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

DR. JOHN D. STEMPEL

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INTERVIEW

This is an interview with Dr. John D. Stempel on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies.

[from transcriber: approximately first ten minutes did not record. First words on side 1, tape 1 are Dr. Stempel's..."to reinforce Cuba..."]

STEMPEL: ...to reinforce Cuba and then had turned towards the West. However, before I actually arrived, the Ghanaians had taken the Guinea Foreign Minister hostage for a brief period of time because Guinea had captured some Ghanaian fishermen in Guinean waters. It is very complicated. But the point was that when I got there as part of an American buildup as a junior officer in training, the relations were somewhat suspicious and, in fact, I was to be transferred in the fall...my wife was pregnant with our first child, and Guinea had very little in the way of hospital gear and they had needed somebody in Burundi and the hospitals there were great. The Belgians ran them, so I was being transferred. But in the meantime, we had another crisis in Guinea relations. I guess, the first time in February, 1966, when Nkrumah was overthrown in Ghana, he came to Guinea and then in that fall with the incident with the Foreign Minister being captured. The Americans were blamed for that because he had been on a Pan Am plane. The long and short of it was that four of the five who gave us going away dinners ended up departing before we did as a result of that crisis. I was kept on an extra month. I was doing consular work at the time and all of the Peace Corps was processed out and we had a real draw down at the embassy, too, to a skeleton crew. It stayed that way for some time.

So that was a kind of exciting first post. We were going through roadblocks and being held at gun point for a while and this sort of thing. As someone said then I had been through my first revolution at Berkeley, my last year in my doctoral program was the year Berkeley exploded and started the campus revolution of the 60s, so I had experience early on.

Q: During that time also, it is notable that you received the State Department Meritorious Service Award. Can you discuss the reasons for you receiving that award?

STEMPEL: Yes. As a result of the Guinea Foreign Minister being pulled off the plane in Ghana, the Ghanaians put our ambassador under house arrest. And what happened was sort of an inversion then as the crisis developed the two of us who were junior officers there did all the work in the embassy and were more or less free to go whereas the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission were restricted. I think they were very appreciative of our efforts and felt we had done a good job. That was the reason we got the award. My colleague, at that time, at the moment that our embassy was being mobbed by Ghanaians, opened a piece of mail that was his draft notice from the Chicago draft board and he was supposed to report that very day. So we sent a cable asking the State Department to pass to Chicago saying that Houdek was tied up fighting off a mob at the embassy and couldn't make it. It was such a well drafted cable that they exempted him from the draft completely, this was 1966. So Bob has always given me a little bit of credit for his career. He is still in the State Department and is just going out as our ambassador to Eritrea. He remained in African affairs, I eventually wound up going on to the Middle East, as you know. He was our chargé and then ambassador in Uganda; then DCM in Kenya...he went on to a very good career from that one draft board business.

Q: From December, 1965 to April, 1968, as you said, you went on to Burundi and there I believe you were the acting deputy chief of mission. What were your responsibilities in the embassy?

STEMPEL: Well, it was a very small embassy. We need to back up a little bit. In late 1965 there had been a coup d'etat in Burundi and the Hutu majority tribe attacked the Tutsis and they had repressed this. In the meantime they threw out four of our embassy officials, allegedly for messing around or plotting internal interference. Well, my then boss, who was the Chargé d'affaires, we did not replace the ambassador as a sign of our displeasure at this unjustified dismissal of our people...but they had been playing footsie with the Chinese, particularly the Tutsi leadership that then overthrew the king... But things were kind of tough. The king was on the throne throughout 1966 and my boss said, "Look, we need somebody else. We can't replace all four of the people, but I need a good junior officer to help me out." Well, I was chosen. It looked like a good choice for a lot of reasons. My wife was pregnant and would have to be evacuated, but if we moved to Burundi she could have the baby there. So after this delay in Guinea, we left for Burundi. We were in Kenya and ready to leave for Burundi when the word came through that the Tutsi army officers had overthrown King Mwambutsa and ended the 300-year monarchy. Well, we wound up staying four more days and being the first foreigners flown into Burundi after the revolution. Now, the man who took over was a colonel named Michel Micombero and he was exactly the same age I was. So I went into an embassy as acting deputy chief of mission as well as acting head of USIA, AID and a number of things. I was in a sense an upper level gofer. But it was a good job for me because I got to see how the other agencies worked. I helped to untangle their affairs. I got into a lot of interesting kinds of things that I never would have been able to do as a junior officer at a much larger post, or one that was more organized. My boss, who remained the chargé d'affaires, was a very good person to learn from. He had had a good bit of experience including being an ambassador's assistant in Paris before he got there. So this was a chance for me to learn to do all kinds of things.

And the pressure wasn't very great which was good because two months after we arrived, the day after they canceled the curfew, our first daughter was born at 7:01 in the morning. The doctor barely got there before she was born. It all happened much more quickly than it was supposed to. So Amy was born in Burundi. And then later on the second daughter was born in Zambia, six years later. So both my daughters by my first wife were born in Africa. The younger daughter will graduate from college in two years. The two of them would like to go back to see where they were born.

Q: Are young Foreign Service officers usually sent to a hardship post to learn for that same sort of reason?

STEMPEL: Well, in my case I was sent to French West Africa to perfect my French. But also because I had done my doctoral thesis on Vietnam and it was becoming quite a controversial issue in the fall of 1965. The Department thought that it would probably be better if I were not around. It was bad enough that Senator Fulbright had gotten a

microfilm copy of my thesis and was using it to badger the government. It was felt that it would not be very good for either my diplomatic career or the State Department if I were around and got involved in this business.

Q: After Burundi you were sent back to Washington and became a watch officer in the State Operations Center. What major incidents occurred during that time that you had to deal with?

STEMPEL: Well, there were the usual round of aircraft hijacking abroad for which the State Department was the coordinating agency. But probably the biggest thing was the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, August 9, 1968. At that point we discovered that there were so many cables coming in that our machines were putting out paper faster than we could read them. And it was really a major crisis at the time. The United States elected to take no military action, but there was a lot of political action, condemnation of the Russians. It was a minor turning point in the history of the last 40 years because it made clear that certainly Brezhnev's Russia was not going to allow different varieties of communism to exist. The Russians had repressed the revolutionary in Hungary in 1956 and in East Germany in 1953, but then after Khrushchev when Brezhnev took over there was some feeling that the Russians might be easing up and it might be possible for states to take different roads to communism.

What had happened in Czechoslovakia was that a gentleman named Alexander Dubcek had taken over and Czechoslovakia was going in different directions. I think the deciding factor was that he wanted to leave the Warsaw Pact, the Communist military alliance. At that point the Russians just moved in militarily and took over.

Although there were some other difficult moments but nothing like the two years I spent as Operations Center Director, that was ... or, say, the period in the Operations Center surrounding the takeover of the Iranian embassy in February, 1979. This was before the hostage crisis, actually. That day the American embassy in Tehran was seized by revolutionaries and the American Ambassador to Afghanistan was shot and there was a major airline hijacking out of South China. We had a similar situation develop in my second year in the Operations Center...the Falklands war broke out, we had the Polish Martial Law Regime Task Force in, Anwar Sadat was assassinated and we had again the ubiquitous airline hijacking, which was the most crises they had ever had at one time.

