

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

AMBASSADOR JAMES F. COLLINS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is July 15, the Ides of July, 2003. This is an interview with... Is it James...

COLLINS: James F. Collins.

Q: What does the "F" stand for?

COLLINS: Franklin.

Q: Franklin. But you go by...

COLLINS: Jim.

Q: Jim. To start at the beginning, can you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

COLLINS: I was born in rural Illinois, about 60 miles southwest of Chicago, in the City of Aurora in Copley Hospital on the fourth of June, 1939. My father was a schoolteacher, recently graduated from college, and my mother was the daughter of a farm family. That farm, between Aurora and Joliet, Illinois--actually between Plainfield and Naperville, is now all Chicago suburbs, but in those days it was rural farm country. With the exception a couple of years, it was my home until age twelve. So, I was a farm boy and the 280-acre farm where we lived was my world. I went for three years to a one room rural school (one teacher and nine students) and then accompanied my father to the school where he taught in the Chicago suburb of Northfield, Illinois. But the farm was home, and I grew up in a world of cows, tractors, threshing machines, and big family events that were the norm then.

Q: I'd like to go back. Can you tell me something about your father, where the Collins's came from that you know of, and about his education?

COLLINS: The Collins family came from Great Britain, from the area of Bath in the 1830s. They crossed Canada and ended up in the Lower Peninsula of Michigan around

Alpena where my father's father was born and grew up in logging country. As a young man he went to what was then called the Ferris Institute in Michigan (today called Ferris University) to study bookkeeping. But he was a man of many interests and talents. He became one of America's top penmen; he was a credible amateur violinist; he gave well-regarded lectures on astronomy; and in his youth he was a pretty good baseball pitcher. My father's mother Jane Fox, was the youngest in a family of twelve children. I don't know exactly when they migrated, but know that her father William F. Fox, had attended Trinity University in Dublin and Cambridge University before leaving England. There was family rumor that he was related to Charles James Fox, and had left to avoid political trouble, but that was never clear. In any case he was well educated, set himself up like a country squire in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. It's not clear that he ever really made a living, but he was a man of letters and authority in the area.

I don't actually know how my grandmother (Jane Fox Collins) and grandfather (George Washington Collins) met, but know that they married and set up a family in Big Rapids, Michigan where my father (Harrison Fox Collins) was born in 1914. A couple of years later they moved down to the town of Lombard, Illinois where my grandfather found work in the insurance business and ultimately went out on his own. He ended up a quite successful insurance agent until the Depression hit, in which he -- like others -- lost the business. At that point he found work with the Post Office as postmaster for Lombard, Illinois, the position he kept until his retirement.

My father grew up in Lombard. He went to the local schools, then on to Glenbard High School, the consolidated high school for several western Chicago suburbs. After high school he went on to North Central College (today, North Central University) a small, liberal arts college in Naperville, Illinois, where he prepared to do what he had always wanted -- to become a teacher, the profession he pursued for the rest of his life.

Q: What type of teacher?

COLLINS: He was trained as a teacher of English.

Q: Are we talking high school or elementary school?

COLLINS: He majored in English, and started out teaching in elementary and junior high school. He spent his career in elementary education, and after not many years he became a principal as well as teacher at the elementary school in Northfield. It was there that he was my sixth grade teacher, and later when the school expanded to include upper grades, he gave up teaching to become a superintendent. But at heart he remained an English teacher, and I recall lots of dinner conversations about everything from grammar to the poetry of Alexander Pope, a family favorite.

Q: And on your mother's side?

COLLINS: My mother's family came out to Illinois and homesteaded in the early 1840s. Her ancestors came from Lowland, Scotland, a town called Eckelfechen, not very far

from Lockerby. They left Scotland in the 1830s, spent a few years in upstate New York, and when land became available in the then Northwest Territory, they moved out to the region of Chicago, which was then a cow town of shacks, and not much else. The family, a father, several sons, and two daughters, one married, took ownership of some 1,100 acres of virgin prairie land in Wheatland Township between the established towns of Plainfield and Naperville. The Clow family and descendants kept much of that land, and I grew up on the original homesteaded farm that passed down through generations until the suburban expansion of the 1970s finally engulfed it.

Q: What was your mother's family name and how did she meet your father?

COLLINS: Her name was Caroline Clow. Her parents, my grandparents, were the heirs to the homestead farm in Illinois, and she grew up on that farm and like her father went to the local rural school. She then went on to high school, something not taken for granted at that time for a girl. The high school was in Naperville, a town about seven miles from the farm. She graduated there and then went on to North Central College, where she met my father. She did not finish college because they got married, but the fact that she went on to school set her apart from nearly all her friends from the country, as well as from her two brothers who did not go beyond high school.

Q. So how did you end up back on the farm where you said you spent much of your early childhood.

COLLINS: After I was born, my father had different teaching jobs, but during the war finding housing where he taught was impossible. So we lived most of that time on the farm and my father commuted to his job. For a lot of the time he taught outside Chicago, in the town of Stickney. He lived there during the week and came back on the train for the weekends. I think he stayed at the YMCA. During this time, he also had jobs during the summer as a carpenter, where he became skilled at the construction trades. Near the end of the war my father got a teaching position on the North Shore of Chicago and then his first "administrator" job at a very small school district, in Northfield, Illinois. At that time the school had about 50 students in six grades. My father taught the sixth grade, drove the school bus, and did the carpentry work to finish a kindergarten in the school in time for me to attend it. So administrator was a flexible term. When he got that job the family moved from the farm to Northfield for about a year and a half. I went to kindergarten and much of the first grade there in my father's school. But we were renting homes, and when our landlord wanted our house back, we had to move again back to the farm, and I changed school back to the one room school my mother had attended. But, just to jump ahead a bit, I should note that all this was before Northfield's big suburban expansion in the 1950s. My father stayed with his job when we moved back to the country and led that school district for more than 35 years as it grew from 50 to about 700 students and from just six to eight grades with multiple classes in each grade in two schools.

Q: It sounds like you had a varied school experience. When you were going to school, was there more than one class in a room?

COLLINS: I had different school experiences. In my father's school, there were several classes and several students per class: each class had its own teacher and its own room in a school that had a dozen or so rooms. Then when we moved back to the country and lived on the farm again, for three years, I went to a traditional rural American one-room Illinois schoolhouse in which there were nine students in eight grades, all in one room. I learned everything from multiplication tables with eighth graders to penmanship with my one fellow student in first grade. One room, one teacher. It was obviously a different kind of experience. When I reached fourth grade, I went back to my father's school, which by that time had grown some, but was still not large at perhaps 150 students. There I spent three years and finished that school in sixth grade where I had my father as my teacher: he was a very good one. As I finished that school we moved again up to Northfield and away from the farm for the last time. I went on then to junior high school in the neighboring town of Winnetka, Illinois, one of the better-known North Shore suburbs of Chicago

Q: My family came from Winnetka.

COLLINS: OK. Well, then you know all about it. I went to New Trier high school, which had between 3,000 and 4,000 students. It was quite a change from the one room.

Q: One of the best public high schools in America.

COLLINS: Yes, it was.

Q: Let me go back a bit to when you were growing up. What was family life like? Your father was away quite a bit, but did you have brothers and sisters?

COLLINS: In our immediate family, I had one brother and my parents. But, when I was growing up on the farm, we had an extended family. My grandfather and grandmother lived in a separate house a few yards away. Two uncles, my mother's two younger brothers, lived with them and worked on the farm as well. And my great-grandmother, my grandfather's mother, lived there until her death when I was very young. From time to time my grandfather's sister joined the family too. She was another English teacher who taught in the high school in Joliet, Illinois. (I might note that she was quite an exceptional woman. She had graduated from the University of Illinois in 1903, went on to graduate school at Columbia University, and returned to the area to teach for a full career in the Joliet public schools.) So this was a rather large grouping. And there were also countless cousins, other people known as "uncle," all sorts of relatives of this Clow family who made up my extended family in the country. Finally, there was usually a hired worker who had a family that also lived on the farm in part of the same house we lived in. My father's family was not part of this group, and they were visited from time to time but were not really part of the rural family. They were seen, I think, as city folks.

My time on the farm saw a transition in the way the farming community functioned from, I suppose, what existed any time after World War I to what were the very beginnings of modern agriculture of the post-World War II period. For example, in my early years on

the farm, during harvest time, several families had only one threshing machine. So my grandmother would have 20 men or so for dinner (the noon meal in farm language), because the men went around in a sort of circuit operation to harvest the oats, soy beans, and wheat. The farm also fed beef cattle, and had a dairy herd of some 20 or 30 cows. It was a traditional family farm in rural Illinois. And in that world, kids were put to work early. I learned to “drive” a tractor when I was five years old. I was put on a self-propelled combine when I was eight and was, up to my capacities, pretty much a full time member of the laboring crew from the time I was five or six years old until I went to high school. But, this was quite standard for kids my age in the country then, and I would not trade the experience for anything my children had in growing up.

Q: In your family, did the outer world intrude? Did the family sit around and talk about issues or world events?

COLLINS: There were different elements of the family. Around our table, my mother, father, and brother discussed things going on in the world. My parents were liberals and read a great deal. I think my father’s family tradition, if you put it in historic context, came from the world of Wilsonian Progressives. In my mother’s family – her grandfather, my great-grandfather, ran for Congress on the Bull Moose ticket. and were solid Illinois Republicans. A lot of that family had fought in the Civil War on the Union side. Abe Lincoln was their hero and, indeed, my grandmother and grandfather grew up in a time when Civil War soldiers were relatives and neighbors. I remember very well that there were lots of books about the Civil War, and when I was young they would talk about relatives who were Civil War veterans. In fact, we’ve got papers, letters, diaries, and artifacts from that era, from Andersonville and from people on campaigns and so forth. They were very close to that tradition. Later the rural relatives became Teddy Roosevelt supporters, and by the time I came along really didn’t like Franklin Roosevelt and were staunch anti-New Deal Republicans.

Q: On your father’s side, his father was the postmaster. Isn’t that a political appointment?

COLLINS: I assume it was. I have his letter of appointment from James Farley, Roosevelt’s Postmaster General, but I never really knew how he got the appointment. I assume there must have been connections to Democratic politics because he got that job. What I did know is that they were always solid progressive Democrats. They lived in town. My grandmother was an early and vigorous member of the League of Women Voters, for example, and a steady advocate for progressive causes in the home town. So the two sides of the family, the Clows and Collins came from very different places on politics and it made some of the holiday gatherings rather heated.

Q: Being born in 1939, by the time you reached 10 years or so, were you picking up stories about the residue of World War II in Europe and Japan?

COLLINS: From the war period itself, I have a few memories. I remember there was rationing, and we saved grease, oil, and tin cans for the war effort. On the other hand, on

the farm we were pretty much self sufficient for food. I remember my mother, grandmother, and others doing what they called “cold packing” of all sorts of vegetables, fruits. Cows provided milk and butter, and there were chickens for eggs. They also had a “locker” in the nearby town where they stored frozen meat from cattle that they butchered themselves. It was the outside things like gasoline, that were rationed and that did affect life. That’s part of the reason my father was unable to come home daily from his teaching job. He had enough gas to get to and from the train once a week, but no more.

Other memories are just incidents. I remember Roosevelt’s death and hearing the broadcast of the news from Gabriel Heater, a broadcast newsman listened to daily by my grandfather Clow. I recall V-J Day. We were visiting relatives, and I remember reading the headlines of a newspaper and, hearing people talk about it. But I remember very little about soldiers. They were rare in the country, and my father was not called up. My uncles were too young and my grandfather was too old. But also, they were in agriculture, so they were kept working on the land as were their neighbors and relatives. As noted, I remember saving grease, tin foil, tin cans and carefully packing them and taking them to collection centers. I had a book of war bond saving stamps, and I remember listening to the radio with my grandfather when they tested the hydrogen bomb in Bikini. But, during these years in the country the world’s events were far away as daily life revolved around crops, weather, and for me school and being part of farm life.

Q: What was daily life like in that community?

I remember it as very homogeneous. For example, I never met a black person. It was rare to meet a Catholic. I never met a foreign person. This was a Scots Presbyterian and a German Lutheran community, and while there were some other groups, they were outsiders and you didn’t really know them. The city was also far away both in distance and as an idea: it was alien. The family went to the city very rarely, perhaps three times a year.

Q: This is Chicago.

COLLINS: Yes, Chicago. Usually they would go once for the holidays. I remember as a child of some three or four years old being taken to see the store windows on State Street. It was magical and was my first train ride.

Q: Yes. The Christmas displays were a big deal.

COLLINS: Yes., a big deal. Then they would often go in once in the springtime to look at technology or see what was new. I also remember going more than once to deliver cattle to the Chicago Stockyards: that would have been in the fall. But other than that, we went to the local towns. Aurora and Joliet were the big towns and were within about a 30-mile radius: closer yet were Naperville and Plainfield. For a child the world was pretty much confined to that rural area and the people there. The first person I ever met of truly foreign origin or for that matter who spoke with a foreign accent was the man with whom I studied music. I was 10 or 11 years old, and it opened a whole new world.

Q: Where was he from?

COLLINS: He was from Austria. A remarkable man. We'll talk more about him later because he is the one who really set me on my career.

Q: Let's take elementary school first. What things did you find you were interested in?

COLLINS: It's hard to remember, but what I can remember is not so much about school, but being part of the farm, spending lots of time with animals and pets and my fascination with mechanical things. We had calves, a pig, cows with names, and two draft horses all of whom were seen as pets as well as farm animals. Pets per se included several dogs and cats, a raccoon, a baby pig we raised as a pet, and a bird that walked around the house. On the mechanical side, I spent a lot of time around farm machinery. We also had a blacksmith shop filled with lots of intriguing tools and implements. I became pretty adept at taking apart and putting together engines by the time I was in junior high school. I also had a fascination with trains, which I still have. I got caught up with ships when the family went to the east coast: I was about 10. From school, I liked penmanship. I remember reading, but not much about it. I liked numbers and arithmetic. I think it was pretty much the three Rs. Sports weren't particularly important, I did play baseball and softball in a country church league for kids, but in the area there were not enough kids my age to have team sports. And then there was croquet. Croquet matches were a big deal on the farm: the entire family was passionate about it. They even had set up floodlights for the front yard so games could keep going after dark.

Q: Were you were involved in 4-H and things like that?

COLLINS: No, but it wasn't a very big thing there. We had something called a plowing match every year. It was akin to a local fair where there were contests and competitions, including who could plow the straightest furrow in a field, the competition that gave the event its name. But there were displays of machinery, rides, and a general weekend of entertainment. And you spent time preparing for these. I did play on one of the ball teams that took part in games organized by the churches, and I once won a competition for penmanship, a fact few friends would believe today.

Q: Tell me a little about home.

COLLINS: I haven't said much about my brother. He is almost three years younger than I am, but he was basically my playmate and only regular contemporary. Outside of school, I didn't see other kids very much. The other children in the community, probably fewer than a dozen of them, lived a long way away, and outside school were rarely together. So, my brother and I pretty much made our own entertainment and amusements. Before he was old enough, I think I spent a lot of time following adults around or playing on my own. This was, of course, before television, but I remember listening to the radio a lot, to all of the standard radio programs that attracted kids.

Q: There were a lot of them.

COLLINS: Well, there was The Lone Ranger, Jack Armstrong, The Green Hornet, Superman -- all of these were radio serials and were eagerly awaited in the evening.

Q: Any other memories?

COLLINS: We would also go visit my other grandparents, and I remember “working” in the post office as a four-year-old and – I suppose -- just getting in the way. But being a part of that work, going with my grandfather to take the mail to the train to Chicago, that’s the kind of thing I did. A lot of my life as a kid was taken up not so much with what you might call book learning. Rather it was being part of what big people were doing. I was with adults a lot, so doing what they did was kind of apprenticeship learning and was as much a part of what I did as school.

Q: As we are leading up to junior high and high school, did your locale change?

COLLINS: Yes. We moved from the farm for the last time when I was 11 and in sixth grade. It was 1950. With the help of my grandparents, my parents bought some land in Northfield, where my father had by that time become superintendent of the school district. We built a new house, a very interesting one. It was designed by an architect from Austria who had learned his profession from colleagues at the Bauhaus. His design was very progressive for the time. It had things like radiant heating in the floors. It took advantage of large plate glass windows to heat the indoors in the winter, but was positioned so that the sun didn’t add heat in the summer. The house was also a family project. We had the shell built by a contractor and then moved in. We finished the whole inside ourselves, which was a three- or four-year project, while we lived in it. It never quite got finished, while I was there, but its construction was a part of my growing up, learning to be a pretty good carpenter, electrician, plumber, painter, all useful skills.

After we moved there, my life changed a lot. As a junior high and high school student my world was the Chicago suburbs, and although we visited family in the country and in Lombard, that life was in the past. I lived in the Northfield house until I went off to college and my parents remained there until my father died. But the move to the suburbs opened a whole new chapter. That’s where I got my first real exposure to the wider world, and what I suppose today we might call the diversity of the Chicago region. So I guess that leads to the next question, “How did you get hooked up with the Russian experience?”

Q: Yes.

COLLINS: It was during high school and through music.

Q: When you say music, what are we talking about?

COLLINS: I played cello. Like many kids, I started taking piano lessons when I was in grade school. Then when I was in sixth grade, the man who became my mentor in many

ways said, “Well, I think you should take up a string instrument.” So I started to study cello about the time I began junior high school, and continued to play through my first year in college. But then, I gave it up as college pulled me in so many new directions. Today, of course I regret I did, but I suppose everyone says that about giving up their instrument.

In any case it was through music that I met Dr. Herbert Zipper, the man I mentioned earlier who was the first foreign personality I really came to know. I was in sixth grade. Dr. Zipper had just become director of a private music school in Winnetka, the town next to ours, and he and my father became acquainted when the two of them began to explore having the music school take on providing a music program for my father’s students. He was in fact a world personality. He had been born in the Austro-Hungarian empire. He came up through the music tradition of Vienna. He studied at the Vienna Conservatory with Richard Strauss and graduated at the beginning of the 1930s, an inauspicious time to begin a career. When he completed his studies at the conservatory, he became deputy music director of the Düsseldorf Opera in 1932; and he was Jewish. That job lasted about a year. He then went back to Vienna, and found various ways to make a living until 1938, when the Nazis sent him to Dachau.

He managed to get out after a horrific period of nearly two years in Nazi camps and became director of the Manila Philharmonic. He went to Manila where in 1941 he again had the world turn upside down for him by the arrival of the Japanese. But since he was an Austrian national, he was not interred as the Americans were, and he became influential in the Philippine underground during the remainder of World War II. From that time, he knew most of the Philippine post-war leadership, and I remember he talked with great respect about Magsaysay whom he knew well. I also recall his story about how, when General MacArthur landed, he organized Philharmonic concerts for the troops. He re-assembled the Manila orchestra immediately after the liberation and set up concerts for the American army in bombed out churches. It was what this extraordinary man felt he had to do after living through the War. He had dedicated his life, particularly after the Dachau experience, to the belief that you had to spend your time training young people to hold the right values. That had to be your mission. After Manila, he came to New York in the later ‘40s, taught at the New School, and from there came to the Chicago area. There’s so much more to his life to be remembered, and in fact, there is a book and a documentary about this unique man I commend to anyone.

In the Chicago area Herbert, as I knew him, became quite influential. He worked with my father to create an orchestra that took music around to public schools. Nobody did this at that time. My father gave him the venue and the chance to try the idea. School systems were not the most progressive and adventuresome of organizations, but my father and his system were. They struck up a lifelong professional friendship and cooperation that lasted as long as Zipper was in his position. At some point he left for California, where he lived to the age of 94, continuing to set up programs for children there. But this is a long way of saying that this was the man who had a tremendous influence on me, more than anyone aside from my parents, and knowing him expanded my world to thinking well beyond the Chicago area.

Q: Could you talk about Germany and Austria?

COLLINS: He talked about his experiences and world as a young man. There was no question his world view was shaped by what happened in the 1930s and the awful things he saw and lived through. But he was an indomitable spirit and optimist. And he talked about things that piqued my interest. I guess it was in junior high school that I turned from learning by doing to asking questions, to inquisitiveness: “What’s all this about?” and “What is this man talking about?” So finally let’s answer the question of how I got started on Russia: I got started on Russia because this man, among his many responsibilities was music director and conductor of the Chicago businessmen’s symphony orchestra. He took my brother and me to the rehearsals and performances of that orchestra as part of what he saw as our music education. At one point he had decided that the orchestra would perform the first two scenes from the opera *Boris Godunov* and that my brother and I would join the performance by playing the church bells that are a central part of the work. Well, that was the spark.

From listening to the score and words I got interested in the language and what the opera’s story was about. I began to study Russian on my own. In 1955 nobody taught Russian on the North Shore of Chicago. New Trier High School didn’t teach it for sure. So, I took the initiative to go downtown to meet the Russian Orthodox priest on the north side of the city. He was the only person I could think of who knew Russian, and I used to see him every other weekend while I was in high school. So, I found what turned out to be a career-building experience through music and through one inspiring man.

Q: So while in high school at New Trier you were studying this on the side?

COLLINS: It was all on the side.

Q: Was there any encouragement?

COLLINS: I don’t remember any. I was not discouraged, but I don’t think anyone tried to find out why I was doing that. It was more an oddity than anything else I think.

Q: Were you beginning to learn about Russia and the Soviet Union?

COLLINS: At that time, I didn’t know much at all about Russia, I have to say. As I look back on it, we were in a very insular setting. The world beyond the Chicago area was pretty much a mystery even in high school. The only other places we had traveled as a family, by that point, were to Michigan, some other mid-western places, and to the east coast, to Boston a few times (where my mother had a cousin). In fact, the only universities I actually applied to, when it was time to apply for collage admission, were Harvard and Columbia: Harvard, because it was the only school I had ever seen other than the University of Chicago and Northwestern, and Columbia because Herbert had told me I should apply to that school. When I remember how little I knew at that time,

and I compare it to what my children, my boys, knew of the country and world at the same age, I realize I was really very provincial.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Cold War?

COLLINS: Not much. I remember the nuclear tests and...

Q: Getting under the desks.

COLLINS: Getting under the desks. And I remember standing at the school bus stop on March 5, 1953, with the newspaper that said that Stalin had died—a big deal. The Korean War was much discussed and I remember the controversy about General MacArthur returning after Truman fired him. My parents may have been the only ones in the town who were appalled at his tour of the country and actions after his dismissal. But I don't remember studying or reading or thinking much about international things. I had a good high school and junior high school education. Classic subjects that included world history, but other than that it was mainly American history, sciences, math, and for me four years of Latin at which I turned out to be a top student. I remember the school made a great deal of my Latin when I got the highest score ever recorded at New Trier on the Latin SAT test. It made me something of a celebrity for a time I also read a lot. My interests were veering toward history, not so much math and science, and I ended up studying a lot of American history. Again, mainly because of a particular teacher, Angus Johnston. He could have taught at a university, but chose high school teaching. He was an authority on the Civil War. So on the academic side, I left high school with a real interest in history, and I stuck with that in College and beyond. But until I left for college, the world beyond the local area seemed a long way away: things didn't intrude that much in Illinois.

Q: I went to college in New England, and we had about four, five guys in my fraternity from New Trier. This was a place that traditionally exported lots of its students off to the East Coast.

COLLINS: That's right. Some 95% of my high school class or more went to college, and the top end of the graduating class almost all went to New England schools. I think in my Harvard class there were something like seven or eight of from New Trier. So it wasn't that going East was unusual for my crowd: it was only that I didn't have a good idea of what I was getting into, what it would mean. It was a little bit like going into the Foreign Service. I'm not sure I'd have done it if I had known what it would mean for my life, but it seemed like a good thing to do at the time. Perhaps it was me, or perhaps it was the way I grew up, without much money or travel, but I didn't really have much of a sense about the larger world.

Q: Also the papers. The Chicago Tribune really wasn't very good.

COLLINS: No, but it was the gospel for lots of the area. My father bought the *Daily News*, though, and wouldn't give the Trib the time of day. I don't remember paying much

attention to the papers, but television was new and we watched some of that: and we still listened to news on radio. But the focus was on domestic matters.

Q: Such as?

COLLINS: I remember very well the campaign of 1948. My father and mother used to think they were the only two registered Democrats in the whole town where he taught, and I remember in fourth grade it was rather lonely being for Truman. But it was a great day for the Collins when Truman won. I remember too coming to school with a very different idea about Truman's dismissal of MacArthur. I don't think I had any idea of what was really happening, but when MacArthur came to the North Shore and drove in a motorcade from someplace up north down to the city for a speech, it made my parents mad! So I found myself at odds with almost all my classmates. Then there were the Army-McCarthy hearings. We then had television, and it was something I remember watching for days. This was a subject of real passion in my family. They were outraged at McCarthy, and I recall the day Joseph Welch confronted him with the "do you have no shame" line at the hearing and the program of Edward F. Murrow where he took on McCarthy. They were both family heroes.

Q: Did you find yourself fighting the other kids?

COLLINS: I don't remember any fights, but it was pretty clear I was in the minority most of the time. The family were unapologetic liberals in a solid Republican suburb.

Q: Was there much discussion of foreign affairs?

COLLINS: Our kitchen or dining room table was very much taken up with discussions about everything from philosophy to things of the day. My parents read a lot, and we always had papers and magazines as well as books around. But they were focused domestically: this was not a family with any international experience or connections. Other than a couple of trips to Canada, my parents never went abroad until I joined the Foreign Service. So whatever I got in that vein came largely through my time with Dr. Zipper until I was well into High School.

Q: About this interest in Russian: Did you run across the anti-Soviet types saying, "What are you doing studying that subversive language?"

COLLINS: There were people who really wondered what I was up to and why would I want to do that. It was an odd preoccupation, people thought, this interest in Russian. And I was studying it as much out of curiosity as anything else. There were absolutely no family connections. And no one I knew had any association with Russia.

Of course, to jump ahead, nobody asked about this after October 1957 when the Russians launched Sputnik. But before that, when I started at Harvard, I think there were about 12 people in the beginning Russian class for the entire university.

Q: So, you graduated from New Trier when?

COLLINS: In '57.

Q: You applied to Harvard. Was this considered a major step or was this not a big deal?

COLLINS: This was a big deal for my family. While I was not by any means the first one to go to college or even away to school, I was the first one in my immediate family. My mother and father both lived at home when they went to college. The only one I knew who did do anything like this was my great-aunt, my mother's father's sister who graduated from the University of Illinois in 1903 and then went to Teachers College at Columbia University.

Q: Particularly a woman, too. Going out to Harvard, were you warned to be careful about all those Reds at Harvard?

COLLINS: No, not by my family, of course. They were very proud that I was going off to a liberal school. My father's mother was more worried. She was concerned that on the train to school I would be taken in by gamblers.

[laughter]

COLLINS: Her view of this was a little bit dated! I think she pictured riverboats or something. But, my father's family were very proud and always thought that going to Harvard was a great thing. I might note that my Grandmother's father had gone to Cambridge and then Trinity College in Dublin before he came to the States, so education was valued by this family well back. My mother's parents on the other hand, never knew what to make of it, because they thought my mother should never have left the farm. They felt that whatever you needed for life was right there and anyone who left to go even 50 miles was somewhat suspect. But they were probably sort of proud that a grandson was off. And it was also OK because they had cousins in Marblehead, just up the coast from Cambridge, people they had visited. But it's hard to know what they really thought.

Q: You were at Harvard from what, '57 to '61? What was Harvard like when you arrived there?

COLLINS: Yes, '57 to '61. First of all, it was a men's school, and in that sense was a Harvard that was more similar to what it had been for the previous hundred years than it has become in the last few decades as a fully co-ed integrated institution. But the school was also entering a period of change. I arrived after the great wave of World War II, GI Bill veterans had made their impact. They were largely gone, but I seemed to be at the front of a new wave of change. My class had a number of firsts. It was the first that had a majority from public schools rather than privates. My class was also something of an admissions experiment put together to create what we would today call diversity. So, we were people from all over the country; we were multi-confessional; and to a very limited

degree we were multi-racial. So, it was different from previous classes, but I think it prepared us for the future we would live in where these differences would mean a lot less. I remember, for example, that on arrival the distinction between the preppies as we knew them and the public school kids seemed important – at least to the preppies. The preppies considered themselves sophisticated, which in some ways they were, but in some ways the public school kids were often better prepared to cope with the realities of life as we lived it on our own. But by the end of the freshman year, nobody much cared anymore “who you were.”

The university was also smaller than it is now. They didn't have the Kennedy school and other more recent additions. It was more the Harvard of President Conant than it was of Derrick Bok: it hadn't undergone the large expansion or the arrival of lots of new disciplines. And the faculty was different. A large part of them had done something outside academe. Either they had been in the military or they were involved in the war effort in Washington or elsewhere. So these mentors had both real world and academic experience. From the spirit of the place, you also picked up pretty quickly that you were part of the future elite: you were expected to do something with your life and make a difference for your country.

Q: Public service. The motivation then wasn't, “I will do this and make a lot of money.”

COLLINS: I know much of the class did make a lot of money. We have lots of successful lawyers, business leaders and Wall Street people, but we all lived in an environment that said the idea was you should do something bigger than just make money. This was the era of Eisenhower's last term and buildup to the Kennedy election, it was the “ask not what your country can do for you but what...” So it was about the study of rigorous academic subjects combined with the idea that you would go out and do something with what you learned. And this idea was alive with the people we had as professors, people who had their war stories or government stories and proudly told them as part of our education. It was a lot bigger world than what I had known in high school.

It was also a new world for me in that I didn't have any family nearby. And remember this was the era of communication by letter: no cheap long distance calls, cell phones, email, and easy connections to home. When I went off to school it was by train, and on arrival I was part of a different world with peers and the larger Harvard community as the new family and environment. There were not many things to hold on to from the past or that made you stand out. You may have stood out academically, or in sports, or music in your high school class, but you found out that everyone was at the top of his high school class. It was a great leveler, and you started over. But it was also a confidence builder. You learned to live comfortably with the exalted and famous: you also learned you all also go to the john.

There's no question that the whole spirit of the place – at least as I knew it - had a major impact on me: the sense of being part of a larger community where bigger issues and the bigger purposes of the human race and the nation were the coin of the realm and were discussed all the time quite simply changed my world. It wasn't that we didn't talk about

some of these things at home, but it was in a very different way and in a very different context.

Q: How about some of the subjects you took that you consider influential and some of the professors who were influential?

COLLINS: A lot of my Harvard career was serendipity, but I suppose that's true for many. I did decide I would study Russian as a freshman, and that set me in the direction for what became my major, History and Literature. History and Literature was a combined major at Harvard. I signed up for it to stay with the Russian theme, but I have to say I didn't know what I was getting into when I started. First of all, it was a double major, something that was not done very often at the time. For the major you chose either a historic period or a region for study. I concentrated on Russia. The program of study involved taking courses offered by various departments in the traditional disciplines, and a tutorial in your subject that amounted to a fifth course. The major had no faculty: it had only a program chairman – Hanna Arendt in my time –and a group of tutors, but this major gave me access to an exceptional mix of tutors and faculty over the three years. My first Russian History course was with Jim Billington, the future Librarian of Congress and path breaking scholar on Russian cultural history. The second one was with Richard Pipes who would serve in the Reagan administration at the White House. Merle Fainsod was the nation's authority on Soviet government and politics. I audited Henry Kissinger's course. And my introduction to the mysteries of economics came from the lectures of John Kenneth Galbraith, who taught the introductory course for the entire college. There were several others, less known outside Harvard, but exceptional as teachers and personalities who were accessible to us in Harvard's houses or as teachers. I remember a philosophy professor named Demos, for example, who taught beginning philosophy more often than not in his house and from my experience really thought he was Socrates. These were fairly exceptional people to work with or listen to.

But in many respects the most important people for me were the tutors. One of my tutors for a time was a young junior faculty member named Zbigniew Brzezinski. But my main tutor Valentine Boss was a British historian getting his doctorate in Russian history. Over the two plus years I spent with him he opened new vistas about Russia, about literature, and about a broader world. He brought the Oxford idea of a tutor to his work, and it was something of a revelation or perhaps better said a shock. When I first met him, he said, "Now if you're going to study Russian literature, you really have to know about Lord Byron. So, why don't you go home this week and read all of the long poems by Lord Byron. Then write me a nine- or ten-page paper on that, and we'll talk about it next week." That was the beginning of the kind of reading that we did. This would have been a full major in and of itself although I took four other courses with it. But this immersion opened all kinds of new avenues and ideas from how to read literature to what questions different eras ask about the past. Finally, while the tutors and faculty were very important, there is no question the students were also a major part of being at Harvard. I must say that I probably got more out of them than any individual professor.

Q: How did that work? Was it conversation?

COLLINS: Yes. It was conversation and doing things together. As a freshman you lived in what's called the "yard," the core part of Harvard. For your last three years you lived in one of the houses. The houses were set up to give the environment of colleges at schools like Oxford. I was for one year in Lowell House, where I lived incidentally almost directly under the famous Russian bells that would later be returned to Danilovsky Monastery, their original home. I then moved for my last two years to Kirkland House. Living in these small college communities I got to meet all kinds of people from varied backgrounds, with different interests, and planning different futures. People planning to be ministers, lawyers, and professors: people from all different parts of the country and with different life experiences. It was a great mix with whom you lived, ate, played sports or cards and generally came to know as your family. They were an extraordinary group to learn from even just by osmosis. And I still keep up with many of those good friends today.

Q: How did the Kennedy surge affect you? You were there during the 1960 election?

COLLINS: I remember that a group of us went down to Boston to see his final speech before the election. We had all listened to the debates, the first presidential debates ever – on a black and white TV in the basement of Kirkland House. No one had his own TV then. The Kirkland House group, like most of Harvard I think, was pretty liberal at that point and for us Kennedy was a hero. There was a sense that Kennedy spoke to us and to the spirit that defined the school. You have a chance to do something and make a difference; come do public service. A lot of my friends left college moved by the idea that they would end up in public service, and a very large percentage of my class did. Many of them went off to law school or professional school, but they then went into government or other kinds of public service. Tim Wirth, who was senator, was from my class; so was Barney Frank, who made his mark as a leader in the House. We had two or three FSO's from my class. Vlad Lahovich and Alex Watson, and of course Avis Bohlen were among them. We all responded to what the Kennedy ethos seemed to call for. We wanted to be part of something bigger; that would make the world a better place.

Q: While in Harvard, you were doing Russian studies, but were you learning about the Soviet Union per se?

COLLINS: Oh yes. I was deeply immersed in the history, politics, culture, and foreign policy issues surrounding the Soviet Union. And I was part of the United Nations Club at Harvard where we sponsored speakers, among whom was the then Soviet Ambassador, Menshikov. And I had the chance to meet some of the first Soviet exchange participants as they passed through Cambridge, including Lev Vlasenko, who had placed second to Van Cliburn in the Tchaikovsky competition. But the Soviet Union remained pretty abstract as did most things outside the U.S. I had never had the chance to travel abroad, and all things foreign seemed rather abstract. My experience of anything outside the United States came after college, but college did make the world much bigger and piqued the interest to know more.

Q: Did you get any chance to get down to Washington or New York to see the UN or any of those places?

COLLINS: Yes. I did in my last two years in college. I knew several people who were from the Washington region. I came down to visit twice during my last couple of years. I got to New York more because between my junior and senior years, I met a stunning and brilliant young lady whom I would later marry, and she lived in New York. So in my senior year I got to New York a good deal. These visits gave me a feel for government and UN in a way that was less abstract. But, as I look back on it, while I was telling people that I thought I wanted to join the Foreign Service, I hadn't really a clue of what it was about.

Q: Did anybody?

COLLINS: I don't think that anybody did then, before they went in unless they grew up as part of it.

Q: This is certainly my experience and others': it sounds great but I kept wondering where I'd buy a set of tails!

[laughter]

COLLINS: Yes! I really had no idea what an embassy or a consulate was or what they did.

Q: Did anybody cross your path during the time you were in Harvard who had known someone in the Foreign Service or had a father who was in the Foreign Service?

COLLINS: I did know just one: Avis Bohlen. Avis and I were in the same class. Her father Chip Bohlen had been Ambassador to the Soviet Union, but she didn't talk much about that at the time. Several prominent diplomats and world leaders did visit Harvard. I remember meeting George Kennan that way. I also remember Fidel Castro's visit. I believe at least one secretary of state came as well, and there were many others who spoke about foreign policy and international affairs. Being part of a community where these people were routine visitors was one of the great things about being at Harvard; you could see and get a feel for these people. It was horizon expanding.

Q: As you were approaching graduation, what did the Russian major do for you? What were you projecting?

COLLINS: I decided I was going to go on to graduate school. I'm not sure who, but I had talked to somebody in the State Department in 1960 or '61, and he said it wasn't a bad thing to get some more studies. So I did. I didn't want to stay at Harvard, and I'm not sure I could have. I applied to Columbia and Indiana University. Indiana encouraged me, offered me support. Columbia did not. So I went to Indiana, which was a fortuitous choice. Indiana was then establishing one of the new area studies centers under the

National Defense Education Act. There was a young, dynamic faculty building a new Russian and East European area studies program. I enrolled in that program and it opened up a lot of opportunities, which I'm not sure I would have had at a more "established" program like Columbia's. Perhaps most importantly it was from this choice, I got my first opportunity to go overseas – to spend an academic year as a graduate student at Moscow State University as part of the U. S. Government Bilateral Exchange Program.

Q: Indiana at the time, in Russian studies, did it have a particular thrust, an outlook?

COLLINS: Well, I don't know that they had a particular outlook, but it did have a peculiar setting; southern Indiana was not known as the world's most outward-looking, cosmopolitan or liberal place. But it had undiscovered and more or less unknown qualities. It had about 16,000 students then; today it is double that. It was moving on to its next phase; it was a very dynamic and growing place. Indiana's chancellor was a man named Herman Wells, a legend. He had a much bigger view of what the university was about than that of the state legislature or most others in the state. He was truly trying to make Indiana University a major and leading center of learning and culture in the center of the United States. And in going after that goal he was willing to take on all kinds of experimental and innovative programs from the federal government, private citizens and others. Among these were the National Defense Educational Act area centers. These programs were almost never really funded by the Indiana State legislature. In other cases, he raised funds from private sources to expand what was possible. He went to Louisville, for example, to begin what has become, I think, one of if not the preeminent music program in an American public university. And he built an outstanding reputation in the sciences, particularly the life sciences, by landing some top professors of genetics (from Europe) before this field was so popular. And, of course, the Kinsey Institute for research on sexuality—and Dr. Kinsey himself, were there, too – a pioneering endeavor.

Q: The famous sexologist, the Kinsey Report.

COLLINS: Exactly. All of this was nurtured and developed in such an improbable place.

Q: When I think about Indiana in our profession, I think about Slavic studies. It's one of the two or three...

COLLINS: It was one of the three: Harvard, Columbia, and Indiana.

Q: Was this—the Slavic studies—a major emphasis when you were there?

COLLINS: Oh, yes. This area studies program had brought an infusion of money. Indiana also had, from the Cold War, a linguistic school and language program that had been developed for the military during World War II. When I was there they were teaching Albanian to the Air Force, and improbable as it seemed I got to know four Albanian instructors in the middle of Indiana. The Slavic department predated the beginning of the Russian Area NDEA Institute, but the NDEA funds gave it a huge boost to develop a faculty, to branch well beyond language and literature.

Q: First, to one side: What was the background of your wife-to-be?

COLLINS: I met Naomi when we were both in Harvard summer school in the summer of 1960. Naomi came from New York to take summer courses to be able to finish her B.A. early. She was born in Brooklyn and grew up there and in Queens. Her father had been in the Army in the Pacific during the war. He was a civil engineer by training and profession and a chemist by education. That meant that during the island hopping in the Pacific, he fought mosquitoes on the islands before the troops landed to prevent malaria and Dengue Fever.

Q: Of course, a major problem for anyone in that area.

COLLINS: Of course. He had to get rid of the mosquitoes before the troops landed – so he had to be there first! He survived and returned to Brooklyn until the family moved to Queens. Milt (Maurice Milton Feldman) returned to City employment when he came back from the War, and he continued to work for the City for his career. He ultimately rose to become Commissioner of Sanitation – and Environmental issues - under Mayor Lindsay. When he retired, he became consultant and instructor, and lived out his life, with Naomi's mother, in the City. But the city bears his imprint: he created some of the most significant landfills that today are city parks and was a pioneer in areas such as clean water for the city, and he was elected to membership in the New York Academy of Sciences.

Naomi was born and went to public school in Brooklyn. This was a Jewish family with a traditional story. Her grandparents had emigrated to the United States from the Russian Empire (today Ukraine and Belarus). Both her parents were born in the United States. Her mother had grown up in Detroit. Her grandfather had gone out there in the '20s to work for Ford, and then moved back to New York. Her father's family had been custom tailors in New York City. She grew up in that Brooklyn-Queens community of New York. We met when she was at Queens College (part of the city universities of New York).in the summer of 1960. When she graduated in January 1962, a semester after I did, she came out to Indiana University when she just turned 20 years old for a Ph.D. in history. She completed that degree with a concentration in English history in 1969 as we were preparing to leave for my first post. We got married in Bloomington in May 1963.

Q: What were you doing?

COLLINS: I undertook a straight-forward course of study in Russian history and was enrolled concurrently in the area studies program. The program required about two years of coursework. I completed work for a Master's degree and the exams to proceed to a PhD. At that time, we also needed to pass exams in two foreign languages, at least at reading competency levels. So I had Russian and German. The PhD required passing comprehensive exams in five subjects. They were in four different fields of history and one outside field. So I had two in Russian history, one in European history, one in American constitutional history, and one in political science. It usually took about three

years' full time to get to this point. Then to finish your degree you had to write a dissertation based in original research in archives and records. That was the part I did not finish, and I never did actually get my doctorate. But Naomi did, in 17th century English History. She wrote on the Cromwell period. But, I did do much research for a dissertation and it was in doing this post-coursework research I got the opportunity to spend two years abroad: one in Russia 1965-'66 and one in England 1966-'67.

Q: Moscow University was '65-'66? What was it like? It was your first real trip abroad, and this was really abroad!

COLLINS: Yes, it was really abroad. But our introduction was very traditional for our time starting with the way we travelled. We got on a small ship in New York and arrived in Le Havre after 10 days on a small Italian-owned ship. We spent a little time in Paris enthralled by the place; we had never seen anything like this; it was a revelation. I don't think we will ever forget the Les Halles market, for example. I had never seen anything like it. From Paris we took the train, the fabled Orient Express, to Vienna. changed trains there, and boarded the Soviet Chopin Express train for the trip from Vienna to Moscow. In all it was a four-day trip from Paris, and when we finally did get into Moscow, we really knew what it meant to arrive! And the trip gave a real sense for the distances involved in all those historic movements of peoples, armies, travel accounts we had encountered only in books to that time; how far it was for Napoleon to walk.

Then, when we arrived, it was sensory overload. Everything was new, being abroad, everybody speaking another language, nothing looking like it was supposed to, and all of these things together. One initial impression was that, unlike the abstractions you heard and read in the U.S., this was actually another society with people who got up in the morning and went to work each day. It was another city.

Other early impressions took a bit longer. But it did not take long before I came to see how extraordinarily anti-human the Communist order really was, and how much time Russians spent in humanizing what was a system designed to be impossible for a human being to live in normally. It really did bring home the meaning of the word "totalitarian." The system of controls and self-isolation really worked. There was no regular involvement with the West at that time; foreign radio, including short wave was jammed. There was no Western press, except for Communist party newspapers from other countries. There was no travel outside the Communist bloc by anyone but "cleared" people. It was impossible to know a Russian for any length of time unless he was vetted by the security services or working for them. We were monitored virtually all the time. I don't know that I ever had a conversation of any substance in someone's room. Real talk was always out in the park or on a balcony or someplace people thought they were not being overheard.

On the other hand, over time, living within this world engendered in me a basic sympathy and admiration for the ability of Russians we knew to survive it all, live in their world and in some ways make it work for them.

Another thing I perceived early was the extent of cynicism about the Communist system and ideology among people our age. The students were quite cynical. You got the impression that our media and politicians took Soviet ideology or the “story” of the system far more seriously than the Russians did. This was the Soviet 60s and it is worth remembering this was the time when Gorbachev was at Moscow State.

Q: What else struck you about your fellow students?

COLLINS: There were two impressions I had of the students at that time: One was how extraordinarily immature they were in some ways compared to their American counterparts. Not in terms of their training, which was often clearly a cut above ours, but in terms of their ability to deal with things of daily life. Most of them never had the chance or need to make serious life decisions for themselves. For us by age 24 or 26 we were used to having made these kinds of decisions: about our futures; where we were going to school, what career we might choose. But almost all of their decisions were made for them either by the system – which might select them for something – or by their family, who might say, “We can get you into this or that,” based on connections. In general, they were quite unprepared it seemed to us for taking responsibility for their futures. That made a big impression.

A second big impression was that few if any really bought into the ideology or the “Party line.” Ideology played a pervasive role in the system as the legitimator of the Communist structure and intellectual disciplinarian. Nevertheless, nearly everyone thought ideology important for others than themselves. But there was great cynicism about Marxist studies and the required courses on Marxism-Leninism among the students I knew. These studies punched your ticket either to get a degree so you could do something else or so that you could get into the Communist Party channel and establish yourself as part of the elite. And so nearly everyone went along.

Q: What about all the verbiage that came out of Pravda, Izvesvestia and all that?

COLLINS: Well, they all read these papers because it was “their” news, to see which way the wind was blowing. “Where are things going?” “What’s important?” They were very good at reading between the lines to see what the leadership might be trying to do. They didn’t read these because they thought they would learn the facts or factual news. They read it to understand what the leaders wanted or were doing. So, there were certain times when *everybody* read the newspapers: if something controversial was happening or there was a party congress, they all read the newspapers.

Q: Was Khrushchev still in control then?

COLLINS: Khrushchev had been ousted the year before we arrived and he had become a non-person. His disappearance was an impressive feat. If you arrived when we did, in September 1965, you would never have known that Khrushchev had ruled the country for nearly a decade. His name had disappeared; there was not a single reference to him that I ever found in the Lenin library card catalog where, just one year before, he would have

had two or three drawers of his own. In that sense, the control system in the mid '60s was still very capable of isolating that country remarkably well from the outside world and inculcating in the populous as a whole a set framework for life because there was no alternative allowed. The managers were good at what they did and they were very thorough. It was a real lesson on how the 1930s could have worked. This was still basically a 1930s system: a Stalinist system.

Q: What was in it for them to have you there? You and other foreign students?

COLLINS: Probably not much, but it was the price they paid for getting access to the U.S. Remember that Khrushchev been the first leader-proponent of peaceful coexistence. This had meant a shift away from ideas about Socialism in one country or the permanent warfare and confrontation. Khrushchev was a man of the nuclear age. The doctrine had emerged that we have got to avoid war. So it flowed logically that controlled contact was something to give lip service to, to support and exploit with careful controls.

The exchange program I was in emerged in the late fifties and was based on a bilateral agreement that called for various kinds of cultural and educational exchange. It produced the exhibition that brought the famous Kitchen Debate between Nixon and Khrushchev in 1959. The exchange of graduate students and young faculty began around the same time, so I was there in the fifth or sixth year of the program. In our year the size of the group was very small. There were all of 16 of us there for the whole country. With only one exception, all of us were in Moscow or Leningrad, so we weren't spread around very much. But we lived with Russian and foreign students. We lived on the sixth floor of Zone V in the main Moscow State University building in Lenin Hills. On our floor— in addition to the Russian students who made up the majority, we had Mongols, Vietnamese, Indians and Africans as well as another American and a few British students. So it was a very mixed group.

Q: How about your contact with your fellow Soviet students?

COLLINS: We had a reasonable amount of contact. It was an interesting phenomenon: you could talk endlessly with somebody on the first meeting. They would pump you dry. Americans were a real oddity and aroused a lot of curiosity. I was usually taken for an East German. I guess it must have been my accent in speaking Russian, but it was an unfortunate assumption. Then, when people spoke with us, usually in public places, they didn't want to let you go. This was their one chance to get a little glimpse of something outside. So you had an immense number of conversations in one-time meetings, but almost all knew that they couldn't keep it up unless they wanted to come to the attention of authorities. So, most initial contacts fell away.

We had only a much more limited number of people became real acquaintances, people whom we saw fairly frequently. There were also those who lived in our immediate vicinity and we did see them as well. Then there were a few "acquaintances" whom we knew were reporting on us. Some were annoying, but others after a certain time keeping track of us, let us know their role and we just agreed that that was the way it would be.

We understood each other's position. With most friends we got to know one thing was different in nearly all cases. No matter how much time we would spend together or talk we never got to know much about our acquaintances personal background, about their family, where they came from, what their parents did. Knowing things like that seemed so normal for Americans, and it made an impression that even good acquaintances didn't want to talk about themselves for the most part. There were some exceptions, but most people seemed to be wary about what use you might put such information to. So, I can't say that we made a lot of friends *per se*. There were one or two people whom I did actually see later, in the 1990s, but that was a rarity.

Q: You weren't under the same type of pressure that the KGB was putting on our diplomats, were you?

COLLINS: No, it wasn't the same because we just weren't in the same ball park. But we were pretty closely tracked, and they kept us under close scrutiny at the outset. Once you established a pattern, they seemed to make up their minds who you were, and then watched you or decided you had limited interest. I ended up being elected leader of our group of American students that year, so they probably paid more attention to me than to some of the others. But they couldn't keep track of you every minute and probably didn't try in that huge Moscow State University building.

Q: What were you studying?

COLLINS: I went there to work on my dissertation. Although I did not get to finish it, I got most of the research done on it, and wrote a good part of it. It was on Peter the Great and his era, particularly on the work he did to restructure the system of local government. He was revolutionary for his time. And this reform was central to the way he reordered the government to control the empire and ensure it met his needs for an army, navy, and bureaucracy. I did a lot of work in archives and in libraries; and I did work with some professors, attended some lectures, and delivered a report to history faculty at the end of the year. But truth to tell, I was more interested in other aspects of being there than simply the archives papers and studies. And my time in Moscow consolidated my interest into going into something other than academic work.

Q: Did you have any contact with the embassy and get a feel for what an embassy does?

COLLINS: Yes, Naomi and I did. We did know people at the embassy pretty well, and the embassy at that time let us come and buy a limited number of things at their basement commissary, a rinky dinky little place. But peanut butter was an essential staple for us. We came to know the agricultural attaché, and of course the cultural affairs officer, who was our liaison there. I remember my first visit to Spaso House was on Thanksgiving Day in 1965 when the Ambassador Foy Kohler had all the students to Thanksgiving dinner. We were very grateful indeed: it was our first truly familiar meal since we had arrived. Years later we were mindful of the hungry American students in Moscow and invited them to our place when we had the advantages the Embassy offered. Some things you don't forget.

Q: You left the Soviet Union when?

COLLINS: In the spring of 1966. We went to England. There's a story about leaving as well.

Q: OK. We'll pick up their next time. Thanks.

COLLINS: Great!

Q: Today is the Fourth of August 2003. OK, the story about leaving.

COLLINS: My wife and I had been in Moscow living at the university from the fall of 1965. I was there on the formal U. S.-Soviet exchange program for young faculty and graduate students. I was doing research for a doctoral dissertation on the 18th century Russia. Student life for American exchanges at that time involved being treated as a corporate entity by the Soviet government. They expected us to have a leader when we arrived. So - on the train in - the group elected one - and somehow I was it. I never understood why, but Naomi says it's because I had such fluent Russian. As "*starosta*" (elder) it was my duty to call occasional meetings and try to ensure that our general interests were protected or at least considered by the authorities at the University. I also felt it was wise to be sure we all supported one another in the face of efforts that the authorities made to divide us. I was all of 24 years old.

Almost from the outset and for the duration of my stay in Moscow I was a subject of considerable interest and attention by the Soviet authorities. I suspect this was because I had arrived with the position of group leader and as such was in some sense the focal point for the American group's cohesion, or at least so they thought.

Now it was usual for fellow Russian students to come by our room all the time. Many were just curious and wanted to talk to an American. Others had questions or an interest in learning about some aspect of American life. So such drop byes were not unusual. One such fellow, a student in the chemistry faculty came by to chat, and rather early on announced that he wanted to leave the Soviet Union. He had had it. He wanted to apply for asylum. I knew nothing good could come of being involved with this young man given there was nothing I could do for him. I said, "Well, look. I'm a student and have no idea how you deal with things like that. I can't be of help on this." We parted, and that was that I thought. But, it turned out that months later in the spring of 1966 this student had gone off on a cruise in the Far East and jumped ship in the Philippines. More to the point he had given the authorities my name as a reference - an American he knew!

This information made its way to the American embassy in Moscow where it sounded loud warning bells. The Embassy I have come to assume was worried by the report because the previous year there had been an incident in which an exchange participant, Professor Barghorn of Yale, had been held by the authorities after being set up for a charge of spying. So we were brought into the embassy to have a discussion with the

people running the exchange program, as well as others from security and the Agency. It was decided that we should leave the country immediately, quietly and without forewarning, without telling anyone. We would fly out early the next morning. Naomi and I went back to the dorm quite shaken and spent a very restless night worrying that we didn't know who knew what and whether we might be prevented from leaving Moscow by the KGB. In the end nothing happened; a car and officer from the embassy picked us up early the next morning and we boarded the plane without any questions or incident. But it was with a real sigh of relief that we took off on an Air France flight to Paris amidst a French gourmet tour group that had visited Moscow for reasons that eluded us given our experience of Soviet cuisine. But we were glad of the company and after uncertain moments during a stopover of the flight in Warsaw arrived exhausted in Paris from whence to took a direct flight to London where we were to spend the next year plus.

The long and short of all this drama was, we had a hasty and unexpected exit from the USSR. I have no idea what the Soviet authorities thought. Our story at the time was that we were leaving for health reasons. Naomi was taken to visit the embassy doctor, to provide credibility to the story. Oddly, he discovered that she actually had strep throat and had been walking around with it for some time. He gave her an antibiotic which made her feel much better soon, but also provided the cover story used to explain our hasty departure - an acute dental problem that required immediate attention not available in Moscow.

I have never known whether this asylum seeker story was credible or how it was taken by the Soviet authorities. Nor am I sure in retrospect there was a real reason to be concerned. But, nobody wanted to take the risk of another incident like the previous year's detention of Fred Barghorn. This was at the height of the Cold War and the buildup of the Vietnam conflict. So people were uncertain what the reaction of the Soviet authorities would be to the fact that this fellow gave my name as reference. In any event it was a dramatic way to end an exchange year, and we were at the time more than relieved to land in London where we would spend the next year, though we arrived without any luggage or money.

Q: Did you think that maybe you'd blotted your copy book as far as the Soviets were concerned?

COLLINS: I was never convinced we had. We hadn't done anything that ought to have given them cause to think one way or another about our activities. I had not advised this student to do what he did or had anything to do with his defection. I can see why the embassy officials at the time thought, "Why run the risk of a bigger problem?" I think in retrospect that the departure decision might have been a bit of overkill, and the incident never came up from the Soviet side during my career. It did have an impact on one assignment later, but it was from the American not the Russian side.

Q: You were in London from when to when?

COLLINS: We went to London in April of 1965 and were there until the beginning of the summer 1966.

Q: What were you doing?

COLLINS: I was doing research and writing on my thesis using the British museum [now called the British Library] and just being there. We went to England because Naomi was getting her Ph.D. in English history and was doing in England what I had done in Russia the previous year. I spent the year reading in the British museum and other libraries and doing some writing. It was an interesting year for me, but it was an essential one for her research on Oliver Cromwell and his period. London did, however, bring a major career decision for me; in December 1965 I took the Foreign Service exam at the American embassy in London. At that time the exam was a full day affair; it was in three or four different parts. There was no essay on it that I remember, but it examined a considerable breadth of knowledge as well as an aptitude. I took the test and then waited, a pattern that would extend for almost three years until the Foreign Service began taking in new officers again after a lengthy hiatus. That spring I was also trying to find a job and succeeded in finding a position as Assistant Professor at the U.S. Naval Academy as a civilian member of the faculty. I took this up in the fall of 1967, after we returned from England and spent the next two years teaching midshipmen.

Q: While you were in London were you picking up a difference between the British academics' view of the Soviet Union vis-a-vis the Americans' view in the universities? Was there a discrepancy?

COLLINS: I don't know that there was that much difference. I didn't spend a lot of time with British academics, but there were quite a few British students in Moscow with us on a program similar to ours, and we spent a fair amount of time with them. I wouldn't say that our views were very different. I think – in retrospect – that they may have had a more historically based view of the Soviet Union and its place in the world. They had been living as engaged neighbors of the Russian Empire for centuries, and the Soviet Union was seen in some sense as the latest phase. But, they still saw it more as Russian than an ideological issue. There were certainly those who had an ideological bent about the Soviet Union that probably colored how they saw it. But, in many ways I think they were more able to see the Soviet system and the Russian society in a less abstract way than the Americans did. We saw communism as the challenge to the American way of life. It wasn't about Russia or the Russian Empire.

Q: How so?

