

ARMENIA

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MILDRED A. PATTERSON Analyst, Bureau of Intelligence and Research Washington, DC (1993-1994)

Mildred A. Patterson was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and entered the Foreign Service in 1976. Her postings abroad included Copenhagen, Brussels and Ankara. Ms. Patterson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: Well, let's take Armenia first. What was going on when you were there?

PATTERSON: We watched Azerbaijan as well, but our main focus was on Armenia and Georgia. The Armenians were just getting on their feet in terms of being an independent country after the break up of the Soviet Union. We were watching the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh and what that meant domestically in Armenia. Another item was the status of Armenia's energy supply and its dependence on one of the old fashioned nuclear reactors of the type that had blown apart in Chernobyl. That reactor sits on a major earthquake fault line. Armenia's dire economic situation was another issue. The Armenians were poor as could be and cold most of the winter and we watched much of the Armenian population go to Moscow and stay with relatives in order to escape the winters.

In Georgia we were watching the civil war between the Abkhaz and the Georgians. We watched the attempts by the Russians to keep their thumbs on Shevardnadze and his efforts to deal with the Russians, the tremendous crime in his country and the bleak economic situation.

Q: Well the breakaway group there, how did we read them? I mean were they, was somebody else prompting them or was this an indigenous thing?

PATTERSON: We were reading them at the time as enjoying huge support from the Russians.

Q: What was the feeling, I mean what did the Russians want to do, retake Georgia essentially?

PATTERSON: Yes, they did not like the idea that it would slip away from its influence and that they wanted its ports.

Q: Were we doing anything in either of these places?

PATTERSON: At that point, no. Now some American troops are there as military trainers, I believe, but in the early '90s all we were doing was watching. We were giving Shevardnadze lots and lots of moral support, but we were giving him very little actual support.

Q: Was the American community in the United States a factor as you looked at what was going on, I mean the Armenian factor in America?

PATTERSON: Yes, they were a factor because Armenia was getting a tremendous amount of aid from us. Tremendous aid. The Armenian Americans made sure of that.

Q: At that time was the devastation of the earthquake from some years before still a factor?

PATTERSON: Yes. They were so poor they hadn't been able to rebuild, and the Embassy and any Washington visitors were still reporting seeing wrecked buildings.

Q: It sounds that what you're saying particularly at that time, but particularly Armenia, but also to a certain extent Georgia were you know, sort of ideals of wouldn't it be nice for the Armenians to have a country, but there wasn't anything to put a country together there.

PATTERSON: They were both basket cases economically. If it weren't for the Armenian Americans and Shevardnadze, the U.S. probably would have paid very little attention to them. But the Deputy Secretary, Strobe Talbot, was an admirer of Shevardnadze, although as I said there was very little that we actually did for them. That was '93 to '94. Then in 1994 my husband was nominated to be Ambassador to Turkey, so I left my job in August of '94 and went to Turkish language training for a semester.

LOUIS F. LICHT III
Deputy Chief of Mission
Yerevan (1996-1998)

Mr. Licht was born in Maine and raised in New York. Educated at Yale University and the Fletcher School, he served in the US Army in Vietnam and joined the State Department in 1974. Mr. Licht served in Washington, dealing with Latin American Affairs as well as Arms Control and Nuclear matters. His foreign posts were Santo Domingo, Lima, Canberra, Yerevan and Chisnau (Moldova). Mr. Licht was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

LICHT: Wither? To Armenia to work for Ambassador Peter Tomsen from 1996 to 1998.
[Editor's Note: Ambassador Tomsen served from September 1995 to September 1998.]

Q: *What was Armenia like at this point?*

LICHT: Armenia compared to Chisinau wasn't exactly Paris to Peoria, but Peoria was Podunk. Armenia is a place where, unlike Moldova, where people don't have a very clear idea of who they are, the Armenians have a very firm idea of who they are. It was a place where there was more available than Chisinau in terms of goods. There are more automobiles, probably. They have a maybe slightly higher standard of living and a firm feeling that this really was a country that existed before the Soviet Union. It was a tougher place to work. They also, of course, had territorial issues regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, which remains a very thorny issue. There, like in Moldova, there were various aid organizations all over, many I was now familiar with when I got there. It was a slightly easier place to live than some places. It was more difficult, but somewhat more interesting, political atmosphere. We had a larger embassy and a DCM to help run it. I guess I had more affection toward Moldova, but overall, Armenia was the more interesting place to be.

Q: *Well, you must have felt the heavy hand of the Armenian community in the United States there, didn't you?*

LICHT: We did in various ways. They were always on your neck, and when they came to speak to us... There was one time when a group of Armenian Americans came to speak to us, when one of our officers said something that he wouldn't have said if the government official were there. No sooner had the group left than the government was calling us in (I happened to be chargé at the moment) to object to this particular statement. So, you had to be pretty careful about that. There were important, well connected, wealthy Armenians from the United States who were well connected in the Armenia world. There was quite a bit of good work being done in the embassy. But, yes, you always had to be concerned about how the Armenian Assembly was going to view what you were doing.

Q: *The Armenian Assembly being an American...?*

LICHT: Yes, the Armenian Assembly is an American organization. They would come down out on particular officers, as not being sympathetic to Armenians.

Q: *In a way, it duplicates the atmospherics which our embassy in Tel Aviv experiences didn't it?*

LICHT: The situation is somewhat similar, yes. The Armenians now have either the third or the fourth highest per capita assistance of any country. They have a very good organization to solicit aid.

Q: *What was our interest in Armenia at the time?*

LICHT: We were interested in preventing an all out war in the Caucasus.

Q: *In particular, Azerbaijan?*

LICHT: Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh. We were interested in seeing that democracy was established and seeing they were generally better off as a democracy. We were interested in...(tape ends)

Q: *Did any issues come up with Iran?*

LICHT: We often talked to them about Iran because we wanted to warn them to make sure they were not cooperating with Iran in a way that was bad for our interest, particularly in being a potential transit point of nuclear weapons or other weapons from Russia. The other factor here is that there are still Russian troops in Armenia, and Armenia continues to feel close to Russia, closer than Georgia and Azerbaijan. People who came through were continually bringing up the Iran issue. And the Armenians were continually saying, "Look, we have no other options than to deal with Iran, because, look, we are blockaded by Turkey on one side and by Azerbaijan on the other side. The only way to get things into here is through Iran," which was right. There is a lot of transport across the border. The Iranians were buying things from Armenia. They were buying things like scrap metal from Armenia, and taking it across. So, the corner was Iran, Armenia and Georgia. That was the way they could get things in and out, to block it off would not have made sense.

