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

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Initial Interview Date: June 9, 2008

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INTERVIEW

Q: We'll start at the beginning; when and where were you born?

FARSAKH: Brooklyn, New York, March 26, 1939.

Q: Let's start on the family side. Let's talk about on your father's side. Where did they come from?

FARSAKH: They came from Krakow, Poland and they immigrated to Brooklyn. I am not sure of the year. I never knew them because they died before I was born, but they had nine children; my father was the youngest, there were six girls and three boys.

Q: How about your father? What was he doing?

FARSAKH: He was in the men's hat business in Brooklyn with his father. I never really knew much about that because they went out of business at some point. I think my father may have been in business with one or two of his brothers. They both died before I was born. By the time I remember my father, he was in the wholesale women's sportswear business, in New York City.

Q: On your mother's side?

FARSAKH: My mother's side I know better because I knew my grandparents very well. My grandmother came at the age of ten; my grandfather was about 15. They came from the same town in what is now, I think, western Poland – a town called Bialystok, which at that time was considered White Russia. My great grandfather made military uniforms for the Russian army. My grandmother had five brothers and a sister, some of them were born in Europe and some in the States. My grandmother must have come in 1905. She was very smart and by the time she came here spoke fluent German and Russian and possibly Polish. She did very well in school, graduated from high school, and spoke unaccented English.

My mother tells me that she was so smart that she was hired right out of high school to work at Macy's as a stenographer; this would have been right after the First World War. She worked there for a couple of years. I think she met my grandfather when she was probably still in high school; he was about five years older. He had fled from his hometown. My grandmother came from a very middle class family. Her father had come over first, set himself up in business, had a clothing store and then sent for the whole family. My grandfather, on the other hand, came from a very religious Jewish family background. He didn't get along with his father as he didn't want to go into the religious life. He was not religious at all, and he also didn't want to go into the Russian Army, so he just left. Two of his sisters were here already; they had come over and gotten married. I knew them slightly.

My mother was born in April, 1915 and my father in June 1908. My grandparents got married when my grandmother was about 20 and my grandfather about 25. He was in the women's wear business for his entire life. He had periods when he did very, very well and some when he did not but they had a very solid, middle class life. They rented a large apartment in Brooklyn and they usually had household help and had beautiful things.

When my parents first got married they lived a few blocks from my mother's parents but shortly moved into the same apartment building.

Q: Where did they meet?

FARSAKH: I think probably through mutually known relatives of my father. They started going out right away and they got married two years after they met. They married in May 1937 in a big wedding.

Q: How religious would you say your parents were? I assume they were Jewish?

FARSAKH: Yes. Not very religious at all.

Q: Was this a big factor?

FARSAKH: No, it was not. My father came from an orthodox Jewish neighborhood but I am not sure his family was religious at all, but I really have no idea. My father had six sisters, many of whom I knew and some of whom lived close by; I do not remember them as particularly religious. My maternal grandparents were not religious at all. As I said, my maternal grandfather ran away from Russia, and he ran away from religion also.

My maternal grandparents had three children, two girls and a boy. My mother, the eldest, never had religious training nor did her sister. My uncle, the youngest, was bar mitzvah and that's all. We used to celebrate Christmas. We didn't celebrate the Jewish holidays. It was an extremely secular upbringing.

Q: In your neighborhood, I've talked to people who grew up in Brooklyn at somewhat the same era and they say they didn't know anybody who wasn't Jewish until they got off to college. How about your neighborhood?

FARSAKH: Well, I had two neighborhoods, the one that my parents moved to in the same apartment building where my grandparents lived when I was less than two; they didn't move again until I was in college so even though they had another apartment for the last years of their time in Brooklyn, the one I most remember was the one where my grandparents lived. It was mixed. We had a lot of Irish and some Italian and many Jews and even a Seventh Day Adventist family; I remember a sprinkling of Protestants – all friendly and we got along well. Obviously, at that time there were no African-Americans. I also I remember that we could walk to all the shops. There was an Italian delicatessen and a Jewish pharmacy, for example.

Q: Let's talk a little about family; were you the oldest?

FARSAKH: I was the oldest of two. I have a sister who is four and a half years younger than I am.

Q: What was family life like? How would you describe it?

FARSAKH: My parents were not very well matched intellectually. My father was a high school graduate; my mother is a college graduate, so they did not have many interests in common.

Q: Where did she go to college?

FARSAKH: Brooklyn College. She wanted to travel; she loved classical music. She like the opera, museums. She loves to read, she played the piano. She saved up, and we had a Steinway baby grand in the house. My father really didn't have any of those traits. He loved sports and I grew up as a mixture, I guess. My father and I shared a passionate love for the Brooklyn Dodgers and we went to many, many games together. Some of my fondest childhood memories center on my father and the times we spent at Ebbets Field.

My father died in 1992, after fifty five years of marriage to my mother.

Q: Where did the family fit politically?

FARSAKH: Definitely Democrats and I was thinking about that today, because I have never had a Republican moment in my life. It was just part of the atmosphere to be devoted to FDR, to be as I was in junior high and high school, very much opposed to McCarthy, to have very progressive sympathies. I really didn't know anybody in my circle or in my parents' circle who differed much politically. We were all sort of mildly left of center.

Q: Did the sort of Jewish European socialist type culture creep in and I am thinking of that element coming out of New York City?

FARSAKH: No, no. My grandfather used to buy a lot of newspapers, including the Journal American, which I remember was kind of a right wing paper – I mostly focused on the comics – we had access to a lot of newspapers. We didn't get the New York Times when I was small, but I started reading it in high school and have never really stopped except when I was overseas, but no, we were not really part of the socialist culture at all. When my mother, through friends, joined Hadassah (Women's Zionist Organization of America) in 1947 and became a Zionist, we had to stop celebrating Christmas, which my sister and I resented very much. My mother became a committed Zionist, which has been a constant thread through my life and a great problem for me that worsens with time.

Q: Was Yiddish at all the language?

FARSAKH: No, my grandparents deliberately did not use it in front of my mother, as they wanted to speak only English. My mother might have had the chance; as for my father, I don't know, as I never really talked to him, much to my regret, about what the actual atmosphere in his home was like, whether it was religious, or if other languages were used, but I know that my maternal grandparents, never used any language but

English in their home. My mother didn't have the opportunity to learn Russian or German or Yiddish.

Q: Did you pick up anything about, your father being in the garment trade, the what is it? The Ladies Union, Dubinsky, you know that whole thing. Did that?

FARSAKH: No, he was not involved in any union. He worked with a very mixed group of colleagues. His main business partner for a while was Italian. There were Puerto Ricans, blacks working for him but I never, ever heard anything about the union. Nor did I hear it from my grandfather who also worked with an ethnically mixed group of people who were very fond of him, as they were of my father. No, we were never caught up in union affairs at all.

Q: OK, let's talk about living in this apartment building

FARSAKH: Six floors, it was really pretty normal for the times.

Q: What about the neighborhood as a kid? What was life like?

FARSAKH: We mostly played with kids on the block, kids from the building and kids from the houses next door and around the other side of the street. I remember that we used to play punch ball and dodge ball in the street. We lived on a main street, the equivalent of 20th Street, called Ocean Avenue. You couldn't play there, but 19th Street, which was in the back of the house was not very highly trafficked so we used to go outside in the summer and play in the street, especially in the late afternoons and evenings when it was not so hot.

Another thing I remember that there was no air conditioning and it was before television, so all the neighbors in the building used to bring up beach chairs and sometimes portable radios to the roof. People got to know each other, and we used to sing and play cards and gossip and generally enjoy ourselves in the evenings. We really had a kind of community made up of the people living in the apartment house, which was very pleasant.

Q: You know, the pre air conditioning times, I lived in Annapolis and we used to get on the front stoop and our neighbors would be on the front stoop. We really knew everybody and you were talking all the time.

FARSAKH: I think air conditioning and television and of course, now with computers, we are progressively more isolated as people go into their shells and operate as individuals instead of being tied to the community. The memories of the old days are very nice.

Q: How about being a girl? Were there boys' games and girls' games or mixed?

FARSAKH: I think mostly mixed actually and I never really felt that difference so much. I was not an athletic type at all. I was not the kind of person who got chosen to be on

teams or anything. I think my mother sort of worried that I was going to be physically dysfunctional so my parents sent me to summer camp starting at the age of seven; I went to camp for about 8 years. I did become a decent volleyball and softball player but I became a very good swimmer. That was the one thing that I really could do very, very well. As for being away from my parents, it was hard at the beginning, but I really got to look forward to camp every summer.

Q: Where did you go to camp?

FARSAKH: It was called Camp Guilford, near Binghamton, New York. There was a boys' camp, Camp Oxford across the lake. It was a beautiful lake and of course, it was a Jewish camp but a lot of the counselors weren't Jewish.

Q: This was part of the Catskill?

FARSAKH: No, it was much farther north. By car or bus, it took a good 6 hours to get there, and Binghamton was the main urban area near the camp. I loved the camp, really enjoyed it. Of course, when you go there for a number of years you are with the same kids who become good friends.

Q: Actually, as a kid you were not exactly able to do much reading during World War II but after World War II you sort of came forth, didn't you?

FARSAKH: I was very small during the war, so would not have been able to read much, but I was exposed to different cultures. My sister was born in 1943 and she had two German nurses successively, one Catholic and one Protestant. There was big, beautiful Catholic church right across the street from us and the Catholic nurse used to take me into the church and we would pray for the soldiers. She was followed by a Protestant, and we used to sit on the steps of the Protestant church that was within walking distance of the house and talk about various things, such as her idea of heaven. So I was exposed to other religions at a very early age, by the age of four and a half, five. As for Jewish religious school, my parents forced me to go and I hated it all the way through. I hated the teachers, I thought it was stupid and I couldn't wait to get confirmed so I could get out. I never was really religious. I went through a phase when I was in high school for about a year when I thought maybe I was religious but spending so much time in the Holy Land in my adult years has not made me more religious – rather it has put me off.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

FARSAKH: Not really early on then because I was so young, but later I became a voracious reader. I do want to recall the death of FDR, which I remember very well.

Q: 1945.

FARSAKH: I remember that the radio announcer was crying.

Q: Yes.

FARSAKH: I don't remember that much about my own reading in the early years but we had really demanding teachers. I liked elementary school. It was a mixed school. We had a lot of Jewish kids but also many others. I'm thinking back now that I probably had a more diverse experience than many kids who grew up in Brooklyn at that time.

Q: When you are looking particularly at that era, the Brooklyn schools could be extremely good because of the Jewish influence. That's where young Jewish ladies went who were very smart.

FARSAKH: My elementary school was about two blocks away from the high school that I went to and a few blocks from that was Brooklyn College, so everything was very close. It was a very pretty area, very leafy, filled with beautiful private homes. It was not at all urban looking; it seemed suburban, except for the main streets with the apartment buildings.

Q: Through elementary school do you remember any subjects or teachers that particularly enthused you?

FARSAKH: Well, I always liked history and geography and I liked English. A junior high school was built just as we were finishing elementary school so our class was the last seventh grade class to graduate from that elementary school. They gave us the choice of going to eighth and ninth grade to the junior high and then going to high school in tenth grade or just having eighth grade at the junior high and going into high school for ninth grade. We overwhelmingly chose to just go to the junior high school for one year and to go to the high school for ninth grade. So I had one year at that junior high which was a bit outside of the neighborhood where I had been before. I can remember the teachers pretty well but I can't actually recall if any of them made a real impression on me.

Q: Where was high school?

FARSAKH: Midwood High School in Flatbush. Woody Allen went there a few years before and the author Eric Segal also, who was two years ahead of us. We had a student government called the "city of Midwood," and Segal was "mayor of the city of Midwood," so everybody knew who he was.

It was in high school that I developed a real love for what was then called social studies, that is, history and economics and current affairs. Eventually I became the president of the international relations club in my senior year, and I remember arranging a discussion about apartheid in South Africa. I was already looking at foreign affairs as something that I was really, really interested in. I had a wonderful social studies teacher and I did extracurricular work for him.

Q: Who was that?

FARSAKH: His name was Mr. Kramer. We also had something a lot of high school students didn't get, which was economics. We had advanced placement courses too. I had a course in biology which gave me advanced placement in zoology in college. I wasn't the scientific type but I did all right, although not great. Also at Midwood I had a wonderful English teacher and we had a course in Shakespeare. It was a really great high school with smart, really motivated kids. who went to Harvard, Yale, Cornell, the Seven Sisters women's colleges, of which Mount Holyoke, where I went, was one.

One of the things I decided when I was applying to colleges was that I didn't want to go to a big school like my high school. Midwood wasn't so large as New York City high schools go, but I didn't want to be in a huge school where I would get lost, and I didn't want an urban setting. I wanted something different. I wanted something small, more intimate and more rural, so that's what I chose.

Q: You seemed to be interested in foreign affairs. During this time up through high school, how did Israel, did it enter into your life and conception during this time?

FARSAKH: My mother would occasionally bring me to her Hadassah meetings. I remember one where there was a big move to send a letter to the secretary of state, who was Dulles at the time. In Sunday school and at camp we learned Israeli Hebrew songs and sang them. I liked singing them but I never really got into the history, I did not know much about the issues. It was all sort of in the air but not something that I really grabbed on to. I didn't consider Zionism really seriously.

Q: What about sort of the other element, communism, anti communism, McCarthyism and all that?

FARSAKH: We were definitely aware of McCarthyism and there was certainly a very strong anti McCarthy strain running through high school, so I can't can imagine that there were any individuals or friends who had one iota of positive feeling about anything that McCarthy was doing. Running through the issue, although I wasn't really aware of it at the time, was that there were a lot of Jews who supported the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. People were aware of that and that a lot of those people had joined Communist front organizations, of which several were associated with the Spanish Civil War. I think there was a sort of a general awareness. I remember watching the hearings on television. I remember seeing, I think, the exchange when Secretary of the Army Welch, said to Senator McCarthy, "Have you no honor, Sir?"

Q: You graduated from high school when?

FARSAKH: 1956.

Q: What were you looking at? Here as a young lady of eighteen or so or about, what were you looking at for your future and college?

FARSAKH: Definitely political science. I knew even before I got to college that I was going to major in political science. I had had four years of Spanish at Midwood – by my senior year, our excellent Spanish teachers were having us give speeches in Spanish. So, by the time I got to college, I was actually quite fluent in Spanish. When I first chose to take Spanish I considered that, we had a really good program in my high school (also in French) but that Spanish would be more useful because so many people speak it. I always regretted that. I regretted that I didn't choose French instead, because it would have been more useful to me in my diplomatic career. French was something I really could have used, whereas I didn't get to use the Spanish at all, seven years of it, as I took three more years in college. Now, however, when I go to a Spanish speaking country, it takes only a few days for it to start coming back and I can start speaking again.

Q: Where did you go to college?

FARSAKH: I went to Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts.

Q: Why Mount Holyoke?

FARSAKH: Well, I applied to Bryn Mawr College too and to Brandeis because it was a new Jewish University; I also applied to Brooklyn College, where I did not want to go. I didn't want to live at home. My parents encouraged me to apply to Barnard College in Manhattan, but I didn't want to go there either because I didn't feel like commuting on the subway. There weren't dormitories for women who lived in the City and I knew that. A very good friend of mine, whom I met in second grade and who is now a full professor of English at George Washington University, well, she and I went to Brandeis together. She was brilliant, graduating summa cum laude from Radcliffe and has a PhD from Harvard.. We didn't like Brandeis at all and we just crossed it off our lists right then and there. I didn't like Bryn Mawr when I went there either; it seemed very cold and unwelcoming, I thought. I also visited Smith College as well as Mt. Holyoke. I always had hated and feared mathematics. I think I had very bad math teachers and in high school especially, when I went to math class I would become almost physically ill. It's amusing that the person I married is a mathematician.

Anyway, I found out that Smith required a year of math but Holyoke didn't require any math, so I chose Mount Holyoke, which I liked better anyway.

Q: You were at Mount Holyoke from 1956?

FARSAKH: 1956, I graduated in 1960.

Q: When you got to Mount Holyoke, how did it strike you? What sort of a school was it?

FARSAKH: First of all what struck me is that I had been given a single room, although I had asked for a roommate. I found out after a couple of days that I was the only Jewish freshman in the dormitory so for a couple of months I felt quite lonely. I started going to religious services every Friday night and meeting the other Jewish kids at Mount

Holyoke who were maybe ten percent of the total. However, shortly I started becoming friendly with the freshmen in my dormitory and as I became more and more close to them, I sort of drifted away from the Jewish set and began forming my friendships with those in my dorm and people in my classes. I started dating and I found that I was curious to meet people from all over the world so I went out with Spanish, South Americans and a Chinese guy and at one point with an Indian. My parents were absolutely out of their minds at this behavior.

Q: Where were they coming from, Amherst?

FARSAKH: Amherst and University of Massachusetts, yes. A couple of my closest friends now live overseas – two women who are I am still in close contact with. After my freshman year, I roomed with a girlfriend for three years. She went on to get a doctorate in psychology from Brown and went to England on a postdoctoral fellowship, fell in love with her psychology professor at Cambridge and stayed there. I have visited her there many times. She is now retired.

Another very good friend lived in Germany during the war; she is German, and left with her family when the Russians took over her home area in East Germany. They fled to Australia and then went to the United States. When she graduated from college she got a master's at Columbia in Russian Studies and then went to work for the OECD in Paris. She did come back to the States but she lives in Paris. She is now retired there.

So I developed many friendships and they all had wide interests.

Q: Who was the, Wendy Wasserstein, Meryl Streep, some of these. Was that sort of intellectual thing going on at the time?

FARSAKH: I think it was, and actually one of the incidents I remember best was when I was a freshman. I had a part scholarship and part of the scholarship entailed waiting on tables in the dorms. We stayed for graduation to wait on tables and the class that stayed in our dorm was the 55th reunion class. It was a new dorm and had elevators so we had an older class. Frances Perkins was the president of her class and she resided in our dorm. Hence, we all got to see her, to meet her and hear her speak.

Q: She was FDR's secretary of labor, the first woman to be in the cabinet and not just a token woman; she was a power.

FARSAKH: She was a real power. I have read a lot about Roosevelt and his times over the years because that is something I really enjoy. I have read a lot about her, and she was really a very great lady. We at Mt. Holyoke knew very well who she was, we knew how important she was. Also, I would say at least a good half of the professors were women. They all had PhDs, and they were brilliant. Because there were no male students on the campus essentially, we didn't dress up, we didn't hesitate to talk up in class. We were kind of free spirits. When we graduated many of us really felt we could be whatever we wanted to be so it gave us a tremendous feeling of self-confidence. I think when they do

studies about women of certain generations, perhaps mine and maybe the one right after, they will find that the highest achievers generally came from the women's colleges.

Q: I can understand this.

You know, speaking of Frances Perkins, my wife taught high school English overseas and one of her students way back had never gone to college but she was in her late 40s and she decided this is the time to do it. She was a single mother and she got something my wife helped her with was called a Perkins Scholarship. They have at Mount Holyoke taking women who are sort of blossoming in their 40s or even 50s and it is a wonderful thing. I think she just graduated.

You graduated, you say in 1960 so this was sort of before the '60s hit. Were there any political movements going on or left wing, right wing? This is still sort of the Eisenhower?

FARSAKH: I actually participated in the 1956 presidential campaign. I rang doorbells for Adlai Stevenson and I remember people slamming doors in my face. They would say, "I like Ike." I also remember that in my freshman year, a junior in the dorm was Mary Ann Trump, a sister of Donald. She later became a federal judge but she was a passionate Democrat then, and the night that Stevenson conceded she was just crying like a baby in front of the one TV we had in the dorm. I saw her again about 30 years later, this beautiful statuesque woman, much better looking than he is, although with a very strong resemblance. I said something to her about the Stevenson incident, and she of course, had become a Republican. She laughed and said, "Who would ever?" I certainly was interested in politics. We had in the political science department two women who were rivals; one was sort of the guru of domestic politics and the other of international affairs and the students had to take sides! I was mostly on the international affairs side but I did take some courses in domestic politics; we participated in domestic political canvassing and things like that. But in my senior year I was president of the College's International Relations Club. It was an elected position and I organized conferences and seminars and invited people from the United Nations, for example.

I was passionately interested in international affairs and my female professor, Professor Ruth Lawson who was the sort of international affairs specialist, asked me at the beginning of my senior year, "What do you want to do with your life? Would you like to go into the Foreign Service?" I had been working part time in the summers at the United Nations gift shop, I had gotten to know some diplomats and had already learned that if a woman in the U.S. Foreign Service got married she had to resign. So I said no, I wanted to get married. So I decided I would probably go into academic life.

Q: Speaking of getting married, what was sort of the, from your perspective, what was sort of the dating culture of the time?

FARSAKH: It was a big deal. On the weekends there was this exodus of women from Mt. Holyoke – they were going to Yale, to Harvard, Dartmouth, to Amherst which was very close by.

Q: They went to Williams too.

FARSAKH: They went to Williams, oh definitely, definitely to Williams, Wesleyan – and the big thing was to have a scarf, you know a striped scarf. My son went to Wesleyan so he had the red and black. Everybody had camel hair coats and Bermuda shorts and these striped scarves. The next step of course, was getting (fraternity)"pinned," that was a big, big deal.

Q: The guys were still probably in white bucks, dirty white bucks.

FARSAKH: Yes, that's right. And crew cuts.

Q: Were people going steady much there?

FARSAKH: Yes.

Q: Were they peeling off and getting married early?

FARSAKH: Not so many. We did lose some who got married and had to drop out, but not that many. My group of friends saw ourselves as superior to the girls who spent dinner time talking about silver and china patterns and all that stuff while we were discussing more serious matters. We were going to graduate school. We knew we were going to graduate school. They were just going to tumble out of college and right into marriage.

Q: Get an "MRS" degree.

FARSAKH: That's right. So there was this kind of real split between the women who took their education seriously but didn't really plan on doing anything afterward and those who really did, and there was a significant number. I would say probably a good third thought about going to medical school, law school although maybe not so much then, and graduate school. The College and faculty very much encouraged people who wanted to continue their studies.

Q: Mount Holyoke had a rather strong ethos of public service, didn't it?

FARSAKH: Well, I think so and I think this was especially because we had a very strong political science faculty and when you think of public service you mostly think of government service. There was the Frances Perkins factor. I think a lot of people did think about that. Of course, the Foreign Service was not something a lot of women thought about then.

Q: No. This was almost twenty years later before really this marriage business terminated a career. That ended.

So you graduated in 1960 to what?

FARSAKH: Well, the big thing that happened was that I met my future husband at the beginning of November of my senior year; he is a Palestinian Arab. He was the president of the International Relations Club at the University of Massachusetts and he had just gotten his master's in mathematics. He wanted to meet someone who was interested in international relations, so he had first called and dated the president of the international relations club at Smith but he didn't like her, so he called me! He asked me to go out and I said, "sure." I can still remember standing there in the dorm thinking, well, I've never met an Arab before. Wouldn't that be interesting?

Q: Well, how did this work? Here he's a Palestinian and you're Jewish. How did this work?

FARSAKH: He took me to his apartment briefly on our first date and I remember seeing a map of the Middle East and something was scratched out, so I asked, "Why is Israel scratched out?" and he said, "We don't recognize it or it's not there for us" or something like that. And I told him on that first date, that I was Jewish and he laughed and said, "Well, that seems to be my fate. It seems I often date Jewish girls."

But he was planning on going back to the Middle East to teach. We dated for the whole year and we decided towards the end that we really did want to get married. He attended my graduation although my parents didn't know that he was there. He got a job teaching mathematics at the American University of Beirut and I had been accepted in two places for graduate studies. I was accepted for a PhD program at the University of Pennsylvania in Indian Studies and the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of the Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC. I had done my honors thesis on the Indian Parliament and as a matter of fact, I had to go to University of Massachusetts to take a course in Indian history in my senior year, because there were no courses given at Mount Holyoke in non-Western history. They had Russian history and Latin American and Spanish history but no Asian history at all at then. As a matter of fact, none of the colleges in the area had any Middle East or Arabic programs at that time. About two years after I graduated, they instituted an Arabic and Middle East program at Smith that was open to Mt. Holyoke students.

So I was accepted for this PhD program in Indian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania on a full scholarship, but I had heard negative things about the neighborhood in Philadelphia where the University was. And by that time I had met my husband and thought that I might end up in the Middle East. Anyway, I decided to go to SAIS; I liked the idea of being in Washington.

When I reported for classes at SAIS I found out that the Indian Studies program was really terrible but the Middle East studies program was very good, so within the first week of my graduate studies I switched to Middle East studies and Arabic language.

Q: Going back to Mount Holyoke, did civil rights raise its head much while you were there? This was the early days.

FARSAKH: It was early. We were very aware of South Africa, I think much more than we were aware of what was going on in our own country. I do have a memory, going back to high school. From the time I was about ten until sixteen, I passionately wanted to be an actress. So my parents sent me to a drama camp on Long Island at the end of my sophomore year of high school because they had a professional summer stock theatre attached to the camp. We did a lot of performing, a lot of acting and so on. I befriended there a black girl who was the daughter of someone who worked at the camp. She had a beautiful singing voice and she and I became very good friends and we started corresponding. This is one negative thing about my father whom I loved dearly. When he heard that I was corresponding with a black girl, he erupted and I had to stop writing to her, which I should not have done.

My mother didn't seem to be that upset about it and in fact, my mother in the early '60s, through a rigorous exam process, entered the New York Housing Authority. By the time she retired she had become the manager of a large housing project. She had a lot of black colleagues; many of whom she respected and she was quite good friends with some of them.

Q: Well, different generations, different pressures.

So you went to SAIS from when to when?

FARSAKH: Only for one year. In the Middle East program, I had a really excellent Arabic teacher. I did very well, and at the end of the year I was awarded a National Defense Scholarship in Arabic, a full scholarship for the second year to study at SAIS, but by then my husband and I had decided to get married and he came back to the U.S.. My parents gave us a beautiful wedding at a hotel on Park Avenue in New York and then we sailed for Beirut. Before leaving, I went to the Department of Education to learn if I could use the scholarship at the American University of Beirut (AUB). I made an appointment with someone at the Department and said, " The American University of Beirut is registered with the New York State Board of Regents." I had found that out, and that it was accredited by New York State. However, they refused to allow me to use the scholarship outside the continental U.S.

So I went with my husband to Beirut and I went to AUB and applied for their master's program. They said that they could not accept any of my credits from SAIS but that they would let me finish my course work in a year when it ordinarily took two years. So I started my course work, and I taught English for a few months at a high school near a Palestinian refugee camp. All my students, except maybe one or two were refugees from

the camp. I also got pregnant that year, so it was a rather busy year. I stopped teaching around Christmas time. I had a full load of courses. My son was born the end of June and I barely got all my papers written by the time he was born. Then I took and passed my qualifying exams. I brought my son with me to the exams, and finished everything but my thesis by the time we left Beirut that summer. My husband by then had found a job teaching mathematics at Central Connecticut State College in New Britain, Connecticut.

Q: How did your parents react to you were marrying an Arab? Is he Christian or?

FARSAKH: Muslim.

Q: How did this?

FARSAKH: It wouldn't have mattered to them whether he was Christian or Muslim. They were just absolutely horrified. They used to scream at me over the phone when I was in Washington and we had horrible fights – they would call me up and they sent my uncle, my mother's brother, down to try to convince me to break the relationship. I remember that my uncle took me out to dinner and said: "Here you are in the United States where you have all your rights and you are going to go to the Middle Ages, where women are treated like dirt" or whatever. And he literally made me sick – it was so unpleasant. But of course this campaign didn't work and my parents were presented with the fact my husband was coming back that summer to marry me and carry me off to the Middle East. So they sort of swallowed their anger and gave us a beautiful wedding.

Something depressing that happened was that the rabbi who confirmed me made racist statements about Arabs. My mother and I went to see him about marrying us and he said some really terrible things. For example, he said, "You can always tell when an Arab is coming down the street because you can smell him a block away!" I had of course, been fairly well turned off religion during my college career but that incident really did it for me once and for all. I felt that if this is supposed to be a moral example of what a clergyman is, I don't want anything to do with it. We did find a rabbi to marry us. The rabbi was Rabbi Elmer Berger who was the most famous – or infamous – anti Zionist in the entire United States. He spoke beautifully at our wedding and I was so grateful and touched, but my mother was ashamed by the fact that this guy was the one who married us. I of course, so very much appreciated him because I was already more than beginning to move away from anything to do with Zionism.

Q: Let's talk about you at AUB. You were there?

FARSAKH: A year.

Q: In the first place, this is your first time abroad?

FARSAKH: Yes. When I was thirteen, my mother and a friend of hers and my sister and my mother's friend's daughter and I took a trip by car across the United States, two women and three young girls. We saw a huge part of the United States and that was really

great. We did go into Canada briefly and we went to Juarez, Mexico, a pretty nasty place as I recall. We saw an amateur bullfight which was absolutely disgusting, but aside from that I had never been out of the United States.

