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

GEORGE LAMBRAKIS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial Interview date: June 5, 2002
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is June 5, 2002. This is an interview with George Lambrakis. Middle initial?

LAMBRAKIS: B, Basil, my father's name.

Q: Basil. This is done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. George, when and where were you born, and can you tell me a little about your family?

LAMBRAKIS: I was born in Chicago. My father was a physician who had just immigrated from Greece with my mother.

Q: What year were you born?

LAMBRAKIS: I was born in 1931 on the fourth of June which was yesterday, my birthday, so I am now 71 as of yesterday. Unfortunately, my father was killed in an automobile accident when I was just two years old. My mother lost a leg and stayed in a hospital for six months, and then went back to Greece where we lived until I was almost eight years old.

Q: You left there when?

LAMBRAKIS: Well, we left in 1933 from America. We left from Greece in 1939. My mother had seen the war coming. She had actually traveled to Austria where my father had done some of his training, and seen the way the Germans were treating the Jews and saw war clouds gathering. Interestingly enough, it was because I was born in America that she could come back easily into the United States. We came in June, 1939 for a six month stay. The war broke out in September, and we stayed.

Q: Were you living in Athens itself?

LAMBRAKIS: Yes.

Q: I assume you learned Greek while you were there.

LAMBRAKIS: Oh, yes, in fact, because the Greek dictator at the time, Metaxas, had decided you don't start first grade until you are seven years old, and because there was a

semi-fascist youth movement that he had organized, I basically studied at home. I had forgotten English. I had to learn English all over again, English and Greek, but as a result of studying at home, I was able to go right in with my grade level in the U.S.

Q: You came back to the United States in 1939. Where did you settle?

LAMBRAKIS: I spent six months in Chicago and then moved to New York. I was put into a Greek-American boarding school in Port Chester, New York where I learned both languages. Actually they skipped me ahead a grade, so for the rest of my school life I was burdened by being one year younger than everybody else. But on the other hand, by the time you get to college, about a third of your class is in that position. I had four years at Greek-American boarding school. Then I had four years at Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts, which at that point was not the Northfield Mount Hermon School that it is today. Then I went to Princeton where I decided to be an English major and study creative writing.

Q: You were at Princeton from when to when?

LAMBRAKIS: 1948-1952. 1952 was an important year for the Foreign Service at Princeton because as you may know, the motto at Princeton is “Princeton in the nation's service.” Of course Woodrow Wilson was president there and had that tradition. Members of my class went to the Foreign Service. I counted at least 12 at the time. I can't remember them all now. In fact, I knew only some of them at Princeton, since I had been an English major, not in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. I know that Carlucci is one. Hal Saunders was not exactly Foreign Service but ended up being there.

Q: Tom Boyatt?

LAMBRAKIS: He was a year after. But others would be Bob Oakley, Moorehead Kennedy, Quincey Lumsden, Chips Chester, Walt Ramsey, Steve Rogers, Mike Healy. Eventually Jim Baker who was in the class but came in sideways later. Frank Carlucci, of course, left the Foreign Service early, despite the fact that he had rather a traumatic experience in the Congo at the time. We have some amusing stories about that.

Q: He was PNGed in Tanzania, too.

LAMBRAKIS: What I was told at the time was when Mobutu came for his first visit to Kennedy, he looked around and said, "Où est Carlucci?" (“Where is Carlucci,”) and Kennedy looked around and said, "Who is Carlucci?" They got him into the dinner party in time. Do you want me to tell you more about the Foreign Service?

Q: Go ahead because this is going to have to be done. You graduated in '52. Were you influenced; had the Foreign Service crossed your radar?

LAMBRAKIS: Yes. Even though I was an English major, my thought had turned to how am I going to make a living. I didn't particularly want to go into teaching right away, and

I couldn't think of any other way. So I went to the school of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins, (SAIS) in Washington, which took me in the summer on trial. I stayed. I got an MA in one year. That was the last year they gave the one-year MA. It was "With Distinction." Then I found that no one in government was hiring because Eisenhower had frozen the hiring process. I stayed on an extra summer there, studied, taught some Greek, sold encyclopedias to stay alive. It was actually Paul Nitze, going down the stairs one day while I was going up the stairs who said, "George, they are hiring at USIS. You might want to try it." The CIA had meanwhile talked to me, but I wasn't terribly interested. But I was interested in USIS. I had an interview, and I was one of six or seven of us, three of us from SAIS, who were in the first entering class of Foreign Affairs Trainees. They said they were interested in my French. I saw visions of Paris where I had been in my sophomore year at college. I had spent a summer in Paris. I thought "gee, this is great." Then they accepted me and said, "We would like you to go to Saigon, Vietnam." I had to look at a map to figure out where it was.

Q: This would be in '54.

LAMBRAKIS: This would be '54. I also taught by correspondence personnel relations to business people at a school called the Holmes Institute. I was teaching Greek and selling encyclopedias. Then I passed the Foreign Service oral exam in Asia, in Saigon, where three ambassadors examined me. One of them, Mac Godley in Cambodia, much later took me on as his DCM in Beirut, Lebanon.

Q: Well, when you arrived in Saigon, what did they do?

LAMBRAKIS: It was pretty good. USIS had about 12 people. I was the first, and then we got a second junior officer trainee, Tom Grunwald, so there were two of us. I was assigned to the press section to begin with. Howie Simpson who used to make wonderful cartoons for the Foreign Service Journal was the press officer. He knew a lot about everybody. This was shortly after Dien Bien Phu. I went there in September; Dien Bien Phu, the great defeat of the French, had happened, I think in June. Simpson knew several of the French colonels who had either served there or knew people who had served there. I was rotated from section to section over one year, publications, field work. I traveled around the country with mobile units passing out literature. When my year was up, the word came in that I was going to be transferred to Laos.

Q: Before we go to Laos, what was the situation in Vietnam at the time?

LAMBRAKIS: When I arrived in Vietnam, Ngo Dien Diem had just taken office. I was told as I arrived there that South Vietnam would last at the most six more months, and Ngo Dien Diem no more than three months. This was the beginning of my experience with people telling you what will happen, and of course, eventually many people are right, but the problem is what is their timing. In this case, as we know, Ngo Dien Diem went on for many years, South Vietnam went on for many years. But everybody was very pessimistic. It was a dicey situation, but frankly USIS was trying its best to fix it. I had interesting experiences. One of my assignments was with the radio section. What we

were doing was monitoring the news around the world in the evening and then we would tape them and they would be rebroadcast by the Vietnamese to their own field posts, so they would be put out as news bulletins all around the country next morning. Somebody had to get that tape from where we were recording it to the broadcasting studio at night, around midnight. One of the problems was that the police and the military were fighting at that point, because the military were under Ngo Dien Diem, the police were still quite corrupt, and with a lot of French influence. The French had left very unhappily at the time. Also there were at least three other armed groups that were anti-government. One of my jobs was on my motor scooter carrying this tape. I had to go up this main street between the police on one side and the military on the other, who would occasionally shoot at each other. This was always kind of fun as I zoomed through in the middle of the night and got to the Saigon radio station where people would turn their Tommy guns on you. That was one of my various experiences here. The situation in Vietnam was quite good when I was there from '54 to '55. It got much worse later.

Q: Well, had the exodus from the north started?

LAMBRAKIS: I am glad you mentioned that. Yes, and I had a part in that too. First of all that was the height of the exodus. I was sent to Haiphong because Hanoi and Haiphong were the last places to be evacuated. Haiphong harbor was the last place from which they were leaving. I went up there and did interviews on the ship on the way back with people as to what their experiences were as refugees, most of whom of course were Catholics fleeing to the south. Ngo Dien Diem was a Catholic, which eventually was part of his downfall in a Buddhist country. The other part of it was that the North Vietnamese got kind of preferential treatment. People thought that this was because they were Catholics but it was also because northerners tend to be a lot more energetic in Vietnam than the southerners. They were ready to work. But I did come back on their boat with them. I was also sent up there for six weeks to sit in for the USIS representative in Haiphong, “Red” Austin, the last one we had, while he went on leave. That was one of my temporary assignments.

Q: Was the plan early on to stay in North Vietnam?

LAMBRAKIS: I don't think so. We had to leave. The last thing we did, one of the many futile gestures, was passing out radios to people. That was one of my last jobs in North Vietnam, which of went to all of the villagers when we had to leave. As soon as we left, the local Viet Minh came by and collected them all. They were all supposed to be tuned to our frequency. I would just drive around and distribute them with a Vietnamese team. Mind you, it was quite clear at the time that there wasn't going to be another election in the south, because by then people knew all about elections in communist countries. We figured if there was going to be one total election for the country, there would be 99% vote for the communist party in the north, there would be a large percent in the south. The communists would win, and we had already seen what happened in places like Czechoslovakia when even 40% of the vote goes to the communists. So reinterpretation of this later on had it that the Americans broke the Geneva agreement, but at the time there was no talk about the issue. In fact even as late as when I was in Israel, I was

making speeches in favor of the American position in Vietnam.

Q: Who was our ambassador when you were in Saigon?

LAMBRAKIS: Well we had several. I can't remember the name of the Foreign Service officer. Was it Reinhardt?

Q: It was Donald Heath at one time.

LAMBRAKIS: Actually I got there while Heath was still ambassador. Then he was replaced by someone else, I think Reinhardt. A military man, I think General Collins, came out there as presidential special emissary because I also did a run up country following President Diem with Collins when Diem went around introducing him and showing him the country. I even had an amusing time one day when I got to a theater late. I told the usher "I am from the American embassy." He ushered me to the second row where there was an empty seat right in the middle. The guy in front of me turned around to see who I was. It was Ngo Dien Diem, the President! The usher must have thought I was an American ambassador just arrived!...Not very sophisticated.

Q: Then you were moved. Is this part of a regular rotation thing?

LAMBRAKIS: There is one last thing I should say about Saigon since I have a French wife. That is that French junior officers were very unhappy about the Americans appearing to take Vietnam from them. They started setting off bombs. The first bomb was set off in front of the USIS library which happened to be just below where I was living at the time. I was in my apartment when the explosion occurred right in front of it. Then they were leaving bombs all over until finally they were caught. The Vietnamese police officer I was sitting next to in a theater one time turned to me and proudly said, "I was the one who caught those Frenchmen."