Americans tended to know the place from the printed word, film, and political speeches; our views were more abstract. I think we tended to start from an ideological perspective. The Soviets were our opposite, our opponent. Our vision of things didn't leave a lot of middle ground the place or encourage a lot of empirical thinking about how Soviet society functioned, or thought about how Russians got up in the morning, went about their business and went to sleep at night. I think if there was anything that the year did for someone like me living there, it was to make the Soviet system and its society much less abstract and more concrete. It was about people who did not spend every moment of their

waking existence living according to some Marxist textbook. They made accommodations, found ways to make an unworkable system work, and lead a life, albeit with all the inhumanity and brutality of the system.

Q: Were you learning to view the Marxist texts, which supposedly ran the country, as being not that much a driving force as we tended to think in the United States?

COLLINS: I think what struck us particularly about that time was the degree to which the people our age, the ones in the university, the ones we knew best, were to a person totally cynical about ideology. It seemed to play very little role in their lives. They all complained about and disparaged having compulsory courses on Marxism/Leninism and the history of the Communist party as a waste of time. They also resented being treated like children by the system, not being trusted enough to have any judgment about what was true and what wasn't true about the outside world, for instance. They resented jamming of VOA or the fact that they couldn't travel. They were quite incredulous at the degree to which an American student our age had been making decisions about his future, his development, and career choices. For them, decisions were made either by family or by the system that said, "You will have the opportunity to go to university if you study linguistics," let's say. Or by the selection process. But they struck us as being very immature about getting ready to play a role in the real world after graduating from university.

On the other hand, they also struck us very highly trained in their specialties, more specialized than Americans for the most part. But it seemed to be more training than general education. If they were in history, and we would talk to them about biology, for example, they would ask whether we had studied biology. I remember the Life Magazine issue that had the first pictures of the development of a fetus. It was a very famous issue. We received a copy and shared it with our fellow students. It was a revelation. We found the people in the philological faculty, with whom we lived, didn't have a clue about human biology and the sciences of daily life. This seeming lack of knowledge about things almost any American would assume a friend would know made a lot of our Russian friends seem limited or naive about whole ranges and swaths of existence that we as Americans took just for granted. They were perhaps prepared for their own society, but not very well prepared to deal with the regular world outside.

Q: Some of the things you say about the Soviet system of education, absent the ideology, seem to parallel somewhat the Oxbridge type of education. People are placed when they enter an Oxbridge: they choose a course, and that's what they do for that time.

COLLINS: In many ways, that's probably true, although I think most of the Europeans we knew, and certainly the English students we knew, had a broader based education and more general savvy about the world. Russian education seemed very narrow and channeled students very early. If you were identified as talented in science person, for instance, you would be specialized very early. If you had language talent, you might speak three or four languages, and you'd be first rate at it. But would you know the

essentials of math, economics, history? Probably not as we would have been introduced to such topics.

Then there were also distortions in the system that affected your entire existence. We learned as young people to shop, but for them the idea of finding something to eat was closer to a survival instinct. The preoccupation was finding things. Money (and therefore finances as we learned them) was not so much of an issue. The important thing was access to goods or services, finding or building the network that would allow you to find the staples you needed. It was a very different set of skills. While I wouldn't overdraw this, it was a society without checkbooks and credit cards: a cash society. And there was little point in savings because the state was supposed to provide – and there was not much you could buy for cash. So this was very different from what we grew up with.

Q: This sounds like a tremendous education at an early age, because most people who were interested in Russia, the Soviet Union, had no real practical experience. In a way they were as much creatures of ...ideology is not the right term, but how it was presented...

COLLINS: Correct, I think.

Q: Did you find as you moved back into the American academic world you played the devil's advocate in trying to get this across?

COLLINS: It was very difficult to get this across, very difficult to explain to people what it was like to live in that society because you had to start from a set of premises totally different from what people brought to their questions. Again, most Americans only knew what they saw on TV or in newspapers, or what politicians said. Most had no experience of day to day realities outside the U.S., much less the Soviet reality we lived. It was very difficult to speak about the experience. You could tell stories and talk about experiences. But the minute you tried to generalize or to express a view different from the established one, it became difficult because your interlocutors had no base from which to start.

For example, let's take information access. At that time no American would conceive of living where you couldn't imagine that there was anything you would be prevented from knowing, seeing or reading: you didn't believe there was anything of significance you couldn't explore if you had the interest. For Russians, by contrast, from birth, they lived in a system determined to isolate itself and its people from the outside world's views, to teach its citizens a certain worldview, and ensure that they bought into certain premises. And they were quite successful in this. It was certainly true that our fellow students rarely just accepted the "party line" on the day's events or the description of what was happening outside the USSR. But the leaders were remarkably successful in bringing their people to think in terms of the ideological principles of the system. In discussion they would begin more often than not with totally different assumptions from ours. Russian citizens also had regular access only to information that the party and government permitted. Any other views they picked up were random, bits of information that may have dropped on them from – for example – a single issue of Time magazine or

some garbled VOA broadcast. Outside information came in episodic little pieces. What that meant was that most Russians had a strange view of the outside world, a view that was actually more positive and beneficent than any reality could be. This, of course, was diametrically opposed to what the leadership was telling them. Americans had absolutely no experience of this. It was very hard to describe or discuss how totally isolated intellectually that whole nation was, and how effective the regime was at keeping it that way.

Q: You were trying to do this at the Naval Academy for a while. You were there from when to when?

COLLINS: I taught there for two academic years, from the fall of 1967 until the summer of 1969. I came into the Foreign Service from the Naval Academy.

Q: To bring the picture up to date, how did your wife do on her PhD?

COLLINS: She finished her PhD over the four years following our return to the U.S. She finished most of her research in England, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Bloomington at IU; she had started writing in London, continued in Annapolis and finished when we were in Turkey on my first Foreign Service assignment. Completing the thesis took time because when we got back to the U.S., and after being abroad for two years in Turkey, Naomi also began full-time work. And after a year our first child Robert was born in Annapolis. But the eight years from 1962-1970 for completion of a Ph.D. was close to average at that time (even without the “interruptions”). Also hard to remember is that only 15 % of the Ph.D. recipients in history at that time were women.

When I started the job at the Naval Academy, Naomi found a job with the State of Maryland, working on something uniquely interesting for a historian of England. In 1967, Maryland was starting to write a new state constitution. She applied for a job with the commission that was hiring a staff for the constitutional convention, got it, and among other things, ended up drafting, with others, the Bill of Rights for the State of Maryland’s new constitution, which included a lot of English constitutional and common law and research. She worked with that group for about a year. Although the voters then did not pass the document, they have since then passed almost all elements of that draft constitution.

Q: That stirred up special interests...

COLLINS: Yes, and it was about change. I seem to remember that the Sheriffs didn’t like the new order because it curbed their role in the counties.

Q: Let’s talk about the Naval Academy society. You were there during the height of the Vietnam War. How did you find this?

COLLINS: It was my first experience teaching. I’d say at the outset that I was not particularly well suited to being a teacher and researcher; I don’t think it ever really was

my makeup. I had the idea that it was more interesting to be part of making history than just writing about it or talking about it. I also had the feeling as I started out that, "Here I am 27 years old, what do I know? Maybe when I'm 50, I'll have something useful to say." This was a deeply held conviction. I wasn't very certain about my judgments and passing them on with all the certainty that I saw amongst my colleagues. I couldn't feel very comfortable with that.

But I had a good time at the Naval Academy. This was at the height of the Vietnam buildup. But I recall that the Academy was strangely aloof from the controversy around the war. This was, of course, a very different Naval Academy from what it is today. There were no women. It was an institution I felt was doing its absolute best to keep the Navy like what it had been before World War II, at least in terms of the way the culture was conveyed. It seemed they had managed to minimize the social and other effects of the wartime years that so changed the Army and Air Force: it was hard to avoid the feeling that one was living with the late '30s Navy. This was certainly in part because the Academy was run and overseen—in its management structure and its board of directors--by its alumni who left no doubt that the Academy provided the Navy with its officers and its officers ensured the Academy remained unchallenged as the source of leaders for the service. This was still the time of the Philippine Steward Corps. In many ways it was a time when, I suspect, those who graduated in '52 or '48 probably felt right at home.

Q: My brother was Class of '40. I lived as a teenager in Annapolis, and I remember during the war, the ladies of Annapolis would say, "Oh, Betty Sue is marrying a Naval officer." "How wonderful! What class is he?" They'd say, "Oh, no. He's a Reserve," and it was as though he were a garbage collector.

COLLINS: That really hadn't changed much. A reserve officer wasn't really Navy, and that attitude prolonged the Navy's ability to keep outside pressures and change at bay. This was most striking to us when it came to integration. When I joined, one of my colleagues was the first Black officer to teach there. He was in my department, and his presence there put issues of integration squarely on the agenda for the Academy community and the town. One issue was simply finding housing for him. And to give the CNO and the Admiral who was running the Academy their due, they said to those renting apartments, "You don't rent to this man, you're off limits for the Navy." That changed the tune immediately, but it was that kind of thing almost everywhere. This was still a small southern town with a tradition that went back a long way, which they were proud of preserving and didn't really want to change.

Q: It was really very southern. The Navy is very southern. One of the kids I played with had a cousin named States Rights. His father was a Naval officer.

COLLINS: Yes, the Navy was very southern. It seemed then that the younger sons in the South who didn't inherit the family business or land went into the Navy. The other thing that struck me about the students at that time was that they were very intelligent and had above average capabilities, but they didn't have much of an education. One of the real shocks was how little the students knew about the outside world, how little they had read.

I think they were probably the top products of middling high schools across the country, and probably indicative of the education offered bright kids in a lot of systems.

I also remember that each year I began to discuss what history was about or why we bother with it by asking the students about historic events they could remember. Remember, this is 1967 or '68. It was a real shocker to me that only one or two mentioned the election of John Kennedy and it seemed that anything before 1961 was the equivalent of Ancient Greek History. I'd imagine today it's similar: Ronald Reagan is sort of like George Washington. So it made me rethink how you would teach history to people this age.

Another shock was in learning their image of the Navy. Unless they were Navy brats, their image of their service, it seemed, was almost totally shaped by the movies. Most had little or no idea about the service they were joining, what it was about. Over the course of four years they learned a lot more, but I'm not sure if that image they brought to Annapolis ever left.

Q: Here you are, your first teaching assignment at the Naval Academy. Was anyone saying, "This is what you'll cover, this is how you'll do it." Was anyone telling you how to run things?

COLLINS: Well there was something known as the "core curriculum," courses everybody took. These courses had a curriculum; they used the same textbooks. It seemed to me much like high school and as a teacher there was little discretion about reading or assignments.

Q: You're coming out then with an Electrical Engineering degree or something.

COLLINS: That had been true. But by this point students did have some choice and could shape their own curriculum beyond the core course requirements. Students could even major in fields other than engineering and sciences, in fields that included humanities and social sciences, but it was still largely a technical engineering school, with history, writing, and other subjects included to make the officer an effective leader and gentleman. So in my time the Academy was in transition between having all prescribed courses (which they had until the early '60s) and a system more like a traditional BA program at other colleges--where you had a certain prescribed percentage of your curriculum and then could select the rest. The so-called elective side was something I had a lot of discretion to develop, so I taught Soviet government and politics, and a course in Russian History. I mostly developed those myself. I picked the readings and did the outline. No one tried to tell me what to do.

Q: Was somebody monitoring you?

COLLINS: Only in the sense that they wanted to know a competent person was in the classroom. But I never had any sense that anyone was trying to tell me what to say. In fact, I think the education and latitude given us was probably no different from those in

any other institution. And we were encouraged to challenge these kids - to make them think, to question. It was professional. In that sense I thought it was in some ways a remarkable institution.

Q: Again, we come back to '67 to '69. This was the height of the protest against Vietnam, our involvement in Vietnam. Did you feel engaged? How did you feel?

COLLINS: It was a bit strange. For most of the Vietnam protest build-up, we had been either out of the country or were in this cocoon in Annapolis. It was not something that penetrated the Naval Academy in any significant way, I would say. Indeed, the mood, as you would expect, was fairly hostile to those criticizing the military or the war effort. I remember in one discussion during the riots in Washington over Martin Luther King's assassination, their reaction was not to ask, "What the hell is going on? What does this mean?" but rather how to deploy the troops to restore order. This was the mentality. Trying to encourage them to think in broader ways could be frustrating.

Q: Here you were a young, still in your mid-20s, civilian, an instructor at an academic university institution, and university people were the prime bomb-throwers in the Vietnam movement. Were you getting any reflections from friends or others saying, "Come on, join the party?" or something?

COLLINS: Not particularly. No. I had gotten the job on my own, not through my professor. It was a time when it was rather difficult to get jobs, because the big expansion of the academic world had peaked and was coming to a close. So people were not getting to pick from 15 offers. They were lucky to get anything. When I found this job, I was the envy of others because it was a known school. It was a reputable place. It was in a place a person would choose to be. So people were not pressing me to do things differently.

I did find in the cocoon there wasn't much protest or questioning. We also didn't have that much connection with the larger academic world outside, although I also taught at the University of Maryland's University College, but this issue didn't come up there, either. But we didn't get to Indiana or Harvard or other universities during those years.

Q: Did you have much opportunity to draw on your time in the Soviet Union or not?

COLLINS: I did discuss that a lot because everybody was curious. This was obviously the kind of thing they wanted to know about. So I used experiences in teaching. But, again, it was a challenge to convey to these kids who were getting ready to go drive some ship of war against the enemy that the enemy was more complex and less one-dimensional that they thought. There were a few who were very interested, but I did not get through to too many. One hopes they at least found out where the place was, how big it was, and how complicated it was; but even with the seniors – and I taught mainly seniors – I was often discouraged at how little they knew even after four years. That said, they were not spending most of their time in these fields.

Q: Was there somebody somewhere else talking about the Soviet Navy and its tactics?

COLLINS: I didn't spend much time on that because they had others who taught sea power and histories. There would be a few kids who wanted to know more and I'd help them with how to go about learning more.

Q: So it's '69... When did you take the Foreign Service exam?

COLLINS: I had taken the exam in December of '66.

Q: In London.

COLLINS: In London. And I took the oral when I came back in '67.

Q: Do you recall anything about the oral exam, any questions or how it went?

COLLINS: Well, I had the impression by the time I came out that they had pretty much made up their mind even before I had gone in that I was someone they wanted. I think it had to do with my background. As far as I know, I was the first ever exchangee to join the Foreign Service. I don't think any other FSOs had participated in that program. Let's put it this way: The oral I had - and I don't remember the names of the people, but there were three senior male FSO's - basically just asked me a few hypothetical questions. "If this happened, what would you recommend?" So I just used my judgment.

I think I took the exam over at Fort Myer Drive, which is where the Foreign Service Board of Examiners was located at that time. I recall it was about three hours long, and not nearly as complex or structured or organized as I gather it is today when they test different skills you need. At that time, too, before "cones" or modern management ideas, it was a more traditional Foreign Service. You were going to be brought in, do consular work or some entry level job, and they would decide what you might become or make of yourself. None of those kinds of things pertained in the oral particularly, either. Nobody seemed to think he was going to do admin work. At that time, we had the Foreign Service Staff and Foreign Service Officers. Admin work was performed by the Staff. There were no Foreign Service Officers doing Administrative work *per se*. The questions were substantive and quite general. I think there were some on economics and on politics, but mainly it was, "If you were..." I remember one question had to do with, "if the Russians did something nasty in Africa, what would you do?" So we discussed the options. I guess I gave them satisfactory answers.

Q: You came in when, in '69?

COLLINS: I actually came in as a state department intern in the summer of 1969 after the academic year was over. I worked as an intern on the then Soviet desk. At the end of the summer, I was brought into the A-100 class that began in August of 1969.

Q: During this short period you were an intern, what was your impression of the Soviet desk, and what were you doing?

COLLINS: I started to understand a little of what people did, but didn't fully understand it. I was trying to help them understand the organization of the Soviet embassy and its diplomatic structure. I did some research on it. And I would go to meetings and sit in on things, but only for about six weeks, until I joined the August class.

Q: Your class: What was the composition? How did you find the people in it?

COLLINS: Well, remember, this is at the height of Vietnam. I did not get anything sooner apparently because of the famous BALPA exercise in which they cut back the size of the Foreign Service. So, I was the first class they brought in for places other than a Vietnam assignment. It was a very small class, only 19 of us, as I recall. We were older. Everybody had been sitting around waiting for a while. I was, I guess, the oldest, at 30, but there were two or three others of similar age.

Q: You were an old man.

COLLINS: The class was quite varied, an interesting group. Some of the people worked for the government, others had held jobs for a year or two. The Vietnam situation was very real because we were told at the outset that half of the class was going to Vietnam. That was a real issue: by this time things weren't going that swimmingly in Vietnam. But most accepted that if asked they would join the CORDS program. I must say that as a husband and father I was not prepared to do that, but fortunately never had to make the choice.

Q: Men and women? Minorities?

COLLINS: Our group became quite congenial and grew quite close. There were two women; both were black. One, Alma Thomas, went on to a successful career at USIA, but I don't know about the other. We had a couple of USIA people, but most were State. At this time the whole A100 course and the consular course lasted only six weeks. You probably know the details. But the main thing that distinguished my class, I think, was our action to put an end to a tradition. In the past, entrants into the A-100 class were supposed to express a preference for where they would like to go for a first assignment. It was also understood an officer could be assigned to any post by personnel. We had a different idea about this whole procedure. We said to them right at the beginning, "We're not going to give you a preference on where we want to go until you tell us what's available. We'll go where you send us, but why should we tell you we want to go to Turkey when there is no assignment in Turkey?" The result was a stand-off for most of the A100 course. Apparently, the State Department of Bureaucracy didn't feel they could assign us until we told them what we wanted. So, they finally did tell us what was available. For better or worse, I believe this was the beginning of the bidding system (which later may have gotten out of hand), but it began with us old guys to whom our view only seemed common sense.

Q: Also, it was a period where young people were taking things in their own hands. "Question authority" was the banner that many people marched under.

COLLINS: Even though we were older, we brought that to the table. It was not that we were trying to rebel or say we won't go to place X, but the existing system just seemed ridiculous. We said at least give us a realistic choice. This was the "leitmotif" of our A100 course. Otherwise, it was rather straightforward.

Q: Where did you want to go?

COLLINS: I would have liked to have returned to Moscow right away, but at that time State would not assign a first tour officer to Moscow. So, I told them I would like to go to Turkey if something came available. I can't remember what else I put. In the end I did go to Turkey, but it was the beginning of a peculiar assignment history for me. I was not originally destined to go there, but someone selected to go or who had an assignment there gave two weeks notice and I got assigned to Izmir.

Q: You went to Izmir, and you were there from when to when?

COLLINS: 1969 to '71.

Q: What was Izmir like at the time?

COLLINS: First of all, it was a Consulate General. When we arrived there were something like six to eight thousand Americans in and around Izmir. But the place and function of the post had diminished over the years before I arrived mostly because of changes in the military presence. NATO's Air Force presence had diminished significantly. The very sizeable Air Force contingent at Cili air base, at one time a large facility that hosted nuclear weapons, had all but disappeared. The LandSoutheast army headquarters remained, and the Air Force had a logistics command that served all the services and the Consulate with everything from communications to commissaries. So, the military presence was still significant and a major part of Consulate responsibilities.

Our Consulate had five Americans at that time, four officers and one secretary. There was the Consul General, Tom McKiernan; a political officer, Bill Rau; an admin officer, Clarence Pierce; and a junior officer, me. I did the economic work, and Clarence and I split the consular work. Tom McKiernan, had started out as a part of the Department's "German Mafia". He had served in Berlin early in his career and was one of those who served as part of the military occupation after World War II. But he had a career that took him also to Africa and his Izmir post was linked to that. He had been brought to Izmir by the then-ambassador Handley, who asked him to take the Consulate General when he went to Ankara. This, it turned out, was Tom McKiernan's last Foreign Service assignment., and he decided that one thing he would do was teach me the business. He did a first rate job, and he became a mentor, helping me understand what the Foreign Service and diplomacy were all about.

Q: You were very fortunate.

COLLINS: Yes. I also think, in retrospect, that it wasn't a bad thing to have been at a consulate. I don't think I'd have benefitted in anything like the way I did at a visa mill on the Mexican border. Izmir was a consulate in the true sense of the word: it did everything. It had a very substantial role in economic and political reporting. It had all the infrastructure and functions of a full Foreign Service post. It gave me the opportunity to do everything from using one-time pads to economic and political reporting: there was no task I didn't do at some point during those two years. It did have some limits as well. Although I learned a good deal about the infrastructure of the Foreign Service, when I went to Moscow for my first Embassy assignment, it was a real revelation. To work at an embassy, particularly in Moscow was a very different kettle of fish. But what I had learned about practical things, like how communications worked, served me well for a whole career, and I never regretted that first consulate assignment.

Q: Was there much contact with the Turkish population?

COLLINS: Oh, sure. We made good friends with the Turks who were neighbors and those we met through my economic and business work, and people our age were open and accessible. The Izmir consulate was a fixture of the Izmir community. It was one of our oldest posts, opened around 1803, and I understood that at one time it was our diplomatic outpost in the Ottoman Empire. At that time the Ottomans wouldn't allow the foreign mission in Istanbul itself, so they used Izmir.

It was also a post very much associated to the long traditions of Levantine life in the Izmir community in the Ottoman period and in post-Ottoman Turkey. After the Crimean War responsibility for the different confessional communities were divided among foreign powers, and non-Muslim citizens had to choose their nationality. The result was a mix of nationalities with roots only in Aegean Turkey. We knew all sorts of people with French passports who had never been to France, Italian passports who had never been to Italy, and so forth around the Levant.

Q: Protégés.

COLLINS: Exactly. And when we were in Izmir the system informally remained. In essence, the French diplomatic mission looked out for the Catholic community. The Greek consul was in charge of the Orthodox. The British had been in charge of the Protestant life, but the British had only an honorary Consul, and because of the realities after the War, the Americans inherited that role. It was also the case that in a more general sense, the Americans were seen as the latest in the line of the foreign protectors for the Levantine community as a whole. So, our consulate was a major element in the town and the region.

Q: Were there a lot of American missionaries there at that time, too?

COLLINS: Yes, although not as many as there had been

Q: There were American missionaries all over the place.

COLLINS: The earliest secondary schools that were established by missionaries in the Levant were in Turkey; one was Roberts College in Istanbul. That was the men's school. The girls' school was in Izmir. It had a rich, long tradition, and was still very much sought after as a place to send a daughter. Later these early schools spread and these missionary traditions founded the American university in Beirut and Cairo and so forth as well.

Q: The Consul General in Izmir - I can't think of his last name right now - during the evacuation of all the Greeks. George something, in 1922 played a remarkable, a very brave role in getting a lot of people out of there.

COLLINS: I don't think we had much sense that those events were seen as a part of life by the time we were there. The mood *vis a vis* Americans in our time was very much a function of the post-World War II Truman Doctrine, the role of the United States in saving the Turks from the Communist menace. That was the environment in which we lived. The big disruptive force in the relationship was always the relations the U.S. had with Greece and everything surrounding the Cyprus question. For the most part, the view of the United States was a positive one, and Americans were seen as part of the protection system. We were quite welcome.

Q: Was Izmir part of the road for hippies and other such young Americans at that time?

COLLINS: We didn't have as much of that as Istanbul and Ankara did, but we had some. I spent a fair amount of time getting people out of jail or visiting them in jail. They got themselves picked up with opium or for some connection to narcotics trafficking. But we didn't have near the problem our colleagues had in Istanbul and Ankara.

Q: Did you get involved in Social Security problems there...

COLLINS: I didn't, because the big social security scandal had happened before I got there. As it was explained to me, it involved not so much the Izmir consular district as the Adana district in southeastern Turkey. A group of Turks from the area - had gone to Detroit before World War II to work in the automobile industry. They had all earned their Social Security benefits, and when they were retirement age, they went back home. Over the years this group developed a mini industry of ensuring that payments never stopped. The key was that no one ever died. People had quadruplets, or whatever it took, to assure that the Social Security system kept providing. I was told—I don't know if it's true or not—that there was one fellow who was getting so many different checks that the Social Security Administration thought he was a town. But by the time I arrived in Izmir, the scandal had largely been cleared up, and with tremendous effort we had sorted out who was real and who wasn't - who was a legitimate claimant and who wasn't. At that point I was told, all Social Security checks had to be picked up in person or delivered by consular personnel to recipients. There was no longer a process of simply putting the

checks in the mail and sending them off to the reported claimant; And that was the procedure we followed as well.

Q: I know at this time I was Consul General in Athens, and we had a Social Security Attaché Butch Corrine who used to have to go over to Turkey and verify things.

COLLINS: We had a fair amount of work verifying the facts about someone who was filing a claim. The most difficult issues we faced came from people from the Balkans. We had lots of people in the district who were Turks originally from either northern Greece, the Thessaloniki area, or from Albania or Bulgaria. They had no records.

Q: There was in the 1920s this exchange of population.

COLLINS: Yes, but they didn't seem to exchange many records., and this was a real problem. Although to give the Social Security Administration people their due, they worked out reasonable and humane ways to deal with the issues. But these cases took time, and we spent a fair amount effort to resolve them.

Q: How did you find the Turkish authorities, people you would have to get in touch with: that you would contact for economic or other reports, or the police authorities to get people out of jail.

COLLINS: I never found any real problems talking with people. Of course, I was sent to Turkey without any Turkish, but got myself up to a two plus in Turkish language the first year, which made it possible to do a fair amount of my professional work quite well. And we had a superb local staff. So, language wasn't a barrier. And people were very open. Once you established some rapport, had the obligatory tea, and exchanged pleasantries almost everyone was only too happy to talk to you or give you information. There were a few key subjects we dealt with in Izmir. One was agricultural produce and marketing; tobacco, for example, was still a big export there; and the whole infrastructure of tobacco: growing, marketing, storing, and so forth, was central to the local economy. It was also the occupation of some of our longest resident American families, some of whom had been in the area for generations. Tobacco and the trade in other agricultural products, especially dried fruits and citrus, were the central exports in the region. The biggest development we were watching was the beginning of Turkish marketing of these products in Europe. Exports to the U.S. aside from tobacco were limited, but Turkey did send a fair amount of raisins to the States.

Izmir also was also the area of new industry and entrepreneurship. So, we were following the development of new industries like paint production which began to take off while we were there. We also followed the broad issue of exports and imports by Turkey as a whole, because Izmir was the country's major exporting port (although imports went elsewhere). Another issue we dealt with every year was the dissatisfaction of Izmir authorities that the United States would not mount a huge exhibition at the Izmir trade fair. The Izmir Fair, had been one of the biggest international trade fairs for the region. It dated back to the post World War I era. By our time, however, like most other such fairs,

it had steadily declined in importance and was almost moribund by the time I got there. It was always a problem to get interest from American exporters to participate and this took a lot of effort for pretty modest return. So, wearing my economic hat, I rarely had difficulty talking to people and getting what information I needed.

For the police authorities (and others) as needed we relied heavily on our staff of Foreign Service Nationals who were extremely competent and well connected in the community. Our relations with the authorities in general were easy. The Turkish authorities, if they were not presented with a problem that made accommodation impossible for them, really didn't want to have problems with American citizens. If there were a way to get an issue resolved short of formal procedures and not put them in the position of having to try a person or put him in prison, they much preferred it. And when they did have to imprison someone, in our district Americans were well treated and we always had open access to them. On the other hand, if someone fell afoul of the law or an issue arose that it was impossible to resolve informally, the authorities could become extremely bureaucratic and very frustrating.

Q: When the Turks want to be bureaucratic, they...

COLLINS: ...they were very good at it.

Q: World class.

COLLINS: Yea. The Ottomans had taught them well.

Q: I realize it was a small outfit, but did you get any feel for the Writ of Ankara?

COLLINS: Well, you mean the central government? First of all, Izmir was of interest in another respect politically because it was the origin of a lot of the people who were then running the country. This was Demirel's home region and it was the region that produced a lot of the people who were the challengers to the Ataturk party.

Q: Bob Dillon made his name by being in Izmir and knowing all these people when they were considered the hillbillies of Turkey.

COLLINS: That's right. But they were in fact very serious players, and they reflected the modern, new economy, the entrepreneurial market economy side of the political spectrum as opposed to the more traditional statist Ataturk tradition. The Ankara-Izmir connection was fairly significant, and I think the relationships were always quite strong. I don't remember seeing a lot of challenges or arguments or disputes between the local folk and the people in Ankara.

Q: Well, Jim, I think this is probably a good place to stop, and we'll pick this up. Is there anything else we should talk about? What did your wife do? How did she find this, by the way?

COLLINS: Well, I suppose what was most important was the beginning it gave to Naomi's effort to square the world of diplomat's wife with her education and preparation for a professional career that often was at odds with being wife of a diplomat. At the beginning all this didn't seem too hard. We moved to Izmir with a one-and-a-half-year-old Robert. Naomi, who had worked in Annapolis, as we discussed, was still working on her Ph.D. thesis and, indeed, completed writing, editing, and typing it while we were in Turkey. We also had our second son in Turkey. He was born in the U.S. Air Force Hospital in Ankara, and he consumed a lot of time as any baby would. So, these two boys kept her more than busy most of the day. But she also found time to teach courses for the University of Maryland overseas program. The University of Maryland taught the military overseas and had degree programs so that the troops could earn a B.A. while moving from post to post. So, in that first post Naomi was able to combine being new mother, diplomat's wife (she was the vice-chairwoman, then chairwoman of the American Women's Association), and continued work in the academic world. It all seemed possible, but it would become harder in later posts as we will see.

Q: One last question: you had a large contingent of Air Force there as well as others. Did this run against the Turkish traditional society? Was this a problem?

COLLINS: By the time I got there, fundamental issues had largely been sorted out and the military was an established part of the community. The political-military issues we had were more about practical issues than policy or political questions. In a peculiar way the issues that were most contentious came from the fact that the military was diminishing; the loss of jobs from closing down facilities brought a good deal of tension with the Turkish union that organized workers on military bases. Those issues were very passionate and very real because they meant the livelihood and jobs of many, many people.

On the day-to-day level there were always customs problems. One of the biggest bureaucratic headaches anybody had was disposing of a motor vehicle, because the prohibition on importing motor vehicles meant interminable paperwork to show that the vehicle's engine number was taken off the official registry of legal vehicles. If it weren't taken off, someone would build an entire car around it. There were also the daily customs issues that came with the military's shipment of household goods, equipment transfers and so forth.

As for politics, the fact that the Turkish military played a major role in LandSoutheast headquarters side by side with the Americans meant there were few real issues about the military presence. We were partners. The one exception to this at that time was a fairly strong leftist anti-American movement. They were responsible for some bombings and other incidents over the time we were there, but that didn't resonate much within the Izmir community.

Q: OK. We'll pick this up next time in 1971, and you're off with Naomi. Where did you go?

COLLINS: We came back to Washington.

Q: Today is the fourth of March, 2004. Jim, 1971, you went back to Washington. What was your job?

COLLINS: Well, that is a complicated question. My return began with a saga of short notice appointments and reassignments. When I left Izmir, Turkey I was detailed to USIA to go as Deputy to the Director in charge of an American USIA exhibit going to the Soviet Union in 1972 with an onward assignment to Embassy Moscow to follow. Let's recall this is the high point of movement toward U.S.-Soviet détente. I returned as preparations for Nixon's first visit to Moscow were beginning. Renewal of the exhibits program, which had been interrupted for several years over the activities of the Jewish Defense League, was to be a part of the broader bilateral program. So I came back to Washington, began the processing to take up the job as Deputy Director for the exhibit. and found some temporary quarters for the family where they could live until they would join me in Moscow after the exhibit assignment (to be six months). All of us then took our home leave and went to Chicago for the holidays to visit my parents.

In Chicago I got a call from personnel saying, well, there had been a change. They told me I was not going to do the exhibit job after all. Instead, it was decided I should accompany the Soviet exhibit on arts and crafts coming to the United States as the reciprocal for the exhibit going to the Soviet Union. I would be one of the two American escorts to travel with the Soviets around the US. This produced a bizarre bureaucratic maneuver as well as lots of upheaval for the Collins's. Earlier, I had been detailed to USIA to go to Moscow on the US exhibit; now I was re-detailed back from USIA to the State Department office in EUR in charge of exchanges (EUR/SES). I was floored. The Moscow assignment was also now seemingly off; family plans were topsy-turvy, I had no idea what was to be involved, and the Department/USIA seemed unable to give me any clarity about what was going on. Meanwhile, all our possessions sat on a dock awaiting shipment to where we'd be after Turkey, so we had no crib, highchair, kid things for our toddlers. It was, I found with time, all too indicative of the way the Department treated its families and its younger officers. It was all too evident why not long after this the family liaison offices, the suit by women for equal treatment, and other demands for change took hold.

Q: Did you ever find out what happened with the assignment?

COLLINS: The whole episode of the assignment was also an eye-opener about how Washington works. The ostensible reason for the change was revealed to me only much later. Apparently the Nixon administration, in all their fine tuning of the nuances of détente, decided that since I had had to leave Moscow as a student in the mid-60s under uncertain circumstances, and there was some question of whether the KGB might have liked to nab me, my presence in the Soviet Union during the summit might become a problem. Why this would have been a problem traveling on a diplomatic passport, I have no idea. In any case the assignment was changed by very senior people and over what seemed to be levels of consideration I could not imagine.

Q: So you are now going around the U.S.

COLLINS: Yes. I took up the job with the Soviet exhibit in early 1972 where it started - in Washington, and over the next year went with it to Los Angeles, St. Paul, Chicago, Boston, and New York, spending a little more than six weeks in each city, and time off between stops. It turned out to be a special time. It was like a senior seminar early on in my career. I got a chance to work in six American cities and learned a lot about this country and its diversity. I travelled with a man named John Karch who was a long time expert on East Europe, a really good man, and I learned a lot from him as well. The year was also a daily seminar on how to deal with U.S. - Soviet relations because every city presented its unique problems, political, economic, social, and personal. And as go between for Soviets and Americans it was real practical training.

I might also say a word about how the family side worked at that time because, of course, they couldn't be with me on the road. Firstly, we had to change all our plans completely in Chicago and on a couple of weeks' notice readjust to staying in the U.S. for a full tour. Fortunately, the first exhibit city was Washington, so we had a bit of time to get organized. But we had to find a more permanent place to live. Making a quick decision, we bought a house, one of the few good things, I suppose, to come out of this venture. Like many who returned to Washington then with children and looked around for housing, we found out that for any suitable housing the rents were higher than the monthly payment on a mortgage. (It was also true then that many apartment buildings did not allow children - no pets, no kids.) So we ended up buying our first house - within three weeks in a city where we had never lived. All of this was possible because both sets of parents helped with the down payment. I think that we got our mortgage for 7% on a \$43,000 house in Bethesda, which by today's standard seems absurd, but at that time was a fair undertaking. The only problem was that the family couldn't move in to the new house until the summer. So, we had to prevail upon my wife's parents in New York to take in their daughter - my wife - and the two little boys and put up with all of that for a few months until they - we - could, in fact, move into the new house. In the end it all worked out well, and I suppose the grandparents didn't mind a lot seeing their grandchildren. They immediately called on neighbors and friends to supply baby gear. And the arrangement was set for the next few months.

Meanwhile, I set off to Los Angeles and then Minneapolis and came back to New York between the cities to see them. I had to pay for most of these family visits personally, out of pocket, once every six weeks. I'd observe now, for younger officers and others, that I lost money all the way through this. The government would not pay for me to come back and see my family. There was absolutely no provision to allow one to live adequately and eat on what amounted to an extended TDY of several weeks in any city. In the end, I think I subsidized the government to the tune of a few thousand dollars that year—as did Naomi's parents who housed and fed the rest of the family.

Q: And that was real money.

COLLINS: That was real money in those days, a significant percentage of my salary, which was then about 12,000 or 13,000 per year. I think these aspects of Foreign Service living at that time took its toll. It was an institution not attuned to people who didn't have independent means, and, frankly, didn't care.

Q: I think you mentioned that one of the untold stories of the Foreign Service is that parents of Foreign Services Officers find during home leave the kids suddenly dumped on them. We've gone through that, and it's both a pleasure and a hell of a burden.

COLLINS: That's right. I think what I took away from that and from watching the stories of others' lives, was the fact that most Foreign Service families, in fact, subsidize the government to a very heavy degree. While it's true that you get your housing overseas and maybe you make a bit of money on renting a property in the U.S., the fact is that you end up subsidizing the government for the costs you incur in all the moves. At least that was the case for us. I'll get into that a little more when we get to Jordan.

In any event, I did go around with this Soviet exhibit. It was an interesting career advancing type of assignment. Very unusual. Because I worked in six American cities with local government, local security forces, local arts patrons, all of the kind of groups of people that surround museums, exhibits, and public events in each of these cities, it was very interesting to watch the real differences in the cultures between and among the cities; how they did things differently and the same. It was also my first ever exposure to the West Coast. It taught me a lot about how these things work. We were largely out there unsupervised on our own.

Q: What was the exhibit?

COLLINS: The exhibit was the first in several years that came from the Soviet Union. It was a combination of artifacts from the historical, art, and Kremlin museums. It consisted of icons as you might expect, historical artifacts from their most ancient collections, and other kinds of paraphernalia of the court. It was a mixed kind of show. They portrayed it as a great art exhibit. In fact, it was as much "craft" as art, usable objects, but it was an interesting exhibit in that it was the first exposure for a long time to a broad spectrum of the historical treasure trove of the Kremlin and other Russian historical museums. It took up several thousand square feet. It was shown in a variety of institutions from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to a small art museum in Hollywood, where it took over the entire museum. It was very successful. It drew big crowds in each city. We were very well received.

Q: I've heard much about our people who have gone with our exhibits—Foreign Service types, USIA, and those who come with exhibits, so let's talk about this side. In the first place, did you get any feel for the museum culture on the Soviet side? Things were changing. Traditionally, it was glass cases, and you put things into them. Were they good presentations, was there a variety?

COLLINS: It was interesting in some ways. First of all, I did get a good sense for the different cultures of different kinds of museums in the U.S. because the exhibit was mounted in very different kinds of American museums. It went to some traditional art museums: The Corcoran in Washington, the Fine Arts Museum in Boston, and the Metropolitan Museum in New York. In these I found the standard art museum culture, a group which I would have to say, I found rather uninspired and uninspiring. The second group were special exhibit museums. These were institutions without much of a permanent collection, if any. They were civic institutions that brought in revolving exhibits. That was true in Los Angeles and St. Paul. Then in Chicago we were in the Field Museum, a natural history museum. It had a very different kind of culture from the art museums. I thought it much more attractive for its emphasis on broad public education.

Q: Every time I'm in Chicago I love to go there because it's fun.

COLLINS: It's a great museum and still is. There the culture was very welcoming. They were more interested in "natural history", ethnography, historical evolution, and so forth. The art museums were all oohing and aahing over the icons, and had little time for the historic objects and what they meant. The special exhibits institutions were interesting because this was a large event for them and they went out of their way to make it successful because drawing crowds was their bread and butter. The other thing that struck me at the time was a lesson I tried to convey to the Russians, particularly in the '90s. Their traditional places to go were New York, Washington, maybe Chicago, and San Francisco. I told them that if they want to have a real appreciation for America, go to the cities that don't get these kinds of visits often. And they will find a welcoming and interested reception in these cities. They had an immense success in St. Paul. They had a really good success in Los Angeles because they weren't in the Los Angeles County Museum. Indeed, when these kinds of exhibits and events are taken to what I would call "second tier" venues, they tended to have a much bigger impact from the standpoint of Russian interests than they do if they go to New York and Washington which are rather jaded about these kinds of visits and events. There's so much going on all the time that it's just another item in the paper. The reaction in these American cities was different: the visitors had newspaper coverage and interviews all the time in places like St. Paul, whereas in New York, there was a review in the *New York Times* just at the opening, and that was it.

Q: What about the Soviet museum types and, I assume, the security types who accompanied them?

COLLINS: It was a very interesting group. It was made up of four groups. First of all, there was a group of curators, people who were museum professionals. We had an icon expert who was a restorer of icons and knew everything there was to know about icons; indeed, I think he lived in the 13th Century. Others were curators in some other museums, and were just as much attached to their world as he was to his. They represented one of the most dedicated groups in the Russian tradition that I know, the preservers of the culture. They're wonderful people, experts in what they do. And they were absolutely

enthralled by the United States at that time which, after all, was a very unusual place for people like that to visit. They were tremendously interested in what was going on in the curatorial world here, in the art world, what kinds of supplies and equipment were used for the work they did and so on. For them this was an experience of almost unimaginable dimensions.

The second group were some young people like our guides. I actually kept up with a few of them over the years. They were mainly out of the more prestigious Moscow or Petersburg—at that time Leningrad—institutions, like the Institute of USA and Canada, the Academy of Sciences, Moscow State University, Leningrad University, and so forth. In many cases they were here because they were Americanists, and this was an opportunity for them to come and see the place in a unique way.

Q: The same way that we were using...

COLLINS: Same way our people were getting to know Russian reality. The third group was the arts management people. This included the man from their embassy who accompanied us, Mr. Dzhyuzhev. It included the director of the exhibit who was the head of a museum in Siberia, a Mr. Podkladkin, a wonderful man, and a couple of other people who managed exhibits. They did contracts, moving details, and so forth, and knew the fields well. They were museum / arts professionals. Finally, there were those who accompanied the group to keep track of everybody—two or three of them—who were rather obvious.

Q: Did they have a heavy hand?

COLLINS: Not really. One was an Armenian, for instance, whose job may have been more to make contacts with the Armenian community in the United States than simply to track his own people. At one point there was a Lithuanian man: that was in Chicago. Sure, they had to keep people in line and make sure that things were done in an acceptable way, but they were not particularly heavy handed. It was a fairly small group, traveling together for a long time, so it was hard to be too heavy handed.

Living with these people, being with them constantly for weeks on end and watching their reactions, talking to them about what made an impression on them was an interesting experience, and an eye opener. It showed how important it is simply to expose people who don't know the culture to the daily realities. You never know for sure what they take away from it, nor will it necessarily be what you planned they should. But it was a transformative experience for them and, on balance, always positive. They can never see us quite the same way after they've lived with Americans for a while. That's one reason I've been a great advocate of exchanges: it makes a huge difference in the lives of people and how they perceive us--and the world.

Q: Exchanges have been a great source. We were just looking at a news brief saying foreign student applications have gone down, which I think we both consider a real

tragedy because this has been so much a part of our strength. We always come out ahead. Way ahead. What were you doing? What was your role?

COLLINS: Essentially, John and I were facilitators/liaisons between the exhibit, which traveled as a unit, and all the elements of the local establishments where it showed. We made sure things like security, relations with local mayor's offices, museum admissions policies, etc. worked consistent with policy and regulations for the exhibits program and served our foreign policy objectives. One of the main concerns was security, so we worked almost daily with the local police, FBI, and others to prevent disruptions of the exhibit and ensure the security of the Soviet staff.

Q: I would think, particularly in a place like Chicago, you would have encountered some pretty rabid anti-Soviet feelings.

COLLINS: The "captive nations" community was certainly alive and well in the city at that time, and the Jewish Defense League was still radical and militant. So, there were genuine security concerns. We were, of course, dealing with people in museums who didn't encounter this kind of thing often. So, it was important to make sure there weren't misunderstandings; for example, over things like press coverage and admissions policies. I also got an intellectual and professional education about what it means to conduct programs that require two different cultures to work together; and each museum had its own way of doing business, usually very different from anything that the Russians ever had experienced. Everything was on the table, from the political dimensions of organizing the arrival of a Soviet delegation in a city like Los Angeles, to the nuts and bolts of how they would share the proceeds from pre-season ticket sales and such. Our job was to smooth these bumps and make sure the show went on. So, we worked with local officials and with the State Department and USIA almost daily, because in the background we knew the issue reciprocity loomed at all times: if anything went wrong in the U.S., it would almost inevitably affect our exhibit in the Soviet Union.

Q: When you take your young guides from either country to the other, they tend to get very enthusiastic about things. It's a little bit like herding cats. I would think you might have the problem in the Soviet Union of some of these guides trying to get people out or trying to do something inappropriate, and there would be pressure put on some of the guides, "Oh, come on. Stay with us."

COLLINS: In my experience our guides were selected carefully: they were pretty sophisticated and also disciplined and well trained. Our guides in the Soviet Union were subject to provocations all the time, but those efforts didn't get anywhere. I didn't experience that kind of problem my year, but you're right: there were some cases here too, not government orchestrated.

Q: More by the local.

COLLINS: More by the local ethnic communities. There were lots of people trying to make sure the Soviet staff members would see the light while they were here, but these

kinds of overt efforts usually had less impact than the daily encounters our Russian guests had with the visitors to the exhibit or their counterparts. Having dinner in a home for instance, I always thought made a much bigger impact on them than any proselytizing.

Q: I take it you were given pretty loose reins.

COLLINS: Yes. The job was basically, "Go make this work: we don't want to hear about you or see you in the news." That's what we were tasked to do.

Q: After this finished, what happened?

COLLINS: The exhibit closed in New York in the fall of '72, and then I came back to Washington. By that time, we had the house in Bethesda and the family was settled. I returned to work again at State, but in a peculiar way. Because my detail to USIA was still in effect, USIA detailed me, a State Foreign Service Officer, back to the State Department. I suppose this made sense to some in the fiscal section, but it was bureaucratically bizarre. At State I was assigned to the office then called the Soviet and Eastern European Exchanges Office of the Bureau of European Affairs, EUR/SES. The office was in the hands of people who really knew the exchanges world. The deputy was Yale Richmond who has written what is still probably the definitive book on U.S.-Soviet exchanges - you might have talked to him at some point. Charles Steffen who had long time experience with exchanges directed the office. The job was focused on implementation of a part of the broader exchanges program with the Soviet Union and East Europe.

This programs we administered were based in one of the earliest agreements with the Soviets. A bilateral cultural agreement negotiated in the late 1950s created the initial framework within which all of the subsequent exchanges took place: exhibits (the Nixon visit to the Soviet Union in '59 and the famous "Kitchen Debate" being the first), joint cultural and scientific work, educational exchanges, all fit under this Enabling Act. EUR/SES had the job to execute the provisions of the agreements with the eastern bloc of countries and the Soviet Union. I had responsibility for a number of exchange programs, including with the National Academies of Sciences, the Graduate Student Young Professor Exchange (in which I had participated earlier), and a number of discreet programs. The work involved tasks like administration of visa procedures, travel controls, liaison with host institutions, and ensuring consistency of programs with the overall agreement's provisions.

In the meantime, I was also still slotted for a position in Moscow in the summer of 1973. And while working in EUR/SES. I was also preparing for the Moscow tour. At this point, in a shock, that certainly put the world in a new perspective, I learned that I had testicular cancer and within a week had urgent surgery. Successful, I then went through what I don't wish on anyone, very powerful cobalt radiation treatments, much more powerful than what I think they use today. In any case the treatments made me sick as a dog for weeks. But I came out, as you can see, and thanks to a good family doctor, the late Dr. Curtis of Bethesda, got through the whole episode in good health. Of course, it was not

quite that simple at State. The cancer raised all sorts of Foreign Service problems, primarily medical clearances. So, the family and I were kept on tenterhooks for weeks as to whether or not the Moscow assignment would go through. Finally, the Medical division decided that I could go because monitoring was all that my condition required. So whether I was here or there would not affect things, didn't make a difference. An interesting sidelight is that having had radiation, having had cancer, I was never told by anyone of the great microwave issue despite the implications microwave exposure might have had for someone in my circumstances. Of course, none of this was known to us junior officers when we were assigned, and I don't even know if the medical division was informed at the time.

Q: Yes. Could you explain what the great microwave issue was?

COLLINS: The embassy in Moscow had for years been subject to microwave bombardment from sources around the embassy building. To the best of my knowledge, no one ever knew why the Soviets mounted the program. Nearly everyone assumed it had to do with communications, that the Russians thought they could either disrupt or intercept/monitor communication this way. There were some further out ideas - that the microwaves were designed for behavior modification, for example. And no one knew about health consequences. In any case, this had been going on for years. It was monitored and known to senior officials, but kept totally secret. Then, in the middle of our tour in Moscow, it all blew up. I cannot remember how it became public. Perhaps someone had contracted an unusual cancer or health issue, or there was a leak from somewhere. Certainly there were articles in the *New York Times* as the story got momentum, and the Embassy community was up in arms. A big investigation started and lasted several years. The State Department reported that the exposure of Embassy staff was not consequential for health. That was met with a lot of skepticism, of course and meanwhile, I'd been sent out, never having been told about this or so far as I know having the issue considered as I was considered for a medical clearance. I have to say, it was pretty irresponsible.

Q: Oh, sure.

COLLINS: That in this kind of a medical situation no one even decided that it was worth raising this issue or even simply denying us the clearance. Frankly, I would say it was callous disregard for fundamentals at a point that not enough was known about the impact of the microwaves on a cancer patient. The history of this whole episode, the revelation about the microwave bombardment, and then how the investigation was handled eroded the confidence of people involved in the integrity of the Department's management - in those who were supposed to look out for our welfare. Nobody knew what the stakes were here. And although some people were totally emotional and probably irrational about the subject, it was a fact that the levels of radiation involved were above what Russia considered safe, but not what the U.S. considered acceptable. It also remained a fact that a considerable number of people who served in Moscow with us contracted cancer after that assignment. Most notably, perhaps, the then Ambassador, Walter Stoessel, who died of a rare cancer, which many people believed was linked to the radiation. Johns Hopkins

University did an epidemiological study, but there were suspicions that they were not provided complete information on Embassy personnel who were struck by cancer and therefore their results were based in incomplete data. There were all kinds of questions raised about this.

Q: All of this affected even those of us who weren't involved. I know I had served earlier in Yugoslavia, and I got one of these questionnaires.

COLLINS: I know.

Q: Anyone who served in a Communist country seems to have gotten these. Did Nixon talk to Brezhnev about this and say, "Cut it out."

Q: There were efforts to do something about it, but it never really had effect and this microwaves continued until the Soviet Union disappeared although the levels were reduced I understand.

Q: You know, you expose it and say, "Don't do it." This is the sort of thing you could stop.

COLLINS: Well, I think it could have been made more of an issue, but, you know, this was seen as spy vs. spy as much as anything. A lot of the biggest problems of the embassies in both Washington and Moscow were tied to that culture and the inordinate role that both intelligence communities had in driving a lot of the way business was done.

Q: I was just interviewing Don Gregg who is at CIA on an intelligence review panel after some revelations came out, and he was saying he was astounded to find out that we were doing drug experiments on people who didn't know they were being used. These were Americans.

COLLINS: Yes! This is very unsettling stuff. I think you have to look back and ask, "Where was the oversight and the common sense?" "Where was the sense of right and wrong?" I think it gives you pause when you have a mentality that can justify this kind of action. This idea that we are at war even in time of peace and that this justifies such things is very worrisome.

Q: Before we move on: What do you think the Soviets felt they were getting out of the exchange program, because we obviously were able to penetrate a closed society with our exhibits, but why were they doing it.

COLLINS: I think it's a very good question. I don't think there is a single answer. Obviously, in many of the exchange programs on the education side and the scientific and cultural side, they wanted access to modern American science and engineering. If you remember one of the great controversies of the late '60s and '70s, was over the fact that this was a one-sided exchange. A lot of critics said we were sending poets, and they were sending nuclear physicists, and that we weren't getting much out of it. The other

side of the coin was that Americans never felt we could learn anything from anybody else. I think it is certainly the case that a very tangible and practical reason the Soviets pursued the academic and scientific exchanges lay in their interest in western science and technology. They were very isolated from this world, and they were interested in this for all the obvious reasons. On the cultural side, I think they persuaded themselves that putting a human face on the Communist system was worthwhile. The visits had an inordinate impact, as people realized, "Gee. These are actually people," rather than some abstract ideological monster with horns. It was good PR. And then, they sent artists, performers, and others from whom they also made some money.

But most of all I think they saw it was an antidote to the heavy-handed propagandistic visions that were the coin of the realm in the American media, politics and society. To a degree they were right to think these programs had an impact. The image of the Soviet Union and its communist system was so hyped and distorted in this country that it was an easy target. We saw exchanges somewhat differently in that the Soviet people were so isolated from any contact with the rest of the world, simply the idea that you would meet an American for two minutes or that you could see inside some part of the United States even briefly was a huge attraction. And we attracted millions to these exhibits. It was truly incredible! And its impact was lasting. I would meet people in the seventies or nineties who would recall meeting an exhibit guide or attending a concert by Dave Brubeck forty years earlier as though it were yesterday, and discuss it like a life-changing moment Russians remember these events and individuals in a way Americans don't seem to. It's both quite touching and quite instructive, this kind of impact.

Q: Ok. Let's pick this up in 1973 when you arrived in Moscow. We already touched on the radiation issue. I'd like to talk about what the situation was when you arrived, how relations were between the two countries. You were there from when to when?

COLLINS: We were there from August, 1973 to August, 1975. It was a normal two-year assignment. We went out as a family with two young children.

Q: How old were the kids?

COLLINS: One was born in 1968, so he was five. He started kindergarten the year we arrived. The younger boy was two, born in 1971.

Q: You were saying you didn't quite know what your job was going to be?

COLLINS: Again, there had been another assignment saga for me - now almost routine. I just didn't seem to do the normal thing in assignments. As I wound up my tour with the exhibit and time in EUR/SES, I had been slated to go into the job of the embassy's publications procurement officer. In the Soviet period, that was a very interesting position for a younger officer because it was one of the very few positions that allowed you to travel a lot. It was designed to do what the embassy could to ensure that we collected for the Washington intelligence community and the Library of Congress copies of Soviet publications in Moscow and in the other Soviet regions that were of interest to our

clients. There were long lists of wants, and the job was to go out and buy books. I thought this was going to be near Nirvana. During our student days there, I did a great deal of book buying and collecting for myself and now to get paid to do this was beyond good fortune.

Q: I've talked to some people doing this, and they had a hell of a lot of fun.

COLLINS: It was a great job. I was all geared up by summer, and I had done most of the orientation to get ready for it. I didn't need language training because I had Russian language when I came into the Service. But then, two or three weeks before I was to go, I got called by personnel - I think from 'the European Bureau - and they said, "Well, we really think we want you to take another job because one of the officers who had been assigned to the political section has opted to take a different position in the embassy. So we'd like you to take the position in the political section responsible for reporting on Soviet foreign policy in all of the third world except Asia. It excluded Europe, China, Japan, and the rest of the Far East, but the job covered everything else. This was, to say the least, somewhat daunting. I really had no background in any of these areas because I had done Soviet and East European studies. All that seemed relevant was my assignment in Turkey. But a bit like the first assignment to Turkey, I left with almost no chance to prepare for becoming the Embassy expert on the Arab-Israeli issue, and on Africa, Latin America, or the Subcontinent. So, I arrived in Moscow in August, 1973, with almost no background for the job, and I set out to try to catch up. I know it is not that unusual for Foreign Service people to move to new areas of work, but this was tough and I knew of few who had only two weeks to prepare for a job like the one I entered.

Q: It was a time of very active diplomacy on the part of the United States. Our policy toward the Soviet Union was on the front burner.

COLLINS: I arrived in Moscow one year after the 1972 summit and the launch of what was known as *detente*. So, it was a time of active diplomacy bilaterally. We were well into the process started in 1972 of establishing a number of programs based on bilateral agreements with the Soviet government. There had been some previous efforts, such as in the cultural area, including the famous one that launched a variety of exchange programs including of exhibits that in the Kitchen Debate. The new agreements expanded those initiatives. By the time I left they were covering such fields as housing, health, work on earthquake prediction, scientific subjects and, of course space. In other words, the '72 summit resulted in a number of initiatives to broaden engagement between the American and Soviet governments. All this was brought under the rubric of *detente*.

Along with these projects there were also on-going arms control negotiations, and there were a variety of efforts to establish a commercial relationship. All of these things were background as I arrived, and at least at the outset I was fortunate to be overseeing a rather sleepy portfolio as the key attention was on the bilateral relationship and arms control.

Q: I know in London and in Paris we had a Middle East person, an African person. Did we have any equivalent to that in Moscow?

COLLINS: From time to time we had had in Moscow people with Middle East background. Indeed, some of my predecessors in the position I had were experts in Middle East or in Africa and had served there before coming to Moscow. I had no such experience other than the assignment to Turkey. My background was really the Russian-Soviet-East Europe world itself. And while I had background in a variety of areas that focused on that region, I had to begin afresh *vis-a-vis* the Middle East

Q: What about China, Asia

COLLINS: The China portfolio from the time of the Sino-Soviet rift had most often been staffed by officers who worked on both countries. When I was there, for instance, Curt Kammen and Stape Roy both experienced China hands, had the position. No one had been in mainland China at that point, but our China experts were gifted and expert in the Sino-Soviet relationship and were experienced China watchers.

Q: So you arrive in the late summer of 1973, things are rather sleepy on your account. They didn't stay that way did they?

COLLINS: No they didn't. Rather, with my feet barely on the ground, I found my work catapulted to the front of our agenda by the October '73 Arab-Israeli war.

Q: Known as the Yom Kippur War?

COLLINS: Known as the Yom Kippur War. In some ways that tragedy was a windfall for me professionally. First, my areas moved from backwater to headlines and I found myself at the center of high-level diplomacy. When I went out, of course, I was assured that the Middle East would be a sleepy account, that I would have plenty of time to read in because nothing significant was foreseen for the area. U.S.-Soviet diplomatic work on the area centered largely on the UN and complex negotiations about implementation of UNSC Resolution 242. A rush of diplomacy, including the famous Glassboro Summit, had followed the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, but by the time I arrived in Moscow the diplomacy had taken on a routine almost pro forma pattern that kept diplomats busy but didn't seem to be going anywhere. The war changed all that overnight, and it certainly changed my job.