Q: While you were at SAIS, were you picking up, Kennedy had just come in. How did you feel about Kennedy and sort of the call for government service at that time?

FARSAKH: Actually, my friend, the one I told you about who spent her life in Paris was invited to the inaugural ball and she came down for the inauguration and she got stuck in the snow; it was so cold and so snowy. There was a terrible blizzard in Washington – I remember that. She stayed with us, my roommate and me in Washington.

I think if I had not gotten married and gone off to Beirut I would have been very tempted to join the Peace Corps. That was something that really appealed to me but because I was going to the Middle East anyway, I was going to study.

Q: How about SAIS? Was there much of a gender gap there?

FARSAKH: There were very, very few women graduate students at SAIS at the time, especially in the Middle East department. There was one other woman. We got along all right but were not close friends. My roommate was in Russian studies and we were OK together. It was very much a professional school, not very academic. I found it very, very different from college in that respect. It was very oriented towards the work world and there were some students there who had already been working and had gone back to school. I remember there was one guy, a Lebanese from the Lebanese diplomatic service who had gone back to school – so it was a mixed group of people. I did like it and one of the people in my Arabic class I met up with later. I don't know if you ever heard of David Ransom and his wife Marjory. David and I studied Arabic together and when I joined the Foreign Service many years later, I was going to Yemen on my first orientation trip, and the country clearance cable said, "If this is the Andrea Farsakh who was at SAIS, she is invited to stay at our residence." So I stayed with them and I remember sitting on the roof with them in Sanaa going over old times; he was my DCM in Abu Dhabi many years later. He was a good friend.

Q: Off to Beirut. What was the situation in Lebanon at the time?

FARSAKH: Those were the golden years. There had been of course, a problem in 1958 when the Marines had landed on the beaches of Beirut. I remember sitting in a restaurant on New Year's Eve in 1961-62 in Beirut and hearing that there had been an attempted coup but it didn't succeed. Things were reasonably quiet. My husband was in the math department; he had American colleagues, he had Palestinian colleagues and all were our friends.

In the Arab Studies Department at AUB I really didn't have any graduate student friends. I spent most of the year being pregnant and it wasn't really accepted I think in those days for pregnant women to be on a university campus. So I had the sense that I was kind of

being avoided. There was one woman who was the wife of one of my professors and we sat together in Arabic class. At SAIS the Arabic was excellent. We had two hours a day, five days a week and we really learned a tremendous amount. We had a tough exam at the end. At AUB we had a good teacher but the class was full of Iranians. They thought because they knew the alphabet and a lot of the words, they knew everything. So they never studied and we never progressed at all and we maybe got through the first twenty five pages of the book. It was one of the worst Arabic courses I ever had, but I did manage to pass an Arabic exam for my master's at the end of that year. I had wonderful professors at AUB – they were terrific. I think I worked harder at AUB than I worked at SAIS.

Q: Sort of as a faculty wife did you find yourself involved in the faculty social set?

FARSAKH: No, because I was a full time graduate student and I had no time. As a matter of fact, at the end of the year when I was already about eight months pregnant and I had been assigned my sixth term paper, I flew down to my husband's office on the lower campus almost having a nervous breakdown because I didn't know how I was going to finish six term papers in the condition I was in. But I did it. So I didn't have much social life with the faculty and I didn't see myself as a faculty wife and I don't think anyone else saw me as one either. I looked very young for my age and I remember people treating me like an undergraduate all the time. But also there was a real division between Americans and non-Americans at AUB. The American faculty got paid in dollars and they got paid first. My husband, even though he wasn't Lebanese, got paid in Lebanese pounds several days later. The American faculty was entitled to faculty housing but the so-called local faculty had to find its own housing. The American faculty had furnished apartments; we had to rent furniture from a rental company and of course, our salary was lower. There was a lot of discrimination between American and non-American faculty. My husband formed good friendships with a couple of Americans who were in his department and with others but I never really formed any friendships there.

Q: Well, then you had your boy and then what happened?

FARSAKH: My husband is from the West Bank. When we got to Beirut the September before classes started, we went to visit his family.

Q: This of course, was before the '67 war?

FARSAKH: Before the '67 War.

Q: When the Israelis took over the West Bank.

FARSAKH: The Jordanians were in charge at that point. We went back at Christmas time. By Christmas I was already pregnant and everybody was so happy. It was freezing cold. There was no, of course, no central heating. Most houses to this day don't have central heating. When I got there in the fall of '61 there was no electricity. Then we went

back again in August just before we left to come to the United States with my son, so we visited the West Bank three times during that year.

We also, my husband had relatives in Damascus and we went there twice, also from Beirut.

Q: Was there sort of in the family and all, your husband a subtext of the lost cause or what have you about Palestine?

FARSAKH: Not at that point. First of all, they all knew I was Jewish and they didn't seem to care. They welcomed me with open arms. That was not the case with my family toward my husband, by the way. That sort of remained a constant theme and I think Arabs are more welcoming and more tolerant, I really do believe that.

The West Bank was then part of Jordan and my husband was not a refugee. His family lived in the home that his grandfather had built and the family had been living in that town for a few hundred years or more.

Q: What town was this?

FARSAKH: It's a town called Bir Zeit, it's near Ramallah, the best university in the West Bank is in that town. It's called Bir Zeit University. The town is evenly divided between Muslims and Christians – Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Protestants and Muslims – and with the University which was then a college, a pretty progressive kind of town. The people didn't like the Jordanians. Jordanian rule was tough. The Palestinians were treated as second class citizens, most of the economic development was going to the East Bank rather than to the West Bank. There was prejudice against Palestinians in government ranks although a member of a very prominent Christian family in Bir Zeit was the foreign minister of Jordan for a few years.

We did have a refugee camp in the town; most West Bank towns had refugee camps. My husband's family had a refugee family living in the basement for several months after they were expelled from their home in Lydda which is where the Tel Aviv airport is now. A lot of people had refugees living in their homes. It was well-known that the refugees did not leave on their own volition but that they had been kicked out. The mythology at the time, still believed by most Jews and other Americans today, was that people were told to leave and were promised that when they came back after the war they would get not only their own property but Jewish property. That's not what really happened. So there was a feeling for the refugees and the fact that they had been forcibly expelled and they had a hard life, but it was still very early, even in 1961 – '62. People were still kind of in shock. Of course, the '67 War changed everything.

We went back to Connecticut in the summer of 1962 and we didn't return to Bir Zeit until '68. By then there was electricity and also the Israeli occupation. A very sad thing happened to my husband that summer, as if the '67 War wasn't bad enough. He had a younger brother who had just finished college in the United Sates and was driving around

the country. He was killed in an automobile accident in Louisiana. This would have been probably August of '67 and we had to go through the Israeli authorities to get his body back to Palestine, now under Israeli occupation. My mother took it upon herself to go to the Israeli Consulate to get the permission. She did that; she called everybody she knew who knew anybody to get this accomplished and we barely got the remains back before Yom Kippur – we were told if the remains arrived even one hour late, they would have refused to receive them –, they would have had to go back to the United States, and it was unsure if they would ever take them back again. So it was just absolutely horrible, horrible.

Q: Let's talk about, '61 you went back?

FARSAKH: In '61. I was married in August of 1961 and we arrived in Beirut in September.

Q: '62, after you went back to the States to Connecticut? That was '62.

FARSAKH: Yes. One of the courses I took on the modern Middle East at AUB – my professor's name was Dr. Nicola Ziadeh – had been my husband's professor in high school. I decided to write a final paper for his course on the British mandate in Palestine. That was my definitive moment. I started reading what really happened during the Mandate period – the brutal and unjust way that the British had treated the Palestinians, and that was a watershed for me.

Q: You are at AUB and you are writing this paper. What was the situation?

FARSAKH: The paper was about the British mandate in Palestine and I can't really remember the books that I used but I sure read a lot of them – British, American, Israeli and Arab. It was the longest paper that I wrote that year and I remember my husband, who types with one finger, typing out that paper for me as I was writing another one because as I told you, I had something like six term papers to write. It was hot as anything; we had no air conditioning in our apartment, and the summers in Beirut are hot and humid, disgusting. We had no car, we could not afford one. I was sitting in that apartment steaming and my husband was typing this 60 page paper with one finger. I got a B++ on it. Many years later, maybe 40 years later, I met Dr. Ziadeh and asked him why he couldn't give me an A - - instead of a B++?" And he said, "You should have told me!"

That was when I was first exposed to the history; it's not as though I had not read Israeli books before but I had imbibed the myths that the Palestinians left voluntarily, that the Israelis had a right to the land of Palestine. My husband had not really said very much to me about what he saw or what he went through. He really hadn't tried to, as my family would claim, brainwash me. I did meet a lot of Palestinians in Beirut but they didn't really talk about the past that much. So I have to say that researching this paper was what really turned me. It wasn't anybody telling me something; it was actually seeing in black and white, reading British sources, reading Arab sources, reading Israeli sources that

changed my mind. Actually, as I said before, I didn't really know much about it before then.

Q: With your husband, I asked you how Jewish was your family. How Muslim was your husband?

FARSAKH: My husband himself is an agnostic. He does not practice the religion at all. His father I think was a religious man, but he had been to the United States twice to work and had gone back. He was moderate, very tolerant and encouraged his two younger daughters to be educated. I never met him, he died before we met. However the family consensus was that he was very progressive.

My husband's mother was illiterate but very, smart, always listening to the news on the radio, always knew what was going on. She was religiously observant but also moderate and open minded. I was always amazed at how aware most Palestinians, even in the early '60s, were about world affairs, unlike most Americans.

The family now, I would say, are moderates except for one of my husband's sisters, his oldest sister, who really is nutty and obsessive about religion. I would say that all of them pray, all of them fast. When you are in that culture, it's expected so you do it. The men go to the mosque to pray on Friday. Most people are observant, but the leftists in the family – there are several – are not and I do not think the family is bothered by that..

The Christians in town are also observant, except the Protestants who are less so. The Catholics and the Orthodox are particularly observant.

Q: Did you get into Jerusalem and see the holy sites?

FARSAKH: Oh, yes. I saw them for the first time in 1961 and visit them every time we go back, so I cannot count the number of times I have been back since 1961. The only large gap was between '61 and '68. After that it has been every couple of years that we have been going back. We always visit the Holy places including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, not just the Muslim holy places. So Jerusalem is very much a part of our lives.

Q: Talking about '62, going back to Connecticut, what were you doing there?

FARSAKH: My husband got a job teaching mathematics at Central Connecticut State College in New Britain and when we got there, discovered that one of his colleagues was married to a woman who was descended from one of the founders of AUB. They were older but we were very close to them; they were very lovely people. That really smoothed our way into that place. My husband got along very well with the faculty there. We were happy. I had not, by the time we came back, completely finished my master's because I still had my thesis to write, so my husband would take care of my son every Saturday and I would go to the nearby Hartford Seminary Foundation, which had a big Islamic Studies department, and sit in the library from about nine in the morning until five in the afternoon when my husband would pick me up. And so I wrote my thesis.

I had a thesis advisor, a Syrian Kurdish guy with a PhD from Harvard who therefore thought he was the greatest thing ever and I sent him my first chapter, which was OK and then I finished three more chapters. I decided rather than trust the mail, I would give them to a friend of mine who was going to AUB. I can't remember who it was anymore, but this person put these chapters in the hands of this professor who took a year to read them and then sent them back via sea mail. Not surprisingly, they never arrived. Luckily, I had made carbon copies, and so I wrote a letter to the chairman of the department and told him what had happened. I told him that I had copies of the chapters that this man took so long to read and then proceeded to lose. I stated that I did not want this professor to be my advisor anymore. The chairman of the department was a Palestinian Christian who my husband had also had as a teacher in high school – a lot of his teachers in high school later became professors at the American University of Beirut. That's how good his high school was; the Rashidiya School in Jerusalem. The chairman agreed, to my pleasant surprise, to become my advisor himself.

So I finished the thesis; this would have been in probably late '64 or early '65, I had started studying in the fall of '60 at SAIS and in the fall of '61 at AUB. My thesis was accepted by the Arab Studies Department at AUB, but I still needed to defend it. I didn't want to travel back to Beirut for the oral defense, so I waited. Eventually, two of the professors wound up at Columbia University, where I went in the winter of 1965-66, defended my thesis, and got my master's degree in absentia in Beirut in June of 1966.

Then my husband encouraged me to go and get a teaching job. So I went to Central Connecticut State College, to the Political Science Department, and I got hired the day I applied, to teach in the night school. For six years I taught there. Twice I was hired full time when other professors went on sabbatical. The rest of the time I was part time. I also taught world history part time at the University of Hartford, and a course in international relations at Southern Connecticut State College, but that was a hassle and I gave it up after one semester. Then the Hartford Seminary Foundation hired me to teach Islamic history and Islamic law on the graduate level. I really didn't have enough of a background to be teaching on the graduate level, although I knew where to find the information and managed to get through it respectably.

Then I decided to go back to school for my doctorate and I began my studies in Islamic Studies at the Hartford Seminary Foundation in the fall of 1970. As a result of the '67 War, my husband had decided he didn't want to spend his whole life in the United States, he wanted to go back and teach in the Middle East. He applied for and got a job at the University of Petroleum and Minerals (UPM) in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia for the academic year 1971-72.

To go back a bit, 1967 was a really terrible time for us. We had a young Jewish neighbor in Connecticut, in New Britain, who used to babysit for us. My daughter was born in 1965 and so we now had two kids. I had my daughter while I was still working on my master's degree. This kid told us that his family was celebrating the victory of Israel in the '67 War, and several of my husband's colleagues at Central, who didn't know a lot

about what was going on were also celebrating. Yusif was just beside himself with the loss of his brother and the war. Also a couple of his sisters fled the West Bank across the Jordan River during the fighting, but luckily they got back quickly enough, before the Israelis started stopping people from returning to the West Bank. They were low on money and he was sending money to them, so it was a very tough time.

In 1970 he got the position at UPM. I was working on my doctorate, finishing my course work. So I kept the kids with me in Hartford and he went to Saudi Arabia for a year while I worked on my degree.

A very strange thing happened that year: my husband had an office mate at the University of Petroleum, a Pakistani with a British passport whose wife was Scottish. They had a six month old baby. Because he was my husband's office mate, they had invited him to their house and he saw the child. Then all of a sudden the couple reported that their six month old had disappeared. My husband and a colleague, also from Bir Zeit, wanted to help them and so the parents drafted a letter to King Faisal asking for his help and my husband and this colleague translated the letter into Arabic and sent it to the king. As a result of my husband's involvement in the case, his passport was taken by the Saudi police and he was prevented from leaving the country because he was a material witness. He was supposed to come home for Christmas. Two days before he was to come home, I got a call from some stranger from some airport saying that Yusif was not going to make it home because he was being held in Saudi Arabia due to his involvement in a kidnapping.

This friend of mine who I mentioned before, who lives in Paris, was working at the State Department in the Bureau of Oceans and Environmental Affairs. I asked her to please call the Saudi desk and find out what was going on. She called me back and said, "You can't imagine the excitement around the Saudi desk about this case. It's the first exciting thing that has happened to them in years." I got in contact with the Saudi desk and as it later turned out, two men whom I later knew, Fran Dickman, the country director and Brooks Wrampelmeier the deputy director, were heavily involved in this case. The upshot of it was that the baby had died, possibly through neglect, although nobody knew exactly how – but somebody saw them digging somewhere. The Saudi police went to that place and found the body of a child. It turned out that the parents had buried the child and in order to divert suspicion from themselves, and possibly also to get money from the Saudi government, alleged that it was a kidnapping.

My husband, before they found the body, was called in several times by the Saudi police, and interrogated for long periods of time. The consul in Dhahran most of the time went with him. Some other people involved in the case who had other passports were imprisoned even though they were just witnesses. My husband was never imprisoned and he thinks it was because of the American Consulate.

Q: I was vice consul in Dhahran in 1958 to '60.

FARSAKH: Well, I was consul in Dhahran later on.

Anyway, they wouldn't let him out of the country. His passport was held by the Saudi police. We finally decided we were going to join him in Saudi Arabia. I had taken and passed my comprehensive exams, had passed my language exams – French and Arabic – and had the prospectus for my dissertation accepted. My husband and I and the kids planned to meet on Cyprus and then proceed to Egypt for a short vacation and on to Saudi Arabia. I didn't know if he was going to show up in Cyprus. He didn't know if they were actually going to let him out of the airport in Dhahran. I remember vividly sitting at eight o'clock in the morning at an outdoor café at our hotel in Nicosia waiting and wondering whether he was going to come. Sure enough, he showed up on exactly on time. He had finally arrived and all was OK.

We went back to Dhahran, spent three years there, and my husband spent four. I was there with the kids from '72 to '75.

Q: I'd like to go back before we talk about Dhahran. You say in 1968 you went back to the West Bank.

FARSAKH: Yes.

Q: What were your impressions of this time on the West Bank?

FARSAKH: We didn't see so much of the Israelis. I don't remember really seeing them, except on the Allenby Bridge. We flew to Jordan and crossed the Bridge, and there the Israelis were nothing but lousy, and they got worse as the years went on in terms of the way they treated Palestinians. The Palestinians were out in the sun, waiting hours having all their luggage dumped while the foreigners waited in a shady area and were wafted through quickly, put on buses and sent on their way.

But aside from the experiences on the bridge, my memories of that year are kind of vague. When we were there in '61 under the Jordanians I remember that we had to go to a place that had been a British military installation in Ramallah in order to get an exit visa for my husband. He had to apply for an exit visa almost from the minute we arrived, because it took two weeks to get one. The Jordanians later took over that installation and when the Jordanians were defeated in '67, the Israelis grabbed it. It eventually became Arafat's headquarters but it goes back a long way to the British days. And of course, the Israelis almost totally destroyed it in Operation Defensive Shield in April, 2002.

Q: Your husband's family and all, how were they responding? We are talking about '68.

FARSAKH: I think people were still kind of in shock at that point. We were there for just a couple of weeks. The kids' memories are probably more vivid than mine. I really don't remember that year all that well, really. What impressed me most was that we had gotten electricity, but that was not because of the Israelis. It had been installed by the Jordanians before the '67 War.

Q: OK, let's go on to Dhahran. You were in Dhahran for what, three years?

FARSAKH: Three years. My husband was there from ’71 to ’75 and I was there from ’72 to ’75 with the children.

Q: What was Dhahran like then?

FARSAKH: Well, we were at a compound, the university compound. It was located between the consulate and Aramco.

Q: In my day that was desert.

FARSAKH: Well, it was desert. The first year we were in a prefabricated house but then they built regular permanent concrete houses. The second and third year we were in a regular villa in a new compound with a big beautiful pool that the kids just loved and there were a lot of community activities. I remember that Halloween was the biggest holiday of the year. The Saudis didn’t want us to celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving wasn’t something that kids especially enjoyed much, so at Halloween there was a parade at the school, a parade in the compound. A constant celebration, a three day celebration of Halloween. Yusif enjoyed his time at UPM, and his colleagues, once he got over this kidnapping incident. There was a very impressive community of Arabs from different parts of the Arab world. I also remember Americans and some other nationalities.

Because my husband is Palestinian we mostly socialized with other Arabs and we had friends who were Syrian, Egyptian, Palestinian, Jordanian, and Moroccan. As a matter of fact, we are invited to a wedding next week by a Palestinian family who was with us then, and I expect we are going to see others who were there at the time, whom we haven’t seen since the mid-‘70s.

Q: Your children were how old at that point?

FARSAKH: In ’72 my son was ten and my daughter was seven.

Q: So was there an international school?

FARSAKH: There was a school on the grounds of the consulate, called the Dhahran Academy. There was also an Aramco school but that was only for Aramco kids. The kids went to the Dhahran Academy and it was a very good school. The Academy wouldn’t accept kids who didn’t have a western passport, so there was a little school on the campus. While I was working on my doctoral dissertation I also wanted to work so I got a job in this little school on the campus. There were three teachers; the “headmistress” was British, the other teacher who taught Arabic was Egyptian and me. We became very good friends. We had about six or eight kids. The kids were Saudis and Palestinians, and some of them we still see occasionally. One of them is being married next week. We enjoyed it. I had never taught on that level before but it was something to do with a small salary. I also started teaching Arabic and Islamic culture to the Western faculty wives.

UPM didn't approve of me using the university buildings because there weren't any women students and there weren't supposed to be any women at all in any of the buildings. We always had to move around and find places to meet, sometimes in homes.

Q: Tell me, Saudi Arabia in the '70s being a woman, how did you find this?

FARSAKH: Well, there was a lot of segregation on the campus of the university. Among the faculty we mixed very freely in the compound. The nearby town of Al-Khobar by the '70s was not a bad place for shopping and we'd have to go in there for just about everything. When we first arrived, they had crummy little grocery stores. There was just one western grocery store and I can remember you'd pick up the cereal and it had expired a year before. If you wanted to buy vanilla, it was from under the counter because it had alcohol in it. It was sort of bizarre. I remember by the time I left the consulate in 1981, we had a Safeway. We had by then a variety of western, top notch facilities. At the beginning, it was kind of primitive and of course, we weren't allowed to use Aramco medical facilities. My son developed an adenoid problem so we had to go to a hospital in Al-Khobar to a Pakistani doctor who removed his adenoids. The doctor was fine, but the hospital wasn't so great. The nursing care was very much less than great but he was only there overnight. It turned out OK. We were partly in the university but partly also on the local economy.

Q: Could you drive?

FARSAKH: No. The only women who could drive were the women in Aramco who were driving inside the Aramco compound. Otherwise, no women were driving.

Q: My wife, this was in the '50s, she could drive. The consul general got the X gave the women of our consulate general gave licenses to the women to drive to the airport and to Aramco. Otherwise, on the plea that otherwise men were being made to do women's work by chauffeuring.

FARSAKH: Well, there were plenty of men who did women's work in my day –such as houseboys – but no. By the time I got there, no. I guess women could drive inside the consulate compound and they could drive inside the Aramco compound. I did not notice any women driving inside the UPM compound. I don't think so. UPM were stricter because it was a Saudi government institution.

Q: Did you have much contact with the American Consulate General?

FARSAKH: Very little, no, except when I heard the Foreign Service exam was being given there in December of '74 and I decided on a whim to take it and I passed.

Q: What was the thought at that time? Was this just to see how you'd do or were you thinking about the Foreign Service, really?

FARSAKH: I wanted to see how I would do, because I didn't know that the rules had changed regarding married women.

Q: It had just changed.

FARSAKH: It had just changed a year or two before. I didn't know that. When I passed I got a letter from somebody named Miss Georgianna Young who was the head of the Women's Action Organization of the Foreign Service and it was a really great, welcoming letter which explained that things had changed. My husband encouraged me to pursue it and we returned to the States in 1975 in the summer. I had my oral exam in Rosslyn at FSI. I didn't think I would pass the security check. My husband had been a U.S. citizen since 1966 but I thought that with a Palestinian husband, I was never going to get in – but I did!

But something happened before we left Dhahran that was quite interesting. While I was at the Hartford Seminary, the education reporter for the New York Times, contacted the Seminary because he wanted to write an article about education in Saudi Arabia. The head of the Islamic Studies, who had been my professor and whom I had known quite well, suggested that if he were going to Dhahran, "why don't you look up my student?" So he called us up and we invited him to stay with us. We met him at the airport. He wanted to go to Friday prayers – my husband told him that he did not attend Friday prayers, but would find somebody who could take him. So my husband found this very nice Pakistani guy who actually was helpful to me with my dissertation at the time, took him to the mosque. My husband warned him before he left, "Whatever you do, don't take any pictures and don't take any pictures in the courtyard either because that's considered a part of the mosque." This guy, Edward Fiske, was tall and blond and stuck out like a sore thumb. To make a long story short, he started taking pictures in the courtyard. The police of course, were right there, they swept him up and took him to the police station.

We were sitting at home and the phone rang – it was the dean of the university saying, "Your guest is with the police." The police had emptied out the contents of his camera and then let him go. He was there by the way, under the auspices of the ministry of information. He had been invited by the ministry and he was going to go to Riyadh next; they were going to take him around. But he went off the reservation in Dhahran.

Things quieted down for a while, but then Fiske wrote an article about Saudi education and a very unflattering article about Saudi Arabia in general – suddenly my husband got a call asking him to come to the dean's office and was told that his contract would not be renewed and that in fact, he would have to leave Saudi Arabia right away. We were all about to be expelled from the country.

The chairman of the department who was Saudi, not greatly respected but being Saudi was what counted; he told the university that he could not find a replacement for my husband so quickly and thus could not function without my husband. He had no way of covering the classes, so the administration agreed that he could finish the semester. Then the department wanted him to finish out the year and leave when his contract really

expired. They therefore suggested that he go to Riyadh and talk to the minister of interior. So Yusif went to see Prince Nayef, who remains the minister of interior, 40 plus years later, to his majlis or audience, and gave him a note about the situation. Prince Nayef said he would "look into it." Finally Yusif was allowed to finish out the contract and we left in the summer of 1975.

Q: We'll pick this up in 1975. You've left Saudi Arabia. By the way, what sort of impression did you have of Saudi Arabia? I mean this is sort of the center of the Islamic world, in a way.

FARSAKH: Well, first of all, I have to say that I got to Mecca and Medina, which is unusual for a non-Muslim Westerner. The reason I got there was because I am a dark haired female and I was with a Muslim male, so they didn't notice me.

Q: You didn't ask, "Could you tell me where the Jewish section is?"

FARSAKH: I never really liked the country. I served twice there in the Foreign Service; once in Dhahran and once in Jeddah and I always say, "If you have had to be in Saudi Arabia, Jeddah is really not bad." Many of the people with whom I served are still good friends. We had a wonderful group of people. My husband always reminds me that I shouldn't bad-mouth the Kingdom, as it started me on my Foreign Service career. I had good assignments and worked for good people which was true. Dick Murphy was my ambassador in Jeddah. I worked with wonderful colleagues. I didn't love the country, but I wasn't treated badly either.

Q: We'll pick this up in 1975, you'd left Saudi Arabia. We are talking about when you left Saudi Arabia th4e first time but you wanted to say something Medina and Mecca.

FARSAKH: The year before we left, we drove from Dhahran to Jeddah to Mecca and of course, I am not a Muslim; my husband is nominally Muslim. We were with our kids who were then "ten-ish" and "seven-ish", I don't remember exactly when we got to the check point where they tell the people who are non-Muslims to go on another road. They asked my husband if he was Muslim and he said, "Yes". That was all that counted, as far as they were concerned. I suppose if I had been blonde and blue-eyed maybe they would have asked more questions, but they didn't and so we sailed through to Mecca.

Q: Were you wearing?

FARSAKH: No, I was wearing a "thobe" the traditional Saudi male garment but in a feminine material, which was then fashionable among foreign women. We at UPM used to go into town from the university and pick out material which a tailor then made up for us. That's what I was wearing. I maybe had a scarf on my head.

Q: Something to cover the hair.

FARSAKH: Yes, but more for the heat than anything else. We got to the mosque, the Grand Mosque and we came to this huge plaza with the Kaaba (the most holy place in Islam) in the middle and the floors were marble. Nowadays they have water pipes with cool water running under the marble but at that time they didn't have that. It was April and it was about noon and when we put our feet down on the marble, it was blazing hot. My husband and my son had socks on but my daughter and I did not, so the guide who was going to take us around said, "It's OK. Your daughter and you can wear your shoes." So we circumambulated the Kaaba seven times as is the tradition. It wasn't very crowded, strangely enough. I think most of the people going around seemed to be African; everybody was staring at my daughter and me because we were wearing our shoes. After we finished, we left and we went into the souk area – -it was during prayer time. We didn't want to pray so we hid in the souk until prayer time was over.

Q: Souq or souk which is the market area.

FARSAKH: We hid in an alley in the market area so that the religious police wouldn't find us and cart us off to the mosque, or worse, if they found out there was a non-Muslim in Mecca. Anyway, we managed to avoid that.

On the same trip, we went to Medina and we got to the Prophet's Mosque. I was wearing the same type of outfit, and the man who was guarding at the door must have thought we were suspicious looking, so he ordered us to get down on the floor and pray. Of course, I had never prayed in a Muslim fashion in my entire life. My husband hadn't prayed in years and years but of course, he knew how, so I just placed myself right next to him and out of the corner of my eye, I copied everything he did – so we passed the test! We got to see the Prophet's Tomb and the tombs of the Companions of the Prophet.

It was highly unusual for someone like me to have seen Mecca and Medina even to the present. But I actually did.

Q: You left Saudi Arabia this first time when?

FARSAKH: We left I think it was probably June or July of '75 and we had a vacation in Morocco for a week or ten days and then we came back to the States. That's when I took my oral exam.

Q: How did you find the oral exam?