Q: But it was French who were doing that?

LAMBRAKIS: They were French officers, junior officers, but there was a lot of bitterness among the French. If you think back on it, Eisenhower had refused any meaningful assistance at Dien Bien Phu. They resented the Americans because they felt we were supporting Ngo Dien Diem, and Ngo Dien Diem was taking the country away from them. There was somebody named Bao Dai, the former emperor there, who was on the French Riviera and never came back.

Q: In '55 you moved to...

LAMBRAKIS: In '55 I was assigned to open up a field post in southern Laos. We had already got one post there in the capital, Vientiane, with two USIS people. Ted Tannen and Yale Richmond, I don't know if you ran into them.

Q: I have interviewed Ted.

LAMBRAKIS: Okay, Yale Richmond was later in eastern Europe in Poland. As a matter of fact I introduced him to one of the Foreign Service officers in my entering class, and they got married. He lives around this area still. I was told to open a field post in Savannakent, which is halfway down Laos. I visited another place, Pakse, further south and I thought that was a better place, so we opened in Pakse and Savannakent, but I lived in Pakse. In Pakse, there was a royal family, headed by Prince Boun Oum, not terribly well connected locally but with a lot of respect from a certain group there. I ran the USIS operation pretty broadly. We had a lot of field work, movies. I remember that in my oral examination for entrance into USIS, one of the questions they asked me was what would you do in a country where the people can't read and write to get your word out to the people? I thought and I said, "Well I would show them movies." That seemed to satisfy the examiners. I ended up doing a lot of that in Laos, sending out Laotians with mobile units in various directions. We had a cultural center, and basically I used to call myself the king of southern Laos. What happened during that time, AID moved in. In fact they sent a guy to stay in Pakse who became a friend of mine. And to show you the difference of resources, they said if you let him stay in the house you have, we will furnish the house for you. So a plane with furniture came down within a week. I had had no USIS money to buy furniture, but suddenly I had a furnished house with AID. The guy was John Alden, who stayed, and remained a friend. At the time, Laos was under the Geneva accords and had Canadian, Polish and Indian officers in Pakse as part of the International Control Commission to control the armistice. They were in a pretty rickety hotel. The one good thing was the Canadians had lots of good Canadian whiskey, and the Poles had lots of vodka from time to time, but we used to end up in my house more often than not. The governor of my province there and others around him played tennis. I used to play tennis with them almost every evening, sit around over a beer and chat about things. I had two other provinces that I used to drive to from time to time, and I would do them both together. It used to be a 14 hour trip in a Land Rover. I used to have to cross nine dry river beds, couldn't do it in the wet season which is half the year. You had a lot of people to people contact. I did a certain amount of reporting on the communists, a little bit of communist propaganda in Laos. One of the brothers of one of the ruling families was the top communist. He was also the top engineer in the country. He was very much under Viet Minh influence. But he was also brighter than most people in the country. I did a little bit of political reporting. Then, let's face it, there were a few quiet Americans who arrived, military and others once the French left. The French did leave as they were supposed to. Savannakent was their last post. But a few Americans came to look over the land. These were presumably CIA. I stayed there just one year and then I came back to Washington and decided to move to State.

Q: What was USIA doing? What was the message?

LAMBRAKIS: Well the message was Americans are good. The free world is good; communists are bad. How do you get that across? And by the way, I wrote an article when I came back for the SAIS Journal. It was reproduced in my Princeton yearbook, my 45th yearbook. At that point Laos was a neutral country, very much under the threat of communism because of what was being threatened in Vietnam next door, and our

message was along those lines. The message to the elite was more complex, but for the mass population, in movies, you could show American cowboys - which went over big as a starter. Then you might show something about health matters, how to keep drinking water clean. Then you would show something bad the communists were doing somewhere. Then you might show some other thing, how you would do this in the United States. It was a light touch. It was not heavy, basically introducing America to that part of the world, and what we are and what we stand for.

Q: Were the communists doing much while you were there?

LAMBRAKIS: Not an awful lot compared to what happened later. But you know, even in Vietnam they weren't doing a lot at that point. It was a quiescent period while I suppose they were organizing themselves in Hanoi and hoping that the south would just collapse, which it didn't, primarily because of American assistance. But also because of the ability of Ngo Dien Diem, and the fact that he was not known as someone corrupt, as most leaders were.

Q: You came back then in '56?

LAMBRAKIS: Yes, I came back in '56.

Q: Why did you want to move into the Foreign Service?

LAMBRAKIS: I just thought it was more a career. I figured that USIS was a 15 year career, by which time I might become a Public Affairs Officer, and where would I go after that? Whereas the other was what I thought would be more of a lifelong career. In those days we did think of the Foreign Service as a lifelong career.

Q: So where did you go after you came into the Foreign Service?

LAMBRAKIS: Well, I had to do junior officer training. As I mentioned before it was amusing at the time. When we got our assignments, two people from the class, two of the brightest, were assigned to Tijuana, where they felt that getting drunken Americans out of jail was not exactly what the Foreign Service was about. One of them resigned; the other stayed on. It was Larry Eagleburger, who became of course the only career guy ever to make Secretary of State. Another member of our class who was a lawyer was assigned to Abidjan. Nobody knew where Abidjan was. He quit. He decided to stay in Washington and be a lawyer. I was assigned to INR, African affairs. Even though one day in the elevator before I was assigned, a personnel officer said to me, "There is another agency that is really keen on getting you." I said, “Who?” He said, "USIS. They want you to open up a field post in Laos.” Because USIS was opening up Zuang Pnagang at that point, and my name had crossed their list. I said, "Have you seen what I have done before? Why do you think I am in the State Department?" Anyway, that is one of the many amusing things. Another personnel officer, and I think this is good for us generally to understand, another personnel officer asked me if I was prepared to go to Izmir in Turkey. This was a time when there were riots against Greeks in Turkey. I said, "Have you looked at my last name? How do you think that is going to play in Izmir?" So he

dropped that idea too. But it shows you the way in which personnel assignments were made. So I had two years under somebody named Bob Baum, who was an excellent teacher running African affairs in INR.

Q: Yes, Bob Baum.

LAMBRAKIS: Bill Lewis was my immediate boss. And after two years in INR I was given my choice of three African assignments, I chose Conakry because it was a brand new post, and I spoke French. So I went to Conakry, Guinea, which was the one country in the new French empire that De Gaulle was creating from the former French colonies, which had said “no,” they didn’t want to join the empire. The first chargé d’affaires, Bob Rinden and I went out there. We were stopped on the way. We were stopped in Dakar, Senegal, because opening our post had not been cleared with the French. The European bureau in the State Department was very nervous about what De Gaulle was going to make of it. We spent, I think, 10 days or two weeks sitting in Dakar waiting. Finally we were allowed to go to Guinea. As we arrived in Guinea, we knew that the British and the Russian ambassadors had gone there, and they had been received with red carpet treatment and bands playing and all that. So Bob asked me, "What do you think? Should we be the first or the last off the plane?" We decided on being the last. We got off the plane, and there wasn't a soul around. We walked into the airport, and a guy came up to us and said, "You must be diplomats. I work here. Do you want me to help you?" So on that basis we were received in Guinea by the guy who, I later realized, was the head of immigration there.

At which point we were immediately taken to a visit with the president, Sekou Toure. I shouldn't say immediately. We did get into the hotel first. Just before that, Telli Diallo, who was the Guinean ambassador to the United States and to the United Nations, came to us at the hotel and said, "You will be seeing the president in another hour." This was Friday the 13th of the month, by the way. He said, "You know the president is planning to fly to see his friend President Kennedy on Monday.” So Bob Rinden’s first job on meeting the president was to explain to him that he could not just fly into Washington and see his friend Kennedy next Monday.

Actually Sekou Toure never did go to the United States on an official visit. We did have a tough time because of the French connection and the fact that the United States had to play a role between the French and Sekou Toure. Also, let's face it, Sekou Toure was a dictator, a fairly brutal one, although with a very lovable surface. The French had left there pulling the light sockets out and everything. Then, I am jumping in time to get ahead, at one point later on where we had gotten to know the cast of characters there, one of the most friendly ones who was married to a French woman whom we all knew quite well, was among those who had asked Sekou Toure if it wasn't proper to have an opposition party. Sekou Toure told him, "Yes, petition me. Sign your names." Some 50 or so of these guys did, and they disappeared. At that time, Sekou Toure had already accepted Soviet, and particularly East German, assistance. There was at least one torture camp where some of the most terrible things you can imagine were being done. We never saw this guy again. His wife was deported back to France. He was just one of many

people who disappeared.

Q: In the first place did the French have any representation there or did they really not just clean out the light sockets, but did they have any residue there?

LAMBRAKIS: Oh, yes. The French not only had representation there, which by the way going back to Laos, in Pakse, I had gotten to know the French representative very well, as well as the military there who were still in Laos. But in Guinea too, the French were still there, and what's more, there was a big French business community. I was assigned in Lonaksy as consular officer, not political or economic. The Chargé did the political and economic work. I did the consular and administrative work until we got an economic officer, a fellow named Curtis Strong, and Darrel Keene came out as administrative officer. Eventually the new Ambassador came out. Because Bob Rinden was an East Asia hand he was unhappy there and eventually got transferred back to East Asia when the new ambassador came. He was a non-career African-American professor from North Carolina. The first ambassador to Guinea, and I think he has written a book. His name was Mornow.

Q: Well, on the French...

LAMBRAKIS: The French were still there. In fact the reason I went into all that is that I spent most of my time there dealing with Frenchmen more than Africans because of the job I was doing, and I'll explain why. We had two important administrative things to do. To import goods and household effects for a growing embassy, we needed to fill out long forms for the customs. The only people who knew how to fill them out were two Frenchmen who had remained. The only place you could find them was if you knew which cafe they were drinking in at that time. So I used to go around and find them, buy them a drink, get them to fill out the papers, take them, go to the Guinean chief of the customs, listen for about an hour while he questioned me about what the CIA had done to Lumumba in the Congo. (Lumumba had been killed at the time. I was explaining how the CIA didn't do it). After about an hour of inconclusive discussion, he would sign the papers and I would go off.

