such as in the Cold War. So they were not too concerned about the regional ramifications of our military supply arrangements with Pakistan, but were much more concerned in having a reliable friend in Pakistan in the Cold War context.

Q: You were dealing with that in 1958. How about the events that led to the Baghdad Pact blowing apart. Qasim killed off the king and then N. Said was lynched. That whole business in Iraq which effectively ended CENTO.

SOBER: Not really. It took Iraq out of the Baghdad Pact. And then the Baghdad Pact became CENTO. The headquarters moved from Baghdad to Turkey, where it stayed until CENTO died after the revolution in Iran. It didn't really affect the operations of the Baghdad Pact, and then CENTO. We never joined either one, although we were hard pressed by the regional members and by Great Britain, because of Middle Eastern concerns. First of all Iraq was the only Arab country in the alliance. Other Arab countries like Egypt were dead set against Iraq's joining with a western alliance. Then of course there was the question of Israel. How do you deal with Iraq which was and still is one of the steadfast anti-Israel countries. For those reasons we didn't join the Baghdad or the CENTO Pact. We were officially observers. However, in effect we were full-time members. In effect. We took our turn hosting the ministerial meetings annually, we were members of all the committees, we took part in joint military exercises. We were, to all intents and purposes, accepted, except for signing on the line, as members of CENTO. It did not change very much after the departure of Iraq, because it did not very much affect our view of the "threat". There was still the Sino/Soviet threat at that particular time, which continued.

So we went along with the transfer from Iraq to Turkey of the headquarters. Actually because we would not or could not join, we entered in March of 1959 into identical bilateral executive agreements not only with Pakistan, but with Iran and Turkey who remained as the regional members. And the one with Pakistan is still in effect. It's talked about more since Afghanistan went critical.

As a substitute for joining CENTO, and under the authority of the Eisenhower doctrine, the Joint Resolution on the Middle East of 1957, we said that in the event of threats we would consult and might use force in accordance with our constitutional processes but limited again by the Eisenhower resolution -- in effect, the operative meaning was, if Pakistan were threatened with aggression by a country "controlled by international communism." That has been a very sore point, in various times in the past, because we did not come to Pakistan's help in 1965 when it found itself in a war with India; nor in 1971 in another war with India. We did not come militarily to Pakistan's help, quite the contrary. Pakistan felt that we had led it down, because we had the '59 agreement. It still is on the books. The point is that they have never been really willing to accept that our

limitations under the '59 agreement involve Pakistan's being aggressed upon by a country controlled by international communism. We did not and do not consider India a country controlled by international communism. There the '59 agreement really does not come into force.

Q: You left INR in 1960 and you went to Bombay, where you served until 1963. What were you doing and how a consulate general in Bombay operated.

SOBER: I was sent as the number two in the consulate general with immediate responsibilities for economic work. That was interesting. Bombay, first of all, was, and still is (my wife and I were there just a few months ago) a vibrant city. If you detached Bombay from the hinterland, you might look upon it as, westernized is not the word, but modern in many aspects. With a middle class that you could see fitting into a commercial environment in the west. Obviously there's a lot of poverty, and hovels, but a good part of Bombay gives you a cosmopolitan outlook. A fascinating place that we enjoyed very, very much. People were quite friendly. Economic work was okay because it was and still is the major center for American economic interest. It's where investments are, and a big financial center.

Relations with our embassy were fine. But varied. Our first ambassador was Ellsworth Bunker, for whom I had the greatest admiration and respect. The next one was Kenneth Galbraith, and a very different person.

Q: I wonder if you could talk about your impression of him. I understand there was a tremendous ego there.

SOBER: I think saying he had a tremendous ego is a considerable understatement.

Q: Did this impact on what you were doing?

SOBER: No, it didn't really. No, to his credit, never did we have instructions as to what not to do, or what to do. We reported directly to Washington, with copies to New Delhi. I was there, for example, for the Goa takeover in 1961. I was there and happened to be in charge during the whole period of the Sino-Indian War of 1962. That was of considerable interest to the United States. No, I don't recall ever being directed by New Delhi, "do this in a particular way."

Q: How about the Goa takeover. This did not sit very well in the United States.

SOBER: No, it did not.

Q: What happened and how were you reporting it?

SOBER: The dispute had been brewing for a long time. Back in late '55, John Foster Dulles had issued a joint statement along with the foreign minister of Portugal who

happened to be in the United States, in which there was some reference to Portuguese overseas provinces. The Indians took that very badly and said, oh you're taking the Portuguese position. The Portuguese had been quite adamant about not doing what the French had done, for example, agree to give back their Indian possessions peacefully. So this had been building up.

What happened in 1961 was that the Indians got tired of the Portuguese adamancy about not giving up Goa. India organized their military, surrounded the area and claimed that someone had fired on them. They said therefore it required a police action, and in retaliation, they had to go in.

Well, it was pretty clear that the Indians had decided enough was enough and we're going to finish this off once and for all. And they did it in very short order.

You're right. This did attract international attention. The American ambassador to the UN was Adlai Stevenson and he had been considered to be very friendly to India. This was the Kennedy period, and Kennedy was also friendly to India. And I think that's why he sent Galbraith there. Another reason he sent Galbraith, I think, is that he was happier to have Galbraith in India than in Washington.

When Adlai Stevenson took out against the Indian aggression, use of force to achieve a political end, it sent the Indians up the wall.

Q: Did that have any repercussions?

SOBER: Oh yeah, they were mad at us, but it was passing. Whatever ill will existed because of that was overtaken surely the next year, by the Sino/Indian War. There was a tremendous turnaround, as you recall. There had been trouble building up for six or seven years, with disputes over the borders between China and India in two regions. One in Ladakh and the other in the northeast frontier region.

The war broke out in 1962. The Chinese thought that they had had enough of threats and disputes with India and thought there was a need for some reaction. They sent their forces over the border. Especially in the northeast the Indians were badly prepared. Krishna Menon, somebody who was not liked in the United States, the minister of defense, was sacked. Lo and behold, Nehru made a 180-degree reversal of course and, in panic, called upon Washington and London for military help. Now that's quite a change, since he was the apostle of nonalignment. It was unexpected. Jack Kennedy -- of course I was there and not here, but my guess is that he spent not more than five minutes cogitating about how to react to this request. He said go, and we sent some military transport planes from Germany, the closest place, with some things like tents and small arms. Nothing that could really affect the course of the war in these far away, very high altitude places.

You're talking about the Himalayas and the foothills. But politically it was a momentous turn of course, in India's position. How did it affect us? Well, at the time I happened to be in charge of our consulate and it was quite a development in our relationship with the Indians. I remember being asked to come sit on the platform at various public meetings,

when people were exhorted to do their best, the women were encouraged to throw their gold bangles and bracelets into the war chest. There was a tremendous euphoria regarding US-Indian relations because of Kennedy's willingness to do what we could, which was, in the event, not very much.

Q: I've heard it said by somebody else whom I interviewed that there has been this perception in the area that when a Republican administration is in the tilt goes to Pakistan, and when a Democratic administration is in, to India. And looking at it I can see a certain amount of validity about it. Is this valid?