FARSAKH: It sounds easy in retrospect, compared to what people go through nowadays. I had been in Saudi Arabia for three years; we didn't have access to newspapers except for the Saudi English newspapers, The Arab News, and Saudi Gazette, which were not that bad. The first thing they asked me when I got in was, "It seems as though your whole life experience has been the Middle East and you have signed on to become worldwide available. Are you really worldwide available?" And I said, "Well, of course I am. Just because I specialized in the Middle East doesn't mean I would not go anywhere else." And then I missed a couple of questions having to do with current events in the United

States and I said, "Well, you know, you have to excuse me. I have been in Saudi Arabia. I haven't been able to read the international press and all that so I am really not up on some of the things you are asking me about." But as it I remember it, it was about maybe two hours long and there were people sitting around in a semi-circle, maybe six or eight of them. One of them was a woman and their questions were not so much about myself but what I thought about various issues and so on. It was not that difficult as I remember it.

Afterwards, I sat out in another room with a few other people for a while and someone came out and told me I had passed. I was sent to an office to start filling out papers for the security clearance and the medical exam.

Q: How long was it between the time you passed the exam?

FARSAKH: It was just about a year. I think commonly it takes that long anyway, but the reason it took a whole year for me was that, I had spent the year after I got married in Beirut at the American University with my husband who was teaching there, and I was doing a master's degree. The civil war in Lebanon broke out in 1975, and apparently, one of the first things that happened was that some of the police stations or wherever they kept records of people got destroyed, and so the security people had a hard time substantiating what I had said about my time in Beirut.

Q: So you came in in?

FARSAKH: In '76. We were the first class after the bicentennial.

Q: What was your A-100, your basic officer's course? How big was it and how would you describe the composition of it?

FARSAKH: Well, I thought I was going to be the oldest one in the class because by then I was 36, but I wasn't. There was a woman there who participated in the Mustang Program. She was a secretary and she was about forty. Altogether there were only four women and there were about twenty nine or thirty in the class. As a matter of fact, I just met one of the women twice in the last week, after just coming back from overseas and not having seen her for a long time. She is going to be a consular inspector in OIG, and I had done an inspection over the summer for OIG so I was in those offices and that's where I saw her.

So there were four women; the Mustang lady, the two younger women and myself.

Q: Did you get a feel for the class? I mean, this was sort of the early post-Vietnam. How would you describe them? Were they sort of cynical or very eager or what?

FARSAKH: Actually, I have to say I never got really friendly with any of them. I didn't bond with them the way some people do and maybe it was because I was already married and had kids. I didn't get a sense that we spent that much time talking about Vietnam. I had been in Saudi Arabia when the helicopters flew out of the embassy in Saigon. I

remember afterwards, after I joined the Foreign Service, being very impressed with the numbers of people who had served in Vietnam and I was interested in hearing about their experiences. I don't really remember discussions about that subject in the A-100 class.

Q: They do ask where you want to go and what you want to do. For you, what was?

FARSAKH: My husband had said to me, "If you stay in the Middle East, I'll go with you but if you don't, I won't." So we sort of had a deal. As it turned out, he came with me to my first post and he was with me at my last post, Embassy Tunis, and in between we commuted because he found a job at Aramco that he liked, and he decided that he didn't want to travel around looking for a new job every time I was transferred. We commuted before it became fashionable to commute.

For my first tour, I wanted to be in Washington and they let me do it, since I had just come back from overseas. I had been overseas for three years, we had young kids and we had just put them in school. I asked for an assignment in the Department and I wound up in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which toward the end of my tour moved over to USIA so I was on detail to USIA for the last three months. I had a good job at that time I was a "5", I guess which would be a "3" nowadays.

Q: About the equivalent of a captain in the army.

FARSAKH: Because I had a master's degree they gave me a one grade higher. They put me in a job that was two grades above my real grade so I had a lot of responsibility. I was the program officer for the entire Arabian Peninsula and I also grabbed the West Bank because I was interested in it. Nobody wanted to fight me for that. I was involved in education and cultural programming, the Fulbright programming, the exchanges and international visitor programs.

Q: This was '76 to '78?

FARSAKH: Yes.

Q: For Saudi Arabia, for example, you have this peculiar situation in Saudi Arabia. I don't know if it was pertinent then but where the Saudis, an awful lot of them, they get education but basically don't work very much.

FARSAKH: Well, as far as the educational exchanges with the Saudis were concerned, the Saudi government paid for most of the students and there were a huge number of Saudi students in the United States at that time. As a matter of fact, they had an office in Washington at the embassy, but they also had a big embassy branch office in Houston where I went once to talk with the officials about exchanges.

Q: What was your impression of the Saudis who came to the United States? Were they serious, were they, Saudi government or were we getting giving the money's worth for what they were doing?

FARSAKH: I think it is hard to generalize. I think having served in Saudi Arabia and doing two tours there, I have an idea of what they are like. Certainly one gets the impression that most of them are not exactly hard working people. I believe that the women – there were not very many women studying, but those who had husbands or fathers in the States were allowed to go – the women generally worked harder; that was because they had something to gain from educational achievement whereas the men knew they were going to be taken care of, whatever they did or didn't do.

I don't really remember having much contact with Saudi students when I was in ECA and I don't think that there was a Fulbright office in Saudi Arabia at the time.

I took my first official trip when I was in that job; in '77 or '78 – I went to every country on the Arabian Peninsula and also the West Bank; I visited USIS posts – the public affairs officers and their operations and the educational exchange offices, and I met with officials who dealt with exchanges. It was a wonderful trip.

Another thing I was responsible for in that office was the overseas visitor program – IVP. Instead of individual visits, there were also group visits around specific subject areas. There was an Arab world group of educators that was going to travel around the country and then get together for a conference on education at the end. I volunteered to go as an escort, and I accompanied a very lovely Bahraini woman around the United States on that education program.

Q: Did you see any difference between say the exchange visitors, part of the visitors program from the Gulf States including Kuwait than with the Saudis or not?

FARSAKH: I think the "Gulfies" have more in common with each other than differences regarding their attitude toward educational work and work in general. I think you see the difference between them and the Levantines or the North Africans – people who don't have the so-called advantages that the Gulf people really do have. The Gulfies generally do not work hard or take their professions seriously, with the notable exception of the women. I think you would find some exceptions in the Gulf but not very many.

Q: I would imagine those of the West Bank would be a much more serious group, wouldn't they?

FARSAKH: Oh, yes. The West Bank people are very serious. Of course, the situation over the years has gotten worse and worse, and education is still the most important thing that families can give their children.

Q: Were there any of the people you were dealing with, was there any sort of concentration was it mostly in science or was it pretty across the board?

FARSAKH: To tell you the truth, I don't really recall. I think mostly I participated in the visitors' programs and the embassy strategic plans. Embassies at the time had to submit a

plan every year to USIA regarding all the things that they planned to do for the year; the number of exchanges, the number of students and the number of cultural programs, lectures, concerts. And we worked very closely with the embassies on those plans. We also attended conferences and meetings but in terms of actual contacts with students, I don't recall that as being very much a part of that job. As I said, I met exchange visitors, plenty of those, because they all came to Washington and we would always meet the visitors from our countries.

Q: Did you have much contact with the geographic desks at all?

FARSAKH: Yes, I did with the desks of the countries that I dealt with, the Arabian Peninsula office and the Palestinian office which at the time was in the Jordan, Syria, Iraq desk.

Q: What was the bureau you were working with?

FARSAKH: The Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. We had good assistant secretaries. I had a great office and we dealt with the whole Middle East including South Asia, which was then part of NEA at that time, so we had India, Afghanistan, Pakistan and also Iran. It was a very busy office, everybody was very engaged and we worked well together.

Q: Looking back on this after a bit of time, I really think our exchange program was probably one of the most important arrows in our foreign policy quiver.

FARSAKH: I think Foreign Service people would generally agree with that. You cannot think of a better way to have people learn about the United States and about our values – even Saudi Arabia where we did not have formal exchange programs with the U.S. government. These Saudi exchange students, for example, when they would go back home they would have this affinity for the United States. They were big football fans and so they would get together and watch football games and sometimes the embassy would sponsor a showing. When there were U.S. elections, USIS would open their centers and we would watch all night long on television and served refreshments, so people became friendly with each other through these events. They could network also. It was a great way for the official Americans to have local contacts because naturally, the people who had studied in the United States were the people who could speak your language, understand your culture, and you could learn from them. In many ways it was a very positive thing.

Q: Your kids are how old now when you were in Saudi that time?

FARSAKH: My son would have been 14 and my daughter would have been 11 when I joined the Foreign Service.

Q: How did they find coming here? This often I know, knowing my own kids, coming to the United States and going to school is often a real shocker.

FARSAKH: My son had started school in the States. He had finished second grade and my daughter completed kindergarten when we left. They had three years in Dhahran at the Dhahran Academy, an American school on the grounds of the consulate and then after UPM, they came back to the States. My son went into junior high and my daughter into elementary school. My son is the more studious one and seemed to have an easier time. My daughter doesn't do well with authority figures. She's very strong-willed and she had a harder time. When we went back to Saudi Arabia for my first overseas tour at the end of 1978, there were still no high schools for foreigners in Saudi Arabia, so my son had one year of high school in Bethesda and then had to go to boarding school. My daughter came with me and did her eighth grade in Saudi. She loved Saudi Arabia when she was little, but when she went back at an older age, she hated it and she didn't want to stay there, so she went to boarding school beginning in tenth grade.

Q: Where did they go to boarding school?

FARSAKH: My son went to Andover for two years. My daughter had three years of boarding school. She spent two years at a Quaker school in Pennsylvania, but they were not very compassionate to her as a kid whose parents were far away overseas, and she was so unhappy that we switched her for her senior year to a place called the Solebury School which was nearby, a much smaller school and much nicer and she liked it there.

Q: Your first job overseas, you went back?

FARSAKH: I was off cycle. I was assigned in the fall of '78 but reported to Dhahran in December. I had Arabic brush up training and they had to give me the consular course after they assigned me. When I finished the A-100 course, it was already September – there were only two jobs open in the Near East and that was, naturally where I wanted to go. They were amenable to that. One of them was GSO in Damascus and I couldn't see myself being a GSO, even though I would have much rather gone to Damascus. The only other opening was as head of the consular section in Dhahran. My husband and I discussed it. We decided that there was a school for our daughter there, there were employment opportunities for him and so that would be a good place to go. So that's how I wound up in Dhahran again.

Q: My third job in the Foreign Service was being a consular officer in Dhahran. It was obviously a smaller operation. It was a one man show. I was there from '58 to '60.

FARSAKH: I got there in December of '78 and because I was off cycle, I extended so I came out in the summer of '81. I was there for two and a half years. I was head of the consular section.

Q: Will you talk about Dhahran at the time and how you saw it and its kind of role in Saudi Arabia at the time?

FARSAKH: Well, of course for the principal officer and the deputy, it was Aramco all the time. Because I was also a reporting officer, the consul general encouraged me to do political reporting and I did do some, which helped me get my next job. Consular work was very, very busy because we had a lot of American citizens at Aramco and in the Eastern Province. – we had about 40 to 50,000 American citizens living there. The Eastern province went all the way up to the Kuwaiti border and all the way down to Qatar. We had a tremendous non-immigrant visa traffic; one of the reasons was that at the time the embassy was in Jeddah, and Riyadh had only a small liaison office. They did not do visas in Riyadh so everybody who was in the western part of the country went to Jeddah and everybody who was in the eastern part came to us. Also, Riyadh is closer to Dhahran than it is to Jeddah we had most of the applicants from Riyadh. We had both the Saudis and the third country nationals who all came for non-immigrant visas so it was very busy.

American Citizen Services were very busy too, because we had destitutes, we had people who were mentally not all there, but mostly we had a lot of people in prison, so we had to do a lot of prison visiting.

Q: First destitute; in a way I find it hard to think of how since you had to have a sponsor to get to Saudi Arabia. How did you have destitutes?

FARSAKH: I had a young man, I don't know how he got in but he wound up at the consulate one day with absolutely no money. He was in his 20s. We put him up at some cheap hotel in Al-Khobar and managed to get hold of his family in the U.S. Eventually he left after about a week or two. He dedicated and wrote a poem to me and left it on my desk just before he left!

We also had a guy who was with a company and was let go but he didn't leave. He moved around the country, eating out of garbage cans, imagining that the FBI was following him, and he was really out there. We had him for quite a while. The company luckily continued to support him but we had to get him out of the country, and work with the Saudis to do that. It was pretty painful. He was screaming curses at us at the airport as he was leaving!

Q: Did you have problems with people leaving the country with people getting the equivalent of sort of a visa to leave the country? Was this a problem?

FARSAKH: No, because the companies secured the exit visas, but what I did have were problems with American women married to Saudis. There was one case that was particularly awful: an American woman married to a guy who was half Palestinian, half Saudi who taught at the University of Petroleum which was our neighbor. She came to the consulate and said he was abusing her and I probably did things that were not exactly authorized. I kept her Bible in my safe along with her credit cards and cash. One day she came and said that the abuse was getting to be too much. Could I find a place for her to stay? I went to the consul general and he approved, actually letting her stay on the compound. She stayed for a few days and then her husband came and we had a sort of

reconciliation session, with the Consul General present. But she still wanted to leave the country and she convinced her husband to take her and the kids – who were quite small, about two and three – to a conference in Kuwait that he was attending. He agreed to take them to Kuwait. While he was at the conference, she went to the American Embassy there – I had alerted the embassy that she might show up. They gave her and the kids new passports and the consular officer took them to the airport. The Kuwaiti passport control let them out, which the Kuwaiti government very soon regretted because the husband put up a big stink, and then the Saudis government did too. There was a debate about the matter in the Kuwaiti parliament soon afterward, and at first, the Kuwaiti government wanted to throw out the whole embassy. However, in the end, only the consular officer got "PNGed" as a consequence.

The woman and the kids went back to the States under a different identity. They went to a different state from where they had lived before. She started working. However, the husband hired a private detective and found out where they were. One evening, the private detective – or the husband – rang the doorbell. The kids went downstairs to answer it and got scooped up. They were quickly taken to Canada and put on a plane to Saudi Arabia.

Several years later I was in Riyadh on TDY and I saw this woman who looked familiar. She was wearing an abaya and it turned out to be the mother. She had gotten permission from the Amir of the Eastern Province to go back and see her kids. She traveled to the Eastern Province, but the husband used his connections and had her arrested at the border. She was put in jail and went on a hunger strike. The Amir or the central government finally kicked her out. I presume that she didn't get to see her kids again until they were maybe 18, when they – or at least the boy – could leave the Kingdom or sponsor a visit by her.. She was prohibited from seeing her kids for many years. It was a long, drawn out, horrible, horrible case and I was the one who got involved in it at the beginning. I read something in a magazine in the U.S. at some point years later that a movie was going to be made about this case, but thank goodness it never happened!

Q: Did you have many of these cases?

FARSAKH: None as bad as this one.

I had an American woman married to an American. She came to the consulate and alleged that he was beating her up. She showed me welts on her body and I wrote a report; I helped her get out. The husband then showed up and he was furious. We helped her get out, although we were probably skirting the bounds of legality.

There were several interesting prison incidents also.

Q: What were they?

FARSAKH: There was a case of a young boy who was the son of someone who was pretty high up in an American company, it could have been Northrop. We had Northrop,

FLUOR, Bechtel, we had all these giant American companies there. This kid was arrested for drugs and he got flogged. That was the first time that an American had ever been sentenced to flogging, in the Eastern Province. Usually the Americans just got deported them but after this initial flogging case, I had a few other subsequent cases of people who got flogged for liquor or drug offenses.

Q: Well, flogging, did that take care of it?

FARSAKH: No, they had jail time also and then they were deported.

Q: How did you find the jails?

FARSAKH: I never went into a cell. They always brought the American prisoners into the office of the prison commander and I would talk to them there. There was a large prison in Dammam (the capital of the Eastern Province) called Dammam Central and when I walked in, I could see a round hallway area with the cells around it. The office of the commander was down that hallway, so you could see the prisoners as you passed by. They would stare through the bars at me and I could determine the international nature of the prisoners – Thais and Filipinos and Egyptians and Ethiopians, Indians, Pakistanis, Yemenis, the entire third country national workforce, all represented in these prisons.

Q: Did the companies or the American Consulate take care of sort of providing food or items of, you know, toothpaste or?

FARSAKH: Some were better than others. We would usually provide reading material. Aramco was the best, they were the best set up to take care of their prisoners – and they would visit them and make sure that the families, the wives, could visit. As for the other companies, some of them –not all – would visit and would help out and mostly they did pay their salaries or at least their expenses, and they paid the tickets out when they got deported.

If anybody died in the Kingdom, the companies took care of all the formalities. So American citizen deaths were not so hard in Saudi Arabia because the companies took care of all the paperwork and transportation.

Q: How about automobile accidents? When I was there, they used to, if there was an automobile accident, everybody got arrested.

FARSAKH: I don't remember being involved in automobile accidents there, again, the companies took care of such incidents. I remember having some involvement, doing consular work in Egypt several years later, being involved there but I don't recall that sort of thing in Saudi.

Q: How did you find, was there a problem with visas, immigrant and non immigrant?

FARSAKH: The immigrant visas were pretty straightforward except for the Yemenis, because they had to have blood tests in order to determine paternity. They would commonly claim that they were the son of somebody and you never knew whether they really were. There was a certain part of Yemen – Ibb Province – where this type of deception was particularly prevalent.

Q: You were dealing with the children of the people I dealt with.

FARSAKH: Yes, with the Yemenis. Obviously, the Saudis were not involved in immigrant visas. There were Palestinians, Syrians, Egyptians, a lot of Vietnamese – a lot of refugees from the Vietnam War. A lot of American men, probably veterans of the war, who worked in the oil rigs and married women who were 30 years younger than they were. On the day women got their U.S. citizenship, they would come and file petitions for their nine siblings and their families. We were quite busy with immigrant visas.

Q: How big was the consular section?

FARSAKH: I usually had British ladies in the secretarial position – and they were largely responsible for much of the immigrant visa paperwork, I became friendly with several of them. We had one Saudi, Abdul Rahman who had worked for the consulate for many years and was a valued employee for a long time. However, he liked to drink, and he was allowed to live on the compound. I'm not sure how we got away with that because he was not supposed to, and he also had maneuvered to obtain a liquor supply. He got progressively lazier and more spoiled while I was there; he would take long vacations and not bother coming back when he was supposed to. When he was supposed to be working, he would come in late and leave early. So, on one of his vacations I had to put him on leave without pay, because I felt it was a bad thing to give Saudis special treatment when other people were put on leave without pay, and also reinforcing bad Saudi work habits. After that he was never really that nice to me again, not surprisingly.

We also had a young kid who had Saudi nationality but was of Bahraini origin. For several years he was a good worker in the consular section; he was also a lot of fun. He was very westernized and liked disco, which was very popular at the time. He was very personable and we all got along well with him. We had a couple of Pakistani men who were extremely nice and were very hard, dedicated workers. Those are the consular employees that I recall now.

Q: Did you have a vice consul too?

FARSAKH: Yes. For the first few months I was the vice consul, because I had an overlap with the officer who was the head of the section. When he left after about three months, I became the consul, the chief of section. It was just a one officer section when I arrived, but a second position was put in soon after because the workload had become so much heavier with the growth of the NIV and IV load, prison visits, growth in the American citizen community. Yes, I had two successive vice consuls when I was there.

Q: Who was the consul general?

FARSAKH: Ralph Lindstrom for the first year and a half, and then Maurice Elam for the second year.

Q: Did you have any feel for the Saudi authorities that you dealt with?

FARSAKH: I was only the second woman to serve as a consular officer in Saudi Arabia; the first one had been there many years ago and had failed badly. The consul general who was there when I was assigned, didn't want me – he didn't want a woman and he tried through phone calls to break my assignment. The ambassador, Ambassador John West, the former governor of South Carolina, supported me strongly, and as it turned out this consul general and his wife behaved so badly that the Department pulled them out. I was later told by NEA personnel that if he had still been there, they never would have sent me. Ralph Lindstrom welcomed me and treated me wonderfully. I loved the man dearly. He was a wonderful boss.

Q: Did the consul general that was before your time behave badly?

FARSAKH: Yes, he did. I know there was something going on with the Marines who got on very badly with him. One Marine guard actually committed suicide on duty during the night – his blood was found all over the duty book. It was rumored that he was having a thing with the consul general's daughter. I think what made them leave was an incident at a party; the consul general's wife threw a drink in the face of one of the FSNs. His name was Bushnell, Bob Bushnell, and I don't know all the particulars because people talked about it in bits and pieces when I got there – I never got the full story. I know that he was pulled out for bad behavior and that there were real problems with the Marines.

The contact I most enjoyed was the Amir of Eastern Province.

Q: Who was that?

FARSAKH: It was Abdel Muhsin bin Jiluwi.

Q: A bin Jiluwi was one of the original twelve who conquered the fort in Riyadh with King Abdel Aziz.

FARSAKH: That's right –A Bin Jiluwi was one of the small group that accompanied and fought with King Abdel Aziz at the Masmak Fort in Riyadh – the key battle in the takeover of Saudi Arabia by the Al-Saud. That's why the Bin Jiluwi clan got the Eastern Province – as a reward. It belonged to them until Bin Jiluwi was eventually eased out as an old man, and King Fahd's son Muhammad became the governor as a fairly young man. He remained there for a long time. I am not sure who is there now.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Amir and his office?

FARSAKH: He was very cordial to me. I would go into the room that was his majlis or audience chamber; it wasn't his regularly-scheduled majlis which was attended only by men. I would be escorted in by his chef de cabinet and Abdel Muhsin would sit with me and converse. He was fascinated by the U.S. space program! The fact that I could speak Arabic made all the difference. Some people thought I would have a hard time in that assignment, but I actually think I had an easier time than most of my male predecessors who didn't speak Arabic. The Amir – and many other Saudis – were so delighted that I could talk to them directly that they were very, very gracious to me. The Amir invited me to lunch with him several times. Needless to say, I was the only woman at the table; there were usually eight to ten men there.

The only thing I couldn't attend was when the male officers in the consulate went to pay a call on the Amir on the two main Muslim holidays. The meal was eaten out of a large communal dish, and it was all men who gathered around a big plate. I was told that that would not be acceptable for me to go.

Q: You didn't miss anything.

FARSAKH: No. I'm sure the way they described the food, I was kind of glad that I didn't have to.

Q: A big sheep which is kind of cool by the time it got there.

FARSAKH: Yes, from what I heard, it was congealed fat, with the eyes staring out at you and all that good stuff. So that was probably the only thing I really missed out on, but the fact that the Amir and I got along very well was definitely satisfying. I paid a call on his wife once too. I also got on very well with the Amir of Al-Hasa, a large oasis large province to the south of the Eastern Province.. When I went to Al-Hasa occasionally, I would call on him and he was very gracious to me, again, I think, because I could converse in Arabic. The Saudis were actually extremely nice to me when I was in Dhahran.

Q: How did you find that other peculiar tribe, the American "Aramco-ans"?

FARSAKH: My husband started working with them and so we had friends. To tell you the truth, for the most part, they were Palestinians, my husband being Palestinian. We had some American friends too, but the Palestinians were our main social contact there. Of course, I had very close relations with the American government relations people, who were the ones who took care of the Americans in trouble. I did not have substantive reporting relationships like those with the economics officer (who was the deputy principal officer) and the consul general. I wasn't doing reporting on Aramco. Consulate staff were able to use some of their facilities.

Q: Did you find in the Eastern Province, were the Shias, they were around?

FARSAKH: Yes they were. At the airbase at Dhahran, the Mission Inn dining hall, all the wait staff were Shi, and Muhammad al -Amine who ran the Mission Inn was a Lebanese Shiite. The young man at the consulate who liked disco dancing was Shiite and my husband was working with a young Shiite woman, so we did know some. Our time there in November of 1979, was probably the most exciting period of my time in Dhahran because that was when our ambassador to Afghanistan was assassinated, the Mecca mosque siege was underway, there were Shia riots in Qatif, the American Embassy in Tehran was seized – this all happened around the same time.

Q: How did this affect you? First, the takeover of Mecca.

FARSAKH: Well, we started hearing about it right away from the Embassy in Jeddah. You know, the Saudis didn't report it at all; it only leaked out gradually. The Saudis have always had an information policy – if you could call it a policy – of suppressing everything important. Even the world media didn't know about it for several days, but the embassy was getting inklings. There was a guy in the embassy, in the consular section, who made it known that he had his bags packed and he was ready to go at any moment – not very good for morale!

As it turned out, every post in the Arabian Peninsula was evacuated except for Saudi Arabia, because the Department was afraid that if we were ordered to go, Aramco would start sending its people out, and the U.S. didn't want the oil production to be affected. So we were hostages to fortune. Even though there were riots in Qatif nearby, and the siege of the Mecca Mosque was ongoing in the country where we were, the staff and dependents in Kuwait and the UAE, even in Oman, were evacuated and we were stuck at post.

Q: Well, this happened ten years later during the Gulf War. What it comes down to if you pull the Americans out of Eastern Province, the oil fields shut down. And you know, this is vital so

FARSAKH: We had the National Guard living on our compound. The Saudi government sent a National Guard contingent and they were with us for about three weeks. My husband had to act as the interpreter between the commander and the consul general. I think if they hadn't left when they did, we would have died of disease due to their poor sanitary habits. They also had big guns pointing out at the road and they were just all over the place. It was very unpleasant but this was our protection while all these events were going on.

Q: What caused the riots in Qatif?

FARSAKH: I'm not sure what started them but of course the first thing the government did was send in the National Guard, which is made up of Sunni Wahhabi bedouins who regard Shia as heretics or worse. When the demonstrations broke out, the National Guard fired on them and killed a few dozen. Nobody will ever know how many; the whole Shia region was shut down and cordoned off for a couple of weeks.

Q: Qatif was about how far from Dhahran?

FARSAKH: It wasn't more than about twenty miles. It was close. It was the big Shiite concentration. Al-Hasa province was largely Shiite also; I don't think they shut it down, but I am not sure.

Q: What was the impact of the takeover of our embassy in Tehran?

FARSAKH: Well, we started getting requests for cables asking, "could it happen here?" I think all posts in the area got those types of cables. We tried to analyze what we thought was going on in Saudi Arabia and sent our material to Embassy Jeddah; they put all of it into a report which they sent to the Department. We came to the conclusion that it couldn't happen in Saudi Arabia for a variety of reasons – one of which was the close alliance of the ruling hierarchy and the religious establishment. If I thought deeply about it, I could probably remember much more, but it was long ago.

Q: You just didn't have the mix. You didn't have the student population.

FARSAKH: You also didn't have a middle class that was Westernized and a poor, working class that was very religious. I think this is one of the main things about the Iranian mess; the Shah was not only corrupt and brutal, but he was also totally scornful of the Muslim religion. As far as he was concerned, Islam was not important; I remember reading in a book much later on, that his wife had had a champagne reception during Ramadan! They would deliberately do offensive things and most of the people for a lot of reasons just couldn't stand them. The whole country pretty much rose up.

That was never going to happen in Saudi Arabia. By the way, I had a second tour in Saudi Arabia which was Jeddah.

Q: The Palestinians, how did they feel about the Saudis?

FARSAKH: I don't really know. I didn't get the sense that they disliked them. The Palestinians didn't love the country or the general atmosphere of the place but I don't think they had any hostility toward the Saudis and they worked well with them. The Palestinians as a group were feared by the Saudi government for political reasons and their activities were closely monitored.

Q: In the Middle East this whole problem of the Palestinians who have to leave their country in order to get jobs somewhere else and not having a real country to go back to. I mean, this had to have effects on this group, didn't it?

FARSAKH: On the Palestinians? Sure. Well, most of them probably had Jordanian passports at the time. There were some, – one of them was one of my husband's good friend who has since passed away – was part of a group that went back with the Iraqi army to Baghdad after the '48 war. The Iraqis took good care of them but never offered

them citizenship as the Jordanians did. They had access to education, professional jobs, good housing. It was only when we invaded in 2003 and the Shia took over that the Palestinians in Baghdad started having a really hard time, because they were identified with Saddam's regime. Now there are a few thousand of them marooned, expelled from Baghdad, on the Syrian and Jordanian borders in desert camps with no place to go.

Obviously, they were not admirers of the Saudi monarchy; or of the system. They knew that the Saudi government faithfully supported the Palestinians financially; the Saudis are probably the only Arab country that over the years to this day has regularly given money to the Palestinians, first the PLO and now to the Palestinian Authority. They never missed a payment and the Palestinians do get Saudi political support.

Aramco was a good place to work. Non-Saudi Arabs, and mostly Palestinians, spent twenty, thirty years there. They got good pensions, good medical care, nice housing and when they retired they had enough money to go back, usually, to Jordan, sometimes to the United States.

Q: You didn't have that relationship that was apparently not great in Kuwait?