Second, events also called on me to change the way I saw things professionally. It called on me to think about issues central to the U.S.-Russian relationship at a strategic level. I had never had that kind of experience. My subjects were suddenly the ones that the President, the Secretary of State, the newspapers, and all my diplomatic colleagues in Moscow were focused on.

Third, and for me something of a godsend, the war changed the vocabulary, the framework, the context that everybody used to look at the Arab-Israeli crisis and the Middle East. The diplomacy about Middle East questions in the bilateral relationship was transformed overnight, and as I was in on the ground floor, I had a role in shaping this

vocabulary and the ways our people looked at what the then-Soviet government was doing in that part of the world. Further, for U.S.-Soviet relations more broadly the nuclear alert that came in the middle of the War was a watershed moment that underscored the dangers of escalation even in regional conflicts away from Europe's lines of confrontation.

And finally, this period gave me a crash course in understanding the role of an embassy and the role of someone like myself in an embassy in dealing with a national level, presidential level, secretary of state level issue. I had been, remember, in a consulate in Turkey far from anybody's real issues except for the narcotics problems that became a major issue between Washington and Ankara in the early seventies. When I returned to the Department, I was in an area on the margins of the U.S.-Soviet policy arena. Our issues in EUR/SES were not the ones on the Seventh Floor's menu. In Moscow all of a sudden I was dumped into a quintessentially seventh floor policy issue engaging the leadership of the two countries. It meant having to think in those elevated terms, and to look at things from an embassy's point of view. It was a real eye-opener and called for a lot of changes in my way of thinking. For my professional development, it was a crash course in moving me from academic into policy thinking.

Q: It's about, "What do you do?"

COLLINS: That's right. And what are your options. It ceased to be analytic/academic thinking about what you were reading and became a question of, "How does this fit?" or "How does it have a role in defining or shaping or affecting the policy choices that are being discussed?" It was a critical moment for me, and it was the single biggest thing, after my choice to study Russian in high school, that shaped my career choices from then on.

Q: Let's go through the time. First, the '73 war started with a surprise attack by the Egyptians on Israel. How did that hit you all in Moscow, and can you talk about the how things developed? What were we doing, and what were the Soviet reactions?

COLLINS: First of all, I was control officer for a Congressional Delegation (Codel in the parlance) when the War broke out. In the embassy, we were reasonably well informed for the time: but by today's standards, we were totally information deprived: we had the AP and UPI tickers; we had reports from the department and other agencies; we had limited access to foreign radio (all short wave and poor quality because of jamming): there was no television or visual material outside Soviet TV. The international press (mainly the International Herald Tribune) arrived two or three days late. And use of the telephone was not common for business communication. Otherwise we were behind or dependent on highly ideologically colored Soviet coverage., in this case biased in favor of the Arab side.

On the policy side the long-standing Soviet relationship with Nasser and with the Arab side of the equation set them against our support for Israel, and we were dealing implicitly with whether our reaction to events was going to upend the gains of the new

détente. This became most graphic when our detection of the movement of Soviet nuclear weaponry through the Bosphorus and the nuclear alert that was called put us on a path of confrontation that seemed to question all the work that had gone into changing the pattern of relations. As an aside, by the way I might note that as an officer, I found out about the alert from the AP ticker.

Certainly, the war brought back the highest level of anti-American rhetoric from all quarters. At the early stages of the crisis there was portrayal of the conflict as Cold War jockeying in one of the hotspot regions of the world where big stakes were at play. But as we provided a variety of kinds of support for Israel, the US. was played up in the Soviet media as warmongers, perpetuating the occupation of Arab lands.

Q: Were we picking up that at the upper levels, the Soviets might have their nose out of joint? Because Sadat had kicked Soviet advisors out and went ahead with this. Did they seem to be complicit in.?

COLLINS: I honestly can't say. Yes, there had been obvious tensions between the Egyptians and the Soviets, but when the war broke out, much of that was seen as neither here nor there. The Soviet stake in Egypt was large and suddenly at grave risk. It wasn't just with the Egyptians after all. While they might not have wished the war to break out, once it did they saw their stakes across the region were at risk.

Q: Of course, they were big suppliers of Syria.

COLLINS: Yes, and Iraq. So, there was no question they saw what happened in the war as having serious implications for the Soviet role in the Arab world and the image of the Soviets as a useful and powerful ally. Early on it looked like the Egyptians were doing well, and the Soviet reaction was what you might expect: that this was a legitimate effort to regain occupied territory, the occupation's been going on for far too long, etc. Implicitly, this line continued until the turnaround on the ground. Once the Israelis began the successful pushback, Moscow faced new and very difficult questions about the fate of Egypt, and a new phase of Middle East diplomacy began.

From my vantage point that phase became a professional game changer. It ended the normal work week and put the seven-day week in its place: it ended life in a backwater and put me in the center of a maelstrom; it meant I was playing in the big leagues overnight. This change really began when Henry Kissinger made his famous first trip to Moscow as part of his shuttle diplomacy in October. He arrived at the time that the Egyptian army was in deep trouble, and the question discussed with the Soviet authorities was what kind of arrangement could stop the fighting before a disaster for either side. Up to this point I had been reporting on what we could figure out about Soviet thinking from the way the media played events and from the few contacts I could reach at a time when official contacts were pretty well shut down. I had not, of course, been privy to any significant degree to what was happening as Kissinger began his extraordinary shuttle diplomacy. Nor was I privy to what went on in his discussions with the Soviet leadership, but I did get questions from time to time. What to me seemed evident was that we didn't

see it in our interest to have the Israelis over extend themselves or events take a turn that might bring the Soviets in to save the Egyptians from collapse. This was the beginning of a series of trips Kissinger made over the issue of the cease fire and the beginning of negotiation between Egypt and Syria. and Israel to stabilize the situation and stop the war.

Q: What role did you play during these visits?

COLLINS: Well, as I said I was not really in the policy circle, but it was my initiation into the mysteries of a Secretarial visit. I had never had a job that involved me with the principals of the Department. I think I had met Kissinger once when he and Ambassador Dobrynin came to open the Soviet exhibit I escorted in 1972. So the Kissinger visits were an eye opener about how the seventh floor worked, relations among the principals who were travelling with the Secretary, and how the whole support structure that kept the show going was put together. This would become a major asset later when I came to run the Operations Center.

On this first Kissinger trip I became one of the control officers not because I was part of the policy group, the farthest thing from the travelling party's mind I am sure, but because I had good language skills. I was put to work in the compound where Kissinger was housed, and I did liaison work between various Russians and the party—the KGB, secret service, communications technicians, food providers and cooks, etc. the practical matters involved in the care of a Secretary of State. At that time the Soviet Government housed the travelling party up on what was then called Lenin Hills (today, Sparrow Hills) in a guest compound that overlooked the city. Because I did this work the first time, I became something like an appendage to the Kissinger travelling team, and each time they came thereafter I ended up doing the same tasks. It was my first real experience around the Secretary of State, his immediate seventh floor staff, and all the others brought out for the trip. I hardly knew it at the time, but many of these same people would become part of my career later when I joined the Near East Bureau. Another side benefit was broadening the number of Soviet contacts I had, in particular with a young Soviet diplomat, Eduard Malayan who would cross my career path for the next three decades.

The visits also had a further effect on my working environment. Not long after the cease-fire, the U.S. began reestablishing relations with Arab capitals with whom we had broken diplomatic ties in 1967. As a practical matter that meant that when I arrived in Moscow I could not see most of the Arab diplomats who were my counterparts. It also meant that they were off the screen for the ambassador and senior people except perhaps casually at national day events. But we were not supposed to be talking to them. Following the Kissinger trips this all changed, and I suddenly was sought out by my Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi colleagues. This circle of professional contacts broadened our understanding of what the Soviet relations with the Arab world truly involved and gave me an immensely richer pool of information about how the Soviets were conducting their business in the region. It also brought home the reality that the Soviets had few real friends in the Arab world and were dependent on their military aid and international support they provided the Arabs for whatever influence they had.

Q: Who was the ambassador at this time? Who were your colleagues?

COLLINS: When I arrived we were between ambassadors. The *Chargé* was Spike Dubbs, and it was several months before Walter Stoessel arrived as ambassador. Mark Garrison was the political counselor, and the political section was quite small. We had an internal and external division. I was part of the latter working for Warren Zimmerman and with Mike Joyce, and Curt Kammen as colleagues. On the internal side Martin Wenick headed the division initially and he was followed by Donald Graves. Melvyn Levitsky and Eric Ronhovde were the other colleagues there. So it was a small group. But then, if I recall correctly, the entire embassy had approximately 50 to 60 officers,

Q: Tell me a little about your work? Who were your Soviet contacts? Who were your audience?

COLLINS: Being a relatively small political section had its advantages. Our portfolios were broad. Mine included Soviet policy toward the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, and the Subcontinent, a big area, but one, as I noted before, that was frankly seen as something of a backwater when I arrived. The focus at that point was on the summit topics - *détente*, arms control, bilateral agreements, space cooperation, etc. So, I had the luxury of being left largely alone to read in pretty much out of the limelight. I also had the chance to establish working relations with the Soviet officials in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic colleagues, and many others who were engaged with my issues. So, when the October War erupted, I was the only one in the Embassy in any regular contact with key Middle East actors, people like Yevgeny Pyrlin and Deputy Foreign Minister Sytenko, who led the MFA Middle East division and Yevgeniy Primakov who even then was a major figure in Middle East affairs in Moscow and was known to be, if not the, then a main contact with Yasser Arafat. That meant I was suddenly in the center of the maelstrom. I was the one with the ready-made contacts and information sources everyone needed: I quickly got a lot of assignments from high up to go and find out X, Y, or Z, because I was the only one who knew these people. As the post-war diplomacy evolved the demands became more diverse and complex. As Kissinger's diplomacy moved from consolidating the cease fire to the diplomacy surrounding the Geneva Conference framework he redefined the next big round of negotiation over the Arab-Israeli dispute, the framework that lasted for almost five years, until Camp David. This was also the time when Egypt shifted toward the US, abandoning the Soviet connection that had defined its international position since Nasser.

Q: Until Camp David, and then Afghanistan, really...

COLLINS: Yes. The Geneva framework lasted until Sadat's visit to Israel and Camp David redefined Middle East diplomacy again and became the next context for Arab-Israeli diplomacy. But for five years the Geneva Conference framework was what everybody used as the way to discuss diplomacy about the Middle East. It was the basis on which Kissinger kept the Soviets on board as he put America at the center of diplomacy in the Middle East, brought about a realignment between the U.S. and Egypt,

got the cease fires and stabilized the armistice after the '73 war, and set the terms under which negotiations subsequently took place. In retrospect, it was also this strategy and Kissinger's diplomacy that almost certainly saved the improvements in Soviet relations from collapse, and took us from emerging confrontation and a nuclear alert to a diplomacy that more or less kept the Middle East from becoming the premature graveyard of détente.

The focus on the Middle East for most of my remaining time--a year and three-quarters--also meant intense interest in whatever the Soviet government was saying, thinking, doing, or planning regarding the Arab-Israeli negotiations, the Arab-Israeli peace process, arms shipments, etc. Whatever they were up to in the Middle East was a heavy topic, and I found my readership had an insatiable appetite for what the Soviets were doing in their bilateral relationships with Arab countries. In particular, how they were changing their approach to the PLO and the Palestinians was a key subject for Washington and one on which I was well informed because of key contacts among the Arab community and among the Soviets involved.

Q: The Palestine Liberation Army.

COLLINS: Yes. The PLO. It was during this time that the Soviet government moved from treating the Yasser Arafat and his PLO as an organization without political status toward giving them political standing as representing Palestinian interests. At the outset their relationships were run through intelligence channels. But after the 1973 War, the Soviets moved to elevate the relationships to a diplomatic level, almost a recognition of the PLO. Indeed, they did recognize the PLO as a political actor by the time I left, and one of the things I followed closely was their steps toward that end. My unique Arab sources in Moscow gave me a special place from which to do this work.

Q: What about the subject of the PLO and its connection with terrorism at that time? Was that a major stumbling block? Was it a major factor or not?

COLLINS: The whole framework of thinking about terrorism was different then. Most of what we call terrorism got attention when it involved hijacking aircraft and in fact most of the talk of the time was about preventing hijacking aircraft. Israel had suffered from terrorist activity and some grievous attacks, but terrorism was for the most part not seen as a major threat elsewhere. The West Bank, remember, was still under Jordanian control, and so even in the Middle East terrorist activity was less widespread than it would become later. What we were looking at were spectacular events, bombings, kidnappings, hijackings, some kind of event. Terrorism was an issue, but it was not yet the issue that it was to become. I don't think we then had that much discussion of terrorism.

Q: Terrorism was hijacking.

COLLINS: It was hijacking. And you had spectacular outrages like the Olympics massacre.

Q: In '72 or something like that.

COLLINS: Yes. There was a lot of debate at the time over to what extent Arafat was responsible for this or to what extent other groups were responsible. I remember there was always interest in which groups the Soviets were connected to and how much influence they had with them. The emphasis on terrorism was to come later, but hijacking was very much on the mind of everybody at that time. I remember one very difficult hijacking case that I had to address when a Lithuanian Soviet citizen hijacked a plane in Turkey. The United States ended up on the horns of a dilemma about whether this guy was a freedom fighter and refugee escaping Lithuania and therefore had acted legitimately to flee persecution; or was this a hijacking and inexcusable no matter that the cause. There was a great deal of back and forth about this between the Soviets who were pressing the Turks and holding our feet to the fire, wanting the guy back. They were catching us between our absolute aversion to hijacking especially in light of the hijacking epidemic that took U.S. planes to Cuba

Q: Which is going on at that time.

COLLINS: Yes. Or whether we could justify it saying the man had a legitimate reason. In fairness, we came down in the right place in spite of conflicting pressures. What we did as I recall was to support his being tried in Turkey and not being sent back to the Soviet Union. It was one of those decisions that satisfied no one but also preserved the principle that hijacking was not acceptable, period.

Q: Going back to the start of the October war, how seriously at the embassy did we take the nuclear escalation that was going on?

COLLINS: We took it very seriously. Whether the charge had a heads up I've never really known, but my guess is probably not. What I do know is that I and most of my colleagues found out about it from the news tickers I don't recall that there was any warning given to the Soviets, but the historic record will show yes or no. As I understood the situation the alert was in response to intelligence we had that the Soviets were moving nuclear weapons through the Bosphorus at the time the Egyptian army was in increasingly desperate shape. This was read as a move to change the military equation unilaterally. It quickly became serious business and a source of real danger. Just how serious -- I would say that it represented the kind of brinkmanship on both sides, which, we had not seen since Cuba, and given the mood of the time, it was terribly dangerous.

Q: The Soviets were said to have alerted the airborne forces, too.

COLLINS: That is what I understand as well. They were doing lots of things that were indicators they were planning something in response to the Israelis' success. Our side was determined not to see them intervene or use the circumstances to increase their authority, influence, or control over the states where they were already deeply ensconced. The real danger at that point was that people were afraid this could easily go to the next step. It was not at all clear what our reaction was going to be, but it was quite clear that we were

trying to signal we would react. It was more the escalation than the alert itself that was of serious concern.

Q: After the Cease-Fire, was there a visible relieving of pressure on all sides, would you say?

COLLINS: Yes. I think once the military situation was clarified, at least to the extent that the Israelis were not going to destroy the Egyptian military or move across the Suez Canal, and on the Syrian front, too, things were at least stabilized, a lot of the worry that the Soviets were going to move in was defused. I think it then shifted further when Henry Kissinger agreed that we, Washington and Moscow, would jointly oversee the negotiation process. In Moscow, this was trumpeted as a way the Americans finally accepted that the Soviets really had a role in the region; sort of legitimating that role. I think the American side understood all along that it was unlikely the Soviets would expend much capital with their Arab friends to push the process toward peace. But what began then was a rather consistent and skillful effort by Kissinger and the American side to keep the Soviets from being too troublesome; we kept saying, "You are a part of all this," while the Kissinger team undertook key negotiations and shuttle diplomacy which brought these new stabilized arrangements under the Geneva Conference mantle, a new framework for negotiating.

What I remember most about this was that as the negotiations after the war went on, and we saw a warming of U.S. relations with Egypt in the context of the Israeli-Egyptian negotiation that Kissinger led, I often found myself an intermediary with Soviet officialdom on what was happening. The Soviet government didn't quite know what to think about what was taking place. Our relations with both Egypt and Syria went more or less from nothing to the quite extraordinary relationships that Kissinger built with Hafez Assad and Sadat. The only response from the Soviets was to increase steadily the place of their Palestinian card, where they remained a key player and we had no contacts, and to remind their Arab clients about their vital role as military equipment supplier. They also enhanced their relations with Iraq as an offset, but this had limited impact on Arab-Israeli issues and to a considerable extent complicated their relations with other Arabs. These things were going on as we increased our influence and role with the two core players. Remember, the Jordanians had not got into the war, so it was a given that they were a key player and basically pro-Western, pro-U. S.

Q: Who was calling the shots in the Soviet government at this point? A little later you began to get this gerontocracy, but at the time that hadn't really taken over.

COLLINS: That's true. These were the old men, but they hadn't yet come to the gerontology that would set in in the 80s. The key interlocutors for Kissinger were Gromyko and Brezhnev. Certainly on the large issues, in the Geneva context, his principal interlocutor to start out with would always be Gromyko, but Gromyko never acted on his own. The American account and the Middle East with it was always a politburo issue. The channels we used to convey authoritative messages, say from Kissinger, were three people. At the Assistant Secretary level, a man named Pyrlin whom

I saw fairly regularly was the working level contact. He was the Arab-Israeli specialist, not all the Middle East. Deputy Minister Sytenko was the man the Ambassador would see. He was responsible for the entire Middle East region and a key player: the ambassador saw him regularly and I saw him occasionally on my own. And then there was Gromyko himself.

To understand the background to the official side, all of us at the embassy relied on a range of sources, some media and official, some academic or journalistic, some involved in economic or other kinds of activities that gave them insights. I would see people from the Academy of Sciences Institutes, the USA Institute, the Oriental Institute, the Africa Institute; people like Primakov at that time, journalists, some people who clearly had intelligence connections. These were at least outside the authoritative negotiating channel and served to provide background, nuance, and texture to what we were getting through the official channels. But with all this during the Soviet period there were not a lot of freelancers. It was quite disciplined; so the art was interpreting the different versions of the information you received and if you talked to a variety of people, you could put together a plausible picture of what lay behind the official line or position.

I also had to watch very carefully the major statements or speeches by leaders where they touched on the Middle East because that was often the way you had some signal that there was a shift of one kind or another. It was, for example, through these kinds of statements that I followed what they were doing with the PLO. On this subject a combination of talking with Arab diplomats and reading carefully the Soviet statements, became the only way to keep track of what they were doing with Arafat and company. The Soviets themselves would rarely provide much on the subject because it was largely in the hands of the KGB. Occasionally, I would get some more detailed read by this or that official but this was only when a new position was being put forth or there was some message the officials wanted to convey to Washington and I would be a useful channel – probably seen as deniable if necessary.

Q: Were they using you to find out what was happening?

COLLINS: I'm sure that I was watched closely for indications of what we were up to, whom I was seeing, what I was saying, all were very closely watched. I think they probably assumed I was that closely plugged in to what interested them. This was probably reinforced by how I was used at the Embassy. I was the officer who always accompanied the ambassador or the charge to official meetings on these issues. They were very good about that. I don't remember ever not being part of the embassy discussion of these issues at any level. That probably gave me some credibility. I was also given very free reign to see, do, and conduct business as I thought necessary. Now, all of this was not unique to me, but in the eyes of our hosts it was seen as significant, perhaps more significant than was warranted. In any case, they kept close track of me.

Q: They obviously had a pretty good file on you by this time.

COLLINS: They had a good file. I've always been convinced that they were absolutely persuaded that I worked for the intelligence services which could also explain why I received so much attention.

Q: Did you see at this time a Soviet look at the Middle East saying, "This isn't going too well. Let's mess around in Africa." They always had their finger in the African pie, but this was part of your parish.

COLLINS: Well, I guess we might go to some of the other issues that I dealt with. While I was in this job I dealt with three other major developments. The biggest in Latin America was the end of the Allende regime. The ouster of Allende was a huge shock and blow to the Soviets: they thought revolutions were supposed to go only one way. A second issue I had to deal with was Cyprus. Cyprus occupied considerable energy and attention when the Cyprus issue blew up in '74. And just parenthetically I should remind that at this time Turkey and Cyprus were in the NEA bureau so were my issue.

Q: On July 14, 1974.

COLLINS: Right.

Q: I had just left Athens ...

COLLINS: The third big upheaval I dealt with came in '74, '75, the last year I was there, when the Portuguese withdrawal from Africa brought with it wars in Angola and upheaval in Mozambique. The changes in domestic affairs in Portugal, and the ending of the Portuguese empire in Africa attracted major attention from the Soviet government, and made Africa a significant new front in the Cold War rivalry. The Soviet government had spent huge resources to establish itself in Africa. They were all over Africa, in every country, as we were. Everybody was watching what would happen as the Portuguese pulled out. It was another frontier in the Cold War, seen as having potential to reshape the correlation of forces in Africa. Most of it evolved without a great deal of fanfare, but it was Angola, which emerged as a cockpit of the contest. As you know, we got involved with the Savimbi side, and the Soviets backed the leftist government. For the last several months I was there, this became the major issue.

So, during this two-year period, I went from one thing to another, with involvement in almost every Third World headline development. The last preoccupation became Africa. Mostly on the periphery in the Cold War calculus, very few people had any real sense for what the Soviet presence was in Africa, what they were up to. In the early '60s when independence movements transformed the continent, Africa was central but after a decade it was not something that was followed closely. Then suddenly all of that changed. The Portuguese withdrawal reignited the idea of Africa as an arena of Cold War rivalry. And added to the Portuguese colonial world Soviet activity in the Horn of Africa preoccupied the geopoliticians who saw the Soviet position in Somalia as threatening important lines of communication and our friends in Ethiopia

Q: Then we switched.

COLLINS: ...we switched later. At the time I was there in Moscow, we were mostly concerned about what the Soviets were up to in Somalia. They had a satellite tracking station and some military presence in Somalia.

Q: Was it the feeling of Soviet watchers that you had, essentially, an aggressive Soviet Union? Detente aside, this was not a benign group.

COLLINS: I would say that the containment idea was alive and well and it was felt that it was being challenged almost daily. The Soviet Union was still seen as an expansionist power. This manifested itself in different ways. In the strategic area, it came in the arms race and the build-up, of nuclear arms. It was also in space. By this time there was a sense that the Cold War's ideological expansion vs. containment was decided in much of Asia, China, and Japan. In the key places. And the struggle for Europe seemed decided along the East West fault line in the center of Europe.

Q: But there was great concern about Portugal?

COLLINS: There was concern about Portugal, but that was not at the real core of Europe. There was determination not to have Moscow outflank the Allies, but I never had the impression that we thought Portugal would threaten the political decision in Europe about communism vs. the West. Basically we didn't want to see the Soviets get a new foothold anywhere, but no one saw Portugal as the heart of Europe. If there was a deep concern it was that Europe might find itself faced with its own Cuba on the continent. People weren't very worried about Italy anymore, for example, as they had been earlier. But in Latin America, Central America, Africa, all of the Middle East, South Asia the picture was very different. This was the proxy Cold War battlefield and was seen as such. If either side gained anything, the other saw it as a loss; the vocabulary of win-win was not around as yet.

No, we were engaged in making sure that a country that was determined to expand its influence at the expense of the West didn't do so. So each of these issues, Middle East, Cyprus, Allende, Africa, was seen in this context. No matter the details of a context or conflict in one of these areas, the super-power rivalry was always at the heart of how people thought about it. And that was the framework in which I worked, and it was why Moscow's moves, thinking, strategy on all these questions mattered to the key people in Washington.

At this particular time there were a lot of developments which, from the American point of view, were seen as setbacks for the Soviets. Egypt, which went from no relations with the United States in October '73 to a Nixon visit in July of '74, Kissinger's relations with Hafez Assad and the developing American relations with Syria, all were seen as upsetting the Soviet apple cart, and they saw it that way. The fall of Allende was another real shocker for the Soviets, particularly in the way it evolved. The ideological story line just didn't have a way to cope with a revolution that was reversed, a factor that would have

implications later in Afghanistan. So as the last of Africa's colonial empires began to fracture these developments became a major factor for Soviet attention. The Soviets had made significant investments in a number of African venues during the sixties as African nations became independent. Some of the initial investments had not really panned out well, but by the seventies they were prominent in Guinea, in the Horn, and had a significant presence in some other countries. Then during my final half year in Moscow Africa reemerged as a major issue. I'll come back to that when we get back to my return to the Department. But Moscow's new attention was linked to what was happening in Portugal and to its colonies, and this was becoming a new focus at the end of my time there.

Q: I realize that you had this foreign affairs assignment but again, from your fellow officers dealing with domestic issues, what were we thinking about the Soviet Union: the economy, the relationship with the various elements of the Union and so forth. Were we seeing signs of weakness or not?

COLLINS: I don't think at this time you can say that anybody saw the Soviet system in serious trouble. No, they were seen as formidable, disciplined and solid. Everybody understood that the economy was not as developed as in the West. But the Communist model was not discredited as an approach to development, and Moscow was aggressively still proselytizing their ideas all over the third world. Remember, this was the high point of Lumumba University, and Soviet culture was sent abroad almost everywhere to fight the ideological struggle on every front possible.

In the Soviet Union itself, the core system still worked. This is before the information/digital revolution. Controls were effective, and the leadership could still control the flow of information. The Party system had a monopoly on the production and dissemination of knowledge and information that was generated inside. And very little information got into the country from outside that they didn't allow in; what got in was episodic. Some people listened to VOA, but it was jammed in major cities. A few people would get Western material, but this was largely in Moscow or a couple of other big cities. On the other hand, this was the time when we were making some really significant inroads in changing the image of America. Our exhibits would draw hundreds of thousands of visitors: American cultural events were sellouts everywhere. And American music, particularly jazz, had an avid following among young people. Willis Conover, the VOA voice of jazz was almost an icon. So by the early seventies I do think there were the beginnings of a real challenge to the leadership's ability to isolate its people from the outside, but for the most part the system was still very effective for the vast majority of the population.

I also don't think at that time that there was any real appreciation of how much of an Achilles heel the nationalities questions would become. Among my colleagues, we were closer to seeing the place as based on the Stalinist model, modified, but a going concern. We didn't see it as in danger. I differed to a degree with some colleagues on this. I felt that there were signs that the different nationalities might be growing restless under the Russian centered rule. One of the things I watched quite carefully and which I did think

was an issue of more than academic interest was the beginning of Islamist revival in the Soviet Union's south. Remember, this is the era of the Gadhafi revolution, when he was seen much like the Ayatollah would be later in Iran. The Soviets were intrigued and anyone who claimed a revolutionary mantle could not be ignored. So, he came on a visit to Moscow. And it was pretty clear almost from the beginning that the Soviet leaders didn't know what to make of this "revolutionary". He was pretty strange. But, it seemed to me that when he went off to Central Asia talking about Islam and his little green book and got quite a bit of public attention, the leadership was somewhat nonplussed. There were also a couple of visits by the Turkish Prime Minister that raised questions. He got enthusiastic receptions from the local population in Central Asia. For the Soviets, it clearly caused a bit of a consternation that he could speak Turkish and the Central Asians could all understand him when it wasn't clear that all the Russians that accompanied him could. And I recall having a sense that the "warm" reception the leaders wanted him to have may well have been seen as somewhat too hot.

This was also the time that the Shah was celebrating the thousandth anniversary of the monarchy. This was the high point of the Shah's reign and of the oil and gas wealth being put to work to modernize a Muslim country. It was clear that people in Central Asia had an interest in Iran and in the Arab world, but not for the reasons of the Soviet government's interests, but rather because they represented another idea. While it was very hard to document this, you could sense a little bit of it just by watching how the leaders of these countries were received and how the Soviets worried about what the Iranians were up to.

If we can jump ahead a bit, to the time the Carter administration was coming in and everyone was writing transition papers; I was in INR and had the same portfolio as I had had at the embassy. As part of that exercise, I sat in on inter-agency meetings of intelligence analysts who were writing papers on the Middle East and other third world areas. The rise of a religious fundamentalism in the Islamic world and in the Jewish community in Israel was a hot topic. I thought context mattered, and I noted that in our own country we were having something of a religious revival, and that this was something we ought to pay attention to in the Soviet context as well. As the only "Soviet expert" in the room, I noted my observations about what was happening in Central Asia in particular. Nobody wanted to hear about it. They thought this was ridiculous. Maybe I'm unfair, but that was basically the reaction I got when I raised it as a topic for a paper. I think it's fair to say that nobody was looking the USSR as the site for a religious Achilles heel.

But to get back to your basic question, did people see the Soviet Union in trouble? Not really. They followed the leadership. It was pretty clear to me leaving Moscow and to many of my colleagues there who watched this, that the people in power—Brezhnev and his crowd—were determined that they would never again have a succession crisis like the one that followed the death of Stalin. Nor did they want a succession like the one that ousted Khrushchev. So they were determined to see an evolutionary leadership change, which meant that as the old guys died off or retired, they would replace them one by one. They were determined to avoid the instability of one of these "somebody comes in and

everybody's out" moments that had been so destabilizing in the past., and it looked as if they were managing this pretty well.

Brezhnev wasn't a young man, but his health was not yet a grave crisis, and people were not yet watching every small thing the General Secretary did. That was to come later. Meanwhile changes in the politburo did take place without a major upheaval as the existing team chose its new colleagues. So, I think it fair to say that there were few signs of instability internally to suggest real trouble in the political system and the leadership seemed confident. And so, it was in this context that they sought something of the same stability in the international arena to relieve a world that seemed to remain uncertain and dangerous. It was within this context that they sought to consolidate the gains of World War II and reduce the challenge to their position in Europe. This objective led them ultimately to negotiate with the U.S. and its allies what I think was the greatest miscalculation Moscow ever made: the adoption of the Helsinki Accord which profoundly changed the external and internal dynamics that would shape the Soviet system after I left Moscow.

Q: The Helsinki Accords?

COLLINS: Helsinki Accords. I didn't follow this negotiation directly, but my colleagues were involved with it almost daily. When the agreement was concluded, as you might recall, there was a big debate in the United States about whether we were just legitimating the Soviet hold on the nations of East Europe

Q: A second Yalta.

COLLINS: A second Yalta and all the political and emotional baggage that those ideas carried. In fact, of course, what it did was put the Soviet government in an untenable position with its own people, because it set a standard of behavior, particularly in Basket Three on human rights. Those provisions were to emerge as a powerful tool in the hands of those out to challenge the regime on democratic and human rights grounds: it gave them ammunition to justify criticizing the Soviet government for not living up to international obligations it had freely undertaken. That didn't happen immediately, but it began not very long after I left. Intellectually, it evolved into a demand for a different kind of behavior by the Soviet government.

The Helsinki Accords were a tool in the hands of the people of the Soviet Union that really gave them some leverage, and not incidentally gave outside powers as parties to the Helsinki Accords legitimacy in supporting their claims. In many ways it became a rallying point of all the opposition, the critics, the refuseniks, and others. It helped stimulate the Jewish emigration. Helsinki was extremely important in legitimating an alternative view that began to pervade the *Intelligentsia* and critics of the Soviet regime. It gave them a framework within which to define how their own government ought to behave. But in the debate a lot of the political establishment in this country dismissed Helsinki as a sellout of the nations under Soviet occupation. Few of the pundits could have been further from the mark.

Q: So here was something that was done, and both sides didn't realize what they had created.

COLLINS: I couldn't figure it out. At the time I also said, "Look at what these guys are signing!" I thought the boundary issue was irrelevant because nobody was going to change borders in Europe by force anyway. Nobody was going to go to war again just to change a border: so acknowledging that fact in Basket One was largely an irrelevance as I saw it. And that was all we agreed to. What the Soviet government signed up to was revolutionary from their perspective. I can forgive many people for not thinking that this was going to change the world, but the fact was I don't believe the Soviet leaders ever understood the things they were going to unleash when they signed Helsinki. It would seem they had their eyes fixed on an 18th or 19th century idea of the security the treaty would provide when this would become largely irrelevant.

So, it turns out I was really there at the end of what you might call the post-Stalinist system as defined by Khrushchev and Brezhnev. That system worked. It was kind of "Stalinism lite." You didn't have the big camps anymore, but you had camps. You didn't have the big forced labor system, but you had some. You didn't have quite such brutal and arbitrary police, but you had a KGB capable of really vicious behavior. But what still remained that was very effective was the thought control process. I don't mean everybody believed everything in the party line of the day or the propaganda, but the worldview of most Soviet citizens was shaped by the Soviet regime and its ideology. Nothing from the outside penetrated adequately to provide any kind of real alternative or balance to it. Until you had real changes in the global information environment brought by the new technologies, Soviet leaders were very successful at keeping out alternatives, at isolating their people from the rest of the world's thinking, at developing their own models, their own ways of thinking about things, away from the intellectual streams of the rest of the world. And they certainly did it in structuring and managing their economy. Their economy developed right up until the end of the Soviet period in isolation from the rest of the world and on the basis of ideas and principles that were alien to the West and the rest of the world's market based economic thinking and system.

Q: On more of the personal level, how did you find living there, contact with the Soviets, social contacts, and contacts with the KGB, and getting around?

COLLINS: Well, we were there as a family: Naomi, my wife, and two young children Robert and Jonathan, and me. Our daily lives were very much embassy centered. The American community was small. I think it was about 300 total in Moscow at that time. I think the number of officers for all U.S. agencies at the embassy was about 50 to 60. Our contacts with Soviet citizens were very circumscribed. I attended official events, of course: National Day receptions, formal meetings and official things of that kind, and had broader contacts in the context of day-to-day work-a-day support for visits or programs. There a broader section of people from different ministries were engaged, because visitors wanted to see a variety of officials and others and making these contacts provided *entre* to a broader than usual range of people. But these contacts were rarely followed up.

There were efforts to have junior diplomats and ministry people come to events or to meet, but that was never very successful. And any contacts with non-official Soviet citizens (at this time) were very, very limited.

In my case it was more so than for officers who worked in internal affairs. They had regular contact with the dissidents and others, but there were only two or three who did that. Most people didn't have much contact with average Russians: and what they did have was with a limited number of people like a few of the dissident artists whom all the foreigners knew. Some of these were dissidents in a way that was, almost a semi-profession at the time. At least I was cynical enough to see them this way. What all had in common was that you didn't really get to know these people but could see them as an alternative to the usual official you saw in the work context. I had contact (outside official business) with two people I came to know there when we were students, both of whom showed up in our lives in ways that made me ask, "how would they show up?" But one was someone we liked and got to know well and see him from time to time. It was obvious that nobody saw anyone at the embassy for more than one meeting without having to report back.

What did happen frequently is that you would go out to a restaurant and be seated with or near people who talked with you. Or on a train ride. They wanted to talk forever. But you'd never see them again. So there were plenty of times that you would talk with ordinary people, but it was a one-time thing. You didn't really get to know them. The kids were useful in that way. If you'd go to a park, people would always have kids, so you could always talk about kids, and kids were a privileged class.

We were also living in a large city, with a fairly wide variety of things you could do although in all honesty attending events was never very simple even if inexpensive, and most of the public facilities were both crowded and not particularly interesting by American standards. We did sometimes go to a symphony, opera, or ballet, and I would go occasionally to the theater because my Russian was up to it. But things like the movies or simply going out to dinner were not very attractive and were very limited in variety. At that time, for example, the restaurants that could be considered for such an evening were either in the major tourist hotels or belonged - one each - to the Soviet republics. There were really almost no restaurants with foreign dishes; the Peking, for example had no Chinese dishes, and it was a sensation when Cuba opened a restaurant that had a real Cuban chef and dishes. We actually never did make it there because the demand was impossible.

Travel was also very limited. We did some driving around the Moscow region to parks from time to time in summer or cross-country skiing in winter. And the embassy had one dacha in the country that the staff could visit. But its facilities came to each family only about twice a year, and I was too busy working to take a weekend off. But the travel regime in force for us permitted travel not more than 25 miles from the center of Moscow and a lot of even that area was closed. To travel further away required a diplomatic travel note to receive special permission, and a lot of other rigmarole that was not easy or routine. So, I think the answer about my contacts with Russians is that I had all the

expected and normal professional contacts, but they were almost never informal. Occasionally we would get people to visit us from places like the institutes, or from the academic world. Some of those would come to a dinner or a lunch, but usually only when it could be justified as an event in someone's honor or with the excuse that there was a very formal reason to visit a foreign diplomat at his home. It was almost certain too that they always had to get permission to do it.

So, did we have many real relationships with Russians? No, not really. Except for a couple of people, we had known earlier, we did not have what you would call friendships. With the diplomatic corps, it was different. The diplomatic corps there, no matter where they were from, almost all felt like a besieged minority thrown together in a difficult if not hostile setting. We had everybody from Mongols to Iraqis to Egyptians, or Finns as acquaintances and there was a certain common starting point given the place we all lived together. Some of the people we knew lived in our buildings, a complex of three apartment buildings fenced in a guarded diplomatic ghetto. And I knew and worked and we socialized with the range of people you might expect, diplomatic colleagues, journalists, and a few business people from the UK, Germany, France, Japan, etc. and from other countries that had the same concerns we had like Turkey, Pakistan and India. The American community itself was quite small, and so we knew almost everybody in it, which has pluses and minuses. But on the whole it was a pretty close knit group with fairly high morale even as nearly everyone shared the adversities of life in Moscow and bitched about it almost daily

Q: There always seems to be better morale in places like Moscow where life is that way compared to, let's say, Paris or London where living was more comfortable but people were much more on their own and often felt more isolated.

COLLINS: Yes, I think the other thing that was true about Moscow was that you had, if you were an FSO, the sense that you were a part of something that mattered, that made a difference. That's why you choose a career like this. Everything I was working on was in the newspapers and was of interest up the chain. I had a readership that included the Secretary of State, something not too many could say. That was compensation for a lot of the other things. At least for me. It was much harder on Naomi and the family.

Q: How did you deal with the media there, because I think you would be a prime target for them to get briefed on what's happening.

COLLINS: We were given great latitude with the media. The number of Western correspondents was small, maybe 20-or so, and as the only other American community of any size in Moscow, they were close to the American embassy community: just about everybody knew them. Between us there was trust on both sides. There were no games being played, and I never heard of one of our number being misquoted or, and I think we may have learned as much from the journalists as they did from us. And remember these were quality journalists. Only the best were sent to Moscow. Marvin Kalb, Hendrick Smith, Bob Kaiser, Murray Seeger: These were people who studied the language and,

were well prepared for their assignment were sent to do serious reporting from the foreign bureaus of the top media outlets.

Q: Did you have any particular problem with harassment? I assume you knew you were bugged.

COLLINS: I did. We were closely monitored almost all the time. We knew our apartment was bugged, and you assumed there was eavesdropping on everything you did. I had little harassment personally, but was followed a lot. This was partly because our hosts often confused me with the embassy station chief. Also because I was doing work of real interest, it was clear the authorities really wanted to know what I was up to, who I met, what I was doing. I always had the impression they were especially interested in my contacts with Arab diplomats, for example. So, I was used to being closely watched; but nobody tried to interfere with me or my work. On the personal level, we assumed people came into the apartment occasionally, but that was neither here nor there: we took that for granted. On the other hand, there were colleagues who had other experiences. Our officers who had contact with dissidents were actively harassed. They had tires slashed on the car or a huge chunks of ice smash their car hood to send the message that what the officer was doing was not acceptable. In general, of course, the KGB assumed everybody was involved in intelligence work, and there was a lot of spy vs. spy gaming as a part of life. It was wearing and it took its toll on many in the community. But I personally saw it as part of the working conditions and would not let it interfere.

Q: Let's pick up in 1975 when you came back to Washington to INR. You were doing it from when to when?

COLLINS: I was in INR from late summer 1975 until the mid-summer of 1978. As my tour in Moscow was coming to an end, I had asked to go to the Soviet desk, and for a variety of reasons people didn't think I was ready for that at that time. Instead, I got recruited by INR to continue the work that I had been doing in Moscow - as an analyst on Soviet policy and activity in the Middle East, Africa and the Subcontinent, and part of Latin America. The INR office, then called "Soviet Union-East Europe," had an internal division and an external division. Martha Mautner led the latter and was initially my immediate boss. I could not have been more fortunate. Martha was legendary in the State Department. Her husband had been part of the great Berlin transition.

Q: Yes, we certainly interviewed him, and I think we interviewed her.

COLLINS: Well, I do hope that you have interviewed Martha. She was one of the central people on the Soviet account at State for years. She was a mentor to many of us, and a particularly effective one for young women in the Department. I know in the '70s and '80s when State was not an easy environment for women, she gave them a model and showed them what could be done.

Now, when I started in INR, as had been the case with Moscow, I had a bit of a strange beginning. When I arrived, Mel Goodman, whom I had known in graduate school and

had come from CIA to INR, had been doing the work in the bureau I was doing in Moscow. It turned out the director of INR didn't really want to change horses at the time I arrived. The portfolio had a very high profile with Kissinger at the time so there was a lot of reluctance to bring a "greenhorn unknown" person in from the embassy to take up these issues. So, I had to work my way in. As it turned out, my first assignment helped establish me quickly.

The outbreak of civil war in Angola in 1975 quickly evolved into a Cold War proxy struggle. We were supporting the anti-government Savimbi forces against the Soviet backed government. I had covered this in Moscow before coming back, but it had up to then not had much attention in Washington. But as I returned the issue was heating up politically. Critics of the Administration asserted that the Administration had not kept Congress informed about what we were doing in support of Savimbi, and Kissinger was being criticized. As a result, he was summoned to testify, and the testimony had to be done in a day or two. So, as the one analyst who had followed in some detail what the Soviet Union was doing in Angola, I was given the job of writing that part of the testimony for our office. As it turned out, that part, the Soviets' role in the conflict, became central in the final testimony, and sort of established the credentials of its author in the bureau. Not long after this I also picked up the Middle East portfolio as my predecessor moved back to the Agency, and INR itself underwent a transition as Hal Saunders became director and my new boss.

Not very long after this I began to realize that the portfolio I had - Soviet activities, policy, and behavior in much of the third world - was a focus of attention from many in senior quarters. The Angola conflict, Soviet activities in Somalia and the upheaval from Portuguese withdrawal from Africa continued to involve me in Africa matters. With the outbreak of the Lebanon Civil War, Middle East issues rapidly became even more central. The result was an opportunity to write on matters nearly every day that were on the agenda of the seventh floor. I became part of a group of young analysts in INR whom Hal Saunders turned into an in house think tank and daily analytical machine serving the Secretary. Further as Hal and the Secretary wished our group also became a source for policy work on issues, particularly Middle East matters where Hal had played a central role for Kissinger for years. Two people in particular Phil Stoddard who headed the Middle East office and later became Hal's deputy, and Graham Bannerman who wrote a daily Middle East sitrep for the Secretary, were especially close colleagues during this time.

Q: Why were you so much involved in the Middle East?

COLLINS: Because the Soviets were a key player in the Lebanon equation and there was nothing that the Soviets were not seen to be a part of. I began to be a part of almost everybody else's office because for the numerous things being written there was almost always a Soviet dimension. But for some time the Lebanon daily sitrep was key. This particular daily publication became Hal Saunders's and INR's vehicle for direct access to Kissinger. It went directly to the Secretary who followed these issues with great intensity since what happened in Beirut was affecting the whole Middle East equation. That again

gave me a sort of *entre* into the policy side, because our work wasn't just analysis. I always remembered Hal Saunders injunction, "When we do intelligence, it's analysis, and when we do policy, it's research." And we all worked with that understanding of what we were doing.

There were many kinds of questions that came to us that were essentially, "Well, what if?" "What would be the reaction if?" These were the kinds of questions that moved beyond simple analysis. And in almost every case there was interest in what the Soviet reaction would be. So I sat as a sub-set of the Middle East office as well as the Soviet office. This was very intense. Every day we looked at the intelligence and tried to provide our best judgments about developments. This period gave me *entre* into the Middle East community, too.

At the same time, as I said, the Africa account and growing Soviet involvement there called for daily or weekly analysis regarding a range of issues. I thus also worked closely with the Africa bureau. It was a follow-up to what I had done on the testimony, but with new elements. Around this time Cuba begins to appear as a factor in Africa's trouble spots, with the Soviets seemingly having the Cubans do a lot of their dirty work. We were intently watching aircraft flights, and who was building up where as the Soviets seemed to be moving aggressively against western interests and using surrogates to advance their goals. This was also the time when the rule of Haile Selassie comes to an end and the Horn of Africa moves into chaotic change with the Soviets moving to take advantage of new opportunities in ways that set off alarm bells in Washington. So, I ended up contributing to every one of the daily and periodical INR publications. I think I was the only analyst that did that. The Soviets were everywhere. We had interests everywhere, so we always showed up together. And explaining what that meant was at the center of what I was doing.

Q: How about Latin America, Allende and all that?

COLLINS: Allende had fallen when I was in Moscow. It was certainly a major setback for the Kremlin. But by the time I returned to D.C. Pinochet was firmly ensconced in power. Cuba was the major focus of the Soviet account including what Moscow and Havana were doing together in Africa or elsewhere and what the Soviets were up to in Cuba itself.

Q: Here you are in INR, and supposedly the INR great motto is, "We don't do policy, we do research." But you're moving into this. But you've also got the Soviet desk, and somebody must have had the equivalent position.

COLLINS: I worked very closely with the desk, talked with them almost daily. But the desk guarded its prerogatives, and they didn't care much to hear our policy views, and I was initially surprised that they rarely would incorporate or use what we produced in what they wrote for the policy level.

Q: Did they consider you their man in INR or not really?

COLLINS: Up to a point I suppose, but we were seen as separate from the European bureau. Our channel for getting ideas to the policy people remained Hal Saunders; on Middle East matters he and Roy Atherton were Kissinger's key people, the ones he relied on. As a result, Hal Saunders had a major policy voice. He used INR very skillfully to play his role as a key policy adviser for Kissinger because that was what Kissinger wanted. Roy Atherton was the Assistant Secretary in NEA at that time, and he and Hal worked very closely. They were an exceptional team. And particularly the younger analysts on whom Hal often relied heavily, this meant we enjoyed an exceptional opportunity to have our thoughts and views heard at the senior levels of the Department.

Q: What were the Soviets up to and what were their capabilities, because the Soviets didn't seem to be very good at mixing with other cultures.

COLLINS: What I always sensed was that the Soviets were being used as much as they were using when it came to their supposed client partners. Particularly in the Middle East, countries like Iraq and Syria were getting the Soviets to provide all kinds of military equipment on credit which meant more or less for free. In turn, these countries were willing to act as if they were reasonable allies, so long as the Soviets kept relations pragmatic and didn't over reach. But I had a rule of thumb that the minute the Soviets pushed their partner to sign one of their Treaties of Friendship and Cooperation, you knew that there were troubles present and Moscow was trying to consolidate commitments where the partners were uncomfortable. These treaties were a fair indication that whatever the professed depth of solidarity and cooperation, things were not working so well.

The other phenomenon I was watching at this time and that I found significant was a growing indication that Moscow was beginning to see what was happening in the Arab and Islamic world as an issue with domestic implications. I thought that this was one of the things that explained and made more sensible some of the ways the Soviets were acting toward the Middle East. From my experience in following Soviet policies in the area I believed what was going on in the Islamic world, in Iran, in Libya and the Arab world, was increasingly becoming also a domestic issue for Moscow. There was no question in my mind the Soviet Muslim population was an increasingly significant factor in the calculus about where the Soviet Union was going at home. By this time, you had people talking about Soviet demographics, for instance, and the big population growth in the Soviet Union was taking place in the non-Slavic primarily Muslim parts.

You also had challenges to the traditional Soviet self-promoted image as champions that helped the poor, the underdog, enslaved, downtrodden, and exploited Third World peoples. That they were the only voice for these people. At this point, for instance Moscow sees competing revolutionary ideas arise to challenge Moscow's self-proclaimed ideological monopoly over revolutionary thinking in support of the oppressed. I remember while I was in Moscow Gadhafi going down into Central Asia with his green book and talking about the marvels of Islam and how it was transforming Libya, that Libya was now making pots of money off oil, and so forth. You also had Iran and the

Shah increasing their prosperity, prestige, and world standing - as a Muslim country right on the borders of Central Asia. And we have also spoken of the visit by the prime minister of Turkey during my time in Moscow, making the Soviets uncomfortable, visiting Azerbaijan and Central Asia, and chewing the rag in Turkish with these people while their Russian-speaking Soviet minders could only look on. All of this, it seemed, argued that Soviet domestic interests were clearly driving elements of their policies beyond their southern borders. And it seemed to me as well that we would ignore this at our peril

The second dimension of these issues for the Soviets was that the Soviet system had always functioned on the premise of keeping people where they were. Unlike the U.S. where everyone moves around freely, the Soviets had a nationalities policy that largely cemented people where they “belonged”; Central Asians stayed in Central Asia; Caucasus peoples stayed in the Caucasus. There were, of course, people who came to Moscow, and Russians who went to Central Asia and the Caucasus - mainly to keep track and run things. But what was beginning to dawn on Soviet leaders was that if the non-Slavic groups were growing and having a greater place in the Soviet population, this would have implications for the established domestic order. How did you keep the Central Asians from becoming a growing factor in deciding where the Slavic population’s future would go? Of course all this was unwritten and unsaid, but you could smell it.

Therefore, in ’76 when we were doing papers for the incoming Carter administration, I tried to flag this. I said one of the things we ought to be watching is the role of Islam and the challenges it represented for the Soviets in Central Asia; that there was a growing divergence in the area. If the Turkic peoples and others in Central Asia began to feel a greater sense of entitlement or demand a greater role in the governance in the Soviet Union, there were going to be problems. Nothing urgent or immediate, but it was there. This was laughed out of court at the time. But I kept at it, raising these issues and over time there were some people who began to listen.

I thought it was particularly germane when it came to the question of what they would do in Afghanistan, as that emerged later. I didn’t think you could explain a lot of these things except in terms of their seeing the shift in Afghanistan and any alternative as a very dangerous for them. Very few people were willing to see it that way. They always wanted to see it as the Soviets being expansionists and aggressors, but in many ways this always seemed to me a defensive issue from Moscow’s perspective.

Q: When you’re dealing with the time, it’s hard to reconstruct it; but you have to look at magazines and papers from the time, at the big red arrows in Africa pointed toward this and that. In hindsight, “What was this all about?”

COLLINS: The fact was that the Soviet Union had a tremendous military establishment. They were the one country that could destroy us. They were the one country you couldn’t push too far without courting true disaster. That said, I think that Americans then tended to focus so much of their thinking on the military dimension of Soviet power, that we

missed the Soviets' tremendous vulnerabilities. The fabric they had constructed internally was increasingly unable to support a lot of the global role they were playing. But people here didn't want to hear that. You know, counting submarines and missiles was the name of the game, and that is what we did.

Q: We had an establishment for a long time that lived off this.

COLLINS: Absolutely. And it continued to grow just as the other side's did. I think Strobe Talbott (and others) have pointed out that one of the great things about the Cold War was that both sides of this equation reinforced each other and had huge vested interests in doing so. It was a going concern. But if you go back to the late 70s, what you really had at the height of the Cold War was a situation in which regional conflicts and regional policies were seen through the prism of the Soviet-American rivalry. Washington saw the Soviet hand in almost anything that happened and Americans felt they had to counter it. And in Moscow it was the mirror image. It was a daily business.

Q: Did you sense any difference when the Carter people came in?

COLLINS: Yes, there were differences. But before we go there I should say something about the Kissinger era. I believe Kissinger's great strength was his conceptual ability and understanding of international statecraft. I think we lived off Kissinger's conceptual framework for policy toward the Soviet Union, China and the Middle East all the way to the end of the Cold War. His framework shaped our approach to the Middle East, to arms control, to the changes in Asia. At the same time, Kissinger himself had one great disadvantage, and that was his limited capacity to build any base of support domestically for his concepts and what he was doing. I thought of it as his being a great foreign minister for Bismarck, but not necessarily for Thomas Jefferson. One of his great strengths was his ability to manipulate and to work the system of the international community - to conceptualize ways that the United States could advance our interests and leadership through statecraft, marshalling resources, working with allies and so forth. But at the same time, one of his weaknesses was his limited ability to work with Congress and engage the American people. By the end of his time, he didn't have a lot of support for many of the things that he was doing that were both very skillful and successful in advancing our interests; that was the irony.

I think when Carter came in, he was acutely aware of this. One of the things Carter did to put his stamp on an approach that would provide our foreign policy with a moral foundation, a base that would make Americans feel good about the role we were trying to play in the world. Making Human Rights a core element of his foreign policy provided that basis. He created the Human Rights bureau at State, with a lot of controversy and upset to established patterns. I myself had problems with some of what was going on. Trying to reduce some of the greatest intellectual ideas of the Enlightenment to bureaucratic language in support of mission statements for agency offices or budget justifications seemed in many ways to demean something much more noble. Nevertheless, the concept of human rights as a major part of America's approach to the world became a significant factor. This both complicated and strengthened our work. It

complicated it in sometimes absurd ways, with some of the things we tried to do. But in others it certainly strengthened the American hand and credibility. And one of the greatest things that it did do was to give impetus to the CSCE process and the place basket III, the human dimension part of the Helsinki Agreement, would play in profoundly changing the Soviet Union.

Q: The Helsinki Accords:

COLLINS: Yes, the Helsinki Accords. All this was a great irony for the Soviets, of course. They had insisted on getting Helsinki done, and it really turned out to be their Achilles heel. I think at the time that Kissinger himself may not have fully understood the significance of these accords.

Q: I talked to an officer who was trying to deal with the negotiations on this, and Kissinger was going to Dobrynin and undercutting them all the time saying, "That's not really very important."

COLLINS: When the Accords were done and the Soviets signed, Moscow saw it as a moment of triumph in consolidating the post World War II order they had created in Europe. In reality, of course, they also handed a tool to their own people that the leadership certainly never anticipated; and, I must say, that most people negotiating on our side didn't see it either. Kissinger, I think, certainly did not. But it became more vital as the Carter people came in, put the Human Rights bureau in place, and the fundamentals of basket III became a tenet of U.S. foreign policy. That was one of the major changes the new administration brought in.

The other was that the Administration decided to continue the pursuit of arms control and Middle East peace efforts, and they put energy into both. Although not new, these were both topics that kept me busy. For my first two years back here, Hal Saunders, with whom I worked, continued to be a key player in the Middle East equation working with Roy Atherton. And in fact the major issues that I had worked on in late '75, '76, kept right on as priorities into the Carter administration.

Q: I know Carter appointed Ambassador Watson to go to Moscow. In a way this was a signal that we could do business?

COLLINS: I wasn't part of the Soviet desk at the time; I didn't do a lot of the arms control business, but there certainly was an effort to find areas in which we could do business with the Soviets. What was remarkable was the degree of continuity as the new Administration took hold. I think it is fair to say that we had more or less a bipartisan policy at that time *vis-a-vis* most of these issues. There were differences of emphasis, like that on human rights, but fundamentally, my impression was that during the Carter period there was not a major shift in foreign policy. There was more continuity than change.

Q: Can I stop for just one minute? Did you feel a difference in approach? Brzezinski was not a great fan of the Soviets, or at least that's how he's portrayed.

COLLINS: I was down in the trenches, but I can't say that I necessarily saw great differences. It's true that Brzezinski was far from a great fan of the Soviets. I'd had him briefly as a tutor while I was at Harvard. I always felt that he had a sort of blind spot when it came to analysis of the Soviets and Russians. He seemed to begin with an unshakable premise about them, and it didn't matter much what they did, they fit into it. In that he's not so different from many other leaders who often start with a theological premise about the Russians. It was also true, however, that arms control issues and other aspects of our policy toward Moscow continued to be there. Brzezinski had an appreciation of the realities of power and the dangers of the arms race.

But in some ways the world was shifting. As the Carter Administration came in nobody really predicted the coming events that would shake key elements of our Soviet and Middle East policy. Certainly events were percolating in '77 or '78 - the latter part of my time in INR - that were preparing events that would have significant impact: the collapse of the Shah, the Afghan invasion, for example. But, I have to say I can't recall that we were very prescient, and many events would catch us off guard.

Q: In your role in INR, you depended on information that came to you. Could you talk a bit about your evaluation of what you were getting, particularly from the CIA and maybe the Defense Intelligence Agency, and all? I mean information you were getting from overt sources?

COLLINS: There were two elements to it. One was that nobody thought he had enough information. There were always things you didn't know that you'd like to know - that bit of confirming evidence that would make you would feel much better about a judgment. On the other hand, you were overwhelmed with information. I remember as a young analyst going to the rooms in INR set aside to read sensitive intelligence. The sheer volume of material was unbelievable. If you had read it all, you would not have been able to do anything else. So, we had to have people who were charged with trying to make sense of it or sort it out so that it was manageable by analysts. But this meant we were already depending on screeners and sifters to provide us the information we would use. There was always a question of what didn't we see.