SOBER: This is a fact that is deeply believed in by the people of Pakistan. In fact, also by people in India. And I think, historically, if you check it out, you can support this. I'm not sure this is a result of a deliberate interest or effort by democratic or republican administrations. But that's the way it has worked out. It's a fact of life, in the political map of the subcontinent, certainly as to what they believe and expect.

Q: Part of this is because Republican administrations tend to be a little more hard line towards the confrontation with the Soviet Union. That's changed considerably now. Therefore Pakistan is more interesting than India.

SOBER: I think you can carry that through to a point where it doesn't work out. For example, Jack Kennedy. Yes, he said, let's help India. He was friendly toward India. He was friendly toward India before he became President. As a senator, not too long before the election campaign, he proposed a resolution which would have pinpointed India as a country to help. Why? Well, he might have liked India but we were concerned about Communist China, and we didn't want China to be seen as the model for third-world uplift. We wanted to have a democratic model. So again it was China, and it was still the Cold War context. And why did he accede instantly to Nehru's request for help in 1962? Remember it was China - a communist country. So he wasn't out of accord with the American procedure. I would jump ahead a little bit. Jimmy Carter also liked India. Remember Ms. Lillian, who had been in the Peace Corps in Gujarat, north of Bombay. In fact he sent her as his representative to the funeral of the President of India. So he was favorable to India. Still when the Soviets went into Afghanistan in 1979, he immediately made some efforts to reconcile with Pakistan. Relations with Pakistan had gone to their nadir. They had never been so low as they were just before then. But he wanted to open up the relationship, because the Soviets had gone into Afghanistan. So there he wanted to do well by Pakistan, because it was in our interest, because it was again in the context of the Cold War. Thus I'm not sure that it's correct to say that there is something inevitable or inherent in the democratic or republican makeup which makes one favor Pakistan or India.

Q: Anymore on Bombay?

SOBER: No.

Q: But it did help solidify your interest in the area.

SOBER: Yes. We loved our stay in Bombay. We'd like to go back.

Q: Then you came back to Washington. What were you doing from 1964-66?

SOBER: 1963-64, I was assigned to the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. It was pleasant and useful.

Q: Did you find the military understood the complexities of issues as the State Department viewed them?

SOBER: No, I didn't find that. That's not to say that some of the military would have had difficulty in understanding the byways of diplomacy in world affairs. On the contrary, I must say that my relationships with the military were excellent and I found by and large they were appreciative of a particular viewpoint which our experience brought to the region. So in every way it was a positive experience.

Q: You were then assigned to NEA?

SOBER: Yes, the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. My first job was one which no longer exists - officer in charge of economic affairs in South Asia. I stayed in that job for a couple of years. Then I was transferred within the same bureau to be the deputy director, and then director, for regional affairs, covering the entire bureau, which as you know includes the Middle East.

Q: Other than reporting on economic matters, did we have economic interest in the area.

SOBER: As for South Asia, no, not really. There is virtually no product of South Asia that is necessary to the United States. Certainly nothing like oil which is essential. We have business interests there. We have AID interests. It was a period when Kennedy had already gone, but there was a considerable interest under LBJ in economic development in the area and particularly in India. It was a carryover from the idea I spoke of before, that India, as the second largest country in the world, might be seen to be an example of successful economic development along generally democratic lines. As a counterpart to China with its backyard furnaces and such. So there was a good deal of interest.

I think the economic element of our interest in South Asia at the time, which is most strongly remembered in the region to this date, revolves around one of those failures of the monsoon in the subcontinent. India had a failure of the monsoon as I recall in 1965-66, and there was a threat of famine as they had ever so often. Recall the enormous famine of Bengal in 1943-44. They appealed to the United States for substantial help. I might say that the euphoria of Indo-US relations that began and followed for sometime after the Sino-Indo War had pretty well washed off by this time.

The United States under LBJ was quite willing to help except that he had some other concerns. The Indians were not being at all helpful on Vietnam issues which more and more were preoccupying LBJ's attention. He also felt that the Indians were not doing enough in their own agricultural system to help themselves. It was a period when self-help was a very big thing to us. So LBJ engineered this policy. We would help India but we would do what we could to make sure they helped themselves. We had what we called the short tether policy. Which meant that LBJ, and the White House, would reserve unto itself, the authority to release segments of PL 480 assistance in accordance with perceptions of how much India was doing to help itself.

Now it was a very important program. Some 10 million tons of grain were shipped to India by the United States in one year, 1966-67. An unprecedented amount of grain. It used to be said that there was an almost unbroken line of ships from the American gulf ports to India.

On the other hand, we did press the Indians to do more than they'd been doing, in the way of self-help. In the way of rodent control, pesticide control, better storage/silage, better transport facilities, easing up on credit facilities to encourage farm production. A wide variety of things. Despite the fact that in many ways the aid program was successful, and widespread famine itself was averted, what tends to be remembered in India, I have found, is not how much we did for them, but what we did to them, as to "political" strings, aid strings, where we were mean and hard. Well, some people might say that that was for their good but it one of those things that didn't leave too good a taste.

I was in the Bureau dealing with these issues.

Q: We were watching the Indian economy very, very closely then. What you were reporting on had a direct impact.

SOBER: I was in Washington, of course, and we got our reports from our people in India. The Agriculture Department here was quite active, Orville Freeman was LBJ's Secretary of Agriculture. He was designated as the key point man here, and we had meetings with the Indian agriculture minister here, Mr. Subramaniam. We sent people over there. We watched pretty carefully what was going on. As we watched we did send very substantial amounts of grain.

Q: Then you moved to NEA. During this five-year time you had Philip Talbot as assistant secretary, then Raymond Hare, Luke Battle and then Parker Hart. Did you feel a lack of continuity, so many in such a short time.

SOBER: No, it didn't disturb me. They were all competent and professional. I had personally very good relationships with each one of them and still consider myself a friend with each of them. A good competent man at the top is smart enough to rely on staff. That's the continuity that's necessary. If they didn't know they sought advice.

Q: These were professionals.

SOBER: Talbot was the only one who was not foreign service. But he had been associated particularly with South Asia during and since World War II. So there was not a problem in his not knowing the region. As they came in, there were no substantial changes in the deputies, and so you had a strong continuity element.

Q: Then what position did you assume.

SOBER: I transferred from being the officer in charge of economic affairs for South Asia to being Deputy Director of Regional Affairs for the whole Bureau. And in a fairly short time, I became the Director. I was the Director of Regional Affairs from October 1966 for three years.

Q: What is Regional Affairs?

SOBER: Regional Affairs is an umbrella. It covers and has functions relating to bureau-wide activities that don't properly fit into the purview of any of the specific country areas, the country directors. So, for example, you talk about military matters across the whole vast area, you talk about congressional relations, about relationships with AID - those which don't deal with a single country that would be more properly dealt with by a country director. A variety of things.

Basically, in addition to the things I've said, it's what the assistant secretary wants to use it for.