FARSAKH: There were 350 to 450,000 Palestinians living in Kuwait by the time of the first Gulf War. Palestinians and Egyptians built Kuwait, not the Kuwaitis. The Kuwaitis began to really resent the Palestinians – who had their own schools, their own institutions and were a powerful force. The Iraqi invasion gave the Kuwaitis the opportunity they had been looking for for years, because even before the war they were starting to deny visas to Palestinian kids who were born in Kuwait and went to the States to study, whose parents still lived in Kuwait. If someone in the family became ill in Kuwait, the kid would apply for a Kuwaiti visa and be turned down. The Kuwaitis were getting pretty nasty. Some Palestinians – although the evidence is scanty about how many of them actually did anything against Kuwaitis during the invasion – were accused of such activities. There is some evidence that those who did may have been Palestinians who came from Iraq with the Iraqi army but no one really knows. A few incidents gave the Kuwaitis the opportunity of their dreams – to throw them all out. There are a few thousand that they allowed to return. Most of those expelled went to Jordan; many of them lost everything.

There was also a mass forced exodus of Yemenis from Saudi Arabia at the time, again because of Yemeni government support for Saddam. I was working the Yemen desk and Saudi POLMIL, so I know this for a fact. There were at least half a million Yemenis who got thrown out of Saudi Arabia – and probably many more – but when people think about the first Gulf War, this doesn't enter into their calculations.

Q: When you were there this first time in the late '70s, what were the Yemenis doing?

FARSAKH: They were involved in different things; some of them were manual workers, some worked as clerks in jewelry stores, in different types of retail. They worked in restaurants. There were Yemenis from the lowest manual workers up to middle class.

Plus you also had the bin Ladens, especially from the Hadramaut area in the south – some people from Yemen were the richest people in the country.

Q: Did the fact that you came from a Jewish background have any play this time around?

FARSAKH: No, because I didn't advertise it; I am not religious at all, and over time I have become less and less proud of what my co-religionists have done in this world, particularly regarding Israel, which infuriates me. I said on my Saudi visa application that I was Unitarian, which is pretty close to what I consider myself to be.

Q: The Unitarians, that's the thing. They believe in one God, at most.

FARSAKH: And in Arabic it's "Muwahiddun," which is belief in one God. Perfect.

Q: When did you leave there?

FARSAKH: Leave Dhahran, the consulate you mean?

Q: Yes.

FARSAKH: I left in July of '81. I wanted to go to Abu Dhabi because my husband decided he wanted to stay at Aramco. They had just created a political officer position. I applied and found out through back channels that the ambassador and DCM did not want a woman officer. This was the second time this had happened to me successively. It had happened in Dhahran with Consul General Bushnell, who didn't want a woman either.

Q: Wasn't it pretty tricky in these days to even have that attitude?

FARSAKH: The attitude was fine as long as you didn't put anything on paper; it was all phone calls. I found out I couldn't get the job. They chose someone who I think was in the administrative cone and who didn't speak Arabic. But I was informed that the embassy in Jeddah wanted me for the political section. I wanted to go where I was wanted! So I became the first woman ever to do political work in Saudi Arabia. It was not difficult for me because I had the external relations portfolio. That meant that I was dealing with the foreign ministry and relations with the rest of the world rather than internal stuff, where I would have had to go traveling around the country to places like the Najd and deal with the really retro locals. So I had a good two years at the embassy. I served under Ambassador Dick Murphy.

Q: Dick and I came in; we were in the same A-100 course.

Who was the political counselor?

FARSAKH: David Newton, who is still a friend, and whom I admire and love dearly.

Q: How about the DCM?

FARSAKH: We had two; first, Jim Placke, who is a really nice guy and whom I still see from time to time and then Rocky Suddarth. We had really good people. A lot of my friends to this day are from Jeddah, from that period.

Q: It is an important post and we send good people there and also I think there is something about as the Russian, a few other countries where you have important matters to do and a hard language, people sort of meld together.

Let's talk about Saudi Arabia. The external policy of Saudi Arabia, where was it? I don't think of Saudi embassies all over the place.

FARSAKH: Well, first of all we didn't deal with relations with the U.S. That was done on a much higher level. We had another officer who later transferred to Riyadh, and he and I were in sort of competition. He was senior to me so he took away part of my portfolio. He had served in South Asia so he did Pakistan, which was a big relationship at the time, but he was also interested in South America, which was not too important. I covered relations with Europe, the Arab world and the Arab League. Of course, the Islamic Development Bank and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) were in Jeddah too and I covered the OIC.

I had a very active portfolio. I spent a lot of time at the foreign ministry; a lot of time with my foreign diplomatic colleagues learning from them and they learning from me, writing reports. I had to report on women because I was the only woman in the political section. After finishing a lengthy report on the issue, I remember saying to David Newton, "I never want to do this again. I've had it with the women". The reason was that women would tell me regularly how much they loved their situation, they were so well taken care of and so cherished, and Western men didn't care about their women, let them parade around the streets half naked and subject to rape, etcetera. I thought these arguments were silly and that the women were probably lying to me to make Saudi society look better. I also did a long report on the Saudi military with the help of the defense attaché who later became a friend, although I haven't seen him in a while. I admire him very much: Pat Lang was for a long time head of the whole Middle East section at DIA and is now a consultant.

Q: I see him on TV all the time.

FARSAKH: Yes, he's' a really smart guy. He speaks beautiful Arabic. I used to meet with him often and I wrote a report on the Saudi military which was very well received in the Department.

Q: Talk about your view of what we were reporting about the Saudi military at the time.

FARSAKH: I don't think much changes. We discussed the work ethic, for example. The military has the same work ethic, or lack thereof, that the rest of the male population does, and I remember talking to American military who would say, "We are ready at six

o'clock in the morning," we are out there getting ready for to work and they would drift in. They would come in at nine o'clock, ten o'clock and say they were sick, or they had to take their wife to the hospital, or they were out all night playing cards or whatever they do.

Q: I can remember hearing, at the time we had a brigadier general at the Dhahran base, an American general who used to make exactly the same complaints. He would call a formation and the Saudi pilots wouldn't show up. What happens if you are attacked?

FARSAKH: And the pilots were the best of the bunch. If they couldn't show up, then what about, the rest of them? And, they didn't have enough people in the army so they would hire Pakistani soldiers. All the maintenance people were foreign – all of them – because no Saudi Sunni would get his hands dirty. In Aramco the Shia used to do manual work; they would get their hands dirty, but the Sunnis wouldn't. It was sort of a conglomerate army with Omanis, Yemenis, Pakistanis.

Q: It would be a different mix but I remember reading an account of one of our military attaches talking about the Egyptian army where if an officer was trained say an artillery officer, you would expect that artillery officer in our army to then start training the sergeants how to operate the artillery piece and all that. In the Egyptian army, whoever was trained, that was something he would husband to himself and would not train anyone else because that was giving him his power.

FARSAKH: Well, there is another thing that may be peculiar to Egypt. First of all, I don't know if there is any army in the Arab world that has non-commissioned officers for starters. So you have the officer class and you have everybody else, the soldiers, and nothing in between. The officer class is made up mostly of upper class people and they are cultured, educated, coddled by their government. The Egyptian military officers had beautiful housing, cars, lived in luxurious compounds, and led the high life. The soldiers are conscripts and paid very poorly – almost nothing. It is a social problem but it is also, if it ever comes to fighting, a huge morale problem.

Q: In the Saudi army was there also a non commissioned corps?

FARSAKH: I don't think there are but I am not sure.

Q: May be the Omanis and the Pakistanis.

FARSAKH: It may be, it may be.

Q: I remember interviewing Admiral Crowe who was the head of the Joint Chiefs who talked about a tour he made with his equivalent in the Soviet army and came back and said, "You know, the thing we don't have in the Soviet army are the real runners of the war and it is non commissioned officers." This is the guts of our military.

FARSAKH: If you don't have that you are missing something very major. Maybe it is a social thing; if you are an officer, you are an officer. You're upper. And again it is this power thing that you were referring to. The non-commissioned officer is in a higher class and you have to treat him with respect. You need him, and that may be not something that they are willing to acknowledge. Everybody who is lower is inferior and they shine your shoes.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Saudi diplomats?

FARSAKH: Some. The ones in the foreign ministry, such as the protocol officer and the one who was responsible for the Americas desk, the ones who dealt with Europeans, were fine to deal with. I would also sometimes accompany the ambassador or the DCM to see higher ranking officials. I remember once going with Rocky to see a senior official; he sat us down in front of his desk and we sat there for forty five minutes while he conducted his private business on the telephone in front of us. This was not an uncommon thing. They all had sidelines that were making money; their government job was something of a sideline.

Q: I recall in Mecca and in Saudi Arabia where anybody, even Egyptians, anybody who was a doctor, a medical doctor would have a pharmacy and that would be his source or money maker or something.

FARSAKH: The protocol chief was very, very nice to me. I once had a big fight with him because he wanted to take his Filipino maid to the States and this was something we tended to be kind of tough on. The Filipinos were and are notorious for wanting to live the United States. I think the whole country wants to migrate to the United States. So we gave him a very hard time with the visa. Eventually, I guess he must have gotten it. But he comes back several weeks later and said to me, "Andrea, I owe you an apology." They were in California and don't you think that that woman just fled? She just took off. And I said, "Well, now you know. You learned the lesson the hard way. That's why we don't give them visas." That apology was worth a lot to me.

Q: But it really was, no, I mean because most of the time you just don't hear.

FARSAKH: The last night I was there, just as we were going on the plane that night, the foreign ministry was giving a farewell reception for Ambassador Murphy, actually a farewell dinner. There were several women in the embassy, the budget and fiscal officer, the personnel officer, one of the econ officers, Janice Bay, and me. I don't know if you know Janice – she remains a good friend of mine. He made sure that he invited all of us women to this event at the foreign ministry and we were all very, touched. Ordinarily, I wouldn't have gone to a party on the night that I was leaving post, but I made it my business to go to that.

On the whole Saudi Arabia was both good and bad. My husband likes to say, "You shouldn't run them down, they were good to you. You took your exam there, you served there twice."

But the Saudis were really OK. Most of the time if I had gender problems, it wasn't with the Saudis; it was with the American embassy, with my own colleagues – some of my superiors – who were afraid of offending the Saudis and bent over backwards to make sure they weren't offending them. But the Saudis were mostly OK to me.

Q: What sort of outfits, a question I never ask except in a place like Saudi Arabia. Dress. Was this a problem?

FARSAKH: Things got worse after the first Gulf War. When I was there it wasn't so bad. As long as you wore a skirt or pants with the calves covered, long sleeves, a high neck, you were OK. If women wore pants they had to wear a tunic over them. When I was in Dhahran, I dressed that way. At first, in Dhahran, I used to keep a long skirt rolled up in my desk for when I went to prisons. Then it got very hot during my first summer there – I decided it was just too uncomfortable and I started wearing my regular skirts. Nobody seemed to mind. So I just dressed normally, just conservatively. When I got to Jeddah it was the same. I remember once going to see the Grand Mufti of Jeddah and I brought a headscarf in my purse which I did put on. The Mufti shook my hand, which surprised me. He received me very graciously. I wore a long skirt that time. But for the most part, I just dressed conservatively and nobody bothered me.

I think it was after the first Gulf War, long after I had left the Kingdom, when a lot of American female military were in the cities, driving everywhere, and the Saudi women held a driving demonstration in downtown Riyadh. Prince Nayef, one of my least favorite Saudis, by then the minister of interior for 50 years, got really ticked off by that demonstration and things went downhill in terms of women's dress. I understand now that most American embassy women when they go to shopping malls, wear abayas. We never ever did that.

Q: What about the other embassies, since you were doing external affairs? Did you have much contact with the other embassies?

FARSAKH: A lot. The political officers from all the European countries used to meet with us and the Canadians regularly – every month – to discuss specific topics like the military or internal politics or relations with such and such part of the world..

Q: Did the embassy or your diplomatic colleagues from other embassies have any view on wither Saudi Arabia?

FARSAKH: Oh, sure. We used to discuss it all the time. I think we always figured that the royal family had better stay in power because even if they weren't the greatest in terms of human rights and rights of women, the alternative – even then we saw as far worse –that is, the really rabid Wahhabis taking over; I think that's still the issue. There is still a large constituency for that type of extremist ideology there. The Saudi government fostered it themselves and it is strong.

Q: Did you see any answer to the problem of the growing population all the time?

FARSAKH: We only felt that they were exaggerating the Saudi population figures, and the foreign workforce is a very significant element in the population. We at the time didn't think the population was more than ten million and that included the foreign workforce. Now you hear 17 to 20 million. I know from the time I was in UPM that birth control pills were banned from the country and of course the sale inside the Kingdom was prohibited, If people got caught on the way in, customs would confiscate them. There was a big move in the '70s to increase the population. They wanted Saudi women to have as many children as possible and they made if financially worthwhile. I think now they probably regret having encouraged such a high birthrate because they can't find jobs for all the young men that they have. Of course, the young men don't want most kinds of jobs and the government does not know what to do with such people.

Q: This seems to me, every country, Japan's got the problem of not accepting immigrants but and not having many children so that's their problem but Saudi Arabia is almost unique in having this growth of women and having young men who don't want to work and having foreigners do all the work.

FARSAKH: Also it's their educational system which is so oriented to religion. Now King Abdullah is starting a new university, a graduate technical university that women can also attend. Of the seven universities that were there in my time, four of them offered religious education. What could be done with these characters who were coming out of these schools and studied Islamic law and Hadith and Koran recitation but knew no science and math and could not do anything with their hands? What do you do with such people and what do they become, but a mass of unemployed, resentful, super religious people who have nothing but time on their hands – that's a dangerous thing.

Q: Very much so.

FARSAKH: Now they have come to realize that but need to devise solutions. That will be hard.

Q: Were you and other diplomatic colleagues, was this pretty evident?

FARSAKH: Yes. We certainly didn't predict this explosion of terrorism but I am not sure I find it that surprising. If you look at when Abdul Aziz conquered Saudi Arabia and you had the uprising of the Ikhwan in the late 1920s – these are the same type of people who took over the Mecca Mosque. As a matter of fact, many were sons of the Ikhwan, and there is a book called The Siege of Mecca that I read recently, which carries the thread from the Wahhabis under Abdul Aziz through the siege of Mecca through the explosion of radical Wahhabism and 9/11 throughout the entire world, as a result of Saudi money and their desire to spread their ideology.

Q: Were you aware of anybody looking at what the religious schools were teaching?

FARSAKH: What the curriculum was? I am not really sure. We certainly had people who knew Arabic and one of my colleagues whom I am still friendly with did the internal stuff. I could ask him but I think they were mostly looking at the royal family and governance and talking to people in various parts of the country. I don't know that they were dealing with the schools very much.

Q: What were you getting from your colleagues, the Philippine embassy and the Pakistan embassy, Bangladesh embassy and all about their work there?

FARSAKH: They were concerned to a point. I remember the Philippine embassy had many women, maids, camped out at their embassy who were fleeing their employers. On the other hand when I was in Dhahran and a Filipino died, their embassy didn't think it was worth their while coming out to identify and deal with the remains, and they wanted us to handle it for them. I had a fight with my boss, the consul general about identifying the remains of a Filipino. I still said, "I'm sorry. I'm not going to do it. It's not my job." The Philippine embassy surely didn't think it was their job either. It was too much trouble for them to come from Jeddah. They cared as much as they had to care.

I thought the Indians were pretty good at trying to take care of their people. The Pakistanis, so-so. The Egyptians had a big problem because Saudis, when they got rich, would go to Egypt to look for second wives and they would essentially buy poor girls who they would dump them in these remote places and abuse them. The consul used to tell me that he was getting phone calls all the time from these women saying, "Save me, help me get out of here." There wasn't much that he could do.

Q: You left there in?

FARSAKH: I left Jeddah in December of '83.

Q: Where did you go?

FARSAKH: To Abu Dhabi. I finally got my job in Abu Dhabi.

Q: A new ambassador?

FARSAKH: That's right.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

FARSAKH: Quincy Lumsden, a very nice guy.

Q: And who was the DCM?

FARSAKH: David Ransom, my dear friend who recently passed away. He and I went to graduate school together so I had known David for a very long time. We studied Arabic at SAIS together.

Q: You went to Abu Dhabi. Explain where Abu Dhabi is.

FARSAKH: The United Arab Emirates is the largest emirate; it's the one with the most oil, and quite conservative. Because it is the richest, the president of the country always comes from Abu Dhabi. It seemed as if I had died and gone to heaven because it seemed so progressive and free compared to Saudi Arabia. It was beautifully green; Sheik Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan had thrown a lot of money into making the place beautiful. There was a gorgeous cornice along the Persian Gulf and traffic circles with trees and flowers. The place was clean and pleasant. And of course, the main thing was oil, which the Emirate of Abu Dhabi had in abundance. I was the only political officer and I worked closely with the economic officer. We used to take trips together and do combined reporting, so we went all over. Also, the consul general in Dubai was afraid of the large Iranian community there so he didn't want to do reporting on them. I would go down there and work with the vice consul. We would take Iranians off the visa line, and there were plenty of those. There were two flights a week from Tehran – we only interviewed people we gave visas to. We didn't interview "refuseniks" but we did a lot of reporting on what was going on in Iran. At the time, the Department had almost no information on internal Iranian affairs, and I think that's why I got promoted on my next tour.

Q: Let's talk about the structure, there are seven emirate states?

FARSAKH: Yes, seven: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah, Ajman and Um al-Quwain.

Q: As I recall they're just little.

FARSAKH: Yes, some of them are very pretty like Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah. Um al-Quwain and Ajman are nothings. Sharjah was the big souk and not much more.

Q: How did this all fit together?

FARSAKH: First of all our consular district was Abu Dhabi, which was the biggest and by far the richest and the most important. The Dubai consulate, which started out as just a consulate and became a consulate general, had the rest of the emirates as its consular district. Dubai became the principal Iran-watcher post, which it still is. Each emirate was ruled by a sheikh and there was a royal federal council of sheikhs who made all the decisions. Now they have a partially elected advisory legislature but it doesn't have real power.

Q: Was Abu Dhabi sort of the center of where things were being done?

FARSAKH: Well, yes and no. It was certainly the center of the oil industry. The commercial capital has always been in Dubai, which got its start smuggling gold from India and was very much a conglomerate of different nationalities, very heavily Iranian, Iranians with UAE citizenship. So Dubai was the loosest, socially, where you had really

good restaurants and entertainment, and could have a really good time. Now Dubai has become a huge tourism and shopping hub for the region.

Q: Sharjah?

FARSAKH: Sharjah is separate, on the border of Dubai. You drive from Dubai and you are in Sharjah.

Q: I recall Sharjah being a big city.

FARSAKH: I don't know about that, but they built a big modern souk where we used to go shopping.

Q: When I was there it wasn't modern but it was big.

FARSAKH: I think what you probably saw was the old souk, which I am sure was a lot more interesting than the new one which is one huge building that has all the shops in it. But it was interesting enough.

Q: You were mentioning in Dubai the consul general there didn't want to do reporting on Iran and Iranians.

FARSAKH: The consul general in Dubai didn't want to talk to the Iranians.

Q: Why?

FARSAKH: He was afraid that they would do something to him. As a matter of fact, the vice consul, with whom I became very friendly – and he lived there – I was a commuter from Abu Dhabi – the vice consul had a threat against him and we had to stop reporting for a few months to wait for things to blow over. We used to go out and meet the Iranians who lived in Dubai, we used to meet Iranians who were visiting, and we once met a mullah who lived in Dubai. The Iranians had institutions in Dubai – a hospital, schools, a whole system and network for the Iranian community. There was a business community which had UAE citizenship and they were very, very rich, and then you had the Iranian Iranians who were very well established there. The ambassador was a high ranking clergyman and of course, because Iran is so close, – workers mostly – would come over by boat at night from Iran, and the minute they got there they were immediately absorbed. They were given jobs, had places to live, everything they needed. We never knew how many Iranians really were there but we knew it was a considerable number.

Q: Was there concern on our part about an Iranian fifth column?

FARSAKH: The Dubai Iranians, the ones who had citizenship, so probably not, because they had too much to lose, I would think. But the others, the transients who were the more numerous Iranian Iranians, sure.

Q: Were we taking steps at our embassy not in Abu Dhabi about a possible attack on our embassy?

FARSAKH: Well, we always had two APCs in front of the embassy.

Q: Armored personnel carriers.

FARSAKH: Yes. Of course, when we were there, in '83, the attack on the American Embassy in Beirut and then the attack on the Marine barracks and the attack on the French soldiers took place. That all happened while we were in Abu Dhabi and Hezbollah, obviously Iranian inspired, was found to be responsible. So yes, we were very aware. As a matter of fact, one Christmas we had to scrap our plans for a holiday celebration because there were was a threat against the ambassador.

Q: You were a political officer there?

FARSAKH: Yes.

Q: What politically were you looking at?

FARSAKH: I was looking at external relations because I was the only political officer – with the U.S., Europe, with China, with Russia. The UAE established diplomatic relations with China about six to eight months before I left. I covered the internal politics, the way the different emirates sort of got along or didn't, obviously, demarching the foreign ministry on a regular basis. I had my friends and contacts there. I often went with the ambassador and DCM on meetings.

Q: Was there much in the way of political movement?

FARSAKH: Internal political movement? No. The interesting action was on the econ side. The Gulf Arabs, – and I think it's true of the Saudis to some extent – remind me of baby birds. They are just sitting there with their mouths open, waiting to be fed. What motivation would the Abu Dhabians have for doing much of anything? In all of the emirates the citizens are maybe 20 per cent of the population. The foreigners –80 percent – do all the work. The UAE nationals don't have to work, they don't have to do anything. This is the leisure class. You don't see much of them either. Even in the foreign ministry, most of the people I knew there were from Dubai and of Iranian origin because the Abu Dhabians were insular Bedouin types, very wealthy, while those from Dubai were cosmopolitan, outward looking. The Abu Dhabians spend their time hunting the bustard in the desert with falcons.

Q: Did they have much in the way of foreign relations?

FARSAKH: Oh, yes. The UAE was active in the Organization of Islamic Conference and the Arab League.

Q: What were they doing?

FARSAKH: The President, Sheik Zayid, was a prominent person in the Arab world.

Q: How did the Palestinian Israeli conflict play there?

FARSAKH: I remember a meeting with one of my main contacts on the Americas desk who was an Iranian origin Dubai citizen. I went in on a demarche on human rights somewhere and he said, "What about the Palestinians? Don't they have any human rights?" And I said, "Well, you know, I'm here in my professional capacity. We're not talking about that right now. " Sure, it would come up all the time. People knew that my husband was Palestinian. The UAE gave a few Palestinians citizenship and these tended to be very wealthy people. In one case, one of my Palestinian contacts invited me and my husband to dinner. We arrived, and there was the chief PLO representative, sitting in the living room – and we were prohibited from meeting them at the time. I took the host aside and said, "You know, you shouldn't have done this. I am not supposed to be in the same room with this person." He said, "Well, I thought it would be nice if you met him." I said, "No, I am sorry. I can't."

So we had a quick dinner and we left. The next day I went to my DCM, David Ransom, and I told him that I had been set up. I asked him what to do. He said, "Just write it up. Make a memo to the files. You've told me and if it ever comes up with anyone, if anyone ever finds out, you're OK." I naturally followed his instructions.

Q: Did the emirates do anything for the Palestinians? Were they supportive?

FARSAKH: Oh, yes, especially Sheik Zayid. As a matter of fact, in my husband's hometown, Bir Zeit, the university has a building that was funded by him and named for him. The UAE gives quite a bit of money to the Palestinians.

Q: What was it like living there? I mean one sees these hotels that are put up and you are charged $2,000 a day or something.

FARSAKH: Well, that's now. That was not the case when I was there.

Q: But why would anybody go?

FARSAKH: Well, that's mostly Dubai. I was in Abu Dhabi for an Iraq conference about three or four years ago, and stayed in the Abu Dhabi Intercontinental, which was there in my time and it is still a beautiful place. I don't know how much they were charging then. We actually stayed there for a few nights before we left the UAE in 1985. As you know, the post allows people, after they pack out, to spend the last few nights in a hotel. In Abu Dhabi, we lived in villas rented by the embassy and we all had pretty nice housing. I got picked up every morning to go to work by an embassy shuttle van; sometimes I drove to work. I had a nice life there.

My husband, of course, was in Saudi Arabia, so we commuted. Mostly he came to see me, I would say, once or twice a month, as the UAE was far pleasanter than Dhahran.

Q: As you were there looking at this, wither Abu Dhabi or wither the emirates looking towards the future?

FARSAKH: We didn't get the sense that there was any dissatisfaction among the citizens. Where there was dissatisfaction was in the foreign workforce who were not treated very well in general. There was a rumor that one of the wives of an important sheikh owned the taxi cab company and that most of the taxis were driven by Afghans, mostly Pashtuns I think. They were very tall, handsome guys with blue-green eyes and it was rumored that these men had come to the UAE to earn money to pay off blood feuds because they had killed someone. That didn't exactly make you feel comfortable in those little crappy taxi cabs that we had to use.

It was hard to a get a sense of any kind of political opinion among the Abu Dhabi nationals because there were so few to whom you could speak and they really weren't interested. They were focused on their lifestyles and making money. In Dubai there were businessmen whose main interest was making money. They were apathetic about politics. They were just happy with their comfortable lives, getting supported by their government.

Q: One gets the feeling that whole area, including the Americans at Aramco, keep your head down, work for twenty years and get a good pension and get out. When you look at it, the great majority of the population, this seems to be the case.

FARSAKH: They were working so that they could buy an apartment in Egypt or a house or apartment in Jordan, or build a house in India, send money to their families. They all had goals and they were working toward these goals. The Americans had good, secure lives with good schools for their children. They really had a great existence at Aramco. People did not want to get into trouble, save for some who were really badly used. If you saw the recent George Clooney movie, "Syriana," it was a fairly accurate portrayal of the way things probably are among the most abused and exploited third world manual laborers. And there have been some strikes in the UAE and Qatar in the last several years among the disenfranchised labor force.

Q: You were there from '80?

FARSAKH: '83 to '85.

Q: Was Iraq at all a presence there?

FARSAKH: The Iran-Iraq war was on. As a matter of fact it started when I was in Dhahran and I remember the night it started. When I was in Abu Dhabi, it hadn't yet gotten to the point where we were escorting the Kuwaiti vessels through the Gulf. We faithfully kept up with what was going on. Donald Rumsfeld came to Abu Dhabi in his

capacity of Middle East envoy at the time. He was traveling around the region, and on one of his trips he went to Iraq and embraced Saddam. We were all aware of the kind of regime that Iraq had and what Saddam was like – this was no secret. When Rumsfeld came to Abu Dhabi, he had scheduled a meeting with the ambassador. David Ransom told me to attend; Margery was also present. We all sat there and heard him spout off really racist comments about Arabs. I was really very offended; I thought he was just a nasty man from the get go.

Another thing I remember about my time in Abu Dhabi is that the intel community was sending intelligence teams who would come to the UAE, brief the UAE officials and then go on to Baghdad to brief the Iraqis about what was going on in the war, via satellite intelligence. They would inform the Iraqis about the Iranians and what they were up to.

Q: At the time was the feeling sort of well, we don't really want the Iranians to win?

FARSAKH: Well, I think we liked the idea of the two countries fighting and exhausting each other. The longer it went on, the better off everybody would be, we believed. We didn't care about the thousands of casualties or the types of weapons that were being used. I was in INR a bit later when the chemical attack on the Kurdish civilians in Halabja took place. We didn't care very much at the time.

Q: What about the American military? Did they come often?

FARSAKH: They visited Dubai a couple of times. We had a military office in the embassy headed by a full colonel, there were half a dozen people working there and we worked very closely with them. They really bulked up later on. When I was there it was pretty small office but it became very large over the succeeding years.

Q: You left there in?

FARSAKH: The summer of '85.

Q: Where did you go after that?

FARSAKH: Egypt – Alexandria.

Q: So you are really sticking to that Arab world.

FARSAKH: I stuck with it my entire career and nobody objected. I was an Arabic speaking officer who wanted to stay in the Middle East. Why would anybody want to send me anywhere else? And I had this deal with my husband, as I told you, which, as you know, didn't work out completely.

Q: I would imagine too while you were in Abu Dhabi were you sensing that the pendulum had swung so that having an Arabic speaking competent woman officer was kind of an asset as opposed to being, oh, my God. What are we going to do with her?

FARSAKH: I think so, and there weren't very many of us. Margery Ransom was one, I was another. At that time there were very few female Arabic speaking officers.

Q: Well, the Foreign Service was changing at that point too.

FARSAKH: I think from the time they started welcoming married women, it had started to change.

Q: When did you leave Abu Dhabi?

FARSAKH: In July of 1985.

Q: Where did you go?