Meanwhile we were living in the one decent hotel, the Hotel de France, where they had the best restaurant in town and where all the best French business types used to come. Eventually I got to play poker with them and get business done easily. The other key job I had was to find housing for new people coming to the embassy. I think I became the real estate agent for 23 different houses which we rented from various people. We even had a Frenchman building houses to rent to us, and I had to find office space, taking care of all of that. Then when the first administrative officer came, he sat next to me, but we had to write memoranda to each other because he wanted to document the files. This used to drive me crazy. The embassy was in a two bedroom apartment, even when we had an ambassador, a DCM, an economic officer, and a CIA guy who came out as labor officer. You know, there were six or seven of us. There were a couple of local employees there. Still we had to write memoranda so that future generations would be able to read what happened.

Guinea at that point was just coming out, becoming independent. I said earlier, they had a brutal government. The big thing in their economy was the extraction and production of aluminum. There was an old Canadian company doing it, but there was also a big new French operation there at FRIA, in which an American company had a minority share. I remember when the Americans came out after independence to discuss what would happen with Sekou Toure. They were interested in that sense. But otherwise Guinea's importance began to fall away as things developed later on in Africa. I was there when Nkrumah visited. Nkrumah, of course, despite having studied in the United States, became quite anti-American, so the two of them had a jolly time being anti-American for a while. But I think we managed a pretty good relationship with Guineans.

I could throw in a couple of other items. For example, the fact that every morning I used to drive to the airport. I tell my students this when I am teaching diplomacy. I was the consular officer. The planes from Europe would come in late in the morning. There was the immigration chief there. Everybody arriving in Guinea was supposed to have a visa. There was nowhere in the world you could get a visa, but you were still supposed to have one. The only place you might get one is if you caught Ambassador Telli Diallo running around in the UN in New York or in Washington and he personally gave you one. So my job was to manage to get every American arriving into the country. I never lost one. However, in the beginning I had a tough time with this chief of immigration who was a bit of a smart aleck, like I was at the time. One day I got on the telephone to the Foreign Minister to complain that he was giving me a hard time on this perfectly innocent traveler. The Foreign Minister said, "Put him on the phone," I was so angry I said, "You call him yourself," and I hung up. The Foreign Minister wanted to PNG me. He came back to Sekou Toure. Bob Rinden and I went up there. Rinden said, "If Lambrakis goes, I go." I think they realized at that point that this was a serious problem, so I stayed on.

However on a second occasion they again wanted to PNG me. This was because you needed exit visas to leave the country. By then we had a USIS public affairs officer, as well, who had to go to a meeting elsewhere. We had put in for his exit visa two or three weeks in advance. Nothing was happening. So the night before he had to travel, I went down to see Mr. Banka, (I still remember his name), a young man who was in charge of American affairs at the Foreign Ministry. I said, "We need this exit visa." He said, "Oh that's too bad. The chief of security has gone home. He has to sign it." I said, "I am sitting here. I am not leaving until I get it." So after about an hour, they sent out for it, got it signed, and our man could travel the next day. But then they talked about PNGing me again. I think they knew me by then and they decided not to PNG me. The next time I saw the chief of security, he kept me waiting, I think, two hours in his outer office before he received me. But we got along fairly well. He was a pretty nasty guy, but he was nice with me. Amusingly when I was transferred after two years, he was the one Guinean official who came to the airport and walked out to the airplane with me. As I tell my students to this day, I don't know if it was a friendly gesture or he just wanted to make sure I was getting on the plane and leaving the place.

Q: You met your wife there, too.

LAMBRAKIS: I met my wife. She had come down for six months as a French nurse for the Canadian mining company on an island across from Conakry. We met, and she stayed on. She worked for another doctor in Conakry. She stayed there for about a year. We didn't actually get married until about five years later. She went back to Paris. We kept in correspondence and saw each other from time to time, until we finally married in Athens (when I was later stationed in Tel Aviv.

Q: At that time human rights was not a particular issue. In other words if Sekou Toure was being nasty, which he was to his people, this essentially was not our concern.

LAMBRAKIS: Yes. Well if you think about it, human rights did not become our concern until Carter made a big thing out of it. Sure, occasionally it would pop into the news, but there was no question that anti-communism is what counted. Africa was the land in which you want one way and then the other. Every time the communists took a step towards getting a better hold in a country, the U.S. had to take a step counter it. A good example is the waltzing that was done with Ethiopia and Eritrea, as the Soviets and we exchanged clients after the Ethiopian revolution.

Q: Well now, how about the Soviets? Did you get involved in the cold war in there?

LAMBRAKIS: Yes. Well first of all Guinea had problems financially. From one day to the next, they broke out of the French franc and they made their own currency which had been printed in East Germany or Czechoslovakia, I am not sure which. Suddenly we had money which was worth nothing outside the country. The Soviets were there. I didn't see much of them because I didn't have much occasion. But for example the Poles were there. When I left Guinea, the Poles bought most of my furniture because they would buy anything with the money there. It all looked good to them. Our first chargé d'affaires, Bob Rinden, got in serious trouble because when we first were there, just the two of us, we had one-time code pads to do our reporting. One time pads is a coding system if you don't have a code machine to code. The one time pad is a laborious hand done job, and we had to use the public telegraph service and pay for it, so we were rather strict on what we sent by telegraph. Well, unfortunately, Bob wrote a long message about the arms deal that the Czechs had made with Sekou Toure, but we sent it by pouch, not telegraph. The Czech deal hit the news long before the pouch message got to Washington, and we got this bomb out of Washington saying “why haven't we heard about this deal. What is happening anyway?” So Bob had to go back and explain why. It is hard to think of today's modern Foreign Service realizing the conditions under which people were working not so long ago.

Q: Were people sitting around, were you all analyzing why he did his anti-French thing?

LAMBRAKIS: Well, I think that Sekou Toure in many ways was a precursor of what happened with the rest of Africa, you know, unlike Houphouet-Boigny in Ivory Coast and Senghor in Senegal at the time, both of whom were French educated elite. Sekou Toure had come up through the labor movement. He was radicalized. He actually had at

least one communist Frenchman as an advisor in a key position. I assume he just wanted independence. I think, as in many cases, if you broke away from a western power, the Soviets were quite prepared to help you with arms or anything else you wanted. He accepted a good deal of that. His monetary situation became pretty difficult after his monetary reform because from one day to the next we stopped getting goods. Of course the country was fairly poor anyway. If they could not get goods from Europe, it probably hurt them less than us foreigners. But what did happen with us was that rumors spread quickly. You knew if cheese arrived in town, you would drop whatever you were doing and rush out to buy whatever was available. This is what such monetary “reform” can do in a country.

Q: You left there in when?

LAMBRAKIS: I left there two years later. I got there in '59; I left there in '61. I spoke French, Greek, and I had learned quite a bit of Russian. Therefore the State Department decided that I should learn German and go to a country where I didn't know the language, again in the usual way in which these things happen. I was assigned to Germany, and they switched my assignment. I was assigned to Stuttgart first, and then I was assigned to Munich, and sent back to FSI for German language training. I spent four months in Washington, and then became the junior of the two political officers in our consulate general in Munich.

Q: And you did that from '61 to...

LAMBRAKIS: I was in Munich for a little more than one year, after the home leave and four months at FSI.

Q: '62?

LAMBRAKIS: I wanted to move to something a little livelier. Mind you I had the experience in Munich of working with Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Again I stood in for a more senior officer when he went on leave. This was the senior officer whose wife had slapped a Russian policeman when he was in Moscow. He was a Soviet specialist, and he was PNGed on that occasion and couldn't go back. because of that. He was our main liaison with Radio Liberty. I had a wonderful personal time as a bachelor in Munich at the time, but I wanted something more exciting politically. I came back to Washington. I think I had the best time in my life in terms of jobs being offered as alternatives. I could have stayed in Washington and started on eastern Europe through Washington personnel, or I could have gone to Rio de Janeiro as political officer. But instead I went to Tel Aviv as political officer, as Steve Palmer's deputy there. Steve unfortunately died, had a heart attack just a year ago.

Q: You were in Tel Aviv from when?

LAMBRAKIS: I was in Tel Aviv from 1963 to 1966, about three or three and a half years. This was a very interesting time, before the '67 war. We had a political section of

three people, four people counting the aide to the ambassador. The CIA there operated entirely as liaison. My personal job was both internal politics and handling the cross border incidents that were taking place regularly across the borders from Jordan, Syria, and to some degree, Lebanon. I got to meet all of the stars that you hear about. I knew Dayan personally, Peres personally, Begin personally, as well as many of the others, such as Ezer and Weizmann. All of these people became even better known later on.

Q: You got there in '63. What was the situation in Israel at the time?

LAMBRAKIS: Well the situation in Israel hasn't changed a hell of a lot except in some ways I can describe. The Arab-Israeli situation has become probably the largest part of my career one way or the other. At that time, '67 hadn't taken place. Brael was still organizing itself as a new state. While I was there Ben Gurion, Eshkol, and Golda Meier, were the three prime ministers. It was still run by the Labor Party. It was still the regional Israel, as it were. A major change in Israeli foreign policy took place with the election of the right wing, the Herut party and Begin only in 1977.

Q: So it was a labor government.

LAMBRAKIS: Labor government internally. While I was there the United States changed its policy in one major way, to begin selling arms to Israel which only the French, among Western powers, were doing before. It turns out I had a personal hand in it because I wrote a telegram describing how the Israelis were getting very impatient with the way the Syrians in particular were trying to close off their water sources. The headwaters of the Jordan was one of the big issues at the time. I had very good contacts in Israel, and I suggested they might just lash out in time. Interestingly enough, two or three days later, my boss Steve Palmer said, "There is a telegram in. It is LIMDIS, limited distribution, and you are not authorized to read it, but what I can tell you is that your last telegram seems to have tipped the balance, so now the United States is prepared to sell arms to Israel for its own defense." I, of course, didn't know anything about that kind of debate going on in Washington, because I was too removed from it. The amount of interchange has changed so much; the second person in a political section not being able to read a limited distribution cable is unheard of today. But that happened. What else happened then; a lot of different things. I could tell you some stories which have to do with how you operate as a diplomat.