Q: We're talking about the latter half of the Johnson administration. Dealing with India and Pakistan, you coming in from that angle, to a bureau known for its battles over middle east policy, especially with regard to Israel, how did you view this. You hadn't been really involved in this before.

SOBER: I had a little bit of experience, really on the periphery, having been three years in Turkey. But not directly with Arab-Israeli affairs, one of the things I was thrown into quickly at the time of the June 1967 War.

I worked with Luke Battle, who was the assistant secretary, on military questions and military supply by the United States. Frankly I never perceived in the NEA Bureau the type of battle that you refer to. Of course it existed outside. I think there are misperceptions about how the State Department looks upon this particular region. Questions about the so-called Arabists, who are widely perceived to be pro-Arab and anti-Israel. Well, frankly, with perhaps some exceptions, I would say that this is a misperception. My own feeling regarding the people who had worked in the area, lived in the area for years, was that, yes, their views on different questions had been colored by their experiences, but I always felt that they deserved the credit for doing what they believed was right, not because they had a bias which predetermined which way they

were going to think. I certainly did not see at the leadership of NEA, certainly not in Ray Hare or Luke Battle, any predisposition to take one position over another on the Arab-Israeli question.

Q: Was Pete Hart stronger?

SOBER: Ray Hare you might say was an Arabist but he had such a long and broad experience. Pete Hart was an Arabist but I had less to do with him because he didn't stay very long. He was only in as Assistant Secretary for three months or so, as you may recall, until just about the time we were leaving to go to Pakistan. Again, with Pete, although his experience had been Arabic rather than Israeli, I felt that he, just like the others, took positions he considered to be right for the United States, as an American, not because he had a predetermined position.

Q: Was there a problem with the military? There's nothing they hate more than someone raiding their larder.

SOBER: You remember the Six Day War. It was so short. It wasn't a question of resupply. The war ended before you could have had any.

Q: It was the '73 war that caused all the heartburn in the military.

SOBER: In the '73 War, we were in Pakistan, and so I know about that from having toured the Middle East, studied it, lectured on it. I believe I have some understanding about that. But to go back to the period we were talking about. One of the myths that hasn't been knocked down is that the enormous victory by the Israelis in the Six-Day War was only possible because they had all this American equipment. As a matter of fact, during that war there was not a single combat aircraft of American origin in the Israeli Air Force. Not a single one. Those air attacks were basically with French-made planes. We had agreed to sell the Israelis some combat planes but nothing had arrived as yet. And in fact, we had been following a policy of great caution with regard to military supply, let alone resupply, to Israel. Certainly during the Eisenhower-Dulles years and even later on. It would soften up a little bit, but by '67 they didn't have a single US-made combat aircraft. Now after that it changed. There was a great positive reaction in the United States to what they had been able to do.

LBJ, as president, decided to go along with what had been begun, but not really come into force, by the time of the '67 War. For example, he did agree, the US did agree, to supply the Israelis with the F-4 which was a first line aircraft, which we had not been willing to supply previously. One of the things I was involved in as Director of Regional Affairs was to work out, with our military, the first ferry supply of F-4's to Israel. It was at a time when the very clear public and outright military arrangements with Israel had not yet come into effect, so that we had a lot of cautions about what sort of reactions we were going to have in the area. We wished not to endanger unnecessarily our relations with Arab states. So we talked about painting out any country insignia on the aircraft and

sending them by a route, (it turned out, as I recall, through Crete), that would not cause too much disturbance, not too much public notice. It was still, in those days, a far cry from the supply relationship as it became in later years.

No, I do not recall that there was ever a serious problem with the military. Yes, some reluctance then and at a later time about denuding American military stocks. As I recall, that became a question in '73 when Nixon ordered the resupply to Israel during that war. But I'm very glad to say, as I'm sure we all are, that the military do take orders from the civilian leadership. So there may have been a little bit of hesitation or reluctance, but never to my knowledge, was there any simple refusal to do it.

Q: What other matters were of concern in your area, were you particularly involved in.

SOBER: Particularly involved may be overstated but we talked about the colonels in Greece. I was in the job of Regional Affairs at the time of the colonels' revolt. Greece was then part of GTI (Greece, Turkey and Iran), a part of Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. Greece, Turkey and Cyprus were removed to the European Bureau in the spring of 1974. But in '67 they still were in NEA. So we dealt with that particular problem.

Q: The colonels had that coup on April 22, 1967. What were your concerns, did it give us a surprise?

SOBER: Came as a surprise to me. I really can't talk about others, or whether, as some people have suggested, we were involved, or had some foreknowledge if not some participation. I simply do not know. I knew that there was a widespread perception that the United States welcomed this, a widespread perception among opposition elements in Greece. To what degree we were involved, if at all, I simply do not know. I am not aware but I'm not prepared to say we were not involved. Because at certain levels you simply accept not knowing about these things.

Our major concern, I suppose, was to make sure that Greece's connection to the United States and with the free world, the NATO alliance, remained intact. There were concerns about domestic political trends in Greece before that. Concerns about this fellow and that fellow. Certainly as I recall it the advent of the colonels seemed to cement the western alignment. To that extent I suppose it was welcome. But I don't want to suggest that people liked the idea of the military throwing out a civilian system in order to take over - that they liked that as such.

Q: Were there any sort of debates at the time in NEA.

SOBER: The overriding concern, aside from the domestic and political implications of a military overthrow of an elected system, was Greece's connection with NATO. I surely don't remember any debate suggesting that we try to force the colonels out, if in fact we could have been able to do it. I just don't know enough.

Q: How about our increasing preoccupation with Vietnam. Did that impact in any way.

SOBER: I mentioned LBJ and his preoccupation. This had a certain impact in the subcontinent. I don't recall that it had very much to the west of the subcontinent. It was too far away. But I think that was one of the reasons LBJ was impatient with India.

For example he called off an official visit by the man who was at that time the Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, which was to take place in '66, as I recall it. (I may be a year off). Also there was a delay in the AID consortium meeting on Pakistan, which annoyed the president of Pakistan, President Ayub Khan, at that particular time. I think that LBJ's preoccupation and worries with Vietnam were factors there. Not necessarily that he took these actions in retaliation to what he perceived to be an inadequate support of our position on Vietnam. But it affected his state of mind in dealing with various other problems. He was perhaps not giving as much attention as he would have in different circumstances.

Q: How about our position on nuclear proliferation in the area? Was there the concern there later was about this?

SOBER: South Asia. That came much later. India exploded their device, what they called and still refer to as their peaceful nuclear explosion, in the spring of 1974. That's well after.

Q: How about in Israel?

SOBER: That had started earlier. There was some awareness, some concern as to what might be going on at the moment. That goes back well before, before Jack Kennedy's advent to the White House. There was some knowledge about it. We had made some arrangement for periodic visits which were never very satisfactory and that lapsed after a while.

Q: Any other concerns before we move to your next assignment?

SOBER: No.

Q: Then you moved to Rawalpindi, as deputy chief of mission in 1969.

SOBER: Islamabad was the new capital which had been built beginning in the early sixties. We moved our embassy up in Karachi, I guess, by late '65. We had kept a branch office up in Rawalpindi.