Then there was the problem of using the sources we had. There was a wide variety of different kinds of source material. There was raw intelligence material. And the different agencies had their own publications and synopses or analyses of the intelligence information they used. There was open source material, such as the press, and there was a great deal of reporting from diplomats and non-intelligence agency people. INR was unusual within the community because of our mix of intelligence professionals and diplomats with field experience. It was almost equal in number and mixed in every office. That was an advantage. What often seemed to me lacking in the products of the other intelligence community members, was an input from practical experience in dealing with other governments or societies, or with people who have done so, the ability to weigh this experience against the kinds of reports or information they would get from their sources.

Further, the intelligence agencies had a predilection to believe their own sources more than anybody else's. The result, I thought, often skewed things.

Finally, a further problem I came to understand was the tendency of the intelligence community to be driven by what I came to call "supply side" intelligence production. I always felt one of the worst things in the intelligence business was the periodic publication, whether daily, weekly, or whatever. If you had a periodic publication, you had to fill it up; so, by definition, there were events or developments each day that our leadership had to know about, events that each day would fill a publication of several pages. To me this was nonsense, and I often wondered why on one or another occasion we could not tell the Secretary of State that nothing happened that day that had to occupy his attention or divert him from what he was already doing. The journalistic imperative was what I called it, and it was dangerous because it could skew priorities.

Q: And also, it couldn't help but emulate a newspaper in that it had to be something grand each day.

COLLINS: Yes. This was the time we were all engaged in producing the famous CIA newspaper publication, the NID (National Intelligence Daily), which was in newspaper format. It had a journalistic imperative to it. Most of the publications seemed to me driven by the need to fill them up, so even on days when objectively nothing significant happened, you would get the same emphasis on marginalia, that you got the previous day when a regime collapsed. One exception was the kind of situation report (sitrep) that we did during the Lebanon civil war when there were daily developments the Secretary needed to know when he got up in the morning, because he was engaged in a diplomatic process that changed daily.

So, one of the things I thought the intelligence community was very bad at was prioritizing, to provide a regularly structured set of priority issues to help senior policy people do their jobs. Many days, if I had been in charge, I would have written an intelligence issue saying, "Mr. President, nothing happened today that you need to worry about. We're still focused on the two things we reported to you yesterday." It made things strange because like any news product: whatever people say is important today is important. This is nonsense!

A further complication was the tendency to have priorities driven by what sources reported. If you had developed sources about such and such, it was presumed important because you had expended resources to develop the sources. Well, not necessarily. You could have collected a whole lot of information about something that's totally insignificant, but it's hard to say that because you paid for it, spent a lot of time on it, etc. I thought there were times that things got skewed and driven by the availability of information. At the same time, you had the problem that when information wasn't available, it might seem that the question must not be important. If we can't answer the question, it isn't the question that's significant enough to be given priority. Now that's not true of major issues, but you did have some skewing of questions and premises by the sources of information available.

I was convinced at the time, and I don't think it was just State Department chauvinism, that the best political and policy intelligence, the best analytical material, was done by us in INR. It was solidly based, with feet on the ground. We didn't have our own sources of intelligence, but we had our diplomatic reporting, practical background and a cultivated sense about how you did business with other governments and societies. We could not, of course, compete on many of the technical subjects or in some of the specialized topics that did demand attention, but we were solid when it came to basic policy analysis

Q: So, numbers in intelligence don't necessarily spell better?

COLLINS: That's true. There were many cases on which I spent time on estimates, working in the intelligence inter-agency community, trying to produce a paper for the government. Two things struck me. First, I'd go alone for State, and be there with a room full of generals and colonels from DIA and squadrons of people from NSA and CIA. For the most part I was not a regular member of this community and they didn't know who I was. I could have been an assistant secretary or a flunky, but for the meeting I spoke for the Department. Secondly, I was often the only one in the room who had any practical on-the-ground experience of the place we were talking about.

For example, at one point in Soviet analysis the topic of civil defense was the flavor of the month. The intelligence community was tracking where the Soviets were setting up civil defense structures. They had an entire construct of how the Soviets would evacuate Moscow. It was totally unreal. I remember one meeting - a classic case of one of the big problems - where they had an impressive collection of photographs from 200 miles up. Looking at it, they spoke about how Moscow University had constructed a huge shelter on its grounds to accommodate its staff. I had to intervene. I said, "Look. Have you ever been there? I have been there. I know it. That's the water supply at the university. It's not a shelter." They didn't know what to say, but for me it raised questions about how solid the other information they had used was. It was inferred; it was perfectly logical; it was good analysis, but it lacked a real look at things on the ground. It was one place that the State Department had a leg up because we had people on the ground. People at these meetings would be analyzing leaders, yet the only person in the room who had met them was from State.

The other problem was that the people from State had a much better sense of what would really be on the minds of the people you wanted to talk to. I don't think most people in Langley or DIA or Fort Meade had a very good grasp of what a man like a President wants to know about his counterpart when he goes into a room. People like Presidents and Secretaries of State want to know, "How do I get to this guy? What's the deal we have? What will appeal to him?" Again, this is a place where the Department was ahead of others. Even the junior people had a better sense of this because they had gone to meetings with the subjects they were asked to understand. They knew the king, or they knew the Politburo member. They'd met them. That makes a big difference. Our analysis in INR, I thought, was often better tailored to meet the real needs of the policy people. It was less academic, and more policy oriented. It was more leader oriented. It was better

tailored to the real questions on people's minds because we were closer to them. We talked to them. So I think the product was a good one. Certainly at that time I thought we'd done a good job.

It was also very important that for my time in INR Hal Saunders was a part of the policy process, so the bureau was engaged. directly. That made a big difference. There are certainly times it's not; when it's marginalized. It always depends on whether a Secretary or the people at the top of the Department are interested in using INR.

Q: I've interviewed Phyllis Oakley who said that INR couldn't deal with Madeline Albright. Phyllis was told there was no need for her to brief the Secretary because CIA was briefing her.

COLLINS: I cannot say what the situation was with Albright. But we didn't have that with Kissinger, nor with Vance.

Q: You mentioned talking about getting absorbed in minutia. Then you said at one point that we were putting out daily briefings, that the Secretary was reading daily about the state of the civil war in Lebanon. To me it seemed like a bunch of kids fighting in blocks and shooting...

COLLINS: Remember, Lebanon at that time was in a sense the cockpit of conflict in the Middle East. Everyone involved in any aspect of the Arab-Israeli business was playing. The players included – beside ourselves and the Soviets --the Syrians, the Israelis, the Palestinians, the Egyptians, the Saudis. It was a surrogate play pen. This was only two plus years after the '73 war. It was believed that this could spread; it was a potentially a harbinger of where events might go. Kissinger, in particular, was intent on trying to insure that the conflict was managed or, if possible, turned to the American advantage in doing something broader on the peace process. I don't think that changed as the administrations changed.

Q: Did the secretary ever reach down?

COLLINS: Every so often we'd be asked to sit down with him. Vance in particular used to have people come up, particularly on Middle East subjects. I'd be part of that. Hal Saunders and others gave us – even the younger analysts – a lot of latitude. We went to say our piece to the more senior people. Importantly, even in these cases I never felt that anybody tried to tell me what to think. I always found great respect for the analysts and what they had to say. On the other hand, I think INR was never seen as the big player in the intelligence community. We were significant largely because we worked for the Secretary of State.

Q: This is interesting because it's come up recently in our involvement in Iraq, and has come up before. That is, INR seems to consistently—it's probably the wrong time—more often than not to get things right for many of the reasons you've already mentioned, yet

you still have this huge intelligence apparatus both with the military, the CIA, the NSA and all, and yet here is the pygmy maybe saying the emperor has no clothes on.

COLLINS: I think INR's strength is again not in its sources. It really has no intelligence sources of its own and relies on the community for that. But it does have diplomatic traffic, the embassies, and all the overt sources that receive real attention in its analysis. It has unique perspective as well because it is made up of about 50% FSO's who serve abroad and 50% professional analysts. Together they combine the practical experience of dealing with the societies and the skills of professional analysts who specialize and look at topics in depth over a long time. I also think that most of the intelligence community, find it difficult to factor in America as a player in the equation. INR, because of who they are and what they do, almost never discounts Americans of American action as part of the equation in its analysis.

Q: When we're reporting on a society abroad, we have to take that society into account. That by inference means we have to take our own society into account.

COLLINS: What I mean is that when you read the intelligence community's joint product, you would never know the United States played a role in the world; almost as if we don't exist. Yet as often as not we're the big elephant in the room. The idea that you can discuss what is happening in, say, Islamic attitudes to the West without reference to what we do makes no sense. We're the point of reference for this. There were efforts at times to take this into account, but for much of the time, the discussion of the Soviet Union was done as if Americas didn't exist. But the idea that Moscow did not behave in ways that were often linked directly to what they saw in America or our actions distorts reality. There were bad relations with Europe, bad relations with elsewhere, but the relations with the U.S. were discussed only in the diplomatic traffic. It's almost as if when you're an analyst, you're looking at the other society from above, without looking at the relationship between that society and ours. We look at their policies and their reaction to things, but rarely put our own activity into the equation as a factor in shaping developments.

In working for Hal Saunders, many of the questions we got were, essentially, "What do you think the reaction will be if the Americans do X? What will the impact be?" Those questions were not asked by the intelligence community to the best of my knowledge, but were asked regularly in INR. What they wanted to know was, "If we're forming a policy, what is the result going to be?" Others said, "Well, we don't do policy." That was a big part of the problem. Not only didn't they do policy, in many cases they didn't think about it in this way. Maybe this is a bit harsh, but that was what I thought about those meetings, at which I heard people talk or read papers which lacked two things: one was the sense of reality gained by people who had any real experience with what they were talking about; and secondly, the idea that you didn't have to take into account what the impact of American action would be on a given situation.

Q: We're moving into the year of 1979.

COLLINS: Nineteen seventy-eight and seventy-nine when I was the staff assistant for Hal Saunders in NEA. That was the beginning of my NEA phase.

Q: Let's start '78 to '79. How did you become Saunders's special assistant?

COLLINS: I had come back from Moscow in '75, and I went to INR, as we've discussed. In INR I ended up being the analyst who wrote on the Soviet aspects of what was going on in the Third World. This was the height of the time when the Cold War was seen as playing out in rivalries and conflicts all across the globe, where actions by Washington and Moscow in Asia, Africa, Latin America, were seen in terms of the impact they had on the broader balance of power. It was the zero sum game. So at that time, my INR focus was on the Middle East in particular; but also some on Africa, and I shared Latin America with another analyst. Hal Saunders, who had taken over INR, shortly after I returned from Moscow, was one of Henry Kissinger's key people on Middle East policy. Hal used a number of us younger analysts to look at issues he saw as important, and used our findings as background for his own input into the policy process on the Middle East and other areas. Because nearly everything seemed to have a Soviet dimension I came into contact with Hal more frequently than many others.

When the Carter administration made the breakthrough at Camp David, the Middle East team at State was restructured. Hal Saunders became assistant secretary of NEA. Roy Atherton, who had been assistant secretary, became the special envoy for negotiating the Arab-Israeli issue. As part of these changes the opportunity came for me to go to NEA with Hal Saunders. I asked him whether I could have the staff assistant position, a spot that by long NEA tradition played a more central role in the bureau's work than was the case in some other bureaus. This was because the NEA assistant secretary had no special assistant, executive assistant, or privy counselor: rather we were expected to fill those as well as traditional staff assistant roles.

By tradition there were always two of us in the front office. My colleague for the year Ann Korky and I worked closely with Hal and the deputies in managing the business of the bureau. We worked on his behalf with the rest of the building to try to ensure that NEA's business moved smoothly and the bureau's foreign policy in the building and Washington was clear and coordinated as necessary. This was obviously primarily a process job, but it a real eye opener for me. It provided a sense of how people in the department worked at the policy level, and how a bureau functioned. Up to this time I had never had a management type job. I'd always been an analyst or a reporting officer or someone who worked at the specialist level. The year working with Hal Saunders was an important transition. Professionally, it exposed me to and involved me in managing policy, using the resources of the Department of State and other government agencies, and working with the White House. Seeing how these different pieces intersected, getting a sense for what the strengths and weaknesses of different parts of the equation surrounding the Middle East process were, and watching the way different officials worked at the policy level at the State Department, White House, and other agencies was a real revelation.

When you're down at the hamster level doing the daily work that's asked of you by those who have major responsibilities, you have one perspective. You worked on the substance, tried to be responsive, and aimed to give your professional best to the input you're asked to provide. And you conduct the government's business at whatever level that is. The NEA position was the next step up, when you are asked to look across the resources of either the State Department or the government and get the right people to do the right things, bring the right talents and assets to bear on an issue, and then try to get results.

I think there was no better tutor in this than Hal Saunders. He was one of the best and most effective policy developers and managers I ever had the experience of working with. First of all, he showed me that it never makes sense to get your ego in the middle of things. What you want is the best advice you can get, the best product, and best position you can develop. If you have that, it will either carry the day or it won't, but you've got to have it or you're going to go off in the wrong direction. Short cuts don't pay.

He did something which I later used when I was ambassador and DCM and in other positions. On issues that needed a variety of minds brought together to address them, he would assemble people from all over the department. Not necessarily people with any bureaucratic responsibility for what he was asking, but those who he felt could make a contribution. He would assemble them in his office and say, "Here's the issue. How are we going to approach this?" He would then give assignments for people to go off and put their heads together and come back with an idea. Essentially, he was forming little task forces all the time to address issues that had no logical single bureaucratic home. I also watched him be an extremely effective partner for Roy Atherton. Roy was the lead negotiator for the U.S. government on Arab-Israeli issues, on-the-road negotiating. Hal helped him get things formulated and establish the positions that he needed to negotiate. They were an extremely effective team.

I had the good fortune to be part of that for a year, a critical year, as it turned out. I joined the bureau right after the Camp David summit in which Mr. Sadat agreed with Mr. Begin on the Sinai withdrawal and the Camp David framework. While I was in NEA during the meeting, I didn't get to Camp David, because only a few did, I joined the bureau as this extraordinary meeting was coming to fruition and for the next year was engaged daily in the intense effort to follow through on the promise of Camp David.

There was an intense process of negotiation in which Saunders, Atherton and others were out in the field remarkable amounts of time, taking grueling trips to talk with Arab and Israeli leaders about how to get the next step done. There were many echoes of the Kissinger shuttle diplomacy. The teams engaged in this were from across the U. S. government. There was a comprehensive idea emerging, requiring analysis and development of issues. Hal assembled groups having to do with everything from water resources on the West Bank to what you would do about Israeli settlements in the occupied territories; from boundaries to repatriation of refugees. All the issues that were part of any comprehensive settlement, that were before the entire Arab-Israeli community, were what made up the agenda of the Saunders-Atherton group in Washington. I was a part of that indirectly, working on Saunders' behalf with my

colleague Ann Korcky to help Hal ensure things got done on time, engaged the right people, and stayed on track.

Q: I'd like to catch a little spirit of the thing. You're the new boy on the block although you'd been dealing with this from INR, but what was the feeling coming out of Camp David? Was it euphoria, or was it, "Gee whiz, it's an incomplete thing, "or what?"

COLLINS: I think everybody felt euphoria. This was an extraordinary achievement, something nearly all the people I worked with had been pursuing for much of their careers: it was an extraordinary moment for President Carter, who is due a great deal of the credit for pulling it off. And the other key players – particularly Begin and Sadat were also seen as deserving credit for the courage to move and achieve an historic breakthrough. Everybody had approached this in a way that brought forth the best kinds of outcomes and possibilities from what was certainly not a foregone conclusion nor an inevitable outcome.

It was accepted that a huge step had been taken toward peace and that it had solid future prospects. The idea of a new Arab-Israeli war without Egypt involved was not really conceivable. But Camp David left myriad tough issues unresolved or untouched. The professionals who were working these - the unresolved Palestinian future, the Syria front, etc. - had no illusions about how hard they were. There were also issues in this country: different assistance levels for Egypt and Israel, over what the U.S. should stand for in the coming negotiations over the occupied territories; longstanding arguments about the meaning of the UN resolutions which were the core of the internationally accepted framework for peace: the future of Israeli settlements. That issue, remember, was far less advanced than it is today. There were far fewer settlers, and much less sense of permanence about them. But despite such big challenges, Camp David was seen as one of those moments when you had turned a corner, opened new possibilities, and rearranged the problems.

All that said, there were other issues in the region that remained despite the accords. The Lebanon civil war, for instance, didn't stop because of this. If anything, in some ways it intensified. The disarray in the Arab world's reaction to Camp David, Egypt's isolation and how that would be greeted, were all part of the dynamics that were unfolding during that year. The bureau's key actors in the field as I recall were Sam Lewis, Herman Eilts, and, Talcott Seelye. Roy Atherton continued on as the special envoy and in the front office we had Nick Veliotes, and later Morris Draper, overseeing the Arab-Israel portfolio and Bill Crawford, the senior Deputy was the authority for Saunders on the peninsula. It was an extraordinarily talented and experienced group of people.

Q: I'm told by people who have dealt with the Middle East that the fun really begins after you sign any agreement with the Israelis because then every detail is argued over and begrudged. It's just their style.

COLLINS: From the very onset there was a problem with the Israeli government and where it was going beyond Camp David. The Begin government's political philosophy

never thought that the Sinai belonged to Israel. An agreement with Egypt and withdrawal from Sinai was essentially a political-military issue. It was not an issue of Israeli theology or ideology. But the remaining Arab-Israeli issues - the West Bank, the Likud's Eretz Israel idea - these were very big challenges. So while there was much euphoria about the achievement of Camp David and the agreement on Israeli withdrawal, what remained to achieve real peace was daunting. And it was the more daunting because there was no pre-existing framework about what came next.

Rather what followed became something of a two track project. On one hand, you had a group working on implementation of the treaty's territorial military elements which required a number of very creative ideas. From this, for example, came the Sinai monitoring mission. Nobody had done anything like this before. You had had involvement of UN peacekeepers in the area, but this was a very different idea. The establishment of the Sinai mission was in and of itself a rather amazing bureaucratic process. A lot of very creative people worked to get it in place. Then, you had all the practical elements of Israeli withdrawal and Egyptian recovery of sovereignty over the Sinai. As you can imagine, every I was dotted and T crossed by lawyers, by politicians, and you didn't have a great deal of trust anywhere in the process. At the same time, you had another process that was central to the agreement - the normalization of relations between Israel and Egypt. The Israelis pressed this issue regularly and the Egyptians reluctantly kept saying, "Yes, we agree with it" but dragging their feet.

In the end the Americans sooner or later had to get into almost every negotiation to break a deadlock over something or find the middle ground the two parties couldn't reach. The implementation of the agreement in that year was a grueling, tiring undertaking, and difficult as it was, most understood implementation of the Sinai part was only a prelude to the ultimate objective of comprehensive peace. But there was no doubt the accomplishments of that first year demonstrated what active, engaged, and intense diplomacy could accomplish. And for me it made more than clear that getting an agreement is always just a beginning. The hard follows.

Q: What was your impression of the role of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and also the White House and Brzezinski.

COLLINS: Camp David was a presidential matter. There was no question that Brzezinski and the White House staff, the secretary, the people at the most senior level of the cabinet had bought into the gamble. But there's never been a question in my mind that it was Carter who made the political call to stick his neck out. This was a terribly big risk. Nobody knew whether bringing Begin and Sadat together would come out right. In my time, it was the most clearly presidential operation I saw, and Carter continued to take a very strong interest in its outcome and follow on as did his immediate advisors, including Brzezinski and Secretary Vance. And this group gave strong backing to people like Atherton and Saunders who put their hearts into doing whatever they could to make the most of Camp David's potential.

Q: When Kissinger was doing his shuttle diplomacy, some people thought this was very much ego driven. I'm not using it as a pejorative term, but very centralized in one person. This was much more a team effort; would you say?

COLLINS: I wasn't involved in this area in the run up to Camp David, and certainly Camp David was a Carter driven event. There was no question about who was in charge. But, in the follow up, it was a team effort. and everyone played an active role. On a day to day basis almost any issue could blow up into a major crisis. When someone decided an issue was a matter of principle—well, you were not going to go any further, and things could escalate very quickly. The Secretary was seeing people engaged in this effort perhaps more than in any other part of the world at that time. Frequently, the President would have to see people to get it unstuck and move it to its next stage. It was one of those times when everyone at every level seemed at some point to become the desk officer or staff negotiator to keep the process from stalling. But they all did what was necessary with commitment.

This was an active team effort for almost my entire year in the NEA front office, even though there were tensions over other issues we'll come to in a minute. The reality was that everyone was committed first and foremost to getting the Egyptian-Israeli agreement implemented because everyone from the President down had a huge stake in it. Secondly, they were committed to getting the next stage moving because it was seen as essential if you were to have stability in the agreement. There was extraordinary cooperation. I didn't see much in the way of bureaucratic rivalry or of egos and posturing. It was government at its best in many ways.

Q: When you think of the Near Eastern bureau at this time you had this perpetual Arab-Israeli question; you had the Lebanese war; you had Iran rising on the agenda; you had Afghanistan beginning; and you had India-Pakistan.

COLLINS: There was no question NEA was in the headlines. But at the end of that summer – 1978 - and into that fall, the follow-up to Camp David was front and center. For that period the other issues didn't intrude terribly much on pursuit of the next steps. But as you move on, of course, you're right. The Lebanon situation was not terribly disruptive at this point. It had settled into a situation to be managed. The critical, unpredictable times had passed in many ways and Lebanon only occasionally engaged the energies of the most senior players. The biggest shock came in the new year when Iran began to dominate and where tensions began to emerge among key U.S. players.

Q: In a way, Lebanon was self-contained. It wasn't going anywhere. It was just a constant condition – neuralgia factor – that had to be taken into account.

COLLINS: That was the problem. It seemed not really going anywhere. It didn't look as if it was getting out of control, either. Meantime, intellectually, many people thought, "Look, if you can do something about the Camp David process, this will have its effect over time on Lebanon as well." In this thinking the Palestinian dimension of the Lebanon problem was seen as significant.

But meanwhile what was looming was Iran. In my memory from this time – late 78 - Iran would become an issue episodically, but until very late did not engage the policy people at the senior levels until quite late.

The Iran issue burst on to the scene with a rapidity that had not been anticipated. The rapid unfolding of events that led to the Shah's departure forced a seismic change that few saw coming. Iran just wasn't the central focus in the NEA front office at that time, at least from where I was sitting. There were, of course, those who followed Iran very closely. Henry Precht was the bureau's Iran expert, and there was an Iran crowd for whom what was happening there was their preoccupation., but I don't remember that what was happening in Tehran was raised as a daily warning to, "Watch out for this. It is coming. It's going to be big."

I remember that for me at least, the first thing that began to suggest we were in for real problems were reports in '78 about the Shah's health, that he was failing. I do not know that we knew initially how serious it was, but I believe it was in the late fall of '78 that we got the sense the stuffing had gone out of the regime, that something profound was going on. At this point there were a lot of discussions about the implications of his failing health. He seemed to be losing interest in ruling and authority; people were saying the handwriting's on the wall. And suddenly we were getting all kinds of indicators that people who had been kept in their place under the strong hand of the Shah were exerting new independence. There was a cascade of events that showed the Shah's decline and the emergence of increasing chaos. It went very rapidly.

It was an exponential disintegration of state authority that culminated in the Shah's departure in mid-January and the collapse of the regency government less than a month later, and then the trauma of the takeover of the embassy and the beginning of the hostage crisis. The subsequent series of events have become infamous for us. As I was part of the front office during all this, I saw how Iran almost overnight made a hash of our priorities. From the moment doubts about the Shah's health emerged as a question his fate and our future in Iran began quickly to replace Camp David implementation as the priority for the bureau. Suddenly the Iran crowd was showing up at the front office daily, and I have the memory of Iran steadily and rapidly moving to become an issue of crisis management and the central preoccupation for the bureau's leadership. In retrospect, I'd say this was a bit like the collapse of the Soviet Union. Whatever people may have thought or said afterwards about the situation, it hadn't been well anticipated or well planned for. It burst upon Washington as a crisis. It happened very rapidly. Nobody was ready for it. I remember the earliest issue was, "How do you get the Americans out of Iran? Evacuate them?" In this the bureau took the lead at once. We urgently set up a task force to manage that problem, a group that became the Iran Task Force, and ultimately, the Iran Hostage Task Force. Henry Precht was the absolute central man for NEA.

Q: I recall an interview with Henry and others. Henry was a little bit the Cassandra saying, "You shouldn't do this," and Brzezinski said, "I don't want him at any more of my meetings."

COLLINS: Henry did become controversial. Not unexpectedly as things went wrong, tensions increased and there were increasing tendencies to fracture bureaucratically. People had specific views about how to go about things, and there were also some of the less than flattering, "He did it, I didn't." moments. When the hostage taking occurred, political pressures at home increased dramatically, which put pressure on those involved that seemed to turn up a notch every day.

As the months went by the tension increased. Remember we are in a political year. I suppose it all reached an apex over the events that brought about the resignation by Secretary Vance. At the time I didn't know much of the detail about the struggles over freeing the hostages that were building within the upper levels of the administration. What was pretty clear was a division between those, in particular Secretary Vance in particular, who were committed to a diplomatic solution to the hostage crisis and others, led by Brzezinski and the White House, who pressed to take action to free the hostages. Things came to a head with the abortive military action to free the people held in Teheran. They had not told Vance about the plan, and he resigned. For those of us in the trenches it was a real shock. It was an open secret that the tensions between Brzezinski and Vance were growing. Their personalities did not make for a good marriage, I can say, just knowing what I did of the two men. But the entire military operation and final rupture came as a shock to me and I think most of us at State who were not privy to the planning for the operation. In retrospect it is still a shock that those people who had worked so well to make the Camp David accord possible became so unable to work together over Iran.

Q: All of a sudden, did the focus of the front office change?

COLLINS: Not really. Iran became a daily preoccupation for those who were involved with the task force and who had responsibility for the complex of issues surrounding the issue. But, frankly as I look back on it, it is rather clear that the center of action on Iran did not end up at State. I suppose that was one conclusion I could draw from the whole abortive military project. What did remain at State was the follow up to Camp David. The people working on the Arab-Israeli issues kept at it and there was no let up. While the Iran issue intruded and took a lot of Saunders' time, the Arab-Israel team continued to work steadily. Saunders and Atherton had a support group of teams from varied specialties and the negotiations to follow up the promise of Camp David both regarding the consolidation of peace between Israel and Egypt and to move toward a settlement with the Palestinians. These continued without let up.

Q: During this time did you feel that Congressional members or staff played a role?

COLLINS: I'm not a good one to ask about that. Hal testified all the time, but I was not involved in that.

Q: But you weren't feeling anything permeating what you did?

COLLINS: On the Arab-Israeli Issues Congress was a constant presence, and competing lobbies from all sides were a constant. Nobody found that unusual: it had been true before Camp David; it remained so after Camp David. If there was any trend, it was strong support for Camp David. Just look at how Congress at this time gets ready to vote huge sums of aid to support the Egypt-Israel treaty. Sadat and Begin are lionized. Nobody was going to get in the way of an extraordinary step toward peace. You had the sense that everyone wanted to be part of an achievement that made everyone feel proud about what America had accomplished.

At the same time, as you got further from the Camp David euphoria, which Congress was more than willing to share, and into the beginnings of decisions and diplomacy of implementation of the withdrawal agreement and in the peace treaty, things get more difficult. Additionally, as you also begin to talk about the framework, all the politics of the Arab-Israeli issue increasingly intrude. This was also reflected in the Congress. Any time the Israelis felt that they were being pressured, Congress became a target for pressure from all sides. There was much talk about the power of AIPAC and friends of Israel and their ability to influence our policy to Israel's advantage. There was also a lot of talk about Arab oil money and the pressure that could exert and how the Arabs were increasing their lobbying efforts to the Arab's advantage. And then, on Iran, I recall constant demands for testimony and congressional back and forth with the task force. In sum, I think, it was as good a lesson as possible that Congress had an essential role in our foreign policy.

Q: When did you leave the job?

COLLINS: I left the job in the summer of '79.

Q: Back to Lebanon for a minute: Were there hostages? Were various groups on the Muslim side picking up Americans and holding them?

COLLINS: I don't recall any hostage taking then. It is my memory that hostage taking as an issue for us got started with the Iranians, but it doesn't become a major issue in the Arab context until later. The hostage taking in Lebanon comes somewhat later.

Q: Did you get any feel by the time you left about Iran? The Shah is gone, but we're going to be back in business with this new government. Obviously, you say you worked at the hamster level.

COLLINS: I think when the hostage crisis was resolved at the start of the 80s, no one thought the gulf between us was a transitory thing. When the Shah left and before the hostage crisis plenty of people understood Iran was in revolution, but believed we could find ways to deal with the new people. It was a fluid time. Everyone was trying to figure out with whom you could deal, but I don't think there was a sense that the change would throw us permanently out of Iran and leave us unable to talk to the new people. People realized we would have problems, but I don't think that until the hostage taking occurred, there was any sense that we were up against a totally different kind of regime. We had

dealt with the fall of authoritarian leaders, but we were not prepared for the new religious based extreme leadership that ultimately prevailed.

Q: Did you feel any sense of the thinking about what to do about the Shah?

COLLINS: I remember there was a lot of discussion about how to handle the situation and what to do with him. There were lots of people who weighed in on behalf of the Shah, favoring taking him and giving him the medical treatment he needed. There was much discussion of where he should go and whether he should come here or not. There were many who insisted we could not abandon a friend in need.

Q: Rockefeller and Kissinger were two major players.

COLLINS: They were. Before the hostage taking, there were many who felt that we had to take care of the Shah, and many who thought we were taking a big risk by getting involved. I remember those who said, "Look, this is a man who stood by us and for whom we have responsibility. We cannot simply act as if that didn't happen." On the other hand, many very sober thinking people were convinced that helping the Shah would enrage the group taking over in Tehran. They were saying, "If we do this, we are going to burn bridges and cause ourselves immense problems." At this time nobody was saying that we shouldn't try to help him, but the controversial part was just how visibly and to what extent we should be involved. This was one of those issues that quickly rose above the assistant secretary level, and quickly moved to the White House. Again it was a classic case of how quickly an issue can become presidential, particularly in a political year. In the end President Carter relented and permitted the Shah to come to the U.S. for treatment. But this decision was soon linked with the hostage taking and the subsequent disintegration of U.S. relations with Iran from which we still suffer.

Q: You were in NEA from when to when?

COLLINS: I came to NEA in the summer of 1978, about the time that Hal Saunders moved from being director of INR to become Assistant Secretary. I was in the bureau until '82 when I went to Amman, Jordan. I was in Amman, Jordan until '84. So I was in NEA for about six years.

Q: In this period were South Asia, Afghanistan, and India, Pakistan, Bangladesh much of a factor?

COLLINS: The South Asia countries were a part of the Near East bureau at that time. But, frankly, the area did not occupy a lot of the assistant secretary's attention when I was in the front office. One of the deputy assistant secretaries, Doug Heck at this time, and the desks under his supervision had day-to-day responsibility for Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal. and that community acted as something of an autonomous sub-set of the bureau, distinct from those involved with the Arab world and Iran and occupied with very different sets of issues. The one exception was the initial rumblings that were coming from Afghanistan and the question about what the Soviet

role would be following the ouster of the government by the Soviet backed leftist regime of Amin. The most dramatic moment for all of us at that time was the murder of Spike Dubs which brought the uncertainties about Kabul's direction front and center. But the dramatic time was yet to come with the Soviet invasion in late 1979.

Q: In the summer of '79 where did you go?

COLLINS: I became the deputy director of what was then called NEA/ARN, Northern Arabs—that is, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Nat Howell (W. Nathaniel Howell), who later became ambassador in Kuwait and was there during the first Gulf war, was my boss in the office. I was the deputy, and we had a desk officer for each country plus one regional economic fellow. It was an impressive staff over that period of time, including Beth Jones and Mark Grossman, people who went on to become leaders in the Service.

Q: What was your principal preoccupation?

COLLINS: I supposed the most abiding issues were three. First, the Lebanon civil war had not disappeared. Nat, the Lebanese desk officer, and I spent a lot of time on elements of the Lebanon civil war, its evolutions and permutations, flare-ups and hopes. That was a leitmotif of the whole three-year period. Lebanon was always with us. We had John Gunther Dean as ambassador. He was very active and kept Washington engaged in his diplomacy and activities. Further, his almost poisonous relations with Sam Lewis, who was in Tel Aviv ensured we were regularly involved in our own diplomacy with the Israeli desk across the hall. Second although it was never so stated, I was more or less the PLO desk officer, a responsibility I shared with Nat Howell. Officially, of course, no such responsibility existed. We didn't recognize the PLO. But, the PLO was real, and our office had responsibility for addressing issues that came our way regarding the PLO, like a visit to the U.N. by Arafat.

Third, I served as something like DC M for the office, the office's manager in both administrative issues and policy management. That was a heavy but instructive responsibility, trying to make sure we had good staff, working out admin and policy issues with other offices, being the voice of the office around the building, at other bureaus. We also had a continuing informal watching brief for the front office and Hal Saunders on the Soviet role and activities in the region, a responsibility that followed me from INR and the Front Office because I was, so far as I knew, the only one in the bureau who had served in the Soviet Union.

Q: What were the Soviets up to?

COLLINS: Most simply, the Soviets were continually trying to find ways to expand or maintain their influence in the region. The sequence of events from the '73 war through this period had largely seen them more or less on the defensive, trying to protect their equities in the Middle East. The Kissinger diplomacy in the early and into the mid-70s had put the Americans in the driver's seat in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. The Soviets had suffered setbacks with the loss of their stake in Egypt, which before '73 had been very

substantial. Then, after the disastrous defeats of the Arab side in '73, they were on unsure ground with Assad and the Syrians as well. Their tools in countering the American role at the time were such things as arms sales or playing games in Lebanon in ways that we saw as unhelpful. Their one seemingly stable partner in the region was Iraq with whom they remained reasonably close although I think they always thought they were closer than the Iraqis did. But, even with these limits, Moscow was for us a constant factor in the region, including in the peace process.

It's important to remember that the framework within which much of Arab-Israeli peace process work took place, the diplomacy of this whole post-'73 war period, was based within the context of further UN resolutions, and also the Geneva Conference system which Kissinger had established as a framework for negotiating the peace. The Geneva framework kept the Soviets at least formally in the diplomacy of the period. I always believed that it had been a brilliant way to manage the Soviet role because Kissinger had it arranged such that he had a free hand to negotiate with the parties in the region and let the Soviets have the self-image as involved without actually having to deal with them at the table. That said there was a dynamic part of the Soviet role in the Middle East. It was based in how they maneuvered around and with the Palestinians, the one party we did not engage. After 1973, they steadily increased the level of recognition and status they gave the PLO as a Middle East player. These steps caused them tensions with Jordan, as well as complications with Palestinians who were competitors with the PLO. At the same time, the sense on the American side was that, while at times a significant nuisance, the Soviets' hand was not strong and they could actually deliver little. So the approach was to minimize the role that the Soviet Union could play because whatever role they played sooner or later would be minimal or negative for American objectives.

Q: What about in Lebanon, what could we do? You say John Gunther Dean was active,

COLLINS: By the time I joined NEA/ARN, we had had seen two or three years of bloodletting. As the fighting intensified we were watching a disintegration of civilized Lebanese society. Increasingly the driving force were those with the guns or who were in the business of the means to wage war. We saw one restraint after another torn away. For a long time, churches and mosques were out of bounds for military attack, but they ultimately became targets. I think the most disappointing thing was the stage at which American University of Beirut became a target. It had always stayed out of the fray. At a certain point, however, somebody lobbed a shell at it; after that it became just another target. Flare-ups in fighting were a constant danger, particularly on the borderline between groups in Lebanon when one or another of them tried to change - or was thought to be trying to change territorial boundaries. Intermittent bouts of shelling could quickly escalate as well, and armed groups running around in jeeps kept the level of provocation high. This was a very dangerous and unpredictable place.

By the time I came to ARN our ambassador John Gunther Dean was engaged in a constant effort to try to manage the conflict, prevent flare-ups, and search for any opportunities to begin negotiation of some new paradigm in Lebanon that would prevent further hostilities. A second objective was to ensure that the American role would do

everything possible to prevent the Syrians or Israelis or anyone else from getting out of control in Lebanon. It was a time of activist diplomacy under the most dangerous and uncertain conditions. In Washington it was our responsibility to ensure the support for Dean and his team as best we could. That often meant trying to bring other desks or bureaus along in support of his latest negotiation, work as best we could to put the bureau's weight behind preventing others, particularly Israel, from interfering in Lebanon in ways that complicated Dean's efforts, and from time to time working to bring about useful action by the United Nations. It was also our responsibility to do what we could to ensure that Dean and his Embassy understood the limits of U.S. policy and support for his diplomacy.

Q: During the earlier time in Lebanon when you were dealing with it, were there groups we couldn't get to--and how about the PLO? If you're trying to calm things down, you've really got to talk to a lot of people.

COLLINS: Technically, we didn't talk to the PLO. We didn't have relations with them. There were certain liaison channels with them, particularly over security issues, but there was not any negotiation of a political nature, which, I would say, was always a problem. The fact that we could not open talks with these people in Lebanon where they were a major player was one of the great limitations on our effectiveness in the whole equation.

Q: Focusing on Lebanon, how did you view the Israelis? One, were they an inhibitor from keeping us from opening up dialogues? Were they giving us good information? Were they a troublemaker? Were they on our side? How did you feel about that?

COLLINS: I think everyone understood that the Israelis were on the Israeli side, first of all, which, I think, is perfectly understandable. I was never one who minimized the challenges and dangers the Israelis had on their northern borders. Having been thrown out of Jordan, the PLO made southern Lebanon their sanctuary and base of operations. This was the only front they had. To the extent that they were going to try to make trouble for Israel, it was from south Lebanon it was going to happen. And it was perfectly clear that the government of Lebanon was not in control of its own borders or its own territory in terms of preventing the PLO or the Palestinians from doing what they wanted to do in the south. So the Israelis basically faced a situation in their North in which they had the Syrians who, I think, under no circumstances wanted to start another war they would lose, but who were also not averse to keeping the Israelis on pins and needles. Then they had the Palestinians who had every interest in trying to show that they remained the Palestinians' leader and that they were continuing the struggle against Israel. So, the Israelis had real problems in the south of Lebanon. There was no question about that.

Further complicating matters the Shia populations in Lebanon, even before the Iranian events, had begun making a bid for a greater voice. They were insisting that their status did not reflect their population or authority in the country. It was a very unstable area, and once the lid came off—once the system that apportioned political power for the nation broke down—this added to the instability of the entire area. The Israelis, as immediate neighbors, certainly were intent on establishing whatever kind of an

arrangement they could in the south to push any threat to their border back away from their territory. This ultimately led them to establish their domination over a southern zone in the South that they maintained for a long time. From this base they also injected themselves directly into the Lebanon conflict at times, thus becoming occasional active participants in the military conflict itself, even if only marginally. Their actions were focused mainly on the South where they basically wanted to protect their border and northern areas from shelling or military attack. They, of course, would have preferred in charge in Lebanon sympathetic to them or who could work with them, but it was pretty clear that was not in the cards.

So, by 1979 there was something of an understood arrangement for the area. Neither the Syrians nor Israelis wanted the war to lead to a broader blow up. At the same time nobody was willing to take on the responsibility to stop the Civil War. They wanted it to be managed as long as it was not a direct threat either to Syria's own stability or Israel's security. I think everybody was reasonably comfortable that it could be kept from getting out of hand, and in many ways absent any support for active efforts by the parties involved to end the fight, that was what we were about as well.

Q: Where did Syria's Assad fit into our thinking at that point?

COLLINS: I think the Syrian bottom line was determination that no one would be a greater influence in Lebanon than Damascus. That seemed to me their strategic objective. They didn't want to take over Lebanon, either. That would have been very hard and very expensive. Assad seemed uninterested in a real diplomatic resolution for Lebanon because that would have reduced his leverage. On the other hand, he clearly didn't want the fighting to get out of control or drag Syria into another war with the Israelis, which they weren't ready for. So, Syria seemed satisfied with the status quo, not wanting things to move in a dangerous direction, but also not seeing advantage in the issue going away because it gave them leverage.

Q: Was Assad considered somebody with whom one could deal?

COLLINS: Secretaries of State and Presidents believed that Assad was someone with whom - if the formula for an agreement could be found - was a partner with whom you could cut a deal. I think this dated back to the Kissinger period when Assad had negotiated a halt to the conflict and cease fire terms that had endured. After that nobody thought he was a hopeless case, and there was a feeling that you could work with Assad if the right formula could be found.

And the U.S. did undertake a variety of openings with him at that time. I know we were supplying Syria civil aircraft, arranging programs for training of pilots and maintenance personnel. There was a reasonably active relationship with Syria at that time. I think Assad was seen as a potential future partner in some kind of comprehensive settlement in the Middle East and not someone who was dead set against settlement. He was seen as a pragmatic leader with whom a deal was possible.

Q: What about King Hussein?

COLLINS: Hussein had a long standing special relationship with the United States. He visited here more than once while I was in ARN. His challenge throughout this period and into the time that I went to Jordan was to define the relationship between the West Bank and Jordan proper that would not disrupt Jordan itself. Remember that at the time of Camp David, the Jordanian position was that the West Bank was Jordan's responsibility. The PLO's implicit challenge to this premise remained a principal in some ways existential preoccupation of the Jordanian monarchy.

Despite the Jordanian historic role, the PLO and Arafat were *de facto* becoming more and more authoritative. Jordan was finding it harder and harder to exert authority over or responsibility for the West Bank. They were increasingly out of the equation. The Jordanian case also suffered from the fact that Israel's prime minister Begin now injected into the post Camp David equation the idea of Eretz Israel, the idea that the West Bank was in fact part of greater Israel. So the key development of this time was erosion of Jordan's voice in determining the future of the occupied territories. The Palestinians were increasingly effective in asserting their own authority over Gaza and the West Bank at the expense of Jordan. And the Israelis joined in denying Hussein any legitimate voice over the West Bank.

Q: Was Iraq part of this? What was that about?

COLLINS: Much of my time there was in the period of the Iraq-Iran war. Saddam at that time was like a number of the other Arab leaders, moving to distance himself from, the Iranian revolution.

Q: Although it wasn't part of your particular bailiwick, how did the Iranian hostage taking affect you? How did you learn about it?

COLLINS: I was in the NEA front office when Iran turned the world upside down. As in so many traumatic events, change was incremental, but from the beginning of the upheaval that was to come, one event after another destroyed the accepted ideas of the world order around Iran and it seemed to me our thinking and diplomacy were almost always behind the curve as the dramatic events of 1979 unfolded. Put simply I think Washington generally just was not up to dealing with the world without the shah and an Iran that turned almost overnight from friend to hostile power. Furthermore, it was not just an event that took place "over there". The taking of the hostages was a trauma both on the human/personal level because all of us knew someone in the embassy and on the diplomatic level because the seizure of a diplomatic mission and its staff was unprecedented and violated every norm people in our profession took as a given. And finally it was a challenge to Americans and our self-image of power and leadership.

The bureau responded to the Embassy takeover and hostage crisis with the well-practiced steps of establishing an inter-agency crisis task force. We had done a fair amount of this in NEA over the years as terrorism emerged as a problem. What no one expected of

course was that this instrument would last more than a year and become a preoccupation for the bureau for the remainder of the Carter administration. The Task Force was headed by Henry Precht. From its beginning it had to develop special ways to work and meet unique demands. Its tasks were unprecedented. For example, it became the one place the families of the hostages were able to contact at any time - day or night - to talk about any worry they had. It was also the venue for coordinating the diplomacy of response to Iranian actions. And it was the one place any elements of the USG could reach for an authoritative update on events or how the U.S. was managing the day's events. So, the Task Force was a preoccupation of the bureau that was with each of us every day. No matter what else was on a day's agenda, dealing with the hostage question was a topic from the first thing in the morning, and as time wore on with no end in sight it was a draining presence for nearly everyone in the bureau.

Well into the crisis, State and NEA were also dealt a blow when it turned out our policy leadership on Iran was at least in part an illusion. We were kept completely in the dark about planning for the abortive military rescue effort, and when that took place it was a shock to all of us. It also brought about the Secretary's resignation. Looking back, it is difficult to convey how traumatic and unsettling the hostage crisis was. It seemed almost daily to bring acts, events, challenges that were unprecedented for Americans and for those of us in the foreign affairs world. No one had dealt with something like it, and no one had a ready precedent to address it. Negotiations did not seem to be leading anywhere. The military option proved illusory. And the daily visuals were a constant humiliation for the nation. In some ways it was an introduction to the new Middle East, and it is unsettling to look back and see how limited we found our ability to deal with a group of fanatical people who just didn't play by any rules we knew.

Q: You came over to NEA/ARN - Northern Arab affairs – in the summer of 1979. We were in a political campaign. What effect if any did the election and coming of the new administration have on your countries?

COLLINS: For the bureau as a whole the release of the hostages was the end of an agony, a tremendous relief. But for our office the biggest shocker came over Arab-Israeli issues. When I joined the office in mid-79 Camp David's provisions remained the guiding framework for working toward Arab-Israeli peace. But, not long after the Reagan administration took office a policy shift toward Israeli settlements upset a core element of the peace process. For 15 years the U.S. along with the international community had held Israel's West Bank settlements illegal or at least not consistent with U.N. Resolution 242. They were an obstacle to peace. The Reagan Administration abruptly changed that formula to say the settlements are "not illegal". This set off a firestorm of Arab anger, and Israeli actions to move ahead on settlements. The result was a huge blow to those who had a major stake in the negotiating process from Camp David. It seemed to open up the opportunity for the Israelis to go forward with the settlements without any real penalty and to weaken the case for finding a settlement the Palestinians and Arab states could accept for the occupied territories.

Q: Sometimes these policies come from the President having said something. I was just reading about President Roosevelt when he called upon the Axis for unconditional surrender. That had not been agreed upon at Casablanca. It popped out. Was this one of the things that a president might have said during the campaign and then...

COLLINS: I frankly at this point don't know how or exactly when it arose, but it was clearly the position of the appointees who came in with the new administration and they were adamant about its implementation as the new U.S. position. It happened very quickly.

Q: Did the events in Iran affect our relations with the Arabs/Israel? What was the impact on Iran's revolution as you saw it on the region? When you were dealing with Iraq, did you find that Saddam Hussein was a quasi-good guy?

COLLINS: The Iranian revolution certainly shook up traditional thinking and alignments across the region. In turn it also opened new opportunities for the U.S. as well as new dangers that emerged gradually. I suppose most significant in the new equation was the emergence of an issue beyond the Arab-Israel conflict that began to preoccupy Israel's Arab neighbors. The dangers Arab leaders saw in the Iranian overthrow of the Shah and emergence of a militant Shia Islamic regime implacably hostile to America suddenly brought new interest in Washington among former hostile powers like Iraq and among others caused some rethinking of priorities about what the real dangers to their security would be in the future.

For us what this meant over the next period were openings to explore more productive relations with states like Iraq and Syria and strengthen the ties we had with traditional friends in the area. Put simply the Iranian danger had shocked their thinking no less than ours. It did not end many of the traditional rivalries or suddenly make Israel accepted as a partner. Indeed, the Syrians and Iraqis remained at each other's throats. The Jordanians were weak and intent to avoid getting things stirred up and the Saudis were more than nervous about a militantly Shia Iran across the Gulf. But, it did make them somewhat more flexible and pushed leaders like Saddam and Assad to think about hedging their bets. This was certainly true for Iraq. The Iraqis, who had cast their lot with the Soviets now in the face of the Iranian challenge became more open to talking with us. But it was pretty obvious that the Iranian upheaval was affecting nearly all the Arab capitals in ways that meant we had new avenues to explore in seeking more reasoned relations with Arab leaders.

Q: How effective did you find the embassies of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon?

COLLINS: The Syrian ambassador was a very cultured, very experienced and professional diplomat. At the desk, we felt that Ambassador Jouejati was a trustworthy professional with whom we could work. He wasn't necessarily that influential with his own government, but he was listened to, and he was careful not to mislead. In that sense we saw the Embassy as an asset we could use. The Lebanese Embassy was largely a zero. It was riven by factions, just like the country itself. The poor ambassador, a very decent

fellow seemed unable to run his embassy, much less speak with authority for his country or even its government. Most of our dealing with Iraq took place via Baghdad and I have very little memory of engaging their embassy here. Our relations with the Jordanian embassy were always good and workmanlike, but basically again we tended to work through our embassy in Amman where we dealt with the king on any issues of real substance.

Q: He came over quite a bit.

COLLINS: He was a regular visitor, but on a day to day basis our Ambassador in Amman carried on the dialog with the King.

Q: While you were with the bureau, how did the release of the hostages change the equation?

COLLINS: Well, first off it brought a huge sigh of relief: it was possible to stand down the Iran task force and return to more normal routine. Of course, the hostage release did not end the complex and multiple issues that remained in dealing with the Iranians and that would occupy key parts of the bureau for the next several years. But, what really made an abrupt difference was the change of our administration. The arrival of the Reagan team brought a new secretary, and a large group of new people came with him. There was not a major shakeup in the bureau, but in other bureaus we worked with new faces that changed our broader team. These were mainly political appointees from the Reagan crowd, and they brought with them new ideas and new focus that added up to a shakeup of serious proportions.

It also turned out, if I remember right, that Al Haig, the new Secretary turned his focus early to the Middle East, announcing that he would make his first foreign trip to the region. As a result, NEA became the first bureau to have to prepare the new Secretary for a foreign trip and the first geographic bureau to have the job of pulling together all the new faces with their new ideas into some kind of coherent whole. At the outset the whole process was something of a circus. Nobody closely involved had experience or knowledge about how to work with Haig. There was a spectacle as different new people at State jockeyed for position, the Secretary's ear. Further as novices in many cases to how State worked, they had almost no ability to come to decisions or move the process of getting the Secretary ready for the trip.

For those of us used to getting senior people ready for trips the process we watched or were involved with in this case was nearly dumbfounding. Among the new group the infighting was intense, ideological positions were fought endlessly, nothing seemed ever to get agreed, and preparing the briefing book for the Secretary was an exercise in battles for turf, ideological positions, and the Secretary's ear. In preparing the briefing books we were called on by various participants in the project to prepare papers on everything conceivable. These papers had a normal format of background on an issue followed by a few talking points to use with the foreign interlocutor. Getting these papers agreed was a task, but most interesting to me was that in the vast majority of papers time was spent

arguing about the background information, and the points to be used with the foreign government officials received little attention: for the most part these passed with little if any change from what we in the bureau had written. What seemed most important to these new colleagues was what they were saying to each other rather than what they were going to say to the foreign government. It was a revelation: I hadn't ever dealt with this kind of environment. But, it was a reality that would last through the Reagan administrations.

In the end what happened to these briefing books was fascinating. Once completed and agreed by all the players, a book about six inches thick went up to Haig who took one look at them and said, "What do you expect me to do with these? Go back and get me something that I can use." This response for one thing suggested that Jerry Bremer and his staff had never asked Haig what kind of briefing materials he wanted, or certainly conveyed guidance that was useful to those preparing the papers. They had let the bureaucracy and ideologues produce their version of what was acceptable to them. What happened then was also instructive. In about 24 hours, three of us who had done this work before rewrote the briefing books completely, got rid of most of the materials over which limitless blood had been spilled, and produced a book with minimal background and the talking points that for the most part the bureau had begun with. It was instructive to say the least.

Q: Did you feel while you were doing this that the hand of the Pentagon and Weinberger...

COLLINS: I can't say I saw that at this stage. And the Middle East was not where the greatest gulf between Defense and State would occur. Also this was early in the game before the teams at State and Defense had established themselves.

Q: I have the impression Haig never established a relationship with Ronald Reagan.

COLLINS: I think that may well be true. I don't think he ever established himself in the State Department either. He seemed unsure how to use State's bureaucracy and skills, whom to rely on to build his authority. The staff around him didn't help him very much because they didn't know either. It was my first time seeing up close a group coming in and seeing their key mission as throwing out those whom they believed had screwed it all up and assuming they would reshape the world the way they thought it ought to be with little or no reference to the past or what they inherited. There was also a nasty side especially to the ideologues among this group; they lacked any sense of respect for their predecessors' accomplishments and professionalism, evinced high suspicion about anyone linked with the previous administration, and for the most part distrusted the Foreign Service and State professionals.

Q: During the time the Reagan administration came in, you were doing your thing. Was there much connection of the South Asia types or was that...

COLLINS: I had moved on by then. I'm not a very good one to talk about that. I dealt with the South Asian people a lot when I was in the front office, but that pretty much came to an end in the summer in '79 when I moved to ARN.

Q: Was there any talk of how we're going to put this thing together with Iran, or were we so pissed off that we weren't going to think of that? Or wasn't there any opportunity?

COLLINS: By the time the hostages were released I was in ARN, and I was no longer very involved in any of the Iran issues. What I do recall is that much of the discussion immediately after the hostages' release revolved around what Iran would and would not receive from assets that had been frozen over the hostage issue and a variety of other legal issues that were presented by the end of the hostage crisis. But, so far as I can remember whatever policy discussion that might have taken place then, the reality was that we weren't doing much to reestablish any kind of relationship with the Iranian government. Contact was minimal; there was uncertainty about whether the new regime was going to survive. and the hostility was profound.

Q: One of the things that strikes me is that you're saying how busy you were. I've been doing these interviews for 20 years now, and the people who dealt with the Middle East all worked their tails off, spent long hours, families suffered, and yet looking at it, the situation has gotten worse over the years.

COLLINS: You've got to wonder a little bit about the opposite question, "What happens when we aren't involved?" I think a lot of the Middle East diplomacy and American activity was centered around the premise that you hoped that you could do something, make a difference. But you also knew that if you didn't stay pedaling the bike as fast as you could, there was real danger you would fall over.

Q: In '82 you moved on.

COLLINS: Yes. But before we leave ARN, there's something else I should mention because it had an effect on how things evolved in the future. Dick Viets had worked to get me as political counselor in Amman, and in mid-1982 I was winding up my time in ARN. But, at that moment the whole Arab-Israeli situation erupted as the Israelis invaded Lebanon. There had been plenty of buildup in tension before this between Israel and Lebanon, particularly its Palestinian population. Much of my time in '80, '81, '82 had been taken up managing issues like the incidents provoked by the Israeli ally Colonel Haddad and his Christian army in the south of Lebanon. We had managed to keep the peace at least in relative terms and to prevent any serious conflict. So, the Israeli invasion when it came was a blow to many with whom I had worked in NEA. It was just something that seemed out of all reason and a catastrophic blow, the kind of renewal of war that so many had worked to avoid for years. It was made the worse because Ariel Sharon had come to Washington not long before the invasion.

Q: The question was had Alexander Haig given him the green light?

COLLINS: That's right. I don't know to this day whether there was any green light or the impression of one, but it must certainly have been the case that Haig didn't give him a red one. And when the invasion came, there was a real crisis of confidence in NEA. Many were simply stunned into immobility. Those of us, including people from the Israeli desk, I from ARN and a few others took on the task force staffing to deal with the issue for the bureau. We ran the task force, staffed the principals dealing with the war, and became the core group in coping with the implications of the invasion. As so often happens this made me part of a group whom I'd known before but had not worked with as a team, people like Charlie Hill and Jock Covey, plus Phil Habib and a number of others. This group was serving as the action team at State for the crisis when Haig departed abruptly, and we ended up as the group George Shultz first got to know when he came to State. For me this proved to be serendipity because it formed connections with the Shultz team that would last into the future and give me opportunities that would shape my career in the future. So much for career planning I might add.

Q: What do you think brought down Haig's tenure?

COLLINS: I have always believed that the Lebanon invasion and position it put President Reagan in was probably behind the departure. It was pretty clear to all that Haig did not have a solid relationship with the President, and there were accumulated incidents that had eroded his relations with the White House. But the invasion put him in an impossible position. I am not sure any Secretary could have survived if he gave a President the choice of seeing the destruction of Beirut or becoming the savior of Yasser Arafat. That's where Haig found himself in my eyes, and he got fired.

Q: Let's talk a bit about Secretary Shultz. He comes across by many as probably the most effective Secretary of State.

COLLINS: I can certainly say he was one of the very best I had the opportunity to work with, and he certainly brought out the best in the Department. The transition was interesting because it gave an indication that there was going to be a real change in style and approach from the Haig tenure. It was symbolic and extraordinary for all of us that Shultz didn't bring anyone with him. He arrived virtually alone and from the beginning used the Department's professionals for his staff and team, a practice he continued for the remainder of his tenure. He was also a master craftsman at working the bureaucracy, both in State and in the inter-agency world. At State he knew how to get the best from the building, and the staff from top to bottom produced for him. And he was masterful at getting the politicals and career FSO's to work as a team. I learned a lot from being part of it.

Q: Can we go back to Lebanon for a minute. What happened when Shultz came in?

COLLINS: Well, the thing that comes most to mind was the appointment of Phil Habib to be the point man to do something to unlock the standoff in Beirut. As Shultz arrived the principal question was, "What the hell do you do?" The Israelis are poised on the outskirts of Beirut threatening an attack against the PLO that would devastate the city;

Arafat is adamantly saying he'd go down with his colleagues fighting the Israelis in the streets and alleys of Beirut, meaning the destruction of the city.