Q: When all these things happen at once, how do you deal with them? Do you have a large staff in the Operations Center?

STEMPEL: Well, the Operations Center pulls in people from other places but we set up task forces. Our job is to get the Secretary information and his key deputies for that crisis. Information, of course, is bad enough when one is occurring. As a rule of thumb one former Foreign Service officer wrote, "The government can never handle more than one and a half crisis at a time." I think that probably is about right. In the 1980s we got our crisis capacity up to about two and a half, depending on the level.

Q: But don't they usually occur about seven at a time, or something?

STEMPEL: Not always. The big ones spread themselves out, fortunately. But it is always a problem when you have two or three going.

Q: What responsibilities did you have as staff assistant to Deputy Secretary of State Elliot Richardson from March, 1969 to August, 1970?

STEMPEL: That was a wonderful assignment, first of all because Elliot Richardson was probably the best public servant I have ever worked for at the senior levels. He is a man of balance, vision, order and just a thoroughly nice person to be with. You rarely find that combination in one individual. So he would be one of the people that I look to and identify with as a role model. I was his staff aide and helped work on his schedules. I traveled with him on some occasions. We had four people on his staff and I was the junior person, so I did most of the junior jobs. This was a tremendous opportunity for me to see how the whole State Department operated. If you were a desk officer working in a small office you see how that operates. If you are working as a staff aide to a principal officer, you get to see how the whole building functions and how difficult it is to manage a bureaucracy. A lot of things happen. I did some short speech notes for Richardson. I did most everything that you can do to help somebody out.

And during that period I was also on two of the panels of the Macomber Reform Commission, which recommended major reforms for the State Department in 1970. That was when it officially came out but the work was done while I was working for Elliot Richardson.

Q: After that, you went on to become the Ghanaian Desk officer. How did your experience in Guinea help prepare you for that job from August, 1970 to 1972?

STEMPEL: I had, of course, had experience in West Africa in Guinea and in Central Africa in Burundi. And I had met other African figures, including the Ghanaian Ambassador to the United States when I worked for Elliot Richardson. It was a great opportunity for me. I had studied under one of the premier American scholars on Ghana, David Apter at Berkeley, so I probably had a much better academic background on Ghana than other people. Plus, my boss in that job was the first career black Foreign Service officer, who had been a USIA officer and was working for the State Department, Rudolph Aggrey, the great grandson of J. F. Aggrey, who had been the minister in the first Ashanti government when the Ghanaians tried to break away from the Brits. So, within that office we had a lot of plus factors, plus the government in Ghana, when I came into the job, was a democratic government which had been elected following Nkrumah's overthrow and a brief military government. One of the sad features of that job was that government was overthrown in the spring of 1972 by a colonel who felt life was a little tough. At that point it brought home to me the fragility of governments in some of the newly independent states. There was no particular reason for the coup.

I had done a paper on saying that the major danger for most countries, given the weak economic position, was the captain, the major, and the land rover, on the idea that if some captain and a major got drunk one night and decided to overthrow the government they could take the land rover down to the radio station and declare a coup and if they had people willing to go along with them, it would work. Well, that was about what happened in Ghana, except that it was a Lt. Colonel who did it. The military took over and the civilian government just melted away. There were no major riots. That was in effect a sad part of that period. Later the paper came back from the then Assistant Secretary for Africa, David Newsom, who said that I had been more prophetic than I knew.

I had worked with African affairs, I knew what some of the problems were and I was very quickly introduced to some others and worked with the deputy assistant secretary and later our Ambassador to the Ivory Coast, Robert Smith, to develop the first debt relief package. When I was in Iran four or five years later, I got a cable from Ambassador Smith, who said that it had taken five years but we had finally signed the Ghana debt agreement, almost as you and I drafted it four and a half years ago. Now, I have always had the feeling that if the United States had been a little quicker and the other countries more receptive, and we had the debt agreement in place, it would have given democratic government a new lease on life. But we learn our lessons about timing, slowly and with difficulty sometimes.

But it was an interesting assignment. Rudy Aggrey, my boss, was one of the four or five outstanding people I worked with. He had balance and was a thoroughly great person to work for.

Q: Well, your third and final African posting was to Zambia as political and economic officer from 1972-74. What exactly were our interests in Zambia?

STEMPEL: Well, our interest in Zambia really revolved at that point around the American economic interest in the Zambian copper mining, and also the fact that it was a democratic state. It was one of those front line states. It bordered on then Northern Rhodesia. and what is now Zimbabwe. When I went out to Zambia in the fall of 1972, Rhodesia had been independent for seven years and the Prime Minister, Ian Smith, was still thundering defiance of the world community on the quarter deck and there was a blockade of Rhodesia which had been imposed. The Rhodesians that fall tried to impose a counter blockade on Zambia because the whole southern African transportation system was linked through railways. This blockade was a sort of phony blockade, but we were very interested in keeping the pressure on the Rhodesians to negotiate a way away from white supremacist government. And that pressure kept up. It didn't work as fast as some people wanted, but by the end of the decade, seven years later, Ian Smith, who swore he would never give up power in Rhodesia, was in London negotiating black government in Rhodesia. And that is when it became Zimbabwe, in 1980.

Anyway, I was there for the first couple of years of that. Particularly when they put the blockade on the Zambians and the Zambians were upset about this. This led to the building of the Tanzam railway by the Chinese Communists from Dar es-Salaam to the north on into Zambia to give them an alternate transportation route. One of the byproducts of that was when our car and household effects got stuck in the blockade and had to come up through Zambia and be trucked overland. We got a free trip to Mali to pick up our car and the household effects were shipped on later.

And that was an interesting job because at that time we had relatively low level official contact with the south African groups. The ANC, SWAPO from Namibia, and all the black revolutionary groups had offices in Zambia. As the political officer, when it was appropriate, I would talk with them and deal with them. We had another officer, a consular officer, who dealt with them on a regular basis. I was hauled out as the "big gun" which shows we weren't using very big guns at that point. But I was a middle level officer and the first political officer that had ever been assigned to Zambia.

And there, of course, our second child was born. I did a lot of different things. I helped coach the police academy basketball team. I played on one of the national league tennis teams and my doubles partner was a Nigerian judge who had come to Zambia. We won one of our key matches. It was one of the nice things I remember about living there. We were trailing one to five in the second set having lost the first set against the Zambian number two Davis Cup team. We decided to try a very unconventional strategy, lobbing the ball. They were both very tall and nobody ever thought to lob over them before and they weren't used to dealing with such returns. By the time things had settled down we had won that set seven to five. They were dispirited enough and we went in and started strong and beat them six to three, third set, thus wrapping up the national championship at Kabulanga Tennis Club.

I don't know that I had any professional achievements that were more exciting than that, but there was a lot going on in Zambia at the time. For one thing, by 1974, before I left, the Portuguese had just had their revolution over Salazar and were getting ready to let the African colonies go, Angola and Mozambique. It turned out that my biggest professional achievement at that point was getting from a good Zambian contact the fact that the Portuguese were going to let them go and had set a date for independence. And that was sort of a very atypical professional contact, because the ambassador, at that time, who was very, very status conscious, had in effect forbidden the junior officers to talk to this particular individual. Well, this was difficult. He had been a friend of mine long before he became important in Zambia. And he was the one who told me. So I had to find a way to get this information back and out to people without letting the ambassador know that I had been talking to him or she would have been quite outraged about it. We succeeded in doing that.