Rawalpindi and Islamabad are a dozen miles apart. Rawalpindi was used first as our embassy site, and as Islamabad was developed, we moved our operations there.

Q: This was the beginning of the Nixon Administration and there was a new ambassador. His name was Joseph Farland?

SOBER: Yes. He was asked to be ambassador and he asked me to be his DCM. My wife and I got to Islamabad a week or two before he got there with his wife.

Q: You'd been following this area for some time. Did you notice a change, having a new administration coming in, like the wind had changed?

SOBER: You'd have to think hard to identify actual changes of policy and action. It was generally known that Nixon was favorable to Pakistan. He had been vice-president when our strong connection with Pakistan had been built up, during the Eisenhower years. When he was out of office he had visited there and kept up his contacts. Again there is this syndrome that a republican administration is going to be good to Pakistan. As a matter of fact things began to happen that were not known to the general public. Nixon did stop in Pakistan in spring of 1969, just a few months after he had taken office. He had a meeting with the man who replaced Ayub just briefly before, President General Yahya Khan raised the question as to whether Pakistan might be willing to be helpful, as conditions permitted, in establishing some sort of link between the United States and China. That was very secret.

When we arrived in Pakistan in late '69, we still had certain problems. In 1965 there was a September war between India and Pakistan. I alluded to this before. Much to Pakistan's annoyance, although CENTO was still going, SEATO was still going, we still had a military defense assistance program that had started in 1954, and we had this 1959 bilateral agreement which I mentioned before, not only did we not come to Pakistan's help in this war in 1965, but we said, in effect, a plague on both your houses. We suspended military supplies to both India and Pakistan. Now that sounds quite even-handed but, in effect, it hurt Pakistan and didn't bother India at all, because India had not had anything substantial in the way of US military aid, but Pakistan had become quite heavily dependent. Not only for equipment, but for things like parts and ammunition. So Pakistan felt betrayed by the United States. And the embargo on military shipments was still largely in effect when Nixon came in. We had lifted it slightly by saying that we'd sell spare parts. We said we'd supply non-lethal weapons - some things that don't go bang, like radio or transport equipment. But it was a pretty low-key level of military supply. So Pakistan was looking elsewhere and China was the obvious place that they were looking to, mainly. Thus that although Pakistanis perceived a benefit to them in Nixon's coming in, the immediate effects were not much evident when we arrived in 1969.

Q: Your ambassador was Joseph Farland.

SOBER: Joseph Farland had been a political ambassador before and had served in the Dominican Republic and Panama, under Republican administrations. He'd been an FBI agent during World War II and he was married to a lady whose father had been a coal operator in West Virginia. There was a lot of money there, and I guess where most of the

money for political contributions came from. But obviously Farland, when he was named to his third ambassadorial post after a certain number of years, had some background. He knew something about the system. He went out with obvious feeling that it was his job to improve the relationship between the United States and Pakistan. And he set about to do that. He liked to travel and liked to be seen. He was quite good at that. As for running the embassy, my relationship with him was excellent. Without sounding self-serving, let me say that I think in retrospect, he was wise in letting experienced career people look after the operation of the mission. Which he pretty much did. He saw himself as chairman of the board and myself as chief executive officer.

Q: How long were you there?

SOBER: We stayed a little more than four years. We came in October of 1969 and we left in November of 1973.

Q: What was the political situation in Pakistan while you were there?

SOBER: President Yahya had come in in the spring of '69, having replaced Ayub, another general whose time had run out after ten years. Ayub was forced out. Yahya had a martial law system, and the military really ran the show at the top. It was referred to sometimes as the Junta. But Yahya, to his great credit, really wanted to move back toward a more normal political system. He instituted, not too many months after he took over, a number of reforms, under what he called a legal framework order and some other steps, which moved forward toward the restoration of political party rights and eventually towards a national political election which took place toward the end of 1970. What is what noteworthy about this, is that not only did the election take place--a national popular election for the National Assembly--but it was the first-ever democratic national popular election in Pakistan's history, since the country was formed in 1947. There had been so much political maneuvering and shenanigans that they had never been able to come to a really free and honest election. Now that took place and I think it was very much to Yahya's credit. He was very much maligned later on. Some of the complaints were justified but many were not. He isn't given credit enough for what he did. He had the elections on the basis of one man, one vote, which sounds normal and easy but was a very controversial issue in Pakistan, as it now may be in South Africa. Because in Pakistan, one man, one vote, meant that the majority of the electorate was located in East Pakistan, a thousand miles away from, if you will, the core of the central government.

Q: East Pakistan is what is now known as Bangladesh.

SOBER: Now known as Bangladesh. It had been part of Indian, Bengal - which was partitioned in 1947 and the Eastern portion became East Pakistan. Since there were and still are more people in that area than in what was West Pakistan and is now just Pakistan, it meant that they would have, and were scheduled to have, more parliamentarians in the National Assembly than West Pakistan. A result of that election was the almost

unanimous victory for one party in East Pakistan, which led, after several months, to the civil war which occupied almost all of 1971.

Q: This was Mujib.

SOBER: Yes.

Q: This is very interesting because we have had several interviews which have really been quite interesting, because more than anywhere else, the relations between the various elements of the embassy which reflect the situation there. We've had interviews that have not been completely checked over with Archer Blood and with, at somewhat a different time, with Dick Post. Still there was this consulate genera-embassy tension. Let's focus first on the Bangladesh-Islamabad relationship.

How did the reporting go. Did the consulate report directly to Washington with a copy to the embassy?

SOBER: Throughout the time that I was there until after Arch Blood left, I was the DCM, although I was in charge during a variety of periods. The reporting from Dacca was always direct with a copy to the embassy. We never exercised a privilege that we might have had to say no, we will clear and forward only what we want. There was nothing like that.

Q: Because later when Art Hummel was ambassador in the late seventies and Dick Post in Karachi, it was different.

SOBER: I'm interested to hear this. I was not aware of it. It was not true when I was in Bombay in the consulate there. And it was certainly not true for the consulates in Peshawar, in Karachi and Lahore as well as Dacca, in Pakistan, when I was at our embassy in Pakistan. The reporting was always direct with a copy to the embassy.

Q: How did you view, and the embassy view, the situation in East Pakistan. And how did you see the situation and how did it develop. Let's start from the election.

SOBER: Well, it was an honest election. It was remarkable in that it was the first time such an election had been held since 1947. Mujib won 167 out of 169 contested seats in East Pakistan, which was to give him an absolute majority in the National Assembly. That was December of 1970. Then the question was when would the National Assembly be convened by Yahya. And what's going to happen. Well, what would have happened, what everybody saw was inevitable, was that with an absolute majority of parliament, Mujib, the leader of the Awami League, would become the Prime Minister. Now that caused a great deal of concern among a variety of people in West Pakistan, because Mujib had been campaigning on what you might say was really a nationalist platform of so-called Six Points, which would have given a very high degree of autonomy or self-rule, short of actual independence, to East Pakistan. There were some people in East Pakistan

who were calling for UDI, Unilateral Declaration for Independence. There was a long history, which we won't go into, of troubles between East and West Pakistan because they are of quite different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, although the mass on both sides are Moslems--which is the reason why the one state of Pakistan had been created. But there was a feeling, pretty wide-spread in East Pakistan, that they hadn't been dealt a fair deal. That they had been exploited by the more powerful political, military, commercial, financial elements of West Pakistan; and they wanted a better deal.