Q: *How was the government of Armenia, at this point?*

LICHT: It was a democratic government, but the elections, of which there were three when I was there, were not fairly conducted. The OSCE...

Q: *One of our colleagues was an OSCE observer there. I had been with him in Bosnia, and I asked him how it went. He said, "Well, they're a bunch of thugs, and it wasn't very helpful."*

LICHT: The first year I was there, when they had a presidential election, it was later acknowledged by them, that it was stolen. Baaz Manukian, who was the opposition to the Ter-Petrosian, who was the president, shortly after the election, when it was clear that it wasn't being fairly counted, there was a huge demonstration. The embassy was just a little bit down the street from the parliament. The crowd assembled in front of the parliament gate and therefore in front of the embassy, too, as they marched. They weren't angry at us. They broke down the gates of parliament, went in and attacked the speaker, who was upstairs, and three other people, who landed in the hospital.

We were in the embassy and as all of this is occurring, all of a sudden, shots were fired. So, we did the normal thing. We were buttoning up the embassy, and all these people were out front. It was a reasonably exciting night. As this was happening, we were getting calls from the government, saying, "They are at the gate. It looks like they are breaking down the gate." At that time, the U.S. had not made a statement about the election, not even welcoming the results. One of the things government wanted us to do was to make such a statement. Eventually, we made a statement that didn't congratulate Levon Ter-Petrosian that we would work with him, and was satisfactory enough, but we did deplore the violence that occurred. So, that was reason then.

We had observers out, during the election, of course, and that was pretty exciting. We had an excellent political officer named Susan Thorton, who was in one of the elections, in the district, watching the elections when at something like 1:00, the lights went out and a bunch of thugs came in and stole the ballot box. Someone said later they could not have picked a worse place, because one of the most respected observers was right there to see it happen. At that point, the Petrossian government was never very close to the American embassy. When he wanted help, he called us, but otherwise, he pretty much ignored us. Our enthusiasm for him was not terribly high either, after all this occurred, but we did try to work with him.

Q: Well, what happened when Armenian-Americans would come and ask you about election, what would you say?

LICHT: The fellow I mentioned to you before, where the Americans heard something said about the government that wasn't quite favorable, it would get back to the government. It was instant. You could put your finger on it. It was an instant in which an officer said, "Well, maybe we will never know if Ter-Petrossian was legitimately elected. That's the phrase that got back to the government, and apparently to the president. Quickly, the chargé was called in, and we had to quickly say something. Our answer was that we do not doubt that Ter Petrossian shoulders the responsibility of the president.

Q: So, our basic policy was, I guess, to try to foster development there, and to keep them from getting too close to the Iranians?

LICHT: And also to try to make sure they don't fall completely into becoming pawn to Russian politics. The importance of keeping the area peaceful had a lot to do with the Caspian oil we had an interest in accessing.

Q: Was our embassy trying to do anything with the whole Azerbaijan conflict?

LICHT: We worked with the OSCE in something called the Minsk Group to help the mediation process. The Minsk Group had three mediators, one from France, one from Russia, and one from the United States. There is still an office in the Department which is involved in this process, run by a fellow who was so important in Cyprus. But, we still have a negotiator of ambassadorial rank. So, the Minsk Group would check in with the OSCE. The members, the negotiators in the three countries would come through Armenia, go to Azerbaijan, go to Russia, and go other places, to try to come up with a solution. They would come to town, and it was pretty interesting, because we had to read them in, we would deal with the Russian embassies, the French embassy, and we would make the arrangements for these people to come. We would cooperate on how they would meet, and we would exchange information, to the extent we could, and work with them to help them fix things. That's one of the nice things, sometimes it happens in diplomacy. But, it was very hard to make progress. The people in Nagorno-Karabakh had their own government, and they had to be involved as well. Our negotiators would go up to the Nagorno-Karabakh, but, we who were accredited to Armenia would not go up to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Q: At this point, Nagorno-Karabakh was basically under Armenia control?

LICHT: That's right.

Q: Did you find that you all, at your embassy, were cooperating with our embassy in Baku, or not?

LICHT: Yes, we were. I personally never got to Baku. That is one of the things I'm sorry about. Where you sit and where you stand has something to do with your outlook, of course, but I thought the cooperation between the embassies was pretty good. We also cooperated with the embassy in Georgia. When the negotiators would go from here to there, or from there to here, depending on the schedule at that time, so we maintained contact and we exchanged information, as you would expect. I think they knew the relationships with the ambassadors was good, and the rest of us seemed to work pretty well with them. We might have had clientitis somewhere along the line, but I think it overshadowed the U.S. effort to play a fair mediation role.

Q: Well, now, was official Armenia at that time, nurturing the narrative about the World War I massacre of Armenians, in Turkey, or not? Do they have other fish to fry, at this point?

LICHT: No. It's still on the agenda. Armenia is still awaiting an apology, and still awaiting recognition of the historical facts, that it was a genocide. It will be a long time before it goes away. It's part of national lore now. It is hard to deal with. But they would establish relations with Turkey, if Turkey would establish relations with them despite this. Nevertheless, it is definitely alive.

Q: How about with Georgia? Georgia had this almost subliminal civil war going on. Was that still going on?

LICHT: Yes, it was still going on. It didn't spill over into Armenia so much, but yes. The relationship with Georgia was pretty good. There were Armenians on the southern part of Georgia, which was a potentially area of difficulty. It flared up. They had good reason to maintain good relations with Georgia.

One of the things Ambassador (Michael) Lemon [Ambassador from September 1998 to October 2001] was working on and Ambassador Tomsen started working on was establishing better routes between Georgia and Armenia with the notion that eventually Azerbaijan could also be tied in. It could be a region, and as a region, it could be reasonably powerful, economically. Now, as a fragmented region, it's not economically integrated.

Q: There must still be troops in Armenia.

LICHT: There are Soviet troops in Armenia.

Q: What are they doing?

LICHT: They are guarding the border. In fact, many of the Soviet troops are Armenians who are in the Russian army. The Russian army is not necessarily well paid or well maintained, but they are there.

Q: *Was there any feeling of threat from Turkey, from our perspective?*

LICHT: From our perspective, there wasn't. From their perspective, there always will be, I guess.

Q: *Were there cross-border raids, or anything?*

LICHT: There was a threat. If you were Armenian, you would feel a threat, because the Turk and the Azer-Arabs cooperated closely, so if there were a conflict again in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenians would have to be looking toward their back. I think, probably, it is fair to say that if you were an Armenian diplomat, you would say, "We just have to do it."