And I had prepared a paper with a long analysis and this was one of the first places where I used some of that doctoral training to prepare a 20 page analysis on Zambia and where it was going. I worked very closely with the deputy chief of mission, who was a super

human being. It was the first major policy paper on Zambia since independence had been declared ten years earlier. I was back in the State Department in 1979 and it was still being used as a sort of historical foundation of where we were and where we were going.

So those were the kinds of things that I really enjoyed doing. Plus the other things, getting to know some of the Zambians and working with them on other issues.

When SWAPO began to negotiate a Namibia independence, I met several times with their shadow foreign minister. The Americans were much more in tune with what was happening there than I think was realized at the time. This was largely because of the political work that we had done in Zambia.

Q: At this point in your career you seemed to change gears. How did Farsi language training in your eventual assignment as deputy chief of the political section in the embassy in Tehran, from 1975-79, actually come about?

STEMPEL: Two things happened. I was now the father of two children and Africa is a great place to have kids when they are small, but when you start to think about schooling, and my daughter had already started school, and more importantly orthodontists, and there was one in Cape Town and one in Cairo, and that was not easy to do. And also because I wanted to do a different area. That came along just about that time a fellow named Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State who decided that he didn't want people to be entrenched in a region and developed a policy called GLOP--Global Outlook Program. This said that if you served in Mexico, it is time to go to Iceland.

The upshot was that when I put in my bids to do hard language training to go elsewhere... I think I put in for Indonesian, Serbo-Croatian, and Farsi because those were three hard languages and if you got the languages you automatically got an assignment there. Well, they gave me Farsi language training, which was ideal for me because I am not naturally gifted for languages, but I work hard at it. However, Farsi is not a difficult language. It is an Indo-European language that got an Arabic alphabet grafted on to it after the Muslim conquest of Iran in the eighth century, or something. I got the full ten month course. There were some people who took it for six months and could speak it as well as I did, but I got a good foundation for it. And then I went out to Iran and that first year I was not the deputy political counselor, I was the local affairs reporting officer. But when Archie Bolster left Tehran, the ambassador had liked the work that I had done so much, he made me the deputy chief of the political section. The political counselor at that time left, and neither of my two bosses, the senior political counselors spoke Farsi so I was sort of the lead Farsi speaker in the embassy at that time.

And, of course, when I came to Iran, Iran was in the middle of a boom that had been triggered by the quadrupling of the oil prices in 1973 and Iran's big problems was how do we get stuff in with six week backlogs of imports from Abidjan, etc. And the Shah was sort of in his heyday. But the problems which would cause difficulties were already there, the difficulties of moving society up a level on the development stage. And the beauty of

the situation was that I had three and a half years or so to develop friendships, develop contacts, meet people. And Ambassador Helms, who was my ambassador until December, 1976, for a year and a half, and then Ambassador Sullivan came in in June, 1977, were both people who encouraged us to get out and talk to people. I didn't have restraints put on me that some had complained about in earlier periods. The Shah didn't want us talking to dissidents. We didn't advertise who we talked to and Ambassador Helms told us to be discrete about it. And so over the course of that three years I met some very interesting people. People who had been traditional dissidents. And wound up knowing Shahpur Bakhtiar who became the Shah's last prime minister, I had been talking to him for several months. When the revolutionary government came to power, lo and behold, I knew six of the initial revolutionary cabinet, including the prime minister and his chief deputy. So we were not as ignorant of what was going on in Iran as some of the people in the federal administration would have led you to believe at the time. That is one of the reasons that I wrote my book on Iran, to indicate that we had been familiar with the problem. The trouble was, the whole Iranian revolution was one where there was a lot of ambiguity, so people saw what they wanted to see.

Now, what I saw from 1975 to the summer of 1978, when things begin happening, was a society desperately grappling with the problems of modernization and from the time that a recession set in in 1977, a period where social change merely created tremendous pressures and tensions, and a willingness to go back and look at fundamentalist solutions, which seemed absurd to those of us who had experience with it. But it is not the kind of thing that is totally different. When the economy gets bad in Kentucky, there is more social unrest, there is more bible thumping preachers going out and talking, and this is not all that different, you see. And we had our periods of social unrest in the 30s with the Depression, the veterans march on Washington, etc.

And that was what being in Tehran was like. Now, because I spoke Farsi and worked hard at it from the moment I got there, I was one of the group of people that got outside of what James Bill, noted Iranologist calls the crust. That is, I wasn't limited by what the Iranians who spoke English wanted us to hear. So, I, and a number of my colleagues got out, and got quite a different picture of what was going on by speaking Farsi, sitting in the tea houses, traveling around the country and seeing what was happening. It was fascinating history and made fascinating information for our people. And, as I said I discovered in my book, there was the problem that we would find information, pass it on up the chain, and it would get used in different ways or in inappropriate ways or totally ignored in some cases.

There was an incident, which I think I mentioned in my book, of information that I had gotten and our security people had gotten the same information from two different sources...and it went up through both chains of command. By the time the principals, the Secretary of State and the director of CIA, had gotten together for a meeting they had totally opposite views based on the same information. And I learned later that this was because Stansfield Turner, who was the head of the CIA, simply disregarded what his analysts were telling him.

Q: So the miscommunication, you would say, came between the embassy and the top people in Iran, and then to Washington?

STEMPEL: Well, there are two different kinds of generic problems in diplomacy. One of them is where the embassy gets so hooked in with the ruling group that it simply by both formal and informal sanctions doesn't deal with people who may be coming up. And that is what happened to our embassy in Havana when Castro came to power. We had no knowledge of him, he was totally outside the pale. The other problem, generically, is what happens when the embassy discovers something is happening but tends to be discounted in Washington. They are saying this, but it can't possibly be that bad. Remember, Iran and Washington were tremendously linked during the Shah's time. American business was very active there and people just didn't want to believe certain kinds of things. And there was enough ambiguity around that it was hard to assert that X was certainly going to happen because there was a tendency of things to happen and then we didn't know everything that was going to happen. The Shah's illness, for example. He had successively concealed that from his own wife for four years, and we did not find out definitely about it until the autumn of 1978 when we got a break from another country's intelligence service.

Now, in the process, though, we had found out about it in the sense that we had heard stories to that affect. There was a moment in the spring of 1978 when you could buy reports that the Shah had everything from heart burn to lymphomic cancer, which he actually had, to lung disease or a stroke. And there were doctors' pictures appearing in the press and it was just an interesting situation. What you had was a revolutionary movement that had failed twice before. In 1953, the Shah came back in with the help of a whole lot of people, including minor help from the CIA and British intelligence, and overthrew Mossadegh and the communist groups around him. There was another attempted coup in 1963 when Ayatollah Khomeini got his ayatollah stripes in effect, which was put down by the Shah. The 1978 coup was an attempt again by many of the same people who had been involved in 1963 and who now had 15 years more experience and were ready to rout out the Shah. And the Shah couldn't make up his mind whether to conciliate or coerce and he got it in the wrong kind of rhythm so that when he was tough, people thought he was a bully, and when he was trying to be conciliatory, people thought he was weak.

Q: When you first arrived, what was the general feeling of the diplomatic personnel and others you were working with about the close relationship between the Shah and Henry Kissinger's?