The prospect of being ruled by East Pakistanis was, quite frankly, not one that many West Pakistanis could take easily to. Then there was, beyond that, a concern, and this was surely a concern of the top military, whether these Six Points would lead to the inevitable break-up of Pakistan. As a first step on the way to a break-up. Six Points would have allowed foreign affairs and defense to the central government, but very little else. There was a concern that Mujib and his followers would then take the next, what appeared to some to be the next logical, step towards breaking with Pakistan.

There was a lot of dispute as to whether East Pakistan was a politico-economic plus for Pakistan as a whole or not. But East Pakistanis felt, to a large extent, that they had been milked and they would be a lot better off as independent. To be free.

Among the military, I'm sure, there was a deep concern. I think they thought that if push came to shove, their major responsibility to the nation as patriots, as servants of the state, was to maintain the integrity of Pakistan. Integrity is a word we use all the time. We favor the integrity of Lebanon, whatever that is. We favor the integrity of this country and that country. So saying that they wanted to preserve the integrity of Pakistan is something one could understand. But in a very troubled history, where east and west had not gotten along so well...

Q: Was there much of an East Pakistani element in the army?

SOBER: Virtually none. This goes back to the British days under the Raj. Certain ethnic groups had been identified as what they called, martial races. That did not include the Bengalis. They were seen as poets and dreamers. The bulk of the Pakistani army, as is true now, was made up of Punjabis and Pashtuns. There was a very small percentage of East Pakistanis. So that was a serious problem.

Another problem related to the civilian political element in West Pakistan, and how it would react to a circumstance where not only would it have a Bengali, East Pakistani, Prime Minister, but a man who really was in charge. Now there had been, in previous years in Pakistan, Bengali, East Pakistani, Prime Ministers. There were three. They were always brought in by, and in fact were under the thumb of, West Pakistani Presidents, Generals or Governors General. So Mujib would not have been the first East Pakistani Prime Minister, but he would have been in an assembly which really had the power, to which he was responsible. Not responsible to a President or a Governor General. Much has been made of this, going over the history. The question is how the man who was the

most popular political elected leader in West Pakistan, the winner of the December '70 elections there, one Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, would deal with being number two. Well, he would be the deputy Prime Minister. He had won an absolute majority of the assembly seats in the December '70 elections in West Pakistan. So he was clearly the number two man, but he didn't begin to have the number of backers that Mujib would have in the Assembly. A lot has been made as to whether Bhutto, presumably not willing to be number two, not willing to be anything but number one, didn't have a hand in making sure that the Assembly didn't get convened. There was a lot of politicking involving visits by Yahya as well as Bhutto to Dacca to meet with Mujib. They were not able to come to an agreement.

And ultimately on March 25, 1971, three months after the election, the Pakistani military which had been ferried over by air, over Sri Lanka (that's another story, why not over India) from West Pakistan had been reinforced in East Pakistan in anticipation of a possible crunch. And in fact on March 25, they were let loose. I would call it a military riot. We use the term police riot. That was the beginning of the civil war, with some very gross abuses of force by the Pakistan military. It was the beginning of a war that only came to an end in December when the Indians mopped up the Pakistani forces.

Q: How was rapport between the embassy and the consulate general in Dacca. I can't recall the Archer Blood interview but there was some indication that the consulate general saw things a certain way in Dacca than the embassy saw in Islamabad.

SOBER: There was a certain division. People in Dacca were horrified by the gross abuse of force by the Pakistani military. No question that there was a gross abuse of force. Their reaction was unanimously in favor of the Bengalis, the East Pakistanis, and against whatever action the central government was taking.

In the embassy in Islamabad, no one that I know of was pleased with what was happening in East Pakistan. We were aware that there was a gross abuse of force. On the other hand, unlike Dacca, we were looking upon the situation in terms of a national viewpoint of Pakistan and in terms of a US/Pakistan relationship. When I say looking at it from a national Pakistani viewpoint, I come back to what I said before. My feeling was that the Pakistani military, rightly or wrongly, were informed by one imperative, which was to preserve the integrity of Pakistan. Whether it was a mistake to have an East Pakistan to begin with is, going back to 1947, another question. Historically it was not destined always to be a part of Pakistan. It was always destined, maybe, to be a separate state. Nevertheless, it was part of Pakistan and these military thought it was their duty to their country, to keep the country together.

We had our Civil War. I don't say that I want to compare our Civil War and Lincoln's effort to maintain the union as similar to the Pakistan situation. But at the edges you can see similarities.

In addition to that we had the view of whether the United States should be seen as taking a position to favor the break-up of any country. There had been the Biafra problem before that. There is no modern counterpart in any other part of the world that I can think of to what happened to Pakistan - the break-up of a country, because of its own action. No other revolution has been as successful in breaking up a country. So this is a highly unusual thing.

The question I think we need to deal with in Pakistan is, whatever you thought about the wisdom of what they were doing, was it absolutely wrong for Pakistan to take the view that if they did not do this, the country would be broken up. The wisdom of how they were doing it is another thing.

There was on this issue a very sharp division of view with Dacca. To say it again, we never in any way had any censorship about what they were reporting. We were very much aware of their position. I remember as DCM, I went over to Dacca in the spring of 1971 while Arch was still there - it was before he left in June. I didn't have oranges thrown at me but I would say that there were people who were very unfriendly towards me.

Q: You mean in the consulate general.

SOBER: Yes. We were not, in the embassy, about to take a position to break relations with Pakistan, or make a statement to that end. At that time, Bengali leaders, wherever they were, had already issued a unilateral declaration of independence after the break-out of the Pakistani military. We were not about to say yes, let's recognize the new regime. People had fled to Calcutta. We were not about to do that. So that was the basic difference.

There was another issue that didn't come to public view until after this. Arch left in June of '71. And that was three or four months after the trouble began in earnest with the fighting. I'm going to talk about one other thing that was unhelpful in a general way. Not as a value judgment as to the idea's being unhelpful, but the way it was done was unhelpful. There was a virtual unanimity in our Dacca consulate staff that we should denounce the West Pakistani effort in East Pakistani in every way we could. I was somewhat sympathetic with the thought that we hadn't done enough to distance ourselves, and as I recall, I think it was time when I happened to be in charge, we did send a telegram in which I recommended that we take certain steps, in addition to those we had taken to distance ourselves politically from the methods that the Pakistanis were using in East Pakistan. We had come out publicly in saying we didn't condone, we didn't endorse what they're doing. But we didn't say, gee we think it's awful the way they're handling this. I recommended that we do something more to distance ourselves.

Never got a response.