FARSAKH: After taking a trip around the world, and spending some time in China with my husband as tourists, I wound up in Alexandria, Egypt where I was to be the deputy principal officer.

Q: You were in Alexandria from when to when?

FARSAKH: 1985 to 1987.

Q: What was the situation in Egypt in '85 when you got there?

FARSAKH: Things were reasonably stable. I was at the Consulate General in Alexandria, which closed down as a result of the budget cutting fever of the early 1990's after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The main issue in Alexandria when I was there was sewage! USAID was building a primary treatment plant and it was taking forever. The Alexandrians contended, and quite possibly not without merit, that the reason it was taking so long was because of all the expensive American consultants that AID was hiring to do study after study, so nothing got done.

In desperation, the Egyptians built a sewage pipe out into the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, they didn't build it out far enough, so when the tide came in, all the sewage would come back on the beach. This resulted, naturally, in a major sanitation and health crisis for which the U.S. was blamed. When I got there I was advised that I had better come conversant with the sewage issues because that's all the Alexandrians wanted to talk about.

I remember that there was a cartoon in one of the Egyptian papers soon after I arrived of a guy dressed in scuba diving gear emerging from a toilet, and the caption said something nasty about the American sewage project. It seemed that everybody was after us, was angry with us about this.

Q: What was our reading that you were getting about these consultants because this is a, well, in a lot of places you have sort of university, Michigan State University has almost its graduate program is funded by AID by sending people to Ethiopia or wherever it is and they do these studies and all and they don't seem to go anywhere.

FARSAKH: The Egyptians were tremendously resentful of the fact that it was taking so long and a lot of the money that was supposed to be devoted to the project, they contended was being paid out to these expensive American consultants.
In fact, at the time USAID Egypt in Cairo had the biggest mission in the world, and if you went to visit AID in Cairo, they had an entire apartment building of at least six stories, occupied solely by AID employees. They were about a five minute walk from the embassy.

Q: Did you get any feel from people you knew about AID? They have had this huge operation but was this sort of Americans supervising Americans? Was something coming out of this?

FARSAKH: USAID did redo the telephone system, at least in Alexandria and Cairo, and I think they did a pretty good job. I don't know how many years it took. Obviously, we had been paying the Egyptians as well as the Israelis since 1979 as a result of Camp David. We continue to pay the Egyptians to keep the peace with Israel. That's really the most important issue; the Egyptians know it and they resent it and they resent AID. They resent the fact that because Sadat signed this deal, they have to be under the domination of the United States and support U.S. foreign policy in the region, which most of them don't agree with. This situation continues today. So how much we are getting for our huge investment in Egypt is debatable. Of course, even then it was obvious that we were supporting an extremely corrupt, brutal, and authoritarian regime.

Q: This is Mubarak.

FARSAKH: This is Mubarak. And 23 years later he is still there, worse than ever. Egyptians tend to be politically fairly apathetic but that doesn't mean they like their government – they don't. They don't like Mubarak, and they don't like peace with Israel although they are willing to tolerate it because they don't want to fight Israel ever again. They are very cynical about all of this. I do not keeping up with Egyptian affairs as much as I would like, but I am aware that not much has changed except that the political situation has gotten worse.

Q: I sort of equate Alexandria to Naples; a big cosmopolitan city, extremely cynical. It's sort of like New York too.

FARSAKH: It wasn't international any more by the time I got there. At the time of Nasser, starting in 1956 during the Suez War, the first waves of foreigners started leaving. In 1961 when he started nationalizing the economy – that was the second wave – and then in 1967 the third wave came, and by the time I got there, there were only small remnants of the Maltese community, of the once very huge Greek community. A couple

of hundred people were left in what was once a very vibrant and large Jewish community. It was an Egyptian city by that time and a lot of people would have observed that the times of the "Alexandria Quartet" were gone forever. And they were – foreigners certainly didn't like the fact that it wasn't so cosmopolitan anymore. The Egyptians liked it fine because they said it was their city and now – it finally belonged to them for the first time in history. It wasn't controlled by foreigners anymore. So it depends which optic you are using.

Q: Who was the consul general?

FARSAKH: Well, when I got there it was Frances Cook. She was there for a year and then my second year, it was Mark Hambley.

Q: You mentioned that Frances Cook is not your favorite person.

FARSAKH: No.

Q: Could you explain why?

FARSAKH: Frances Cook is a very, smart woman. Substantively, she was a very good officer. The person she succeeded as consul general had left the place with a reputation as a sleepy retirement post. She put it back on the map by doing political reporting, getting out a lot, raising the profile of the consulate. So in that sense, she had done something very positive, very significant. Certainly the Egyptians thought highly of her. She was a very strong, very assertive personality.

As far as the people who worked for her were concerned, she was not great, although some of the FSNs liked her. Most of the Americans did not. She was one of these people, not uncommon in the Foreign Service, who was wonderful at sucking up to the bosses so that they loved her, but a real tyrant to the people that worked for her. That was obviously one issue.

Another factor was that as a person, she was malicious and interfered in people's private lives. That's what really makes me feel the way I do about her. She essentially tried to ruin my marriage. I became an -02 a few months after I got there; she was already a senior officer.

Q: Close to a lieutenant colonel.

FARSAKH: She was at that point either an OC or an MC. She got promoted while she was there, probably to MC.

I think she was jealous of me because I had a husband and children. My husband was living in Saudi Arabia, working for Aramco, so we were commuting, and the kids were in school in the States. I was in Alex by myself, which was fine. I had lived that way in Jeddah and also in Abu Dhabi. In Egypt it was a little more difficult because the phone in

my house – as I think most phones in houses in Alexandria then – only worked within Egypt. I couldn't call outside Egypt so my husband had to call me, which he did almost every night, to keep up my spirits.

She made it very difficult for my husband and me to see each other. She would approve leave and then say I couldn't have my leave after the slip was signed. At one point we had some kind of falling out and I don't remember what the circumstances were exactly, but these were her words and I never forgot them: "If I were your personnel officer, I would send you to Vientiane to get you away from your husband!"

Q: Good God. Had she even met your husband?

FARSAKH: Oh, yes. She met him several times, because I didn't want to go to Dhahran, which held few charms for me. Egypt was so much nicer and more interesting. Because it was hard to get to Alexandria –, you either had to take a three hour train ride from Cairo or fly, and there weren't that many flights, I used to try to meet him in Cairo and we would spend the weekends. I had three friends at the embassy and we would alternate staying with them for the weekends when my husband would come; he came roughly once a month or six weeks. Frances actually wrote on my EER that I took off and spent too much time in Cairo. When I went to Cairo it was always on the weekends – on my own time – and if I was on duty, obviously, I never went. She was criticizing me for what I did in my free time. She was really nasty – I won't use the word I really want to use to describe her!

Q: As the deputy and if she were a difficult supervisor, how many Americans did you have working for you?

FARSAKH: I was the consul and the political officer. We had an admin officer stuff, a branch PAO at the American Cultural Center, an NSA person and an American secretary who worked primarily for the CG. It was a very small post, but we had a contingent of very excellent Egyptian FSNs.

Q: Did you find yourself, I mean normally as position, if you have a difficult person dealing with people boss, the deputy usually has to act as the go between and try to keep things calm. Did you find yourself in that role?

FARSAKH: No, not really. The post sort of chugged along reasonably well. Everybody probably had their issues with Frances.. She got along better with men. Her secretary had a really hard time; Frances tried to prevent her from getting married to an Egyptian. After all the paperwork had been finished, except for the last piece, Frances went on leave and the secretary managed to arrange her wedding while Frances was away. She had a very nice ceremony at the local Anglican church and a beautiful reception in her yard; everybody came and we were all really happy for her. The source of the tension was far away! I wouldn't say that Frances's personality affected the operation of the post that much except that a lot of people had complaints, which we shared with OIG when they came! Things went along alright. We all tried to be professional about it.

Q: As the deputy there, what was your role? What were you doing?

FARSAKH: Well, I was doing consular work and the CG was supposed to be the backup consul, which she hated. All she would do was sign visas; not anything else – she would just stay in her office and sign – she never went down to the consular section.

I was also the political officer, and that was something that she encouraged, so I was grateful for that. I did a lot of political reporting and one of the experiences that I most remember was meeting both of the top imams in Alexandria. One of them I actually met several times.

I also met with a lot of business people, a lot of university people. The University of Alexandria was a big, important institution there. I had wonderful contacts among my Egyptian friends. Egyptians are very outgoing and very friendly and I had a lot of real friends there as well as contacts. We did a lot of reporting on political Islam, which was the area of most interest to the Embassy and to Washington.

Q: What was going on in political Islam? I always think of the sort of the fundamentalists coming from up river or something like that.

FARSAKH: No, no. They were very powerful in Cairo and Upper Egypt, but Alexandria was and still is today to this day a very important center for the Islamists. We had powerful imams who drew huge crowds. They were important at the university, dominated the lawyers' association, the medical doctors' association, and the engineering association even then, so they were a real force to be reckoned with.

Q: OK, you've got Islam and we've looked at the pernicious effect that Islam has had in Saudi Arabia.

FARSAKH: Wahhabi Islam.

Q: Wahhabi Islam. Was there a difference, can you describe seeing scene particularly in Alexandrian Islam as compared to Wahhabi Islam?

FARSAKH: Egyptians, I think from the time of the pharaohs, are very devout, si8ncerely religious people. The Saudis are not in my view as sincere in their faith. The Saudis put on a big show of being religious but they don't really think much about what it really means. Egyptians take religion very, very seriously. It is really a part of them and many of those who are political and social moderates are religious. But they are tolerant, unlike the Saudis. I remember once going to visit a businessman during Ramadan and he absolutely insisted that I have a cup of coffee. Now in Saudi Arabia you get caught chewing gum on the street during Ramadan and you are put in prison for the rest of the month! In Egypt people have a tolerance, a self confidence. These things don't bother them. They appreciate what it means to be truly religious. That I think is true of most of them, probably true of most Egyptians to this day.

The extremists are a different brand. They are extremely intolerant and narrow minded and most of the leaders, like so many religious leaders everywhere, are not necessarily so religious themselves. It is a power grab – they manipulate people to gain power. That's the way that I saw it then and that's the way I see it now. As far as being narrow minded is concerned, yes, the extremists are very like the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia. That's not a coincidence, because Saudi money has fostered the expansion of Wahhabi Islam all over the world. We have Wahhabi mosques in the United States. The Saudis have the resources and they have these organizations that build mosques, supply reading material, imams and teachers, so that this kind of Islam has spread all over the world. It is extremely unfortunate –now the Saudis – the king anyway – realize what they have done and they are trying to walk the cat back. It's going to be very hard.

When Nasser was in power and someone from the Muslim Brotherhood tried to assassinate him, he cracked down and many left the country. A large number went to Saudi Arabia and stayed there for a long time. Many came back because Sadat, before he died, decided he wanted to cultivate the Islamists. Eventually they killed him and created a violent movement which lasted from his time until the massacre at Luxor in1997. The "Islamic Groups" ("al-Gama'a Islamiya"):perpetrated all kinds of horrible acts; blowing up buses, slaughtering tourists in Upper Egypt in Luxor, killing Christians in Upper Egypt and so on. They were very active and committing horrible atrocities.

After the massacre at Luxor, the government cracked down on them and they have been less visible. Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden's Egyptian sidekick, is one of those who was a leader of the Islamic Groups. I think there is still a significant number of these extremists in Egypt, waiting for their next opportunity.

Q: Did we have or did you all have a brief to really look at radical Islam?

FARSAKH: I did in Alexandria. I was the one because I had the language and Frances did not. Obviously, her doing it would also have been much higher profile, so I did all that.

Q: How does one look at that? You mentioned meeting the imams but did you sit down and have substantive conversations with them?

FARSAKH: Yes.

Q: Did you find any difference between them or did they have concerns about radical Islam too?

FARSAKH: They were radicals, the ones that I met.

Q: But there is radical and radical.

FARSAKH: They weren't members of the Islamic group, they weren't terrorists, at least as far as we knew. They were, let's say Wahhabi types in their beliefs, practices and their philosophy. Whether they were advocating violence was something I couldn't know from talking to them, but from what I remember they expressed views that were pretty retrograde.

The person who used to go with me was the political FSN, also a woman, and these extremists were actually very courteous to us, very nice, very polite. They knew that two women were coming to see them. They didn't object. We wore long sleeves and long skirts and scarves on our heads.

Q: Well, in a way of course, you are sort of exotic in a way in their eyes, I guess. I am told in Korea when women officials come there and have these peace parties, sort of geisha type parties and all that, the protocol people make you honorary men. In a way, it is of that ilk.

FARSAKH: Well, that is what they said foreign women were in Saudi Arabia and that's true, to some extent. For most Egyptians you didn't have to be an honorary man. They were used to dealing with women in high positions. For these imams, I would say that this was an extra step for them, but they seemed to be perfectly polite.

Q: Did you get sort of the normal diatribe against American culture and all that?

FARSAKH: I don't really remember. I don't think so but we mostly talked about what they thought, about their issues. We talked about women's issues, certainly. Women were a large part of their constituency. Women went to the mosques faithfully to listen to these men – they were some of their most devoted fans. One mosque that I used to go to had a huge balcony for the women, and I went to prayers a couple of times – the place was packed.

Q: In a way Egypt at an educated level, women are very much part of the structure, the government structure and business structure, aren't they?

FARSAKH: Well, to some extent they are. Egypt is a very class ridden society. The upper classes are accepting of educated, professional women, and most of the women who are active are upper class. But even these women were starting to cover their hair. Our female political FSN was a very good friend. Unfortunately, she was killed a few years after I left in a car accident. She said her mother would tell her that women in Egypt were more free in the '40s and '50s than women were in the 1980's. I think that certainly for the middle and upper classes, that was true.

Q: What about the universities? Not just women and scarves and all that but what was happening in the University of Alexandria and also what was being taught? Were you able to sample that?

FARSAKH: No, I didn't go to any classes, but it is a huge university, like Cairo University. They had faculties of engineering, medicine, law, education. It was the French system. I had a very good friend who was a professor of English there. The classes were jammed, the professors never had any contact with the students, they lectured to hundreds of people, handed out mimeographed copied textbooks that students had to memorize and regurgitate on the exams. The lab facilities were not good. Abdel Nasser created this situation. I don't think his intentions were bad, but he created a disaster. Before his time, students had to pay to go to university and only the upper and middle classes went. He opened the universities to everybody. You didn't have to pay tuition and so people from the countryside and the poorer sections of cities from all Egypt started going to universities, which soon became glutted and there was no obvious solution. The only control they had, which occurs all over the Arab world, what they call in Egypt the "Thanaweya" exams at the end of every year for graduating high school students. Students take exams in every subject. The people who achieved the highest scores would go to the medical schools, the second highest would go to the engineering school, and those who achieved the lowest would go into education. Science was always the most prestigious, so the smartest people were always in the medical and engineering schools. What was interesting and is still the case – if you look at the ranks of extremist Islam – you find a very large percentage of doctors and engineers in those ranks and in fact, as I may have mentioned, Ayman al-Zawahiri is a medical doctor.

Q: Did doctors, for example, perform as doctors or, because you know, in Saudi Arabia as we were talking about before often they would end up running pharmacies, getting involved in moneymaking organizations.

FARSAKH: The money was in private clinics. If you were a good doctor you ran a private clinic. You did not want to find yourself in an Egyptian government public hospital. The conditions there were absolutely horrible, just as they were in public schools and the universities. There was this huge crush of population, most of them poor. One of the ways the Islamists gained support and credibility is that they would go after students from the rural areas and small towns and pay for their books. They had dorms for them where the costs were very low, and they would pay girls to wear the hijab.

There were stories that some of these girls when they graduated, would throw off the hijab, but I think a lot of them did come under the influence of these groups. The government wasn't – and isn't – doing much of anything to help them. This is true in many poorer parts of the Islamic world. It was certainly the case in Egypt – whenever there was a crisis or whenever people needed help, it was the Muslim Brotherhood that would be there, while the incompetent and corrupt government would not be. It happened when Cairo suffered a devastating earthquake, in 1992, I think. It was true then and it's true now. The Egyptian government is a moribund, ineffective and corrupt dictatorship.

Q: Did you see any sign of enlightenment when you were there of the government?

FARSAKH: In the government, no. Certainly among my friends, they were wonderful, well educated, and they were very wonderful people. I did a TDY there in 1989 when the

consul general left and there was a staffing gap. At that time a good Egyptian friend of mine brought me to meet the Nobel Prize winner in Literature, Naguib Mahfouz. He used to hold court at a seaside hotel in Alexandria every summer and anybody who wanted to meet him, could, and they would sit and listen and talk to him.

Q: How was he operating when he would have these gatherings? Was he just open for discussion?

FARSAKH: Yes. He was quite elderly and hard of hearing and he spoke very softly so if you weren't sitting close to him it was hard to hear him. As a matter of fact, I remember a young woman coming up to him with a baby and he kissed the baby. People really revered him.

Q: Did we have ship visits coming in?

FARSAKH: Yes, we had a lot of ship visits.

Q: How did they go?

FARSAKH: They went fine. The most memorable for me was the visit of the USS Nimitz.

Q: An aircraft carrier.

FARSAKH: Yes, and we had dinner with the captain, a tour of the ship and had our pictures taken with him.

Q: Often with these ship visits they will have people who will sort of go in and paint a school or do something like that. Did they do that?

FARSAKH: Yes, the crew did some of that. In Alexandria we did a lot of passports for the sailors because many of them didn't have passports. We had to brief them and watch out to make sure they didn't get into fights in bars and things like that. We didn't have trouble with them.

Frances left the end of my first year. The only time I have ever gone to a psychiatrist was during her tenure. The embassy psychiatrist came up from Cairo. It was in the late spring of '86 and I told him about all my issues with Frances. I told him that my husband used to call me almost every night and I used to tell him everything that was going on. The psychiatrist advised me to, "Just listen to what your husband says. If she were going to be here another year, I would probably have to have you "psycho evaced" but since she is going, I think you will be OK. You can hold on." When Frances was actually leaving, I just stayed in my office with the door closed. After she had gone, the Egyptian political FSN and her secretary came to my house, and we finished two bottles of champagne ! We had the wheels up party of all wheels up parties.

Her successor was Mark Hambley who I had known somewhat from Jeddah. He was wonderful – I got along famously with him and I did very well. The second year was a wonderful, wonderful year. It was one of the best in my career.

Q: How about American tourists? Alexandria, of course in a way was not where, they were not climbing the pyramids.

FARSAKH: No, we would have American cruise ships that would dock in Alexandria and then they would bus the tourists to Cairo, so we didn't have too much to do with the tourists except of course when we had the Achille Lauro hijacking incident near the Alexandrian coast. I was actually at a consular conference in Vienna when it happened. By the time I got back, it was over.

Q: Did Israel come up often? Was this sort of a sore point?

FARSAKH: Yes, it was. We had an Israeli consulate in Alexandria. It was very small and the Israelis also took care of the very beautiful 19th century synagogue in Alexandria, which was very big and elegant. You could tell from looking at it how prosperous the people were who attended it. The Israelis were a low key presence because they were not popular. We used to go to their national day; there was a decent turnout but mostly it was other foreign diplomats. There weren't that many Egyptians there. Egyptians really felt very uncomfortable about having the Israelis there and associating with them.

Q: Did you find as the American consul were you getting, why are you so much on the side of the Israelis? Was that a theme?

FARSAKH: I don't remember it being that much of a theme. I do remember more of that when I was in Abu Dhabi. It was a sort of underlying theme in Egypt, I think but I don't remember it being something that we had to contend with all the time. It wasn't overpowering. And I am super sensitive to that issue!

Q: What about the relations with the embassy?

FARSAKH: Well, during Frances' time I had good relations with the DCM, Bill Clark, who was a wonderful man. He was just there for one year and I know he has passed away. He was actually very sympathetic to me and defended me when Frances wrote me a bad EER. He rebutted a lot of what she said in his reviewing statement, so I was grateful to him for that. The ambassador was Nick Veliotes. He never came to Alexandria and didn't seem to care much about it.

The second year Frank Wisner was the ambassador and he was something else. He was very outgoing, loved to come to Alexandria – generally he loved to go everywhere to see everything and meet as many Egyptians as possible – they loved him back! When he was about to make his first official trip to Alexandria, the consul general's father passed away and he had to go back to the U.S. So I was in charge the first time the ambassador came to Alex, and I established a very nice relationship with him. It turned out that he and his

wife liked antiques which I also do. As I told you, a lot of the foreigners left there hurriedly in 1957 and in 1967 and they left lots of their goodies behind. Alexandria had a very active and attractive antiques area. Frank would say, "Just call me Frank" and so I did, and he would come with his wife to Alexandria and go shopping for antiques. Because I used to hang out a lot there, as my husband wasn't around a lot of the time, I had developed friends in that part of town. I used to take him around, so I got to know the merchants fairly well. Wisner would come from time to time on official business also. He was all over the country all the time.

Q: How would you say, you had the Mubarak regime with a very heavy hand and we had very close relations with Egypt and we were paying the Egyptians not to fight the Israelis and all. What did this do from the viewpoint of the consul in Alexandria? What was this doing to Egyptian American relations at this particular time?

FARSAKH: The consulate, before I got there, had celebrated its 150th anniversary. It was one of the oldest U.S. diplomatic posts in the world and the people who we mostly dealt with were wealthy businessmen who were very friendly to us and used to come to all our events. They would say things about the American AID program and about Israel, but it never got to anti-Americanism. I didn't ever sense that there.

Q: Did you have any demonstrations?

FARSAKH: No. The most famous one was after the '67 war which was way before my time. The consulate was mobbed and the consul general was almost attacked, but saved by a newly hired FSN who used to serve the coffee. When Frank Wisner came and found out that this old man who was still serving coffee in Alexandria, had had his pension credits cut off when we cut diplomatic relations after the 1967 War, – until 1974, when we resumed relations and reopened – Frank spent almost his entire tenure assaulting the Department with letters and cables and whatnot to get Muhammad his pension restored. His efforts succeeded finally at the end – this illustrates what a great man Frank Wisner is. This old man was the one who saved the life of the consul general in 1967.

Q: Was the Port of Suez?

FARSAKH: No, we had nothing to do with that. No, the embassy in Cairo had a consular agent at Port Said, I think. We had nothing to do with the Suez Canal, just the Alexandria Port.

Q: Did you get any feel for relations with Libya from Alexandria?

FARSAKH: There were lots of Libyans there, we knew that. We hardly ever came into contact with them.

Q: I mean, there wasn't a group that Gaddafi would push a button and they'd get out and demonstrate?

FARSAKH: No, no. They used to come for medical treatment. They would also go to the university but they were not a troublesome element.

Q: Did the Greeks?

FARSAKH: The Greeks were very much there, but in greatly reduced numbers. The Greeks had this immense consulate building and they used to give huge parties. One of their most famous poets, Constantine Cavafy, was an Alexandrian and they used to have big celebrations on his birthday. Once, during my time, when Melina Mercouri was the Greek minister of culture, she came to Alexandria. So the Greeks were a big deal.

Q: I served for four years in Greece; '70 to '74 and found out that the top belly dancers were Greek from Alexandria.

FARSAKH: Well, I wouldn't be surprised. There were some Greek restaurants, some Greek restaurateurs, and some Greek businessmen that I knew. There were some left.

Q: After this time, you left there in '85, wither?

FARSAKH: Back to the States. I worked for a year in IO/UNP on Middle East issues; then I curtailed. It had to do with them cutting my portfolio in half because I was doing the work of two people. When I asked for the half that I wanted they said, "No, you can't have that. We got somebody else for that." So I said that I did not want to be there anymore and I curtailed.

I went to INR and spent a very happy two years there; the first year doing the Arabian Peninsula, the second the Maghreb, and in between, as I mentioned, I had a TDY in Alexandria, in the summer of '89. Then I went to the Arabian Peninsula Desk, arriving there one day before Iraq invaded Kuwait – that was a very busy time! I was doing Yemen and Saudi political military affairs.

Q: I want to go back; let's take your first assignment. You were working on UN political affairs for a year. What were you doing? This was '85 to '86, I guess?

FARSAKH: I left Alexandria in '87. I was in Abu Dhabi from '83 to '85. I was in Alexandria from '85 to '87.

In UNP, I worked on the Iran/Iraq war which was still going on, and U.S. reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers. I would come in every morning at 7:30 because we had meetings at 7:45 on the reflagging issue every day. The office also thought that the Middle East portfolio wasn't big enough so they gave me Cyprus as well. I had Lebanon too, and the civil war was in full swing. We had the assassination of Chief of Station Buckley. I don't remember if I was there for that.

Q: He was the CIA agent.

FARSAKH: Yes. Then the execution of Colonel Higgins, the Marine captain, occurred. He was working for the UN. That definitely happened on my watch and was a lot of work. I also had the Palestinian issue and I was instrumental in the closing of the PLO office in Washington. I hated being involved in that. It was Allen Keyes, our thoroughly unqualified assistant secretary, a megalomaniac – whose idea that was.

Q: An eventual candidate. I have heard people say that in meeting with him, staff meetings were awful because he would give long lectures to people who knew a lot more about the subject than he did.

FARSAKH: And we had a deputy assistant secretary, Laura something, the one who supervised our office, who was a true blue Reagan believer and she had a mouth like a sewer. She would abuse people in front of their peers. I managed to keep under the radar. Whenever she saw me she would call me "hey, you" which was fine with me because I never wanted her to know my name. That year was a lot of work, lots of long hours and not much fun.

Q: The reflagging issue, because I have been interviewing Jim Hooper who was charge in Kuwait. It so happened that he got involved with the reflagging issue where the foreign minister wanted to split the flags between the Soviets and the Americans, which of course, we didn't want to. How did, how was the reflagging issue playing? He was concerned that no answer was coming.

FARSAKH: Well, actually, I think we probably ignored it. I don't recall that any tankers ever had Soviet flags on them.

Q: No, we didn't and they didn't. No, the decision was made that we would take them all but the problem was that the Kuwaitis had asked and we weren't responding. What was?

FARSAKH: I don't recall that at all. I just know that we were the ones that were doing it, we charted the progress of each one of the ships as they came through and we discussed all the policy implications. However, I don't really remember the discussions all that well.

Q: How did we view the Iran Iraq war?

FARSAKH: As I told you, when I was in Abu Dhabi we hosted intel teams who would go to Baghdad and brief the Iraqis on Iranian troop movements. That was obviously going on and continued until almost the end of the war. I was in INR by the way, when Saddam used chemical weapons on Halabja, so I can tell you that back in 1988, we really didn't care that that had happened. It was only later, when we got our conscience back for other reasons, that we saw it as a problem. We basically gave Saddam a free pass. One the other hand, I don't think we minded that the war went on as long as it did, for eight years. I think the two countries fighting it out to exhaustion was something that didn't bother us at all. The number of casualties didn't really bother us.

Q: How about the civil war in Lebanon?

FARSAKH: I worked on that as it involved Americans during the year I was in UN/P. Our main interest I think was the American hostages that Hezbollah was taking. As far as the war itself, I don't know that we did anything. In '82 obviously, we went in and got the PLO out to Tunis and in '83 an American ship actually shot missiles into some Lebanese town on the coast. That may have been the precipitating event of the attack on the Marines. I'm not sure, but obviously, we got out of there after the embassy was bombed and the Marines and the French were attacked. After that it was hostages all the time. When it was finally over it was the Saudis who brokered the deal at Taif; we didn't really have anything to do with it.

Q: I think most of the time you were dealing with Lebanon it was almost a watching brief, wasn't it?

FARSAKH: Yes. Obviously I know from when I was in INR that we spent a lot of time watching Hezbollah, obviously monitoring the hostage situation, monitoring the different militias and so on. I spent a lot of time watching Imad Mughniyah, who very suspiciously died a couple of years ago in Damascus. He was the worst terrorist that ever hit the face of the earth, at least in modern times. He was definitely a number one target during the time I was in INR. We never did get him though and we don't know to this day whether it was the Syrians who killed him or whether it was the Israeli Mossad.

Q: You mentioned that you were involved in getting the PLO out of Washington, was it?

FARSAKH: Yes, shutting down the PLO Information Office.

Q: How long had they had it and what was it doing?

FARSAKH: It had been there for at least ten years. It was an information office, mostly churning out material to spread around. They had no real diplomatic status; and they still don't. The Palestinian Authority does not have an office in Washington; it's the PLO, it's called the PLO Mission and the person who heads it is not recognized by the U.S. as an ambassador, only the "General Delegate" of the PLO or some such thing. The PLO rep who just left in the spring was an ambassador in other countries, had ambassadorial status but he wasn't recognized as such here. The man who was the PLO rep when I was in UNP may have had a green card or perhaps he was a dual national who was head of the office. Anyway, Alan Keyes decided they were terrorists and we closed them down. We also started making moves to close the PLO Observer Mission to the UN in New York. That would have been harder because of our agreement with the UN on foreign missions. We cannot just do whatever we want in New York because the UN has to approve as we signed a treaty at the inception of the UN limiting our actions. While there were some initial efforts to try to close them down in New York, these came to nothing.