STEMPEL: Well, it was a big plus because it was literally true that there wasn't a cloud on the horizon in Iran until the fall of 1977. And even then it was manageable and most of the people regarded the problems with the militants as temporary. This is not what you will get in the revolutionary history, you know, history that is written by the winners...but there was always unrest. Whenever you have a monarchy and that close to the cockpit of

the various forces...the Russians always had an entrance, were always mucking about there. The Middle Easterners had an interest there. Iran was the one country that had supported Israel during the Arab oil embargo in 1973 on the quite legitimate grounds that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. The Shah wanted Israel's help to keep the Iraqis from being difficult. When that relationship fell out, when the Ayatollahs decided to totally oppose Israel, then, of course, the result in a year and a half was the Iran/Iraq war with an Iraqi attack on Iran. So the politics of the region is really Byzantine and difficult to deal with.

But when I got there, the Shah was clearly modernizing his country, clearly in control. Yes, there were opposition groups and guerrilla groups that were shooting Iranian officials and killing Americans, so we were riding in security vehicles, but the country was developing like crazy. And it wasn't until they hit what you might call the normal kind of recession that you really had this tremendous social unrest building up. It is more complicated than that. For example, the agricultural sector was never well taken care of, so that those who had been traditional supporters of the Shah through all the previous revolutions were disaffected and alienated. And the Shah, as Marvin Zonis, the noted scholar from Chicago, said, took all the credit and now gets all the blame. In other words, if you insist you are the guy who brought everything good, then somebody is going to stand up some day and say, "Yeah, but are you the one who is also bringing the bad stuff?" And after 37 years you make enemies and that is what happened. And the Shah, I think, was quite ill and had his own personality defects which have been written about since then. He was not a strong person. His twin sister, Ashraf, was the strong force in the family. In fact, his father has been reported saying that it is too bad Ashraf wasn't a boy, they were twins.

And in fact, it was Ashraf and General Zahedi more certainly than the Western intelligence people that brought the Shah back to the throne in 1953. You know people tell stories for their own benefit. The Shah wanted everybody to know that he had come back with support from the West and Alan Dulles, who headed our CIA, was not above trumpeting an American victory in that part of the world for his own budgetary and political reasons. But the guy who was actually involved, the senior man on the American side, Kermit Roosevelt, has written a wonderful book about that which said in effect that as interested as we were, for all the physic support we gave them, we were really pretty peripheral. They wanted to bring the Shah back and they did it. And if we helped a little bit, fine, and it probably didn't hurt any of us in the long run. But it wouldn't have happened that way unless the people wanted it. That is what he told Eisenhower and Churchill after it was over.

Q: What impact did Americans living in Iran at the time and working for defense contractors, and various enterprises, have on the Iranian society and how did you protect those people? I know there was a lot of terrorist activity.

STEMPEL: Well, it had a very deleterious effect. In fact, Ambassador Helms, who had been ambassador since 1973, even before I got there had been trying to keep the

American presence down. As he said, "You can tell I failed miserably as it has reached 53,000 in 1978, of whom 25,000 are in Tehran." But the worse part was the level and quality of the Americans which was not always the best. A lot of people working in the military related industries were refugees from Vietnam, a couple of them in Isfahan opened houses of prostitution, which in a very strict Islamic society went down very badly with the natives. Before I got there, there was an American teenager, who rode his motorbike through the Grand Mosque in Isfahan, etc.

The reason we couldn't keep the American presence down was because the modernizing Iranians wanted them. What nobody realized or realized too late was that this set up a gulf between the modernized Iranians, those who had been in contemporary business, and the traditional Iranians who saw the Americans, quite rightly in many cases, as defiling their culture and customs. Now, the Revolutionary government calls this the Westoxification of Iran. In other words, Iranians became intoxicated with things Western. You know, there were blue jeans, tight skirts and shirts, and devout Muslims really didn't like this. Some of them put up with it, you had varying degrees of loyalty to Islam expressed by the senior leadership just as you have in a Christian society. There are some people more committed to their faith than others.

And all of this was in a society which was in the process of change and development. And as part of that change, of course, more people from urban areas came to the cities creating slums as bad as any in the world in south Tehran and some of the other cities. It was from this basis that the revolutionary movement got its impetuous. And it was the ineptitude of the Shah's government, particularly in the 1978 period, that really allowed these forces to play an important role.

Q: How did State Department policy change from Henry Kissinger to Cyrus Vance and how did the embassy react to this change?

STEMPEL: I think the important thing to remember is that it wasn't Vance and Kissinger per se. Nixon, as President, and Kissinger, as Secretary of State, were very, very close to the Shah. When Jimmy Carter came into office...first of all he was an outsider. He had run and won as an outsider. Cyrus Vance was an insider, but he was very committed and concerned with the problem of human rights. The Democrats developed their human rights policy largely as a way of getting at the Soviet Union. But these things take on a life of their own and now we were looking at other areas. But it was clear, even from President Ford's time, that the Americans were focusing on the behavior of their allies and human rights. And the Shah's behavior had not been bad by Middle Eastern standards, but first of all it was a good deal more publicized because there were more Americans present, people found out about it, and the Shah was facing a threat from the late 60s on from terrorist groups in Tehran. He was taking fairly brutal action against these. And, of course, that is what he was criticized for and that's what the revolutionaries blamed his regime for.

Now, was the Shah bad? Yeah, it was bad stuff. Was it improving? Considerably during the four years I was there. In fact, compared to what followed, the Shah looks like almost a saint, in terms of his human rights practices. Amnesty International states that the Iranian revolution killed about 600,000 people in its first year. Nobody has ever suggested that the total killings in the Shah's regime ever approached more than a few thousand over a course of a 37 year regime. But the Shah felt that he wasn't being fully appreciated. The Shah was a geopolitical type like Kissinger and Nixon, and he felt comfortable with them. Jimmy Carter was someone who was worried about civil rights movement and he didn't feel comfortable with him. And the Americans put more emphasis on human rights and the Shah, I guess because he was sick, became distrustful. But at no time did Vance or the incoming Democratic Administration ever suggest that we would not support Iran on security grounds against the Soviet Union or anything else. Largely, what was going on was in the minds of the Iranians and particularly the Shah.

Q: So, when and how was the State Department alerted that the Shah was going to leave Iran?

STEMPEL: Well, there are different levels. It was clear by the summer of 1978 that their was severe unrest and it wasn't going to go away. We had sent in cables in 1977 suggesting why this was going to be so. The Shah was loosening up politically at the same time economic conditions were getting worse. As a couple of my best Iranian friends told me, if he had loosened up when conditions were good, he could have brought more people into the political system. But as it was everybody felt alienated. The modernists felt that the regime, the Shah and his brothers and cousins, were ripping off the country, which was true. There was a lot of money going into slush funds in the Pahlavi foundation and things like this. And what the vast majority of the citizenry wanted, was modern, democratic government without the Shah. What they got was something entirely different, and that was the issue. But it became clear in May-June 1978 the Shah, in effect, botched a reconciliation with Ayatollah Shariat-Madari, the other senior Ayatollah with authority. And we know now why.