The consulate in Dacca sent a dissent message to Washington about the American position, arguing that we should disassociate from what the Pakistanis were doing. In

oversimplification, that was what it was. And that was certainly their right to do. It was an expression of what they felt, and so I had no question or problem with their doing that. Again that message went directly. I think it was unfortunate, in retrospect, that they sent it as an unclassified message with a copy to New Delhi and maybe some other places. Now such a message was destined to become public, which it did immediately. And of course that was very much in line with the Indian government's view which was very much against anything Pakistan would do, and so much against this particular effort in East and West Pakistan.

I think that was a mistake. That it had become a public disclosure of a dissent message enraged Washington, enraged Richard Nixon. As I recall (perhaps incorrectly) the immediate result of that was that he said that he wanted those people fired. Well that didn't happen but it enraged some people.

I think that this method was probably an overreaction. You do have certain constraints, as government people. You may feel very strongly. If you are serving you have ways to voice your protest. It's not supposed to be a public protest. So that was a mistake.

Well, Arch left in June. Let me say that Arch and I came into the Foreign Service together. I had known him all those years. He had been in Dacca during part of the time my wife and I were serving in Bombay. We knew he had been there. I guess I was personally responsible for Arch's being brought as consul general to Dacca, because Ambassador Farland had wanted to have a very strong officer. We recognized the importance of getting good reporting and strong control through the actions of the consul general in Dacca. It was my recommendation to Farland which Arch accepted. He had been political counselor in Athens, and he was detached in mid-tour and brought to Dacca. When we had these events in the spring of 1971, Farland felt, and I agreed with him, given the way events had progressed, that when Arch was ready for home leave in June of 1971, it was probably better for him not to return.

Q: Wasn't there also a question of evacuation of the families because of the attitude of the Pakistani troops, feeling as if they felt we thought they couldn't defend them.

SOBER: There was some soreness with regard to the evacuation. We did decide, when the fighting was growing, to evacuate our people. They went to Tehran, most of them, to begin with. We did have a little trouble at first getting an agreement from the Pakistani military about bringing in a plane. They were dragging their feet. People in Dacca were justifiably outraged at that.

I remember myself getting on the phone, again when I was in charge, because Farland was doing a lot traveling outside. I had a telephone conversation with the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Mr. Sultan Khan, and I said that I thought the delaying actions of the Pakistan authorities in East Pakistan over the preparations for the evacuation were "intolerable." That was the word I used. When the ambassador returned a couple days later, he was called in by the Foreign Secretary who protested that I had used that word

"intolerable." As I remember, Farland did not discipline me. On the contrary he reported on it positively by telegram. The word I got back was (and it made me feel good, because there was a lot of hard feeling) that when the consulate general in Dacca saw a copy of the message, they cheered because I had said that. But there were hard feelings. There is no question about that.

Then another little incident occurred. These are footnotes. No great consequence. I flew down from Karachi where the Pan American plane had stopped with the load of evacuees from Dacca on the way to Tehran. I guess I did say something to this effect: Remember, we still have people in Dacca; and this is a very touchy situation there, and so I hope we'll all be somewhat careful about remarks to the public about what's happening. We knew about our people's feelings. They were outraged, thoroughly outraged. I had no problem with that. But we were in a somewhat sensitive position. After all, we were dealing with the Pakistani government. My remarks were taken rather offensively by some of our people--as if they were meant as a gag.

Q: This is a case of overly identifying with the people.

SOBER: I don't want to be the one to say that. I think there was a danger of that. It was a highly emotional situation. I say there was gross abuse of force by the Pakistan military. You can read whatever you want into that. I think the outrage was justified, but after all we were diplomats representing our government and the situation was fairly complex.

Q: How much did you feel that the hand of Henry Kissinger was involved in this whole thing?

SOBER: What I said before was that there was some other element at the time this was going on that hadn't come yet to public notice. That became public in July 1971. In June Arch left. As you may remember July 1971 was the time of the rather momentous, historic visit by Henry Kissinger to Beijing. It was the culmination of what I referred to briefly before. The first approach about China was made by Nixon to Yahya in the spring of '69. In a later trip, by Yahya to the United States, in '70, he was asked if Pakistan would in fact serve as a channel of communication. Not as an intermediary but as a channel. And in fact Pakistan did and it did it very successfully, very ably and secretly. Those messages between the United States and China, via Pakistan, culminated in the secret flight of Henry Kissinger from Rawalpindi to Beijing about the 5th or 6th of July 1971. What was not known at the time, except to one or perhaps two people in our Embassy, not including me, was that these negotiations had been going on. In retrospect it is very clear that Washington, with its knowledge of these things, was not about to endanger the successful culmination of our talks, via Pakistan, by unduly and seriously endangering our relations with Pakistan. So with that retrospect, one can see why we perhaps did not take as forthright an action as we might have in expressing our opposition about the way the Pakistanis were going about trying to keep the country together.

Q: There was something about an aircraft carrier.

SOBER: Oh yes, that's still a buzzword in current India/US relations. You're talking about the Enterprise, and that was much later--in December 1971. Here we've gotten up to June and July of 1971.

Q: Were you aware of any of this US/China stuff.

SOBER: I personally was not until the announcement which was made about the 15th of July at the White House.

Q: Was Ambassador Farland aware of it?

SOBER: Yes, he was the only one at the embassy who was substantially aware of it. Yes he was in on it.

Q: What happened after, with the break up of East Pakistan? How did you see it? What was our role?

SOBER: The Indians, as I mentioned before, had taken a very open and forthright position, denouncing the government of Pakistan, and established a relationship with the leaders of the Bengalis of East Pakistan who had got through the net and had fled to Calcutta.

Q: Where was Mujib?

SOBER: He had been picked up on the night of March 25 by the Pakistan military, and brought to Pakistan, where he spent the rest of that year in jail. India was just 100% in favor of East Pakistan's independence. They cited the fact that a huge mass (they used the figure ten million) of refugees had come over. And a large number had come over. But clearly it appeared to me then and it appears to me now that India had another iron in the fire and that was something against Pakistan in general. I remember we sent a telegram, in the early summer, when Indian participation was already evident. They were providing safe refuge for the rebels, called the Mukti Bahini, who had crossed the border and they were safe. The Pakistani military were not about to cross the Indian border in hot pursuit. And the Indians were providing arms and some training, and some military leadership. Things began to come out. I remember we sent a telegram fairly early in the summer from Islamabad saying, in our opinion, that India was heading toward an irresistible temptation to cut Pakistan down to size. This in effect is what happened. I think that the Indians saw a ready-made opportunity. Not that they devised it, but which they would exploit it.

I remember that the United States tried to prevent the war. I was in charge and I had a telegram, go to see Yahya. The same telegram went to Ambassador Keating in New Delhi, go to see Indira Gandhi. Make a strong play that they should agree to have military forces withdraw a certain distance, about ten miles, from the border in East Pakistan, and let UN people come in and separate them to try and avert a war. I went to see Yahya who

happened to be in Karachi and he said, sure. It was in Pakistan's interest to agree to anything like that because everybody knew that if it came to a war with India, Pakistan couldn't possibly succeed in East Pakistan. Ambassador Keating saw the Foreign Minister, because Indira was away, and couldn't get anywhere with him. India was already committed.