Q: If the PLO Information Center had been going for ten years, what caused it to be shut down?

FARSAKH: I believe it was Allen Keyes, who I think hates the Palestinians in general.

Q: He was an assistant secretary for the United Nations Affairs?

FARSAKH: For international organizations. The actions against the PLO could have been higher up in the administration, I don't know. The Reagan administration was no fan of the PLO. And with what was going on in Lebanon, they could always associate the PLO with that.

Q: Were you there during the Iran Contra business?

FARSAKH: I think that was before I got there.

Q: You mentioned that you had a double job. What were the two things you were doing and which one did you want to keep?

FARSAKH: I wanted the Iraq portfolio because it was much more active; there was much more going on. The other one was Lebanon, Palestinian issues and Cyprus, but there was really nothing going on in those for UNP, except the shutting down of the PLO office. If I had had any opportunity to screw up the latter, I would have done so, but I didn't. They recruited somebody else from overseas for the Iraq portfolio, which they claimed was the "sexier" portfolio, that I had been covering for a year. I told the director, "Well, if I can't have the portfolio that I have been working for a year – if I can't have the choice – then I don't want to be here."

I also wanted to be leave because I loathed the bureau, the assistant secretary and the deputy assistant secretary, and their entire philosophy regarding the United Nations. IO was a nasty place to work in those days.

Q: Did you sense, or was it obvious we had a right wing presidency of Ronald Reagan which was always beating up on the UN. Did you sense a hostility?

FARSAKH: Oh, yes, very much so. That was very, very clear. The whole business of withholding our dues from the UN was a constant, running theme; the UN going into deficit, the UN not having enough money for peacekeeping. The bureau was really down on the UN.

Q: Yes. So how did you get yourself over to INR?

FARSAKH: I had been going into work at 7:30 in the morning and coming home very often at 8:00, 8:30 at night, sometimes later, and I felt that I wasn't getting anything for my efforts. I told them that when they split my portfolio and wouldn't give me what I wanted, I wished to leave.

They said they wouldn't stop me. I think they understood that the management of the office hadn't been very nice to me after I had been working so hard. I interviewed with INR, and obviously I had this very significant background in Middle East affairs. The Arabian Peninsula position was open; I had done three tours on the peninsula plus my pre-government life in Dhahran. They were happy to have me, so I curtailed from IO and did two years in INR. I did very well there and for six months I was the acting division chief, for which I got an award. I got along very well with my colleagues – I enjoyed them – and it was a fine assignment.

Q: The Arabian Peninsula included Kuwait?

FARSAKH: Yes.

Q: You got there when?

FARSAKH: I got there in '88. I was in UNP from '87 to '88. I was in INR from '88 to '90.

Q: What was going on in the Arabian Peninsula during this particular time?

FARSAKH: One of the big things was the discovery of Chinese missiles in Saudi Arabia. That was a big deal because INR had been the one that figured out their existence in the Kingdom, and that was very embarrassing to the Saudis.

Q: Well, very embarrassing to the CIA too, wasn't it?

FARSAKH: Yes.

Q: How did INR find out?

FARSAKH: I don't really know, probably from looking at satellite data, but I am not sure. There was a lot of really intense attention on what they looked like, their shape and how they were placed and comparing it with other information we had on Chinese missiles. I had Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Yemen, Qatar – all those countries and I really don't remember all the details of the outstanding issues that I dealt with. I only covered the Peninsula for a year. The following year I requested a change because I had been spending so long on the Arabian Peninsula and the Maghreb position had come open. In my second year I did Libya and the Maghreb.

Q: Why was the fact that there were Chinese missiles in Saudi Arabia such a shock?

FARSAKH: Well, because throughout their history, the Saudis refused to deal with "atheist" regimes. They didn't have diplomatic relations with the Chinese or with the Russians until around the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union. All their previous weapon deals were with the United States and UK, and here they were sneaking in

missiles from China. It was quite a scandal, and obviously they thought they could get away with it.

Q: Why were they doing it, do you think?

FARSAKH: Because of Iran, probably.

Q: They thought that Iran was going to be a problem?

FARSAKH: Possibly, yes. Saudi-Iranian relations were really bad. I remember at one point one of the Iranian leaders called King Fahd" the pig of the peninsula". You couldn't get more insulting than that. The Saudis were really afraid of Iran and there were Iranian inspired demonstrations in Mecca on two successive pilgrimages, There were riots and people got killed – there was a lot of tension between the two countries. I think Khomeini was trying to make himself out to be the leader of Islam and King Fahd, "the custodian of the two holy mosques" viewed himself as that leader. There was also the Sunni-Shia rivalry. Fahd was defensive, as he had had a very checkered past. Before he became king he was known as a corrupt playboy, and everyone knew that he wasn't a sincerely religious person. He had no religious standing whatsoever, unlike King Faisal or the present King, Abdullah. Fahd had to work extra hard at his legitimacy. Bilateral tensions were very high.

Q: How about Yemen? Did we see Yemen as, it was taking sort of a pro Soviet stance, wasn't it?

FARSAKH: There were two Yemens at the time; they hadn't unified yet, and South Yemen was communist. North Yemen while a very traditional, very tribal, very religious country, had excellent relations with the Soviet Union and was also very close to Iraq, to Saddam. But Yemen has always been and to this day – you saw what happened yesterday with al-Qaeda – is riddled with violence and tribal disputes. The politics of Yemen are quite Byzantine, something that only a few people have been able to master.

Q: How about the Emirates and all?

FARSAKH: The economic people in INR dealt with petroleum issues. The part of INR that I was in didn't spend much time on them, except when they impacted political issues.

Q: Were we trying at that point, were we working on trying to build up basings for U.S. troops?

FARSAKH: No, that was later.

Q: Well, then you are off to the Maghreb. You were dealing with the Maghreb from '88 to?

FARSAKH: ’89 to ’90. The big thing that happened on my watch was the Algerian municipal elections, when the Islamic Front gained a majority – which was a harbinger of what was to come in the subsequent general elections. I was there for those as well; the “FIS” (Islamic Salvation Front) won definitively, and the government overthrew the results of the election. We and the French immediately supported the government’s voiding of the democratic elections. The overthrowing of the election results precipitated the brutal civil war that raged in Algeria for most of the ‘90s.

Q: Qadhafi was he an irritant or a real threat or how did we deal with that?

FARSAKH: I think by that time, an irritant. I do not remember any significant events in Libya on my watch. Of course there was the PanAm 103 crash in December 1988, but I do not remember having anything to do with that. There was some evidence that Qadhafi was having trouble in the eastern part of the country with Islamist types, and that problem persists.

Q: Was he messing around in Chad or Sudan?

FARSAKH: Yes, he was messing around in Chad. I do not recall Sudan, but yes, messing around in Chad was par for the course.

Q: The French seem to be able to take care of that kind of, weren’t they?

FARSAKH: Yes, but I am no expert on Chad. The Libyans were messing around in many parts of black Africa at the time and I don’t remember all the countries they were involved in but yes, we were watching that. We were watching the money he was giving and the arms support and political support to various rulers in sub-Saharan Africa.

Q: How did we view Morocco?

FARSAKH: As a friend, except for the problem of the Western Sahara which continues to irritate. We tend to take the part of Morocco. This is an issue that really makes my eyes glaze over. The Algerians obviously support the Polisario and that’s why there has not been a solution; it goes on today.

Q: The sad thing is you’ve got a bunch of people sitting in the middle of the Algerian desert who are prisoners of war. They are still there, they’d been there years. It’s just sort of one of those issues that doesn’t seem to be heading for a solution, at least during the time you were there.

FARSAKH: No, it’s not heading for a solution now either, because Morocco is steadfast in wanting to control it and Algeria is steadfast in supporting the Polisario, which wants an independent state.

Q: Do we view the Polisario as being a separate force or was this just an Algerian proxy?

FARSAKH: They are kind of a separate force, I think. I know that Polisario leaders would come to meet with people in the Department. I don't know if they still do. I think they must have had some kind of office in Washington.

Q: How did you find working for INR?

FARSAKH: I liked it and I liked the people, I thought highly of them, and the work was interesting but it was a little isolating. Except for going to conferences and visiting the Agency, one was are pretty much working on one's own, sitting in front of a computer gathering information and writing it up. I like to write but I prefer to be out there dealing with people. In fact, I enjoyed being overseas more than I ever enjoyed being in the Department for that reason. I liked INR but I wouldn't have wanted to do it again.

Q: Where did you go?

FARSAKH: The Arabian Peninsula Office (NEA/ARP),where I dealt with Yemen and Saudi political and military affairs for two years. Then I went to Tunis where I was political counselor and worked with the PLO – that was the high point of my career because I was the Embassy liaison to the PLO after the signing of the Oslo Agreements in September 1993.

Q: You got to the Arabian Peninsula office at a pretty interesting time.

FARSAKH: Yes, one day before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait! And Yemen was a member of the Security Council which made it even more interesting.

Q: Arabian Peninsula Affairs, when did you arrive?

FARSAKH: It was August 1, 1990 and Saddam invaded Kuwait on August 2.

Q: What happened? They said, "Here, you've got a war" and just handed it to you?

FARSAKH: Well, yes. The whole office had a war. We immediately went onto the task force; I remember being on the taskforce the second night and speaking to the embassy in Kuwait which was under siege. I also spoke to Ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie, who was in a hotel in London with her mother – having just begun her leave – wondering whether she should go back to Baghdad. The Department finally ordered her back to Washington, which they should not have done.

All of us rotated, serving on the taskforce for several days and weeks thereafter. After that, it seemed to be dealing with Yemen all the time. I mentioned that it had always had very strong ties with Iraq and supported Saddam in his invasion of Kuwait. I spent a lot of my time with the Yemeni ambassador going up to see the assistant secretary, who would threaten Yemen with all kinds of punishments if it didn't support us. Sometimes they voted with us on the Security Council, sometimes they didn't. We took away almost

all of their economic aid. One of my strongest memories is writing papers about taking away U.S. aid from Yemen because they were supporting Saddam. As for the Saudi POLMIL responsibilities, we were looking at the positions of the Iraqi troops and trying to convince the Saudis that they were being threatened also. They believed that they were. Of course, that gave us the opening to start putting troops in Saudi Arabia which certainly backfired in a big way eventually, but we at the time didn't even consider that.

Q: That wasn't even a consideration?

FARSAKH: No, I don't think it was, which shows how people at the top who don't know much of anything make decisions. There were plenty of experts in the U.S. foreign affairs community who could have predicted what would happen, and did.

Q: The troops are a later consequence. At the time there was the fact that Saddam Hussein was occupying a significant hunk of oil and a foreign country.

FARSAKH: Well, you could have argued that yes, he was occupying Kuwait and of course with Iraqi oil and Kuwaiti oil he was in a position to dominate the Gulf. He didn't have to take Saudi Arabia to do that; he could have dominated the Gulf just by intimidating Saudi Arabia – the Saudis are easily intimidated.

Q: OK, so there's a problem. You've got to do something about the problem.

FARSAKH: Well, we did. We started pouring in troops in and eventually we kicked Saddam out of Kuwait.

Q: Was it your feeling that we should have let him stay there?

FARSAKH: No, not at all. I am just saying that we convinced the Saudis that he was going to invade them; I am not sure there was ever any evidence that he was intending to do that. And, I am not sure that our putting troops in Saudi Arabia was a good thing. That has nothing to do with the way I feel about what happened to Kuwait. Yes, we had to go in and do what we did in Kuwait.

Q: I don't know, looking at this from a great distance but I think this was such a provocation.

FARSAKH: I think Saddam was really, really stupid because if he had just taken over the Majnoon oilfield on his border with Kuwait, he would have gotten away with it.

Q: I have interviewed Wayne White and Wayne was of the opinion that this was sort of a snap decision on the part of Hussein. He said that they didn't come prepared. I mean, they had sort of tourist maps of Kuwait and they allowed the Kuwaiti air force to take off and leave while there was just one guard, Kuwaiti guard standing and armored brigade, "You can't come in. You I need papers." Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti air force was taking off.

FARSAKH: I think he thought at the last minute that he could take the whole thing. And that was his big mistake, because if he had taken the contested oil fields, where he was arguing that the Kuwaitis were siphoning off Iraqi oil – and maybe they were – he probably could have made that case. The Kuwaitis were also demanding their money that they had loaned Iraq during the Iran Iraq war. Saddam had thought, probably mistakenly, that these funds were gifts because he was fighting the Iranians on behalf of all the Arab states. The Kuwaitis wanted their money back and he couldn't pay it. The Kuwaitis were taking some Iraqi oil and so what he should have done – if he had been smart – was seize the oilfields straddling the border. We surely would not have gone in after him if he had done that. It was because he took the whole country by force, and that was his big mistake. Did Wayne agree with that?

Q: Yes.

Who was watching from INR? Did you have somebody watching, you were on the desk?

FARSAKH: I was on the desk.

Q: Were you getting during this time, anybody looking at Iran and thinking what's Iran going to do?

FARSAKH: I'm sure there were. At the time the Iran desk was one person or maybe two people. Iran-Iraq was one desk – Northern Gulf Affairs – and it was very small. There were maybe five people on the whole desk including the director and the deputy. I'm not sure how much they were able to watch and I 'm not sure how we behaved toward Iran at that time.

Q: What about Iraq? Iraq was part of the, you had the Arabian Peninsula. Iraq had to be part of your calculations.

FARSAKH: Well, on the POLMIL side it was getting American troops into Saudi Arabia. On the Yemeni side, it was trying to work with the Yemenis to get them to support us in the UN Security Council on all the resolutions that were being passed to try to force the Iraqis to get out of Kuwait and give us the authorization to use force. In some cases they did vote with us but in several important ones they didn't. I was on the phone with our ambassador to Yemen easily twice a day, plotting UN Security Council strategy.

Q: The ambassador you are referring to was our ambassador to Yemen?

FARSAKH: Yes, Charlie Dunbar. I developed a very close relationship with Charlie, we got on famously.

I spent my days and – and nights! – writing papers on Yemeni aid and Security Council strategy. We had a perfectly awful assistant secretary, John Kelly. He had been ambassador to Lebanon, his only tour in the region. He had a terrible temper, a mouth

like a sewer and I used to feel, as I walked by him if I saw him in the hall, that I had a brand on my forehead. The other countries that supported Saddam – Tunisia and Jordan – their desk officers all felt the same way. It was as if he was personally blaming us that our countries were taking what the U.S. considered to be very unhelpful positions.

Q: I interviewed Roger Harrington who was our ambassador to Jordan and during the time, King Hussein, I mean you don't have to be a genius to understand that King Hussein was in a very difficult position. We talked about this before that the Jordanians and the Palestinians/Jordanians were supporting Hussein and so his invasion of Kuwait was wildly popular in Jordan.

FARSAKH: Well, the Kuwaitis are not popular anywhere in the Arab world.

Q: They never were so for us to demand King Hussein stand behind us probably

FARSAKH: It could have brought him down.

Q: could have brought him down.

FARSAKH: Basically we understood that. I don't think we were as harsh on Jordan as we were on Yemen. We could afford to be harsher on Yemen as there was not as much at stake at the time.

Q: Well, this was part of it but Harrington was saying that he was getting instructions which he just didn't deliver. This is one of the things that you find sometimes ambassadors are essentially paid to understand.

FARSAKH: To use their judgment.

Q: To use their judgment because often if you have an assistant secretary who wants to show that he's got balls, as with Yemen, it's easy. You can play that game but you can't play that game with Jordan.

FARSAKH: And Tunisia, it was easy to be nasty to them also because we didn't have as much at stake there either. Jordan is too valuable to us. We owned King Hussein just the way we own his son, King Abdullah. We've always owned the Hashemites and at the end of the day, they do what they have to do but they will never really hurt us if they can help it. We know that and we need them as a buffer. We need them and they know that.

Q: Was anybody while you were dealing with this Iran Iraq war raising the issue of Shia and the Sunni and all?

FARSAKH: That would come up from time to time. The main Shia-Sunni issue I remember during my career up until then was in Saudi Arabia, when we were in the Eastern Province and were actually dealing with it and with the Iranian revolution. We were talking about Shia and Sunni issues all the time. In terms of my time in ARP, no, I

don't think so. We had brownbag lunches on "Islam." These lunch meetings have been a constant theme throughout my entire career. People are trying to understand Islam and Muslims. On the whole, I find, with the exception of a few colleagues, the Department's understanding of Islam to be extremely superficial. I studied Islam on the doctoral level and I lecture on it. I live with a Muslim family every summer. I have spent a good part of my life living with Islam, dealing with Islam and you almost don't know where to begin with some of these people in the Department because their knowledge is so superficial. The situation is no better today, and it is sad.

Q: But what do you do?

FARSAKH: I don't know what you do. The only way you get people to understand it is for them to actually be in the countries, befriend the people, study the religion, learn to speak the languages. It's time consuming and it requires a certain kind of open-mindedness to other cultures that a lot of people don't have. I do think even now that a lot of USG employees regard the Muslims as "wogs." They don't take the time to really get into the religion, they don't have any respect for it, they don't respect the people who follow it They come up with superficial analyses and explanations. It's all very frustrating – and probably dangerous..

Q: Before we leave your time dealing with Arab Peninsula Affairs the war is over. Could you say you almost had a watching brief waiting for Saddam to be ousted by his generals? Was that the general feeling?

FARSAKH: I think we thought that that could happen. The tragic part of it was that George Bush the first did to many Iraqis what Eisenhower had done to the Hungarians in 1956 – encouraging them to revolt and giving the impression that if they did, we would support them. Bush the second did the same thing with that crazy Georgian president just a month ago. You incite people, you imply that you are going to be committed to their cause and then at the end of the day, you betray them by not doing anything.

Bush the first incited the Kurds to revolt against Saddam, which they did. Saddam crushed them, made hundreds of thousands of them refugees. Finally, we had to go in and install a no-fly zone to protect them. This gave the Kurds the opportunity to do a lot of things that may come back to bite us. We betrayed the Iraqi Shiites in the south too; we encouraged them to revolt and they did. We did not do anything to support them. The least we could have done was to prevent Saddam from using his helicopters in the south in the agreement that ended the war. He used them to great effect. He killed thousands and thousands of Shiites. He also he drained the marshes in the south as revenge, thereby destroying an ancient civilization which has now come back somewhat.

These betrayals by the U.S. come back to haunt me as I remember my time working on the Future of Iraq project which began in the spring of 2002. I joined in the fall of 2002 and it ended when we invaded Iraq in March of 2003. We met a lot of Iraqis during the project and the fury against the United States, the sense of betrayal by both Kurds and Shiites, was extremely strong. They felt that we had really let them down and they had

suffered mightily as a result. We don't ever seem to get over this idea that we encourage people to rise up against their rulers and then we are not willing to back them up. We may have good reasons but it is irresponsible to behave that way and it surely does not enhance our popularity overseas.

Q: We went through a lot of soul searching in '56 after the Hungarian revolt. What were we doing, the war was over. Were we all under pressure to get our troops off Saudi soil as quickly as possible?

FARSAKH: No, I don't think we were. King Fahd, who I have always had minimal respect for, was scared to death. Most Saudis were afraid of the Iraqis. The Saudis are essentially scared of their own shadows; they can't fight. It doesn't matter what kind of weapons they have. They have no will to fight and probably not the capability either. Fahd invited us in out of fear that the Iraqis and Saddam would invade. We convinced him when the Iraqis first went into Kuwait that they were going to hit Saudi Arabia next. I don't know what the internal politicking was in Saudi Arabia at the time, how much opposition there was to this idea but he allowed American troops to come into the kingdom and to stay there, train and conduct operations. As a matter of fact, even before the war, the U.S. was flying over southern Iraq, over the no-fly zone that we established in southern Iraq. The flights mostly came from Saudi Arabia so there were already some bases there. There had been a training mission in Dhahran since the end of World War II but we really beefed up our forces there after the first Gulf War. Our military were not anywhere near the holy places in the west of the country. However, there was already propaganda coming out of Saudi Arabia against the United States – that infidels were invading the holy places, although the installations were in the east and central part of the country.

In fact, the Prophet did throw all the non-Muslims out of Arabia. The last Jewish tribe was expelled before he died, and so there is a tradition that non-Muslims should not be in the Arabian Peninsula. Now, obviously, that was breached a long time ago by King Abdel Aziz when he signed oil agreements with the Americans and Aramco came in. However, the American troops were the clincher for many traditional Saudis. That was something most Saudis at the core of their being couldn't tolerate. But Fahd depended greatly on the United States. I think we had a lot to do with his staying power and he invited us in – we came in enthusiastically.

Q: After the war there was no particular pressure while you were dealing with it up to '92 to get out?

FARSAKH: No, not at all.

Q: I think most of it for good reason we wanted to keep an army sitting in the middle of the desert. So getting the troops out was more, because we wanted to get them out, right?

FARSAKH: No, I don't think, no. As a result of the first Gulf War we have virtually made Kuwait into an American base which it remains to this day. As a result of that war

we stationed large number of forces in two large bases in Saudi Arabia, one in the northeast up near Kuwait and the other in the general area of Riyadh. One of them is King Khalid City which is up near the Kuwaiti border.

We had absolutely no compunction about having troops in Saudi Arabia. I think we thought because the king wanted us there, it was fine and I don't believe we had any particular concern for the way the majority of Saudis felt about this. Our presence was to protect the king which is very much in our interest, protect the royal family and the oil – the most important factors as far as we were concerned.

Q: In '92 you are off to?

FARSAKH: Tunis.

Q: What was your job?

FARSAKH: I was political counselor.

Q: And you were in Tunis from when to when?

FARSAKH: From the summer of '92, June or July I don't remember – until June of '95.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

FARSAKH: I had two ambassadors; one was John McCarthy who arrived the year before I did. He had been ambassador to Lebanon and DCM in Pakistan. He left in 1994 and Mary Anne Casey, who had been the ambassador to Algeria, followed him. She was my ambassador for one year.

Q: During this time when you arrived there in '92, what was the situation sort of politically and economically in Tunisia?

FARSAKH: Well, Tunisia is a funny place. It's a beautiful country and the people are very well educated and progressive. I would say socially it is easily the most progressive country in the Arab world and a large part is because of Habib Bourguiba, the first president of Tunisia, who was very much in favor of the equality of women, pushed it as a cause, and married a powerful woman who was very active in women's affairs. He also instituted family planning which paid off later on, as Tunisia does not have the demographic problems that they do in other Arab countries. He outlawed polygamy and made other changes which turned Tunisia into a very progressive country.

On the economic side, Bourguiba tried socialism, but it didn't work. Unlike a lot of other leaders, he recognized that it was dysfunctional and after two or three years, he got rid of it. The economy is not dominated by the government. Private enterprise is very vibrant there.

So economically and socially, it is a very progressive country but politically, it's stagnant. Bourguiba was forced out in 1987. He was already about 90, was in bad health and probably had dementia. He was forced out by a man who was then possibly in his 40's, Zein al-Abidine Ben Ali, who came from a police background and had been minister of the interior. He forced Bourguiba out, claiming that he was medically unfit – which was true – to rule. Ben Ali promised all kinds of democratic change and said there would never be a president for life again. By the time I got there, which was five years later, because Ben Ali came in without elections, he held an one which of course, he won overwhelmingly; there was another election while I was there, which he won overwhelmingly yet again. Since then, he has changed the constitution so that he can remain president for life! So he will rule for life, as Bourguiba almost did, except that he's not as progressive, nor as smart as his predecessor. However, Ben Ali is very supportive of women's rights, so Tunisia continues to move along in a progressive direction in that regard. He fears and loathes Islamists, and Tunisia is very, very tough on Islamists. Women who try to wear headscarves in government offices get fired. Girls are not supposed to wear hijab at the university although many do; government agents are in the mosques monitoring all the sermons and attendees. The regime is very heavy handed. The Islamists are mostly either in prison or in exile but Ben Ali has overdone it in the sense that it's not only Islamists, but anybody who dissents from the government line who winds up in jail or exile. It is a very repressive government.

Q: In '92 you come came in as political counselor. It sounds like there's no politics there. What were you doing?

FARSAKH: The PLO was of course there from the time they were kicked out of Beirut in 1982 and so the place was filled with PLO watchers; journalists and other embassies. One of my tasks was to watch the PLO watchers and report what was going on, so I became very active in that regard with journalists, other embassies, and particularly with the deputy chief of mission of the Russian Embassy who was a fluent Arabic speaker. He had been in Tunis for probably six to eight years, knew Arafat personally, and was very high ranking in the Russian foreign ministry. He was a minister counselor – we got on very well. He used to give me great information. I would meet with the British, with the French, everybody, because we were the only ones who wouldn't meet with the PLO.

Q: What were our relations with the PLO?

FARSAKH: None. We were told that if a PLO person came up to us at a national day or any event, we could discuss the weather and then we should graciously say goodbye and walk off to talk to somebody else. We were not supposed to have anything to do with them.

Q: How did they that strike you?

FARSAKH: It struck me as ridiculous but I wasn't surprised. There was another element to it that was amusing. My husband is Palestinian American as you know, and he knew a lot of the Palestinians in Tunis. Some he had gone to school with! When we were at the

Department before we left for post, we were told that my position was one thing and I could have nothing to do with them, but Yusif was on his own; he could meet them if he wanted to, as long as he was discreet and did not involve the embassy. So we went off thinking that it would be so interesting for him to meet all his old friends again.

Well, when we got there, Ambassador McCarthy warned in no uncertain terms: "You are here on a diplomatic passport. You are under our protection. You cannot have anything, anything to do with them, whatsoever." Yusif was not pleased.

He found ways to see his friends. I had nothing to do with it – I didn't want to know and he didn't tell me.

Q: Looking at this, we report on odd cultures and this whole idea of non recognition of people who are vitally concerned. You don't talk to people.

FARSAKH: But that's not uncommon for the U.S. When I was in college it was Red China. It's a miracle that we continue to have a liaison in Havana for all we have to do with them. We didn't want to talk to the North Koreans, now we have to. We don't want to talk to the Iranians. Look what we've done in Syria over the last few years. We seem to enjoy saying that "if we don't like you, we're not going to talk to you, so there." Who does it hurt? Us! It hurts us more than it hurts them.

Q: Absolutely.

FARSAKH: And we keep on doing it, we behave like kindergartners, stomping our feet and saying, "I don't like you. I don't want to talk to you." I don't know how adult people can conceive of conducting foreign policy in this way. It just boggles my mind.

Q: It does mine too. I have always felt that the, in diplomatic practice if relations between two countries get bad, they recall their ambassadors and leave the number two in charge. I mean, what the hell is that all about? If relations are bad, you want your top person in there to deal with it.

FARSAKH: Well, I have a little anecdote about that. I remember, this goes back to the first Gulf War. As I think I told you, I was on the taskforce the second night and April Glaspie was in London in a hotel room with her mother; she had just come out after meeting with Saddam. The Department of course must always give permission for an ambassador to leave post. She called the Department asking for permission to go back to Baghdad. The Department said, "No, just come back home."

She came back, they stuck her as one of the top honchos at the taskforce. Most of the time she walked the halls of the Department until eventually she was called to testify on the Hill. She was the scapegoat for all the mistakes which had been made, which were legion. The Department had decided they didn't want the ambassador there, so they left DCM Joe Wilson as charge. We all know about Joe Wilson now; he's a big celebrity but

I don't think he had any Middle East background. He didn't speak any Arabic. He was an admin officer; he wasn't competent to take on an ambassadorial role.

Q: I've done an oral history with Joe before he became that renowned, but he was an admin officer who worked in Africa, spoke fluent French, very bright, but you know, sort of a big ego and he had a wonderful time and I think he probably did a good job there as far as the problem of protecting Americans which in many ways is what we you really have to do. At the same time it is a screwy way of doing it.

FARSAKH: Well, the Department would not get any reporting from Baghdad anymore, or any analysis regarding what was happening, and did not get somebody with the appropriate rank meeting the top officials. It is so self defeating and we just have a habit of this. I think the reason is, and this may be oversimplified, but foreign policy professionals don't run our policy. It's the political types who are not very well informed, to put it mildly.

Q: It's political and they want to do something. It's kindergarten stuff. If I don't like you, I'm not going to talk to you.

FARSAKH: This is the level on which we operate and on which we continue to operate and I probably shouldn't say this, but if the Republicans win, we will continue to operate that way. God only knows what's going to happen next. It is self destructive as well as self defeating. It's about time that people who win top office wised up. I have some doubts about Obama and about his experience, but hope and think he is smart enough to recognize this. I put my faith in that if he wins, he will appoint people who understand the issues and we will have adults running our foreign policy for a change.

Q: OK, you're stuck with this. You can't talk to the people who constitute your main interest. How did you deal with this?