Q: *At one point, we had this Armenian liberation army, which was sort of a terrorist group, going around killing Turks. Where were any assassinations during the time you were there*

LICHT: The sting seems to have been taken out of that liberation army group. The good Dashnak versus the bad Dashnak. The Turks are still mad about that. The Armenians are still not apologetic about it, but it wasn't as important an issue...No assassinations of Turks, no. A couple Armenians bumped each other off.

Q: *In '98, how did you feel for Armenia? Did it seem to be developing along positive lines?*

LICHT: Well, eventually Ter-Petrosian was forced to resign before the next election [March 1998]. Robert Kocharyan, who had been made prime minister [1997-98] by Ter-Petrosian ran for election. Kocharyan had been the president of Nagorno-Karabakh, so when he was appointed prime minister, it was quite a spectacular event, and when he finally became president, it was almost like the war party had taken over. Yet, from what I could tell, he made an effort to push the negotiations along, but of course, he was replaced by somebody who was just as adamant as he was when he was in Nagorno-Karabakh. Do you remember the massacre in the parliament just recently [October 1999]?

Q: *Yes.*

LICHT: The way this played out, I think you had to kind of backtrack, as far as peace negotiations were concerned. When I left, I wished Armenia well, but thinking that it had an immense number of very talented people, and that Armenia will probably always take care of itself. It was moving slowly, slowly toward a market economy, slowly perhaps toward democratic government, but real democracy had quite a ways to go there. It would always have, in some way, to look to outside itself. A number of people who had traveled to California and back was immense, and that money had come to be very helpful. I guess the collapse of the Russian rule dealt Armenia a blow, too. They were getting remittances from us, from them. Slowly, slowly, Armenia, I hope, will get there.

Q: How about the earthquake? When was it?

LICHT: 1988. Years later, they have made minimal process in cleaning up. There were certain things they were good. There were some schools established by foreign donations. There was a certain amount of clean up. It seems like it is taking them forever, despite the amount of money that has been put in. Maybe that is unfair. If it had happened in Germany, it would have been cleaned up by now.

Q: Well, let me tell you, I was consul general in 1980 in Naples, when they had a very bad earthquake there. My understanding is that it still hasn't been cleaned up. The local bosses get in the corruption seat then, central government doesn't deliver very well, and the money gets pitted away.

LICHT: Well, I certainly think that happened in Armenia.

JOHN M. EVANS
Ambassador
Armenia (2004-2006)

Ambassador Evans was born and raised in Virginia and educated at Yale University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1971 and became a specialist in Soviet and Eastern European Affairs. His foreign posts were Teheran, Prague, Moscow, Brussels, St. Petersburg, Chisinau (Moldova) and Yerevan, Armenia, where he served as Ambassador from 2004 to 2006. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington, the Ambassador dealt primarily with Russian and former Soviet states' affairs. Ambassador Evans was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: Two thousand and four. We're going to be talking about Armenia but how did this come about?

EVANS: I was working at that time in the European Bureau, Europe and Eurasia as it now is styled, as director of the office of Russian affairs. But the time was coming up for my rotation to something else and the assistant secretary at the time, Elizabeth Jones, worked very hard to see if she could get me an appointment to one or the other ambassadorship in the former Soviet Union. And as it turned out the best fit turned out to be Yerevan. So in the winter/early spring of 2004 I got private word that I was going to be nominated for that post and I was actually nominated in May of 2004.

Q: Well now, was Yerevan one of these posts that- I would think like some of the Baltic countries where all of a sudden there's a politician who's got, you know, always wanted to go back to the Motherland; was Yerevan one of these? I mean, did the Armenians of San Gabriel want to go back?

EVANS: It has never...I was the fifth ambassador and none of the five, Harry Gilmore being the first, none of the five were political appointees, they were all career people, and in general most of the posts in the former Soviet Union have been occupied by career professionals rather than by political appointees or ethnic political appointees.

Q: I would think though, I mean because Armenians, as we will get to, take their- the Armenian Americans take their country of either birth or of origin very seriously.

EVANS: Well, they do and there's no law against naming somebody of an ethnic background. As we know, there have been Jews who have served in Tel Aviv and there have been Italians who have served in Rome. So it is not unheard of. I think the conventional wisdom among professionals is that it's better not to name someone who might have ethnic ties that would sway his judgment in one way or another at his post of assignment.

Q: Well I, you know, when we've had so many Italian Americans who have gone to Italy usually, at least in the view of the professional, not with- it has not been a very happy occasion. Often what they're doing is they're not speaking Italian, they're speaking a dialect, you know, some patois, you know, and they're not really considered of sufficient caliber by the natives.

EVANS: Well, there certainly are complications and baggage that can accompany a person with a heritage connected to the post of assignment.

Q: Well anyway-

EVANS: I had no, absolutely no, Armenian connections whatsoever; I'd actually never been there. I did have one great advantage which was that my Russian at that time was in pretty good shape and certainly the political class in all those ex-Soviet republics still speak Russian and mostly work in Russian.

Q: Alright, you're named, you're one on the list but since, as you say, this is not a place where the political appointees are trying to get the job so it's fairly sure- What were you hearing about Armenia? You know, because the Armenians play a larger than life role in American politics and all.

EVANS: The Armenians are well organized and they are passionate about Armenian issues but if you're not really looking to see them they're almost invisible to most observers except on occasions when they have street protests about the recognition of the Armenian genocide. Now, I have run across Armenia once before and that was in December of 1988 at the time of the big earthquake when Gorbachev had to rush back from New York to tend to the devastation there, so I had some knowledge of the Armenian community from that time. I had -- memorably for me -- I had gone to New York to brief all the Armenian church and community representatives on what the U.S. Government was doing to help the victims of the earthquake and I remember, I may have said before, that I never felt so underdressed in my life, faced with all the different bishops of the different denominations in their various robes and headdresses.

Q: Oh yes. Well, was anybody telling you, you know, okay John, you're off to Armenia; watch it?

EVANS: At that point no, although Ed Djerejian, who of course had been in the Foreign Service for years, by this time he was retired, he did say be very careful out there, but I think he was referring more to the local political scene, which he had some disparaging remarks for, than anything else. Now, Beth Jones did say to me, “it’s not a very pretty post but it’s getting better,” or something like that. One of the reasons was that it was known that the ambassador’s residence was a shambles and that the embassy, which was in an old Communist Party building, was a kind of a wreck and that we were building a new chancery. So that’s what she meant.

Q: Was this all because of the earthquake or was it just general decrepitude?