Nat Howell, the ARN director and I on a Saturday morning with the usual skeleton team in the building, had been talking about what could be done for days, and that Saturday we came up with an idea: create a new special envoy to add enhanced American authority to the equation in Lebanon and push the parties to talk. We also had a candidate, Phil Habib, who until that point so far as I know knew nothing about our scheme. In any event, Nat took the proposal up to the then Deputy Secretary of State Judge Clark, and within a very short time we had the green light to proceed. We then wrote the necessary paper, staffed it through the Deputy Secretary in record time. Nat took it to the White House, got it blessed, and Habib was in the job by the end of the day. I have always believed that this got done the way it did because we were working the issue on a Saturday when only the essential people were around. It showed what one could do with the right people in place and the superfluous out of sight. It also turned out that Habib was an inspired choice Reagan liked him, and with the President's imprimatur he and Morris Draper, his sidekick from NEA, unlocked the Lebanon standoff. They got Arafat out of Beirut and the Israelis to back away. There was no further major destruction to the city or major loss of life in the Palestinian areas. It was the diplomat's craft at its very best.

Q: Were there any other aspects of this crisis that had lasting effect?

COLLINS: Well, in a very different realm there were. This had to do with technology, communications. As pretty much everyone knows, the Department of State had a very poor record in acquiring and using technology. We were always behind it seemed, particularly behind our military colleagues. Even so, at times necessity brought change and the Lebanon crisis was one such moment. Everyone understood that we could not send Phil Habib to Beirut without the ability to have rapid, secure, and reliable communications. In Beirut, where moving around was dangerous, and the Embassy not regularly accessible because of security, something new was needed. The Pentagon came up with the solution: a satellite secure phone system that Habib could have with him and a counterpart set in the Operations Center at State. I can tell you it was a marvel and a lifeline for Habib's efforts, not to mention the insight it gave to those of us tech novices about what was to come. But that will be another story later when I come back to Washington to run the Operations Centers.

Q: One last thing on this Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Did you have the feeling that this changed attitudes about Israel, that Israel was no longer the poor little picked on nation, that Israel was now a power that could defend itself and no longer was on the defensive?

COLLINS: I don't think I'd categorize it that categorically, but, in general, yes; the Lebanon action certainly created the view among lots of people that for Israel military security was no longer the issue it had seemed. The readiness to start a war via the invasion demonstrated military strength and confidence that they were confident they

could manage the threats they faced at that time. The issue now was how did you get them to use that fact to advance a peace process.

It is also the case that the invasion was an action that proved divisive over Israel's posture and policies. For many in NEA there was a long-held conviction that Israel was throwing away the opportunity their strength gave them to make a peace from a position of strength. I think this was particularly the case after the breakthrough at Camp David and the peace with Egypt. It was not just Lebanon. Other Israeli actions and agendas from the settlements in the West Bank to the ideological position about Eretz Israel that caused many in NEA and more broadly in the Department to question Israeli actions and intentions. There were also many who felt we were losing an opportunity and undermining the opening the U.S. had helped to create for a peace following the negotiations at Camp David. In all this as I recall feelings ranged from believing the Israelis were arrogant and irresponsible in thwarting what was an opportunity, to those who were disappointed and sorrowful that the Israelis were missing this chance. So, there was a range of opinion, even before Lebanon. But after the invasion, I think few believed the Israelis had a real justification for not seizing fully the chances for a settlement that had been opened after the Egypt treaty.

Q: Jim, you went to Jordan in 1982. How did you get the Jordan assignment?

COLLINS: I came to the Jordan assignment as a follow-on to two other assignments in the NEA bureau in Washington. As we discussed, I had worked with Hal Saunders as staff assistant in the front office of the bureau. In NEA that job was not the traditional bureau staff assistant job, because NEA had no special or executive assistant. So, it combined these functions and broadened responsibilities beyond just the clerical to include organizing and managing the work in the bureau for the assistant secretary and the deputies, managing the paper flow, and preparing the principals in the bureau for meetings trips, and negotiations. Furthermore, because Hal and his team were part of the Camp David follow-on negotiations, we served regularly as his point of contact for the bureau while he was on the road.

From that job, as we've discussed, I moved on to become the deputy in the office of North Arab affairs (the acronym was NEA/ARN) that had responsibility for Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. As deputy I spent a great deal of time on the Lebanon civil war and on the Palestinian issue, and the director Nat Howell and I shared the dubious honor of being the PLO and Palestinian desk officers when you couldn't even talk about having such a thing.

At the end of that assignment, which was in the summer of 1982, I got the assignment because Dick Viets, the ambassador in Amman, had asked me whether I would be interested in coming to be his political counselor, and when I said yes, he made it happen with a personnel system that was not so sure they wanted it. So, by summer of 1982, I was set to go, packed up and ready, but as with many of my assignments nothing was quite simple. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon held everything up for about two months and then jockeying in personnel kept me in suspension for about two more months.

When the situation finally settled down, I finally got off to Amman to take up my assignment as political counselor. In a way this was an unusual assignment. I was not an Arabist. I arrived in Amman without any language training. There had been some talk of at least an introduction to the language before my departure, but that fell by the wayside because of the Lebanon crisis. I did have solid experience with the issues Amman had on its platter after the three years in ARN, and in the end that probably proved the essential grounding. Most of the people with whom I came to work were English speakers and others in my section, including a young first tour officer by the name of William Burns were well equipped to work the areas that really demanded the language. In this I was fortunate, because I doubt there was another country in the Arab World where this would have been the case.

I was also fortunate in my colleagues: Dick Viets was the ambassador, and Edward Djerjian was the DCM. I knew Viets from my NEA time and Ed from a number of ways in which we had intersected over the years. It was a good team and both were willing to spend time in helping me make the transition from reporting officer to manager of a political section and occasionally assuming Embassy wide responsibilities as acting DCM.

The assignment was a good one. A lot of the issues we were working revolved around post-Camp David developments and diplomacy and post-Lebanon issues, particularly in terms of the evolving Palestinian question. This meant we were among the central players in the Arab-Israeli peace process, and our issues were very much front and center priorities in Washington. So, once again I joined a team that was working on issues that had the attention of the most senior levels in the Department and in the White House. That's always a good thing to be part of, and it made Amman a challenging and exciting assignment.

Q: Could you describe what the situation was in Jordan and how Jordan at that time fit into our thinking about the Middle East complex?

COLLINS: Jordan was central to our thinking about the next phase of the peace processes. King Hussein was seen as a stable, rational partner looking for ways to work toward an accommodation with the Israelis. He had met with Golda Meir and other Israelis over the years and we saw him as a constructive force.

The Jordanian position of having responsibility for the West Bank made them the logical partner to help negotiate the next steps. But this was also a time of eroding Jordanian authority over the Palestinians, and efforts to give that claim a territorial dimension centered on the West Bank and Gaza. So, the realities were that Arafat and the PLO were assuming increasing de facto authority to speak for the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

For his part Hussein's central preoccupation was protection his own authority and sovereignty in Jordan. He had defeated the PLO and Arafat's challenge to this authority a

decade before. He wanted no challenge to that outcome or unsettle the Jordanian population of Palestinian origin. So he had to think about what the implications were of the turmoil in the territories, the emergence of the PLO as the Palestinians' international voice, and how it all would affect the role of Jordan in its traditional place as a central player in the peace process.

Certainly one of the central issues we were dealing with in the embassy in Jordan was keeping Washington informed about what was happening to the PLO-Jordan relationship as this issue became more central. During a series of visits to Amman by Arafat, there were further steps to define the relationship between the Hashemite Kingdom and the Palestinians. By the time I left Amman, it was becoming clear that King was moving away from maintaining Jordanian responsibility for the Palestinian West Bank. By extension Arafat implicitly also conceded he would have no further pretensions about Palestinians in Jordan. The king would support the Arab cause, but would no longer tie Jordan's future to the West Bank Palestinians. Jordan would pursue its own interest and protect its own people and those that lived in Jordan. This became formalized later in 1988, but by the time I returned to Washington it was well advanced as a reality.

Throughout these developments our main interest in Jordan remained that the king continue as a constructive force in support of the Camp David peace process as Sadat and the Israelis implemented the agreement on Israeli withdrawal and normalization of relations. And the King did remain if not a driver of those events, a constant and constructive force from the perspective of our policy.

Q: Regarding the Palestinians living in Jordan--particularly after Black September in the '70s--was the King making an effort, and was it working, to include the Palestinians in the boundaries of Jordan, make them Jordanians rather than Palestinians?

COLLINS: What you are raising here is the existential issue for Jordan and the Hashemite monarchy. While not new, certainly during my time in Amman there was a sense that there was only one real Jordanian - the King. He was the definition of Jordanian and Jordan as a nation. Without him, the population of the kingdom would fragment into its constituent Palestinian and East Banker parts. If you asked citizens, "Who are you?" the vast majority would begin by identifying themselves as "East Banker" or Palestinian. Very few would say, "I'm Jordanian." This was not really surprising to me. Jordan was not a very old nation, and in its seven decades it had seen shifting boundaries, demographics, and challenges to its very existence as a Hashemite-ruled kingdom. Furthermore, I would have to say that the European colonial idea of Jordan as a nation state was a rather tenuous thing. Hussein, presiding over disparate and often divided populations of East Bank tribes and Palestinians, in great part refugees from the West Bank, was first and foremost in the business of nation building in the most profound way. And he was doing so in a complex, difficult, and uncertain context.

His style of rule and the way his government was composed and operated reflected his challenges. By history and tradition, the core of his support and the element he depended on for security and loyalty to the crown (in particular in the security services) lay with the

tribes, the East Bankers, people who had been associated with his grandfather and the Hashemites from the beginning. These tribes made up a strong community and network of support and a socio-economic system that was the strong underpinning for the monarchy. As a parenthetical I might add that within this community tribal law, custom and relationships that Americans and most outsiders really didn't understand, had a great deal to do with the workings of the state system, but for the most part remained opaque.

At the same time, Palestinians were crucial to the Jordanian future. There was no question that the Palestinians who had opted to stay after the black days of the civil war in the 1970s were critical to Jordan's economy, politics, educational and cultural world and national identity. But questions lingered about whether they had divided loyalties. During my time this issue lay behind unease among East Bankers and other Hashemite supporters about the Jordanian - Palestinian negotiations and their implications for Jordan's security and future, unease that was magnified by the increasing Israeli idea fostered by the Begin government that asserted the solution to the Palestinian issue was Jordan.

Q: As political counselor, how did you and your political officers operate?

COLLINS: Jordan was a friendly and largely open environment. American diplomats could talk with nearly anyone and we had excellent access to the leaders of the country. The Embassy had talented Arabic speaking officers, among them, as I noted, a junior first tour officer Bill Burns, who would become Deputy Secretary of State in a later decade after a distinguished career in NEA and EUR where he also served in Moscow. These officers got out around the country, and provided a wealth of information and analysis about what was happening in the country and how the populations saw what was happening at home and in the region. We also had a group of military and civilian assistance personnel engaged in programs that kept us well connected with the military and economic communities as well as representatives from Commerce and USIA who worked with the business community and education/cultural and media sectors. It was a relatively small Embassy in a rather small country, but we had a strong team that gave us confidence in our judgments and analysis as well as credibility at home.

My own work heavily focused on Jordan's foreign relations, in particular, on issues of the peace process and our political-military relationship with Jordan. I spent substantial effort reporting on the string of Arafat visits and on what was happening to Jordanian-Palestinian relations. Now, I had come to Jordan without any Arabic. Jordan at that time was seen as a state in which I could operate, at least in the senior levels of the embassy and the government, quite well with English because English was the second language of the elite. Not having the native language was an experience I resolved I did not ever want to repeat because of the limits it put on the ability to engage fully the society in which we worked, but for my professional responsibilities working with government contacts and others among Jordan's elite, accompanying the Ambassador, DCM or other visiting officials on calls, arranging business with key institutions, and so forth, my monolingual existence was not really a problem.

Q: Did you talk to Arafat, or was that out of the question?

COLLINS: No, I never did, nor to the best of my knowledge did anyone in our embassy. We did talk to a wide range of Palestinians, both Palestinians resident in Jordan and visitors. We did not have authorization to engage any official members of the PLO., but we did engage many others who had contacts with them. In this regard, we were not far away from the time when it was forbidden to have diplomatic contact with the PLO except under exceptional and specific circumstances. That had changed as I was leaving Washington, when the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and Habib mission to mediate a way out of the war in Beirut turned out to be the proximate cause for a first genuine, sustained overt contact with the PLO leadership. Discussions with the PLO after getting Arafat out of Beirut and into Tunisia did continue but were closely controlled by Washington, but we in Amman didn't have any part in the future dialogue with the PLO during my time there.

Q: Did you feel that that was an artificial and frustrating system? Did it hinder your work?

COLLINS: It didn't affect my work in any significant way; my responsibilities lay with those in Jordan, not with the PLO as such. As a general principle, however, I have to say that I always thought we limited our options by cutting ourselves off from the PLO as it emerged in the region. I have always believed that even when you have groups or adversaries you oppose or believe must be challenged, you're better off trying to talk with them and understand where they're coming from even if only because it gives you a better basis in which to define smart policies based on good information and facts. There are, of course, limits where open conflict, or threats of violence preclude normal contact, but even then sooner or later almost all conflicts result in settlement based in negotiation. We didn't have that kind of contact with critical Palestinian actors at key moments after Camp David.

Q: How did you personally and others who were dealing with this in Amman view Arafat at that time?

COLLINS: I think I tried to describe what the Jordanians saw. They saw him as a challenge and a threat. He was potentially trying to claim the allegiance of a substantial part of the Jordanian population, and there was always great suspicion between the non-East Banker and the East Banker communities about what the other's intentions were. Again, it came down to the idea that few people really thought of themselves as Jordanians. Arafat had challenged Hussein in the 1970s and was still seen as a potential danger to the future of the Hashemite Kingdom. Yes, he lost one round earlier, but he was still around; and he had grown stronger and gained stature as the generally accepted leader of the Palestinian opposition to Israel.

This put the king on the defensive over the West Bank. So, accommodation was not easy. One of our key objectives, thus, was to ensure that the king was given the support he needed to avoid being undercut by the rise of Arafat, whom we saw as presenting a

challenge to the king's ability to deal with the Israelis. We had a real stake in Jordan's remaining a constructive part of the peace process and an ally in that part of the world, and Arafat gave every indication of threatening that.

So, we undertook major efforts to reassure the king we would continue to back him; that we wouldn't waver. We worked to ensure that the personal relationships that existed between the king and other Americans were well-tended. These efforts were wide ranging and involved tending both personal and policy sides of the relations. In addition to ensuring Jordanians saw no erosion of our support in their effort to establish a new PLO relationship, we equally had to provide assurance that we opposed the Israeli argument that Jordan's territory and their country was the solution to the issue of Palestinian statehood. I always believed this was Dick Viets's toughest task as Ambassador, and it was a complex tough assignment.

Q: This brings up Washington doing things that were not particularly helpful. Washington has and still is often driven by domestic politics in the support of Israel. How did we view Israel at the time as dealing with Jordan? Begin was dying at the time. At a certain point he faded from the scene.

COLLINS: Yes, but his thoughts didn't. I think among the professionals there was a feeling that ranged from disappointment to frustration. There was a sense that the promise of Camp David was fast eroding and that Israel deliberately or for lack of courage was losing an opportunity to secure the peace it sought. By the time I went to Jordan much of the debate about Israeli actions and intentions revolved around Israel continuing to build settlements in areas beyond its 1967 borders. There was little constructive movement in peace negotiations. There had been a great deal of frustration after Camp David about a missed opportunity, and in many ways that frustration became centered in the settlements issue. Settlements came to serve as a steady pretext to prevent negotiations moving forward, and steadily created new facts on the ground that questioned the foundation of negotiations based in principles laid down by the UN after the 1967 War, and reaffirmed at Camp David.

That condition was made more acute when the Reagan administration took office. To recall, it had been a rock solid, long-standing American policy that the United States did not accept Israel's settlements as legal under UN resolutions and international treaties. But the initial Reagan administration encounter with the issue turned the policy on its head by stating authoritatively that Israeli settlements were "not illegal." The result was explosive and a blow to confidence among Arab partners, including Hussein, that Washington had a clear policy toward a negotiated Arab-Israeli peace. And it meant that as I arrived in Jordan the continuing Israeli creation of facts on the ground and their invasion of Lebanon defined a pessimistic outlook regarding prospects for peace and uncertainty about how reliable an ally the United States would be in its pursuit.

The result for my time in Jordan was a rather stale and empty dialog about Israel Arab peace and its prospects. We continued to have discussions with the Jordanians about how they wanted to contribute, but they were not in a strong position to take any real

initiative. And we heard a litany of complaints against the Israelis. From what I read of my counterparts in Embassy Tel Aviv, the discussions with Israel in turn pretty much mirrored exactly the same against the Arabs. It was a very difficult time. It was a stalemate. We weren't moving in a serious way on the peace process.

Q: Did you have a feeling as a political reporter there that through leaks that the Israelis were monitoring what they were doing there?

COLLINS: I don't remember that being a problem. Most of what we reported was common sense. I don't think that we were sending particularly sensitive or unusual reports or proposals. What was most sensitive such as private discussions with the King didn't get leaked.

Q: So that wasn't an issue as it sometimes is.

COLLINS: No.

Q: What was the estimate among your other senior officers of King Hussein?

COLLINS: I think all of us felt he was a remarkable figure. He, with his immediate family, was Jordan - the symbol of what being Jordanian meant. He was a courageous and skilled ruler. I had immense respect for his political skills and the leadership he gave his country in a very difficult situation. He played a weak hand very well.

He didn't start with a log of assets. He presided over a country that had minimal resources. They had potash and rocks, no oil or gas, and little arable land. Hussein decided the only way you could deal with that was to develop your people's brain power to make a place for Jordan and that, in fact, set a tone and direction he maintained. For one, he was progressive open, and ready to absorb Western technology, practices, and approaches. He didn't close himself off or move Jordan toward Islamist ideology. At the same time, he avoided publicly promoting the secular, showed respect for the Muslim dimension and tended his connections with the Saudi Wahhabis. He was comfortably a cosmopolitan figure, kept the balance and played these relationships very well.

Keeping this balance at home was also a big part of his success and paid off for Jordan. Hussein was very skilled at balancing the elements in his society. He never lost sight of the importance of his traditional ties with the tribes and their leaders. It was very interesting to me that he would spend a certain amount of time each year visiting the tribes when they had their gatherings. He never lost the ability to be at home in the desert or in the tent these people had as their way of life and tradition. At the same time, he ensured the position of his Palestinian populations was managed carefully that Jordan was open to them. And this balance paid off.

He was quite a remarkable man in that sense. During my time at the embassy Jordan was quiet: it was stable: and it enjoyed a relative economic boom with a lot of building going on. Part of the reason was that in the aftermath of the Lebanon civil war and destruction

of Beirut, Jordan had become the new Lebanon for the Arab elite looking for a place to go in the summer, a haven from the strict regime of Ramadan in the Peninsula, or a place just more open and alive than many of their home countries. The King also benefited from his ability to serve interests that valued his skill at limiting sources of instability or challenges to traditional monarchies in the region. He received important subventions from the Saudis which he used to tend his tribal business and keep the loyalty of East Bankers. From the West, particularly the U.S. he received military and economic assistance as a solid partner in the Arab world. And he continued to have special ties to Britain, the former colonial metropole.

Q: Wasn't there also a question about his health?

He did have health problems even at that time, and the question about succession was certainly in the background. Every so often we would have a spate of discussion about these things, and most of the time it reflected the King having to deal with some issue in court politics, or among political factions that some of the time would bubble up as talk about his successor. Everybody knew that his brother Sidi Hassam, the officially designated successor at that time, was not Hussein and that Hussein was probably trying to groom the son of Abdullah to take over. But he was very young.

Q: So often it's said that Jordan is a small kingdom in a very rough neighborhood. Speaking of rough neighborhoods, what about relations with Syria and Iraq at that time? How were things going?

COLLINS: Jordan did not have close relations with either one. There were tensions with the Syrians in particular. But the king ensured that he did not take positions or do things *vis a vis* Iraq or Syria that would provoke. And he didn't get into complicated issues without doing his best to ensure support from his benefactors and allies. In the case of these two nations, he relied on his Saudi backers and Washington for strategic depth.

Q: One always talks about the Saudis vs. the Hashemites, the ingrained hostility, but I take it in this case that did not arise.

COLLINS: Yes. The Saudis saw Jordan as a buffer to their north. Jordan kept the Syrians at a distance and absorbed the Palestinian issue. In other words, the Saudis had every reason to work with Hussein. Now, had Hussein tried to be a factor inside Arabia, it might have been a different story.

Q: That was never in the cards.

COLLINS: No, never. It was a mutually supportive arrangement and the Saudis did provide him substantial subvention which he used for his Arab world needs.

Q: Did the Palestinians ever break down into tribal groups? They weren't tribal, were they?

COLLINS: No they were not at least in any modern time. For the twentieth century the Palestinians were a settled, sedentary population: merchants, farmers, people who lived on the land and in towns. They were not nomads or a Bedouin tribe. That was one major difference between them and those who showed up with the Hashemites at the time of World War I and moved in to rule Palestine after the Ottoman defeat.

Q: Switching subjects a little: when you were there I assume that the Secretary of State made a certain number of visits there, didn't he? This would be Shultz.

COLLINS: I do not remember a Secretary visit during my time. He did go later, but not in those years. The king came to Washington any number of times, but Shultz didn't travel there often. Hussein came to the U.S. a lot.

Q: He came to the U.S. a lot both for medical treatment didn't he as well as for political contacts.

COLLINS: He paid a regular visit at least once a year to tend his bases.

Q: Did you get congressional delegations that would hit Israel and hop over to Jordan?

COLLINS: We had a few, not a lot. This was not a big travel time to Jordan. Lebanon was the preoccupation because it involved getting Arafat out of Beirut and the Israelis out of Lebanon. The peace process was largely taking a back seat, and Jordan was on the periphery and got less attention than at times when the peace process was at the top of the agenda. It was also a time in which we were preoccupied with developing relations with Egypt's new leadership.

Q: Sadat had been killed...

COLLINS: Yes, Sadat had been killed, and Mubarak had emerged. There were naturally a lot of uncertainties about what direction he would take, particularly regarding Israel and the peace treaty. The Jordanian role was peripheral here. But as we talked about earlier, there was one significant development that had long term implications and that was Jordanian-PLO relations and the King's withdrawal from asserting responsibility for negotiating the future of the West Bank. Certainly for my time in Jordan, that was the story, and while it got less attention that it might have at the time, it had major implications for the next phases of the peace process.

Q: What led up to your leaving a little bit early?

COLLINS: It wasn't anything I caused, but in a way it was very much part of the pattern that seemed to define the way a lot of my career developed. If you recall, before leaving for Jordan, I had worked on the task force dealing with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Charlie Hill, who became George Shultz's executive assistant had been a key figure in the group that was managing that Task Force, and I had worked with him closely. One day, out of the blue, I received a cable from him asking if I would consider

coming back to head the Department's Operations Center. It turned out there were a bunch of personnel shifts at that time. Rich Kauzlarich, the then director of the Opscenter, had taken another position closer to his specialty, and that opened up the Opscenter. So Charlie Hill turned to me, someone he knew from our work together earlier. The assignment did mean leaving about a month earlier than I would have done in any event. I had no onward assignment set (I don't think I had actually bid on anything yet) and it sounded interesting. So I accepted, and I was put into a job that not unusually I had no preparation to undertake. It would become a real education as my first assignment on the Seventh Floor, an introduction to the way diplomacy would be affected by the new digital age, and an extraordinary crash course in management of a complex, very dynamic part of the State Department.

Q: Did you by any chance run into whatever the problem was that Dick Viets had there that eventually cost him going to Portugal, I think?

COLLINS: No. Nothing came up I knew about while I was there. What happened to him and his appointment was very sad, and I never really understood what was at the bottom of the incident.

Q: So you came back to head the Operations Center from when to when?

COLLINS: I was at the Operations Center from the summer of '84 until the Iran Contra crisis when I went to the NSC staff in February '87: we'll come to that story later.

Q: Can you describe the role of the Operations Center at the time you were there because it does change.

COLLINS: Well it's important to recognize first of all that the Operations Center is part of the larger staff that belongs to the Secretary - to his institutional staff. It does change a great deal and reflects the incumbent Secretary and how he manages or uses the building. In my period as director George Shultz and his group had established an effective framework in which we operated. He had a well developed and well understood model for how the building was to be run and how it conducted its relations with the other parts of the government, embassies abroad, the Congress, and the public.

One thing worth recalling at the outset is that when he came to the Department, he brought no staff or others with him. He came alone and from the outset depended on the institution he took over. So, he began from the premise that he would use the Department as his base of support, and he brought with him the conviction that if he structured the department well and had a systematic organization to it, the building could perform well and provide the support he needed. From the outset, he relied heavily on the people in the Department, and he structured the institution's work to get the most out of the building and its staff.

In his tenure the Executive Secretary's position was a very important one, in practice the number four position after the Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Undersecretary for Political Affairs. The Executive Secretary's organization, the Executive Secretariat (S/S),

was the element of the Secretary's personal staff responsible for managing the Department's bureaucratic process and the Department's role within the interagency community. Its job was threefold: to ensure that when documents went to the Secretary or his principals they were properly prepared, staffed through the appropriate offices and agencies, and ready for decision or other use; to ensure that seventh floor approved instructions or decisions were properly conveyed to appropriate offices or Embassies for their action or information; and to ensure that the seventh floor both received timely information about issues as well as conveyed the authoritative views, instructions, or thinking of the Secretary and his principals to the Department, Embassies, and others outside the Department.

The Executive Secretary and two deputies managed three organizations within the S/S Executive Secretariat family: The "Line" managed the paper flow within the building and with other agencies: The executive office oversaw all the administrative aspects of support for the Secretary and his staff: and the Operations Center (Opscenter) served as the round the clock watch, communications, and crisis management organization. It had responsibility for managing the fast paper (cables etc.), alerts about high precedence embassy traffic or breaking events for the seventh floor, and ensuring that any instructions or other cables sent from the Department to the field from the seventh floor had received proper coordination and approval. In short at the Opscenter we were to serve as the Secretary's first responder and to ensure that any cable that went to the field in the Secretary's name reflected a properly coordinated and authoritative position of the Department of State. So we were responsible for coordination and review of that material and then its dispatch to the appropriate places either in Washington or around the world.

Q: Would you say this paralleled the function of the NSC ?

COLLINS: In certain respects, yes. It was not by accident that the usual form of communication between the department of state and the White House at that time was a memo from the executive secretary to the national security advisor.

Q: What did you know about the job at the Operations Center?

COLLINS: Well, I suppose the answer is essentially almost nothing. As mentioned, I had returned from Jordan at the request of Charlie Hill with whom I'd worked in NEA, particularly at the time of Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. My work as the NEA Staff Assistant and work with the Lebanon and other task forces in the past had given me a cursory knowledge about the center. But, when I got the telegram to ask if I'd return to be Director of the Operations Center, I had no idea about the institution's dynamics or the role of the structure beyond what I saw as a staff assistant, picking up or sending special precedence telegrams and the task force experience. Nor, of course did I have any idea about the profound changes that were going to take place during my two and a half years there.

This was also to be my first real experience on the Seventh Floor and in bureaucratic management on an agency wide level. I had some insights into this arcane world as NEA

Staff Assistant and a marvelous tutor in Hal Saunders to introduce me to some of its mysteries. But, the move to the Seventh floor was an eye opener -- challenging and interesting – and a daily education. Its variety, scope of responsibility from policy to personnel, challenges of coping with crises and routine matters, all gave me experience in different elements that would come as valuable background later in my career. But probably the most unexpected element at the time was the revolution that took place as we adapted and coped with the arrival of the digital age and its impact on almost every aspect of how the Foreign Service would conduct its business in the coming era.

Q: What was the Opscenter like when you arrived back in Washington?

COLLINS: Returning to Washington in 1984 I found a State Department that functioned pretty much as it did when I came into the Foreign Service fifteen years earlier. It had almost the same technology and organization, and much the same *modus operandi*. The Operations Center itself looked like it did when my A-100 class had its introductory tour of the place and as I remembered it from the seventies. It was focused around the activities and responsibilities of the “watch”. The one new element added in my time to the structure was a crisis management section with responsibility for task force operations.

A watch team had 5 to 6 people - a senior watch officer (usually an FSO-2), two watch officers (normally officers on the first Washington assignment), a military representative (sent to us from the JCS), and one or two civil service staff who helped with the clerical, logistical and other practical sides of the watch team’s work. Each team worked an eight-hour shift and we had a total of five teams. The crisis management unit I added while Director, had responsibility for support, staffing and organization of task force operations. That unit’s responsibilities involved keeping contact with other agency representatives with similar responsibilities, planning and managing the infrastructure task forces needed to function, and maintaining liaison with State’s geographic and functional bureaus to know what expertise was available on specific topic areas. This unit also had responsibility for the State component of the national continuity of government program. The management of the Center consisted of a director, the position I held, a deputy director for watch operations, a deputy for the crisis management unit, and one secretary who kept us all going and organized. The Director was a member of the S/S management team, and when one of the S/S front office deputies was away also served as acting deputy in his place.

The center uniquely in the Department worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week 365 days a year. It was, in essence, the 911 number for State at off-hours or in emergencies. It was likewise the 911 number for anyone at the State Department who needed to reach someone outside - an embassy or government overseas, or another agency at off-hours, or for the seventh floor offices during the working day. As a footnote here, by the way, it is worth marking that what this meant in practical terms was that my staff was the one State Department institution available and functioning and available for at least two thirds of the time. It was the Department’s first responder in that sense and it was also the one certain point of contact for use by anyone from the Secretary on down.

Managing the operations center held a number of unusual challenges very different from the usual office director position in the Department. For one, it meant the unit with its staff of some 120, operating 24 hours a day seven days a week worked for the majority of any week without any direct senior supervisor present. That meant no one could run it like a typical State Department office where the office director was in charge of everything all the time. Right from the outset that taught me a lot about management and leadership.

First off, I found the task I had was to empower and train younger people to use good judgment. Because the ops center ran 24 hours per day, seven days per week. I decided you could either work eight hours a day or ten or twelve but you could not be present for twenty four every day. So, you had to find the right formula to pick good people to do the jobs, train them, and give them the confidence to do their job well. That was a good lesson. It's one that I think in our profession often not enough people learn.

Second, I was impressed at the time with the importance of training because I had to re-train people about every six months on new systems or in new procedures, and every day you had to invite them to understand the broader picture facing State, where they fit into that picture, and what they had to watch for. As I noted, it was a fact of life that the Department wasn't working two-thirds of the time, and this small group of people, my watch team of six or eight people, were the State Department first responders, to use a more modern phrase, for two-thirds of the time. It meant you had to have and to instill faith that they could do what they needed to do.

Q: I think it was Dean Rusk or somebody said the problem of being Secretary of State is some son of a bitch is doing something all over the world at some point. How did you bring a young officer up to date?

COLLINS: First of all, you had a rolling briefing and overlap for the watch teams. A team was in charge for eight hours, and they would have about three-quarters of an hour with the next team before it took charge. They would brief them on anything currently on the agenda and ensure continuity from shift to shift. We also had a staff meeting every morning to review at the management level what issues were current, what travel was taking place, what visitors were in town, etc. It provided the larger context. After that meeting I would brief the watch leaders on the morning watch shift, and they would pass this information to their successors.

This process was quite well established when I arrived and didn't actually change much, but I found two other things essential to success. First, you had to give people the confidence that they weren't going to be jumped on or made miserable if they called you in the middle of the night and hadn't needed to. Simply put if the watch didn't have confidence to call me at two in the morning, would they call the Secretary when it was necessary? While there were certain obvious things to alert people about, or wake them

for, there were a lot that weren't obvious. These young officers needed the confidence to make that call and for this they needed confidence in their judgment.

Secondly, you also had to give the watch officers confidence that there was nothing wrong in asking for help. The only sin was not asking when you needed it. That's not inculcated in FSOs. It was terribly important to train the senior watch officer that if they didn't know something it was vital to ask someone who did, because all we would lose is somebody's sleep.

The third thing all of the center staff had to learn was the building in all its aspects and complexities. Most people knew nothing about the State Department. But the Watch had to know every corner of it and how to get in touch with every place in the world. It took about a month to get new officers up to speed, and it was accomplished through a mentoring system. A new watch officer would come in and sit with a counterpart for about a month before he or she took over because there wasn't any other way to do it. It was an art in a sense, and it created a unique family in many ways.

Q: I assume also this built up an alumni network, didn't it?

COLLINS: Yes. First, we tried to get people good jobs. There was a lot of loyalty to the family, and many people kept up with their watch colleagues over many years if not careers.

Q: You were fortunate, too, that you didn't have a Secretary of State like Henry Kissinger, who kept things to himself and wanted, you might say, credit. He wasn't willing to let things go, I would think.

COLLINS: Yes, but even for Kissinger, from what I heard from people who worked with him, the watch was always different. Like others he also depended on the watch. It was the can do assistant day or night. It managed the important calls for him; it ensured his directives were conveyed to the right people; it provided him with constantly updated information. So the watch always had a place of importance. We were a service industry, and if we did it well, then everybody thought we were pretty darned important! In turn, the watch was almost always treated well by principals and colleagues. There were a few cases in which people were abusive to the staff. It was my practice to inform them that if they wanted to use the watch and be supported by them, they would treat them with dignity.

To sum it up, I learned a lot of important lessons from this assignment: that successful leadership involves selecting good people, giving them good training and the skills to manage their jobs, inculcating confidence and judgment to act on imperfect or partial information, and ultimately to work as members of a team. It was also good to learn early that any director can work only a portion of the time his office functions, and that means placing confidence in staff, standing by them, and accepting the reality that no one is

indispensable. I have always been grateful to Charlie Hill and all the colleagues I had in S/S for the chance they gave me.

Q: You also mentioned the technological change that took place during your time at Ops. Somebody looking at this today may not realize how revolutionary the idea of having instant televised information from around the world at places there is a crisis was.

COLLINS: Well the changes we went through in this time were actually far more extensive than that. Over the two and a half years I was at Ops I found myself overseeing a genuine revolution in the technology the State Department used to conduct its mission. That in many ways was a unique side of my time in Ops. It was both technological in scope, but in the end far broader because it set in motion a profound change in the way the Department, embassies, ambassadors and policy leaders would do their work in the coming decades. It was the beginning of the twenty-four-hour news cycle, the digital revolution, and the world of instant communications in the hands of almost every individual.

Rapid, electronically based communications were the lifeblood of State Department operations and the Operations Center was at the center of that system. In the analog age as I began my directorship that meant, the telephone, the telegram, and the telex machines that brought us the wire news as well as our telegraphic traffic. Television and broadcast news were tuned in when something was happening or someone was giving a speech. But they were not monitored round the clock.

So, let's start with the phone. A great deal of Department work was done by phone, and the operations center served as the principal hub for phone services for the Department's principals, task force operations, or other emergency or sensitive substantive phone contacts between the Department and outside. In 1984 the watch depended on a telephone system that the Pentagon replaced and gave to State some two decades earlier. Its consoles permitted call transfers, organization of conference calls, use of direct lines to key agency counterpart centers, and call routing to pretty much any phone in the Washington area, elsewhere in the U.S., or overseas.

The telegram was the medium for written communications and the Ops Center served as the hub for receipt, distribution and dispatch for the major portion of telegraphic traffic needing the attention of the Department's principals or their staffs. It had responsibility for managing the flow of cable traffic of special sensitivity, the requirement for speedy delivery or dispatch, or substance that had relevance for the seventh floor principals. Incoming cable traffic arrived on the Watch from the fifth floor communications unit on a set of telex machines that printed cables out on multi-ply paper. The watch tore these printouts apart, marked the distribution for each cable and had them deposited in a set of mailboxes outside the Watch to be collected by the receiving bureaus/offices. Outgoing cables approved by a seventh floor principal, with special sensitivity or with high precedence (need for speedy delivery) were brought to the watch, reviewed for proper preparation and review, and were then sent by a pneumatic tube to the fifth floor communications center for dispatch to the field. It reminded one of operations in a

department store in the early fifties. So, in short we were conducting business with technology that would have been familiar to anyone who came into the State Department in the 1960s, and although I didn't have much feeling for what was to come, change was imminent.

Communications within Washington among agencies was likewise antiquated by any modern standards. When I arrived the State Department communicated securely with the White House and some other agencies via a secure phone system, cable or a secure Xerox-like system known as LDX, Long Distance Xerograph a very slow precursor of the secure fax machine.

Q: Sounds like something I saw as a kid in the newspaper room where they sent pictures.

COLLINS: It was related to that but it was a newer technology. What you would have seen was the old wire photo capability. This was similar except it was for printed text. You'd put a document page on a roller which spun it around for several minutes until it produced a copy of the other end. Everybody thought this was an absolute marvel. But it was about to succumb to the digital age.

The first harbinger of what was to come really arrived about a year into my time at Ops, when State discovered the fax machine. They were still new and began to show up in a few offices around the building. The Fax machine arrived without any authority from the top or the administrators of communications, and, in retrospect, I suppose was telling us how new technologies would just happen. Its arrival soon also provided a hint of the challenges new tech would bring as the fax machine precipitated a bureaucratic scrap of Department wide proportions. At the time the only transmission of documents by phone took place over a very few LDX machines, and they were all controlled by the communications section. This unit saw the fax as another LDX machine and the argument very quickly emerged that there should be only one fax number and machine location for the entire Department of State just as was the case with LDX. It was assumed the communications unit would then receive and see to the appropriate distribution of all incoming faxes just as they did with telegrams. The issue precipitated bitter bureaucratic arguments over how you would control information flow and what went in and out of the Department. If there were more than one fax number for the department, it would mean anyone could just receive and send documents from any office in the state department. What would that mean about what was authoritative? That argument went on for some time: it was whistling in the wind, of course, because technology and events just overwhelmed the old ways and machines, as people simply refused to acknowledge the idea of a single fax machine and number for the institution. By the time I left Ops, there were fax machines all around the Department. It was just the beginning.

Telegrams were next. Dean Acheson might have signed every telegram that went out from the State Department in his time; and in my time every telegram did go out in the name of the secretary even if he didn't sign them all. The Acheson substitute was at least for the seventh floor of the Department the Ops Center. Ops was the last review for any cable from the seventh floor or any telegram with high precedence or caption before it

was dispatched. That function for other cable traffic belonged to the communications unit on the fifth floor and to managers of bureaus and offices who could send cables with their own authorization.

With the coming world of email and computers in the hands of nearly every Department employee this process too would succumb, and we would enter the age of communications without central control and everyone his own communicator. That was to become a huge challenge – and a new element to be dealt with in running the bureaucracy. But that is some time ahead. I was part of the revolution only in its earliest stages as we introduced the computer and digital technology to the Operations Center and the way it conducted business.

Q: Are you talking about the communication side?

COLLINS: Yes, for the most part, but it involved adaptation and new procedures as well.

Q: But not the clearance and writing side?

COLLINS: Oh, it had deep implications for that as well. As I arrived I have already noted the means of communication employed by the Department was not that different from what it had been for 50 years. Telegrams, the principal means of communication between embassies and the Department were relatively condensed if not brief. Longer or more discursive prose used the air gram which permitted longer reports less tightly edited writing. This was not used as much as in the past, but it still was a vehicle.

Q: In which you could wax prolific, and it was sent by pouch, but it looked like a telegram.

COLLINS: It looked like a telegram, but you didn't have to worry about the length. The technology in sending a telegram was really quite labor intensive.

Q: And expensive.

COLLINS: Yes. But the new technology was emerging. We've mentioned the fax. That was peanuts compared to what was coming as the new digital technologies arrived. Here the impact was profound on operations, procedures, and the very way information was used in the building

Not long after I moved into the Opscenter, we moved from the older analog technology based in the telex and the phone system of the sixties I described earlier to the first computers for managing telegraphic traffic and a new digital phone system. The impact of the computer systems' arrival was profound. As the Department adopted the new technologies, all the traditional limits about writing, length of documents, etc. evaporated. You could now send a classified telegram of any length, any size. The communications section didn't have to retype or reprocess it. Instead a machine would read what was typed, encrypt it, and send it. This began with the advent of the OCR system and

expanded as the first word processing computer systems became widely available. it completely changed the dynamic of telegraphic reports. And the implications were profound. It almost overnight created a revolution in the volume and variety of information available at any given moment. It had profound implications for the work of the Watch, but more broadly for the most basic ways decisions would be made for the future.

When I came into the operations center, the decision making process at the top of the State Department and U.S. Government was governed by limited amounts of information: decision makers, analysts, advisers almost always felt they had less than enough and there were too many gaps. By the time I left, the situation had completely reversed such that the problem was a glut of information and data, and the challenge was how to pick out the relevant to ensure it arrived in a timely way for a decision to be made.

The challenge for the operations center teams was to move from a time at which it was fairly easy to determine among what came in from overseas, what you would send to a principal in the state department. When I left the situation was one in which the volume of information was overwhelming, and the task was to be sure that you didn't miss something in the pile of material for that morning that should have gone to somebody's attention. This was a challenge to training, to technology, to the capacity of the system to handle it. For example, during the bombing of Libya in 1986, the system basically crashed. The volume of traffic from the military plus state overwhelmed the system.

Q: Let me talk just a bit about technology. Did you have technical experts, so-called nerds? Did you have somebody who kept up with developments and let you know what was happening?

COLLINS: Yes and no. At the initial stages, we had to rely heavily on learning by doing. We were at the leading edge of what the Department was doing: we received the new things first. We were directly connected to the pipe from the communications people who were always out front at the beginning. The initial computers we dealt with were Wangs.

We had technical people from the company and a few from State who made the transition from file clerks and information file specialists to the new technologies that would take over that world. They were largely younger people as you might expect, and they were led for many years by Danny McCall. Danny was Mr. Wang for us. He was the liaison for the ops center and S/S-EX, the executive secretary, on these matters. He worked with and was trained by the Wang company, and he had a few people working for him. In reality, though, we all really learned as we went along.

The issue for us, of course, was that all of this had to be done while normal operations had to keep going; nothing could be stopped. We had to have a continual upgrading of the Opscenter's technologies, but not permit any interruption in normal routines.

Q: Four hundred thousand cables a year?

COLLINS: Or more. Nothing could stop. When we rebuilt the entire facility, we moved into temporary quarters, and kept going without interruption. But it was not just physical facilities that changed more than once. Each time we changed the technology as well. We started with what we called the “scat system” (the telex machines and multiple hard copies to distribute) and moved to a computerized distribution system where everyone gave up the pencil for a keyboard and screen.

Q: Did you at your time move from the Wang system to the IBM?

COLLINS: No. The Department took the Wang system to about as far as it could go before moving to PCs. But, in my time the Wang was just being introduced as a computer system linking different offices and machines. Up to my time it had been used almost exclusively for word processing and disc storage exclusively.

Q: Did you have much to do with the Secretary’s travel?

COLLINS: Yes very much. Secretaries ever since Kissinger had been travelling a lot, and it was Kissinger so far as I know who established the practice of having his office structure down to the phones move with him. This, I think, originated during his shuttle diplomacy after the 1973 War. What it meant, however, was a major logistical and communications operation. When he travelled he was accompanied by secure communications and when I arrived at the Ops Center this amounted to something like a ton and a half of equipment and supplies. In short, he put in place the concept that the Secretary of State never was not Secretary of State in charge.

Q: He took his office with him.

COLLINS: Yes, he took his office with him. He was in constant contact. The expectation was that there would be nothing he couldn’t do anywhere in the world. There was, of course, officially an acting secretary when he was out of the country. But, the fact was he was hooked up as though he sat in Washington all the time. What that meant was the Opscenter was closely involved with the Secretary’s travel people and had to ensure the effectiveness and integrity of his communications systems. Secretarial travel also put the Opscenter at the center of the Secretary’s work as focal point for his communication with anybody in Washington. As I noted this meant that initially he would travel with about a ton and a half of equipment: big secure phone machinery, communications gear that was just huge. But technology changed this as well. Ops became the first organization to acquire secure laptop computers and new types of secure printing equipment. By the end of my stay the ton and a half had become something like three trunks.

Q: This was miniaturization.

COLLINS: It was. We introduced the first secure laptops, printers, and so forth. It became more than three suitcases, but he could travel and communicate with three suitcases: telephone, telegram, anything the Secretary needed. So it was both

miniaturization and new technology - the move from old communication systems to a digital, computerized one.

Q: I might say as an aside that today we're doing this on very small digital recorders whereas previous interviews I've had with you have been on tape cassettes. Time moves on.

COLLINS: Yes. Those digital recorders probably have more capability in them than we had in the entire ops center at the time.

Q: I suspect so.

COLLINS: So these major changes in technology had a huge impact on the way the Department did business. Just as we were sending volume faster and in great quantity back and forth between Washington and our embassies, for example, there seemed to be no limit on the amount of communication or those communicating anymore. The technology had liberated the individual from nearly all the constraints of the typewriter and earlier communications equipment that was labor intensive. But the most immediate result here was the increase in the volume of traffic - information - that presented itself to the Department's principals each day and the new challenge of sifting through it to find what was important and what demanded attention.

Then, other means of communication also began to impinge on the way State functioned. Here we come to CNN and the phenomenon of the twenty-four-hour global news cycle. The Operations Center had been established after the Cuban missile crisis to ensure that there was always someone awake and working if something broke when Washington was asleep. It was recognition that not everything happened on a DC time schedule. But we were there to take the calls from posts or others who had something then needed to deal with at off hours as well as during the normal work day. Now that was to change as nearly every citizen had access to a round the clock monitor of events and we were off to the races of the twenty-four-hour news world.

One event brought the change to Ops in dramatic fashion. In the summer of 1985, a Palestinian militant group hijacked a TWA airliner and took it to Beirut airport. What followed was a long hostage saga with the hijackers taking the plane to Algeria and back to Beirut, hostages being moved and some freed until it ended in Syria days after it began. At the outset Beirut Embassy staff along with Lebanese authorities from various agencies were involved in trying to resolve it, and at least one passenger was killed early on.

Q: An American navy man.

COLLINS: Yes. But what was new for all of us aside from the brutality of the hijackers was that the upstart new channel CNN was there providing instant coverage on television for everyone to watch – citizens in the US, decision makers, political leaders; suddenly it seemed for the first time an event that involved the lives of Americans in a remote airport

was being understood and reported through a system which communicated faster than any system the U.S. government had in place. At best what we - the official channel for government communication - could do was, establish a nonsecure telephone connection to our officials at the airport. CNN meanwhile was interviewing participants in the events and others that seemed beyond the reach of our officials.

In a matter of days this event revolutionized the world of crisis management and the environment for decision making surrounding such events. It brought an explosive change in the media's role as reporter, sometimes as player, and almost always from then on as factor in the way a crisis would evolve. Further after Beirut and TWA 847, nearly all the television networks took it as obligatory to cover such crises or events. Meanwhile our traditional sources in such cases - embassy and security officials - were nearly always behind the images on the screen in shaping perceptions about what was happening. It was a new world in which the professionals were playing catch up and the decision makers faced the challenge of having to deal with a far more complex and diffuse information environment.

I don't need to tell you the role this has played in many crises since, but this new world emerged during my period in Ops and it changed the way we did business. From that time forward the TV news became a constant companion for each watch team. CNN on all the time. It was more than just another news program. The advent of the new role television would play, no less that the digitization of our information systems brought revolutionary change to the way the Department had to address issues. In a world where the weather in Brazil could seem like local news to the citizen in Detroit, there followed an exponential explosion in the number of things to which the Secretary of State or the Department of State was expected to react immediately: it was on TV, so what was the U.S. government going to do about it?

Q: Were you the instigator of calls to the press secretary spokesperson, saying, "Hey, this is on TV?"

COLLINS: The media managers in the department were part of a broader community that was alerted by the watch. They had a press duty officer. Similarly, there were duty personnel in the bureaus, on the staffs of principals, in other agencies. What was new at this point involved the emergence of competition among the networks and others to be the first with what we know today as "breaking news." This put new burdens on the watch no less than the explosion of information from our embassies and intelligence sources. Now my officers had to decide what deserved attention of duty personnel from among the steady stream of television information. It imposed new responsibilities for judgment on a lot of very talented junior officers, and was a challenge for the entire Service. And here I give George Shultz very great credit for helping the Foreign Service broadly to understand what was happening during this time. I would also give him very high marks for empowering the people who were dealing with this new world and phenomenon, trying to shape a response it.

Q: You were fortunate to have a leader and manager like George Shultz. The normal lawyer Secretary of State is not the greatest person to deal with at such a time.

COLLINS: Yes. He had empowered his executive secretary to deal with and shape the way the department responded to this time of change. He recognized what the changes meant for diplomacy and supported those trying to embrace and adapt to these new ways.

Q: When did the Crisis Management unit emerge?

The Beirut hijacking event also had its role here. It did spur the creation of the Opscenter crisis management unit, and from this point on we became the Department's focal point for dealing with "exceptional" events. It was a logical evolution because there were two critical aspects to dealing with rapidly emerging events: the first was communications. If you weren't able to talk to everybody involved at State and across Washington it was a real problem as we learned by experience. Second, we quickly developed the procedures and protocols to establish an interagency organization or inter-bureau task force to deal with crisis situations, a process that worked very well.

In my time we had something like 50-plus task forces for events such as the Beirut hijacking, the Mexico City earthquake, Chernobyl, a number of terrorist incidents. Over time we developed a standard approach to setting up a task force and equipping them to function effectively. We had a core set of skills in the ops center for managing communications and managing the structure of a task force. We established a small office to develop and oversee these procedures and keep current on the necessary contacts. The Opscenter never ran a task force. In most cases they were led by a geographic bureau; but the center normally determined and brought together the necessary cadre of people from consular, geographic bureaus, the desks, the offices to deal with an issue effectively. Then, we brought in other agencies' liaison to ensure the inter-agency component of any crisis was coordinated. I think that framework has lasted.

Q: It's so logical.

COLLINS: Yes, and it wasn't invented by us as an idea. It had existed before, but we created a systematic approach to organizing the work of the task force, ensuring its correct composition, and providing for its support. Much of the impetus for the changes we introduced were also in response to the new world of instant round-the-clock communication. So, we developed a standard set of procedures for organizing crisis management, and while I won't argue it was ever perfect, it served very well.

Q: How did you find relations with CIA and the Pentagon? These would be major players.

COLLINS: In that role, and at that level - bearing in mind that I was overseeing an office whose major job was to disseminate and collect information and make sure that all the right people had things they needed - I think we got along very well with our counterpart centers. These included the National Joint Command Center at the Pentagon, the similar

center in CIA, and the sit room in the White House. We also had people at NSA and other agencies on our alert list. It was a community of OpsCenter's and we understood one another.

We had a system in which an officer would pick up the phone on certain kinds of alerts in one center and it would ring automatically in the counterpart centers. They would instantly have the senior duty person in each center on the phone to compare notes almost instantly. It ensured good coordination, and overall worked very well. We also had a military representative at the Opscenter in my time. He was our liaison with the different pieces of the military, could get us to the right officials, and helped FSOs understand the military perspective on events.

Q: I was interviewing a man who was DCM in Sierra Leone when Liberia was blowing up, and they were taking refugees from there. They were getting these cables that they didn't understand from the American military. They had to get a military man in to translate the cables.

COLLINS: That's what our milreps did. They were very good, dedicated, and helpful. We also had someone at the White House. We had an FSO in the sitroom. At times we also had liaison in the NMCC, the National Military Command Center. These individuals were invaluable in avoiding miscommunication and in helping the centers communicate effectively. It was a solid and well organized system.

Q: The antipathy between Shultz and Weinberger, the secretary of defense, I take it didn't translate down the line.

COLLINS: Not in these relations. We weren't in the decision making business. We were facilitating the flow of information to and from decision makers. So far as I know, we were never told we could not share information other than those items that were specifically identified as limited in distribution to State only. In this connection, another new item in my time was the development of pre-programmed distribution for telegraphic traffic. Since it was agreed that some kinds of information had to be distributed instantly, and distribution often caused controversy, we were now able to design a system to distribute certain kinds of telegrams automatically both within the Department and inter-agency. This system also emerged in part from the Beirut hijacking and other terrorist incidents where effective management required rapid dissemination of traffic. Developing that system took a lot of inter-agency negotiation about limits; about what, where, who would get cables; how they would be handled by recipients; about procedures for handling traffic that contained intelligence and/or military sourced information. All of this meant negotiating common ground rules. And oddly enough in a way the most difficult negotiation to complete was with our own nearest neighbor, the INR watch.

Q: Why?

COLLINS: Well, it was essentially a turf battle, and once we sorted the turf issues we didn't have a lot of difficulty.

Q: I got a look at turf battles in technology when I was in Seoul. This is '76 to '79 when we were trying to computerize Seoul. As an experimental thing, both the political section and the consular section were engaged. In Political we were moving along, and we were being run by the centralized technology people, but we then found out the consular affairs people were doing their own thing. Had that been settled by the time you were doing this?

COLLINS: There were still issues of that kind. I saw the first Wang in the Department in '79, '80, somewhere along in there. Once the introduction of the computer/word processing systems took off, word processing in the communications process rather quickly became standardized at state. But you're right that there were also other systems being developed in areas like consular affairs to do specific things that they needed that were not addressed by the Wang structure. Their efforts to address their specific needs did cause some problems.

Q: While you were there running the ops center, did you have any feeling that you were sort of the brood hen of the incubator of our upcoming brightest stars in the foreign service?

COLLINS: I did, actually. One of the great things about working in the Opscenter then was that under Shultz it had become the entry point for the executive secretariat, sort of the boot camp for the Secretary's staff. Few people were taken into other positions in S/S (not counting top management) who hadn't started in the ops center.

This meant I had the good fortune of being able to pick around 120 people a year from among the best junior and mid-level officers in the Service. Essentially I got to pick anybody I wanted from among those who expressed any interest in working on the seventh floor. This was before all the complications of bidding. We would get some 300 to 350 expressions of interest. Those would be looked at by central personnel first. They'd weed out the ones that really were not going to make it. Then we'd get 200, 250 files to look at, to see which ones we wanted to interview. We brought in some 100 to 120 people a year. They were the up and coming people in the Department, the promising juniors and med grade officers.

Because I went through three cycles of this process, I got to know a half generation of some of the best talent that the Foreign Service had. It's partly from that experience that every ambassador in the former Soviet space during the nineties, for instance, had worked for me at some point, many of them in the ops center. My graduates included people all over the world and in every bureau who stayed in the Service and did well. It was quite a cadre of people. It was an exceptional opportunity to introduce most of them for the first time to the mysteries of running the Department's bureaucracy and exercising the leadership and judgment to be effective at the job. It was very rewarding, a chance to get to know some very bright and talented younger officers.

Q: When you were there, Charlie Hill was the...

COLLINS: He was the executive assistant.

Q: How did he operate?

COLLINS: When I first came back, Charlie wore two hats: he was both the executive assistant to the Secretary, that is the head of the Secretary's personal office, and the Executive Secretary, meaning he led S/S, the executive secretariat. The two were different structures, of course, because one was a personal staff and the other the Secretary's institutional arm. At some point not long after I came back from Jordan, Charlie gave up the Executive Secretary function and brought in Nick Platt to be the Executive Secretary.

When I joined S/S Charlie was very much the overseer and hands-on manager of both offices and the relations between both offices were close with the two functioning nearly seamlessly as an extension of the Secretary and reflecting Shultz's managerial style. In this system the Executive Secretary was the fourth ranking voice/position in the Department of State., coming after the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or the Under secretary for Political Affairs. The other under secretaries oversaw defined functions and had responsibility for oversight and coordination of the work of particular bureaus. It was also the case in my time that the principals, in addition, had informal responsibility for particular substantive issues or areas delegated to them by the Secretary.

In holding the work of these offices together for the Secretary, S/S had responsibility to ensure that the work prepared for the principals was properly coordinated, which meant the Executive Secretary or those working for him signed off on anything going to a principal's office for action. The Opscenter signed out everything that went overseas from the seventh floor or had the approval of a seventh floor principal for the same reasons. Ops was also in charge of alerting the seventh floor principals about traffic of information that would need their attention as well as alerting bureaus in the same way. It was these core functions that also put us at the center of communications when the Secretary or other principal were traveling. We were, in sum, the service center for the seventh floor principals and the Secretary's communications center. That was how Charlie ran it.

Charlie had two deputies at that time. One had responsibility for the bureaus dealing with Asia, Middle East, and Africa. The other deputy had Europe, East Europe, and Latin America. They divided the functional bureaus between them. They oversaw the management of the paper flow, decision making, and so forth for the bureaus in their responsibility. Opscenter supported both of them, and when the deputy in charge of Asia, Middle East and Africa was out of the office, I stood in for him in the S/S front office.

I should also mention the other big piece of the Executive Secretariat. The Operations Center was essentially the interface for the Department of State with our posts overseas and the manager of telegraphic and electronic communications with the interagency community and White House. In Washington the flow of slow paper, as it was known

then, was managed by what was called “The Line,” (S/S-S). It was a counterpart to the Opscenter, and managed the preparation and monitored the flow of slow paper (memos of all kinds, correspondence, official correspondence with the White House and other cabinet secretaries). It oversaw assignment of responsibility for preparation, coordination, management, and as appropriate execution of these kinds of documents and paperwork on behalf of the Secretary. The Line also had responsibility for staffing the Secretary when he travelled. I had a counterpart who was head of the Line, and the front office oversaw both of us. You also had an executive office that managed travel, personnel and other administrative aspects of the Secretary’s office and staff. But the ops center was the biggest and was the only ‘round the clock’ operation.