FARSAKH: I would go and talk to other people who had talked to them. I would talk to reporters who had gotten information and I would send back cables; I was reporting on the PLO even though I wasn't having direct contact.

Obviously, we were reporting on Tunisia; we did a big report right after I came on why Tunisia should be the Middle East's first real democracy., We may have been reinventing the wheel. The fact that Tunisia is small, ethnically and religiously homogeneous, the people are well educated, women are treated fairly, they have a strong private sector economy, have the desire to have a democracy, makes the argument strongly. But what do you so with the fact that they have a dictator who throws people in jail and there is nothing that anybody can do about it? He's like a junior Mubarak, torturing people and throwing people out of the country, terrorizing them and so on. I spent the year looking at Tunisia, obviously making contacts, reporting on various political subjects; certainly we were busy enough. And then I did have this brief for covering the PLO as best I could.

Q: Did you have the equivalent of a go-between? Could you send people to say, "Look, I want to find out this? Could you talk to the PLO about this?"

FARSAKH: I didn't really do that. What I would do was go to my friend, the Russian DCM and I would say, "We would like to know this, this and this. Do you have any information on it?" I didn't actually send him with questions but it seemed to me as I recollect that he gave me pretty complete accounts of what was going on in the PLO.

Q: What was his view of the PLO?

FARSAKH: I think he thought very highly of Arafat. He had a very close relationship with him. I am not sure how he felt about the organization. As we came to develop relations with them after Oslo, I had very strong feelings about the organization, mostly very negative ones. I don't know that I ever knew if the Russian had done an analysis of the organization as a whole, but I don't think so.

Q: How did the PLO fit in this country? You know, the PLO certainly in Jordan and Lebanon ended up by causing all sorts of problems.

FARSAKH: Well, part of the deal when they were expelled from Beirut in 1982 was that the fighters went somewhere else. They mostly went to Yemen, so the PLO in Tunis, unlike its predecessors in Jordan and Lebanon, had no fighting force. They were just civilians and they were working on totally civilian issues. They also had a very, very severe funding crisis. As I came to learn, virtually everyone around Arafat cautioned him against supporting Saddam in the first Gulf War but he decided he would anyway. He disregarded all the advice that was given him. As a result of that poor decision, a lot of the Gulf Arabs, especially the Kuwaitis and most others as well, but not so much Saudi Arabia, stopped funding him. So while he had been wallowing in money earlier, all of a sudden it started drying up. I came to see after Oslo, when I started visiting their offices, that outsiders who thought that they were living in the lap of luxury were very much mistaken. The PLO offices were really crummy looking.

Q: Did Tunisia have relations with Israel?

FARSAKH: No, and still does not. In my last year the Israelis were trying to open a trade office. It didn't happen then, but it did a few years later. It is not there anymore. I think it probably was closed when the second intifada broke out in 2000. We spent an inordinate amount of time in a lot of "moderate" Arab countries, strong arming them to allow Israeli offices to open. In my last year in Tunis it was one of our main tasks as far as the Department was concerned. I know offices did open in Oman and in Qatar. In Qatar I believe Israel still has a trade office. Working on establishing some sort of relations with Israel appear to be almost the most important thing we do in these countries. I have a major problem with this.

Arafat had this severe funding crisis and he had lost tremendous political support in the wealthy Gulf countries. Egypt didn't have the wherewithal to support him, so the PLO was a major, major mess by the end of the Gulf War.

Q: I know at one point there was an Israeli raid on Tunis.

FARSAKH: Yes, that was before I came. They bombed the PLO compound in one of the suburbs of Tunis and Arafat's chef de cabinet, who became a good friend of mine, was in the office when it happened. He was lame from polio and had to be carried out. People were killed, the place was obliterated. Another thing the Israelis did in Tunisia was sending in a commando squad and executing Abu Jihad, in front of his wife and child, in their house in Tunis one night in the late '80s.

Q: Did you get past trying to persuade the Tunisians to open up relations with Israel?

FARSAKH: That was more on the ambassadorial level and that was much later in my tour. That was in '95, '96, after Arafat left Tunis for Palestine. The Tunisians were not involved with Israel in any way whatsoever until after Oslo and even then, it was minimal.

Q: When did Oslo happen?

FARSAKH: In August-September of 1993 when the Madrid process was failing, the Israelis and the Palestinians set up a secret channel in the suburbs of Oslo with the help if some Norwegian academics, and they worked out an agreement which the U,S. found out about only after it was signed. Once we knew about it, we wanted to reap some of the glory, so Arafat and Rabin were invited to the White House to sign the agreement.

This was the beginning of a very interesting chapter in my life. We got word on a Friday that Arafat was going to be invited to the White House and that we had to get him and his entourage there. Every single member of his delegation needed visa wavers, every last one of them. The day before, the charge and I went to deliver the invitation to the PLO ambassador, because Ambassador McCarthy was out of town. That was an experience! It was the first time any American officials had actually gone to the PLO embassy, even though we had had discussions with them in the late '80s that were later broken off.

The chargé, Kay Stocker, and I went with this invitation to call on the PLO representative. His name was Hakam Balawi and we went to his office. We got out of the car and a bunch of men with guns surrounded us. Kay and I were escorted into the presence of this guy who was shorter than both of us! Kay and I were about the same height, maybe 5'3" – he was maybe about five feet –and he seemed to be just beside himself, that we two women would deliver the invitation for Arafat to go to the White House!

Then the next day, Saturday, we went to the Embassy and started working on the visa waivers. A PLO messenger brought in all the passports. Arafat, I think had a Tunisian

diplomatic passport, but we had passports from Mauritania, Senegal, Yemen, from all kinds of places because these people had no nationality. We had to send cables into the Department on a Saturday and CA had to turn everything around and get these waivers the same day, because the delegation had to leave on Sunday. The White House signing was to be on Monday.

We got them done, – of course we had to get them done. Several of us stayed in the office all day and almost all night on Saturday.

Early Sunday morning, the Russian DCM, my good friend Robert Turdiev, called me up. The Russian ambassador was out of town and he was in charge. Robert said, "Andrea, you know we are the co-sponsors of this effort. Is the American Embassy sending anybody to the airport?" None of us had thought of that! I called Kay and said, "Kay, Robert is going to the airport. Don't you think we ought to send somebody?" She advised me to call the Op Center.

I called the Op Center and the watch officer said she would get back to me. They contacted Kay who told me, "Guess who's going to the airport?" I was the third ranking person and was the chosen one. They didn't want to send Kay because they thought she would have been too high ranking. After all, we wanted to slap them down even as they were going to the White House. So my husband and I were the ones designated to go to the airport.

When I called the Op Center back, I asked, "What are you going to do about flags? Are you going to have a Palestinian flag and an Israeli flag? What are you going to do about playing national anthems?" I just knew they would have an Israeli flag and they would forget about the Palestinians. "Hmm," they responded; "Well, I guess we won't have any flags or any music."

The signing on the White House lawn may have had flags, I don't remember. I watched it on TV. The Op Center called me again before Arafat left Tunis, to say, "Arafat can't carry his gun." He always carried a gun, I called up the chef de cabinet – whom I hadn't met yet and who later became a friend. His wife answered, saying he was in the shower and would call back in a few minutes. He called me back and I said, "Sami, Arafat can't carry a gun." Sami said that he always carried a gun. I responded that he could not be seen to be carrying a gun. We made an agreement: Arafat had two outfits; one was an Eisenhower jacket outfit and the other was a tunic outfit. He would wear the tunic and the gun would be hidden under the tunic so that it wouldn't show; he would not be searched. That's how that went.

My husband and I went off to the airport; Tunisian ministers all around, not the president, but the ministers. I sat next to the minister of defense. Arafat asked, "Where is the American charge?" He had noticed that she wasn't there, but he knew who I was. I neglected to mention earlier that when I first arrived my husband and I made it into a news item on the Lebanese station, Radio Monte Carlo. They announced that an American with a Palestinian husband had just come to the American Embassy as political

counselor and that perhaps this signaled a new era in U.S. – Palestinian relations. Of course, my husband had friends and they all knew who we were. Arafat's send off made it on to Tunisian television and we were at the ceremony. Arafat marched on a red carpet onto a Tunisian plane with the bands playing and went off to the White House.

After that, we at the Embassy had a sort of the seat of the pants operation. The Department wasn't prepared for this sudden blooming of relations with the PLO. The Oslo Agreement wasn't something we had planned. Who of the Palestinians should we see? The Department had no idea, so Ambassador McCarthy asked me to draw up a list, which I did, and the Department said OK. I could have put anybody on that list except for maybe really infamous terrorists like Abu Nidal – then they might have noticed!

Q: He's a renowned traitor, I mean terrorist.

FARSAKH: But he wasn't in Tunis anyhow. Anyway, I drafted this list. I sent it and they said, "OK. We asked when we should see Arafat. Do we need your permission every time we want to see Arafat" When Ambassador Pelletreau had seen Arafat in the late '80s, he used to have to get Department permission every time. They decided no, we could go see Arafat when we wished; we didn't need to get permission first. We also asked if we needed sets of questions because when Pelletreau had his discussions, they always pretty much centered on terrorism issues and the Department always gave him questions to raise. No, the Department said, we didn't have to do that. It was sort of a free form conversation kind of thing. I was put in charge of the Embassy's U.S.-PLO relationship. I went with the ambassador every time he saw Arafat and I had a lot of my own contacts. I saw them all the time and did a constant stream of reporting – sometimes in the middle of the night after a meeting. The Op Center was calling me all the time, telling me that the Secretary was waiting for my reports!

Once Ambassador McCarthy got angry with me, called me into his office and said, "You know, we are in Tunisia, Andrea. Why aren't you reporting on Tunisian affairs?" I went to the DCM. I said, "Kay, if he wants me to stay here until three o'clock in the morning I suppose I can do that. It's not like I have any free time. There were two other officers in my section who were working on Tunisia only. I said to Kay, "We have been covering everything that was on the reporting plan. We haven't neglected any Tunisian issue that I know of. If he finds something that we are not covering, he should tell me. Meanwhile, I was designated to work the PLO issues. If he doesn't want me to do it anymore, he should tell me."

For a couple of days I didn't talk to him and we sort of ignored each other. Then he invited me out to lunch. He never apologized, but I figured the lunch was an apology and after that, we were fine. He just had some kind of sudden outburst.

From September of '93 until Arafat went to Palestine in '94 the PLO was all I did, pretty much.

Q: What were they doing, what were we interested in your reporting on during this time?

FARSAKH: We were interested in their positions on negotiating with the Israelis. We were interested in their internal organization; in biographical information. Obviously, things happened like the massacre of Muslims at the mosque in Hebron.. It was the winter of '94 when Baruch Goldstein, the American Jewish doctor, mowed down 29 Muslims at prayer in the mosque at Hebron. We had to offer condolences. We reported on PLO reactions to that tragic event.

I saw many other PLO contacts. I reported on all my meetings with them. Some of them were negotiators. The Tunisians then became very interested in the multilateral workshops that had been set up by the Madrid conference, and they became active participants. So I did a lot of work with the Tunisian foreign ministry, I would meet with them on a regular basis and we worked on hosting these meetings and reporting on them.

The Tunisians hosted a meeting of the refugee working group and they also had a meeting of the arms control working group. Both working groups attracted officials and journalists from all over the world and the logistics that are involved in organizing such events were quite complex.

Robert and I were co-sponsors of the Madrid Process at the time. We did a lot of work together.

It was a very frenetic year. And Warren Christopher came to Tunis, the first time the Secretary of State ever visited Arafat – and that was a very big deal.

Q: How did that go?

FARSAKH: We had several visits from Dennis Ross and Aaron Miller and I would sit in on those and take notes and write reports. When the Secretary came, it was a bid odd; he sat there and didn't say a word. Dennis Ross and Aaron Miller did almost all the talking as if the Secretary wasn't even there. Then when the big conference was over, Christopher and Arafat had a private meeting – a one on one with Arafat, whose English was adequate, so one could have a substantive conversation with him. It wasn't beautiful English, but it was adequate. No others were at that meeting.

Q: Did you have the feeling that whatever you reported was going to end up in the Israeli embassy's desk in Washington immediately?

FARSAKH: Well, that's a given, I think. I think we all assume that, have for years.

Q: Did you find that you were being asked to present things to Arafat which were essentially pro-Israeli? Did you feel that or were we acting more as an honest broker?

FARSAKH: I think from our side, the ambassador always felt we were delivering unpleasant news to him. We were telling him what to do. The ambassador really didn't enjoy those meetings very much at all. I would say the most substantive discussions were

not conducted by us on major policy issues; Dennis Ross would call Arafat in his office and would speak to him. We all know that Ross kept no records. Nobody really knew what was going on exactly. The Department didn't know, we didn't know. Dennis Ross knew. That was it.

Q: Were you getting any reflections of this from your colleagues in the State Department of this by-passing of the Embassy?

FARSAKH: Not really, But I remember once being in Arafat's office with him and the ambassador when Dennis Ross called. No one else listened in. I would hear from the desk officer and from a friend of mine in Jerusalem what was going on. People pretty much knew it. As a matter of fact, the consul in Jerusalem would call Dennis Ross – this is after Arafat got back to the West Bank – to ask Ross how he should cast his reports. He would write his reports after he had spoken to Dennis Ross and gotten his instructions!

Q: Who was the consul general there then?

FARSAKH: John Herbst. He is now ambassador in one of the "stans". This is his third ambassadorial tour. He is one of the very few who didn't find the consul general job in Jerusalem to be a career breaker, which is a little suspicious in itself.

Q: One of the things I was picking up, this is during the first tour of Clinton that the negotiations dealing with the PLO and Israel were basically handed into Dennis Ross' hands which raised some flags. It could have been well, American interests but these were all people who had been rather strong proponents of Israel.

FARSAKH: The Palestinians certainly noticed it.

Q: The Palestinians of course, noticed it but you know, for the rest of us looking at this knowing that the same way that if the whole thing had been put into the hands of Arab Americans or something like that.

FARSAKH: Oh, my God.

Q: It sets a tone that is disturbing, I think.

FARSAKH: Well, I wouldn't be a bit surprised. It would be the same thing with any administration, I think. And again, Dennis Ross is so high up in Obama's campaign, he could probably have anything he wants.

Q: I don't know. I don't have any particular take on Dennis Ross other than I am always suspicious if one person.

FARSAKH: I would think if new people were going to choose someone from that previous team, the fairest would be Aaron or Miller or Dan Kurtzer, who are supporters

of Israel but reasonably fair. I would not put Dennis in the quite fair category, let's put it that way. I am the most suspicious of Ross, in that group of" peace processors."

Q: Were we trying to get Arafat to agree to certain things or was Arafat doing his things with the Israelis vis-a-vis the Norwegians?

FARSAKH: Arafat never conducted negotiations with the Norwegians. It was Mahmoud Abbas who had been involved in the negotiations, so he was in contact with the Norwegians. Terje Larsen, who later went to the UN, was the primary Norwegian negotiator; he used to come to Tunis all the time. I don't think the Norwegians, once Oslo was signed, were involved in the multilateral workshops. I am not so sure they were substantively involved in the negotiations either. I think they were trying to act as a bridge between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

As far as my reporting was concerned, I was reporting on conversations that I had with the Palestinian leadership on various issues that came up and I would have to go through my stuff to remember them. Almost everything I drafted had a NODIS slapped on it.

Q: What was your feeling as you were doing this? Did you feel a new day had dawned?

FARSAKH: I did for a while, I really did. It was the only time in my career that I felt that way, that the U.S. government was doing something good on this issue; that we were on the right side for a change. I probably told you that the Department wouldn't allow me to have anything to do with the Palestinian issue earlier in my career, and if they had known that we were going to be dealing with the Palestinians in Tunis they probably never would have let me go. They had the feeling that I was probably dominated by my husband and could not be objective on the issues, which I find tremendously insulting. My husband and I certainly have the same feelings about the issue but we differ on a lot of aspects – he doesn't change his opinion and I don't change mine.

I remember asking Edmund Hull, who was previous ambassador to Yemen, about this issue. His wife is Palestinian and he met and married her when he was serving in Jerusalem. I once asked him if he had ever had any trouble with assignments involving the Palestinian issue because of his wife and he said, "no", which immediately led me to believe that in my case, the problem was a sexist one. You know, no one would think that he would be influenced by his wife, but people in the Department may have thought that I could be influenced by my husband. I did feel insulted, so I really felt very self-satisfied that I got myself this position in Tunis where I could do this work. I did feel good about it initially, although I could see as the year wore on the way things were going – that the settlements were still expanding, the Israelis weren't fulfilling their obligations at all, and the Oslo process was probably going downhill, which of course it did.

Q: This is one thing that doesn't get played up but the Israelis from what I gather for years making these promises particularly about the settlements and not living up to them.

FARSAKH: It's actually all PR and it all gets reported but whether it's the Labor government or the Likud government, it's all the same. When Bush the first was in power, I remember Baker was trying to negotiate the Madrid Accords, and made the comment that every time he went to Jerusalem the Israelis would announce a new settlement. That set Bush and Baker off and made them threaten to cut off U.S. loan guarantees to Israel, or else we would deduct the amount from whatever new settlements they announced. Of course this policy made a lot of Israel supporters in the American political system angry ; some think that is one of the reasons Bush lost the election. A lot of Arab Americans voted for the second Bush because of his father's stance against Israel and were of course, cruelly disappointed.

This Annapolis thing which was really pathetic.

Q: There was a one day meeting in Annapolis supposedly to reconcile all the differences.

FARSAKH: The Saudis came and they shouldn't have come – that was our big victory that the Saudis came. Rice has been to the area more than a dozen times since Annapolis. Almost every time she goes, either when she gets on the plane or right after, they announce a new settlement. They are doing the same thing to her they did to Baker. Baker objected, but she never does. She will say that the settlements are "not helpful" – blah, blah, and blah.

I have to tell also, speaking of Annapolis of an incident that happened to my husband's family.

Q: When was Annapolis?

FARSAKH: Annapolis was the fall of 2007, November of 2007.

Q: This was Annapolis, Maryland.

FARSAKH: Annapolis, Maryland. The Bush administration finally decided after seven years of doing nothing, that it was going to do something to try to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict. It had not even bothered to look at the issue for the first seven years of the administration and of course, as a result, things just kept getting progressively worse. The Israeli army beefed up its security presence on the West Bank during Annapolis. My husband's town is a university town. We see Israeli troops but not that much. During Annapolis an Israeli Humvee came to town, very heavily armored with a type of metal webbing along the windows. Some kids started throwing stones at it as it was passing on the way to Ramallah from Bir Zeit, in front of a small grocery store that my husband's nephew owns. Kids threw stones. Per usual, the Israelis just keep driving if kids throw stones, because obviously, the stones don't hurt the Humvee. This time they decided to stop. The kids ran. The Israeli soldiers thought they had run into my husband's nephew's store. It is a tiny, tiny store. They ran into the store, they didn't see the kids, they asked my husband's nephew who was sitting there – a guy in his mid – fifties, sitting in his store, "Where are the kids?" He said, "Oh, they are very young, you don't want them" or

something like that. They started beating him with their guns and they killed him. This is just an indication of what goes on there every day. There is no accountability. It is like the Wild West. Just this week, settlers burned up some olive trees in northern Palestine. Nothing will happen to them. The soldiers just stand there and watch settler abuses of Palestinians.

Q: One can only hope this arrogance will get its comeuppance sometime but unfortunately, we have been complacent in the whole operation.

FARSAKH: Everybody is talking about a two state solution, but with the settlements where they are now, how can you have a two state solution? The Israelis are expanding everywhere. You go almost every month and you see something new, even around where we live in Bir Zeit. One of the main settlements happens to be the headquarters for the Israeli military on the West Bank; a settlement called Beit El, which we can see from our house. It continues to expand. The Israeli Supreme Court about a month ago said that it is on private Palestinian land and should not be there. So what's going to happen? Nothing is going to happen.

Q: The United States has gotten itself into this thing and it's domestic, political.

FARSAKH: And the Congress? You have maybe half a dozen congressmen who find this sort of activity objectionable but for the rest of them, Israel can draft its own legislation in our Congress, and almost everybody will sign on to it.

Obama said at the recent AIPAC convention that Jerusalem should remain the eternal undivided capital of Israel. That's farther than Bush has gone. As a result, my husband, who is a Democratic precinct captain, will not lift his finger for Obama. He's working for Rep. Moran, for Senator Mark Warner, the county board, all the Democrats, except Obama. When somebody called him last night he asked who it was for, and when the person said Moran, he said, "Fine." If it were for Obama, he wouldn't bother.

Q: Did you get any feel for the problem of Arafat? I mean it has been spelled out many times whether it is true or not that he is a person who is very much constrained by survivability and will not go very far from the stand of his more militant followers.

FARSAKH: I don't know about the latter part. Yes, he was absolutely concerned about his own survivability. He was also concerned that he was regarded and still is, as father of the Palestinians. He was one of these people that if you were with him in a room, he would make you feel as if you were the most important person there. He was someone you could yell at, disagree with and sometimes if he didn't like it, he would just get up and leave. Nobody ever got punished for disagreeing with him. As a host he was very hospitable. I remember once Dennis Ross and Aaron Miller came and we were invited up to his private quarters for lunch – he dished out the soup and gave some to each guest and after the meal was over, he put fruit on each person's plate and handed it around. He was extremely gracious.

He kept talking about democracy all the time and I remember saying to Ambassador McCarthy on a number of occasions, "He has absolutely no concept of what it means, whatsoever. He has no idea." He operated on sort of a different plane of reality, he thought he was right – he was close minded although he might listen to some extent, but he if he felt really strongly about something, I think he was just out there on his own – he would just shut down, as he did on the issue of support for Saddam.. People thought he had a lot of money and he probably did. Nobody, I think, knew where it was. Maybe his wife knew and I think that is why she kept everyone away from him when he was dying. It is thought that she extracted a promise from his followers that they wouldn't come after her and her money. He himself lived simply, however. I saw where he lived in Tunis. His quarters were very modest so while he had this money, he wasn't living off it. Many in his close circle in Tunis lived far better than he did.

He also had an orphanage that he ran in Tunis for Palestinian children, many of them orphans from the Lebanon war, from the refugee camps; he supported all of them and educated them.

I think he was a good leader in some ways, but in terms of leading a government or being able to govern, he was totally and utterly hopeless. He wouldn't take advice and he had this idea that if you play people off against each other, no one could get too powerful. Hence, he had all these security services and he would play and pay them all off – nothing operated correctly. I think towards the end of his life, people in Palestine did get fed up with him. They knew he was a terrible administrator, that he didn't have the first idea about how to run anything. It was all sort of seat of the pants and rewarding friends.

I think now that he is gone, people remember that he was a terrible governor and that he was corrupt or at least a lot of his associates were. A lot of the people who came with him from Tunis are still around, and are regarded as corrupt. They are disliked much more than he ever was. His picture is still everywhere and people still revere him.

The PLO was a mess. By the time I got there it was so clear that it was a totally dysfunctional organization. I tried to convey this in my reporting, but somehow I think people back here thought they were dealing with a shadow government. They assumed that as soon as they installed the PLO in whatever part of Palestine, it would begin to operate as a real government – and that never could have happened.

Q: Did the Tunisian government play any part when things started to open up between the United States and Israel and the PLO?

FARSAKH: Well, certainly when the Israeli negotiating teams came to Tunis. They were put in a nice hotel and welcomed into the country. When the working groups came, we would have an Israeli delegation, usually one or two people. The Tunisians were not creating obstacles.

On the Palestinian side, Ben Ali and Arafat had a pretty close relationship and the Tunisians treated him and his entourage well. Any Palestinian who came to Tunis airport,

regardless of his passport, had to go into a PLO office at the airport. My husband and I did not arrive in Tunis together. I went a week ahead of him and when he came in, he wound up at this PLO office in the airport with this American diplomatic passport, and they didn't know what to do with him! He was a Palestinian with an American diplomatic passport – so they kept him for a little while and they had a conversation. I don't know whether they let him go or whether we had to call, but it was kind of amusing.

The Tunisians were pretty hospitable to the Palestinians. When they first came, the Tunisians complained that they drove up the rents in many parts of town as they all started moving from Beirut and setting up shop. There were a few Palestinian restaurants in Tunis, which the Tunisians came to appreciate very much. Tunisian food is very different from Palestinian food. By the time we got there I think most Tunisians had sort of lost their resentment of the Palestinians for driving up prices and rents. They were pretty accommodating to them. Every time my husband and I went to the old medina in Tunis, and people asked him where he was from and he said, "Palestine" they would be effusive to him, would cut their prices and were super nice to us. I think that they really did feel for the plight of the Palestinian people.

Q: Let's move away from the PLO.

Tunisia has two not very nice neighbors; Algeria and Libya. What was happening while you were there?

FARSAKH: Algeria was the bogeyman as far as the Tunisians were concerned. They were scared to death of them. The bombing of the Algiers airport occurred while I was there. Terrorism was the excuse that Ben Ali used to clamp down on all his opposition, in particular the Islamists, because of course there was this horrible war raging in Algeria.

Q: This was a civil war between the Islamic group and the government?

FARSAKH: It started after the FIS won the election and the government carried out a military coup; it decided to not recognize the elections. The U.S. and the French agreed with this action. The Algerian government, what they call "Le Pouvoir," – the military – has ruled Algeria since 1962. So the Tunisians were very afraid and watched that border very carefully. They would get terrorist alerts regularly about what might be going on there and were always concerned about whether the extremists might be coming over and planning something in Tunisia. We never thought there was anything, but we got all the reporting. It was scary stuff.

As far as the Libyans are concerned, no, they didn't feel any threat from the Libyans at all. They rather liked them – the Libyans came over in droves through the Isle of Djerba and filled up all the private hospitals in Tunis for medical treatment. Most of the Libyans come to Tunis for their visas to the United States, so we always dealt with a lot of Libyans in the consular section.

Q: Gaddafi wasn't trying to play any games?

FARSAKH: No, he wasn't. I think he was, by that time more involved in Sub-Saharan Africa, in Chad and other places by then. He was not fooling around in Tunisia as far as we knew.

Q: There was an explosion, I am not sure when it was, a bomb went off by a mosque in Tunis.

FARSAKH: Yes, that was after I left. That was on Djerba Island. It wasn't a mosque; it was a synagogue. There is a small but vibrant Jewish community on the Isle of Djerba which is very close to Libya, but the Libyans certainly had nothing to do with the bombing. I think we believe it was al-Qaeda.

Q: Was there concern during the time you were there about terrorists?

FARSAKH: Some I think, because of Algeria, because of what was going on in Algeria.

Q: It was that nature, not an al-Qaeda type thing?

FARSAKH: No, not yet.

Q: How about the French? How stood relations with the French?

FARSAKH: Mixed. The French of course, had a huge, lovely embassy, lots of cultural programs. Virtually all Tunisians speak it except maybe for the people in the far south in Berber villages. It's amazing how many of them did speak French, yet the government had a sort of rocky relationship with the French government. The French journalistic elite, didn't like Ben Ali for obvious reasons. He's not easy to like and has a lot of corrupt relatives. While I was there, there was a big scandal about one of his brothers alleged involvement with drug trafficking. If you had satellite TV in Tunis, you got the French channel. A few times the government cut off the French channel and the French newspapers, especially Le Monde. They hated Le Monde because that was the focus of their discontent for its constant criticism of Ben Ali and his ruling clique. The Tunisian press is very censored. The government didn't at all like the fact that the French were looking at their scandals and publicizing them. I don't think ordinary Tunisians have the same distaste for the French. And Tunisians didn't have the same kind of relationship with France, the fraught relationship that the Algerians had, certainly. They was some resistance against France which led to their independence, but it was fairly short and not terribly bloody and so they don't have this emotional, negative relationship with France that Algeria has. Most people went to France on their vacations. Culturally, the upper class in particular is very attuned to French culture.

Q: And I assume lots of French tourists?

FARSAKH: Oh, yes. Though that we had as many Italians as we had French, and huge numbers of Germans, because the Germans seek the sun. There are even German

restaurants in some of the resort towns, which I found hilarious. Why would you want to be eating heavy German food in Tunisia? They also had one section in Hammamet – a big resort area – which they sectioned off for German topless beaches.

Q: How about the Tunisian government per se? How did you find the foreign ministry and all that?

FARSAKH: The foreign ministry was very friendly. The man who was foreign minister when we there went on to become ambassador to the United States for a while. They were all rather like Frenchmen – they all spoke French when the ambassador came, not Arabic. We had excellent relations. I had a lot of good friends in the foreign ministry and they were always very easy to see. We very rarely had differences with them. We went through a very rocky period before I got there during the first Gulf War, when the Tunisians were supporting Saddam and there were big demonstrations in front of the embassy. The embassy had a terrifically difficult time dealing with the Tunisian government at that time. We were effectively shut out. They didn't want to talk to us. By the time I got to Tunis the negative feelings had largely ebbed away.

What had caused their support of Saddam?