Q: Yes.

LAMBRAKIS: One of these stories: I had a lot of good contacts there with Israeli journalists who, unlike other places, have very good contacts themselves. Israel is a country where you can learn a lot from the press but even more from the journalists themselves, who like to keep you as their contact as well. The issue had been on one occasion whether the Israelis would carry out a return attack for one of the cross border attacks they had suffered. We had sort of set up a record of asking them to restrain themselves every time we saw that coming. So it was not in their interest to let us know in advance what they were going to do. On this occasion, we didn't know whether they

would or wouldn't. Just before the ambassador's staff meeting (the ambassador at that time was Wally Barbour who had been there for about eight or nine years. He stayed like ten or eleven, the longest serving ambassador to Israel, although my friend Sam Lewis who was a classmate of mine at SAIS, later became one of the longest serving ambassadors in Israel also. But Wally Barbour still holds the record.) Anyway, just before that staff meeting I had gone down to the commissary in the basement to buy something, and this reporter I knew actually tracked me down, and he told me that unlike what he had told me over the phone, the Israeli military were not going to carry out this reprisal attack. So I went in to the staff meeting, and the military attaches, the colonels, said they had their good contacts in the defense department who said they are going to carry out the reprisal attack. I said I just heard from this contact who says that they won't. Perhaps because my contacts were so good, the ambassador decided to go with me. And they carried out the reprisal attack. So that burned one of my contacts. I never believed him again.

Another such story: There was a very senior ambassador who was in charge of monitoring cross border raids, cross border activities in the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, which is an hour and a half away from Tel Aviv. I used to go see him. On one occasion, we got a telegram from Washington, unusually brief. The Israelis had just occupied a bridge over the Jordan River which in effect was going into Jordan. Washington said, "Tell the Israelis to get off the bridge." It was basically in that many words. So I was sent up there, and I, a very junior political officer, was sitting before this very senior ambassador. I said, "You must get off the bridge. Washington says you must get off the bridge." He was incandescent. He just blew up. I got back in the car on my way back to Tel Aviv. It took an hour and a half. By the time I got there, he had called my boss and said, "What is this guy Lambrakis doing?" Steve Palmer said, "Those are his instructions." But again you have to have your bosses back you up in these situations.

Q: Oh, yes. What about, at that time of course, Israel had not occupied the west bank. Was there much contact with, I guess it was part of Jordan at that time. Was there much contact there? I mean how were the Palestinians perceived in those days?

LAMBRAKIS: Well, the Palestinians were perceived as non-entities because, remember, before 1967 while a PLO was in existence, it was not very lively. It was run by a very passive character in Cairo before Arafat took over. And it was the '67 war that really made the PLO active. Mind you there were groups of revisionists, who would attack across the borders. Some of the major problems which historically occurred were due to them. This included the 1954 Gaza raid which Israel carried out as a major reprisal raid for the attacks over the borders from Egyptian controlled Gaza, which indirectly started a series of events that ended up with the Suez crisis of 1956. That was important enough. There was another heavy Israeli reprisal raid in Jordan whose name I forget now, which followed a series of pin pricks across the Jordan River; that again made an awful lot of trouble for the Jordanian King Hussein, the brave young king as he was known in the U.S. There was the Lavon affair hanging in the background. The Lavon affair was a complicated thing that had happened in the early 1950s when the foreign minister, Lavon, I guess at that time he might have been minister of defense.

Q: I think he was minister of defense for some reason.

LAMBRAKIS: That's right. He was blamed for messing up one of the secret Israeli operations that was intended to tear up U.S. relations with Egypt by pinning on the Egyptians some kind of attack on American installations in Cairo, which the Israelis carried out indirectly and were caught. Lavon was the one who was supposed to have given the order. Ben Gurion insisted that it was Lavon's problem, not his. That hung over the Labor Party at the later time when Dayan was minister of defense. Peres was below him in the ministry as secretary general. There was an awful lot of internal political action that we were following in Israel. I can go on now and talk to you about what I did when I came back to the Israel desk.

Q: We want to do that, but how was Ambassador Walworth Barbour seen? Was he seen as being by his junior officers as being in the pocket of the Israelis, or was he his own man?

LAMBRAKIS: Wally, I wouldn't say he was in the pocket of the Israelis, but I would say that he had made a decision that he was quite open about, saying that the Arabs were hopeless. You must remember at the time that the Arabs had tried to carry out a war, invading Israel in '48. Lost it. Their foreign policy under Nasser and others was one failure after another. Wally had been in the UK; he had been in the Soviet Union. He had been through the '56 crisis when he was DCM in the UK. There is no question that he was on the Israeli side. I don't think he would ever have been in line to become assistant secretary or anything of that kind because he wasn't balanced enough in that sense. On the other hand, he was a pro. He could write very good cables when he chose to, and he carried things on as a professional. I don't think he leaned towards the Israelis when leaning meant serious changes in policy, but there is no question that they liked him, and he lasted so long and in effect, longer than political appointees afterwards, some of them Jewish. At the time when he was there, there were no Jewish officers ever assigned to Israel. But then I don’t think there weren't Greek-Americans assigned to Greece.

Q: You never were tempted to go to Greece?

LAMBRAKIS: Actually I came close to going there on a couple of occasions. Once, a firm offer in the political section, but I preferred the job in London. Much later I was sort of offered a couple of jobs there by the ambassador when I was coming out of Beirut, political counselor or consul general in Thessaloniki. But I had other plans.

Q: Did you get any feel that in our embassy as a political officer you were obviously reading the cables that were coming from the other posts in the area. Was it a them versus us idea? I mean you know, the pro-Israelis can see these and the others, the Arabists. Would you consider that they were seeing a different world or something or they were too wedded to the Arabs or something like that?

LAMBRAKIS: Well, in justice I think that the Arabists of the world suspected that the

Israelis were up to something, which in the long run turned out to be true, but which at the time we didn't think the Israelis were up to. In fact I remember we went through a whole production. I was part of drafting a cable in which we talked about the fact that Israel because its an industrial nation, would no longer be dependent on territory for its economic future, and had no ambitions to take more territory. Mind you this was under a Labor government, and this was in the early 1960s. There was an awful lot of pressure in the Arab world to throw the Jews into the sea. The Arab posts were reporting this and properly were suspicious of what the Israelis were up to. There was a right wing in Israel which talked about Judea and Samaria and how the Bible required this to be Jewish. We thought of them as kooks at the time. It was a small minority that were writing in a few newspapers, and we thought, you know, this is not who is running the country. Interestingly enough, Ezer Weizmann who was heading the air force at the time was considered the most right wing hawk. He is now president of Israel, and is considered a dove compared to where everybody else has moved. What happened primarily as of '67, but afterwards in '77 as well, is that the whole Israeli political establishment, and with it the majority of the people, moved steadily right, more hard line, after this period.

Q: What about relations with our consulate general in Jerusalem. I know later on they got very strained. At this time was there much of a difference?

LAMBRAKIS: I don't think there was because, again, sure there would be differences at times, and the consulate general always had to protect its independence from ambassadors on both sides, particularly from Israel. But then there wasn't any effort to take that over. I think our embassy didn't consider the consulate in Jerusalem as being terribly important in the way things were going, so you can't say that we worried much about them. As I obviously knew Consul General Wilson and other people in the consulate, they worried more about us than the other way around. Sometimes there was, I wouldn't say bad feeling, I would just say different views.

Q: Well of course, it was really after the '67 war when essentially they became the representatives of the occupied territories.

LAMBRAKIS: Right.

Q: Well then you moved back in when, '66?

LAMBRAKIS: I was transferred back in late 1966. I had home leave, got established in Washington, had a daughter here, and brought another daughter, born in Israel, with me. My wife was pregnant with my second daughter. I was put on the Israeli desk. I was the only one on the desk who had served in Israel. Eventually it was turned into a country directorate under Roy Atherton. Mike Sterner and Henry Precht were with me there. There was also Jim Bahti and one other whose name escapes me, but I was the only guy that had served in Israel, so I had a special cachet.

Q: At that time, Israel was a sort of a dead end. You couldn't serve in an Arab country if you had served in Israel.

LAMBRAKIS: I don't think that was entirely so. Of course I was not an Arabist, so that was a problem. Later on as you know, even though I had served in Israel, I went to Lebanon and Iran. I presumably could have gone anywhere else if I was an Arabist. In fact it was brought to my attention later on when I was in line for an ambassadorship somewhere in the area and Roy Atherton noted that I was not an Arabist, as ambassadors there were supposed to be. However, this was a particularly important moment in U.S. policy, because the six day war must have scared the American Jewish community as it scared the Israelis. And I have always wondered in my own mind why the American Jewish community became so strongly pro-Israel after a war which the Israelis won hands down so easily. Up to then there had been a strong anti-Zionist group in the U.S. which disappeared after '67. We on the Israeli desk noticed this because from one day to the next we were dealing differently.

The '67 war personally was important to me because, having served in Israel, I predicted that the Israelis would win the war on the first day when they destroyed the Egyptian and Syrian air forces on the ground. I wrote the first cable. For the first week I was writing the cables all around the world. I remember we got a cable later from Mac Godley, who was ambassador in Laos, saying this is the best coverage I have ever seen in the Foreign Service of any important event. But Roy Atherton asked me, "Do we really want to say the Israelis won this war?" So we tried to cover ourselves. But it was very clear to me from what I had seen of Israeli military abilities that if they destroyed the air force they were going to win. It was only a question of when.

I also did briefings that first week for the NATO embassies. I got a very good friend in the Belgian embassy as a result. Mike Sterner and I alternated after that. We kept this up for several weeks. I think the '67 war made the Israelis feel invincible. One of the interesting things to me was that Abba Eban and others, Abba Eban was then the foreign minister under Golda Meier, came out saying Israel do not want to hold on to any of these territories. It was prepared to return them all for peace. Then within a few weeks we were hearing, "well the exception is Jerusalem, well the exception is Sharm-el-Sheikh..." Then there was something called the Alon plan which was to set up a series of strong points all along the Jordan River, even though the rest of the territory would eventually be returned.