A little later, Indira visited Washington, in November of '71 and Nixon tried to talk her out of any engagement with Pakistan. Didn't succeed. He's written about this in his memoirs.

In early December, the war started. The way wars go in the subcontinent, they take two to three weeks. That's the standard period for war. And that's what happened. At the end of it Pakistani forces in East Pakistan were mopped up. There was some fighting on the western front but it was inconclusive. Some 90-odd thousand Pakistanis were captured and that was the end of Pakistan as it was. There was no more East Pakistan. And that was the birth of Bangladesh.

Q: How did the Pakistanis regard America during this time? Were they pleading for help?

SOBER: No. Fairly early after the March 25 beginning of fighting, we suspended any new shipments of military equipment. Now that wasn't very important because the embargo that we put on in the '65 war had never really been lifted to any substantial degree. So there wasn't much coming. But there were a few things in the pipeline. In fact we had a glitch. The Foreign Minister of India, Swaran Singh, had visited Washington in the summer. He was told no, everything was stopped. It turned out that there was a shipment of about five million dollars of stuff in the pipeline, which went through. The Indians cried foul, we've been misled. Well even then, five million dollars didn't make for much, and the type of things we were sending to Pakistan had no important--if any--military impact in East Pakistan. It's not a place where tanks could be used, where combat aircraft were used. It's very watery. But the Indians took it as another sign of American hostility.

Pakistanis were not unfriendly to us, although we did not help them. We stopped all military shipments. All economic aid was also put on hold because you couldn't operate in East Pakistan. Everything was in suspension. We didn't really help them but on the other hand, we certainly didn't abuse them publicly.

In Islamabad, we maintained a friendly and open discussion under Yahya with Pakistan. We went to see him. We appealed to him on several occasions. I think we can take some credit in that he decided to not have Mujib executed, which some people in West Pakistan were demanding. We made appeals to him, some of which were accepted, to ease up in East Pakistan. Replace the military governor with a civilian governor, who happened to be of Bengali origin; offer amnesty. Some things were done to soften things, but the total

effect was not very much. The die had been cast and the fighting had already gone too far. It could not be stopped or pulled back.

And we kept saying, as we had been saying in the Sinai Desert one or two years before, stop shooting and start talking. We weren't ever able to get to that point. Fighting had gone too far. Nor were we able to avert a war in December of 1971. But during that period, I would say we maintained a good, decent relationship with the government of Pakistan. Not to say we liked what they were doing but in terms of a dialogue with them.

Q: Did you feel at all threatened during the war between India and Pakistan?

SOBER: I happened to be returning from home leave when the war broke out. My wife and I had just arrived in Tokyo on the way back. I got a call from the desk officer, Peter Constable, about two in the morning at the hotel, and he said the war had started. I was on a plane the next morning at eight o'clock out of Tokyo Airport. We couldn't fly over India because the air space was closed. I finally got a plane to Tehran and flew from Tehran to Kabul and drove from Kabul back to Islamabad. I got back to Pakistan about two days after the war began.

There was one minor air raid. One airplane came over and shot up the terminal in Rawalpindi. No bombs. The Indians clearly were superior overall, although the Pak air force was giving quite a good account of itself. No, I don't remember that we were worried.

We did evacuate people, dependents and non-essentials--people from various posts in Pakistan, especially from Lahore and Islamabad.

Q: For the rest of the time you were there, how did things play out?

SOBER: My wife and I stayed on almost two more years. Ambassador Farland went on home leave in January and while he was home on leave, he was designated to be Ambassador to Tehran. That was an important job. I think his work was appreciated, particularly the Pakistan link with the opening of China. He came back for a week to say goodbye. But basically throughout all of 1972 and until we left in early November of '73, I was in charge of the mission.

It was a very interesting time. Pakistan had suffered a very serious defeat - 90,000-plus people had been captured. They had lost half their country, more than half their country in terms of population. It was a tremendous humiliation. And the question was, what's going to happen. Yahya gave up immediately with the surrender of the West Pakistani forces. He turned power over to Bhutto who had been the big winner in the elections of West Pakistan the year before and was the obvious civilian to take over, which he did. He became President, and was in charge of the country until he was ousted by Zia in 1977.

It was an interesting period, while Pakistan tried to set itself right, and in retrospect, they did a remarkable job. The United States was reasonably sympathetic. We provided a great deal of economic aid. Bhutto had a past in which he had at times criticized the United States. He had been very critical of our failure to help in the '65 war, for example. He had been the architect, to a large extent, of the close relationship between China and Pakistan, at a time before we opened up with China. That had caused some troubles between the United States and Pakistan. But I would say that certainly for the two years I was there, and I know for some years thereafter, the United States and Pakistan under Bhutto maintained a very good dialogue and relationship.

Q: How about your personal impression in your dealings with Bhutto?

SOBER: My dealings with him were always very friendly. I had reopened an embassy relationship with Bhutto in 1970 during the first year I was there, with Farland's approval. That relationship had been closed down by the previous ambassador who had been turned off by Bhutto because of some of these anti-American things he said. But I didn't think that was the way to operate because he clearly was a man with a future. My relations with him were always very, very good. It wasn't a deeply social relationship but it had some social overtones. And a very open political relationship. My impression of him at the time was, here is a man with great ability. He was a standout. I saw him operate with a crowd of more than 110,000 people in Lahore Stadium, where he was speaking in Urdu, which was not a great language of his. He had people eating out of the palm of his hand. On the other hand I saw him dealing on sophisticated global issues, on a one-to-one level with a man like Henry Kissinger. He had that vast reach to deal with the populace. He was a populist leader. But with a very sophisticated and sound view of world events.

Q: Do you think he understood the United States? What made it tick. I always had the impression that the Indians tended to respect but really look down upon the United States, being a lot older civilization.

SOBER: I think that's true of Nehru. I think Nehru tended to look upon the United States as rather an upstart and with not too deep culture. This is perhaps what Nehru imbibed while he was at Cambridge.

Bhutto was different. After all he had gone to the University of California at Berkeley. I wouldn't say which one of us does fully understand the United States. But I think that his understanding was more than adequate. He did understand pretty well. Whether he looked down upon us I can't really say. My own relationship was very open and on a very level basis. During the period I was there, I must say, we had no disputes of any important nature. On the contrary, it was very close and very good.

Q: Anything else to cover during that time?

SOBER: There were no major disputes or events. We were sympathetic in helping Pakistan get back on its feet. We did have a series of very important economic aid

agreements. Military aid was not opened. It was not an issue. I think he wanted very much to have good relationships with the United States. With Iran also, which was a factor in this. He stayed in CENTO. You might have thought from his statements in earlier years that he would have wanted to get out of CENTO. He did get out of SEATO but that was understandable because East Pakistan was the link towards the east and towards southeast Asia. With East Pakistan gone, Pakistan had no basis in SEATO and he did get out of it.

I think the reason he stayed in CENTO, was not only that he wanted to maintain a close relationship with the Shah of Iran but also because of the United States.