EVANS: You know, most of those, what became republic capitals, had been provincial cities in the Soviet Union and so they weren’t set up to be capital cities, with the possible exception, oddly enough, of St. Petersburg, which was a capital but not a capital.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: It was the northern capital of Russia. It had had embassies and so it had a great fund of wonderful buildings. But the other cities, even Kiev, had a terrible shortage of hotels, so none of these places were really well set up to receive foreign diplomats.

Q: What did you do to prepare yourself?

EVANS: Since I knew very little about Armenia I started reading as much as I could as fast as I could. And I went through such classics of Armenian history as Richard Hovannisian’s two volume History of the Armenian People and several other standard histories, and then my predecessor but one, Michael Lemmon, lent me his copy of Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story, which is his personal account of being U.S. ambassador to Constantinople during the First World War.

Q: As the- as you get, what is it, Franz Werfel’s- “The Forty Days of Musa Dagh” or however you pronounce it?

EVANS: You pronounced it just right. I did not read that at the time. And one of my big frustrations was that because of the State Department’s concern about the confirmation process it wasn’t possible to get language training until after I was confirmed. The State Department’s concern, of course, was not to imply to the Foreign Relations Committee that we were taking for granted my confirmation and to come here to FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and sign up for Armenian lessons would be taking for granted a positive outcome. So I wasn’t able to study Armenian and in fact I was advised, “Oh John, you’ll never learn Armenian well enough to use it; just go out there and speak Russian.” That’s a direct quote from Lynn Pascoe, who was the deputy assistant secretary.

Q: What about in preparation before even the hearings, were you talking to either the Armenian communities? I was making reference to San Gabriel because a large- is it San Gabriel-?

EVANS: The biggest center is Glendale.

Q: Pasadena.

EVANS: But there are a couple other places out there, you know. Right, Pasadena.

Q: And also, but also to any particular congressmen or -women who were particularly Armenian-oriented?

EVANS: I stayed very much away from anything Armenian before my confirmation hearing, which was in July. I even went so far as to avoid a talk at the Center for Strategic International Studies given by the Armenian foreign minister, at that time Vartan Oskanian; instead I sent my wife to hear what he had to say. I didn't want to be accused of getting involved before I was confirmed.

Q: Well this is a little bit unusual, isn't it? I mean, with somebody who's sort of on the track to go to, I don't know, Tanzania, to have to play games like this?

EVANS: Well, perhaps I was being ultra-prudent or ultra-careful here but I simply didn't think it was appropriate to be in touch with Armenian Americans at that stage.

Q: Alright then, how did the hearings go?

EVANS: Well, you asked whether I was in touch with anyone on the Hill and I did call on one prominent senator, Senator Sarbanes -- a former senator, he's now out of office, now retired. He was known to be interested in Armenia; he had an Armenian on his staff and it was he who, actually during my hearing, said "Mr. Evans, I think you should learn the Armenian language. Please ask the State Department to give you training." And so, armed with that command from Senator Sarbanes, I did come back to the State Department, having been confirmed, and I was given eight half-day sessions at the Foreign Service Institute so I could read the alphabet and say a few short sentences.

Q: Did you, while you were getting ready, did you touch into the Turkish desk?

EVANS: No, I did not. I had, during my Cox Fellowship, done a lot of reading on Ottoman history. I knew people who had been involved in Turkish affairs, of course; I'd known people all along but at that point I did not make a formal appointment at the Turkish desk.

Q: Well then, did-

EVANS: I should add to that, though, that my old friend Eric Edelman, who had succeeded me as DCM in Prague, was then ambassador in Turkey, and in a very casual encounter we had in the lobby of the State Department he said "John, don't forget our position on the Genocide is that it was the chaos and fog of war."

Q: So- Because the genocide or the "g" word was a huge landmine; anybody dealing-

EVANS: It was, first of all, taboo. It was not something we were to discuss. We just learned that; we weren't told it precisely. I knew from my previous study of Ottoman history that there was a problem around this question. I didn't know much about the facts of it and I didn't know much about the definition of genocide, either. But I did start reading about it in the weeks leading up to my departure for Yerevan and I read more about it when I got to Yerevan. I also, before leaving, made a point of calling on the expert in our legal advisor's office who has the unenviable job of thinking about genocide full time, and I asked him point blank, I said "had it been the case that the Genocide Convention of 1948 was in effect in 1915 would not the events of 1915 have been characterized as genocide?" And he said, "yes, of course. It's a matter of policy, not fact; it's a matter of policy that we do not refer to it as genocide."

Q: Okay, why don't we take it why? I mean, at the time, we're talking about 2004, was it? Why was this, I mean, what was the rationale for having a policy not to call it genocide?

EVANS: I was never given a point-by-point rationale for why we did not refer to it as genocide. What I clearly understood, and I think most other people understood, was that it was Turkish official policy to deny that there had been a genocide. Turkey was our good ally, our faithful ally in NATO, had fought with us side by side in the Korean War and so on and so forth. We had big -- enormous -- strategic interests in Turkey and therefore in deference to Turkish policy we simply did not talk about those times or events.

Q: Did you- still talking about the early days when you were getting ready to go out there- did you chat with anybody else of your colleagues in various positions; did they bring this up or was this sort of-? You know, when you say "Armenia" it sort of- it's hard almost not to think about the...

EVANS: Well, I did not discuss it with very many people but I did discuss the question with a couple. One was a State Department employee of the Historian's Office, a man of Armenian background. We had a furtive lunch one day in which he told me what he knew about the question. He told me about Rafael Lemkin, the Polish legal scholar who lost 49 members of his own family in World War II in the Holocaust but who had been led to the study of atrocities and mass crimes by his hearing of the Armenian massacres in his law school days in Krakow and who had asked his professor at that time why was it that if a man commits murder and he is sent to jail whereas if a government murders a million men, women and children there's no retribution? And his law professor had no answer and so Rafael Lemkin went out to try to find a way to make a crime of these things.

The other person I spoke to before going was, of course, Elizabeth Jones, the assistant secretary. I called on her along with the Armenia desk officer, Eugenia Sidreas. I had noticed that the Background Notes that the State Department furnishes for the use of mostly schools about each country that we have diplomatic relations with said nothing whatsoever about the events of 1915 or massacres of Armenians or anything of the sort, not to mention using the "g" word, but there was absolutely no mention of that period of history, no mention of the fact that millions of Armenians had -- or at least some number of Armenians had -- fled Ottoman territory and ended up in what was then Russian Armenia. There was no mention of it, whereas our President,

several presidents, had made veiled and euphemistic mentions that went quite far. President Bush had talked about “massacres,” “forced deportations” and used quite...and there was even... the word “murder” had been used in a presidential statement. But the State Department’s Background Notes glossed over it entirely. And I pointed this out to Beth Jones, who’s a very smart and sensible person, and I said “don’t you think that we ought to revise the Background Notes so they at least convey as much knowledge and sympathy as the White House statements that have been made do?” And she said, “yes, I think any issue that’s of interest to our clients,” -- meaning the people who read the Background Notes -- “ought to be addressed.” At that point the telephone rang and we weren’t able to continue our discussion and we had worked so much together that I felt I had a very good understanding of what she wanted and how she expected her ambassadors to conduct themselves.