We do know the Arabs didn't help themselves at all by going to Khartoum in November, having already burned one British or American embassy, I don't remember. They attacked several embassies in the Arab world. They went down there, and there they came up with the three or four no's of Khartoum, no negotiations, no recognition, no this, no that which didn't help any with the Israeli public. So within about six months the Israelis were talking about returning some territories, but not many. As you know, eventually there was this compromise resolution, resolution 242, in the Security Council, which I always tell my students about, where ambiguity of language was purposeful and was the only way to get the resolution passed, in which peace and security on one side were to be exchanged for "territories conquered" by the Israelis in 1967, not "*the* territories conquered." Because ever since then it has always been accepted that the Israelis will hold on to some of that territory. The question has always been how much.

Q: Well did you get a feel on the desk about the Jewish community in the United States?

LAMBRAKIS: Oh, yes, sure. Maybe those were different days, but you know, we in the State Department did not feel that our job was to reflect American political realities. We left that to the Congress and the White House. We called the shots, we thought, the way we saw them. Yes, we did get pressures here and there, but not directly. As a matter of fact, a little side story, when my next assignment came up and I was going to be assigned to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, I didn't mind going as Congressional Intern instead. Roy Atherton, as I recall, said to me, "Why do you want to go as a Congressional Intern anyway? What is there to be done there?" Those were days in which the Congress operated separately from us. While I was in Israel for example, I was control officer for a visit of Senator Tunney from California and Congressman Culver, both of whom were close to Kennedy. We visited various places in Israel, but I never felt political pressure. Nowadays I think there is great pressure on the State Department to make things easier for the White House in the sense that if you report something which doesn't fit political beliefs, it is going to be turned down or twisted, so you might as well do it the other way to begin with, which I think is too bad, but it is the way the world has developed.

Q: Was anybody saying let's watch out for the Israelis because now they have gotten this, I mean this does not look like, I mean this nation which is fighting for its life now, may turn into a monster to gobble up the rest of the...

LAMBRAKIS: I didn't feel that very much. There is a lot of talk about how the Arabists are running the State Department and all that, which as you know, has resulted actually in one case of a Jewish lobbyist becoming Assistant Secretary of NEA.

Q: He was not even an American citizen until, an Australian...

LAMBRAKIS: Right. I don't know his background, but he was ambassador in Israel, and he was Assistant Secretary which I thought was...

Q: He was the head of American-Israeli...

LAMBRAKIS: ...public affairs committee.

Q: And as an Australian citizen.

LAMBRAKIS: Right. Interesting. Well, others you know, Ned Walker, Nick Veliotes whom I served under eventually and others, had to take much more care about getting through the Congress. You know, they had to be acceptable as not Arabists. I never felt the Arabists had that much influence. Frankly, I always thought the Israeli desk carried its proper weight in there, and I still do. After 1967 I think we all thought that Israel would be very secure, just as the Israelis did. So the 1973 war came as a shock. That is another story. We will get to it if you want to later on. You have to remember, there has been a

book written about 1967. The Liberty, the attack on this American ship by the Israelis who sank it with the loss of a large number of naval personnel.

Q: I think it was around 30 or something.

LAMBRAKIS: Really?

Q: Yes, but it was significant, and for many people in the Navy and others have never forgotten because you know it is impossible to think it was not a deliberate attack.

LAMBRAKIS: I agree. I remember at the time, and I was on the Israeli desk just before the war started, there was a lot of pressure being put on the Israelis as well as on the Egyptians and Syrians, particularly on the Egyptians, on Nasser, to keep the war from breaking out. I think the Israelis put a lot of weight into who would be blamed for starting the war. As you know, they kicked it off, because, and I can understand why, they had a reserve army. They could not keep their people in reserve mobilized. The Egyptians had a non-reserve army, a professional army. They were sitting on the frontier; they were carrying out maneuvers in the Sinai. There had been attacks there. Nasser had been talking about closing off the Straits of Tiran, which incidentally, he apparently hadn't done. We know that the Israelis had to do something and they did kick off. But because the Liberty had all these acoustic devices, they presumably didn't want the Liberty being able to prove that they struck first. I have to assume that was their reason. I can't think of any other reason apart from possibly the fact that the Liberty was sitting in that part of the Mediterranean over which their air force came to attack the Egyptians from an unexpected direction, and possibly they were afraid that the Liberty would pick this up and somehow pass it on to the Egyptians. It is conceivable. I have forgotten the exact timing because the Liberty was kind of a side show at the time. It was only afterwards that we began to understand what had happened.

One of the interesting things of course was that Nasser was talking over an open telephone line, and we could read what he was saying to King Hussein. He was saying, "We are victorious, victorious. Come join us." This was after his air force had been destroyed, and he was anything but victorious. Hussein bought it partly because he was under pressure from his own Palestinian people, and entered the war. As a result he lost the whole West Bank and Jerusalem.

Q: Was there concern, I mean at the time did we see the conquering of the West Bank and all as being really a temporary thing? Was this sort of...

LAMBRAKIS: I think that is so, especially as Israel was saying it was a temporary thing in the beginning. But of course, along came the Allen plan. I remember explaining it to others in the State Department. Holmes was one of the other people who was then in political military affairs before he later became its Director. He was interested in it. But, you know, because the Israelis were thinking of alternatives, we assumed that they were planning to return most of the territory at some point. On the other hand, you know this was the beginning of a very different approach by the PLO, Arafat, where they carried

out really a political mission which could easily be interpreted, if you read the constitution of the PLO, as being "we want it all back. The Jews must be thrown into the sea."

Q: But while you were on the desk, the Palestinians were not seen as a particular factor.

LAMBRAKIS: No, not during that period. We talked about the other Arab countries of course. Nasser was the key at that point. He didn't die until 1970. He offered to resign, as you know, after 1967, but the people said no, no, Nasser stay with us.

Q: How did we view Nasser? I mean did we see him as a real menace or did we see him as somebody who really wasn't very effective?

LAMBRAKIS: Well, I think he was a menace in 1967 in the sense that he obviously called for the removal of the UN force and amazingly the UN secretary general removed them immediately.

Q: U Thant.

LAMBRAKIS: U Thant, yes. In that sense a bit of a menace. It all depends on whom you are speaking to. On the Israeli desk I don't think we felt he was a great menace because we knew how powerful the Israelis were. If you go back and read some of the CIA and other people who served in Egypt in the 1950s, you will see that they object to the American foreign policy under Eisenhower and Dulles going back that far, which made the devil out of Nasser rather than perhaps accepting him as a kind of Sekou Toure who wanted independence from everybody and therefore accepted Soviet assistance. However, he was sitting in a more volatile part of the world. I don't think I would say that he was a menace, but on the other hand I don't think of him as a tame little lap dog either.

Q: Well let's see, you left the Israeli desk when?

LAMBRAKIS: Well I left it two years later. I wanted to break out of Israeli affairs. I had been in there for over five years, and I got an assignment to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Q: Then you went into personnel?

LAMBRAKIS: Coming back from there, there were several possibilities. I got interviewed by Ambassador Pedersen to be senior assistant to the Secretary of State. Ambassador Don McHenry was another assistant at the time. But I didn't do well in that personal interview (though Pedersen much later offered me a job at the American University of Cairo, where he was president). Then, they wanted me to go as deputy to the consul general in Naples, which I gladly accepted. But personnel wanted me, and personnel wouldn't let me go, so I came into personnel. Originally I was going to be heading the political officer section. Eventually I ended up as the head of the training section of personnel.

Q: Well I want to move on because we are limited in time. Then you went to NATO war college.

LAMBRAKIS: Yes, NATO Defense College in Rome for six months. Then as political officer to London, where I was handling the NEA area.

Q: Well just sort of quickly then we want to move on to get you to Iran, but...
LAMBRAKIS: I can take a little more time if you can. Don't worry about it.

Q: I think the thing to do is to concentrate on two areas now. The first one will be when did you go to Beirut?

LAMBRAKIS: Well I had three and a half years in London in charge of NEA affairs there. By the way, taking over from Steve Palmer's successor, a fellow named King, and much later our ambassador who got into trouble in Iraq, April Glaspie, had that job. I got assigned to Beirut in 1975.

Q: What was the situation there?

LAMBRAKIS: The situation was that there had been a serious incident between the primarily Christian and the primarily Muslim sides, although it was a much more complicated arrangement in that the so-called Muslim side was really also radical and not openly Muslim because a Druze was leading it. The so-called Christian side was more right wing as well as primarily Christian. But there was no war going on in the summer of '75. There had been a bloody incident. I was asked to go there as deputy chief of mission to Mac Godley. As usual in the Foreign Service, if you spoke some kind of French there was a series of posts. French Indo China often led to Beirut. Ambassador Donald Heath had done the same thing. Mac was there then. I went in as his DCM. I was more junior in grade than two of the officers there, both economic and administrative counselors, although I got promoted the next promotion period the next year. Then all hell broke loose in September when the war really got going right in Beirut. My family, my wife and kids, came with me in July and got evacuated in September. They hardly unpacked. I stayed there for exactly a year, from July to July, '76.

Q: The war, what was the war?

LAMBRAKIS: This was a complicated war following on previous problems between the haves and have nots to a large degree. The haves being the Lebanese Christians for the most part, led by the Maronites, although some of the Christians, non-Maronites, Greek Orthodox, were primarily neutral or even on the side of the have nots. It was a war that had its beginnings perhaps as far back as independence. I did my Ph.D. dissertation on the American relationship with Lebanon. I could go into a lot of detail, but I don't think we have an awful lot of time for that. Let's say that the original agreements between Muslims and Christians setting up the state of Lebanon involved an unwritten agreement which allowed the Christians more power than the Muslims, but also required that the

Christians stop asking for aid from the French or British or anybody else, in return for which the Muslims would not try to join the neighboring Muslim countries such as Syria which has always claimed Lebanon. Up until the end of World War I, the area was basically known as Syria. In fact I think I have a postcard of the American Consulate, Beirut, Syria. Now in 1958 there was a brief outbreak of fighting, much more specifically Muslim versus Christian. It had a lot to do with Arab socialism led by Nasser and the Syrians at the time. Camille Chamoun, who was president back then, had called in the Americans. The American marines had landed in '58 only to find that the war had ended. And by the way, a little known incident in that is the American ambassador at the time - Rob McClintock, another fellow who had served in Indo-China - had a very important part in stopping the war because the Lebanese army was getting ready to oppose the landing when he intervened with Chehab, the commander-in-chief of the army who then became the next president.