The Shah's Commander of the Imperial Inspectorate was a Khomeini man and he probably was responsible for this botching of it. Because the Shah had humiliated him so many times, it was his way of getting back. And then the Shah, himself, was a little bit sicker. He was never willing to use violence. In 1963 when it became necessary to use the army, and I heard this story from someone who was with the people who went in, the Court Minister and Prime Minister went to the Shah and said, "Sir we have to use the army." And the Shah gave his usual, "We can't break the mystical bond of the Shah and the people with force." And finally the Prime Minister said, "Look, if you want to be Shah we have to let the army shoot." And then the story varies as to whether the Shah nodded his head or let them go ahead with a tacit yes. But anyway, they went out and gave the army orders to shoot and put in a curfew and it was touch and go for ten days, but after that it was over. The Ayatollah was shipped out to Iraq and other people made their peace with the regime and they had fourteen years of unbroken progress until 1977.

But, in any event, the Shah was unwilling to use force, was unwilling to find a legitimate stand. Most people, up until November, 1977, the bulk of the Iranian people, and even at the time of the Jaleh Square riots in September 1978, were pro-monarchy. If the Shah had said these people are threatening the country, we will open up the political system, but first we have to repress the poison in the system, he could have wrapped up the whole Mullah movement, put these guys out in guarded camps in the desert, and gone on and made political changes. But he was paralyzed, he couldn't do that. And as a result they just grew and grew and when it became obvious that the Shah wouldn't use force, as I say in my book, at the time the army got mad enough and stopped protecting the streets in early November and there was a day of wild riot and chaos in Tehran, the Shah instituted martial law. But the army wasn't allowed to shoot people who violated the curfew. It took them two weeks to find this out and then the revolutionaries just came back.

Now interestingly enough, that very same night in Turkey there had been riots in 15 cities and the democratically elected Prime Minister of Turkey imposed martial law and told the army to shoot to kill. Their problems evaporated overnight. And not many people who were in Iran at the time think that the Shah could not have imposed draconian martial law and retain power. Now, what would have happened later on had he repressed the Mullahs and the revolutionary movement in Iran, then it would have been over. There might have been further terrorism and even a more difficult outcome down the pike. But he could have probably survived. What he couldn't do was be weak on one side and not be strong enough to retain power on the other. And the Ayatollah Khomeini played that carefully. First in Iraq and then in Paris where he had access to world media. Until by in large he striped away the layers of support from the Shah.

By December, when the Shah put in Bakhtiar as Prime Minister, a man who had opposed him, it was his effort to bring in an acceptable revolutionary to accept the monarchy. Khomeini wouldn't even take that. Bakhtiar lost all the revolutionary support and then it was just a question of what's legitimate. By the time Khomeini came back to the country on February 1, the Shah had left on January 15 and everybody knew he was gone for good, although that wasn't the way it was billed, 98 percent of the people celebrated. I was out in the streets often that day and everybody was delighted that the Shah had left. Everybody thought they were going to get something different.

Q: When Khomeini came I am sure there was quite a bit of celebrating. Did it seem like it was mostly very strong, radical Islamic support?

STEMPEL: No, everybody celebrated Khomeini's arrival because he was going to put in a government...he had named Bazargan Prime Minister, again somebody I had been talking to for some time, as prime minister, and a couple of his assistants, one of whom I had been dealing with for a substantial amount of time, as the shadow government. Khomeini had been there about two weeks, I guess...and, of course, the army, the Imperial Guard, was still loyal to the Shah, but there was a riot at Doshentapi Air Base on February 9 and the Imperial Guards sent two divisions down to put it down and they were bushwhacked and the air cadets distributed weapons from the arsenal there. The Imperial

Guard commander was killed and then it just degenerated. At that point there is no government to take over, it just fell apart and the Liberation Movement people moved in; two days later there was a new government. It just turned over. And then, of course, the killing started. The people went after the enemies who had been in positions and people were frantically changing sides, etc.

And, of course, we watched all from the vantage point of the embassy. In the meantime, beginning in early September, the embassy was encouraging Americans to leave. We had got it down to 25,000 Americans in Iran by Christmas, which was still far too many. By the time the Ayatollah came in after the Shah left, people then began to get the message and left more quickly. But there was still 7000 Americans and there were people who were trying to kill them. There were attempts made on several Americans. We had fortuitous outcomes in some cases. The military attaché shot two of his assailants who were going after him. And I think the way it was handled diplomatically is a real credit to Ambassador Sullivan and everybody who was there, because there were only three Americans killed and only one of those was a deliberate political killing. One was Joe Morris, the famous Los Angeles Times correspondent, who was killed by a sniper's bullet at Doshentapi. The one who was assassinated by terrorists was an oil company executive. And there was a retired Army colonel who was working in Western Iran, who surprised a burglar in his house and was killed, but they didn't think that was political.

Now, before that in the seven years leading up to that, there had been, I think seven Americans killed by terrorist attacks, including two embassy locals in 1975, a month before I got there. And three Americans who worked for an American company were shot in March of that year. So by the time I got there we were riding secure vehicles to work.

Q: In that small amount of time between that new government taking over and the embassy actually being taken over, had there been any sort of promise to your people that we are going to take care of Americans, try to make sure that nothing happens?

STEMPEL: Well you have to remember the timing. Khomeini's government wasn't really firmly in power, they were there but still trying to establish control on February 12. A radical faction of the revolutionary movement took over the American embassy on February 14, which was several months before the hostages were taken in Tehran. At that time the government sent Foreign Minister Yazdi in with Revolutionary guards to push the radicals out and restore order in the compound. However, they never left, they kept people in the compound and we were not in control of our own diplomatic space. And that continued on until the embassy was taken over...and they said that they would assure our safety. We said that we accepted the results of the revolution, we are not opposed to the Iranian people, etc. But there was still deep suspicion because of the 1953 episode. They felt that we would try to come back in with the Shah.

I left in June, 1979. As it worked out over the summer we drew down our embassy to what was a skeleton staff. But the Administration decided that our relations were good enough with the new government, Khomeini's government of Medhi Bazargan, that we

could put more people back in. And then there were mistakes made. We let the Shah in for medical treatment, Brzezinski went to Algiers and met with Yazdi and Bazargan, and at that point the radicals said it is 1953 all over again and then they took over the embassy in November of 1979.

At that point our people became merely a pawn in the Iranian game. The radicals used the control of the embassy and the documents they found there to justify putting in a radical Islamic constitution. Up until that point, Bazargan and the far more moderate element, wanted essentially a European parliamentary constitution, which would give the ayatollahs a political role. But the Islamic constitution provided that the head guy in the whole set up was Khomeini, and he controlled the faithful and was the final arbitrator of all laws is the Islamic Revolutionary Council, which was all ayatollahs. So what you went back to was theocratic government by December, 1979. And, of course, things putted on for another year and a couple of months, until our hostages were released.

Q: Will you describe your own personal experiences on February 14? What exactly happened on that day of the takeover.

STEMPEL: I had been at the ambassador's request outside the embassy. I was the known contact with Bazargan and the others when it became increasingly clear that they were going to play a role, we didn't know how important. So the ambassador said that he wanted me to stay home where they could contact me. My house wasn't in a compound, we were just living out in Iran. We had neighbors who protected us and took care of our kids, etc. So I was not there. I had been out since the Doshentapi Air Base thing broke. Sullivan said, "You need to stay at home or free in case somebody does take a run at the embassy."