Q: Well did you submit, do a draft, or would that have been in your province?

EVANS: First of all, going out as a new ambassador one is terribly busy with all sorts of concerns and indeed in the days after my confirmation I was busy more than...well probably ten to twelve hours a day meeting with people in different departments, getting briefings. INR very kindly scheduled a daylong meeting with scholars from around the country who came to brief me on the politics, the economics, and, to some extent, the history. And so I was very busy right up until my departure on August 23, at which point then all the focus was on getting a grasp of the embassy, staff, of who was in charge of what, what the main problems were, and of course I had to present my credentials to President Kocharian.

So the issue of the genocide was not at the top of my list by any means when I arrived and in fact I did not go out there with any intention of addressing it in any special way. What I did do somewhere in the middle of the fall was to refer to the conversation with Beth Jones in a telephone call to the desk officer and I said, “isn’t it about time we see if we can revise the Background Notes so that they reflect some sense of our understanding that something happened back in 1915?” Now, I should say that up until that time the director of the office for Caucasus in Central Asia had been answering inquiries about this issue from Armenian-Americans by saying that there was “no space on the internet to address every issue.” Armenian-Americans had shot back by saying “in your background notes on Fiji there’s room to talk about the marshland grasses that grow in the shallow water,” or something like that. But we were saying that there was no...our explanation of why we didn’t mention 1915 was that there was no room or no space on our website.

So I did suggest that we make a careful revision of the Background Notes. The answer came back that “now was not the time” because Turkey had...was in negotiations with the European Union over setting a date for the accession talks and that was to happen in December of 2004 so this was no time to monkey with the Armenia Background Notes.

So, in short, I did try to get the Background Notes amended but I was told “this is not the time” because Turkey is in sensitive talks with the European Union on setting a date for accession.

Q: Yes, well and it still is, I guess.

EVANS: Well, the date came and went and the date for starting accession talks was fixed and after a decent interval I reverted to the question again and I was told “oh, it’s too soon after the fixing of the accession talks” and so the clear impression I got, this was... by this time it was January or so...the clear impression I got was that no time was a good time to bring up this issue.

Q: Well in a way, when you’re looking at it, you’re trying to have relations with an important country and what’s the point in pulling the scab off, you know? Now, there are reasons for it but you know, we kind of let the Japanese get almost a free ride on World War II, on the rape of Nanking and its behavior in China.

EVANS: Yes. No, I am fully aware of the dilemma that this issue poses and you’ve put your finger on it; it is a dilemma. The dilemma is between the truth of the issue, which is now virtually unassailable when you look at what has been done in the last 20 years by historians and not all of them Armenian-American or Armenian. There are some very distinguished historians, such as Donald Bloxham in the UK (United Kingdom) and others who have made it clear that yes, what happened in 1915 did fit the definition of genocide, whatever the...I mean, it was done against the background of World War I, yes, there had been rebellions by some Armenian armed groups, yes, but if you look at that definition, the shoe fits. The dilemma for us is precisely as you said; we have a loyal NATO ally, a good ally, although in 2003 Turkey’s parliament did vote against our troops going into Iraq through Turkey and that enraged a lot of people on Capital Hill as well as in the Executive Branch. But still, the dilemma here is between historical truth, which is still disputed by Turkey but by no one else, and our diplomatic equities.

Q: Yes. Well anyway, this will crop up again but let’s go on to- What was the, sort of the situation in Armenia when you went there?

EVANS: The most salient fact about Armenia then and now is that it is a very poor country in a very difficult neighborhood with few natural resources and many, many economic and social problems. And so the largest ingredient of our policy there really was our assistance program, which in per capita terms was the biggest in the former Soviet Union and in fact in per capita terms it was exceeded at that time only by our assistance to Israel. Now, Armenia has only about three million people; by the time I got there the cumulative value of our assistance program was about a billion and a half. So it was not huge in dollar terms but in per capita terms it was rather big.

The other concerns we had, of course, besides economic development were stability in the region and the development of democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Q: First place, with Armenia, how close is- is Armenia really the- sort of the center of Armenians or is this sort of an offshoot or what? Because you’ve got Armenians in Lebanon and Syria and other parts of Turkey and all.

EVANS: Of course the Armenians as a group go way back for thousands of years, probably 3,000 or more years. They’re mentioned in the Bible, they consider themselves to be descendants of Noah’s -- one of Noah’s sons -- and the real...they were all over the Middle East; in various times they had had their own kingdoms but by the 19th and early 20th century the largest number

of Armenians were in the Ottoman realms. The historic dividing line was between those who were in the Persian world, and that included most of the Caucasus and those that were in the Ottoman domains. So when one talks about today's Armenia it is really on the land that way back in the 18th century was under the Persian shah, but then when the Russians moved into the Caucasus it became Russian Armenia. The genocide struck at the community of the Ottoman Empire but about 60 percent of today's population of Armenia is descended from, or related to, those Ottoman Armenians who either fell victim to the genocide or escaped it. So in today's worldwide Armenian community, which is about 10 million, most of those people are descendants of the Ottoman community that was so decimated: they fled to France and the United States and other places.

Q: So they, in many ways they didn't have particular ties to Armenia as it stands today?

EVANS: That's right. In fact, there's an old linguistic division which points up that fact. The Armenian spoken in today's Republic of Armenia is that spoken also by Armenians in Iran and Azerbaijan and places like that, not the...that is, it's Eastern Armenian, whereas the Western dialect is what's used by the Armenians in Turkey and their descendants.

Q: All right. Let's see; you got- you arrived in Armenia when?

EVANS: In August of 2004, and I presented my credentials just before...on the Saturday before Labor Day of that year and had already in effect started working at the embassy and then I began my official diplomatic time there.

Q: What was the embassy like?

EVANS: In terms of people the embassy was great. We had some of the best -- I was told, in fact, by Beth Jones -- that probably the local staff of our embassy was the best educated in the former Soviet Union. We had people working on assistance who had advanced degrees in economics and so on; we had a very good American staff with the possible exception of one fellow in the Fascell Program who turned out to be selling visas along with a Ukrainian confederate of his. We caught that guy. But by and large it was a very good staff and I was very proud of them.