This leads us up to by '75 you had a much bigger Palestinian presence there because the Palestinians had been kicked out of Jordan in 1970, Black September. Actually they had been in Lebanon before that. In 1969 there was a pact in Lebanon (the "Cairo agreement") which gave them privileges, in effect running the southern part of the country even before 1970. This began to stick in the craw particularly of the haves, namely the Christian dominant group, the Maronites, who by agreement always controlled the presidency and always controlled the army. This continued, and in Spring 1975 there was a bad incident between the Palestinians and the Christians which blew up for awhile. Camille Chamoun was also involved. His interests were involved in southern Lebanon where people objected to some of his economic moves.

The president at the time, Frangie, was a warlord from the north who had become president by one vote in a hung parliament. He was certainly a fairly unsophisticated fellow compared to his predecessors, but he nevertheless had a special relationship which allowed him to get along with the Syrians while still opposing tooth and nail the left wing led by Jumblatt, the leader of the Druze, who under the unwritten agreement had no place to go, because the Maronites had jobs, the Sunnis had the prime ministership, the Shias had the chairmanship of the parliament, the unicameral parliament. No place for the Druze even though the Druze had originally (in Ottoman times) been in charge of Lebanon even before the Maronites. This undoubtedly bothered Jumblatt who had taken a fairly ambiguous position in 1958, and who was leading the have-nots and the Muslims in 1975-76.

The war as it broke out in Beirut in September was primarily between the Phalangists under a right wing semi-fascist Maronite warlord, Pierre Gemayel and his sons, the Jumblattist forces, a mixed group of radicals assisted by Palestinians. The war went back and forth for quite awhile. We, the American embassy, evacuated non-essential personnel early on at the end of '75. Mac Godley happened to be away on leave when the war actually started, so I had my first bloodying there with Camille Chamoun telling me that the army was going to move in, the war would start, and the U.S. should intervene. We didn't do anything. I held off. Mac came back, I went home for Christmas, and was asked to come back urgently because he had throat cancer and had to be evacuated to the United

States for an operation. Then I ended up being Chargé between three more ambassadors there, one of whom was kidnaped and assassinated, Frank Meloy.

Q: How did that come about?

LAMBRAKIS: Well let me give you a little bit of the flavor. Beirut was a place in which no one was in charge. You ran a risk of being kidnaped and killed if you walked the street, quite apart from the shooting that happened periodically across the streets. My wife was almost kidnaped before the war broke out by people who would kidnap. They were known to be raping and killing European women, among other things. It was a completely lawless kind of place. I lived three blocks form the embassy. I remember one morning walking out and having a ten year old kid with a big automatic pointed at me. I smiled, and he smiled, and that was it, but he could easily have pulled the trigger playing games. After awhile, we did not go out in the streets too much, except incognito, on a weekend, taking a little walk. Otherwise it was very dangerous in a suit and tie. In January or February, I believe it was, that year, or maybe earlier, two of our people were kidnaped. They were USIA. They ran a printing shop. Beirut had been the center of our Middle Eastern regional operations. It had a lot of Americans.

Q: Printing press or something like that.

LAMBRAKIS: Well it was the USIA printing press. The USIA has regional presses in each part of the world, and the regional one for the Middle East was there. These guys were printers. They were in a different part of town. They were kidnaped by this little band who accused them of being CIA. They were locked up, somewhat beaten up, not too much. We made a big effort, and we got them out after two months. I believe, and this has never been proven, that even though we said we would not pay to get them out, I believe that Frangie or someone on his behalf, made a promise to the kidnappers that had to do with giving them arms or something, which he then did not carry out. That is one theory. Why do I say all this? Because later on the Frank Meloy issue comes up.

By the time Frank was assigned to Beirut, we had already had Dean Brown come and so this is really a key time. The Palestinians were helping the left wing so well that they were winning, and they were winning to the point that the Christians were in panic. I recall the cadence. I was Chargé at the time. We used to write two cables to Washington every day. One was the normal situation one on what was happening cable, from which the CIA got a lot of information through their contacts. The other was the Chief of Mission's own judgement cable. I remember the daily cables that I was writing at the time. I remember the panic of the Maronites who were asking for American assistance and who were claiming that they could hear Russian voices on the other side, which I thought was ridiculous. Actually I never reported that until much later to Washington. But at that key moment Jumblatt was invited to Syria where the Syrian president, Assad, gave him a tongue lashing for two or three hours. Jumblatt was unhappy because the Syrians had started to help the Christians to keep them from losing. Jumblatt was saying whose side are you on? Assad said, "I am going to help the Christians because if I don't I will lose all my credibility with them." Jumblatt wrote that in his memoirs. It is

interesting to read his memoirs as well as Chamille Chamoun's memoirs afterwards. Assad took that position, which Americans welcomed, certainly did not object to it. The Israelis and others accused the United States of having encouraged Assad to invade Lebanon, but it seems pretty clear to me that Assad did it for his own interests because Syria has always wanted the dominant role in Lebanon. He thought that this was his way of getting it. So all of this had taken place.

At that moment someone named Ghassan Tveini, who was a very prominent journalist, and was also then minister of information, came to see me and said, "We really should have Americans try to stop this. How about acting as a mediator." I reported this to Washington. Washington said the Secretary of State (Kissinger) is very busy. You are doing fine, just keep doing what you are doing. I went and saw the British ambassador and the French ambassador and said, "What about the three of us doing this?" They didn't want to have any part in it. So I went and saw Jumblatt when he returned from Damascus and said to him, "What about trying to settle this thing now. What can we do to help?" Jumblatt played me off a little bit and said, "Why don't we meet tomorrow?" I went back to the embassy and wrote a quick cable to Washington saying what had happened. Got a quick cable back saying don't do anything until you hear again. We have our position. This was a stated position which we had repeated many times and which people were laughing at because it was repeating the same platitudes we had always repeated. As a result of that, Kissinger, when he did focus on it, said, "I don't know who Lambrakis is. He is only a Chargé." And as Dean Brown told me the story afterwards, Brown was at the airport to meet King Hussein who was visiting Washington at the moment, and Kissinger said, "come see me, I have a special job for you." Dean Brown, who was retired, was then sent out to be the mediator.

In my estimation, and this is not just talking sour grapes, I thought that the high level way in which this was done, very publicized, was the wrong way simply because both sides then assumed the United States had a very important interest in settling this thing, and therefore they would ask the maximum to see if the Americans can get it for them. So Dean came, and I went back and forth with him to the Christian side, to the Jumblatt side, negotiating this, negotiating that. It failed. Dean wrote about it afterwards. It was then decided that they needed a proper ambassador there who would pick his own DCM.

Frank Meloy was encouraged to pick his own DCM rather than keep me. He picked Dayton Mak who had been DCM there before and was also retired. Frank came to Lebanon, and Dayton Mak was coming, and I was about to leave, when a cable from Washington said, Frank, you have been here awhile. Maybe it is time to present your credentials to the new president. After Frangie, the new president was the former minister of economy, but he was now living in east Beirut, which was a Christian area. You had to cross a green line between the Muslim patrolled and the Christian patrolled areas. It was kept very quiet. I only learned at the last minute that Meloy was going that morning. He took along with him the third ranking man at the embassy, Bob Waring, the economic counselor, who knew the new president very well. I was leaving anyway, so I was left back at the embassy. The two of them, with the ambassador's driver and a follow car, went. The follow car was told as they were approaching the green line by the

ambassador's driver, "Okay, you can leave us now." Nothing more was heard. Then two hours later, we got a call from the president's office saying, "Where is the ambassador?" At which point I got involved, sent a flash message back to Washington saying, "We have lost the ambassador and Waring." We started asking around, didn't learn anything.

Then that same afternoon two Red Cross men came and asked to see me. They came up to my office and we were sitting next to each other like that. One of them said, "Are you having any problems?" I said, "Yes, I am having problems. I've lost my ambassador." He turned around to me like that and said, "Well, my dear sir," he was a Swiss. "Why don't you come with me to identify the bodies." That's how we learned that they had been shot and dumped in front of an area that was going to be the new American embassy. It was further into the Muslim area, one we never finished. I called in the embassy security officer and all that. We identified the bodies and we took care of it after that.

At that point, of course, Washington decided that this was a critical moment and we should evacuate all Americans. Then it was a question of how that would be done. I stayed on as Chargé under the circumstances. We had a major evacuation in which Kissinger was twisting everybody's arm to "let my people go," as it were. There were a lot of intermediaries. The French and the Egyptians were actually the most helpful intermediaries. We came very close to another invasion of Lebanon on that occasion. It was early afternoon when the British chargé came in to see me. (The ambassador had gone.) He said, "What are you people doing?" I said, "What do you mean what are we doing?" He said, "What are you doing? We know what you are doing." It was through him that I understood that Washington was contemplating a second marine landing in Lebanon (after 1958). At that point I sent a message to Roy Atherton who was then Assistant Secretary of NEA asking what is happening? Then we started talking on a secure telephone. He said, "Yes we are contemplating this. How do you feel about it?" I said, "Well I don't think it is a good idea, and the British don't think it is a good idea." He said, "Well hurry up and send me a message because the president is about to make a decision." So I got our very senior colonel who was our military attaché in there and the top embassy people, and we were talking about this. Ten minutes later a telephone call came through. "What's happened to that telegram? The President is about to make a decision." So we got off a flash telegram saying we think this would be very bad, unnecessary, and the British think so too. Washington wasn't aware that the British even knew. That apparently swung the balance.