On the morning of February 14, I was at home and had called in to my boss, George Lambrakis, who was the political counselor and said, "George, there really is some stuff that I can't go into over the phone that needs to be known." And he said, he admits it was the worse decision he made, "Well, things look pretty quiet here, I'll send an embassy car for you." So they sent an embassy car and about an hour later we were approaching the embassy and we saw people running over. We heard over the car's two-way radio that the embassy was being fired on. I suggested that we go in around the other way...some of us never get the picture! So we went around the other way and saw a mob with ski masks on. At that point I said to the chauffeur, "Ali, I think they are going after the embassy, let's turn around and go back north." So we got out. At that point I saw something very important, and I passed it on to Washington.

The Mujahideen and the Fedayeen were both manning roadblocks. This was a union of two revolutionary groups who fought each other. But, hey, if they are together, no separation any more, they are united against the Americans.

Q: The Fedayeen was the Marxist group and the...?

STEMPEL: Well, it became more confused. The Fedayeen tended to be people who had Marxist roots to start with, but, of course, they were not the true today communists. These were radicals, sort of Chinese oriented. The Mujahideen, some of them were Marxists but many of the others had come up through a fundamentalist...I mean the Mujahideen had been a factor in Egypt and the idea had been around for years. Then they split up into different factions later. People who reviewed my book a year or two after it came out said, "Well, Stempel really doesn't discriminate among the factions very well." In fact, you couldn't at that point with as little contact as we had had. I probably had as much as any with all the factions. The only ones who wouldn't meet with me were the hardcore communists.

So we are pulling away. I went up to an embassy colleague of mine, his house, and said, "Hey, what is happening?" And he said, "As near as I can tell from the phones and stuff, the embassy is being taken over." Oh, when we were driving down, we called the Marines and said, "Quantico Base this is [my call sign], what is going on?" He said, "Well, they are shooting up.." bang, and the radio went out. What had happened was the radio had been shot out. That was when we turned around and went north.

Well, we had no communications with the embassy. And my colleague said, "I think they are coming to get me, so we had better leave." I had a friend of mine who lived about five doors down the other side of the street, so I put on my trench coat and walked with my chauffeur through a Fedayeen- Mujahideen roadblock that was coming down the street and into Professor Lawrence's house. There I called the Swedish embassy, which was next door to our compound, and got one of my colleagues and said, "What's happening?" They confirmed that it was being taken. Then, I picked up the telephone and called the Iran Desk in Washington. I said, "Henry, we have a problem." He said, "Yes, we are beginning to get that through ham radio operations through the Kuwait and the Gulf. " I explained to him what was going on and got authorization from him to call the Prime Minister's office. I said, "Hey, guys, we have a problem here." Well, Skip Boies, at the embassy had called at the same time and they were already in the process of moving troops in to get it set up. So I stayed out of the embassy then all that day.

The next day order of a sort had been restored and they were merely looting the commissary. At that point the Iran revolutionaries were running the compound. In fact, later on we discovered that there were three groups, and I will go into that later, at this point I stayed out at the ambassador's request and tried to stay in contact with Washington. I stayed in this apartment and it took 36 hours to shut down the telephones at which point we went out and taped a line and was able to call Washington anyway.

They had started to move all the Americans out. At this point it was an ordered evacuation. The new government was just as happy to get Americans out to avoid killings, etc. The ambassador then said to come on in. I went to my house and while I was there I got picked up by the revolutionary comité. Half of these guys were people I had known, they lived in the neighborhood, and I was their buddy, you know. I went to revolutionary headquarters and said I was here, that deputy Prime Minister Entezam

would vouch for me, (all this, of course, in Farsi). So they called the Prime Minister and said that he wanted me to go back to the embassy. "Well, can you take me?" "Oh, sure, sure, we will take care of that, but first the honor guys." So they had six guards with rifles shooting straight up. Well, you can figure out what happens to a bullet when it goes straight up, it is going to come straight down. So I got in the car and they fired their salute and I took off to go back home.

And then that evening I came into the embassy and at the embassy's request, by now we had reestablished the phones, picked up several American families and brought them in, too. I had an embassy station wagon at the time. We jammed everything into their one suitcase and brought them back to the compound.

But at that point I did something kind of stupid, although it really worked out to our advantage. When we came into the compound, I knew there were still Iranians there, but they opened the gates and this wild guy came running out saying," Stop, stop, stop" almost like the Groucho Marx thing. But I had just had it with all this kind of thing and scooped him up on the hood and went roaring in and stopped dead in front of a tree where upon he slide off and went splat against the tree. Well, everybody came around with guns. But the good news was this was the number two guy in the Fedayeen group who was heartily detested by the number one, who was also the brother of the number three. As far as number one and three were concerned, I had done Allah's work that night...humiliated and slam-dunked this guy. Besides, I spoke Farsi and they knew who I was by this time. So our citizens went over to where others were camping waiting for their evacuation flight. And they assigned number three to be my bodyguard, because he didn't want anything to happen to me. Well, number 3 had been a Greco-Roman wrestler who had won a gold medal at the Asian games. He was about 5'8", a lot shorter than I was, but muscular. This guy could crush tire rims with his bare hands. And he followed me around to keep track of me. But it was also good for me because nobody fussed with Amid.

For the next two or three weeks Amid stayed with me by in large. We went out and settled housing leases for the embassy and I moved down to an apartment right next to the compound. It was at that point that Skip Boies, who was the ambassador's assistant and I, as the Farsi speakers, got called in as the mediator between the various groups in the compound. There was the main Fedayeen group. Then there were the air force Homofars, sort of warrant officers, and then there was a group of people who were sent to guard the ambassador, who Skip Boies learned later on were the Muhjadydeen team that had been assigned to assassinate the ambassador in a prior incarnation. So he says, "Do you think I ought to tell the ambassador?" I said, "At some point you can let it be known that they were the ones who were watching out for him, but I wouldn't go quite that far."

Anyway, we got called in to mediate when fights broke out between the groups. They would accept our mediation over who was to get what, etc. because we were not part of the revolutionary coalition, we both spoke Farsi. From that point on it was simply drawing down the American force. The Iranians had taken over our military base and much of our military files. We had gotten back control of our embassy at that point. In the

process then we burned practically all of our records. We were operating on what we called a day's take for about a month and a half. In other words, we would not keep any files. We would burn everything after a day that was in anyway classified or confidential. And we shipped 15 tons of files out on one of the military evacuation flights. Now, fast forward ahead. The military mission shipped a couple of tons back in later on and those were the files which provided most of the fireworks after the...

Q: They shipped ones that were highly classified?

STEMPEL: Old files being brought back in to enable every day work at the embassy. You see, a false impression developed from June through August or September that we that we were back on an even footing, things were back to normal. And those of us who said it wasn't so, were told that we were just disgruntled disaffected characters. I remember Bruce Laingen, a very good friend, going out and saying, "Well, we can't be too suspicious of these people." He was the chargé, the boss, he was a hostage for 444 days. Now granted, it took some extraordinary stupid behavior on our part to lead to that. But still, the point was that we were not looking at the real world as it existed from say mid to late summer of 1979 on through the hostage takeover.

Q: Well, you left Iran in June?

STEMPEL: In June and I reported to Annapolis as the State Department's Diplomat-in-Residence in July, 45.2 miles from my house to the State Department basement. I know that because when the hostage crisis started, I was teaching during the day and working a six or eight hour shift at night at the Operations Center, because I knew all the players. And the other fellow who worked with me part time, he and I were much involved in the early crisis management. That's when I got very firm and decisive views about how the Operations Center was being run and what it should and shouldn't do and why our capacities were ineffective.