The physical accommodations of the embassy were atrocious but we were in the process of building a new chancery which was built really to be a fine example of the new generation of chancery complexes.

Q: In the building, I suppose you had obviously security and earthquakes in mind.

EVANS: The building we occupied when I arrived was the former Komsomol headquarters.

Q: Youth group.

EVANS: The communist youth organization. And we owned it. When we took possession of it we found that it was full of scorpions so we had a lot of work to do on it and had shored it up but

indeed there was a serious vulnerability to earthquakes and that was one of the reasons we had to build our own chancery.

Q: What activities was the, you know, you mentioned relief and all but what sort of activities was the embassy involved in?

EVANS: Well, right after I arrived, of course, there was, to the north of us, in North Ossetia, there was a terrible terrorist attack on a school at a place called Beslan.

Q: Oh yes.

EVANS: And the Dean of the Corps in Yerevan happened to be the Russian ambassador. And I called... When I started my calls of course I started with the Dean and the event in Beslan had just taken place, and this was in early September. Because the attack as I remember was on the first day of the academic year, which is considered September 1.

Q: Yes. All the children were dressed in their-

EVANS: In their finest.

Q: -in their finest.

EVANS: Exactly. And we were approaching the, let's see, it would be the third anniversary of 9/11. And we had commissioned a group of deaf and dumb actors, and I don't know if that's the political correct terminology but...

Q: Hearing difficulties and-

EVANS: Yes. Challenged.

Q: Challenged.

EVANS: People. We had hired a theater and hired this troupe of actors to do a very evocative kind of a play about... basically about international understanding and the need to avoid violence between ethnic groups and so on. Without instruction but convinced it was the right thing to do, I invited the Russian ambassador to come and share our holiday of 9/11 or our commemoration of 9/11 with us. Now, some members of our staff who had Russophobia in their blood thought this was a terrible idea and wanted to ask the State Department what they thought but I was convinced that this was the right thing to do and Ambassador Dryukov vindicated my confidence by making a very moving address at our commemoration and joining with us in the face of these terrorist acts.

Q: Did you have- You say you had sort of aid programs but what sort of things were we doing?

EVANS: Well, we had a very broad program of assistance. It was not only AID but we had a big Peace Corps program. In fact the first thing I did on arriving in Yerevan in August, even before

presenting my credentials, was to swear in the latest class of Peace Corps volunteers who had just gone through their initial training in country. Unlike some other post-Soviet states the Armenians were delighted to have the U.S. Peace Corps there; they worked in public health, in education, in business development, environment, and they were all over the country and a magnificent group of people of all ages.

We also had one of the most successful programs of the Department of Agriculture in Armenia; the Department of Agriculture's longest lasting and largest program overseas, in fact, which was helping farmers develop their crops, find markets for their produce and so on. That was an excellent program. And we had other programs of technical assistance to the police and the border guards and we had, under the NATO umbrella, programs in the Partnership for Peace, so there were NATO exercises in which Armenia took part. And, I must say, that just as I arrived Armenia deployed a unit of 42 military men, unarmed, to Iraq. They were primarily sappers to deal with these IEDs (improvised explosive devices), and there were a few, if I'm not mistaken, a couple of medical people as well. So we had a good bit of cooperation and a lot of assistance going on.

Q: How did the Peace Corps volunteers, what was your evaluation of their effectiveness?

EVANS: I think they were quite effective largely because they really were welcomed by the communities in which they served. Some of them ended up doing many things that were not originally imagined. Most of them were teaching English, whether they were there to teach English or just ended up teaching English. Many of them taught civil society skills. Some of them helped set up Internet cafés and things like that. Because it was a very personal interaction and they were out, almost all of them, were out in the provinces where it's a kind of a village atmosphere where personalities count and individual contact is important, I think they made a lot of friends, they did a lot for the image of the United States, and to quote Teresa Heinz Kerry, "the best face of America is the face of a Peace Corps volunteer." That's a little bit of a cliché perhaps but I think the Peace Corps did a wonderful job, still does.

Q: What was your impression of the government?

EVANS: I had been warned by Ed Djerejian already that there was a kind of an old Middle Eastern/Oriental/Semi-Despotism that was still gripping Armenia and I think that was true and to some extent is still true. Armenia has been ruled one way or another for centuries by small groups with anti-democratic inclinations and indeed President Robert Kocharian, who was a war hero from the struggle with Azerbaijan over Karabakh, was a rather fearsome, tough character, though perfectly decent to deal with and intelligent. I dealt with him almost exclusively in Russian. But he was a kind of a tough guy, a sort of a...almost to the extent of being a bully as President of Armenia. People did not cross him lightly.

Q: Yes. I remember at one point I'd been- in the mid '90s I'd been twice an election observer in Bosnia and I talked to somebody who went to Armenia and I said how was that? He said a bunch of guys with big mustaches and leather coats and it reminded you of, you know, you feel like you're amidst gangsters.

EVANS: Yes. No, there definitely was a certain amount of that. Now, some of it, I mean, there are some fashion differences that are immediately obvious; the young men tend to wear leather jackets and pointy shoes and it's...you might see something similar in the very south of Italy, so there was kind of a sleaze factor there, which strikes many Armenian-Americans who aren't used to that also as it strikes us. And the economic structures of the Republic of Armenia are very, are too closely, intertwined with the political structures. So what you really had was a kind of a tight oligarchy with a parliament that was not more than really a rubber stamp, largely.

Q: Was the Church much of a factor?

EVANS: The Armenian Apostolic Church is not a state church; it is a national church, though, and it considers itself to be the canonical representative of the Armenian people. And it does have an influence, a growing influence I would say, in Armenia because it represented the only alternative belief system once communism collapsed. I mean, there is an articulated system of beliefs and how one should live, how one conducts one's life and...although many, many, Armenians in the post-Soviet period are only nominal Christians...the fact that the Armenians took Christianity as their national religion in 301 AD is an important factor. Armenians look at...they see the Church somewhat as the Poles see the Roman Church. The Armenians see their Church as the glue that has kept their community together over the millennia.

Q: The army, the armed forces?