Then we had a couple of days of discussion on how to make a peaceful evacuation. The airport was closed. Overland seemed dicey. It was finally decided that the U.S. Navy, which was itchy to get into the action, since I had quietly asked them several months before to stand by, was going to take them out by amphibious landing craft. Who would protect them? The only people who could, the Palestinians. But we couldn't talk to the Palestinians because Kissinger had made a promise to the Israelis not to talk to the Palestinians. I had been using an intermediary to get messages back and forth, who was a very prominent former presidential candidate, Raymond Edde, a Greek Orthodox. But we got the message delivered through the Egyptians primarily. On the day we had a peaceful evacuation of about a hundred and twenty American, British, and French citizens. A lot

of them simply because the airport was closed used it to go abroad and come back again. In other words it was not felt as a crisis locally. But it was a crisis in the U.S. government. Of course, President Ford was very happy it went so well. The military were very happy, and all that kind of thing.

Q: Well what was our feeling about why Ambassador Meloy and his economic counselor were killed?

LAMBRAKIS: That is an unsolved issue officially. I will tell you what I think. I knew the ambassador's chauffeur. We were on very good terms. The ambassador's chauffeur needed money. He was always asking me when he was going to get some more money, because he had won a U.S. government award of $500, and could he get a raise, things like that. I also know he was once captured by the radicals who took away his car and things and then gave them all back to him. Putting two and two together, he is the one who told the follow car to go away on the day he drove Meloy and Waring, told them prematurely to go away. He, I am fairly certain, was told that these people would be kidnaped. He would be kidnaped. They would be kidnaped. He was not told anything about their being killed. He probably thought they would be kidnaped like our two USIS guys and eventually released. I have a feeling that they had been holding this over him from the day they took him in and released him; they sort of said your family is going to suffer if you play tricks with us. I have that feeling . Mind you, I presided over a memorial service to him in Beirut because at the time, what apparently happened is they all three got killed immediately. Now who did it, a line seems to go back to the same crowd that did the USIS kidnappings, a small group of possibly Lebanese working under Palestinian control, possibly Palestinians. We are not quite sure, radicals. There was never any political reason for it. There were never any political demands made. It was a mystery. It still is a mystery. The only reason I can think is they felt they were double crossed over the American USIS people, and they were going to show everybody that you can't double cross them. That is the only thing I can think of.

Q: Then you left there. Did you go out, too?

LAMBRAKIS: I went out in July, a little later because Talcott Seelye then came out as special emissary after Meloy's kidnapping. He asked me to stay on as DCM even though they had sent out the head of NEA administration to act as administrative DCM during those turbulent times. But I had had enough. They talked about an assignment at the UNP, which would have been under Sam Lewis who was then in charge of 10. He was an old classmate of mine from SAIS, a very good friend. But I didn't want to come back to Washington. I was given the choice between Canada and Iran as political counselor. Roy Atherton told me I should go to Iran, and I went along. Iran was very quiet at the time.

Q: You were there from when to when?

LAMBRAKIS: I was there from 1976, late September, through the revolution, until April '79. The revolution started at the end of '78. February '79 was when the Shah left.

Q: Well then when you arrived, what was the situation as you saw it?

LAMBRAKIS: Well the Shah seemed to be in great control of things because in 1953 he had taken control. He had a strong SAVAK in control. The military were very powerful. When I first arrived, I asked the CIA station to see the file on the communist party, the Tudeh. They said, "We don't have any." They don't exist anymore. They have gone abroad." So what are the problems? Well there are these two radical groups that occasionally assassinate an American. Actually, since we were driven back and forth from the embassy to work, we kept changing our routes and doing it at different times so as not to be picked off by anybody. But these terrorists seemed to be not very powerful, and not very popular. Those times, you must remember, in the '70s, there were left wing groups all around the world doing this kind of thing. The Shah seemed in control. What we then got involved in was the Carter human rights policy which was pressing the Shah on human rights.

One of the interesting things about Iran was that I only heard two people ever defend the Shah. Of all his huge number of ministers, big businessmen, and others that I met, only two ever defended him, and that was in a meeting with the American and British ambassadors and me sitting in. We were six people. Apart from that, every time we went to visit a minister or an official lower down they would say keep doing what you are doing, pushing for human rights. Everybody assumed that you could safely push for human rights without the regime tumbling, and we did. Of course what followed was the famous article in a newspaper m'Qum (ordered by the Shah) attacking Khomeini, which set on a series of protests, which were put down by force, which 40 days later resulted in memorials for the people killed in other parts of Iran, which were again put down by force and resulted in further memorial riots. This kind of built up. But even in the summer before the revolution, I went on home leave; the ambassador went on home leave. We didn't really think that this regime was unstable.

Q: When you arrived there, you know I have heard that the Shah had reached an agreement with us that we were not to report on the internal affairs. Did you find yourself under constraints?

LAMBRAKIS: When you say that, that is not it exactly. First of all I don't think there was anything like an agreement. We reported on internal affairs. We openly saw the protests, the left wingers, and the non-violent lawyers and so on, some of whom were beaten up by the Shah's men and things of that sort. We would do things like organize parties to which we would invite them and see them in the context of a party. The only time that the Shah intervened was when John Stempel, my deputy(, I was political counselor), and I started visiting a middle man who would put us into contact with the religious people. He was a Bazaari, and the Bazaaris and the religious people were close. We had trouble getting to the religious people. They would not see us directly. We did this semi-openly. We simply drove to the man's home in cars ourselves. We did not try to make this a CIA operation. We drove there, talked to this guy. He would bring in guests, and we drove back. But of course the Iranians picked it up, and the Shah brought it up with the ambassador and said, "Why are you seeing the opposition?" The ambassador

said it was necessary. We would continue doing it, period. My first ambassador was Helms, the former director of CIA. Then he left. There was a five month interim with Chargé d'affaires Jack Miklos, in which I was the acting DCM. Then Charlie Naas came as DCM under the new ambassador, Bill Sullivan, who had come from East Asia, and who brought a new CIA director there who was very quiet, to the point that a lot of people thought I was the CIA station chief. (Members of the French community there are still convinced of that.) We were at that point worried, but not seriously, about what might happen.

Q: Did you have, then there wasn't this thinking about you are not supposed to report on dissident moods and so on.

LAMBRAKIS: Well the Shah didn't like us meeting the opposition, but frankly there wasn't that much opposition to meet because the religious people wouldn't meet with us, and as it turned out they were the serious opposition. Mind you there were the remnants of the Mossadegh period whom we did meet. Actually John Stempel had more meetings with them than I did. I met some of them; he met some of them; other people met some of them. We reported on it. As it turned out, you know, the Shah tried to make them the heads of government and it didn't last. In 1953 the religious movement had come on the side of the Shah after sitting on the fence because they were anti-communist. In 1963, when the Shah carried out his White Revolution, he attacked them where it hurt, and threw some in jail. One of their leaders, Khomeini, eventually got kicked out of the country. All of that turned them, radicalized them, but even as late as '75, '76, '77, '78, there was a pro Shah religious group and an anti-Shah religious group. The Shah talked about the Blacks and the Reds together against him, and he was right, because they were working in parallel together. It reminds me a little bit of Weimar Germany where the left and the right worked against the center. He made a big mistake in getting Saddam Hussein to kick Khomeini out of Iraq. Khomeini went to Paris where he had much better communication with Iran by telephone, and carried out the revolution by telephone. I think that is the first and only telephone revolution we have had.

Q: Were we aware, I mean was Khomeini in our sights particularly?

LAMBRAKIS: Yes, up to a point. Well as Charlie Naas, once said, "In the old days, when the SAVAK was a little more brutal, Khomeini would never have made it to Paris. As he was leaving his home in Iraq a truck would have been coming in the other direction, and that would have been the end of him." But at this point you see, the Shah was very ill. We didn't know it. (Even the French embassy didn't know it, though he was being treated by a French doctor.) He was preparing for his son to take over. He wanted to get rid of all possible opposition. The Shah was doing this and he was not being as brutal as the SAVAK might have been in the past. I think it has always been peculiar that all the people that he sent to America and elsewhere for education were against him, all the students. Why, because he was a dictator, but a fairly benevolent one. I am reminded, that the New York Times, which had kept a bureau in Tehran, decided nothing was happening and closed it at the end of 1977, at the time that Carter came and talked about the stability in Iran compared to the instability in the region. Two months later was the

beginning of the revolution. It was much later that the New York Times had to send Nick Gage from Athens to cover the revolution. He came to people like myself and others to get contacts.

Q: Was there a point where you said there is a revolution going on?

LAMBRAKIS: There was the so-called Jaleh Square massacre in September which happened just as I returned from home leave, in which the opposition claimed there were thousands killed. In fact there were probably a few hundred killed. That was a very serious event, and it led to the Shah changing his government and appointing a military government. We knew then that things were very serious. Let's face it, from February, 1978, on we knew that a revolution of some kind could occur, and what we were working for was to deal with the religious people and to see if the loyal religious people could overcome the opposition religious people because we didn't want to see the Shah overthrown. On the other hand when the key moment came, whether we should push the Shah to use the military against his people, I wrote a cable which said on behalf of the embassy, "We don't want to be remembered as the people who pushed the Shah to kill his own people, which we will always be remembered as." This was the time when Somoza in Nicaragua had turned his army on his people and lost. But at the same time we were aware that something was brewing, and we were trying to head it off by meeting left wingers and others, by pushing the Shah to stop torture, to stop whatever else was being done. In other words somehow to mollify his rule and get the opposition people involved. So, yes, we thought a revolution could take place but was unlikely if we managed this way.

After Jaleh Square, I think that is when we began to be scared because when you start putting in a military government and throwing out your best politicians, and turning some of them over to the mob, and trying them, which is what he did next, you know then you are on a downward slope. There was no doubt about it in December of that year when by various counts almost a million people marched out chanting Khomeini's name. At that point of course, non-essential Americans were evacuated, but the American ambassador could never be heard suggesting there might be a revolution. In fact I appear in the Shah's memoirs. Why? Because on specific instructions from Bill, I mentioned to an Iranian Senator that things were changing in Iran. At that time we were playing with the idea of possibly approaching Khomeini in Paris, which was finally turned down by Washington. That senator reported it to the Shah, who writes about it in his memoirs and says, "Lambrakis of the American embassy says things are going to change," and he accuses the Americans of undercutting him. We never undercut him. We did play with the idea very late, of approaching Khomeini. But I might also add that I think it was in my next to last meeting with our middle man, who was bringing us into contact with religious people and the Bazaaris, that two of the Bazaaris, very prominent ones, said, "We are going to Paris and we will talk to Khomeini, and we will try to calm him down." Then they came back, and we had a meeting with them and they said, "He is an impossible man. We can't do it. He won't listen."