Q: So the next year you became director...?

STEMPEL: Well, I was two years at Annapolis, but the hostage crisis went through and when Alexander Haig became Secretary of States and Ray Seitz, who is our ambassador to London, was the deputy executive secretary, I put in for that possibility and was interviewed with several others. He said, "Do you want the job? What are you thinking of doing?" And I said, "Yeah, in fact, here is what I would do" and I laid down some things. I said, "If you are serious about this, give me a call." Seitz said, "Well, we will get back to you in a month." Seven days later I got a called from the Executive Secretary of the Department who says that they would like me to be in the Operations Center. And I said, "Does that mean that the Secretary agrees with the need to rework and revamp the Operations Center?" He says, "Absolutely and you will have the budget support to do it." That wasn't quite true, we had to fight for it, but we did get it. So, I became the Operations Center's director on June, 1981.

We had started work on it coming in two days a work from Annapolis to start work on it. We laid the ground work for it, despite a couple of fickle pickles in the barrel. By the time I left we had moved to cathode ray tube processing of all incoming messages and we were just waiting for the technology, laser guided stuff, to be able to distribute it in the Department electronically instead of having people run up and get the paper.

Q: Did it cause a lot of problems between computerization and doing your actual job?

STEMPEL: No, that was my main job, to make sure that that transition went smoothly. And we spent a lot of time on training and a lot of time on practical stuff. I once told a group that I thought I earned my entire Foreign Service salary in those years in the Operations Center, in terms of value given for money received. Because it went smoothly and got transferred over and we laid the ground work. We got everything done by the time I left, except the telephone system. Midway through, I had been working with the communicators and they said, "Gee, John, you are not a straight diplomat are you. You look at this stuff, communications." And I said, "Yes. Al Haig likes it that way, wants it and understands it. He is a military man and has had these problems before." So we looked at the telephone system and that was when I discovered we were operating with 1940s technology and 1950s equipment. And instead of upgrading the Operations Center, it had gotten much bigger, a $30 million upgrading of the entire State Department. But that took three years. The first upgrading of the Operations Center was being put in by the time I left. And two years later in Madras I got a call three o'clock in the morning and it was the first call out under the new Centrix system and my colleague who had been in the Operations Center said, "John, I think you would like to know that this is the last link." And I said, "Thanks a lot. What time is it in Washington?" "About five in the afternoon" "Well, it is three in the morning here, David, thanks a lot."

Q: After director of the Operations Center, you were director of the Office of Near East and South Asian Affairs on loan from the State Department to the Department of Defense.

STEMPEL: That was a job that was very interesting. In a way it didn't work out as well as I expected or as my boss expected. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, was Richard Armitage. My immediate boss was an Air Force major general who was angling for a higher command and eventually he commanded the Fifth Air Force. He was the deputy assistant secretary and I was the office director. I commanded an office that had about seven civilian employees and seven military employees on assignment. We had agreed upon a work assignment. They had picked me because I wasn't known to have been committed to either side of the Israeli-Arab dispute. After I took over we had some modifications, some upgrades, to do there too. We computerized that office.

We had the Marine Barracks episode and the American involvement in Lebanon and almost all of my time that year was taken up with that. I came to see other problems, the Iran-Iraq war and other issues. And I think what they were looking for was a sort of hands on desk officer, and what I saw being needed was to push out and deal with some of the

broader issues. After a year, kind of by mutual consent, I went back to the State Department, which was delighted to have me working as a special assistant to the Assistant Secretary for the Mideast and the Secretary on the Iran-Iraq war.

Q: What kind sort of policy did you have to formulate concerning that war?

STEMPEL: Well, we worked out sort of a National Security decision memorandum on Iran and how to handle Iran with respect to the war. I chaired an interdepartment committee, whose White House member, by the way, was Ollie North. My colleague, who I worked very closely with, was a deputy assistant secretary, Jim Placke. We essentially wanted to be in a position to move with respect to Iran if needed, to have a balanced end of the Iran-Iraq war. In other words, no victors, was the policy. And to make sure that our allies didn't support either side in terms of giving an advantage on the war. As part of that I took a two-week trip with Special Ambassador to the Middle East, Charles Fairbanks. He and I went to five European capitals and had a bad cop/nice cop act on beating up on people who helped the Iranians. The Spanish were repairing boats, the Italians were selling everything, the Brits were selling tanks to them, and the Swiss were even selling light private aircraft. However, our intelligence discovered one of their circulars that showed how they had hook-on points for all the weapons on these private aircraft. I was the bad cop that day and got to sit down and talk to the Swiss assistant secretary and say that this wasn't going to fly, it was going to cause problems. That is the kind of work I did.

Q: And, were you successful?

STEMPEL: Up to a point. You member, of course, we attacked Iran for taking hostages and stuff like this. Then I went off to Madras, as consul general in the summer of 1985, and, of course, it was that fall that Ollie North, out from under the kinds of restrictions that our interdepartmental committee had put on him, started going around. What had happened...you see I had been an Iranian specialist so I had some clout and was not willing to roll over for some guy who just <u>said</u> he was speaking for the President. My boss had been a specialist on Saudi Arabia and again had full knowledge of the area. I don't know whether Ollie just decided to ignore the people who succeeded us, or whether he talked them into working for him, but in fact he began his rogue elephant program that surfaced a year later as the Iran-Contra mess. I remember getting a midnight cable from Assistant Secretary Murphy on that and sending back an answer trying to lay out what I knew about it, what was going on. You have a feeling of deja vu in the wrong way. That is one of the things we prepared to do, for example, was that if we wanted to help the Iranians how would we go about it. Well you are not supposed to do that. "Look," we said, "we know we are not supposed to do that but if we wanted to do it, how would we do it?" Some of that probably filtered into the kind of stuff that Ollie got playing around with. But nothing quite so blatant as weapons for the hostages.

Q: Well, during your time in Madras, what aspects of south Indian politics did the US have the most interest in?

STEMPEL: Well, there were two. One was politics and one was economic. First, we were very interested in the Tamil insurrections in Sri Lanka. Now Madras, of course, is the center of Tamil Nadu, "Tamil state," so there was a lot back and forth that had allegedly been helping their colleagues across the water and we kept a very close watch on that.

Aside from that, my mission, my main goal, was to ease consular problems on the one hand, because of all the Indians who wanted to come to the States, and to build up the business and science collaboration with south India. In the three years I was there we tripled the collaboration in money terms. We were strong supporters of the scientific effort down there, to the point of working with the embassy in Delhi to try and get the Indian telephone industries to sign a $12 billion contract. That was two years after the telephone divesture took place and we couldn't get the Americans to organize it, so we got only half the business.

Q: How was it working with the ambassador there, John Gunther Dean? Did you have a good working relationship with him?

STEMPEL: I had a superb working relationship with Ambassador Dean, I think. I saw very clearly what he was trying to do and I supported it. I think he had a lot of confidence in me. In fact, it got so good in effect that the last year or so of my consul generalship, it was almost impossible to get him to pay the ritual visits to the south that he was supposed to do. I would say, "Mr. Ambassador, you really need to go over to Bangalore and talk to these people." "But John we have so much trouble up here and you are doing a good job. Go in and tell them you have my blessings, etc." So it was a very good relationship. Others have said that he was difficult to work with. And he could be firm. But I never minded that because I always felt I knew where I stood and if he didn't like something I was doing he would tell me and I would change it. Or I would try to convince him it was wrong. I had some success in that. You know, we really didn't want to do it the way he wanted because of various negative consequences. He was good to work for.