Q: You moved out of the ops center to where?

COLLINS: I left the ops center at the end of January 1987 and went to the White House, to the National Security Council staff, to become the deputy in the intelligence directorate. The move came about as part of the infamous Iran-Contra shakeup. You may remember that event brought a near total house cleaning at the NSC staff and brought in a new team led by Frank Carlucci and Colin Powell. I was asked by a former Moscow Embassy colleague Barry Kelly to join him as his deputy in the intelligence directorate. It was in a way ironic because taking up the new job put me in charge of some of the responsibilities that had fallen within the portfolio assigned to Col. Oliver North, the man more than any other responsible for the whole affair.

Q: Tell me about that.

COLLINS: Well the irony came from the way the Iran Contra scandal broke into the public domain. Recall, I mentioned the Opscenter develop a system for the electronic and automatic distribution of cables related to terrorist or hostage situations. Well, it was just this system that played a key role in blowing the whistle on part of the events linked to a project being run out of the NSC that involved negotiation with Iran over hostages and covert support for the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. The whole event began when a telegram that revealed elements of the covert operations Col. North was involved in overseeing from the White House came in with this caption and went all over Washington.

Q: This was about American hostages being held in Beirut?

COLLINS: Yes, it concerned negotiations over freeing hostages in Beirut. But, the telegram contained information, among other things, that suggested things were going on under the coordination and direction of Col. North that nobody knew about and were questionable.

In any event dissemination of the cable produced a fire storm. About ten o’clock in the morning the watch got an irate call from North berating my Senior Watch Officer demanding to know, “Who authorized the distribution of this thing? I’ll have him fired. This is unacceptable. I want an investigation.” I took the line from a shaken Senior Watch

Officer and explained briefly to him how - with the NSC's coordination - the system for automatically disseminating such telegrams had been approved interagency and said, "If you have a problem, send it to me in writing, and we'll follow up." He hung up on me. In any event, I never heard anything further from North or about the telegram.

At this point, I don't actually remember the details of what was in that telegram, but when it went all over town, it became critical in the unraveling of the Iran Contra project.

Q: Had you been aware of the Iran contra thing? I mean, looking back on that.

COLLINS: I had not been aware of much of any of this. This was all run in intelligence channels and I remember no communications about any of it coming through the Opscenter or to my attention in any other way. I knew about elements of the Contra support operation, not so much from my Opscenter position, but because of the role that I had at times traveling or working in the S/S front office. I knew, as well, we were doing what we could to free the hostages in Beirut, but I had not known about the Iran side of that equation.

Q: Were you getting any sense about Ollie North as sort of a cowboy or something like that, or was he...

COLLINS: At the time not really. But, because I went to the NSC to the office where he had worked after Iran Contra blew up, I came to understand a lot about what had happened. In fact, I spent much of my time picking up the pieces and working with those who were trying to insure that the intelligence community didn't suffer irreparably from the stupidities that had gone on.

I guess I would say that while I never did understand all the details of this episode, a couple of things were clear. One was that people at CIA, Ollie North and a number of others, had been cooking up these operations: North was central to all of them because he was able to provide a White House cover and to order up this and command that in the President's name. At a minimum he was a willing participant and often a legitimator for these projects.

The problem at that time was that, as far as I could figure out, the White House lacked a rational system of controlling, coordinating and managing what was being done with the support of elements among the NSC staff in the President's name. I found that the NSC staffers all wrote to the front office of the NSC without coordination. Similarly, staff members seemed to work very much on their own. It was pretty clear that North was working various things in his portfolio without much recourse to anybody else in the White House.

Q: "This is the White House calling," or something like that?

COLLINS: Right. And people were stupid enough not to say, "Wait a minute. Let's have a meeting," or whatever. It was an essentially broken system of management and control that allowed someone with no judgment frequently to get way beyond where he should

ever have gone without having his actions vetted. The problem I had in the aftermath of all this was that everybody was outraged and wanted to pass laws to prevent it every happening again. But, there is only so much you can legislate to prevent stupid actions. It was a breakdown in the system. It was not that the system was irreparably wrong, but it didn't function well in this case, and as a subsequent study found needed to be better regulated by those who had charge of it.

Q: Should we move to that time then? You went to the NSC from when to when?

COLLINS: I went to the NSC in February 1987, at the invitation of the NSC's director of the intelligence. He had been brought in by the new National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci in the wake of Iran Contra as part of a whole new team of senior directors. One of these was my new boss Barry Kelly, whom I knew from Moscow. He invited me to be his deputy. It was a very unusual assignment because, as far as I knew, I was the first FSO to hold a position in the intelligence directorate at the national security council staff. It was a great eye opener. The majority of my time there was spent in working with congress over the aftermath to Iran Contra, but it gave me a depth of exposure to the intelligence community that would serve me well for the years to come.

Q: I'm interviewing Nick Burns right now.

COLLINS: Yes, Nick went over to the national security council after my time there, in fact after I returned to State to be a deputy executive secretary.

Q: You were called to the NSC in 1987, as part of the effort to clean up the mess of the Iran Contra, weren't you?

COLLINS: This was part of a much bigger effort than anything I did on my own, of course.

Q: I've talked to Ted McNamara, and he was called in around that time, too.

COLLINS: We were both in the same office, as a matter of fact.

Q: He said he was told, "Find out what Ollie North is up to and don't do it!"

COLLINS: In many ways that was exactly the point. Much of our tasking was to prevent any such misadventure from happening again. I spent a great deal of time with that assignment. As it turned out, I was dealing a great deal with the relations between congress and the White House, and between the White House and intelligence agencies to determine what had gone wrong to permit Iran Contra. I worked along with others at the National Security Council including legal advisor Nick Rostow, Colin Powell, Carlucci, and others to develop a structure to preserve the effectiveness and responsiveness of the intelligence community to presidential authority but would provide assurance the congress would accept that we would not have another Iran Contra.

The problem was that you were trying to structure a system to prevent stupidity. As a friend of mine said, “You can’t fix stupid.” Over almost two years my White House colleagues and I worked to get us past the outrage in congress and elsewhere at what had been done in Iran Contra and create a new system to ensure greater oversight and coordination for future covert action. As we worked it was important to prevent congress from doing things that would throw the baby out with the bath water, but at the same time to structure procedures or approaches to doing business that would give greater comfort both to the White House and to the congress that we knew what was going on in the intelligence community.

The result was a new set of procedures for authorizing covert intelligence activities designed to prevent an abuse of the system like the one that North and his colleagues had brought on the President and the intelligence community. We developed the legal system of so-called “findings” that are now part of the process.

Q: When you say “findings,” what do you mean?

COLLINS: As we developed it this was a document signed by the President that authorized certain intelligence activities in any given area. It was also briefed to the leadership of the intelligence committees, the Speaker of the House and the majority leader of the Senate. It was, of course, classified at a high level. It was to define the framework in which any future covert activity in a given sphere was to take place. If there were activities proposed to be undertaken outside its limits, they had to be the subject of yet another authorization. It was all about establishing accountability. If the intelligence agencies or any element within their control were off doing things they shouldn’t be without presidential authorization, then they were to be held accountable. By the same token, the political leadership of the country was accountable for things undertaken that were authorized. I spent a lot of time on that work with the legal advisor to the national security staff, the congressional liaison people, other people on the White House staff.

The other thing that came up during this period were events that heightened “Cold War spy against spy” issues with the Soviet Union. I was involved partly because under our purview we had the counterintelligence world and the oversight of intelligence *vis-a-vis* the Soviet Union-Warsaw Pact. This was a period of change in Moscow and uncertainty in Washington about its meaning. Nearly everything touching the Soviet account seemed to be magnified. It is at the beginning of Gorbachev’s time, but there is no consensus yet in Washington about whether he is the harbinger of real change or more of the same with a different face. It was a time when nearly any issue affecting a decision about Moscow and our relations was contentious.

Q: All the leaders had died off prior to this.

COLLINS: Right, but this was not yet the late 80s when a page had been turned. There was still a question of whether that page would turn or not. It was in this context that we had had the discovery and revelation of the bugging by the Soviet authorities of the new

embassy building under construction in Moscow. You may remember we stopped all classified activities at the embassy in Moscow and negotiations were suspended for a time, everything from arms control to the rest of the agenda. We had a visit by Secretary Shultz where he was doing all of his work in a trailer. It was quite a mess actually. So that was in the background.

Q: I was just going to say, it couldn't have been much of a surprise, was it?

COLLINS: It was never clear to me what the background was to this, but from my vantage point the way they did it and the fact that it hadn't been discovered was an acute embarrassment to our counter intelligence community. When it came out it became a great scandal. Worse still, it was followed in my time by the scandal involving the Moscow embassy marines. This was the Sergeant Lonetree case. We had a royal donnybrook with the Soviet Union over this.

Now our office was not really directly responsible for Soviet affairs or our relations, but as these events unfolded our responsibilities for counter intelligence programs, brought us into some of the most contentious issues, and I got involved in various pieces of the fallout from these developments. Among them was the unresolved question of what was to be done with the bugged half built new chancery structure in Moscow? While I'm not quite sure how this happened, it came to our office to prepare a memo for the President recommending what to do with this building. Looking back, I think we got the task essentially because this was seen as an intelligence/counter-intelligence issue in the end. Now, I'm quite sure we were not the only ones writing memos, but I did write the decision memo for the President on the subject, and what I recall the memo advocated and the President approved was to tear the building down and build it from the ground up again.

Q: The problem was basically that these listening devices were imbedded in the concrete, weren't they?

COLLINS: It was worse than the concrete. If it had been only in concrete, it might have been manageable. Rather they were built into the reinforcing steel supports of the building. There was no way to deal with that.

Getting that decision from the President was no simple matter. But it was a true lesson in the bureaucracies of the intelligence community. There were as many views and ideas as people in the room. But in the end the President actually approved the plan to tear the existing building down to the ground level. The experts didn't want to go below the ground because there was a lot of infrastructure there; generators, water, etc. So, the decision was to take it down to the ground level and build it up from there. In fact, that would have been by far the cheapest and most sensible option, but that's not what happened.

Even though the President had agreed on that course, it never happened. We did this memo in '87 or '88, but until my birthday in the year of 2000, this project was ongoing.

We finished a new building in the place of the old one and dedicated on June 4, 2000. So it took 12 years.

What actually happened was that the intelligence and counterintelligence people were absolutely determined to find out what the Soviets had done in the old building. Not to get too far ahead of this story, they basically spent years taking it apart employing, every technology, technique and concept down to what to me seemed like using tweezers, in an effort to ensure they knew what had been done and to investigate the capabilities of their opposition. This kept going on for years. Meanwhile we also had a shackled embassy in Moscow with further onerous limits on how it operated as a result of the Marine scandal.

Q: Lonetree.

COLLINS: Lonetree, that's right. We expelled Soviet diplomats and the Soviets withdrew the Russian employees of the embassy in Moscow. A huge folderol followed to the point where our embassy had spouses asked to clean the Embassy toilets and officers dealing with the trash; it was a nasty time. I was not part of it because I was in Washington, but I could imagine what was happening.

More to the point, what happened in this period laid the basis for the way the embassy had to function until the mid- '90s. Only well into the new decade and post Soviet era were we able to pick up the pieces. Only then did we begin to restart the project to construct the new building and rebuild an adequate staff with Russian employees. But we'll deal with that later. The long and short of it was a very interesting lesson in bureaucraties and the limits of White House power in terms of how this played out. In this case the President's decision was essentially ignored.

Q: I don't think we're getting into classified stuff, but this intelligence community. Here you are, the new boy on the block and up against it. You might explain what the intelligence community was at that time and your evaluation of how they operated from your perspective.

COLLINS: I was an outsider and not terribly well versed in much of what was going to come my way over my two years at NSC. I had been a part of the analytical side when I worked in INR at State, and, of course, I knew something of the covert side from my experience abroad and using the products of intelligence collection as an analyst. But, I had almost no experience with the covert action side that had got the community into trouble in the past and again in Iran-Contra.

Coming to the NSC, though, what was eye opening, was the perspective from the White House. It was just very different. According to most portrayals of the system, the intelligence community works for the president, and the DCI (Director of Central Intelligence) at that time headed the community and served concurrently as the head of the CIA. The community had its disparate parts: CIA, DIA, NSA, the imagery centers, the service intelligence organizations and other agency groups like INR at State.

As I looked at this complex what struck me was generally how self referential it was and how often it was detached from addressing questions the leaders in the White House, or in State or Defense had on their agendas. The community had elaborate processes for determining priorities for collection, targeting, analysis, and so forth, but there was a certain academic quality to all of this because it was heavily focused within the intelligence community and driven by its own imperatives, capabilities and interests. The input from the policy side was, it seemed to me, rather weak in determining what intelligence was collected, and what questions were posed to be answered by the analytical community.

In this regard it struck me that there were great limits to the intelligence community's ability to address the actual needs of the policy world. If you asked them a direct question, you would get a good answer. But in terms of saying to the President or the Secretary of State, "Mr. President, there are two things today that you ought to be understanding are of real relevance to the national security of the United States," or in the next day saying, "Nothing happened today that needs to trouble you, so carry on" I thought the community generally let the leadership down. They just didn't do that. Rather, as we have noted previously, it seemed to me there was a journalistic imperative at work where. The dynamic, and even the vocabulary surrounding it, was driven by "production," filling the regular publications like the National Intelligence Daily (NID), or meeting the need to producing analysis regularly whether it had particular relevance or not. I may be somewhat unfair in this but this is what seemed to me to be coming at us in the White House.

Q: And it's dangerous. You're sent out, and you have to have so many pieces of information in a day.

COLLINS: We're talking about the analytical side now, but I'll come to the collections side next because that raises even bigger issues. The analytical side had a variety of daily, weekly or periodic publications. It also had special publications, like the famous NIE's (National Intelligence Estimates) and other studies done outside the regular publications. The daily papers were basically classified newspapers, and you know that no newspaper comes out in the morning saying there isn't any news today. There's always a full paper's worth of news.

The same was true with the intelligence publications. They appeared every day and each day would appear to present issues of equal importance to prior publications because they were presented that way: there was no effort to establish priority among presented items over a week or month, other than how they appeared in the publications on any given day. I thought then and still do that this approach was a great disservice to the political leadership. These individuals needed the best judgments of the intelligence community about what were the real priority threats or issues of the day or week. Not at the desk officer, but at the presidential or cabinet level. But the President's daily brief wasn't all that different from what was done for the general foreign policy-security community. As I saw it, it was a menu of well analyzed items presented without real judgment by the

intelligence community as to what was important and what wasn't – not for a given day perhaps, but more broadly in terms of our national interests and priorities.

A second issue was equally difficult from my perspective. This was the fact that the intelligence community focus gave overwhelming priority to collection vs. ensuring full exploitation of what it had available. This issue would loom very large after the attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, but was given little thought while I was in the White House. I found then that the big bucks, the big issues about budgets, and the issues people spent time on were overwhelmingly about collection, about getting more data, about filling gaps in the same. about new ways to collect. To a degree it reminded of the way people looked at defense issues and defense spending. The things that congress likes, things like satellites, get great attention because they spread a lot of money around making expensive technological gadgetry. These were the topics of major debate and interest, and a lot of money and attention went into this kind of thing. Meanwhile the more conventional was often shortchanged: we were not getting the kind of attention and resources to good old human intelligence and maintaining the capacity for solid analysis of what we had that was needed if you were going to do the best job possible.

People were much too apt to rely on the high-priced, big ticket items of satellite imagery, intercept technology, the latest upgrading computers every year. Whatever it was that took huge amounts of money, kept lots of people in the “military industrial complex” fully employed, whether it added to the end capacity of the intelligence community to serve the political leadership of the country better or worse seemed to dominate the debate about intelligence policy and the debates over effectiveness. The intelligence community had got itself, I thought, into a pretty conventional and unquestioning mode at the time I was there.

Q: Conventional wisdom.

COLLINS: Yes, some of this is more in retrospect than what I realized at the time. But it seemed to me that there were two or three real problems. One was the out of balance emphasis on collection vs. analysis. Secondly, and a function of that but slightly different was an entire structure that wasn't necessarily providing the information and judgments that were needed by the political leadership to deal with a very rapidly changing world. And third, the uncertain role for the intelligence community and covert action which was very much in turmoil when I was there. This latter was more defined when I left because it was the biggest topic we spent time on while I was at the NSC. Not because I spent time on it, but because it was the issue at the end of the Reagan administration *vis-a-vis* the intelligence community that had to be addressed.

Q: Something that struck me, and I'd like you to comment on is how we have the intelligence providers briefing the President. Most of the time Presidents don't need to be kept up to date on a lot of routine matters. I mean unless they're really major things that are happening, I think, for example, that today it's easy to get pretty annoyed at Hugo Chavez in Venezuela who keeps spouting off against the United States. If you're the intelligence person briefing the president, there's a tendency for a President to say,

“Can’t you do anything about that son of a bitch?” All of a sudden things start happening. It’s wrong to get the president worked up

COLLINS: Well, as we have been discussing, I was working in the post-Iran Contra period to deal with that problem by organizing procedures and ensuring a degree of transparency so that the kind of thing that happened in Iran Contra would not happen again without everybody being on board who needed to be. It would not be just the President saying to the DCI or an Aide, “Can’t you do something about that,” and next thing is a covert action program that gets out of hand and probably is out of the President’s purview. By the time I left the NSC, there was a procedure that assured even when a request came from the President, it had to be run through a rigorous process to ensure that you wouldn’t have half a dozen people running some kind of a rogue operation in the name of the President or political leadership. There’s nothing that is 100% sure you can do to prevent that, but it was a lot less likely to happen after we had put the procedures in place than was the case before we did the work.

Q: How did you find things with your colleagues who were, you might say, your equivalent in the CIA, Defense, and all. Was there a like-minded group of people who were saying, “We’ve got a problem. We’ve got to fix it,” or were you on the attack and everybody else was on the defense?

COLLINS: When I was working this problem and particularly its congressional angle, I was in the midst of a tussle that involved the core aspects of separation of powers and the relations between the executive and legislative branches. Our efforts at the time were keenly focused on maintaining the executive branch prerogatives and not seeing them eroded over the Iran mess. At the same time, I found the agency and the DCI acutely aware of where their money came from and very worried about what Congress was going to do to the intelligence community in the wake of Iran-Contra. In this connection the famous Frank Church Committee actions of an earlier period were never far from memory. So, what I found was that the intelligence community representatives were much more willing to share information and were more regularly in touch with the people in the intelligence committees and the staffers on the Hill than they were with us. And we often had the sneaking suspicion that the congressional committee staff and members knew a lot more than we did about what was going on in the intelligence community.

That said, what that meant was that we in the White House were seized with the issue of protecting the executive branch’s authority *vis-a-vis* the congress. This was a real issue of executive - legislative confrontation, and defining once again where the boundary would be. Was it going to shift or was it going to be the same? The people with whom I worked most closely were the ones in the White House who were determined not to let the congress seize more reins of control in this area and run off with them. And I have to say that we often didn’t feel we were getting the strongest possible support out of the intelligence community agencies for our effort.

Q: They had two masters.

COLLINS: Well, that's right.

Q: One had the money.

COLLINS: One had the money. While I'm sure many might not agree with this, it was my perception that many of us working on the issue in the White House were the ones trying to fend off a congressional power grab in this area, and we weren't getting as much support out of the people whose interests we were trying to protect and defend as we thought possible. It wasn't true for everybody, and there were variations. But I remember feeling quite lonely at times in dealing with the Hill.

In the end I think we did succeed in finding the compromise solution that met both Presidential and Congressional needs. Of course, there were plenty of people who didn't like the constraints and involvement of outsiders in the new procedures and authorizations for covert activities. There was that side, too. They felt their hands would be tied. There were people on both sides of this. But it was our judgment, I think, that we had protected the President and executive branch and provided a way to minimize chances for another Iran-Contra.

Q: What were your relations with congressional staff and others? How did you work with them?

COLLINS: They were relationships of respect. There were those on the Hill who saw this as a way to get greater control and greater oversight capacity over the intelligence community and limit the capacities of the White House to get involved in it. And there were some on the executive side who wanted no change or limits on how decisions of this kind would be made. But in the end the majority of us in both branches wanted to ensure that the kind of Iran Contra mess would not happen again. There were some tough negotiations about these things. But in the end we did not have major legislation about the issue, mainly I think because it is just very hard to legislate against stupidity.

It was also the case that the intelligence committee staffs did not let partisan politics prevail or really interfere. They were constructive in finding a way through the issues Iran Contra presented. They understood that it was important to have a working and viable intelligence community, and they did not seek to go beyond what they and we thought were reasonable limits.

Remember, we didn't have any commission on Iran Contra as we did after 9/11. Even though it was pretty egregious, Iran Contra did not lead to kinds of revelations that emerged about what the agency had been up to in the '50s and '60s and '70s. It was nothing like that, but it evoked a lot of the smells of that nature. There were those who would have liked to have seen it treated in some ways like that era. But they did not prevail

Q: How about the vice president, George H. W. Bush? He had been director of intelligence. Did he play any particular role?

COLLINS: I know that we kept his office informed, and they were a part of the decision making process about how we were going to structure the findings and the procedures to govern their use. But I don't recall that his office played a particularly active role.

Q: How about the State Department? There was some question about how much George Shultz was knowledgeable about the Iran Contra and also INR. Were they a player at all?

COLLINS: Certainly people like those in the Latin American bureau, Elliot Abrams and others, were up to their necks in efforts to support the Contras in Nicaragua. But I never knew the degree to which the Secretary or others were briefed or knowledgeable about the Iran dimension of what had been going on. So far as I know the Iran dimension of the mess and what North was up to came as news to these people. They did not know what people like North were up to. Nor have I ever heard that Secretary Shultz or others at State were found to have acted inappropriately during the affair.

What I do know - and I remember very well - was how Shultz acted as the mess unfolded to protect President Reagan's interests. He had Reagan's interests and the interests of the Presidency far more than so many of the others around the President did. And the President must have understood that as well. I remember much being made of the fact that Shultz got invited to the Reagans' New Year's event at the Annenbergs and that others didn't.

Q: At Palm Springs.

COLLINS: Yes. At Palm Springs.

Q: When you're looking at intelligence, you're looking of course at the structure of this. In view of your later career, did you think we were over focused on the Soviet Union? Also, with the Soviet Union, one of the great questions is how come we didn't get it right when the thing fell apart?

COLLINS: I think it's a very good question, and one of the issues that nobody has wanted to investigate fully or think through. When I was ready to go out as DCM in the middle of 1990—this is jumping ahead a bit—I got the usual round of briefings. This, of course, was after the Berlin Wall is down, the Warsaw Pact has come apart, and Germany is on the road to reunification. In short a time of monumental change at the core of Europe.

At that time, the bottom line judgment I was given by the intelligence community (although I do not know if everyone believed it) was that within five years there was a high probability that one of the Baltic republics would achieve a substantial degree of autonomy. This, well into 1990! Now, that's pretty far off the mark, but the very idea that the USSR would not be there was like thinking Citibank is going to go belly up in 2006. It just wasn't in anyone's list of options. Certainly, it was thought, there can be problems, but having this juggernaut disappear was just not seen as a possibility.

In fact, it was far from an accepted as a possibility even after the coup attempt in '91. Lots more people by that time thought it was possible, but still few as likely. This was, after all, the Russian Empire that had been around for centuries. That it would break up and fall apart was not an outcome many thought feasible. So there wasn't much in the way of questioning the fundamentals among the experts and events simply outpaced the way people thought about how developments would take place.

Q: I know when I was doing these oral histories in the '80s, I used to joke by saying, "Someday when you mention the Soviets, I'll have to have footnotes to explain what a Soviet is."

COLLINS: I think it was very clear that there was a huge transformation going on. Soviet realities were very different by 1990 from what they'd been in 1980, but - despite what a number of people have claimed since about how they knew it was coming - it was far from people's comprehension that this empire could break up within a year. Nobody knew, I can tell you, and certainly nobody was developing policy options based on the end of the USSR when I departed for Moscow in late summer 1990.

Q: I think the only one that I've heard raised that question was Vernon Walters. It wasn't a strong question, but he thought it needed asking

COLLINS: There were certainly people who had begun to say, "This may be getting very serious," but not many. There was nobody, I think, who felt that the structure that dominated Eurasia was so far gone that it would just evaporate. Certainly in the Soviet Union there were very few people who thought it was going to come apart; and if they didn't think so, why would we?

Q: They had a little better access than we did!

COLLINS: It's one of these things where even if you had all the information you could possibly want, there was nothing inevitable about what was going to happen. To see what did happen even as probable was asking a great deal of human judgment and to see well beyond what the Soviet people themselves thought was going to happen.

Q: While you were doing this, were other intelligence agencies—I'm thinking the European ones, particularly British and French and Germans —nervous about what was going on? Did you get anything from them?

COLLINS: You mean when I was in the White House?

Q: Yes. I was just wondering.

COLLINS: I didn't really have contact with them to make a judgment about that. In the job I was in, we just didn't have much to do with the foreign embassies or other communities.

Q: This was your main thing. What else were you doing?

COLLINS: That was essentially what I did. There was also a lot of routine work. The President had meetings for which we would provide briefing papers; we also provided memos for the president on topics in our purview from time to time. In this regard, one thing I learned about Ronald Reagan was that you had to be very careful about what you put in talking points because he used them literally. At the State Department, talking points were as often as not used as guidance. But in my experience President Reagan used them literally, like a script, so you had to be very careful in the way you worded things. For example, I spent a lot of time preparing material for the President's meetings with members of congress. Much of this was connected with cleaning up Iran Contra. As we've noted, congressional investigations were a constant companion for those of us in the office where Col. North and Company had worked. There were constant issues about access to White House documents and who could have it over all the papers and documents from that era - over what Congress could see, who could subpoena them, and conditions for access, etc. It was at its base the struggle to define the limits of separation of powers that was a daily question for me and my colleagues. Reviewing this or that document because somebody was asking for it; or coming to a conclusion about whether we could or could not prevent someone from getting access to these documents because they were sensitive intelligence was a leitmotif of my time in the directorate, and I worked a lot with the different people who daily had to confront the question of freedom of information versus protection of sensitive national security data and methods.

What this meant for me was daily working with the most basic aspects of our constitutional system – separation of powers and how that is applied to concrete issues as well as the most basic premises of the relations between democracy and the citizen's access to information and the right to know what his government is up to. It was heady stuff on one level and very mundane on another. But it was never boring.

Q: I would have thought that this would have meant you were very, very careful about what you wrote.

COLLINS: Sure. We were just on the edge of the email generation and the new means of communication and data storage were presenting lots of new challenges. I was pretty conservative given what I was learning about the realities of the digital world. I didn't use email much. But people were communicating more freely that way. I was careful.

Q: You left in eighty...?

COLLINS: I left in the summer of '88.

Q: Where did you go?

COLLINS: I went back to be one of two State Deputy Executive Secretaries working for State's Executive Secretary. As we noted in talking about my time at the Opscenter, one

deputy had the Latin America and Europe bureaus, and the other had those for Asia, the Middle East and Africa. I had the former as well as responsibility for several functional bureaus -- political military affairs, arms control, science and technology, etc. So, I was, again, back in the business of bureaucratic management in the State Department, this time from the front office of the executive secretary.

Q: You did that how long?

COLLINS: I did that from August of '88 through July '90, so two years,

Q: You were there during the transition from Shultz to Baker?

COLLINS: Yes

Q: Did that cause any flurries or differences?

COLLINS: It was a very interesting time, another unique experience. I came back as the Shultz era was coming to a close. My first task, a couple of weeks after I got into the job, was to manage a trip for Shultz to Latin America. Shultz had never had much focus on Latin America; in fact, as I recall this was the first trip he ever took there as Secretary. The trip was a long one and covered much of the continent. We went to Costa Rica and I believe Salvador. Then we went to Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, and we came back to Bolivia where we had a bombing of the motorcade as the finale for the trip.

Secretary Shultz had not taken much interest in the preparation for the trip, and about an hour into the flight, he turned to me and said, "Why am I doing this trip?" [laughter] I said, "Well, Mr. Secretary, I have to confess I was not in on the planning for this trip. [Lynn Pascoe had worked with ARA to set it up before I arrived and I inherited it] But Latin America has been a critical area for us historically and has taken up much of our attention over the last few years." I did not mention Iran Contra, but had it in mind. Beyond this I didn't have much of a substantive answer for him, so I went to get Elliot Abrams and his ARA team to do the explaining. The key ARA players were all there and this was their first big chance in a long time to have the Secretary as theirs. And yet, it turned out they didn't have a very good way to answer Shultz either, and they left him in a fairly grumpy mood as we started out on a long trip. Nevertheless, as it unfolded this trip was a significant undertaking, and it had some implications that went well beyond the region we were visiting. Shultz made a number of public appearances and statements, including a major speech I remember particularly because it addressed the emergence of a global 24-hour news cycle and the impact that was going to have on the way all of us did business.

Q: Things were changing in Latin America, weren't they?

COLLINS: Things were changing in Latin America. It was also the era of the rapid global change. We were seeing expansion of what we today call the globalization process, and I remember how much Shultz made of this topic in his speech. There was

attention as well to enduring issues such as drugs and crime, but the real significance of this speech from my perspective was his focus on the idea that the world now had a global communications system, and people in the United States and people in a Bolivian village all saw the same news at the same time. I remember this was very much on his mind, and as he was talked about it he was well ahead of his time.

So, that was the first trip I managed for Shultz I had been on only one other Shultz trip before, one of his annual ASEAN ministerial trips, and I had at least an acquaintance with how the trips worked, but the Latin America trip was my baptism by fire as Deputy in coordinating secretarial travel, a part of the job that would occupy me intensely over the next two years.

Q: How was that?

COLLINS: In my time the deputy executive secretary position responsible for Europe and Latin America ended up with an exceptional amount of travel by the Secretary - first Shultz and then Baker. A lot of time was spent in managing and coordinating the travel of the Secretary undertook, as the historic changes in Europe commanded increasing attention from our leadership. It seemed I was on the road with the Secretary almost every month including NATO trips, visits to countries in Europe, and visits to capitals in the disintegrating communist bloc. In this connection Latin America was less a focus but there were more trips to that region to come as well. So, from about August 1988 to the end of summer in 1990, I spent two years, travelling almost a third of my time first with George Shultz and beginning in January 1989 with Jim Baker.

Q: Who was the executive secretary? Can you tell us something about the Executive Secretariat? What did it do?

COLLINS: Well, I think one key truism I learned about S/S was that its position, its responsibilities, and its function reflect the Secretary of State it serves at any given time. In my time Shultz and Baker used the executive secretariat quite differently, and their Executive Secretaries had a different place in the way the seventh floor worked.

When I came back to S/S from the White House the Executive Secretary was Melvyn Levitsky, an officer with whom I had worked in Moscow in the early seventies. His position and responsibilities were familiar as was the job into which I was going because Shultz had a well defined idea about S/S's role and what he expected of the institution. We discussed Shultz's approach in talking about my time at the Opscenter. Mel was succeeded by Stapleton Roy following the arrival of a new Secretary Jim Baker at the beginning of 1989. And that transition brought a change in the way S/S did its work as well as its position within the seventh floor system.

Under Shultz, to recall, the Executive Secretary's function was a very substantial and substantive one across the board. He looked to the executive secretariat to be the bureaucratic manager for the Department's policy positions and his means to ensure the outside world beyond the building - other agencies, our embassies abroad, the White

House - had clear understanding of the Secretary's views, policy positions, and directives. Within the building, he expected the secretariat to ensure fair, inclusive and correct coordination of the position-defining and decision making process in State. Then the secretariat was responsible to ensure the correct expression of the outcome of these processes to the building and to those outside. It was in this context that the S/S responsibility to serve as the final point of review for all seventh floor telegraphic or captioned traffic was to be understood and similarly the rationale for the review of slow paper - memos or correspondence, for example, coming from the building for consideration by a seventh floor principal. In this system, the Executive Secretary effectively became the number three or four in the Department, after the Secretary himself, his deputy and depending on circumstances the Undersecretary of Political Affairs.

The function of the Deputy Executive Secretary in his time required significant managerial skills, bureaucratic dexterity and stamina. It was a grueling job. The hours were about 90 a week: you stayed very late at minimum every other day, but actually most days. You traveled a lot. You organized the Secretary's travel and accompanied him on trips overseeing everything from schedules to meeting attendance to security and communications. In short, a lot of the job was the practical side and details that just had to be got right. On the substantive side, I was called on to have a working knowledge of issues and personalities involved in everything from U.S.-Soviet relations to topics under the purview of the Bureau of Oceans and Environment. The function in this regard was to see that bureaucratic games were not played to cut people out of debates, to prevent distortion of the decision-making process and to ensure that those with a legitimate voice in an issue had their say and their views included in the decision-making on any given issue.

It was also a requirement to see that decisions got made and that the process was not made an obstacle. A classic case I recall in this regard had to do with the longest memo I ever processed. It was a decision memo on the topic of our position on whaling. It was for the Secretary of State, and it was to go through the Undersecretary for Economic and Business Affairs. I think it was about 200 pages long because everybody had a view on whales. I found there was, in fact, nobody who did not have strongly held opinions about killing whales, believe me. This memo was a classic case where the process, unbeknownst to us on the seventh floor, had got wholly out of control.

First of all, the memo had lived for months in the grinding process of production. No one could ever bring the decision issue to a head or make a judgment, so they just kept adding to it. Shultz's Undersecretary for Economic Affairs, an older and very sensible man, reduced it to one page. He said George Shultz is not going to read 200 pages on whales! [laughter] But we had to do this: to go to him and say, "Look, this is impossible. The system cannot produce this paper. Can you do something with this?" He did. It was a case that showed the wisdom of Shultz's division of responsibilities among the Department's principals by which he gave the under secretaries on the seventh floor specific portfolios. He kept Soviet policy for himself. Others had the lead on Asia, economic and commercial issues, or arms control for example. He more or less let them manage their specialties,

along with their bureaucratic responsibilities for oversight of State's bureau structure. It was a somewhat informal and flexible system that avoided violating lines of authority at the department, but was effective at ensuring issues that came to the seventh floor for decision belonged to someone who could oversee them.

In my time Shultz himself was the seventh floor principal for the Soviet and Eastern Bloc accounts, and he looked to Roz Ridgeway and Paul Nitze as his support. They were the two people to whom he looked for policy support and the conduct of diplomacy in these key areas.

Q: How did Jim Baker's arrival as Secretary affect you and the Executive Secretariat?

When Jim Baker came in, he established a very different setup. He brought with him a number of personal staff who had worked with him at the Treasury Department, and this group created the core of his team on the seventh floor. Some additional people from outside and a few from the building were added to this group, and the new team worked in a sense as I recalled the White House or NSC staffs working in my time there. I had no real knowledge about Treasury, but the team seemed to me to be run the way I recalled White House staff functioned. The Department with its bureaucracy of bureaus and principals, were somehow seen not quite as belonging to him, but as an institution that existed apart with priorities and or goals that might or might not mesh with those he would advance as Secretary. With this kind of view, what emerged was a kind of insularity of the Baker team that set it at a distance from the building. As a consequence, for most of my time I found the building had great difficulty understanding their Secretary and the Secretary and his team found it hard to know how to use the Foreign Service or effectively make the most of what the Department could provide as support and expertise. Put simply, I suppose, the difference was that Jim Baker simply never saw his success or capabilities dependent on the State Department staff the way George Shultz had done. Instead, he depended very heavily on a group of trusted people he brought with him or picked out of State to join his seventh floor inner circle. The rest of the Department he and his team kept at arm's length, trusting it would carry out its multifaceted responsibilities under the guidance and supervision of the institutional bureaucracy.

Q: Is this where Stape Roy comes into the picture?

COLLINS: Yes. As we noted earlier he followed Mel Levitsky as Executive Secretary. I stayed on as his Deputy with responsibility for the European and Latin American bureaus as well as the functional bureaus dealing with arms control, science and oceans and such. Because I had this responsibility, I almost immediately came to be one to whom Margaret Tutwiler, Karen Grooms, Dennis Ross, Bob Zoellick, and others in the inner circle came to look to for help in getting the building to perform. I became a sort of central interpreter between the two.

The catalyst for giving me this opportunity was the new Secretary's decision to make a major trip at the outset of his tenure to visit each NATO capital. Visiting thirteen capitals in nine days was a major undertaking and as coordinator for the exercise I worked closely

with key members of the new team. This trip was among the most intense and complex I ever would manage. Pat Kennedy the director of the executive secretariat's administration and logistics office, and I found ourselves with an entirely new approach to the Secretary's travel. With the new team we were suddenly involved in an operation that undertook its task like a White House advance. Karen Grooms, who had worked in White House advance, and Margaret Tutweiler were the lead planners and our partners in putting together the trip and others over the next two years and that trip was critical I think, in consolidating my position in their minds as a reliable team player.

Q: I would think you would have to use the department if you're going to a country. Where do you find out about a country but from the state department?

COLLINS: As the Baker team settled in there were people from across the building that they would use. Of course, they also used the embassies and State's infrastructure. For their travel, for example they depended on Pat Kennedy's operation in the S/S-EX. They used the Opscenter and the "Line" as well. The latter undertook the advance operation for these trips. So, they used these institutions, but in nearly all cases these were part of the Secretary's extended staff – the S family if you will.

On the substantive side the Secretary depended very heavily on the members of his circle to ensure he was prepared for any meeting, public event, or other engagement on the schedule. I had immense respect for his determination to be thoroughly prepared for whatever event he would undertake, and his staff was honed to provide him with the materials he needed to do so. He was a voracious and careful reader of what he received to prepare him for meetings or events: he put hard questions to his staff: and he demanded quality in the work he received. But in turn those who prepared his papers would know they were read and what he thought.

Preparing him for events or creating documents for him personally on issues in which he was personally engaged, such as developments in Europe and relations with the Soviet Union were handled in a particular way. On these topics the close advisers, people like Bob Zoellick and Dennis Ross and Andrew Carpendale took whatever the department prepared and re-prepared it for Baker in the particular form he used. The final versions of these papers were the product of discussion and debate among the closer advisers and the material that came up from the bureaus.

Q: The assistant secretaries, would they tend to come to you and say, "Be sure." ...

COLLINS: I had a lot of that. I had a lot of long office chats with people who had no sense of what was happening with what they were doing. I would try without betraying confidences from the seventh floor people to ensure those down below knew how their issues were being addressed, and also that we got the right materials from them to be responsive to what the Secretary needed. Over time, Baker's people also cultivated relationships in the Department with many individuals, and they would rely on their work and inputs. But the team was never really comfortable with the responsiveness of the bureaucracy of the building. Another problem I had to manage from time to time

involved the reality that there were some people they didn't like or trust, and people they thought were absolutely wonderful. It was a very personalized approach to using the Department and Foreign Service.

Q: Like a royal court, wasn't it?

COLLINS: Well, after my experience at the NSC, I saw it more as a mini White House staff.

Q: I had several rather long sessions with Margaret Tutwiler. I've never run across anybody who was so focused on the job of making Baker look good.

COLLINS: That was her job! And she was terrific at it.

Q: A real instrument. There was no involvement in policy or anything interest in it at all.

COLLINS: Margaret was manager of Jim Baker's public persona. She was tough, and she did it very well. She was the director of communications in the White House parlance. She didn't get into the substance particularly. But she didn't let anybody else get in the middle of running the press or public side. Anytime Baker was going to appear in public, she was the one who said, "Here's how it's going to happen."

Karen Grooms, who more or less worked for Margaret, ran the scheduling and travel office. She ran her operation in a much different way from what the Department was used to, closer to what she had done elsewhere, but used the Secretariat "line" to advance trips in a way that was very effective.

I also found it interesting that Foreign Service officers whose whole existence is built around analyzing the way a host government works, learning how to influence a government and policy, and mastering how to bring others to a point of view couldn't figure out the leadership of their own building. There were very, very few people who understood how to build effective relations with the Baker led seventh floor. I didn't find it a problem, because I understood and respected them, and I in turn was accepted by them. But, I would say that they never really understood the Foreign Service or how to use it as an institution. They were comfortable with many individuals whom they saw as becoming part of their team, but they never really found the key to motivating the building.

Q: Was there any attempt to make this group a little more humane or something? A bureaucracy needs to be petted and stroked.

COLLINS: I think the team just didn't really understand how to do it. They were more often than not surprised when they found that people felt alienated. They truly had very great respect for people in the Department and what they did for them, but they never were good at conveying that. In this circumstance, building good working relations was part of the job people like me were able to do, the ones that worked between the seventh

floor and the building. We were the bridge builders. For example, I used trips to help people from the building and embassies know and understand the team and how they worked. What was interesting to me was that the FSOs who went on trips didn't really understand what motivated the Baker team. Once I'd sit them down and tell them, they might not like it, but at least they would sometimes do better in relating to them. There were some people who did well, but many just didn't do it well at all.

Q: You did find yourself in a position of explaining, as an ambassador would to a visitor going to a foreign country, "This is how you treat ...

COLLINS: In a way that's what it was.

Q: You were there at the fall of the wall, weren't you?

COLLINS: Yes.

Q: Looking at this with all the problems - we're two professional foreign service officers talking - looking at this professionally, I thought he handled this whole thing along with the President very well.

COLLINS: If you stand back and look at the period of George H.W. Bush's presidency, it was confronted with momentous changes, one right after another, and the President and Baker in my view handled it all very, very well. I think the main thing they achieved was to resist doing harm or injecting American power in ways that could have brought unpredictable or unwanted outcomes: they didn't move precipitously in reaction to events in ways that could have exacerbated, sown disruption, or, perhaps, tipped something over the edge into violence. They never succumbed to the pressures from countless quarters to "do Something" or act without thinking ahead about the consequences. At the same time, they never lost sight of the larger strategic interests of the United States, and they used diplomacy skillfully to promote outcomes that advanced the interests of the U.S. and the allies. It was just an example of consummate statesmanship.

I think that's true from the first events that began the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and tearing down of the wall, right through the collapse of the Soviet Union over the last half of 1991. As these events unfolded a conflagration could have erupted any number of times. It didn't happen, in the first instance, I believe, because the people in those regions themselves just didn't want to kill each other very much, but also because the West, in particular the United States, exercised restraint and strategic patience.

I am convinced that if the United States had tried to force events, push things faster than they were evolving, or confront Moscow by open intervention in the events that were unfolding, we could have contributed to some very serious problems that might well have resulted in violence. This is why I have no sympathy for those who argue that we should have been more active in the Baltic states at the time, or who condemn Bush's speech in Kiev. We may not always have been on the side of those who wanted to accelerate the disintegration of systems nobody subject to Soviet control really wanted, but we didn't

end up having to witness the killing of a lot of people as a result either, an outcome I think that was a very distinct possibility.

Q: The pressures in the United States were immense: triumphalism and stick-it-to-them.

COLLINS: Yes, tough to resist. I give President Bush and Secretary Baker a lot of credit for the courage to maintain their course. They acted very responsibly; they did not get us into a position where Moscow or others who were losing their grip felt threatened to the point they would make a stand or open a fight, unlike what was to come in Yugoslavia. That could have happened.

Q: It could have. Was there somebody on the team as this whole Soviet falling apart business took place, who was giving advice?

COLLINS: If you go back to the beginning of the administration in '89, the first thing I think it important to remember is that no one, and I mean no one foresaw the profound changes that were coming or the pace of those changes. I may be missing something from my memory, but I can certainly say that as I sat at the top of the Department and saw most of the critical paperwork and results of discussions among senior officials and the Baker team, it was certainly the case that as the new team arrived at State, none expected to see within the next two years the total collapse of the Cold War division of Europe, the end of the Soviet control of East Europe and Eurasia, or the end of the entire Soviet system of economic, political and imperial rule that shaped the post-World War II world. So, the reality of the time was that events drove the demand for new thinking, critical decisions, and adaptation to change at an extraordinary pace.

Fortunately, the Baker team and the group of key advisers Bush had in the White House were up to the challenges they faced and worked as an effective team. In the Department the European bureau, key members of Baker's team – Zoellick and Ross in particular, and a number of specialists from other agencies worked together well and effectively. It was also the case that the close personal relations between Baker and the President and between the White House and State teams led by Scowcroft and Eagleburger were immensely effective.

Q: Did all this start in a way that made it obvious what was ahead?

COLLINS: Well as I look back with less than a perfect memory, I have to say no certainly not. No one was prepared for the collapse of the entire Warsaw Pact within months and for the Soviet system to follow. By the end of the Reagan administration the effects of Gorbachev's perestroika were finding their way into the Warsaw Pact countries. Change had already been taking place in Poland and as I came back to State it was having its effects in Hungary. Over the early months of the Bush administration the changes and challenges to the communist regimes in East Europe were growing albeit at different rates. With East Germany under Honaker resisting the kinds of changes taking place around him. In the end, of course, in a perverse way it was just this recalcitrance that sparked the move that brought the entire system to an end. As I recall these dramatic

events came as East Germany lost control of its population. East Germans found a way to the West through a Hungary no longer willing to honor obligations from the past to return their citizens to East Germany and permitted them as refugees to travel to the West. This development, then quickly led to the events that brought down the Berlin Wall and put the last nail in the coffin of the Warsaw Pact.

Throughout this tumultuous year, events in Europe and management of relations with the Soviet Union were the national security preoccupation of the Administration. In retrospect, of course, we know how events turned out, but for that entire year each day brought challenges to ensure that events did not yield violence. The Baker team in this position were engaged almost constantly in personal diplomacy with counterparts in NATO, in East Europe, in Moscow. The European bureau was front and center along with key offices from INR in working to keep the seventh floor ahead of events, continuing to feed them information, give them their best judgments, and supporting high level diplomatic contacts. I do believe that in this particular circumstance Bush and Baker received some of the best work the Department could produce, and the career service showed its true capability. For my part it was a year that kept me on the road much of the time and engaged with nearly every aspect of the Department's response to these historic events. It was heady stuff.

Q: You were there until

COLLINS: I was there until the late summer of 1990. I left the job in S/S on the eve of the Gulf War and the events surrounding Jim Baker's historic trip to Mongolia during which he achieved agreement with Gorbachev that the Soviet Union would join the US in condemning Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. I was not there, and I did not go on that trip but it created a backdrop to my preparations to move to Moscow a couple of months later.

Q: Let's pick this up in 1990. What were you doing? Were you taking a Russian review?

COLLINS: Yes, that was part of my preparation to go out to Moscow as DCM. Any DCM about to go out on assignment had a number of practical things to take care of. And not having spoken Russian in any concerted way for 15 years, even with very good proficiency earlier, it was only prudent to get some brush up at FSI. Additionally, I was to enroll in the DCM course, given all newly minted deputies which I did in the summer of 1990.

Q: How did you find the DCM course?

COLLINS: I think it was mixed. I found most useful the units dealing with preparing me for public exposure. I hadn't really had any such experience on the job up to that point. I also found it important to have some of the practical side laid out: how you handle money, for example, because, again, as an FSO I had no previous experience with managing accounts for residences or representation budgets of any significance. This was all a new world. Some of the things we had on management and team building I also found interesting, but I can't say they affected the way I ultimately ran things very much.

But it was interesting, made me think about leadership in a new way, and certainly helped me understand the issues I would face on arrival.

Q: Of course, going out to Moscow has always been a special assignment for people, and people who go there are ready to go. It's not a run of the mill embassy, and the people all tend to know each other anyway.

COLLINS: That was certainly true as a rule. But, I had left Moscow in 1975. And in 1978 had left Soviet affairs for Middle Eastern assignments. Then, as we have discussed, I was running bureaucracy in one way or another in Washington for six years. So as I prepared to go back to Moscow, I had been away from the Soviet family for some time. Nevertheless, I must say I had no sense of great surprise in going back. I had been traveling there with Baker over the previous two years. The extraordinary changes in Moscow - not physical but in terms of how things worked and the openness of the system compared to the seventies when I had been there last were stunning.

On the other hand, I think it's worth saying something about the peculiarities of the embassy itself at that time. As I arrived Moscow was not a normal embassy by any means. The embassy was still living under the shadow and context of the pre-Gorbachev scandals regarding Soviet efforts to bug the new embassy chancery building and the scandal with the marine detachment that had rocked the Embassy community in the mid-eighties.

Q: You mean the Sergeant Lonetree affair and what followed?

COLLINS: Yes. The reaction to the combined fiasco of the building bugging and the Lonetree affair produced an embassy very peculiar for the United States. We had no local (Russian) employees at the embassy. We were emulating the way the Soviets did business, which is to say we had only cleared American citizens working within the Embassy. The Russian embassies abroad at least so far as I knew did not employ host country employees. The immediate cause for the American decision to go this way had come when the Russians withdrew their national employees following the Lonetree affair blowup. At that point the embassy went through a bizarre several months in which the embassy community, including wives and other dependents had to do the tasks formerly performed by Russian FSNs. So everything from cleaning the chancery toilets to driving fell to the Americans who were available. It was an example of what Foreign Service culture can achieve and the kind of selfless dedication that makes this community unique in my experience. But this, could not continue for long and have an effective embassy. So, the USG contracted with an organization called Pacific Architects and Engineers to pick up the essential functions previously in the hands of our Russian FSNs.

Q: I knew them well when I was in Saigon.

COLLINS: At the outset, of course, PA&E as they were known, had a steep learning curve. They were brought in as a substitute for the FSN labor force, as cleared Americans who would pick up what FSNs had done in the chancery and the compound including

labor, admin, GSO, travel, maintenance and logistics/driver functions, etc. For many this meant a steep learning curve as they were required to get things done outside the embassy, and the Soviet environment of the mid 80s was unlike any they had known. But I must say they did rise to the challenge and by the time I arrived PA&E was a fully functioning part of the embassy family.

So this atypical embassy environment was still pretty much what it had been in the mid-eighties as I arrived. Still basically an all American establishment, it had an authorized staff of 224 permanent employees working more or less in a Cold War fortress. Only cleared Americans were allowed in except under escort or in particular conditions. The Gorbachev reforms had made little impact on the way the embassy did its business with one exception. As the economic reforms had permitted the emergence of cooperative private businesses, and we had begun to use a few Soviet private contractors to provide key services, in particular, drivers. But for the most part the U.S. embassy was still a totally staffed by Americans.

A second peculiarity unique to Moscow was the structure of the top management of the Embassy. Some eight months to a year before I got there a good friend Joe Hulings had been sent out as a “management DCM” to work alongside my predecessor Mike Joyce. This arrangement gave Jack Matlock, who was the ambassador, two DCMs in effect. One overseeing the traditional management, resource and other admin functions and the other, the substantive, representational and reporting functions. Behind this peculiar arrangement was the looming presence within the Embassy compound of the skeleton of the new chancery building. There had been no new construction permitted for years, and the building skeleton loomed as an immense management and administrative white elephant with which the Embassy staff had to contend. It was a constant security issue for embassy management; the counter intelligence people from any number of agencies kept studying it; and decision makers in Washington could not come to a decision about what to do next. So, one outcome of this situation was the decision to add another senior official to embassy management to cope with the expanded burden this whole mess presented. Hence the second DCM.

Q: So, as you arrived what were your first impressions?

Mike Joyce, my predecessor, had left in the summer before I arrived, so there was no overlap. I never did figure out whether it was symbolic, but Naomi and I arrived on Halloween 1990, without luggage. Pan Am, in its death throes, had managed to leave all our bags in New York. We were informed we could expect them in three or four days when the next flight arrived. It was an introduction to preparing for the unexpected as a way of life. And that was probably a good thing. Before arrival I had little immediate preparation for the new job other than the DCM course, a round of briefings from the usual sources in Washington, and my Russian language brush up. I had prepared myself as best I could, but I was hardly ready for the complexities we faced in the first months after I took up the job.

But first impressions. On the substantive side it was clear to me that I was coming to a Soviet Union that was very much in transition; big things had happened and were happening. This was the era of perestroika at its height, of glasnost at its height, of Gorbachev and all that he represented at his height, or at least so it seemed at the moment I arrived. The changes of the previous four years had created much more vibrant and active relationship between Washington and Moscow, and this had been accelerated by new cooperation in the Middle East sparked by events in the Gulf. The Soviet Government in an unprecedented step had joined us in condemning Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and at the United Nations in calling for Iraq's actions to be reversed. On the eve of my arrival it was probably the most vivid evidence of how far Moscow had come not just in setting new directions in the Middle East or Europe but in reorienting Soviet foreign policy broadly. Expectations were high; that we were going to see further evolution; that the Soviet Union was going to be a very different place in some years from what it was when I arrived; and that Gorbachev was changing the whole picture across Europe and in the Soviet Union itself.

Q: As you got acquainted with this new Russia, how well do you think Washington understood what was really going on?

Well, that sort of gets back to how well I was prepared for dealing with the Russia I met that Halloween eve. I would have to say that on the whole Washington generally was well behind the curve. There were rumblings about needing to look at the Soviet Union afresh and to understand better what was happening internally. But these ideas were still not dominant. The embassy, however, was in the forefront of urging greater attention to what was unfolding. Jack Matlock had been a great advocate for doing so, and he had some supporters in Washington. He had, for example, urged that we begin to look seriously at the Soviet Union's constituent parts in their own right, and he had begun to do reporting from the republics more systematically.

From the time of Gorbachev's accession to power, there had been a split in Washington over whether what he was advocating would mean real change or whether this was just tactics on the part of the hardline old guard. By this time, it had been pretty well established that Gorbachev had undertaken real reform and change, and those in Washington like George Shultz, who saw Shevardnadze and Gorbachev as representing something truly new, had prevailed. But it was also the case that a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the official view I heard in Washington certainly did not foresee the Soviet collapse, and many remained skeptical that the Gorbachev reforms would survive or bring lasting change. As I think I mentioned earlier, for example, in my briefings before leaving Washington in October, the official assessment I was provided stated that within five years, one of the Baltic republics might attain a significant degree of autonomy. It was simply the case that none of us was ready for what was to come over the next year.

Q: I take it we didn't really look upon Kazakhstan or Ukraine or anything else other than as pieces of Soviet territory, or did we, in your previous experience?

COLLINS: I think operationally that was the case. With the exception of the Baltic republics, whose incorporation into the USSR the US never recognized, the other republics had little attention as anything other than constituent parts of the Soviet Union. I suppose Ukraine might be the one exception. It had a vocal diaspora in the U.S. that was adamant in keeping the idea of an independent Ukraine alive. But with this exception there had been no particular reason in policy terms to think about the other republics as having particular relevance for our Soviet policy or that thinking of them as anything but a part of the Soviet Union had much relevance.

For my part, I do remember in the '70s bringing up the idea that we might think more seriously about the future role Central Asia would play in the Union. I had been following Soviet policy in the Middle East for some time and came to the view that some of the issues percolating up from Central Asia and its Muslim population were having an effect in the Soviet constellation. I remember watching the visits by the Shah and the Turkish president in the 1970s – and suddenly having the idea that there were forces at work in those parts of the world that were substantial enough to have us think about what they meant for the future of the Soviet Union. I didn't get any much receptivity to these views back then.

But by 1990 this was no longer the case. Matlock had been advocating for the need to expand our capacity to pay attention, report on, get to know and establish relationships with all of these different republics, which were beginning to have a greater role in the Soviet Union. And he was giving substance to his view. I know he went out speaking whenever he could, and with effect. I remember very much the impact he had in giving speech in Georgia using the local language. The idea that Americas were paying attention to these places had begun to percolate.

Q: Did we notice a sensitivity on the part of the Kremlin to this?

COLLINS: They certainly kept track of us very carefully. But unlike earlier times, as in the 70s when you would have had the KGB all over you if you were traveling, there was less the sense that those you were living with all the time were making every effort to curb contact with local people. It was partly a reflection of glasnost, that people were moving around more, and that more foreigners were in the country. Western press was much more in evidence. It was a more open country by 1990 than it had been, say, 10 years before. A lot more open, though not as much as it would be. So, openness was one of the trends most strikingly in evidence at the beginning of my assignment.

The second was the profound change that was going on in restructuring Soviet politics and the economy. It was clear that the lid was being lifted off the media, the press, the academic world. The impact was dramatic in terms of what was on television, what the public saw, what it read. The voracious appetite people had for all and almost any information was really striking. The other was what was happening in the economy with the gradual but steady openings for something other than the state run entities, in the appearance of cooperative businesses, restaurants, services, etc. that gave a first taste of another kind of economy and what it might promise.

Q: Since you're a Middle East hand, I was wondering whether or not we were on the same wavelength as the Soviets at that time regarding Israel? Basically we wanted Israel to stay out of the Iraq war because of what it would do to our coalition that included key Arab allies but also to our tenuous tie with the Soviets. I imagine as well we would sure as hell not want them monkeying around in our military operations, or was that even an issue?

COLLINS: Well, we have to remember that Israel was not a bystander in the Gulf War. Iraq subjected Israel to several scud missile attacks, and there was no question Israel was demanding an end to the danger. I recall the press was carrying pictures of Israeli children and parents in gas masks and shelters, and the news was about Israel under attack. Certainly there was a lot of priority given to finding the way to keep Israel from retaliating and widening the war, including providing Israel with anti-missile defense weapons. In this I think it is a fair assumption that we shared this objective with the Soviets, even if for different reasons. I have no doubt the Soviets wanted to prevent an Iraq-Israel war.