EVANS: Armenia had really the only serious army in the Caucasus in the 15 or 20 years after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Armenians had always done well in the Soviet army, some of them reaching the flag ranks; there were even several marshals of the Soviet Union who had been Armenians. But the more compelling reason that the army as an institution was so respected was that the army had protected Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave high in the mountains of Azerbaijan in the terrible war that broke out, mainly 1992 to '94, between Armenia and Azerbaijan over that territory. I don't propose to get into the history of how this all came about but basically the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was approximately 90 percent Armenian and they wanted to join Armenia rather than be ruled by...from Baku and this came to a terrible conflict in the early '90s with the loss of something like 25,000 victims; nobody knows exactly. And it's still a very serious unsolved conflict in the area, where young men die every year from sniper fire that continues and the mediation effort has not as yet borne fruit.

Q: Did you have any contact with our people in Azerbaijan and were you all trying to sort out this age old problem or-?

EVANS: Well you know, when I had just arrived in Yerevan my counterpart in Baku was Reno Harnish and I thought, of course, that the three American ambassadors in the Caucasus ought to be part of one team. And shortly after I arrived, in probably early October, we were all summoned to a meeting in Tbilisi.

Q: You say "you all."

EVANS: I mean the three ambassadors and accompanying staff. We had a conference about the Caucasus in Tbilisi, and it was very good to meet my opposite numbers, the ambassadors in the other two capitals; Dick Miles at the time was ambassador in Tbilisi, Reno Harnish in Baku. But then I discovered that the attitude of the embassy in Baku was starting very much to resemble the attitude of the Azerbaijan government. The government of Azerbaijan was trying to isolate Armenia in terms of trade and other kinds of contacts. So whenever a NATO exercise was scheduled to take place in Armenia the Azerbaijanis would boycott it. I had an army major on my staff who was doing a program at Garmisch, an area familiarization, program. He requested permission to go to Baku to broaden his knowledge of the Caucasus and the embassy at Baku turned him down, saying "we don't want anybody from Armenia to come to Baku." And it struck me that this was an American, an American Army officer and why should an American Army officer, not in uniform, not be given country clearance to visit our sister embassy in Baku? And my defense attaché called to question this decision and was turned down again, saying "we don't want to talk to anybody from Armenia." So there was a bad case of localitis in Baku. They were applying the standards of the Armenian government to our embassy.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: I mean the Azerbaijani government. So there was a problem there. I tried very hard to be absolutely neutral on the Karabakh issue. We, of course, never thought of visiting Karabakh, which can only be done through Armenian territory, but our legal position is that Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan and it's...the United States along with France and Russia has been trying to mediate the conflict. But this sense of impartiality apparently didn't apply, so far as I could tell, to our sister embassy in Baku.

I should add, probably, that the mediation effort was carried out totally independently of our embassy. Steve Mann at the time was the United States co-chairman of the so-called Minsk Group, and would fly into Yerevan from time to time, along with his Russian and French colleagues, to conduct talks with the Armenians, but we were scrupulous about not inserting ourselves into his business. His was a separate operation; we simply supported his visits.

Q: Well I was wondering, with this- I have trouble pronouncing Kara-

EVANS: Karabakh.

Q: Karabakh?

EVANS: Yes.

Q: How long had this thing been going on?

EVANS: Well, if you look back it goes back in its modern form to the Bolshevik Revolution. All of the Caucasus, of course, was part of the Russian Empire, the North and South Caucasus, Azeri, Turks and Armenians and others lived side by side but after the Bolshevik Revolution there was a short-lived attempt to create a Caucasian republic. That was effectively squelched by the Bolsheviks and ultimately the three largest groups each got a republic, the Georgians, the

Azerbaijanis and the Armenians. Stalin was the commissioner for nationalities and it was he who eventually decreed that this Armenian majority enclave in the mountains would be awarded to Azerbaijan, although it was given the status of an autonomous region of Azerbaijan. So there was even, in the '20s, when that decision was made in communist times, there was a recognition that ethnically Karabakh was not the same as the surrounding territory of Azerbaijan.

But then in modern times the issue came up again in...already in 1988 in the perestroika period, when Armenian nationalists in Karabakh agitated very strongly to be...they petitioned Moscow for the right to be reassigned, as it were, to be with their Armenian cousins in the Republic of Armenia rather than in Azerbaijan. This resulted in counteractions by Baku and there were some pogroms in Baku and in Sumgait directed against the Armenians in retaliation and that set off a whole series of attacks and counterattacks and then it eventually degenerated into all-out war.

Q: Well did this have ties to the Chechnya and other problems in that area or is that too much of a remove?

EVANS: Well, I would say that basically, yes, because what was happening was, in the early '90s, a large multinational, multiethnic, and, to the extent that anyone was religious, multi-confessional empire was collapsing and the new organizing principle of the new states was going to be the national principle. And so whereas everybody could live together in the Soviet Union because the principle was workers' solidarity, solidarity of workers and peasants across national lines, suddenly that whole system was thrown out and what was left was the principle of a national state with a titular nationality, that is Georgia for the Georgians, Azerbaijan for the Azerbaijanis and Armenia for the Armenians, and of course the terrible tragedy is that the Caucasus is a mosaic of nationalities; there are some 50-odd national and linguistic groups in the Caucasus and so if the principle of state organization is nationality there is always going to be somebody whose idea of the state is different. And so Georgia is now wrestling with these terrible problems in Abkhazia; the Abkhaz do not want to be Georgians. They are, first of all, Muslims and they speak a different language. You mentioned the Chechens; they are the biggest nationality in the North Caucasus and they wanted their own state, they are Muslim also and have a long history of resistance to Russian rule. In Georgia you also have the Ossetians. In the summer of 2008 we saw that South Ossetia became a...it was already an issue, whether South Ossetia was going to belong to Georgia or not; our legal position is that it does but the reality on the ground was that they were not acceding to Georgian rule. So there are all these contradictions that were brought to the surface when the old empire collapsed and new states were formed.

I should perhaps add that there are now, after the war over Karabakh, Armenia is probably the most homogeneous of the post-Soviet states because the Azeris, almost all the Azeris, left Armenia. There are a few Kurds and some Zoroastrians a few other odds and ends but Armenia is about 97 percent Armenian at this point and Azerbaijan is also much more homogeneous than it had been before the war caused displacement of populations.

Q: Well did- Was there sort of a meeting of the minds or a sympathy between Armenia and Georgia or between our embassies?

EVANS: Well, I'd say that Georgia as a country and our U.S. embassy in Tbilisi were definitely the most neutral of the three. The Georgians found it useful to have good relations with both Azerbaijan and Armenia and so the usual location of choice for any meeting that involved all three nationalities was Tbilisi because the Azeris wouldn't come to Armenia, Armenians wouldn't get visas to Azerbaijan and so Tbilisi ended up being the place where lots of meetings took place. I hope that our embassies... certainly I tried to make sure that our embassy was simply an American embassy carrying out American policy and we avoided any... we certainly fought against any localities that might be breaking out. We did have one Armenian-American among the expatriate staff of the embassy, from Pasadena, but otherwise our Foreign Service contingent was pretty much just standard Americans with no hyphenation.