FARSAKH: You know, I am not really sure. I know that when it comes to Yemen, which supported Iraq, that President Saleh had had a close relationship with Saddam over many years. I know that Saddam gave Jordan cheap oil and they have a long border with Iraq. Also, there has always been a lot of trade and close relations between Iraq and Jordan. The latter is a weak country that didn't want to alienate Iraq. Regarding Tunisia, the reasons are less clear but the people certainly had a very great affinity for Iraq. Part of it could have been – -and this is pretty general in much of the Arab world – a real dislike of the "Gulfies", especially of Kuwait. I think the Kuwaitis are not liked at all in the Arab world, so very few people felt sorry for them. Even Egyptians, who were on our side, pretty much loathe the Kuwaitis too. Kuwaitis are not easy to like because they are very rich and extremely arrogant.

Q: How about Tunisia and Egypt? Was there much there?

FARSAKH: Not much.

Q: How about the Tunisians, did they have any particular foreign policy or were they trying to keep a low profile?

FARSAKH: I think they wanted to be close to us. We started having joint military exercises with them during my time there. They of course were most interested in the EU and the closest relations possible with the EU. While I was there, an EU-"Mediterranean Dialogue" was launched. All the European and Arab countries along the Med were involved, as well as Turkey. I would say of all their foreign policy issues, relations with Europe were was the most important because of trade and defense.

Q: Where did they get their oil?

FARSAKH: I would guess from Libya.

Q: I would imagine so. Algeria too. They weren't particularly cut off from any of that?

FARSAKH: No, I don't think so. That was never an issue for us.

Q: Who was training their military? Did they have French or American or British?

FARSAKH: I think not British. We are very involved in training their military.

Q: Did you get involved in any World War II commemorations?

FARSAKH: The ambassador was invited every year to World War II commemorations. There was an important anniversary of the Battle of the Kasserine Pass while I was there; the ambassador went. We have an American cemetery from World War II outside Carthage, a very beautifully maintained American cemetery. We always went there on Veterans' Day and on Memorial Day for commemorations.

The American Battle Monument Commission appoints people to be responsible for maintenance of the cemeteries. The man in charge of the cemetery at Carthage was a German-American who had a really heavy German accent, and it was quite off-putting to walk around with him and hear him talk about everything in this heavy accent. He was the only other person in Tunis who had precisely the same car that we did; it was a Ford Taurus station wagon, so people would mistake his car for ours.

Q: Well, you left there in '95. Where did you go?

FARSAKH: I was supposed to stay somewhat longer, but I was asked to be on a selection board at the Department, so I left a bit early. After that, I went off to Princeton University to be an executive fellow for a year.

Q: How did you find the selection board process?

FARSAKH: I thought it was pretty fair. I was on a board that was doing 03 to 02 consular and econ officers. We had a wonderful chairwoman, an ambassador to an African country. As I recall, we didn't have any significant disagreements. We did what everybody does, we separated the files into piles: the promotable, the neutrals and the non-promotable. We worked long hours and we worked hard. I think we were fair. I came out of it with a lot of admiration for the process, actually.

FARSAKH: One thing that I thought was particularly interesting was that we had one case – and I forget which cone he was in – he had been in the Service in the '60s, had left and come back. We therefore had to look at his files from the '60s and we saw all this stuff about how his wife measured up. He was rated on his behavior, his personality and

appearance; she got rated on her entertaining and on her personal appearance. It was really weird. Most of us were amazed that this had really happened!

Q: You went to Princeton in '95. What were you doing there?

FARSAKH: It was a strange and somewhat pointless kind of program. By the end, although I had had a wonderful time, I considered it to be a waste of the government's time and money, and I said so. After that I was assigned to Personnel, now Human Resources, and got the chance to work on reforming the program. I have to say, although I got no credit for it whatsoever, I was the one who led and organized the entire effort, and it was difficult because we had to establish standards for admission, work with Princeton and select people from the Department to participate. We re-made it from a non-degree, one year program for 01 officers to a one year degree program for 02 officers – a change which would significantly benefit the Department. We got help from a foundation that some family had founded which funded scholarships for people from the State Department to help them get through the program. When I was in the program, the State Department paid the tuition and most living expenses. I took almost all foreign policy courses plus advanced Arabic. I didn't get credit for them. I already had a Master's and the Department wasn't interested in my getting another degree, which would have taken two years. They didn't want to pay for me for another year, so for me, it was a year of just taking courses and getting a certificate, but nothing more.

I liked the courses very much. In my second semester, I was the only one who signed up for advanced Arabic and by the time I knew that, they had naturally cancelled the course. There was nothing else that fit in my program, so I ended taking a course on Jane Austin, which I loved. But I was somewhat uncomfortable with the idea that the Department was paying for this course.

I did some recruiting for the Foreign Service while at Princeton. However, that was the year the Department didn't give the exam for funding reasons, so that was sort of a bummer to try to encourage people to take the exam when there was no exam. There was one other officer from the Department also in the program, and we went to job fairs, gave talks on the Foreign Service. Some Middle Eastern group in Princeton found me, and I wound up giving talks on Middle Eastern subjects to them, so I had a very busy and rewarding year. But I was glad to have the opportunity to change the program so that it became something more useful, as it was surely preferable for more junior officers, and the officers would emerge with a Masters' degree.

Q: They would come out of it with something and then they would have a significant hunk of career left to use.

FARSAKH: Exactly.

Q: How long did you work with human resources?

FARSAKH: Two years.

Q: How did you find working there?

FARSAKH: It was a year of upheaval in that bureau because they had reorganized it. It used to be – and it went back that way after I left – that the career development officers worked with individual officer clients and people in the bureaus worked on assignments. When I was in PER, they merged the two functions so that we were doing both. I had the -02 political officers as a CDO, and I was working with the NEA Bureau and the International Organizations Affairs Bureau and one or two others as an assignments officer. It was a huge amount of work. At the same time, PER was changing its computer system, and that was quite tough for me. I did not grow up with computers and am not such a genius on them. We started on one system and a few months later they changed everything. Plus, we were doing the two jobs – I had a couple of hundred -02 political officer clients and the assignments brief. So it was a crazy time.

Q: And usually that's sort of an adversarial situation. I used to be a career counselor and we would, I won't say fight, but we would have to bargain with the assignments officer and we both had a significant part in the process.

FARSAKH: They tried it for a couple of years and it didn't work, and they went back to the old way. So I was in it during a really messy period. However, I liked the people I worked for, I enjoyed the work and I never had any regrets about doing it. It was something completely different. Sometimes I wound up staying a little later but I was mostly done by six. It wasn't like working on a desk where you finish at eight o'clock – and I didn't have to take work home or come on weekends. It was good because of course, I was setting up my house again after being overseas. My husband was working on the West Bank because he didn't want to go to Princeton. He wouldn't have had anything to do there, so he went to the West Bank and worked for the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics for the year. I came back by myself and was dealing with resettling into the house and this new job.

Q: This brings us up to '97?

FARSAKH: No, '98. I left Princeton in '96 so I was in human resources until '98.

Q: And then what?

FARSAKH: Then I went decided I wanted to retire. Actually, I was asked by a good friend who was a senior CDO if I wanted to be political counselor in Cairo. It was a senior job but they didn't have any qualified bidders. The person who was going to be the DCM, was a very good friend of mine and he asked me if I wanted the job. He told me I could have it if I wanted it. My husband wasn't around; he probably would have convinced me to go for it, but I thought about moving three times in three years and I decided I couldn't take another move. At that point I decided I wanted to retire. I did not want to move overseas anymore.

So I went to OIG.

Q: OIG?

FARSAKH: The inspector general and I did it for three years. I extended so that I could retire from that job.

Q: How did you find the inspection business?

FARSAKH: On the whole, I liked it. I think some of the people who were team leaders, ambassadors who I knew then – and that was in 2001 when I retired – are still there, still leading teams. They don't seem to have enough younger blood coming in and some really old guys are team leaders. Some of them are fine and some of them aren't. There are a lot of retirees in OIG in general, and sometimes the retirees are a little bit out of touch. They don't get enough active duty bidders. I think that is a continuing problem. But I enjoyed it. I wanted to see parts of the world that I had never seen. I revisited parts of the world I had seen: I got to inspect Embassy Tunis; they gave me permission to do it as well as Morocco. I went to Egypt for seven weeks. But I also inspected London and Dublin, Buenos Aires and Santiago, Guatemala City and Honduras, and Ottawa. Just this summer I was invited to go on an inspection; I was invited to return, and I spent three great weeks in Tripoli, Libya, which was absolutely fascinating.

Q: Did you have any particular issues or people that you, problems that you can recall that sort of give flavor to what inspectors were finding?

FARSAKH: One of the things that surprised me, was a situation in Embassy London. You know, in NEA we think that the people who are at EUR posts just have real cushy jobs and are just living the life. I found that in London they work really hard. I covered the political/econ/commercial side. I think I did consular once, never did any admin. I found this one guy in Pol-Mil in London – we were together in Jeddah – and he was the lone political military officer. He was coming in early in the morning and working until ten o'clock at night. He was single, and I think he was being exploited, because the POL/MIL account was hugely busy due to the intensity of our relationship with Britain. So, I think one of the best things I ever did in OIG was to recommend and finally get him a junior officer because he needed one so badly. The embassy didn't seem to care that they were working him to the bone; they thought it was just fine.

In NEA we have very excellent people, and I found the people in the European posts that I inspected to be excellent also. I was not as impressed with some of the people that were in WHA posts. I didn't find them to be the same quality as the people I knew in NEA – not as motivated or hard working. Of course there were notable exceptions.

Q: For example?

FARSAKH: For example, I found a really, really dysfunctional political section in Buenos Aires. The political counselor was fine; he was actually a friend of mine and was

doing a very good job but he had hardly any support at all. There was a lot going on there and Argentina is a pretty important country. In Cairo they had merged the political and economic sections, two huge sections into one, and it was somewhat dysfunctional. At a small post I think it is probably a good thing to merge the two, but at such a large post, probably not. However, by the time I got there, it was too late to dismember it again, so I had to work on damage control and try to make it function better. I made recommendations to improve the functioning of the combined section.

Q: Since retirement you've done these inspections from time to time?

FARSAKH: No, this past summer was the only inspection I have done. I spent my first year after retirement as the Bahrain/ Kuwait desk officer during the first Gulf War. I then went to the Future of Iraq project for a year –it was totally ignored by the Defense Department – much to the detriment of U.S. interests in Iraq.

Q: Would you explain what that was?

FARSAKH: It was an effort by the State Department to organize workshops on different aspects of what might be needed, if we went into Iraq, to get the government, the economy and the society up and going again. We had workshops on transitional justice, democracy, free media, defense policy, economic issues. I had the economic portfolio so I had oil and energy, economy and infrastructure, and agriculture and environment. Those are the three workshops for which I was responsible.

I also worked some on anti-corruption. That was sort of a combined effort as there were a few of us involved in that one. We spent the year bringing together workshops of Iraqis of various types: Kurds from Kurdistan because of course, the Kurds were able to get in and out even during this period. We had Iraqi exiles from Canada, the United States, even one from Australia, from Europe, and. also American and other experts from government and the private sector. We would bring them together, run workshops, conduct discussions, take notes, the notes would be written up and eventually the working groups would write reports and recommendations on how various issues should be handled post - invasion. These were all put on disks and printed and delivered to the Hill, but that was later. Jay Garner, when he became the appointee of the administration to go out and administer Iraq for a period of ninety days – until everything would become fine(!) – heard before he left about this project that the State Department had done. He asked for a copy of our report, saying to Rumsfeld –to whom he was supposed to report – "I understand the State Department had a program and published recommendations on the various aspects of Iraqi society and political structure and so on. Could I have a copy?" and Rumsfeld said, "No, it's useless. You don't need it" which was the attitude of the Defense Department throughout.

We invited participation from other USG agencies. For example, when we had oil and energy, we invited people from the Energy Department; the energy office of the Economic Bureau of the State Department. When we had the economy group meetings, we invited people from Treasury and Commerce. For agriculture, we invited people from

USDA, from EPA and so on. We always had U.S. government experts in there. We always invited people from DOD to participate in all the groups. However, all we ever got were people from the Joint Staff, mostly Civil Affairs officers. We never got anybody from the office of the OSD – Secretary of Defense – so we sort of knew from the beginning that they were boycotting us, and were probably not interested in what we were doing; they didn't think it was important. So when Rumsfeld blew off Garner, we knew right away that we were going to be completely ignored.

Defense policy comes out as a glaring example of dereliction of duty. One of the issues we discussed was what to do with the army; how to fruitfully employ the army so that it wouldn't become a problem, because the army was about 400,000 strong. Most of the officers were Sunnis, not all, but most. Most of the foot soldiers were Shiite. Our idea was that such a big an army would not be needed, but the soldiers who were going to be demobilized had to be gainfully employed. The army had its own factories, its own uniforms, and its own agriculture. It was a sort of self sufficient entity within the country. What was to be done with all these institutions? We had recommendations for those questions, and when Garner went out, he didn't have those recommendations. However, we later learned that some of the people who were working with him already had the personnel lists form the army. The information was all there; the names, the ranks, the serial numbers, where they came from, and somebody who was working there at the time and with whom I spoke much later said, "We were trying to figure out how much pay all the different ranks. We had all the names."

And then Bremer came along and disbanded the army out of hand. They all went home with all their weapons and all their anger, no salaries, and they became insurgents.

Q: The whole thing is so incredible but was there, were you getting from these various people that OK, this is before we really screwed up but the invasion, was there people saying, "You know when you go to this such a society that one hit on it will fragment and all your plans will be

FARSAKH: No, I think that didn't come from us, but there is an existing memo that I've not seen but I have read about, that was done by Bill Burns, currently Under secretary for P. He was then NEA assistant secretary and he and Ryan Crocker who was a DAS at the time, wrote a paper which they gave to Secretary Powell, which the Secretary had requested. Powell had asked what would be the likely effects of invading Iraq; Crocker had served there. I don't think that Burns had but apparently, the paper predicted much of what would happen. But we did exactly what the experts, who were deliberately stonewalled, would not have done. By debaathifying the government at all levels, we got rid of all the people who were capable administrators, the civil servants who were running the government. By disbanding the army we set up the situation whereby there were a lot of disgruntled, armed, trained men who were not just going to sit at home. So we set up Iraq for disaster. Nobody is saying that we should have rehired the top Sunni generals who were loyal to Saddam; of course not. We probably should have gotten rid of everybody above the colonel level or maybe lieutenant colonel. For the civil service, we should have fired the top layer of people. We should have gone down a few layers. We

shouldn't have gotten rid of everybody. The CPA debaathifiers got rid of school teachers! There was nobody left.

Q: We'd already been through this. I can recall when I came into the foreign service in 1955 and went to Germany and the results of de-Nazification were apparent. We'd gone through this and we had the questionnaire and we sorted people out from that but all of us knew how many people were members of the Nazi Party because that's what you had to do to get a job.

I served in a communist country, Yugoslavia and there were communists and communists. Some were dedicated, very few but, opportunists or just wanted to get a job.

FARSAKH: Part of this mess is this passion that the "Bushies" have had for Ahmad Chalabi – Rumsfeld and Cheney. They just adored him and they put him in charge of debaathification, amongst the other things we did. He is one of the most hated politicians in Iraq.

Q: Did Chalabi contribute at all to your study?

FARSAKH: No, not at all. By the time we started, neither we nor the CIA wanted anything to do with him. He had already totally discredited himself. Somehow he was picked up by the NSC and DOD but he had already become sort of persona non grata. We did not regard him as reliable; he had left Iraq in 1958 when the monarchy fell, for God's sake. He hadn't been back since and we brought him back on an American tank. He had no support in the country whatsoever. From the beginning it was obvious that nobody wanted him.

Q: Did you get involved in Iraq after this study?

FARSAKH: Yes, I did. After the study, of course I had earned my chops on Iraq so to speak, even though I hadn't been there since 1974. I knew a lot obviously about what was going on, what was happening and NEA had just set up an Iraq assistance office headed by Ambassador Robin Raphel, who had been ambassador to Tunisia when I inspected but I had known her slightly before then. She had been one of the few who went in with Garner and was kept on by Bremer. She became the overseer of the ministry of trade for several months, so she was very knowledgeable about the UN Oil for Food Program and the food subsidies operation. She was put in charge of this nascent economic assistance office on the Iraq desk which was now divided, like an embassy, into political affairs, economic affairs, public affairs and so on. When I came back from my summer vacation on the West Bank, I was advised to go in to see her and she hired me on the spot.

I spent two years working for her, a lot of it on Oil for Food, writing papers for the NSC, going to conferences overseas dealing with Iraq reconstruction, international reconstruction and the relief fund for Iraq run by the UN and the World Bank. We went to Madrid, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, we went to Rome to meet the World Food Organization, to London, and to Jordan to talk to a lot of the embassies and offices in Amman that worked

on Iraq and we went to the UN in New York several times. We were intrepid travelers. We worked very hard and it was great. I loved working for her; she was terrific.

Q: I talked to her yesterday, I have been interviewing her. I am also interviewing Jerry Bremer.

FARSAKH: From what I know about him and from working on the Washington side, I think he was an arrogant buffoon and was totally out of place in Iraq. He had no business being there, and he took a bad situation and made it into a disaster. He was responsible, I don't care what he says, and there was enough evidence that he was the one responsible for disbanding the army, no matter who else he tries to blame.

Q: When were you working for Robin Raphel?

FARSAKH: From the fall of '03 until she retired, which would have been the fall of '05.

Q: You were stationed here in Washington?

FARSAKH: Yes, the whole time.

Q: What was this program that you were dealing with?

FARSAKH: Well, we were working on economic assistance for Iraq. Some people were working on the American assistance programs. I was working on the international assistance side. That's how I got to travel so much. Robin was very much involved in dealing with the UN, the World Bank, the countries that supported us in Iraq and the countries who didn't – trying to get support. We would have meetings with embassies, we worked on congressional reports that had to be submitted periodically, reporting on the assistance efforts and who was giving what and when. The reports were due every three months so we spent a lot of time on them..

Q: What was the program? You say oil for food. Was this taking Iraqi oil to pay for food?

FARSAKH: Well, yes it was. This is the program that was started by the UN in the mid-'90s because Iraqi children were suffering from malnutrition and dying in huge numbers because of the strict international sanctions following the first Gulf War. It was a complex system that was set up whereby Iraqi oil would pay for food from various countries and this would go into a system run by the Iraqis, except in Kurdistan where it was run by the UN because the Iraqi government was not functioning there. The food would go into warehouses from where it would be delivered to Iraqi cities, towns and villages and from there it would be distributed to grocery stores where people would go with their ration cards. The government ran this huge ration card system. It had a food basket of essential commodities like sugar, tea, milk, powdered milk for infants, laundry soap, cooking oil; people would come to the groceries and get their monthly ration, depending on how many people were in their family. People got fed. In that way it worked and it did raise the health standards, it did make things better – it did what it was

supposed to do – but eventually Saddam figured out how to sell the oil to certain people, set the conditions and skim profits off the contracts that the Iraqi government would sign with various entities.

Once this was found out – a few years later – the UN set up a committee to oversee the contracts. Once the U.S. took over Oil for Food after the invasion, the oil money went into a fund called the DFI, (Development Fund for Iraq) which was administered by the UN and the World Bank. This then became money that was available to the Iraqi government to fund some government operations and other things. So it was complicated.

Q: Were you trying to reach recreate the Saddam Hussein period's allotment of food?

FARSAKH: Yes, It continued for several years after the invasion because it was the only way to feed the population. Iraqi agriculture had been destroyed. First of all, during the Iran-Iraq war, a lot of date palms which were mostly along the borders in the south were destroyed. The agriculture in Kurdistan, because of all the disorder there, was not functioning well and the marshes were drained. A lot of men died during that war and so there wasn't enough agricultural labor. There were a lot of reasons that Iraqi agriculture was not doing well. Then of course, when the Oil for Food program started, the food started coming in from overseas, which further depressed Iraqi agriculture. By the time the U.S. got there, there wasn't much left of Iraqi agriculture. There was no or very little domestic production. It was all coming from overseas.

People had to eat. We feared that there would be starvation and disease, and so the ration program was continued. I am not sure of the situation now because I haven't been following it. I spent last year doing Iraqi political issues. The last time I looked, which was the year before last, the Iraqi government was trying to phase out the program by trying to shrink the food basket, to take some things out. We are involved in programs to revive Iraqi agriculture, but I'm not sure how far they've gotten.

Q: Since that time, since you left there what have you been up to?

FARSAKH: After Robin retired, I was asked to stay on for two more years in the economic section of the Iraq desk and I continued to work mostly on the international side, and on the congressional reports, answering congressional questions, meeting with foreign embassies, pretty much doing whatever I was asked to do, attending some conferences. I went to my last Iraq assistance conference in Istanbul in March of '07.

When I came back last year I thought, well, maybe I'll have a little vacation. I got called in October and asked if I would join the political section of the Iraq desk.

Q: What were you doing in the political section?

FARSAKH: I transferred from economic international engagement to political international engagement. They have a division in the political section between people who work on internal issues and those who work on international issues. I spent most of

my time working with foreign embassies, with other desks, working on charts that continue to be demanded by the NSC and others on where we stand on the opening of foreign – particularly Arab – embassies in Iraq. We spend a lot of time trying to encourage Arab countries to open embassies in Baghdad.

Q: Why would anybody want to open an embassy in Iraq? It's dangerous.

FARSAKH: Well yes, especially since the Egyptians tried it at the beginning and their ambassador was assassinated. Bahrain had a post and a couple of their diplomats were kidnapped. A UAE diplomat was either kidnapped or killed. The Arabs became prime targets of the insurgents. However, since I left the Iraq desk – maybe as a result of my hard work! – some improvement has occurred. King Abdullah of Jordan has visited Iraq. The UAE has announced the opening of an embassy. I think Bahrain may have opened an embassy. The Saudis are vaguely planning to. The Egyptians have made some noises, so there has been some progress. This issue was a big thing that we kept getting hammered on all the time by the Hill – that all the European countries and Turkey are there and the Arab countries aren't. Why aren't they there? Why don't they support Iraq more? Constant, constant hammering.

Q: What were you getting from the Arab countries?

FARSAKH: Statements of intent – but when they would speak to us privately, they would say, "Well, you know. Our ambassador was assassinated." Some of them would say, "Well, we're not going to do it anymore in the Bush administration. We'll wait until the new administration comes in and then we'll do it." Some of them may have held to that. Others clearly have not.

Q: After your plan had been rejected, but afterwards you worked with Robin and then you worked on the Iraqi desk. What was your feeling about what we were doing in Iraq and two, the people who were there because Iraq has not been very, what we have been doing in Iraq has not been popular here in the United States. There's an awfully lot of feeling we should get the hell out and sort of let the Iraqis take care of the problem.

FARSAKH: First of all, on the desk there is a great mishmash of people. It's not like a normal desk. For a start, the tours of duty in Iraq are only one year, so there are people coming and going all the time.

Q: With significant leave time in between.

FARSAKH: Yes. They get three R&Rs during their year -long tours.

Q: I served in Vietnam and we had two R&Rs for 18 months and that wasn't really enough.

FARSAKH: This is three R&Rs in one year.

You know at the beginning, the administration sent a lot of 20-somethings out there, true believers who didn't know anything about anything but believed in democracy promotion or free market or whatever.

Q: And young political types

FARSAKH: Who were building their resumes.

Q: Who didn't bring anything to the table.

FARSAKH: That's right. Like the twenty five year old who decided to build the stock market! So we had a mixture of FSOs, civil service, presidential management fellows, interns and a unique breed called 3161s, named after the executive order that set them up. The 3161s only work on Iraq, either there or here. It's a two year contract, they get paid very well, they are with some contracting company, and there are lots of 3161s working both in Washington and in Baghdad. They are almost always young and hardly ever have real world experience. Some of them are tremendously bright. Among the 3161s you had some true believers but some not. The two biggest parts of the desk are the political and economic. You have POLMIL, which is fairly small, public diplomacy also fairly small, and then a special admin section off on its own that mostly does assignments and training. The only part of the embassy that doesn't have counterpart in NEA is consular – which CA controls. Personnel turnover occurs all the time so it's like the old cliché of herding cats, having a common purpose, being able to manage all this. Then you have all the congressional demands – the reports, the letters, the hearings. It's really quite an experience.

I would say on the whole I thought that the economic section was better managed than the political section, but then I had more years on the econ section.

One thing happened in the econ section that I thought was outrageous; we had a 3161 who was probably making as much as the Secretary. He was in Iraq for a time, came back and was given a job on the desk making this huge salary. He went and had knee surgery and was out for several months. But before he had his surgery, because he was so highly paid and he was one of these administration true believers, he couldn't just be off on his own; he had to be given a staff. So the office broke off part of the operation to put under him so that he would appear more important. He was almost never there, his deputy did all the work, and the deputy supervised the rest of us who were supposed to be in this "section. " It was ridiculous and an outrage.

Finally, he left to work with some flooring company. He was a nice enough guy; he had a Bible on his desk all the time.

On the political side, we had a very good director when I arrived, but David Satterfield, the Secretary's Special Advisor on Iraq, has a deputy position, and it's a fairly high ranking job. There was a woman in it who was doing quite well but then she got an ambassadorship and she left. Within a month of getting a new director on the political

desk, he was yanked upstairs to be David Satterfield's new deputy, and the office had no director for the entire time I was in the political section.

The deputy was an FSO who was having marital troubles and she hardly ever appeared in the office before 10 am and sometimes later, so everybody was scrambling around trying to do the best they could. We essentially had no management. I think the work got done, but it wasn't a happy place.

Now it's better. I am not there anymore but I have visited. I had to submit my travel voucher for Libya and it was done from NEA so I had to go back to the Iraq desk; they have a new director who has come from someplace in Africa. I don't think he knows anything about Iraq, and there is a new deputy with a serious medical problem. He came in for a few days before the summer and he hasn't been seen again; they are holding the position open for him.

Q: Did you come away with a feeling of what we were doing? We're talking about 2006, '07.

FARSAKH: I think most people – with the exception of the small number of true believers, who we always had – most believed that we had made a mistake going in and really messed things up. Many were reading the books that were coming out, like Assassins' Gate and Emerald City, but we felt that we had to make it better; we had to do the best we could to support the embassy, to support the sections we were working with, to do what we could to make the best of it. I think that's the way most people feel – that it was a mess, was misconceived, but we have to make it the best we can. Most people I think are comfortable with that. I felt from the beginning that the whole episode was a mistake, I was against the whole thing, I thought that just about everything we did was wrong – but I still felt OK about working there because we were trying to make it better.

Q: Did you have any feel that we should get our troops out sooner?

FARSAKH: I was of two minds about that. There is always the fear that if we pull them out too soon, we will leave a vacuum and the fighting will start up all over again. But then most Iraqis don't want us there and the longer we stay, the more they depend on us and the less they can do on their own. There were times that I would see reporting that would indicate basically we were just telling them what to do and they were doing it. And that's not a healthy situation. We had some of our ambassadors, not so much this one, but to some extent the ambassadors had no choice but to act like pro-consuls. It's just like the days of the British Empire all over again and it's humiliating. It's disgusting to watch your country behaving like this. I would often feel repelled reading some of this stuff. I still think the country is still fragile because the bad guys – al-Qaeda – are weakened, and the Sunnis are kind of up for grabs. They don't have any allegiance to the Shiite government. The Shiite government doesn't' feel any sense of responsibility toward the Sunnis and is afraid of them. All of these Awakening groups that are to a great degree responsible for the pacification of a lot of the country, Anbar and parts of Baghdad, if they aren't taken care of, the fighting can start up again. Because the Sunnis now

recognize that they are weak, (at the beginning they didn't), any new fighting could draw in other Sunni countries. That's one worry.

The other worry which I mentioned earlier was we gave the Kurds too much and we let them go too far, and now we want to pull them back and it's very hard. If they try to take over Kirkuk-and they even want Mosul – if they keep pushing to expand their territory, it will create a very great wave of violence which could spread through the whole country and draw in Turkey for starters. We are trying to walk the Kurds back. Some of the leadership realizes that maybe they went too far, but they got their population so hepped up. They are like the Israelis; you know, settling people, throwing other people out, constantly taking land, moving forward. The Palestinians are weak, they have no military. They are total victims, whereas the Sunnis and the Shiites in Iraq are not total victims and they will fight back. The whole thing can go up again. I worry about that, and especially I worry about Kirkuk being the flashpoint for all of this to explode all over again.

I am going on to a new stage of my career; starting October 14th as the head of the democratic governance team on the Afghan desk. I am turning over a new leaf; I am going to where the biggest mess is now. Now that I have left one mess that is sort of settling down, I am moving on to the next big mess!

Q: Is this State Department sponsored?

FARSAKH: Yes, it is. It's the Afghan Desk, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs.

Q: Thank you very much.

End of interview