More problematic was the question of whether we and Moscow shared the same view about how to get Saddam out of Kuwait. Our basic military and diplomatic strategy was based in the assumption that Saddam wouldn't leave unless confronted with overwhelming force and the credible threat of war. Hence the diplomacy to isolate Saddam, build a coalition against him, and pursue a military buildup and preparation for war. The Soviet approach was based in getting Iraq to withdraw without a war, and right up to the time of our military attack they were trying to buy time to get Saddam to see reason. The man central to this effort and who was often seen as troublesome and disruptive of American diplomacy was Yevgeny Primakov. I recall well any number of occasions in which he was seen as disruptive to the American effort to mount pressure on Saddam. But, Primakov's diplomacy was consistent with a line of diplomacy or a line of policy that the Soviet Government took from the outset. It was based on the premise that if Saddam suffered a defeat, which Moscow knew was a certainty against the U.S. coalition, it would be a disastrous turn for Russian relations with Iraq and potentially the Arab world more broadly. Therefore, they tried to stay central to the diplomacy in the period before the Gulf War broke out by trying to get Saddam to behave or pull back. We never knew for sure exactly what Primakov was saying to Saddam or what they were injecting into the picture. That caused a lot of frustration and enmity toward what Primakov was doing and toward him personally as an obstructive force in trying to get Saddam to behave. But it was clear, I think, that the Soviet government was trying to prevent a war or at least delay it as long as possible in hopes either outcome would reduce the negative fallout a war was sure to bring. This background tension over managing the Iraq situation was in the distance as I arrived, but was one of the themes that shaped our relations with Moscow at the time.

Q: Were there still skeptics about Gorbachev and whether the Soviet Union was really changing, say, in congress or in positions in the administration.

COLLINS: I don't think by that time there were many skeptics arguing things had not changed. Too much had happened: The Berlin Wall was gone, the Soviets were moving out of Germany, Gorbachev's glasnost had transformed the Soviet citizen's information world, and the '88 speech at the UN in New York had signaled new thinking about Soviet foreign policy. All this had been much too dramatic to ignore or to claim it was without significance. So, pretty much everybody agreed that change had happened and was happening.

The question now was where it was going. How's would it play out? Would it bring a new kind of Soviet Union? The question, I think, was would the USSR become something like a social democrat USSR on a European model, or would the Soviet system survive by returning to its authoritarian ideologically based past in a new form. What intrigues me most in retrospect, is that nobody, even against the backdrop of all that had happened to transform Europe and undermine the basic foundations of the Soviet system, was prepared to imagine that the Soviet Union was threatened or much less would break up. Just to recall something I noted earlier, my CIA general briefing regarding nationalities issues held that within five years there was a high probability that one of the Baltic republics would obtain a substantial degree of autonomy. That in the late summer, early fall of 1990 was the considered judgment. So, I don't care what anybody tells us now; nobody was telling me then that I ought to think about whether the country I was going to enter was actually going to survive my tenure as DCM. Nobody.

Q: You've been involved in some major issues. In Washington isn't there straight line thinking, projecting, "This is the way it is." Is there something within the system that doesn't seem to make it possible for someone to think in other ways, and see that might not always be as they are. Is this too difficult to handle or what?

COLLINS: I think the intelligence community, no less than the political elite or academic community, finds it very hard to think about big changes of this kind. Remember, what we saw within a year was, in fact, nothing short of the end of the entire post-war system, the end of an ideological divide and thinking that defined three quarters of a century. This was change in that scale. Did people predict and get ready for the French Revolution? Not really, and they didn't get ready for this one, either. You can ask, "How could you think that the events of the late '80s in East Europe would just stop at the Soviet border?" Now we call it Central Europe, but I still think of it as East Europe when I discuss the Soviet era. The fall of the Berlin wall, what was happening in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, even Bulgaria it seems were simply compartmented separately from the future of the USSR. I suppose it's fair to wonder in retrospect how everyone could have thought it would stop at the Soviet border.

But this was not the Russia of today: Russia was the Soviet Union, and a nation that united an empire that had lasted four centuries. It was a nuclear super power; it was run by a communist party that had withstood war, domestic terror, reforms. Yes, there were changes going on, but nobody - including the Soviets - saw that the Union would come apart. It's fair to say this was true of all of the experts, and everybody else. Nobody really thought the unthinkable would happen.

There were, of course, those who saw some trends that would ultimately lead to the fracture. One was the nationalities issue, the nationalist movements in the republics where the people in charge were beginning to demand more autonomy. That's why Matlock and the embassy were pushing to have us understand and know more about the republics and who was who there. People were also watching the economic situation. The big development, really an economic crisis, occurred when the Soviet government was unable to grow enough food, and for the first time ever, they came to us for credits. I remember well the near incredulity among the Allies in 1989 when Gorbachev came to the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution and put on the table the idea of the USSR seeking Western credits to carry them through a bad harvest. On another level, small measures by Gorbachev to allow private business cooperatives: restaurants, etc. - small stuff was seen as revolutionary in the Soviet context, but hadn't yet touched anything big. It was another symbol that Moscow was faced with an economic mess, but nobody saw the situation as undermining the basic system or causing radical change.

On the political side of the equation Gorbachev had introduced the idea of expanded participation in the electoral process. He had changed the rules for the election to the Congress of People's Deputies by allowing for more than one candidate for a given seat on the ballot. Now that was a big deal in a country where tradition had allowed only the single communist party candidate's name for any given slot. Moreover, the election had opened the way for Sakharov and others to join the political process. But it wasn't clear that this change was going to go much beyond allowing non-party individuals or more than one communist party candidate to have a place on ballots. So, how far this would go in terms of weakening the role of the communist party was very problematic, and almost no one was ready to suggest the dominant role of the communist party was really in question.

With all this, it was foreign policy where Washington was basically working on the assumption that there were real new opportunities to reshape East-West relations. As we discussed, the Middle East, one of the most difficult arenas for our relations during the Cold War, was certainly being viewed in a different way, given the degree of cooperation or at least non-obstruction at the early stages on Iraq. But it was in Europe that the truly profound changes were creating a new global order. The collapse of the Warsaw Pact had changed the security structure of Europe; ongoing negotiations appeared to promise the reunification of Germany and the withdrawal of Soviet forces. And the NATO alliance was engaged in working to find a way to establish working relationships with its former adversaries that would make them part of a broader security system for the continent.

So, all these developments and the issues they generated were the backdrop to my arrival in 1990. Everybody was pretty upbeat about what was possible. They saw Gorbachev making progress. It was an exciting time and a time of optimism. It was still the USSR, but even if the issues between us were tough, they were being negotiated. But this mood did not really last very long. About a month after I arrived, what I'd call a counter-revolution began. The hardliners in the communist party politburo elected a new prime minister, Pavlov. He was not a Gorbachev man so far as we knew. It became clear the

goal was to bring much of the economic experimentation to a halt and to protect central control of the economic system.

There was no question that the hardliners did not like Gorbachev's opening economic arrangements with the West, borrowing money. They didn't like the privatization idea or the private businesses. So they brought in a hardliner. What we saw from about November, 1990, was a much tougher line from these quarters about slowing things down, restoring discipline, and such. I wouldn't say they were dominant, but they were flexing their muscles. Gorbachev, meanwhile, continued to work on his track and had his supporters, but the tension between the two camps was rising.

Q: Were the Kremlinologists within the embassy and back in Washington having a great time trying to figure this one out?

COLLINS: Oh, yes. It was clear that people like Shevardnadze were strongly supportive of what Gorbachev was trying to do in opening to the outside world. It was equally clear that the security services, the military and the military industrial complex were skeptical or outright opposed. As the hardliners in the Communist Party grew more bold in their challenge tensions were building. So, even as the relations between Moscow and Washington were improving, on the ground in Moscow when it came to embassy operations it was clear we were still in the Soviet Union.

The broad agenda that we were working on was in its essence really still the four- basket agenda that Shultz had developed working with Shevardnadze: As I remember it focused on regional security, in particular European security and NATO; arms control and strategic stability, economic relations, and human rights and bilateral issues. In all of these areas it was clear that different Soviet interests and bureaucracies had different views and priorities. For example, among the first issues I dealt with were maintaining progress on emigration of Jewish refuzniks and resolving two long standing issues of Embassy operations.

The easing of Soviet restrictions on emigration had become a significant achievement for U.S. policy. We had established a business-like arrangement for reviewing lists of Soviet citizens seeking to emigrate. The Soviet Government had an inter-agency committee that met to review the lists of names we provided. It was agreed they would authorize applicants' emigration unless specific security circumstances required further investigation in which case they would be subject to further discussion between us. Periodically I would meet at the MFA with then Deputy Minister Lavrov to review the results of the Soviet process and review existing or new cases and lists. In this instance, I would have to say that the spirit of the new relationship, new thinking and the new openness to finding jointly acceptable outcomes for issues that had been contentious guided the way we did business.

On other kinds of issues, the spirit was different, for example, on the two issues I had to address regarding Embassy operations. Here old habits and attitudes died hard. On the effort to negotiate getting a phone for the ambassador's car, for example, I picked up

what had been in negotiation for Lord knows how long and with almost no success. It required squaring the Soviets' insistence on reciprocity for their Ambassador in Washington with Washington's insistence on holding the line against providing their Embassy with the same permission. Even more contentious was getting permission for the Embassy to put up a dish to receive Armed Forces Television Network. The security services were hard over against allowing that to go forward because our people in Washington would not permit the Soviet Embassy here to have similar equipment installed.

Q: I would think they would love to have a phone in the Ambassador's car!

COLLINS: Perhaps if it had been a regular phone, but we were seeking an encrypted system, so they didn't want that and we had stalemate. The receiver dish for the embassy compound was hung up over reciprocity issues. They said, "You want a dish? We want a dish." Our counter intelligence people, particularly after the fall out from the bugged embassy and the Lonetree scandal, were adamant that the Soviet Embassy couldn't have a dish because it would risk permitting them to construct an enhanced listening system for the Washington area. These issues were ultimately resolved, but the tortured process was a full reminder that key elements of the old Soviet system were still well established. In any event this kind of tension existed at nearly every turn where we had to deal with issues that touched the security services' world. So it wasn't that we had a simple or easy relationship. It was a complex mix of old line and new that made for complexity and to a significant degree uncertainty.

Q: But things were changing. What was different from your memories of earlier times in the way the embassy did its business?

COLLINS: Well I suppose the most striking thing about embassy operations was the extraordinary expansion of our ability to have contact with Soviet institutions and citizens. The new openness that emerged from glasnost had made it possible for us to engage a spectrum of Russians that was unthinkable in an earlier era. And there was the opportunity to travel much more extensively, even though restrictions remained. In this regard one of the tasks I was given by the ambassador was to upgrade our capacity to keep track of what was going on beyond Moscow and Leningrad, particularly in other Soviet republics. To do that I came up with the concept of circuit riders.

The idea was to have individual officers from the embassy's different sections take on responsibility for say, Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan. Each of these officers, in addition to whatever responsibilities they had in the embassy, now had the opportunity and responsibility to go to their assigned republic, get to know the people there, report on developments in their region. and serve as the principal working level link between the embassy and their republic. They were in a way sort of personal envoys for the ambassador, and they were supposed to ride circuit every quarter. That system actually worked pretty well. It was effective in getting us into areas and gaining connections that we had never had before. And before the Soviet Union broke up, it put us in a good

position when we had to open representation in these places a year later. I was reasonably proud that the system worked and as I had conceived it.

Q: It makes sense from our side, but it would make sense to try to stop it from the Soviet side I would think.

COLLINS: The services, of course, kept track of everybody, and we still had travel controls. Officially, though, we had relatively few problems and they were not generally interfering with the program. It was a more open society, and we were careful to push the limits but not overstep the lines. In essence this is what Matlock had been doing since he arrived in Moscow. That was to push the envelope, keep testing how far we could go in pressing to open Soviet society for us. He was not reckless, but he didn't assume that old rules were necessarily unchangeable. He had opened up a lot of opportunities for greater travel, for greater access to the Russian institutions, and public appearances on media not just by him, but by embassy people more broadly. These measures including the idea that we should institute visiting the provinces, were all things that he deserves a lot of credit for initiating and supporting. If he had not pushed it, I think there was nobody in Washington that would have been likely to carry this banner. It was one of his real contributions and it helped to prepare us at least in part for what was coming.

Q: One question: You keep referring to the services. What do you mean by that?

COLLINS: Basically the KGB. The Russians often called them the "organs." It was the security services: ministry of interior, KGB, et al., the eyes and ears that watch, listen and monitor the foreigners, and acted as the enforcement arm for the regime. They were ubiquitous.

Q: Were you given a pass by Washington because of the concerns about the Persian Gulf and all that so that "Washington" attention was focused elsewhere?

COLLINS: I don't think that was the dynamic. Matlock had made clear to Washington his ideas about how the Soviet republics and regions were becoming more important and we were working on this agenda. So, he and I spent time on developing an Embassy response to how he saw the needs for reporting a changing landscape. A great deal of our time was also spent on a complex and growing agenda and hosting delegations involved in negotiating over the expanding set of issues defining our bilateral agenda. This included an almost constant stream of support for visits by senior administration people, and an embassy role in support of negotiations to reach the first START agreement.

Q: Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

COLLINS: Yes. That was completed only in '92, but it was in negotiation all this period.

Q: So the Embassy was increasingly busy. But did you have the staff to take care of this? You still had security restrictions that limited the staff didn't you?

COLLINS: Oh yes. The embassy was still a fortress, and despite all, we were still the Soviet Union's enemy. Moscow was in many ways more open, but for us it was still very much what it had been in the Cold War even though the volume of our engagement was expanding dramatically and the idea of cooperative activity was growing. We were, however, doing more with what we had, and there had been no expansion of the embassy staff.

Q: On your agenda as DCM, was the idea to get away from this fortress policy?

COLLINS: I don't think I can say it was. At this period, we were still too close to the events of the mid-'80s that had shaped the idea that the embassy would have no local employees and that our hosts were seeking every opportunity to breach our security. And in fairness, we were still living in the USSR, and we were the no. 1 target and threat on the agenda of the security services. It was still not an atmosphere or political environment to suggest a different approach. That waited until the events of 1991 when the world the embassy inhabited changed completely.

During the Soviet period, we lived with it, did our best to manage within its confines, and pushed the limits as we could. As a side note I would add that in this time it was very difficult for anyone outside the security/intelligence community to raise any idea that would suggest easing the security restrictions we lived with. The Department was very much on the defensive, and we had to live every day with the view among the security and counter intelligence people that we - State - were wimpish or not competent on security. It was my experience that this view came to the fore most forcefully when something went wrong that the security and counterintelligence community people had signed on to. Then you could count on the State Department being put up as the scapegoat. Well, I took certain lessons from this which we'll talk about later when we get to my time as ambassador. In any case at that time, it was politically impossible to change the security arrangements we lived with, and we did not really make an effort.

Q: How were we looking at the economy, agricultural as well as military production?

COLLINS: I think it's probably important to provide some context here. By 1990 it was accepted that the economic situation was serious and getting worse. The limited measures Gorbachev had implemented or allowed had not brought significant improvement. Stores were empty; the agriculture sector was not producing enough food to feed the country; and winter was approaching. The most dramatic elements of Gorbachev's reforms had affected the stringent and rigid political controls that had been at the core of the communist system. Glasnost had opened the information space and introduced an unprecedented degree of political competition. This had made an immense difference to the intelligentsia and broader elite. But economic perestroika had done much less to change the centralized command economic system that by the second half of the 1980s was simply not able to provide for the population and maintain the priorities the Soviet system had set for it in the Cold War.

Gorbachev had accepted that economic change was needed; he had himself spoken about trying to restructure in a way that would change the economic model to address its inadequacies but also save the socialist system. He had engaged some younger economists to come up with options for him to make this transition. As I arrived in Moscow in 1990, a debate was raging over the plan developed by Grigoriy Yavlinsky, the 500 Days Plan, that was designed to transform the command system to a market based economy. This is hardly the place to get into the details, but suffice it to say the plan had badly split the Communist Party, pitting the hardliners against the Gorbachev team reformers. We as Americans had been supportive of the efforts by Yavlinsky and his colleagues to move dramatically, a consistent policy that had been with us since Secretary Shultz's time when I recall him telling Shevardnadze in response to his request for help on economic reform that the U.S. and he personally would do what we could to help, but Americans simply did not know how to make the communist, state run command system work.

In the end, the outcome of the debate over the 500 Days plan disappointed everyone. It was not adopted nor did the economic situation improve. For the coming months the Soviets had to import large amounts of food. The stores were not well stocked. The novel emergence of a growing number of private economic businesses and cooperatives brought the beginnings of free trade and private restaurants where Georgian food became a rage in the city, suggested a real change in the offing, and more and more private services emerged at least in the major cities. I recall in one of the more bizarre effects was the establishment of pay toilet facilities privately maintained around the tourist attractions in Moscow, a welcome addition I can tell you to nearly any tourist in the city Russian or foreign.

But in the larger picture, the failure to move ahead with something like the 500 Days plan was a setback for the reformist wing of the party. Gorbachev's principal critic, Ryzhkov, led the successful effort to block the 500 Day Plan and within months after I arrived was replaced as Prime Minister by Valentin Pavlov who would preside over a series of half-hearted reform moves and an ongoing decline in the economy over the next months. He was known most for the reform of currency that led to a significant devaluation of the ruble going from six or seven to the dollar to 12 or 13 to the dollar within a few months that hurt nearly every citizen. It weakened any confidence in the government as it eroded people's savings, began a cycle of inflation and de facto produced no visible positive results.

Meanwhile, amidst all this, I don't think American analysts outside or in the embassy for that matter really understood the extreme impact these problems they were having. We certainly didn't seem to have the intelligence or information that led us to know how stressed the whole system was becoming. The mood was, "Yea, there are problems. We've seen these before. The Soviet government again has screwed up its food situation" or thoughts to that effect. I really don't recall anyone saying, "Wait a minute. This time is different. This could come apart." This was a place the embassy was not that prescient.

The focus often - and I think this is the way government inevitably works - was, "I'm getting ready for tomorrow, getting prepared for the next round of negotiations on arms control, preparing for the next summit meeting." And there was reason for this focus, for getting the maximum done we could while the opportunity lasted. Working with Gorbachev was producing dramatic results for us. If you look at what had happened in Europe and what was happening in the Middle East, this was historic: it was changing the world order. Nobody yet thought it was the end of the bipolar world, but people were beginning to say, "Well, the Cold War may be behind us.

Q: The computerized revolution was coming for information. Had that intruded at all into the mix or not?

COLLINS: At that time I would have to say no. We had not computerized our operations. We were still basically in the '80s. There was no secure embassy E-mail. There were no cell phones. We had no computers to do classified work. The one major change for us was the existence of direct "drop" lines to Washington that meant easy phone communication either open or classified with the US. We used these lines also for a fax, something we did not have in the 70s. So, while our communications were a quantum amount better than they had been in the '70s, they had not yet begun to approach the digital revolution and what it would do within the decade.

What had really brought change was the glasnost reform that allowed the freer flow of information not only within the Soviet Union but also across its borders. But the links were still very limited. By 1991 things like CNN and, for us, the armed forces network were available, and we were getting information and news much more promptly. But we were still using the AP and UPI news tickers for timely news and our information infrastructure belonged more to the 1980s than the 2000s.

Q: The Gulf War was played out around the world on CNN, but I assume that the Soviets didn't have access to it. I mean, this looked like a "gee whiz" sort of war: smart bombs and all of that.

COLLINS: CNN was in Moscow - had a bureau there. In the city you could get it on cable. We could get AFRTS in the compound. So at least those in the capital were aware of just what was going on and what the new world looked like.

Q: Armed Forces Radio and Television Service. I was wondering whether the Soviet military were taking note of this, and this had to be disturbing to them.

COLLINS: They had no illusions about Saddam's army, but the way it unfolded and how quickly the technologies emerged and were used, while not unexpected in outcome, was probably a shock. But in another sense, this was seen as yet another defeat for Soviet arms. They almost certainly were saying their clients just couldn't deal with the West's technology or use theirs well. But I suspect what they saw had an impact and had to have been sobering

Q: It had to be.

COLLINS: At the same time I suspect no one had a good answer for the challenge. It wasn't star wars, but it was a real challenge. The resources they could devote to meeting the challenge by this time had been fairly tapped out, building monster nuclear submarines, new aircraft, missiles, etc. Yet the system was not really seeming to have an answer other than, "See? We told you so. We have to get a lot more money." It was a vain plea. But we were getting close to real change.

Q: They were all of a sudden cutting the officer corps in half which is a tremendous change?

COLLINS: By late 1990-early '91 the Soviet military was in turmoil. Economic problems, the early stages of withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact countries, a decline in the military's image at home, the Afghanistan aftermath, and the unrest emerging across the country was taking a toll. The military, in particular, was facing cuts, a decline in the pay for the officer corps in real terms, and then the new issue of housing for the returning officers displaced by the withdrawal from Germany and other countries. These issues added to the general economic crisis and only exacerbated the issues confronting the leadership.

The hardliners were succeeding in impairing serious progress by Gorbachev. On the other hand, they didn't have an alternative because things had gone too far. The result was pretty much a stalemate with the result that events were beginning to take charge rather than having anybody guiding them. At least that's what I see in retrospect.

Q: What did this look like? What were you at the embassy seeing?

COLLINS: Day to day it seemed like drift and decline for the average citizen - not crisis, at least in the city - but a sense of a drift downward. Economic realities were becoming more difficult. There was a shortage of supplies in the winter of 1990 to the point that there were runs on the stores and hoarding, stores could keep nothing on the shelves, a blossoming of private street traders selling any and everything at inflated prices. I recall Moscow Mayor Luzhkov telling me he could not keep any meat in the stores. The minute he brought a large supply in it disappeared as people bought it up immediately to hoard what they thought might be the last shipment they would see. I was also told that there had been a major change in the way the city and country dealt with one another. Historically it had been the rule that the country people came to the city to get what was not available anywhere in the rural areas. Now it was the reverse, people in the city were going to the country to get food and essentials they could not get in the city and carrying the city's goods to trade in the countryside for what they could not find at home. People coped, as always. In the meantime, the leaders fought over rearranging the deck chairs. The hardliners, having largely stalled real reform, tried to hold the line against letting real economic change go forward, pressing instead for more discipline to get things under control. But you couldn't put the genie back in the bottle, and the situation generally continued to get worse.

In the meantime, further afield the nationalities issue was percolating more vigorously. Voices in Ukraine and Georgia were demanding greater autonomy, and in the Baltic states open confrontations were erupting. In Lithuania the republic had proclaimed its restoration of statehood and for months the Soviet leadership had been trying to restore control using the military and communist party to keep the lid on events. Tensions were building, and creating a base for open violence.

The question was how to deal with the economic problems, the fracturing of the Union, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact; all were only becoming more acute. And along with this so did the divisions at the top. The hardliners said restoring discipline, a crackdown in essence, was the only way to deal with the disorder. Gorbachev said, "We can't. It won't work," as he continued to seek a compromise that would save the Union and address the need for economic transformation. So, over the winter of 1990-1991 we were watching these different reactions to events and trying to explain to Washington their implications for our relations.

Q: So, we are now heading into 1991, a pretty important year. It is the year of a summit, the emergence of Boris Yeltsin as a power, and, of course, the coup that is prelude to the end of the USSR. Can we discuss this a bit?

COLLINS: The first half of 1991 was, in fact, quite a ride. We had any number of milestone events of historic proportions and just keeping up each day involved us in events that were far from the routine. But for openers, one day in particular in this period stands out: March 28. I might start with the embassy itself first. We have already discussed the unusual situation at the embassy, which made us an American only staff with no local employees and an embassy leadership that split the substantive and management roles of the DCM between me and Joe Hulings. The new year added to this a further upheaval when on March 28 construction workers building an elevator on the old chancery building started a fire that engulfed the top three floors of the building and the roof. Luckily, and I mean by sheer luck, it did not result in a loss of life or injury to any staff, but it either burned or made unusable all the chancery office facilities above the first floor. We were forced to set up the entire embassy operation, save the consular section, in new quarters in the embassy residence compound.

The embassy response to that fire was one of those moments I was proudest of the Foreign Service and our embassy family. Almost without a missed beat, the entire staff moved into facilities that had been designed as space for public use (auditorium, bowling alley, community rooms) created new public office space, and reestablished mission operations without a hiccup. The only major problem we faced was destruction of our classified work spaces and technology, so that for the next few weeks we were without the ability to send or receive any classified material. Instead, we used couriers to Finland or posts in Germany to dispatch and receive our cable traffic. This meant that although we got classified capabilities back within a short period, for the next couple of years, the entire embassy except for our consular section worked in these "emergency, temporary" spaces. They went through the extraordinary events of 1991 configured such that basically the substantive offices of the political, economic, and several other sections

were housed in a single room, our military attaches shared the bowling alley with other colleagues, and our administrative/security operations took over the rest. It was a different way to configure the workspace, but in looking back I frankly believe the embassy staff never worked better as a team. It gave one food for thought in thinking about how to manage a country team. I, meanwhile, was grateful for all that experience in the Opscenter setting up task forces and building crisis management teams on the fly.

The second event of that day touched another of the major developments for the year, the ongoing re-emergence of Boris Yeltsin as a political force, this time at the head of the Russian Republic. The afternoon of the day we had the fire in the morning, supporters of the Yeltsin campaign for president of the Russian Republic had organized a major demonstration and rally. The authorities had granted a permit for the event, but had refused permission for the march to go to the Kremlin walls: the authorities had said they could not come closer than the so called Boulevard Ring Road that encircled the city center some half mile from the Kremlin. In any event, on the day of the march the demonstration went past the now burned embassy and was confronted at the Ring Road by massed troops brought in to enforce the ban on the marchers moving closer to the city center. The resulting hours-long faceoff between marchers and military was tense, but ended without violence. I was later told that part of the event's significance was that it had been a rehearsal for the actions ordered by the leaders who organized the move against Gorbachev later in the summer. But, perhaps more significantly, it showed the mounting authority Yeltsin was beginning to carry as a political power in Moscow and across Russia.

Q: Looking a bit ahead, you also had a summit coming up at the end of July, President Bush (Senior) visiting Moscow. How did that go?

COLLINS: It was an exceptional event both for what it symbolized and the results it achieved. But it also came at a turning point few were aware would follow within weeks. We Americans now see the 1991 summit meeting as a major event in what turned out to be the culmination of the Gorbachev era and American-Soviet efforts to reshape the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Events over the previous several years were bringing the Cold War as we knew it close to its end. This summit, in many ways, was a capstone that brought that process to its conclusion. The signing of the START treaty, the premier event of the summit, symbolized that a new post-Cold War relationship was now in to begin. The preparations for the meeting had been marked by intense diplomacy and a variety of negotiations over the months before the summit that consolidated the groundwork for that outcome.

And then that summit also turned out to be a turning point for the embassy itself as it marked the end of Jack Matlock's tenure as ambassador. He had made an immense contribution to the daily diplomacy that kept pressing for greater openness within the Soviet Union and in its relations with the U.S. In a sense, he had been the daily implementer of the changes made possible by the Gorbachev reform and the readiness of Reagan and then Bush to make the most of them to bring the Cold War to its conclusion. He had also kept urging Washington to see what was changing in the Soviet Union and

its implications. As we've noted Matlock had been the engine driving the embassy to diversify our coverage of the Soviet Union. He pressed us to see and interpret the growing drive on the part of the different national republics for greater autonomy and a greater say in their own affairs. And we were watching closely and with concern the shifting reaction to the Gorbachev reforms.

In particular, by this time Gorbachev and his allies had been working to address the tensions within the Union by proposing and negotiating among the leaders of the republics what was known as a new Union Treaty. This amounted to a new constitution and fundamental law for the Union that would provide for greater autonomy for the republics and structure of the country's economic and political order. It was strongly opposed by Gorbachev's critics and in particular the hardliners among the Party leadership. We had even had warnings about the possibilities of a coup against Gorbachev in the period not long before the summit and it was clear tensions were rising. In this regard the summit took on special significance not only for U.S. – Soviet relations but for Soviet internal developments as well. Because it came as we were seeing growing resistance to the pace and nature of these changes the summit was an American demonstration of support for Gorbachev's course at a critical time. And it is, in this context, that one has also to see the approach President Bush took when he visited Kiev on his way home from Moscow and the much criticized speech he gave there.

Q: What was behind this resistance? Why would there be resistance to economic reform?

COLLINS: As I think I mentioned, toward the end of 1990, we had seen the first major success by the Gorbachev critics--those who were very dubious about his reforms to open up the system—in pushing back. In retrospect, I think what we were seeing was a reaction to a new emphasis in what the leadership was trying to do. A great deal had changed in the political order through the implementation of Glasnost and political perestroika. But, the end of the 80s the point had come where they had to start addressing the economic dimension and the implications this would have for the structure of the Union. This was where the economic stakeholders who controlled the nation's resources and how they were distributed started to say, "This is going too far. We have to get control over what's happening and get our hands on the system because it's coming apart. We are now seeing a basic threat to our control of the nation." The resistance to economic reform was tremendous precisely because it challenged control by the centralized bureaucracy of the nation's wealth, resources, and priorities in allocating who got what.

This was a challenge to control over everyday life, industry and military budgets, and so forth. It was fine to have the intelligentsia criticizing the system, writing more poems or articles about the horrors of Stalin or whatever. It was quite another thing to talk about opening up the economy to private entrepreneurship, to non-state controlled economic activity, and to the dynamics of a market system. There was a growing reaction against what people saw as control slipping away from those who exercised economic power. The people who had controlled the resources of the nation, the military industrial

complex, the economic ministries, the regional party leaders were watching with great trepidation and great fear for the breakup or loss of their control and their power.

Q: So ideology probably didn't play as strong a part as self-interest. For example, if you had a job in the such and such ministry, that job is now in jeopardy.

COLLINS: I suppose there were elements of that, but it was more that change now seemed to challenge the entire structure of the command economic system, and the power of those who controlled its levers. People and institutions that had controlled vast resources were in danger of having others chip away at their power and grab pieces of their authority. They were right. If you opened up this economy to private enterprise, or you gave leaders in the regions greater authority over their economies, you began to break up industries and vertically integrated structures that the center controlled.

Q: Let's get back to the summit. Did you get involved in any of the summit issues?

COLLINS: More in a procedural than substantive way. As DCM I was pretty much managing the planning of logistics, scheduling, administrative support, and all the other elements that went into the practical side of making a summit happen. I wasn't heavily engaged in the substantive negotiations, but I did have to ensure that schedules, events, participants, etc. were organized to deal with the issues and thus had a good grasp of what those issues were. The biggest element for the summit was the START agreement that was being readied for signature. This was a major, perhaps the culminating step by the U.S. working with Gorbachev to put an end to the Cold War. Its signature called for the destruction of immense numbers of nuclear weapons, opened up an unprecedented system of verification and transparency in the systems of strategic arms, and promised to reverse the arms buildup on both sides in a way that would create greater strategic stability between the super-powers.

On my end this historic dimension to the meeting did little to change the realities that preparations for all summits were pretty much the same. Early on the Embassy had to deal with advance teams from the White House and other agencies including State. We had to work to come to agreements between their insistence that all work as our President's people insisted and the equally firm views of our Soviet hosts who had their own protocol, security, logistics, and other requirements to be observed. My job was to oversee all sorts of negotiations over security, who would attend meetings and meals, where individuals would stay, and the order of motorcades, etc. Then, of course as the meeting came close, we would go over all this again, but with more people involved and egos even further inflated. It was one of the more challenging and pressure laden exercises I undertook in bringing Soviet and American sides to a common position. While I was not particularly occupied with the substance of the summit's negotiations, the way those involved argued over things like who would attend a meeting seemed at the time to be almost on a par with whether we would agree on the number of launch vehicles under the START agreement.

Q: Getting back to what the summit meant, you have suggested it was a turning point. It was the conclusion of Jack Matlock's tenure, the moment of a major turn in the Cold War. Matlock has a particular view about all this I think. He's written a book.

COLLINS: Yes, he's written a couple of books. His key theme, which I think I'm prepared to agree with, is that the Cold War was ended by a negotiated settlement that preceded the Soviet collapse. I would say the summit in July was in some sense the validation of that view. That really put a cap on the end of the Cold War by addressing the issue of strategic arms and a joint commitment to manage strategic stability in the future. This was the critical remaining issue following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and German reunification. The summit was really thus about putting the final piece ending the Cold War system in place and beginning exploration of where Soviet Union-American relations and Europe's relationship with the Soviet Union were going afterward.

One big element of this was, of course, that we were going to wind down the arms race and reduce dramatically the number of nuclear weapons. But there were also discussions about broader issues. The Soviet Union's economic picture was pretty bleak, bleaker than we thought. There were already precedents for the Soviet Union's turning to the international community for financial support, so this was on the table. We also had the questions about how things were going to evolve in Eastern Europe as the Warsaw Pact wound down. What was going to happen to Soviet forces? Within the USSR tensions were rising as the nationalities question grew more urgent in the Baltics, in Georgia, in Ukraine.

In this connection what the summit did was to lend American support for what Gorbachev's reform program had been doing. Matlock insists, and I think he's probably right, that the American administration at the time was very careful and very cautious about involving itself in what the Soviet Union was going through. But there was concern about events turning into chaos. There had been trouble in the Baltics for months. Gamsakhurdia in Georgia was becoming more militant about his sovereignty. There were growing efforts in Ukraine to push the envelope. As the summit took place, Americans were having to think carefully about what they expected to the east of Eastern Europe. I don't think these issues were consciously at the forefront as the summit preparations proceeded. American leaders focused understandably on getting the arms control agreement done, dealing with essential bilateral issues, and making the most of conditions to permit us to nail down agreements critical to the U.S.

It was true and there was understanding that uncertainty about the future of Gorbachev's reform efforts growing, and that did set the context and environment for the July meeting's planning and execution. But what wasn't present in that summit was any urgent feeling or prescience about what was to come in a very short period of time. On the other hand, it was symbolic of what was to come, I suppose, that one of the great issues of the summit was how to handle Yeltsin, who was becoming more and more insistent on a role of importance in Soviet decision making and politics.

Q: How did we see Yeltsin?

COLLINS: Yeltsin was seen, I think it's fair to say, as a troublesome, complicating figure at that time. We were dealing with Gorbachev, and we were dealing with the Soviet Union. There was a sense that Yeltsin, while clearly of growing importance, was not someone that the American side wanted to encourage or strengthen. Yet everyone pretty well understood that he was growing in importance and managing him and his role was a key issue.

Q: Did we have somebody from the embassy working on Yeltsin, a point of contact?

COLLINS: There were a few different officers working on different portfolios linked to the Russian Republic and its government as well as the city of Moscow. I myself had regular contact with Yeltsin's team from the beginning. The ambassador and I split our focus of contacts day to day: he worked with the senior Soviet officials and to the extent we focused on the issue, I carried out or oversaw the contacts with the Russian Republic. Andrey Kozyrev, the Republic Foreign Minister was a regular contact, and I had routine connections to members of the Russian Republic Supreme Soviet members such as Vladimir Lukin, the chair of the committee on foreign affairs, who would later become Ambassador in Washington. Frankly though, even as I spent a fair amount of my time with these people, they were seen as secondary players in terms of issues of importance to us. The real power lay with the Soviet ministries and leadership in the Kremlin and at *Staraya Ploshchad* (the Communist Party Central Committee offices). But as you might imagine, the connections I established in those days became especially relevant as Russian officials emerged with new authority following the attempted coup in August.

Q: But what about Yeltsin himself?

COLLINS: Managing relations with Yeltsin was a complex and delicate issue, particularly when we faced events like the summit. The context had grown more complex with Yeltsin's successful direct popular election as President of the Russian Federation and growing assertions of "sovereignty" by the Russian and other republics that was challenging the authorities of the Soviet Government. Gorbachev, as we noted, was in the process of negotiating what amounted to a new constitution for the USSR, called a Union treaty, that was to give much more authority and autonomy to the republics. If we look at the reporting from the time it was clear that Yeltsin saw his role at the summit was to make clear his intent to demand greater autonomy and authority for the Russian Republic President and his republic vis-a-vis the center under the treaty. All of these issues were roiling the political atmosphere, and there was no question that Gorbachev had pressure put on him from both liberal and conservative forces, pushing him either to move faster or not move as fast as he was moving to remake the Soviet system.

In this context I remember everyone understood we would have to handle the Yeltsin question with great care. Gorbachev and Yeltsin had a poisonous relationship, and they watched each other and what we did with each like hawks. As the summit approached discussions about how contact with Yeltsin and his place in the visit would be managed

were among the most vexing issues. In the end Bush had a separate meeting with Yeltsin, and Yeltsin attended both the Kremlin and reciprocal American dinners.

I remember the Spaso House return dinner in particular. The guest list was the who's who of Soviet leaders: Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Yanaev, the Soviet Vice President, the Soviet Foreign and Defense ministers, and any number of other prominent senior officials of government, the intelligentsia, and the arts. Isaac Stern, whose return to Moscow had been a sensation for the music world, provided the entertainment for the evening in a performance that symbolized the changes in the Soviet Union and our relations.

All evening Yeltsin was very much in evidence, was very prominent, and fittingly for the role I had at the embassy I sat at his table. He came across as a pretty confident fellow at the time. There was just no question he saw himself as a prominent force in Russia's future and was not modest about showing that fact.

Q: So, the summit has gone pretty well? But am I right that the next stop was Kiev and that was more controversial?

COLLINS: Yes. The summit had gone very well. The historic arms control agreement (START) was successfully concluded, and a number of other documents were signed all furthering the process of thickening and normalizing relations between Moscow and Washington. The President's party left Moscow pretty much on a high, and prepared for a stop on the way home in Kiev where Bush was to give a speech. That speech, of course, ended up far from routine and was quickly labeled by critics the "Chicken Kiev" speech. It embroiled the administration in the internal Soviet struggles over nationality issues and the republics drive for greater independence from Moscow. The thrust was a statement by the United States that it would be in nobody's interest to have a collapse of the Soviet Union and a devolution into chaos or conflict within the Soviet space--that people should be careful. That speech which I had not seen beforehand, became very controversial because it was essentially taken as a call to the Ukrainian people to "be careful," that the Soviet Union intact was much better for American interests than a collapse of order and effective government in a region with nuclear weapons and the potential for violence and chaos.

Q: I think going back to the 1917-20 period, you didn't want red and white armies roaming up and down

COLLINS: Yes, but it was also very much at the forefront of everyone's thinking that this was not 1917 or 1920. This was 1991 and we were dealing with a country in possession of thousands of nuclear weapons and warheads spread across four different political entities where nationality issues, political rivalries and a history of violence represented an almost unthinkable danger. We had seen the Warsaw Pact disintegrate and political upheaval capture Eastern Europe with different results in different nations. We were not that far into the Yugoslav breakup or the chaos of the Balkans yet, but the sense of danger represented by the breakup of the Soviet state, where you already had had some ethnic conflicts and the danger of others - where it seemed that tribalism was prevailing over any other sentiment at the emotional level - was seen as a very dangerous business.

Just to recall again, if it broke up (and when it later did), we would face the challenge of four nuclear weapons states in Eurasia. There was plenty of reason to be cautious.

Q: We'd had this huge apparatus of intellectuals and politicians who had been writing ad nauseum about the Soviet Union. All of a sudden push came to shove. Were you finding any consensus coming out of this group that said, "This is what we should be doing," or were all the ethnic groups in the United States trying to take advantage of it?

COLLINS: This is a big generalization, but I think in the American context the only groups who were adamantly active, demanding greater support by Washington for independence of republics were the supporters of the Baltic resistance movements. The Baltics had been for months in semi-open rebellion against Moscow. The Lithuanian parliament was blockaded, and there were troubles in the other Baltic states where the push to assert their sovereignty was gaining steam. Most other ethnic groups (except for the Georgians under Gamsakurdia) were not openly pushing for independence. They were going along with Gorbachev's efforts to negotiate a new constitution or treaty that would preserve the Union but with a new and more robust role and autonomy for the republics. For much of the year there had been growing popularity for the idea of sovereignty of the republics even though the content of that idea was far from defined. It reminded one of the obligatory deference to the "Sovereign State of....." that is a standard part of any number of American politicians' stump vocabulary.

Q: When you get right down to it, the Baltics were almost a unique case in that they had been successful in establishing themselves as independent nations after World War I. None of the other republics had done so. It meant that in some sense their status was different didn't it? Were the Soviets willing to see them go? Were they indifferent?

COLLINS: The Baltics did always represent something of a special case among the fifteen republics. The U.S. had recognized their independence following World War I, and we never recognized their incorporation into the USSR in 1940. Psychologically the Soviets themselves had always seen the Baltics in a somewhat different category from the rest of the Union republics. But, it was also true that the Communist leadership was united in opposition to giving in to their efforts to break away, or as they saw it I think, breaking up the Soviet state. And this was a troubling element for American policy and the effort to keep our relations with Moscow on track.

As the resistance, particularly in Lithuania, gained momentum, so too did the Soviet response to prevent its success, including the deployment of military forces to blockade the Lithuanian Parliament. In these circumstances the time pressures grew for the Bush administration to do more in support of the Baltics, and I remember getting almost daily, or more correctly, middle of the night calls from Washington for updates on what was happening and our assessment. So, yes the Baltic question was a live one with real political pressures in Washington demanding attention from the Administration and almost daily demanding a delicate balancing of the competing interests support for the Baltics was forcing the Bush Administration to balance as it pursued its objectives with the Soviet leadership.

Q: What about the others – Ukrainians, Georgians, etc.?

COLLINS: The message from the Bush administration was, “we’re dealing with Gorbachev: we’re dealing with the Soviet Union; the Soviet Union is changing for the better and we support those changes; they have made a great difference for the security of our country; we just signed a historic arms agreement, and we expect more progress.” We were still putting our money on Gorbachev as the man to deal with and our assessment was that he was in charge. Certainly we recognized the pressures he faced from the hardliners in the Party, from the nationalist forces challenging the unity of the country, from the economic mess he had to address. and we knew not all was quiet in the regime. In the run-up to the July Summit, the ambassador had received a warning from a key pro-reform figure that hardliners were actively plotting against Gorbachev and that he should be warned.

But the bottom line remained. No one, to the best of my knowledge, even at that late date, saw the Soviet collapse and breakup coming. As we’ve discussed they saw change coming in the way it was structured, but they didn’t see the looming destruction of the Communist Party system or the country’s disintegration. When I make that point here, some people say, “No, no, we knew it was coming.” If that was the case, they certainly kept the knowledge to themselves, and their thinking was absent from the basis of the policies we followed.

I look at actions and results for an indication of what people really think. It’s true that Matlock, as I’ve said, a couple of years earlier had argued that we should be paying more attention to the republics because they were exerting a greater influence over the direction of some Soviet policies. There were plenty of signs that the central Asians, for example, were asserting a greater degree of independence of action. The Baltics as mentioned were in all but open revolt. Georgia and Ukraine were showing increasing signs of restlessness. That there were stresses on the system was not a question, but did anybody really anticipate the break up? I don’t think so. I certainly never saw any contingency plans or had any discussed with me or raised with the Ambassador. And that leaves me more than skeptical of those who in hindsight say, “I told them it was coming.” The summit in July, I would say, was a testament to how unconvinced anybody was that the Soviet system was in crisis.

Q: Were we looking at the Soviet military as a force that might be able to say, “Don’t do this,” or in other words hold fast They had an awful lot at stake.

COLLINS: I think it was much more that there was a sense that the Communist Party was still a formidable force: that it remained disciplined, dominant, and in charge, that no forces were yet able to challenge the Party’s authority and that the traditional heavies in the system remained first of all the party and the security services. There was little to support the idea that the military would shape the future. Russia had never had a Napoleonic tradition, and throughout the Soviet period the military had remained subordinate to the Party.

Q: What about security services?

COLLINS: They were seen as having a very significant role. They always did, but the KGB and other elements were subject to party control. They were always closely linked to the Party leadership and party structure; they were the defenders of the party and ideological orthodoxy, and the party used them for its purposes. But the idea that the KGB was going to take over the country, too, didn't strike people as likely. The party, its nomenklatura, and its pervasive authority at all levels from Kremlin to factory floor was the institutional basis for the Soviet system.

So, the real issue that people were watching was the struggle for the leadership of the party, and the big story between late 1990 and mid-1991 was who was going to be up and down in the party? Was it going to be the conservatives or the reformers. It looked after the fall of 1990 like the conservatives were getting the upper hand, and that Gorbachev and perestroika were losing their grip. I noted that the new Prime Minister Pavlov was seen as a break on economic reform. But, it was also the case that Gorbachev continued to press elements of his core agenda. The START treaty was signed and he was pressing forward with negotiations for the treaty that would bring a fundamental alteration to the Union structure.

Q: This is where Kremlinologists within our own apparatus must have been having a field day.

COLLINS: They were. They were watching the fact that people like Pavlov, for instance, was made prime minister. Pavlov's appointment was seen as a setback for economic reform, sort of a counter revolution, and the sign that power had shifted in the politburo. That the hard liners were increasingly pushing back on further reform pointing to what was happening in Lithuania and the Baltics as evidence of what reforms were doing to the Union.

The hardliners were also aghast that Gorbachev was increasingly turning to the Western market for economic support, in their eyes making the USSR dependent on its principal enemy, and so on. Meantime, the general conditions for the Soviet public continued to deteriorate. Gorbachev was facing problems of being able to feed the population, and if I recall correctly in desperation permitted urban dwellers to begin cultivating garden plots. On public lands. The result was an exodus from the cities in the spring of 1991 and emergence of gardens on every free piece of land, it seemed, from railway embankments to highway rights of way. Oil prices were down: foreign currency earnings were down: most concluded the economic situation was untenable. It was getting to the point where the money wasn't sufficient to keep food supplies adequate.

In any event, of course, all this analysis and voluminous discussion of the almost insurmountable obstacles Soviet leaders faced never really brought us to see how fragile the system really was or how it had lost the capacity to command the loyalty of its people. And all this in spite of the momentous changes that had swept Eastern Europe. As

the July '91 summit attested, the United States continued to assume that it would have the second super power as our partner in building the future of a new European order and the bi-polar global system. Certainly it was in this spirit that President Bush concluded the July summit that essentially stood as an endorsement of the Gorbachev path of reform and his leadership, a message further reinforced in Ukraine as he urged patience and caution changing the Soviet system. If you look at the documents and the statements from that summit and the Bush trip that is almost inevitably the message you take away.

And all this is also the backdrop to what I too assumed would be a quiet August or transition for the Embassy with the departure of Ambassador Matlock shortly after the summit and a few weeks for me as charge pending the arrival of Ambassador Strauss.

Q: Did the Soviet Union shut down in August the way Western Europe did?

COLLINS: It was certainly vacation time. August 1 saw the roads out of town jammed with unusual traffic heading for the dachas. The shutdown was not as pronounced as it has become over the past 20 years, but it was a pretty good imitation of Europe and was certainly a time no one planned major business. That said, if we had been more focused, I suppose we would have been watching the development of Gorbachev's negotiations over the Union Treaty. But having got the summit out of the way in July embassy staff were going to go off to vacation and the personnel turnover at the embassy was in full swing. Gorbachev went off to his dacha on a previously announced vacation as usual, and with key people out of the capitol government business was on idle with "actings" left in charge.

In this regard the embassy was no exception. We had bidden farewell to Jack Matlock not long after the summit - I think Jack left on the 10th of August - and I became chargé. With confidence that this was the quiet time, Naomi and I decided we would also join the travelers to see some of the country we had not visited. We made a short trip to Leningrad and then on return, never having visited Ukraine, we set off for a short trip to Odessa. We enjoyed these trips, and I recall especially impressions of Odessa where we stayed in the *Krasnaya* hotel, a Sovietized former British luxury hotel from the early 20th century. It was a memorable trip with recollections of descending the staircase Eisenstein's film on 1905 made famous, having a first encounter with apricot ice cream, and encountering an elderly Jewish gentleman who had survived the war and was relishing the opportunity to tell his American guests about his youth watching grand balls on the veranda of the royal palace that overlooks the Odessa harbor. These days were truly vacation time, albeit full immersion in Soviet shortages of food and water. And we returned to a quiet, almost sleepy Moscow.

That did not last! On the morning of the 19th of August at about three minutes after seven I had a call from one of my political officers Ed Salazar who said, "Have you heard the news? You better turn it on." The radio in the voice any Moscow veteran knew well was announcing that Gorbachev had been temporarily relieved of his responsibilities as President for reasons of health, and an extraordinary committee (the Russian was GKChP) was taking charge of the government. Vice president Yanaev was heading the

committee and serving as acting head of state. There followed a bunch of orders and the obligatory martial music that anyone familiar with Soviet practice knew normally accompanied either death of a head of state or signaled a change at the top. End of vacation! My immediate reaction I remember was “OH (expletive),” and we were off to the races.

Q: I have to say for anybody in charge of a diplomatic office and somebody calls and says, “Did you hear the news?” [laughter]

COLLINS: It’s usually bad news. Rarely do they say Merry Christmas or something. Certainly the case this time.

Q: I assume you called in your staff, those who were there.

COLLINS: Fortunately pretty much the whole country team was still there. They had not yet turned over much that summer. Joe Hulings, my co-DCM, Ray Smith and John Blaney, my political and economic counselors were still in place. Our attaché Greg Govan was likewise still there. The country team sat down at 8:00 a.m. We discussed first what we knew which frankly wasn’t a heck of a lot. We had the announcements from the Kremlin and their list of orders. We had heard nothing from Gorbachev or on his behalf from anyone with him. Nor had we heard anything yet from Yeltsin at the White House. It was peculiar that we saw the beginnings of military movements by some interior ministry forces outside the city, but at that hour they had not yet showed up in the center of town or in our area, a bit peculiar and out of character with what we would have expected. People we had out looking around the city reported normality with people going to work and no significant movement of forces. Communications seemed to be working normally with CNN on, the phones and fax machines operating normally. The one anomaly at this time was suspension of normal press distribution and media programming. On the whole at this early hour urban life seemed to be pretty normal.

The next question for us was what we, as the embassy, should do given the circumstances? How should we conduct ourselves? We had American citizens’ safety and property to think about. We were faced with issues of Embassy security and conduct in the context of uncertainty about Gorbachev’s position. And we had no guidance or official reaction from Washington for which all these events were unfolding at something like 1:00 a.m. We had been on to the Operations Center but at most, key officials were just being alerted to what had been announced. In short this country team was on its own and this charge had the unusual problem of making some critical decisions on his own.

Q: I can imagine it was tense.

COLLINS: Well, I suppose, but I also remember us taking on the business we had before us with calm discussion and as a real team. The thing I remember in a way most of all is that at the outset these events pulled us all together. Any past differences or old squabbles evaporated in the face of a shared sense of purpose and responsibility. As I recall that meeting first of all agreed we didn’t know key facts about what was going on. We did not

know what to make of the announcement about Gorbachev and health, but having heard nothing from Gorbachev himself, we were highly dubious that this was all that it was cracked up to be.

At the same time, we decided that without clarity on that score, without hearing from Gorbachev or a credible statement from him, we didn't see how what had been announced could be a legal act, at least from what we knew of the Soviet constitution. The issue for us thus became how did we deal with issues absent clarity about who was legally in charge in Moscow or at least would be taken as such. What would we do in the event, which I thought almost certain, we were approached by the leaders of the GKChP in a manner that would require us formally or informally to recognize their authority. These issues were not, of course, discussed in a vacuum. We all understood that the leaders of the GKChP were led by Gorbachev's opponents and that this was the effort to halt Gorbachev's effort to reform the Union.

That morning, as Chargé, after consulting with my colleagues, I guess I made the one significant foreign policy decision I ever actually made on my own. I decided that we, the embassy, would have nothing to do with GKChP or representatives of the Soviet Government except in so far as it would be necessary for the protection of American citizens and property. We would not engage in, if you will, diplomatic work with them or have other contact with that government until we had clarity regarding the legitimacy of the GKChP's actions. We reported that back to Washington as what we were doing. Nobody said no, and as Washington came awake that, in effect, was accepted as policy.

In the meantime, developments progressed quickly during the early morning. The Ministry of Interior divisions were beginning to stream into town deploying into the city center around the Kremlin and to the area of the White House located right across from the embassy compound. We also learned that Yeltsin, had arrived at the White House, and was contesting the action of the self-proclaimed committee in the Kremlin. He had announced he did not recognize the GKChP's authority, said their action was illegal, and famously atop a tank announced he would oppose them. That set both the policy and physical framework for the entire situation we found ourselves in over the next three days.

Q: Were you letting, say, the British or the German embassies know what you were doing?

COLLINS: We were certainly in touch with them. We did tell them what actions we took. I honestly don't remember at this point what they told us, but I recall that most of it seemed pretty consistent with our position.

Q: You mentioned the White House? I gather it was central to events.

COLLINS: The White House was the headquarters of the Government of the Russian Federation. It was where Boris Yeltsin had his offices as President of the Federation. Physically it was about a hundred fifty yards across the street from the embassy

compound. This meant we were in an unusually sensitive spot right next to Yeltsin's headquarters, literally across the street. This was to mean we would not be just observers like other embassies, but would be caught up in the middle of the action.

Q: Were you worried about security. Was the military threatening violence?

COLLINS: On that first morning, as the country team meeting broke up, it was becoming clear that events were unfolding in what can only be described as a peculiar way. First and foremost, for the actions that looked like a move by the Kremlin Committee – let's call them the junta - to seize power in ways that recalled earlier actions to oust Soviet leaders, in particular Khrushchev, the whole exercise seemed to be odd. For one thing, the first of the military began showing up only hours after the announcement that Gorbachev was out of power. Then as they arrived, my embassy people were finding that the orders they had were not clear to the commanders or the troops beyond something vague like keep order. As a result, when the troops began to arrive, the tank unit that surrounded the White House took up positions to defend the building with guns pointed out, and not incidentally, at my living room windows on the compound. This unit later that morning welcomed Yeltsin for his famous address atop one of their tanks where he announced he was defending the Soviet constitution, denounced the Committee's illegal usurpation of power, and declared he would not accept the junta's authority. At the same time, other embassy officers were reporting from downtown that the military there had deployed to defend critical central government institutions around the Kremlin, Party Headquarters, and KGB HQ. They seemed to be acting consistent with orders from the Kremlin based junta. But there too, the military to the extent we could determine, had no clear orders about what they were to do beyond a general order to deploy and maintain the peace.

In the meantime, there were the beginnings of a popular reaction to the junta's actions that suggested not all was going as planned. A crowd had begun to form spontaneously around the White House clearly intent on defending the Yeltsin government in response to what the crowd saw as a challenge to the president they had elected and what he stood for. The crowd grew fast and by mid-day was making clear its intention to defend the White House, particularly after the Yeltsin address from the tank. Downtown as well, the public was showing dissent. We were seeing pictures and getting reports about mothers and grandmothers going up to the boys in the tanks and shouting, "What are you doing here? What's this about? Who are you going to shoot?". It was not a friendly welcome for the troops who, it seemed, continued to be unsure of just what their orders were in the face of such crowds and what amounted to a growing mood of passive resistance.

The general picture was made the more murky by the fact that outside the geographic area that encircled the White House on one side of an oval and the Kremlin on the other, life in the city and so far as we could see in most of the rest of the country continued as though nothing was happening. The trains, metro, buses, etc. were functioning normally, including running their normal routes past the tanks: crowds had gone to work and stores, offices, and services were functioning: and with the exception of the electronic and print media other communications continued to function. Bizarrely, moreover, this was a first

as a televised coup. CNN kept covering events all over town and providing anyone with access to cable with up to the moment pictures of what was happening.

Nevertheless, by mid-day in Moscow – about 4:00 a.m. in Washington - the lines were becoming clear. The junta in the Kremlin had announced they were now in charge. No one had heard from Gorbachev, who remained incommunicado in the South at his dacha. Yeltsin had made clear that he and the Russian Federation government were not accepting the authority of the self-appointed ruling Committee and were going to resist. The junta had called out troops, and had seemingly established control over the Soviet government institutions in Moscow at least, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The deployed military appeared split between the supporters of Yeltsin and the junta in the Kremlin. Meantime, the wild card in all this remained the Muscovites. In the main, the early reading was that most were ignoring the developments, keeping their heads down and trying to avoid notice. I suspect it was the reaction of a populace that had seen this story before and saw no good coming from standing out. On the other hand, there was also a determined group ready to take a stand. They were rallying around Yeltsin's headquarters, beginning to establish barricades against any effort to dislodge them, and offering overt opposition to the Kremlin that I am almost certain had not been anticipated. It was really this group that was doing the unexpected.

As time went by that day the crowd kept building around the White House. By early afternoon they had started to set up barricades. It was very 19th Century-ish, almost *Les Misérables*. People were tearing up paving stones and upending signs either to use as weapons or serve as protection. A bus driver would stop her bus only to have it turned over as a piece of barricade. People were bringing their cars and parking them to obstruct road access to the area. I'm not sure these citizen-built barriers would have meant much had the military mounted an assault, but it had become clear these people meant to resist and any attempt to dislodge them would have meant bloodshed.