Q: Did you have a city full of visitors from Armenian communities in the States or elsewhere, like, you know, in France there's a big Armenian community.

EVANS: We did have visitors from America, not from France, but we... I remember one of the big Armenian community groups, the Armenian Assembly, sent a large contingent through Armenia, through Yerevan, in the fall, it would have been in October or November of 2004, and I addressed them. And I might mention that that was the only time, in all the time I was in Armenia, that the question of the Armenian genocide arose. It never... I was never asked by an Armenian journalist about the genocide but I was asked a question by a member of this traveling group from the Armenian-American Assembly. The man got up and said, "I know what the State Department position is, that there was no genocide, but then how can you explain to me that I had no aunts, no uncles and never knew any grandparents?" And I explained to him that the United States Government had never denied the facts of what had happened in 1915, and to my knowledge we have not denied the facts, but what is at issue is the characterization of those events. And I probably at that time said that there was a question of whether there was "intent" on the part of the Ottoman officials.

Now, I should say a word about the Genocide Convention, if I may, because it was during this time that I became better educated on what the Genocide Convention really says. And what I discovered is that most of us Foreign Service officers are woefully ignorant about what the Genocide Convention says is genocide. There are basically four conditions that have to be met. First of all, "one or more persons" needs to have been killed. Now, that's not very many: "one or more." The group must be a "national, ethnic, racial or religious group." It says nothing about political groups. There must be "intent" on the part of the perpetrators to do away with the group "as such," to eliminate the group "in whole or in part"; that's the terminology: "in whole or in part." And the fourth condition is that these actions must take place in the context of a "manifest pattern of such actions in the past," of discrimination against the group in the past. So all those conditions need to be met for it to be considered genocide and what had seemed to be missing was the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part" members of the group.

Now, we have never found and probably nobody ever will find, a firman signed by the sultan or orders in cabinet saying, "destroy the Armenians." In the case of the Holocaust we still have no written order by Hitler to destroy the Jews and we probably never will find that, although we do have Hitler's signature on the Nuremberg Laws. That's not the way these things happen. The

word gets out there what's to be done but it's not...there's no good paper trail because in the case of such a crime one would be a fool to leave such a paper trail.

But in 2003 and 2004, under the leadership of Marc Grossman, who had been Under Secretary of state for political affairs, there was organized something called the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission, and that group was an independent, track-two kind of group composed of some well-known Turks and Armenians and it was called the TARC. David Phillips was the executive director of it and this Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission looked at the events of 1915, looked at the Genocide Convention, and came to the conclusion that at least some of the perpetrators of those events did know that their actions would lead to the destruction of the Armenians of Anatolia and therefore to refer to those events as genocide was fully justified, and that journalists and historians and others would be fully justified to continue to use that term. But, at the same time, the Genocide Convention could not be invoked *ex post facto* to -- in a legal sense -- bring anyone to justice. So, in short, what this commission basically decided was that historically it was a genocide but in legal terms to press that claim against the government of Turkey would be unsuccessful. And I think that was a fairly wise way of splitting the difference. All the perpetrators of those events are now, by definition, gone, most of the victims are gone. There are only...there are fewer than a hundred very old people now who were small children in 1915 and so it seems to me that's a fair way of splitting the difference, to let the Armenians call it genocide in a historical sense but not to try to pin that crime on the Turkish state or the Turkish people today. And I was...I made myself familiar with those findings, they were brought to my attention; I met with one of the people who had worked on that and I must say I thought this was a very reasonable way forward.

Q: Well then, was sort of the bureau pushing on all this or was this something that you all thought should be done?

EVANS: Well, neither. I mean, the EUR Bureau was just carrying on its daily business as it does every day, driven by the news on the front page primarily. There was no desire to unearth old history. But it was around this time that I was asked to make a speaking tour through the United States, particularly to communities where there was a dense population of Armenian-Americans. So I was scheduled to make a tour, a speaking tour, in February 2005, starting in New York, moving up to Boston and then going to the West Coast to Los Angeles, which is the biggest concentration of Armenians in the United States, and then to San Francisco. And it was right about this time in the beginning of late January of 2005 that my wife flew back to the United States to be with our daughter, who had discovered that she needed to get a divorce from her then-husband and she was emotionally a wreck. So my wife came back to the United States, leaving me in Yerevan with a lot of books to read, and one of those books was the very fine Pulitzer Prize winning book called "Genocide: A Problem from"-- no, it's called "A Problem from Hell: America and Genocide" by Samantha Power. And so I had time to read that. And I also read a compendium of essays edited by Jay Winter of Yale University; I think it's called "America in the Age of Genocide." In the same period I read Peter Balakian's prize winning book called "The Burning Tigris," which was also about America's response to the Armenian genocide. So whereas most ambassadors don't have much time to read, the absence of my wife and a fairly quiet winter social season left me in my library consuming these books and becoming more and more disturbed about the dissonance between established historical fact

about what happened in 1915 and U.S. policy, which seemed to me to be very much propping up the Turkish official denial of what had happened in 1915. So I became more and more, as the date for beginning my speaking tour in America came closer and closer, I realized that I was facing a huge dilemma here. I knew that I was expected to repeat the tired old message that we didn't take a position on the genocide, that we questioned whether there had been "intent" and so on, and yet I had read enough by this time to realize that the great preponderance of historical opinion was that indeed, there was no question about it, yes, there was a genocide of the Armenians that took place 1915 through '18. So I set off for the United States not knowing how I was in the end going to respond to questions about the Armenian Genocide.

There's something else I ought to add at this point, Stu, about the period we were living in, and that is that our Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who I had huge admiration for, had in September of 2004, after a State Department study of the matter, Colin Powell had come out and said that he thought that what was happening in Darfur in the Sudan did constitute genocide. That was a very brave thing for him to have done. I agreed with him from what I knew of that situation and his action emboldened me to endeavor not simply to be a bystander on a question of genocide but to stand up and say something about it. Even though it was 90 years in the past I felt that someone needed to take a stand on this issue and call it what it was. I knew that this would cause difficulty for me, I knew that it was contrary to the policy of the State Department and yet I felt that I was caught in a terrible dilemma between knowingly distorting the facts of history or coming clean and trying to deal with the facts while explaining the reasons for our policy, and that was the trap that I -- or those were the horns of the dilemma -- that I faced. And I must say that I really didn't know when I set out on that speaking trip which course I would take.

End of Reader