Q: During that time what kind of relationship did the US and India have? I know there was some problems when we bombed Libya, etc.

STEMPEL: Yes, but actually our relationships were on the upswing. I was in Washington for Rajiv Gandhi's visit in June, 1985. By the time I got to India, everything was on the up and up. We went through it and loved it. It was a terrific time for us. The other thing is that most of the southerns, those in south India, have a really different view of the federal government. They look at it with a certain amount of suspicion and in fact were much more sympathetic to the American views on things like the bombing of Libya. They understood why we were doing it. Well, put it this way, they were at least willing to understand my explanations of that kind of thing. I had some severe doubts about it when it first started too, and it turns out it was quite the right thing to do, I think. But they were not always with their own government.

I remember, it is a very small issue, but in 1987 when the Indian Davis Cup team, and then it was quite good with the Amritraj brothers and Ranesh Krishnan, had won their first round match and was scheduled to play Israel. The Indian government had had a long history of pulling them out before really difficult matches and they didn't recognize Israel. Anyway we helped show P.R. Reddy, the vice president of the International Tennis Association, the steps to take and I got with the ambassador and we helped them out with the Indian government so they could play Israel. They played Israel and beat them, beat the Australians and went on playing in the Davis Cup finals against the Swedes. I think the United States got a fair amount of credit among the tennis circles for helping them out in doing that. A year later they sort of disemboweled themselves tennis-wise. But these were the kinds of things that were going on.

Two or three of the key businessmen on the Indo-American Business Council were based in Madras or Bangalore, which were cities in my territory. I worked very closely with the commercial side of it. That was sort of a new thing for me, but it flowed directly from my own interest of economic development.

Q: *Well, during your career you have balanced the academia and diplomat. A couple of times you were an adjunct professor at George Washington University, and at American University. As we mentioned before you were a Diplomat-in-Residence at the US Naval Academy at Annapolis. And at various other times your were teaching and publishing papers and things like that. You retired in 1988 and now you are the Director of the Patterson School of Diplomacy, at the University of Kentucky.*

STEMPEL: Let me say a word about that. The academics always took second place. The only time they really overlapped was when I was given a State Department assignment to the US Naval Academy. Now, I was also given a State Department assignment to Ohio State's Mershon Center, as a research professor, in 1972. So those are the only places they overlap. The rest was what I really kind of did on my own because I wanted to maintain and saw myself some day being an academic. It came a little quicker than I wanted, largely because of the kind of down turn the Foreign Service was taking, and, to be perfectly frank, there wasn't a whole lot of a market for Farsi speaking Foreign Service officers, no matter how good their record was in 1988. Rather than play out the string and hope for additional promotions and stuff, I decided to take charge, heeding advice from others who said, "Look, if you want jobs in the academic world you will always get those, you have done research, but if you want a second career, you need to move to a good academic job within two or three years of your 50th birthday so you have enough time to give somebody a full charge." And that is essentially what I did. I got an offer to become associate director at the Patterson School of Diplomacy, with the idea that if they liked me and I liked them I would at least be under consideration for the Directorship when Dr. Davis left. And that is, in fact, what happened at the beginning of this year. Now it is my job to train people to go back and handle the next generation's problems.

Q: What do you consider your greatest achievement during your career in the Foreign Service?

STEMPEL: I would say my greatest achievement had nothing to do with the Foreign Service, and that was getting my daughters up and running. But, I suppose in the Foreign Service, two things kind of stand out. One was my work in Iran as a political officer because I think it played a significantly modest if not important role in some places in bringing that to a relatively successful conclusion. I mean we could have had a situation with 10,000 Americans massacred in Iran and we didn't. People tend to forget about that in terms of the trouble we had. And that was probably my best contribution, because I had had three years of preparation for it. I knew people, I had contacts, and experience.

Maybe in terms of long range impact on the United States, the best was the two years that I was Operations Center director. And I probably made some enemies there. I was real hard nosed about getting the job done. And I managed to irritate several senior officers and I am sure that didn't help me in the future. It was certainly one of my considerations when it became time to decided whether to retire or stay on. But we got the job done. Many recognized it and some didn't.

Q: Is there anything that you would say would be your greatest frustration as far as being in the Foreign Service?

STEMPEL: I guess the greatest frustration is that there is not enough leadership in the system as opposed to management. Now leadership is doing the right thing, management is merely doing things right. We have a lot of people trying to do things right but you know if you are climbing a ladder and it is leaning against the wrong wall the further up you get on the ladder, the worse you are in trouble. And I think that was my greatest frustration and it is a bureaucratic frustration. In general terms I think it is the one thing that bothers most Foreign Service officers.

Q: And my final question, STEMPEL, with the benefit of time, how do you view life in the Foreign Service?

STEMPEL: Well, I think life in the Foreign Service can be tremendously exciting and a lot of fun, depending, of course, on your personality. I have met people who just love going into different cultural environments and learning new things, learning about old civilizations, and dealing with different kinds of people. I think those kinds of people will enjoy Foreign Service life. I think people who tend to be afraid of new things, tend to like sameness over a period of time, are going to have trouble with the Foreign Service.

There is a tremendous opportunity to do worthwhile activities and get paid for them. I believe that the challenges for the next 30 years are going to be a lot more different, a lot more exciting, a lot more complex, than they were during my period in the Foreign Service. My period didn't exactly coincide with the end of the Cold War, but almost. We can already see in the research that I have done, challenges that are coming forward. One big challenge which I have spoken before the State Department on, is the fact that now foreign affairs are becoming as much the providence of states and cities as they are the

national government. The title of an article I wrote is "Losing It." The Foreign Service is losing its domination and perhaps it should. But I don't necessarily think domination was the name of the game anyway. The Foreign Service provided a cadre of top professionals to work in different areas. There still remain the problems and issues of interacting a top professional foreign career service with political leadership. We have not solved that problem anymore than some other countries I could name. But in terms of a personal and rewarding life it is a challenge.

There are some downsides to it. I think if you ask my daughters they will come out on the whole positively, but they would point out that in some respects you become what they call a third country kid. You are not completely at home in America and you know you are not an Iranian or an Indian, and yet both of them have tremendous love for the places we have served...they are not quite ready to go back to Iran yet, but both are ready to go back to India, in fact my older daughter is teaching in India now. My younger daughter, when she had a chance to stay in America for her senior year in high school or go back where she had done about three years of schooling, opted to go back and graduate from Katra Kanal school in India. So I think that tells you that it was a balanced thing.

I think it is fair to say that my marriage broke up shortly after I left the Foreign Service and I don't attribute that specifically to the Foreign Service, in fact, maybe we stayed together because we were in the Foreign Service. It is hard to say. I have since remarried and put together another family and blended families, etc.

But there are both challenges and opportunities and if you like the life, if you can stand working with authority, it can be terrific. I think people who are natural rebels don't make good diplomats because you are always working for the government. You may disagree with the government, you may quit, that is perfectly all right, but you have to understand that you are working as part of a team.

Q: Thank you. That concludes our interview.

STEMPEL: Thank you.

End of interview