We discussed questions of all types. There were no major regional issues that needed to be dealt with in that particular time.

Q: When did you come back?

SOBER: We came back at the end of 1973. I started, at the very beginning of 1974, in the job of Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs.

I had been asked by Joe Sisco, who at the time, in the summer of 1972, was the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, to come back and be his Deputy on South Asia. I wasn't too anxious but I said okay. I didn't get back for fifteen or sixteen months, during which time I was Chargé. By the time I got back Joe, after a slight glitch in which he was supposed to leave the Department, had been asked by Henry Kissinger to become Under Secretary for Political Affairs. He stayed on but he left NEA before I started there. Roy Atherton was Assistant Secretary and then Roy asked me fairly soon, after a couple of months in which I was dealing with South Asia for him, to be his senior deputy for the whole bureau. This was the job I had then from about April of '74 until I left the Department at the end of April 1978.

Q: These were the years of Henry Kissinger. From your vantage point, how did you see him?

SOBER: I have a mixed view of Henry Kissinger. In terms of ability, as a genius or near genius, in terms of capability. As an individual, toward the other extreme.

Q: Could you talk about his method of operation?

SOBER: I was watching him on the Middle East. On the many long trips which he had to the Middle East, he was always accompanied by Roy Atherton who was my immediate boss, leaving me for long periods of time as Acting Assistant Secretary for the whole bureau. I was receiving the reports of what they were doing, having to back them up in a variety of things. And I say in terms of professional ability, I thought Kissinger was brilliant, a genius or near genius, with the ability to express, to put into words, spoken or written, at very high level. I have a great admiration for his ability as a professional.

His method of operation was a different thing. He was, as you may know, an egomaniac. He had an enormous obsession with secrecy. He was afraid that if too many people knew what was going on, he would lose control. He always used to say, he wanted control, he wanted control. He didn't want anything to go on without his having a finger in it and pressing the button. He was not very anxious for people to show any particular initiative. You could understand this regarding things he was immediately concerned with, like peacemaking. Even on other things, he had this obsession that people shouldn't do anything without his knowing about it beforehand. I can say from my own personal experience that his personnel management would be open to very sharp criticism by professionals in that field.

For example I remember being excoriated by him in a way that was rather humiliating, at an early morning staff meeting of the assistant secretaries. I was acting assistant secretary. I was criticized by him for something I had done not quite to his perfect liking. Before the whole group. Now this was really not very good. It was humiliating. And I'm not sure it was very good in the impression it left on others. Surely on me. So my relationship with him was not good personally. But that in no way diminishes my very deep respect for his professional ability.

Q: Looking back, did you find any times when his close attention to matters, not letting others have any initiative hurt American relations?

SOBER: I'd have to think long and hard about that.
I don't think of anything important that comes to my mind. I give him credit for that.

Whether things would have been better if he had relied more on initiative by others is another question.

Q: How about the Cyprus question. That's one that came up in July of 1974, when a pro-Greek coup on Cyprus put in the Greek Samson who was absolutely unacceptable to use the term to the Turks.

SOBER: It didn't happen on our watch. Cyprus erupted shortly after a reorganization in the spring of '74 under Kissinger, under which Greece, Turkey and Cyprus were separated from the NEA bureau. The North African states were brought in from the African bureau. And so when the crisis blew, it was the European bureau which had the responsibility for the Cyprus crisis.

We were aware of the problems. Tom Boyatt knows a good deal more than I do. There was a difference of view and I don't feel close enough or well informed enough to say much. Except that Kissinger's obsession with being numero uno caused a problem.

Q: Any thing that particularly sticks out during this period?

SOBER: Many things did happen. The Middle East was the main thing. Kissinger had that in his pocket. Roy Atherton was his man, and I was playing only a supporting role in a quite minor way. In general Kissinger's actions on peace making were brilliant and great. There were things that I question in retrospect. For example we agreed, in retrospect I think this was wrong, not to have any substantive dealings with the PLO. That was part of the deal in the Sinai II agreement. He agreed on that and I think that was a mistake. In international diplomacy, you don't agree not to have discussions with anybody except at the mercy of a third party. I think that was wrong.

But by and large the diplomacy of peacemaking, given the possibilities of the time and what we had a reasonable right to expect, was carried out brilliantly.

Q: You've been here for three hours. What gave you the greatest satisfaction, if anything.

SOBER: This is bound to be a self-serving opportunity, isn't it?

Q: Yes, absolutely.

SOBER: The thing that gave us the most pleasure, and that's different than satisfaction, was our duty in Bombay. For my wife and myself that was the time when we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. Even when the Indians didn't like us. More so when they did like us. There was enough of the good.

As for a single moment of satisfaction--I guess your question comes down to something that probably was related to something that was important in which we had some role.

Q: It doesn't have to be. It could be with relationships, or how one viewed one's career.

SOBER: Okay, this is a little self-serving but you asked for it. It was at the time when I was Chargé d'affaires in Pakistan.

Bhutto wanted to have a constitution, a good constitution. It was hammered out over a period of months. It's the 1973 Constitution which is still in force although it has been diluted, amended, transgressed upon in fact, by Zia, the last previous boss. And that's a problem in current Pakistani politics. But it was a good Constitution, which was adopted unanimously by the Parliament--quite an event, because you had some very stalwart opposition leaders of different stripes. But every single one of them stood up to vote "yes" in the Parliament. I was with other heads of mission in the Parliament gallery, watching. It was a good Constitution, recognized at such, with a recognition of provincial rights, and reasonable protections for democratic processes. Why I had the most satisfaction was that I was there as the acting American head of mission, and as always we were a rather prominent mission. It is certainly true today and it was true then. I had fairly wide contacts, including not only with Bhutto but also with senior opposition people. I remember I had discussions, just one-on-one, at the house with two of the major opposition leaders, one from Baluchistan and one from the Frontier, in which I

encouraged them to take an open attitude toward the effort to come up with a good constitution, one that was good for Pakistan; give the country for the first time in its history, a really good constitution that the people would like. The satisfaction I had was reflected from the day that the constitution was adopted. There was a reception in Rawalpindi, by the government, for the members of Parliament, to which diplomats were invited. I remember (my wife remembers this more accurately) that numbers of the political leaders, including the opposition, came up to thank me for my role.

What was more interesting to me was that I had a call about that time, from Mr. Bhutto, just after the reception. He'd gone to spend the evening in Murree, which is a hill station some thirty miles north of Islamabad. He asked me to come see him, which I did. Drove up. And what he wanted to see me about was to express his thanks to me for helping get the constitution through. Now that's an unusual thing, but not such a wonderful position for any diplomat to be in. I took it in all good grace. I didn't think that I was interfering. But, in retrospect, since that constitution is still looked upon as what Pakistan should go back to, by the present government led by the daughter of the man who asked me to come up and see him at that time, it gives me some satisfaction.

Q: This is what diplomacy is all about. We are called upon from time to time, not only because we are a powerful country, but we have had a constitution that has gone through all sorts of strains, but it still has held up. Naturally, if you are talking about a written constitution, an American is not a bad person to ask about it.

End of interview