And then all this had serious implications for us at the embassy as well. The barricade system as built ran around an area that included the new embassy compound, and on the ring road had the old embassy chancery as a part of its barrier system. Per force we were part of the White House defenders' territory and vulnerable to any action against them. Security was an increasing concern.

Q: Were delegations coming to you to say, "Support us,"?

COLLINS: No. In fact, there was an eerie sense that most of the crowd was just not aware we were there. That changed abruptly, however. About 2:00 in the afternoon, I got a call from Yeltsin's staff asking me to come to the White House. After a quick consultation with my team, I decided I would go, got in the armored car with the flag on the fender, and drove a four -block circuitous route through a crowd of chanting pro Yeltsin defenders all seeming to approve the American "ambassador" coming to call on their man. Intended or not it was seen as a gesture of support for Yeltsin, something we had considered but decided was more than justified given the precarious security position we found ourselves in. On arrival, I was taken to a room used by Yeltsin's staff and

basically given a message on Yeltsin's behalf to convey to Washington. I did not see Yeltsin himself, but I saw his people. The message was straightforward. They hoped the United States would not recognize the illegal action of the group in the Kremlin and that we would do what we could to support their cause in defense of democracy and freedom, etc. In addition to passing this message to Washington they asked for support and for assistance in getting their message out to other leaders.

It turned out that this same message was carried by Kozyrev to Brussels for people there, and there were other emissaries as well. But, I think my call to get the message may have been their first contact to enlist support abroad. In any event, I took the message and assured that I'd report it right away to my government. What I didn't know was that I would fulfill that promise at the highest level possible. But, it turned out that as I walked back into my office the other White House - President Bush - was on the phone for me. I said I had just been to the Russian White House and gave him the basics of the message from Yeltsin I had been asked to convey. He then asked, "How are things going?" and I said, "Well, we're fine and our people are safe." He then asked as I recall what I thought was going to happen. I said, "It's our belief here that the outcome of this effort to seize control by the junta is very uncertain, and we believe it would be a mistake to make any judgments prematurely about where this effort going." And as it turned out in essence we held our water and let things play out. My team and their assessment, frankly, was on the mark, and the way we played those early hours gave us the room to do the right thing.

It had been quite a day. But, I should note that it ended on a note that only underscored the rather bizarre environment we were inhabiting that day. It so happened that a delegation from Freedom House was in Moscow over the days prior to the coup. We had had a dinner with them the night before at a hotel downtown at which Soviet hosts discussed with them the impact of Gorbachev's glasnost and state of the Russian press and media. As normal the embassy had arranged a reciprocal reception in their honor the evening of August 19th.

Q: You might explain the Freedom House.

COLLINS: Freedom House was a major NGO supporting freedom of the press, human rights and political freedoms worldwide. They had brought key board members and supporters to get a firsthand look at what was happening in the USSR. The delegation included newspaper, media and other NGO representatives who had come to talk about the state of the press and freedom of expression in the Soviet Union.

But back to that evening. In best Foreign Service style this event proceeded as the final hours of the first day of the coup played out, Naomi and I welcomed two busloads of Americans, the majority of Russian invitees and American staff to Townhouse One, the DCM residence, at about 6:00 p.m. The Americans were excited and disoriented; the Russians were sober and noticeably unsettled. For the Russians, in particular, it was difficult because it was clear the officials didn't know who they were working for. They were very careful about how they played it. All who came, however, wanted to know

what the Americans were doing. Still lacking any particular public guidance, I explained that we recognized the constitutional government and leadership of the Soviet Union.

To say the least, it was a somewhat surreal evening for all concerned. But as I would meet later some of those who attended - both Russian and American - all would inevitably recall it as one of the memorable evenings they had ever spent. To me it was all the more so because despite the chaos unfolding within earshot of that room, people from every side of the divide outside found a way to come to an event hosted by the American Chargé. My wife Naomi has written a book called *Through Dark Days and White Nights: Four Decades Observing a Changing Russia*, that opens with a good description of that evening from her vantage point as host in these bizarre circumstances.

Q: By the end of that day you seem to have already in a way made a statement of where we stood by just driving to the White House.

COLLINS: Well, yes. I suppose so. It was the right thing to do. Recall we had decided early and had no other guidance from Washington that we would do nothing to suggest we accepted the authority of the junta. I had an explanation ready if needed in Moscow. I would just say I acted in response to an official request from the government of the Russian Federation. We had at least two officers in the White House with Yeltsin's people reporting on what was happening there. I also had people out reporting on Soviet government actions and what was happening on the streets and in the military. We had not so far faced the problem of a contact from the Soviet authorities that required a response. And we had gone through the day publicly by simply defending the position that we recognized the constitutional government and president of the USSR. But, as I said earlier, we also believed keeping our distance from the junta was the right thing to do for our own interests.

Q: So at the end of day one how did you see things?

COLLINS: Well, by the end of the first day it was clear that in place of a consolidation of power in the hands of the junta, we were seeing hesitation from a variety of quarters about accepting their authority. On the ground in Moscow both the Kremlin and the White House were claiming to represent the will of the President, i.e. legitimate authority. But, there was still no word from Gorbachev at all. Nobody knew his personal position or even if he was alive, and there were growing demands from various quarters to have contact with him to find out what his circumstances really were. This seemed to leave the Kremlin crowd nonplussed and without any way to respond. On the ground, meanwhile, it seemed more and more like a standoff. The barricades around the White House and us were building; people kept streaming in and the crowds were getting bigger, and momentum for Yeltsin's resistance to the Kremlin was substantial and growing. I suspect there were about 100,000 people at the end of the first day, and they just kept coming.

On the other side, I think there was a sense of hesitation and mood of uncertainty that contrasted with the determination the White House seemed to represent. The seeming

uncertainty among the soldiers about what they were doing, the rather ineffectual imposition of control over communications and institutions outside Moscow raised doubts. And then there was the disastrous performance at the press conference by Yanaev and his colleagues at the end of that first day, that conveyed anything but a confident image of people in charge. At any rate there were all kinds of indications that the Kremlin really wasn't in charge and were far from establishing their authority convincingly. Moreover, Yeltsin had enough supporters, including it seemed among some elements of the military, that it was going to take a major confrontation to bring him to heel, including the risk of bloodshed.

Beyond Moscow there were also issues. In response to their instructions to embassies abroad to inform host governments about the new authority in Moscow, they did receive, of course, a number of positive replies most prominently from the Chinese who immediately embraced the new crowd. But, they didn't get that response from Washington, European capitals and a lot of other places, including some former allies in East Europe. In some places the ambassadors refused to deliver the message on behalf of the junta, and elsewhere the message was met with silence. Looking ahead a bit, all this would play out later as to who survives and who doesn't after the coup collapses. In essence those who welcomed the junta or bought in by following the routine of doing what they were told by them, including among others, the foreign minister, and a number of others who sent out these instructions found themselves in a lot of trouble or at least out of a job later.

Q: There's always the question in any coup, will your troops fire on the people? This was Tiananmen. I assume it was a given that the Soviet troops probably wouldn't?

COLLINS: Let's put it this way. I think it was clear at the beginning that the coup plotters were unprepared for the question of what they would do if that question came up. I am convinced they didn't ever think they would have to give an order to fire on their own people or that they would face that reality. Looking back now, and even as I thought at the time, it seems that the junta leaders were trying to do exactly what the Soviet leadership had done in 1964 when they ousted Khrushchev. They would arrest or tell Gorbachev he was out and then, expecting him to follow the way things were done in their system, he would say, "Okay;" the new group would take over, and that would be that. They had no idea that a guy like Yeltsin would reject or contest their move, and they didn't bother even to prevent his move to the White House or arrest him at once when he did. They also seemed wholly unprepared for the fact that Gorbachev didn't play by the old rules either; he didn't resign or acknowledge their authority. Then there was the problem of the other leaders around the Union. the leaders in Ukraine and Kazakhstan who didn't sign up right away either. It became the bizarre vision of, "What if they gave a coup and nobody came?"

So, as we went to bed late that first night, it was clear we were in uncharted territory. We had a standoff, the junta had failed to establish itself firmly in charge and the question of whether they could do so was open. Today I think it's probably true if you look in retrospect. it was pretty clear they weren't going to prevail absent an uncertain bloody

confrontation; they hadn't been able to establish their authority early and they also lacked real legitimacy. Gorbachev is not cooperating and they can't figure out what to do with him. Having said he is incapacitated, sick, they can't let him be seen healthy, yet they faced the problem of people demanding to know where he was becoming a growing mantra challenging their credibility. Meanwhile, although they had serious people of authority within the collective leadership - Gorbachev's chief military advisor, the head of the KGB and Minister of Interior, for example, they seemed isolated and stuck in a world that had passed them by; they seemed to have no clear idea about how to make their words stick, and we now know were very unclear what the military would have done in response to an order to use force against the Yeltsin camp.

Yeltsin, meanwhile, was smart enough to set himself up in the Russian Federation headquarters as the defender of constitutional legitimacy, the defender of the President! So you went into the second day with a standoff where the momentum of the populous, at least the part of the populous that was prepared to be active, was all on Yeltsin's side.

Q: Was there any attempt to contact you by the coup people?

COLLINS: Not that I remember. I don't remember being asked. I certainly was never asked to come to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for instance. Now why, I don't know except they probably just didn't think about it. So we could deal freely with Yeltsin with impunity by just saying, "Well, we're just dealing with anybody who asks." Meantime as the second day unfolded the crowd and barricades around the White House kept growing; the military around the White House remained in place seemingly positioned to guard it; and it was increasingly clear that if coup leaders tried to use the military to go in to bring Yeltsin out, it would have meant a possible clash with the troops surrounding the White House and huge civilian casualties. For us it was a tense situation as you can imagine. We were inside the barricades, it wasn't clear what the leaders might try to do, including use of military force, and we had no real defenses if things went badly.

On the outside throughout the second day we were beginning to get more and more reports of insistence from different quarters to see Gorbachev. There was more and more questioning of the whole rationale for the Kremlin's actions and demands that constitutional order should be restored. Yeltsin meanwhile was fanning the flames. He called his parliament together, and they're meeting, demanding a response about Gorbachev, etc. As day two went on it was pretty clear that the coup leaders were out of touch and isolated from reality. They had no particularly visible supporters, and the popular momentum belonged to the Yeltsin people.

What was extraordinary about this was the leadership's insensitivity to issues that weakened their position and left the field of influence over the population to their opponents. For example, they never took real control over communications, and let CNN keep broadcasting for instance

Q: CNN was watched throughout the Soviet Union?

COLLINS: Well, it was watched enough that it made an impression. They did - in good 1960s fashion - stop the publication of newspapers, but the opposition rallied to produce one consolidated newspaper that was available all over the city. It was printed on the presses that belonged to the Library of Foreign Literature, an institution of the Ministry of Culture. In all this, there were certain heroes like Katya Genieva, the Deputy at the Library, willing to risk their lives and positions to stand against what the Kremlin was doing.

But inexplicably, the authorities never stopped the use of the fax machine or cut the wires out of the White House. Yeltsin's headquarters and Yeltsin remained in communication not just with his people in Moscow but with his supporters all over the country. It was a very strange way to run a coup. From the outset this was an amateur operation carried out by people who seemed wholly out of touch with the realities they had to confront to succeed. Yeltsin and his people, meanwhile, were exploiting this ineptitude in all kinds of ways. They were in touch with outside governments, including the U.S. to increase the pressures and keep the momentum they were able to generate building. They were in touch with other republic leaders. And they had the high ground in claiming to stand by the constitution and Gorbachev as the legitimate president.

The mood for the second day was set by the weather: it was very rainy, it was cloudy, it was a miserable threatening day. The Kremlin was moving troops and military equipment around the city and within the big oval that surrounded the White House and the Kremlin. We kept hearing military motors and tracks from tanks close by without seeing just what they were doing. And there were plenty of rumors to unsettle those around us. By demonstrating force, the Kremlin was evidently hoping to show that they were in charge and scare the resistance. It was a dangerous time. and it was that night that brought the only casualties of the coup and it happened right in front of the old embassy chancery building. A column of personnel carriers was passing on the ring road and at an underpass nearby three young people were killed as gunfire broke out. It was a sobering moment for all of us because it was so close and only underscored our vulnerability.

Q: What had you done about security?

Well, as we have discussed the embassy was within the area controlled by the Yeltsin supporters and Russian Federation government. For the record this area was bounded by the Moscow River, New Arbat Avenue, the Garden Ring Road, Herzen Street, Konyushkovskaya Street and the perimeter of the Russian White House. Within the area lay our entire compound (old and new buildings) the Russian White House, a major high rise Stalin apartment building, the so called Comecon building and Hotel Mir and a number of other lesser buildings. From the beginning of the coup this area was the rallying point for Yeltsin's supporters and their effort to erect defensive barricades to seal the area off from the rest of the city. As the first day passed into the second this area hosted huge crowds around the White House, barricades had effectively prevented any normal vehicular traffic into the area with one small exception I will describe later. In essence it had become something of what we might call today a crowd sourced fortress

with walls of everything from rocks and stones to overturned vehicles, furniture, construction machinery and automobiles used to halt access to the area.

We, inside this area, were in a precarious and increasingly vulnerable spot from the beginning. Had anything happened to panic the crowd that was growing to an estimated 250 000 people or had action against the White House resulted in violence, we were defenseless. We knew people could come right over our perimeter walls that were not high enough to stop anybody at about shoulder height. Our staff housing was on the perimeter of the compound and would have been no protection if there had been a military assault to take control of the area. We were, in essence, completely without defenses.

So, we did what we could. As the crowds grew and tensions rose I moved the embassy staff and dependents - families, kids, everybody -from their vulnerable housing, all window glass facing the street, into the gymnasium in the compound. The gym was underground and away from any direct line of sight activity from the outside. All stayed there for the next tense 48 hours which was not all that comfortable, but ensured we did not have any casualties or untoward incidents. I was very proud of all as they pitched in with support and teamwork that kept spirits up and the family together. This effort was helped by the fact that we had food, could provide bedding, and all had access to facilities like the snack bar, commissary, etc. all of which was also part of the underground facilities. Nobody had built this compound to be prepared for a coup like this, of course, but it turned out to be well suited for our situation and served us all well. Meanwhile, the other members of the staff who lived outside the compound were told to stay away unless they had essential business; just stay in place and not get involved.

The one other striking thing about all this in the first day and into the second day was the normality of life across the city more broadly. Beyond the oval that bounded the Kremlin and the White House, city life went on normally. Streetcars were running, people were going to work, the stores were open, and you wouldn't have known much was going on. So. As I noted, it was kind of like you gave a coup and nobody came. With the exception of the crowd around the White House, the presence of military forces and equipment in the city center, and unusual programming on the radio and television, life seemed to go on and people just ignored the drama, seemingly determined to avoid being noticed, standing out, or calling attention to themselves.

My historian wife Naomi has noted that one of the problems in being a part of historic events is that unlike those who write about them after the fact, those who are living participants do not know how they will turn out. And that was certainly true for us during these critical days. We didn't know whether the junta was going to try a military assault on the White House. Everybody agreed it was fully within their capability to do it, and few thought the resistance could prevail if they did. They also agreed it would be very violent, bloody, and dangerous for us and all others in the area, and would have very nasty consequences. In the end, of course, no assault came. Just why no one knew at the time: perhaps they couldn't count on their troops to fire on their own people, perhaps they feared the consequences of a military conflict between different parts of the military

which was certainly possible given what was around the White House: perhaps they just could not launch a bloodbath. Historians will have a lot of documents to mull over about this decision. In any event, the military assault did not come, and we came through the coup safely.

As the second day came to an end, it was pretty clear that the junta was in trouble, and as we awoke on the third day, there were signs things were beginning to unravel. But then for me it was already a designated day of change because our new ambassador was arriving that morning.

Q: This is Robert Strauss -- to be ambassador

COLLINS: Yes. He had been selected by George Bush to replace Matlock and had been confirmed in late July as I recall. He was out in California on vacation when the coup started, and the White House called him back to Washington, swore him in, and he got on an airplane to take up a most uncertain assignment. And so it was on the morning of the third day I prepared to go out to meet him at Sheremetyevo Airport for one of the more unusual ambassadorial arrivals imaginable. First of all, by this time the embassy was thoroughly within a barricaded ring. The only way I could get out to pick him up was through an alleyway next to the high rise apartment building next to the embassy compound. This was the one exit a vehicle could use to get out of our compound.

My driver did get us out and off we went out to the airport. Again some strangeness. No security basically. Normal city activity once we left the area around the embassy. No special checkpoints, requests for authority, or such from military or security folks. It was just me and my driver making a normal run to the airport to meet my new boss.

That said I do have to say the arrival was peculiar. Strauss was to arrive about 10:00 a.m., and we got to the airport well ahead of time. There I met a man from protocol whom I knew well from working with him at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We chatted, and he was clearly uncomfortable. He kept avoiding saying just who he represented or saying anything about what was happening downtown. By the time Strauss arrived, his predicament was clear; it turned out he wasn't able to articulate a welcome on behalf of any authority in particular, so he just said, "Welcome to Moscow!" It was all rather bizarre, and I felt for him because by this time, unbeknownst to us at the airport, things were unraveling for the coup people very quickly. That, however, soon did become clear. As we drove back from the airport, about two-thirds of the way into the center of the city we began passing an armored column going out of town. It was clearly one of the divisions that had come into the city on the 19th. Clearly, this movement meant that at least a key part of the military the junta had called on was quitting, and I told Strauss it looked to me like the coup effort was coming apart. This was confirmed as we made our way into the compound and learned that the coup was collapsing, the junta members were fleeing.

Q: So you are no longer charge. Did Strauss have a particular message or mission on arrival? It was a pretty strange time to take up a post.

COLLINS: Well, we did not really have much time to discuss these questions. When we got back to the compound I took Strauss down to his office and we found he had a call from the British Ambassador whom Strauss knew from Washington. He updated Strauss on what had been transpiring so far as anyone could find out, and said the diplomatic corps, basically the European diplomatic corps, had been asked to get on a plane to go to see Gorbachev. Demands to see him from the Yeltsin parliament, foreign governments, and others had been out there almost from the beginning of the coup. I don't remember exactly what Braithwaite passed to Strauss, but they basically agreed this request came from a credible authority as the coup was breaking up. Strauss said, "Well, we should go," and he put me in a car to join the group heading for Vnukovo Airport, the usual airport VIPs used to arrive and depart. So, I jumped in the car with no bags or preparation and with the driver wended our way to Vnukovo. It was again a memorable trip. We again encountered, in fact, wove in and out of another armored column heading out of the city, broke nearly every traffic rule, and caught up with the European diplomatic motorcade just as it was arriving at the airport.

Well, it was a typical Euro operation. First of all, the motorcade went to the wrong part of Vnukovo airport, and when they managed to get to the correct terminal arrived too late to make the plane. The result was much milling around, lots of diplomatic discussion, and no decisions. I remember we were offered another plane on condition we did not mind that it was only there because it needed repair. The corps decided this option did not sound attractive. So, it was a no go in the end, and the diplomats dispersed as it was now clear that the coup was over. The only question remaining was when Gorbachev was coming back and what condition was he in.

There was also one ironic element to the day that to me at least only confirmed much I had experienced about the dynamics among the European group. It turned out, as I noted, that my European colleagues had screwed up the arrangements to fly south and missed the plane. But it also turned out there was one exception. The only one who made it onto the plane was the French ambassador, who had arrived on time at the correct place which, of course, annoyed everybody else no end. He had gone off with a set of representatives from the Russian Federation legislature and others who were deputized to see Gorbachev, determine his condition and bring him back to Moscow if possible. This all emerged as some of us I hung around the airport continuing to try to find another safe airplane. In the end that never happened, and after a few hours wait that had been useful for the discussion I was able to have with Yeltsin people at the airport, I just went back into town arriving after dark in the evening.

It was the end of the third day and an exceptional chapter for everyone who had been part of what Russians have come to call "the August events." As I got home I joined Strauss, at Town House One, my residence, where he was staying for the time being. I told him what had happened and said that that evening he was basically the ambassador to a condition rather than a country as far as I could figure out. We didn't know what the country was or what leader would have real authority in the morning. What we did know was that the coup was over. The junta members had fled or in the case of at least two

members, the Minister of Interior and a quite a decent man who had been Gorbachev's military advisor general Akhromeyev had reportedly committed suicide. So, it was all over, but it was also unclear who was in charge of what. For the moment it seemed de facto in Moscow itself and in the region of the Russian federation, Yeltsin was in charge. He was the government. But elsewhere?

Nor were things much clearer by the next morning. Gorbachev had come back the previous evening very late. On arrival, he held the famous news conference as he got off the airplane that revealed he was very clearly disoriented. He had no idea what had been happening in Moscow and around the country, what had been going on. Whatever he'd been told hadn't quite sunk in or he couldn't internalize what had transpired. He came back sounding like he was president but seemingly with no real appreciation or understanding for what had happened to his country or the new reality he would face at sunrise. In the literature now available, you can read some of the accounts of what went on while Gorbachev was kept totally incommunicado, cut off from everything. It kind of explains his almost Rip Van Winkle like performance that betrayed a lack of any appreciation for the three days during which the country had changed under his feet.

We at the embassy did appreciate that Strauss was going to be ambassador to a very different country from that he thought would host him when he was appointed. Gorbachev was back, but it was becoming clear we were about to start on what I would say is the post Soviet period. The Soviet Union would survive another four plus months; it was to be a very different country. After the coup Gorbachev and Yeltsin had a very different relationship from what they had five days before. The man who had carried the day was Yeltsin, and he was a power that Gorbachev was going to have at best an uphill fight to manage. Who would prevail was clearly in question.

Q: Today is the 23rd of January 2012 after a long hiatus. Our last interview was 2009 I think. This is with Jim Collins. Jim, we had left of just as Gorbachev had come back, and you were saying he seemed almost detached - removed from things. We're talking now about the interim period between the time he came back and the Soviet Union dissolved. Can we talk about your impressions at that time?

COLLINS: First of all I think it's perhaps worth noting that we are now at the 20-year mark since these events. There have been quite a number of things written and said about this period, and why and how the Soviet Union collapsed. Over the last six, seven months in late 2011, Mr. Gorbachev himself and many others have spoken out as we marked the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

We're talking here about the four plus-month period between the August 19-22 events of the so-called *putsch* or coup and the dramatic moment on Christmas Day, 1991, when Mr. Gorbachev resigned as president of the Soviet Union and the Russian National flag replaced the hammer and sickle red banner over the Kremlin. From the vantage point of someone who was there what defined this time was a constant sense of drama: it was, intense politics, total uncertainty about futures, and condensed time. It was a heady time for all of us. We knew we were a part of history making events; we knew the changes we

were part of were the kind of stuff of history books. And here we were - the embassy - right in the middle of it.

I should recall here that Bob Strauss was our new Ambassador. Looking back now and I think even at the time, to me he was an inspired choice for the times, not because anyone foresaw what was to come when he was selected in the summer before, but because he was at home almost from the moment he hit the ground in the chaotic, unpredictable, hurly burly of Moscow in that time. I remember one quip he made that I thought summed up where we were. He said it all reminded him of a Democratic Party convention: No one talked to anyone else; no one listened to anyone else; everyone thought he was winning. He was in his element.

Strauss you may recall had arrived on August 22 as an “envoy.” The Department, I gather, chose that title because no one knew at the time he left Washington to what he would be accredited or what the government was going to be or even whether there would be one government when he arrived. In the event with Gorbachev’s return and the façade of normality restored within days of his arrival he ended up presenting credentials to Soviet President Gorbachev in a rapidly arranged ceremony at the Kremlin. That event was the first opportunity for us Americans to meet Gorbachev following the coup, and as it turned out to talk with him at some length as well. Following the formalities of presenting the credentials Gorbachev made the unusual gesture of inviting Strauss and me to a private and as it turned out lengthy discussion with him alone with only our interpreters present. He reaffirmed his determination as I recall to keep going on the development of U.S.-Soviet relations. He wanted to affirm there would be no change in course, and that the progress that had been made with George Bush would continue. He also indicated that he intended to continue to pursue the revision of what was being called the union treaty and achieve the consensus that it was clear he saw essential to preserving the Soviet Union.

I think probably it’s fair to say that we had doubts about all of this or his ability to carry it off. The impact of the coup and its immediate aftermath was still unfolding. These events and changes across the entire nation were tearing up the Soviet/communist/Bolshevik model, and there were challenges to the integrity of the empire itself. It was very unsure whether the egg could be put back together again. There were a lot of people with plenty of doubts about that.

Q: From the American point of view were we worried about the equivalent to a red and white civil war? Were there major concerns?

COLLINS: There were definitely major concerns about the stability and sustainability of the government and its future capacity to control events across the country. Foremost this was the other nuclear superpower. still the Soviet Union with its vast nuclear arsenal. Security of that arsenal and its control system were on the mind of nearly everyone. And with reason. We were in the midst of dramatic political upheaval. The communist party, the real central authority in the Soviet system, was being outlawed and its officials deprived of authority. I remember the extraordinary image on television as the coup

ended of a small group of people with a couple of rifles pounding on the door of the Communist Party Central Committee offices at *Staraya ploshchad'* and announcing to its staff that they were to go home: the office was now closed. Elsewhere, the Party was lost its presence and authority in nearly every Soviet institution from factories to town councils to sports clubs to the Soviet parliament. This created great uncertainty at nearly all levels about who was really in charge from the presidential administration on down. The engine that drove politics, the government structure, major economic institutions, the world of education and science was gone, and these institutions, never really meant to drive and lead the systems except in a sort of administrative sense, were suddenly in charge. No one quite knew what this meant. On another level, the integrity of the nation itself was in question. The Baltic republics were now insisting on independence, and the events in Ukraine and in Georgia were creating uncertainties there. All of these things were creating great tensions within the Soviet system and multiplying the uncertainties about whether Gorbachev and the Soviet elite could manage.

Within all this uncertainty from the American point of view, there were critical issues affecting American interests. What was going to happen to the Soviet nuclear arsenal, to the Red Army, and to the whole defense establishment - that complex which represented still an existential danger to the United States and to our allies in Europe. It was one thing to know that it was under control, that it was directed by clear authority, that it was run by the people we knew, that it had coherence. The fact was the situation after the coup raised doubts about all these conditions. I remember very well there began to be real questions about such topics as the integrity of command and control, the security of the nuclear facilities scattered across the Union, etc.

Q: Sometimes an external threat or a possible war or something unifies. Was this a factor playing in the circumstances?

COLLINS: There wasn't really any external threat to speak of for the Soviet Union at this point, or at least as we perceived it. The Soviets I am sure saw it differently and had their usual worst case assessments. In fact, if you can say anything about what was happening here as we saw it, there was what amounted to a benign environment for events to develop after the coup. The Soviet Union didn't really face and imminent external threats so far as we could determine. Yes, the Warsaw Pact had disintegrated, but there were no challenges from that quarter to Soviet territory. Discussion about what kind of relations NATO would have with Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, were preliminary and did not focus on membership. China did not seem to represent an active challenge. And there were few signs of trouble from the south or the Islamic world. The challenges to territorial integrity that did exist came from within. The Baltics alone were arguing for independence, but they weren't yet independent. Elsewhere the talk was still about "sovereignty" within the Union or the redistribution of authorities under a new Union Treaty. So, to us I would say there was no proximate real threat to the Soviet Union from the outside. If there were threats to the unity of it, it was from inside.

Q: This meant of course everyone outside wanted to tread very, very carefully.

COLLINS: Right. I think my colleague Jack Matlock has made the point, and I would agree with him. The United States was not the one who saw the disintegration of the Soviet Union as necessarily advancing the security or interest of the United States or our allies. We wanted a different kind of Union as a partner. No one was sympathetic to communism, or the Bolshevik model. But communism after the coup and outlawing of the Party was seen as all but a moot point. And we suddenly began to make great progress on many of the areas in which we had had real differences with the Soviet Union ranging from business to human rights.

So, as the coup concluded and what passed for more normal conditions returned, our main interest was to ensure preservation of the integrity and security of the huge military establishment including its nuclear strategic weapons. The idea that we saw benefit from the weakening or fragmentation of control over that force was simply not real. In that sense I think it is a fair point to say that United States was not pushing for any breakup of the Soviet Union that would threaten such an outcome. We did stand for restoration of the Baltics states' independence. But the idea that we were pushing to have the Soviet Union break up at this stage was a myth. And you saw a reflection of that thinking in the speech George Bush gave in Kiev the summer before the coup.

Q: Was this something that had been thought out and that was being said, for example, this meeting you're talking about when you and Strauss saw Gorbachev for the first time, or had we really run through that?

COLLINS: It's probably fair to say that Strauss came out guided by the policy that George H.W. Bush had left in place when he left Moscow on the 31st of July. The summit had marked real progress on arms control, and consolidating that progress was a priority. So too was progress in developing other aspects of the agenda from human rights to economic cooperation. But it was a policy crafted for dealing in the future with the Soviet state, and even as it changed with the coup, the issues remained unchanged at least at the outset.

The further message was implicitly that we were not encouraging the breakup of the Soviet Union. The future of Soviet society of the nation in the view of the United States would have to be determined by the people within it. At the same time, we expected the Soviet Union to abide by its international obligations, such as those undertaken by signature of the Helsinki accords and arms control treaties. We also made clear our determination to support human rights, freedom of emigration, economic freedoms, etc. But we were not out there fomenting the breakup of the state. Bush has been criticized heavily for following that course. Many believe we weren't out there in the front and should have been pushing more, we should have been backing Yeltsin, we should have been backing the people pressing for independence. And it is true the United States was cautious in this regard. We were dealing with the government in authority in Moscow, the government of the Soviet Union run and headed by Mr. Gorbachev. We had advanced critical objectives working with him, and we had no assurance another leader would be better for the U.S. Further, I believe prudence made it wise to avoid encouraging change from the outside when none could know for certain where such change would lead. There

was a legitimate fear of chaos or the breakdown of order, including in the military. And no one really saw that in the American interest. On the other hand, there was genuine skepticism about Gorbachev's capacity to continue to rule effectively or to succeed in his effort to save the Soviet Union. And that meant we at the embassy were following all options and developing relations broadly across the political spectrum.

Q: Did you see a Yeltsin alternative or not at that time?

COLLINS: One thing was very clear after Gorbachev came back. The relations between the central government of the USSR and the governments of the republics was going to be very different. Events surrounding the coup had made obvious this was going to be particularly the case for the Russian Republic led by Mr. Yeltsin., who took the opportunity of Gorbachev's return to make clear he no longer would be taking orders from the Kremlin in the old way. To varying degrees all of the republics were asserting greater and greater authority over their existence with the general exception of foreign and defense policy, and issues such as the currency that were beyond the competence of any to manage. The only exception to this came from the Baltics who were asserting the claim to independence from Moscow.

The way this played out reminded a number of us of our own experience after the revolution with the Confederation model that initially "united" the American colonies. This time and in Eurasia we had something that our hosts came to call the war of the laws. This to us looked a lot like states' rights versus central government with the Russian republic in particular asserting sovereignty in a more and more forceful way and insisting that the republics' laws would take precedence in all areas over the laws of the Union. Where there was any conflict. They were asserting more and more control over all that mattered from criminal and civil jurisdiction to property rights, to control over the region's resources and governance. And, with the Russian republic now joining others in this practice, Gorbachev's efforts to save the Soviet Union by renegotiating a new compact, constitution, or union treaty, whatever they wanted to call it, became more and more problematic as time went on.

What I recall most vividly was that in some sense for the first couple of months the remainder of August, September, and the first part of October, there was a fair argument to be made that Gorbachev might get it done, find a way to come to new terms. The result would have been, of course, a very different Soviet Union no matter what, but it would have been held together. By October and certainly by the Madrid meeting on the Middle East at the end of the month, which Strauss attended, I would say the embassy had pretty much come to the conclusion that Gorbachev wasn't going to make it, that he had pretty well done what he could but his efforts were not coming to fruition. By this time Yeltsin had recognized the independence of the Baltics; momentum was building in Ukraine for a new referendum on the republic's March vote to remain in the USSR, and tensions and demands were mounting from other republics for sovereignty, greater autonomy or outright independence. The Union really was coming apart from the bottom up, and it was hard to find how Gorbachev would find the wherewithal or the capacity to pull it back together.

As part of this dynamic the Russian Government under Yeltsin was effectively exercising more and more authority over the governance of the Russian Federation. This now extended not only to domestic issues as the White House increasingly prevailed in battles of the war of the laws but now to foreign affairs as well. After the coup it was certainly a given that whenever Jim Baker came to Moscow he had to see both the Soviet Ministry people (Pankin was the new Soviet Foreign Minister) and their Russian Federation counterparts (Kozyrev). Furthermore, later that fall Baker made visits to other republics as well - to Ukraine and Kazakhstan recognizing their significance as holders of Soviet strategic nuclear weapons

So, by the fall it was clear that events were not moving in a direction that was going to leave the Soviet Government with anything like the authority it had before. In this contest the one real concern for us, and we believed for the Soviet military command, was what to do about the country's nuclear weapons and what was happening with them. As I recall our whole complex of intelligence and monitoring resources were focused on the issue. The embassy had a limited role in this, but we were involved. What we ultimately found was that the Russians were pulling the tactical nuclear weapons out of the other republics and getting them back in the Russian federation. Not only was this prudent from our point of view given the uncertainties, but it represented the judgment by the Soviet leadership, including the military and security forces that they needed to make preparations for the eventuality a breakup could occur. They wanted to be sure that the nuclear arsenal remained under central control. They couldn't do a lot on the strategic side because those weapons were sitting in silos and not moveable, but the other kinds of nuclear material and weaponry that could have been problematic, they were taking care to be sure was back in a place where Moscow was confident it had control.

As all these developments played out. Gorbachev remained president of the Soviet Union and the Soviet structure continued to function. The Soviet Government was also the government still recognized by the United States and with which we were doing business. But, it was increasingly clear we also had to do our business with the Russian Federation Government and ensure that what we were doing with the Gorbachev government was going to be okay with Yeltsin and his team. It was the diplomatic dimension of the war of the laws in action.

One interesting footnote to this period, particularly in the later fall of '91. It was pretty clear to most of the Soviets we dealt with and the intelligentsia we heard from that the Russian Government and Yeltsin in particular were going to be more powerful and central to affairs. In response to these realities we encountered an increasing perceived need among the Soviet leadership and bureaucracy, that is, those who were in the Foreign Ministry and the presidential structure in the Kremlin working with Gorbachev to make the point to us that we should not "worry," We were assured they could make sure that Yeltsin was manageable and could be kept under control.

Q: We the bureaucracy?

COLLINS: In essence yes, but also more broadly we the Soviet elite. They were worried about him. They portrayed Yeltsin as erratic, unpredictable, not up to being a real world leader. Relations between Yeltsin and Gorbachev and between their camps was poisonous, but there was in some sense a clear effort among the Gorbachev people to reassure us - the Americans - that things would be okay, that all of the progress that Gorbachev had made with Reagan and Bush was not going to be lost whatever the changes coming were going to be.

It was an interesting message with, as was often the case, more than one meaning I suppose. On one hand it was meant to do what the people were saying - reassure us. On the other it seemed a way to try to tell us Yeltsin was not up to the job, don't be fooled into undermining us; your interests are secure with the group you know, not by taking a chance on uncertainty. From our point of view at the embassy at least, this message was a bit strange. We certainly were not hearing anything unsettling from the Yeltsin people and, in fact, a number of those were very much more pro-American-pro-Western than the Gorbachev people. However, for those who saw a threat in what they feared was coming - the bureaucracy and the Soviet pro-Gorbachev elite - the message it seemed was an important one to convey. The threats no longer came from the communist hardliners who plotted the coup: they were now discredited and all but irrelevant. Now it was the consensus about Russia moving more and more toward the west and western models.

By the time you get to the late fall, there wasn't any real counterforce aside from the irrelevant old communists to those who were saying, "We now are going to have a Western model future." Broadly this meant that when the final Soviet breakup comes, it's not too surprising that Ukraine, Russian federation, the Baltics, the Caucasus states all of them are saying, "Time for private property. Time for market economy. Time for totally different relations with the West." It had been building after the coup collapsed because the coup discredited almost any alternative.

Q: Here we have an embassy. I've interviewed people who had been there who were Kremlinologists sitting around trying to figure out how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Looking at this, could you talk about the power of the embassy, how did it operate? How was it operating to figure out what was happening.?

COLLINS: First of all, one of the things that happened with the coup was that in a way all the rules changed. The discrediting of the security establishment, the communist party, the ideological infrastructure, the KGB and so forth all of a sudden meant that at least in the Moscow and Leningrad areas we were living in a totally new kind of information and political world. Almost overnight the embassy changed from an enemy outpost to be contained to a positive center of support. Suddenly everybody, and I mean everybody, wanted to talk to us. We went from still being constrained in terms of contacts and the kinds of relations we could develop with people under the Soviet system of control to a situation in which we had everybody and anybody wanting to talk to us, give us their ideas, or make us understand what was really happening.

In this period suddenly what became important for everyone from the officials to the media to the citizen one encountered was, “Where were the Americans? What were they thinking? What should we do?” This was the routine question in this new period. This new open world had a couple of serious implications for us and how we operated. First, it meant the challenge for all of our officers changed overnight. Before the coup the problem for us was to take pieces of information from the limited sources we could engage and analyze them to define the broader picture, intentions, trends, etc. out of fragments of information. Suddenly the reality changed a hundred eighty degrees. Now almost every analyst was confronted with a fire hose of information and swarm of contacts. The problem became how to sort out the important, relevant, significant from the mass you confronted every day. In short, we suddenly went from being a Cold War embassy designed physically and operationally to keep out the enemy and conduct business in a hostile, dangerous environment to one in which it mattered that we engage and talk broadly to the Soviet public, a people that had already shown they were going to play a much different role in shaping the future of their country and its system than in the past. This defined one of our early challenges and was the more complicated because we still had no Russian employees.

Secondly, this change brought a growth in distance between perceptions of the embassy and consulate living day to day on the ground and those of the broader analytic community in Washington and, I would say, more broadly in the West. The fact was the analytic bureaucracies, the intelligence communities, the intellectual leaders across the U.S. Government and society all had a hard time making sense of what was happening and coming to terms with the revolutionary pace and scope of the changes taking place of which we at the embassy were a daily part. I used to say that for us each day was a week, each week was a month, and each month was a year when it came to the pace of change. And it became a constant challenge to keep Washington on the same wave length as we were because bureaucracy just doesn't do well with revolution and rapid change. We will come back to this later, but at this point I think the key point for the embassy was that we found ourselves living and working in an environment that almost no one in Washington could understand. That made getting our views across and having them taken seriously was often a difficult and challenging issue. The old ways of thinking just died hard.

Q: Still suffering from the Lonetree scandal as well.

COLLINS: That's right. We had zero Russian employees; We had a relatively limited number of contract people. I think the total Embassy complement was 224 cleared Americans. That was it. Yet suddenly this was a different world. We had had a big turnover in staff in July and August, giving me pretty much a new team starting in September. These people had to, and I think did, adapt quickly and were especially effective in grasping the new and rapidly changing society they were asked to cover. And the job seemed to expand almost exponentially. For example, we suddenly could not assume that Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan and so forth are in any way going to be developing in the same way. So, we had to enhance our capacity to report from those places, to go to Ukraine, to go to Central Asia. We had an advance team for a consulate in Ukraine and suddenly that took on new importance and responsibility for keeping all

abreast of what was happening in Kiev. The system of what we called circuit riders I had set up was enhanced to engage the local leaders in the republics and report on developments in their areas. These people went to Central Asia, to the Caucasus, to Siberia and so forth basically because we needed now to know what the public and regional leaderships were thinking and understand what was going on in the provinces? Was this going to break up? Hold together? The result of these efforts was that the embassy was better prepared, better informed and frankly, more ready to deal with what was to come than most of Washington. That would be an advantage for Bob Strauss and it certainly helped the embassy voice to be heard at the most senior levels at a critical time.

Q: One of the problems of “back here” is that in Washington, at least in my observation, there’s a tendency for straight line thinking. It’s always been this way, and it’ll always be this way.

COLLINS: I think that’s probably fair in this case. But people like Baker and Bush were listening, and they had a pretty good feel for what they were facing. But across the Government it was certainly the case that the conventional thinking was strong.

Q: Okay, you’re sending me out to Siberia to find out what’s happening. How would I go about it? I’m trying to get people to talk to me.

COLLINS: The problem was to begin working to establish a base of understanding for the variety and diversity of this empire and its eleven-time zone expanse. Remember that for half a dozen decades it had been assumed the only thing we needed to consider to conduct relations with the USSR was to know the thinking, influence the perception and master the way to analyze what was going on at the top among those who were the decision makers and lords over all the Soviet system. Yes, there were local and regional influential leaders, but the Party was a centralized structure and the *nomenklatura* system meant the center ruled and controlled. Well suddenly, in the space of a year or two, it was becoming clear the hinterlanders mattered or were going to, and the task was to get a handle on just who these people were, what was motivating them, what were their views and interests, what was their influence on events. The answer as I noted was a system of circuit riders. The system gave a given officer a territory to know, and we literally assigned people to be our representatives to territories or republics. We had done some of this earlier, but now we intensified the program. As these people began to go off I told them, “You’ve got to travel. You have to spend time getting to know people, becoming knowledgeable about what makes your region tick, and learning what you need to know to help us understand what is coming.”

We were helped a great deal by America suddenly becoming the place to know and the place with the answers. It meant that even the more junior people had great access to governors, to mayors, to *intelligentsia*, to whatever the establishment was in these places. It also helped that our officers were something of an oddity. No American had visited these places for decades in many cases. So, our officers had a pretty good welcome in most cases, and we had a lot of path breaking reporting from our travelers. In that sense

we began to understand the dynamic of what was going on in the republic capitols. People got to know people from the Caucuses, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Central Asia. I remember in particular an exceptionally effective young woman whose beat was Tashkent.

Q: Who was that?

COLLINS: Daria Fane is her name, and she became something of a persona in this part of the world. Others opened our eyes to previously closed areas of Siberia for instance. In Ukraine because we had our consulate advance team, that gave us the perspective of what was arguably the most important of the republics. This program gave the Embassy a unique capability to begin to understand regional developments and the personalities there on the ground. I think it kept the embassy at the forefront of analysis on just what was happening across the Union and led us to believe by mid-October that the Soviet Union as we had known it would not survive. The centralized model we were organized to engage and analyze was morphing, and we were going to have to deal, one with the public in general, and two with these different regional governments whatever role they had in the future.

I think I noted earlier that Jim Baker came to Moscow in early November, and as part of the visit made a trip with Strauss to Petersburg, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. It was his effort to get a feel himself of what was going on. When he arrived and we were on the way into the city from the airport he had asked me what I thought was going to happen. In reply, as I think I noted earlier, I said, "If it were a rational world and people looked at their economic interests as a basis for decision on whether or not the Soviet Union would stay together Gorbachev might have a chance. But, that's not what's working. We have national emotions, local interest emotions, all the pent up grievances feeding separatist thinking plus a sense in each of the various national centers of everybody wanting to be in charge of his own resources and insisting on divvy up the national pie in a different way they believe will benefit their particular interest." I said, "In that sense I think the idea that the USSR will survive in anything like its former self is just not likely." I was not the first one to say this. Strauss had more or less told him the same thing in Madrid. I think that was the first time a senior and trusted member of the team had told him that Gorbachev just wasn't going to make it.

Q: I would think that of all the embassies around there, the Chinese embassy would have been extremely nervous because it could suffer the same fate or maybe bring unpredictable events happening on its border. Were you getting any feel from the Chinese?

COLLINS: We did not have a great deal of contact with them in Moscow and I don't recall that very much. The Chinese had blotted their copy book rather badly because they had recognized the coup leaders and responded quickly and supportively to the junta's call for support. They were held in pretty low regard by both the Gorbachev and the Yeltsin people. In that sense they did not have all that much influence in this period and it seemed to us were keeping their head down.

Q: Nobody was courting them then on the Soviet side.

COLLINS: Not as far as I recall. They were not seen as having much influence in Moscow. And their actions during the coup had only diminished them in the eyes of almost everyone. It was just a reality that where you had stood on the coup largely determined how influential you might be after it failed. If you had been in the winner's corner which meant against the communists and the junta, you were in good odor. You were welcome. People wanted to talk to you. If you had bet wrong, then you basically were history. You just weren't all that relevant and certainly you didn't have any particular influence with those who prevailed. The communists were so discredited and preoccupied with survival that no one among them seemed to be thinking about foreigners and certainly it seemed about China.

At the same time there was no evidence of interest from Moscow in challenging the Chinese or seeking to export their new found thinking. In that sense the Chinese weren't provoked in any way. In fact, if anything, continuity of policy marked the approach toward China. If there was any preoccupation on Moscow's side, it was preventing any breakup of the Russian Federation. This became a real worry, as peoples such as the Tatars and Bashkirs, Muslim peoples in the center of the country, might demand independence or the Russian Far East might break off. These were real worries both at the Soviet level and at the Russian federation level as this period unfolded.

Q: And at our level, too.

COLLINS: Yes. Again, real concern at the idea of this nuclear superpower disintegrating with nuclear weapons falling into the hands of lord knew who. Because everything seemed to be up for grabs., worst case thinking grew all the stronger. Here I do think the embassy, certainly I personally, had much less worry, maybe wrongly, but I had much less worry about a breakup of the Russian federation than some professed. Our people just weren't seeing that as the prevailing mood.

Q: What about this extreme Russian nationalists? I want to say Zhirinovsky.

COLLINS: He shows up later. But what he came to signify, the sort of Russia first or Russia over all, was reflected in this period. For one thing, as the resistance to the coup formed around the White House and Yeltsin, all kinds of characters appeared. We had monarchists with the black and yellow flags pushing restoration of the Romanovs; we had a nationalist Russian almost fascist grouping; and we had a number of groups claiming the mantle of Russia firsters. None of these seemed to represent much of a constituency and later when elections took place, most of them made little showing. But there was one interesting thing about the breakup that I thought particularly significant. That was the belief among the elite in Moscow and across the Russian Federation more broadly that they felt Russia had been subsidizing all the other republics without obvious benefit in return. It was at the base of rising doubt that Russians had a real stake in perpetuating the Soviet Union or if you will the empire. There was a growing sentiment,

not often openly expressed, but there nonetheless, that asked “why should we continue to subsidize the Central Asians or the Ukrainians? This has just been a costly exercise depriving Russians of wealth to keep these others living better than the Russians.” It was a sign that there was no sense that holding on to Central Asia, for instance, was somehow vital in the sense it had been earlier. The question of the other Slavic republics - Ukraine and Belarus - was different, but that is a subject for later.

Q: I was in Kyrgyzstan a little bit later, sent there as a lecturer, and it was very obvious that the Kyrgyz had done very well by being in the Soviet Union.

COLLINS: That’s right. In that sense Gorbachev was fighting against an increasing mood certainly among the Russian elite at that time that they didn’t see any particular benefit in keeping the Soviet Union going. I said at the end, as the clock on the Soviet system wound down, the whole thing was just cancelled for lack of interest. There just wasn’t anybody there to defend it.

The coup’s end accelerated and intensified the disappearance of any evident will to govern on the part of what had once been an ideologically driven communist elite. By the time of the coup any real pretense of ideological cohesion as the driver of the Party had largely given way to bureaucratic and mercenary self interest. When the Party failed to carry the day the rest of the system just disintegrated. The security services were discredited, and they began to look out for themselves. The ideologues were discredited and all were looking for a way to land on their feet. In the face of economic decline, the bureaucratic, economic and intellectual elite were in survival mode. Nobody was interested in keeping a disintegrating system going. What that meant as I said was by the end other than Gorbachev and the Kremlin, who had a stake in the Soviet Union, it was hard to find anyone supporting the Soviet Union.

Q: When you went with Strauss to this initial meeting with Gorbachev, what was your reading of Gorbachev.

COLLINS: Well, we are, of course, now back in August right after the coup. That first meeting was in many ways revealing. It was quite obvious that Gorbachev didn’t really understand what had happened in the three days of the coup, how profound the change was. His TV broadcast at his return to Moscow had been the public manifestation of this, but it really was in person that it became clear he didn’t understand the world was one thing on the 19th of August, and it was a very different thing on the 22nd.

The whole infrastructure that was the base of his previous authority, the glue that held the Soviet Union together - the communist idea and its embodiment in the Communist Party - was gone, discredited or on the way to being outlawed. In its place you had a shell of the former system. The Soviet constitution rather than the Party guidelines was suddenly the operative legal framework for the system; the governmental structure still existed, and the institutions such as the military, security services, ministries, regional governments, etc. continued to work. But they were without a driving engine or the previous institutional and ideological instruments that gave it legitimacy or direction. His challenge was to hold

the Union together, and provide a new basis for its legitimacy. But he was doing it at a time when the centripetal forces at work against building any such consensus had momentum and were just not overcome-able. I think frankly that Gorbachev at that moment really did not understand the depth of his challenge: nor I believe did he have the kinds of people around him to give him the energy and motivation to take up the challenge.

Meanwhile, the engines that drove these centripetal forces were as numerous as the republics and regions. But at basis they had everything to do with the elites running the republics and regions saying to themselves, “Hmmm. This is our chance to get Moscow out of who controls our resources and our people.” These people were fanning the nationalist emotions and grievances against Russia’s imperial rule or taking advantage of anti-Moscow sentiments. Meanwhile, the nationalist sentiments in the Russian case only undermined any idea of compromise with the republics, insisting that the Russian Federation had been exploited by the other republics for too long and it was time to stop.

Q: What about the - again, the names are escaping me - but the Islamic fundamentalist areas and the caucuses?

COLLINS: Again, we are jumping ahead. The Soviet system repressed and prevented expression of religious, tribal, nationalist thinking and ideas. They were heresies even as the appeal of Marxist ideology waned. But as we have discussed, the loosening and ultimately weakening of the communist base for how the future would be structured opened the way for a variety of long suppressed emotions, ideas, and motivations to bubble up. We have already talked some about what this meant in the Baltics and Georgia. But the Russian Federation itself was made up of what seemed like an almost limitless grouping of different ethnic, religious, and national entities. Russians made up some 75 to 80 per cent of the total population, but the remainder were perhaps as diverse a grouping as existed in any state. The Soviet Union’s constituent republics, based essentially in national composition, had been recognized as having a special status under Stalin’s constitution. But the Russian Federation, the largest of the republics, was itself a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, multi-cultural nation, and the relations amongst its different constituent parts over the first couple of years of the Yeltsin administration would become what most believed represented an existential challenge for the new Russian nation. We will talk about how Yeltsin dealt with this issue later, but I might say here that if there was one great failure in that effort, it was in the North Caucasus. Yeltsin managed to keep people together across the rest of the Russian Federation, but he couldn’t do it the North Caucasus. In that cauldron a number of groups saw the end of Soviet rule as a way to settle grievances: groups that had suffered at the hands of Stalin and his successors, including some exiled or removed from their native areas saw an opportunity in Moscow’s weakening grip to distance themselves from the metropole and settle old scores with each other as well. You had Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Mesquetian Turks pressing to come back to their native areas, generating tensions with those who had taken their place. But the issues of the North Caucasus, in particular the Chechnya wars were a post-Soviet phenomenon, and will emerge later.

Q: Did you see a change in the university, the press - Pravda, Izvestiya, etc. Was the language changing?

COLLINS: Well, the real tectonic shift for the press came from Gorbachev's glasnost and the opening of the information space to competition from non-government controlled media. I would note here that it is important to remember we are still in the pre-digital world for the most part: no email, no real internet, no smart phones. So, as glasnost took hold and Russian citizens gained the option of more sources for their news and information, the content even in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* did change somewhat, but even more significantly they faced new competition. Still Soviet citizens continued to look to *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* for the official source of understanding about what the Soviet Government and Communist Party were pronouncing as authoritative positions and views. With the coup, of course, this changed dramatically. The outlawing of the CPSU meant *Pravda* no longer could claim authority. And *Izvestiya*, as the paper of the Soviet Government became only one source for official news. Rather quickly *Pravda* simply lost its readership and *Izvestiya* became one of a number of papers that carried news about what different elements of government were doing. Moreover, now people increasingly looked to the electronic media for the news. As a result of this shift, over some months I remember that *Pravda* sort of disintegrated. It went from huge circulation to basically having almost none; it was ultimately bought by a Greek national I believe. Elsewhere, for the last months of the Soviet Union, the whole information world was in flux and increasingly open, and changing. In particular, television, the preeminent electronic media, began to have more varied content. It covered things like the sessions of the Supreme Soviet, and political debates among different personalities. News about everything from strikes to accidents appeared regularly and viewership grew as more variety appealed to more tastes and interests. What was missing, however, was the old ideological consistency, and as I always saw it the capacity to bore nearly any viewer. Now there was reason to watch.

Q: I know we have to cut this off, but I wanted to ask one question. At this critical time, what was our reading and concern about Yeltsin?

COLLINS: First of all, from the end of the coup up until Gorbachev's resignation Yeltsin was the president of the Russian Federation. He enjoyed authority Gorbachev didn't have, having been elected directly by the Russian Federation's voters in June 1991, whereas Gorbachev had been put in office by the USSR Supreme Soviet, not Soviet voters.

At the same time, Yeltsin had a history both at home and with us. He had been expelled from the Party leadership, and made a comeback in the Federation as what we might call a populist today. He had visited the U.S., and his visits had not done anything much to attract Washington. At the time we are discussing, I would say our concern partly was a degree of discomfort with Yeltsin himself in light of his previous contact with American officials and his visits to the U.S. and partly having comfort with the man you know versus the man you don't know very well. Gorbachev was someone we had done a lot of business with; he was a figure that people were comfortable with; we knew how to work

with him; we knew his team. All these people were familiar. Yeltsin had a new, mostly little-known crowd around him. He himself was in many ways an unknown quantity. Nobody quite knew what he would be like as a leader. They knew he had an alcohol problem. They knew that he was a political animal. He was not versed in the international scene. So, the idea this man could become the key decision maker for issues like strategic nuclear weapons was pretty sobering. People were uncertain. It was some help that people like Shevardnadze and some of the other more progressive Soviet figures were saying not to worry, he will be okay, and supported him during the coup. But there was a lot of uncertainty about Yeltsin, and he had not established any significant rapport or relationship with the Bush administration, which more or less stiffed him earlier and were wary of engaging him even after the coup so long as it seemed that might undercut Gorbachev's chances.

Q: They denigrated him.

COLLINS: And you know, you pay a price for that. On the other, hand I must say that they overcame that pretty quickly once he became the man to deal with, but it was an issue as we began the new era.

Q: I would think there would have been an advantage to having Robert Strauss as ambassador because he understood political animals better than foreign service.

COLLINS: Strauss was a brilliant choice for the time. It was one of those moments when an action by a President taken for one reason turns out to be far more significant and meaningful than anything that might have been intended. Strauss was appointed because he knew Gorbachev, he knew business, he was a deal maker, he'd done a lot of things on the international stage, and he was a consummate political man. He was also very close to Bush and Baker. He was appointed because they wanted someone in Moscow they could talk to and who could talk to the President and the Secretary of State. In short someone who would be trusted, effective, and a real channel both sides could employ.

Well, he shows up, of course, and the whole game's changed. What he had been expecting to find had disappeared and in its place he found uncertainty, political chaos, and almost complete uncertainty about every aspect of the relationship he had been sent to tend. He was not phased in the least. He recognized what he was dealing with. As noted earlier in an environment where as he said more than once, "nobody is talking to anyone else; nobody is listening to anyone else; and everyone thinks he's winning." He was at home.

In all, over a relatively short time, I think he brought three things to us that were tremendously important.

First, he had a terrific sense for power, what was happening to it, who had it and who didn't and how much and where. He had an incredible instinct about who you needed to talk to.

Second, he gained the confidence of everybody - Gorbachev, Yeltsin, members of the parliament, the media, the embassy people at every level. He was accepted as a straight shooter, someone who knew what he was talking about, and someone who had access to the bosses back home. He was, therefore, a person with whom all from highest to lowest could talk to with confidence knowing that they would get the straight story and that their views would be conveyed honestly. It gave him extraordinary access and influence.

And third he did one thing I believe no one else could have managed in the way he did. He became in a real sense a political figure among Yeltsin's circle. He was someone Yeltsin would check with. As time went on this was not just about Americans views or our bilateral issues, but about Strauss's views of what was going on in Russia itself. I think Yeltsin saw him as one of the very few people who would come to him and didn't have something he wanted. In that sense he played an essential role in overcoming whatever problems with the Administration were there from before and establishing a relationship between a new Russian leader and the American administration. He did that with exceptional skill, and he left our ties with Yeltsin and his team in extremely good condition.

Finally, a personal note. Working as Strauss's deputy was an extraordinary experience. I had not really worked closely with a political ambassador before. Doing so with Strauss was a crash education. There were things he did over the time we worked together I believe no career officer would ever have conceived of doing. I learned a lot about dealing with the media. I learned a lot about how to talk with people in Washington. In a way only he could, he used to tell everyone that together the two of us made a fine ambassador. I can only say that whatever I was able to accomplish later, owed a great deal to what I learned working with an exceptional colleague, friend, and mentor.

And a personal aside here, beyond what we've been discussing, is what happened to me in September of 1991.

Q: I think this probably is a good place to stop. We'll pick this up again. We've talked about Strauss's relationship to Yeltsin and all and we'll pick up the changeover from dealing with the Soviet Union to the Russian federation next time.

End of interview