Q: I have interviewed Warren Zimmerman who was in Paris at the time, and he was

designated to be the first to approach Khomeini.

LAMBRAKIS: He was the political counselor in Paris.

Q: Now did you have a, often when you are going through a challenge to a government, you find in an embassy you get a traditional split. The junior officers want to get out there and do things and see things change. The most senior officers realize you don't mess around with relations easily. Were you seeing this there?

LAMBRAKIS: I think that is so. What I did at the time I was DCM, which was quite a bit before that, but comes into that theory, in the beginning of that period, I set up, with the agreement of Jack Miklos, a weekly meeting with everybody, just free flowing talk. We would also get the consuls to come in. We had three one man consulates in Tabriz, Shiraz and Isfahan. They would come in and chat. We didn't keep notes. I just reported orally. There was a feeling out in the field of things moving.

Q: Have you ever interviewed Mike Metrinko?

LAMBRAKIS: Yes.

Q: And somebody else.

LAMBRAKIS: Our consuls in Isfahan and Shiraz too. Also junior guys.

Q: They of course were seeing, and the view from the certain localities is always quite different. I mean they are not sitting around a court and an administrative capital.

LAMBRAKIS: Sure. Well, I had the head of the French secret service at the embassy there, who is a very good friend of mine, stayed since, who came to see me with the Greek ambassador on one occasion and said, "Things are really getting out of hand." But even his own ambassador wouldn't believe him. He had been traveling around the country. In fact it was at a party that I made a public bet with him that the Shah would still be around next April, or later. The bet was a meal at one of the most prominent restaurants in Paris, which I eventually had to honor. I paid him. I took him and his wife out to dinner. But there was the feeling that no matter how shaken things might be, this was not the first time. After all, things had happened back in '63 when the Shah had gotten on top of them. There was no reason to imagine that he couldn't again even though it was dicey. Actually what you are pointing out took place in a different way. Yes we did get this feeling, but we also had to appear to be supporting the Shah. All it took in Tehran was for the ambassador or a senior U.S. officer to begin to appear to be doubting him publicly; we felt this would simply become a self-perpetuating prophecy. After the revolution the guys in my political section - some of whom had just been in Iran before and had been brought in because they spoke Farsi, and were sent as reinforcements - differed from me. There I must say I am proud I was right, and John Stempel and others were wrong. But they were reporting back to Washington that the communists were about to take over. They were convinced of this. And here I have to tell you my most dramatic

moment, which was after the revolution. In February, when the embassy was taken over and we were all held hostages.

Q: February 14, 1978.

LAMBRAKIS: '79, Valentine's Day. After the revolution wins, the Shah leaves. We were still there. The embassy was attacked.

Q: You weren't there.

LAMBRAKIS: Yes, I was there. I was still there, and the embassy was attacked. We moved into the secure part of the embassy first. I wrote it up for the State Department magazine. A couple of us wrote articles for the State Department magazine which I have lost copies of. We were standing around in there, and all hell was going on around us for a couple of hours. The Marines were shooting. There was tear gas in the ground floor of the embassy. We were locked one floor up in the secure part of the embassy, the communications room. I was on the phone with Washington telling...

Q: You were saying you were talking to Washington.

LAMBRAKIS: Yes as we were there, to the State Department, While people were telling me to hunch down in case a bullet came through the window. That was the day of course, on which our ambassador to Afghanistan was kidnaped.

Q: Spike Dubbs.

LAMBRAKIS: Spike Dubbs, and was killed.

LAMBRAKIS: Right, and so Washington had two things happening at once. Of course, we had a lot of people still in Tehran. We managed to get word out of what was happening by telephone to the "good guys" both in the government and one of the religious Ayatollahs in Tehran who was not a Khomeini follower. Nevertheless the ambassador decided we had to surrender. He was afraid they would set fire to the embassy. So we stood around, 50 of us, with our hands up, with six or seven of these guys with tommy guns sweating, very nervous. They searched us and apparently were discussing among themselves whether to shoot some of us or not. I didn't speak enough Farsi to understand that, but one of my colleagues did. At one point a shot was fired into the room and they almost shot us. Everybody hit the floor at once. Then we started telling them what jerks they were thinking we were shooting at them. What had happened is the good guys had arrived and, to call attention to the fact that they shot into the room. Then we were marched out and became their prisoners. The others were sent away, and the good guys released us and then guarded the embassy. That was that day's affair. Mind you a couple of the attackers had been killed and it took us awhile to get a wounded U.S. marine released from the hospital where he was being treated and held.

I had had a personal threat against me two or three months before which the CIA had

picked up in Paris and which turned out to be false, but nevertheless my family had been evacuated before the others, and I had been moved to a little apartment next to the embassy compound. The young Thai woman who had been taking care of our kids, was still with me. On February 14, the attackers invaded my apartment on the way to taking over the embassy. They apparently had her on the bed and were ready to rape her when they were called away to join the fighting. It was a pretty nasty day for us. But because our files were not touched, because our CRU, our communications room, was not invaded, that set the scene for six months later in the major November hostage takeover when the other bad guys came in. The assumption was that we will give up easily because they are not necessarily going to do anything bad. Meanwhile, I got transferred, in April.

But before that happened, after the February takeover, Sullivan sent me on behalf of the embassy, along with the CIA chief and the top MAAG general with the first plane that was allowed out, to report to Washington what was happening. In Frankfurt, I was picked up by General Huyser, who had been there during the revolution, whose job had been to calm down the military. Anyway I intended to stop in Paris for a night with my wife, but instead I was met in Frankfurt by the general and his plane and taken directly to Washington. Henry Precht was director of Iranian affairs at the time I was going to be staying with him, but there was a huge snow storm in Washington. Nothing was moving. I got put into a hotel a few blocks from the State Department. The next morning I was told that the Secretary of State wanted to see me in the morning, and that I was to appear at the White House for the main conference in the afternoon. I was in my little loafers from Iran. There was about two feet of snow everywhere. No cars were moving. Happily one of the guys working in the hotel was a riding enthusiast and he had boots which I rented from him for a week. I walked around Washington in big boots, reminiscent maybe, of a general Patton.

At the White House meeting everybody but Carter was there. The Vice President, Mondale was there. Brzezinski was running it. It was long, complicated. Our CIA guy froze when questioned and could not say anything. The main point, the main problem that arose, was: will the communists be taking over or not. The CIA was convinced they would. I was saying no, they won't. I said the religious people may mess up the economics, but they have the security situation under control. The meeting ended a couple of hours later, and I was asked to come back and talk to the CIA the next day, which I did. Professor Bowie from Harvard was working under the CIA director, Admiral Turner. Turner and Bowie had me in, and they really grilled me on this. "Why do you think it won't happen? We are sure. Your people are reporting it is going to happen." I steadfastly said, "No, it is not going to happen. The communists are not that powerful, and the religious guys really control." That was really important in thinking about the place.

Obviously before the revolution the key difference in Washington was between Brzezinski and the Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance. Because Brzezinski wanted us to push the Shah to use the army; Vance didn't. Bill Sullivan, as he says in his book, was on the telephone, I remember, once with one of them, once with the other. Each one claimed

to be speaking on behalf of the President. He ended up siding with Vance, and we did not push the Shah, who told the American and British ambassadors, "I do not want to turn my troops on my people," because he still thought he could stave it off. He was worried about what people would think of him in the future. I don't think anyone imagined a religious government running a major country in the 20th century. Even Khomeini was saying he didn't want to run the government. "I will go to Qum and let the government run the country." As you know, Bazargan and other former Mossadegh people were originally supposed to run the government, and they did until the second crisis, the main hostage crisis in November. Then Bazargan disappeared, and the religious radicals took over.

Q: Well then by that time you had left.

LAMBRAKIS: I left in April and this took place in November, the second hostage crisis.

Q: Then, I am looking at my watch. Briefly can you just say where you went the rest of your career.

LAMBRAKIS: Okay, let me just tell you one last story about the hostages. Mike Metrinko, you mentioned, he was one of the hostages. Before I left Iran, I had sold my car to a Japanese diplomat and I had four new tires sitting there, and I said to Mike, "If somebody comes around, could you just sell these tires for me." Mike Metrinko was then captured. Mike was almost hanged in Tabriz, but then he was made a hostage. Fourteen months later the released hostages came to Washington, and many of us (who had been volunteering also on the Iran working group) went to see them when they first arrived there. We were all in this big hall full of about a hundred people. Mike was across the room from me, and he came to me sticking his hand out. I stuck my hand out, and the first words he said were, "George, I never sold your tires." I always thought that was a great story, and a great reflection on Mike.

Well what did I do afterwards? It is sort of an anticlimax. I came back to Washington. I finally got the Washington assignment that everybody had been threatening me with. I was director of Regional Affairs and National Security Affairs coordinator (with sort of informal standing in NEA almost of a deputy assistant secretary) which meant handling a lot of different issues, but the main one as it turned out was Southwest Asian security. This was the time, 1980, when the Russians invaded Afghanistan, and when we were all worried about where they were going. The issue came up of protecting Iran and building up our forces in the area. My job, under pressure from others in NEA, was to keep reminding everybody of the political dangers of trying to go too far in twisting arms to let our military be stationed in the Middle East. As a result I came to be known as the bad NEA guy in the minds of officers in Political Military Affairs, when they were pushing the other way around. In fact, Richard Haas, who was not a Foreign Service officer but was in PM then, was pushing in the opposite direction. Richard and I had some really knock down discussions at times. But at the same time I realized that we should get some strength in the Middle East on the ground, some military strength despite the political difficulties. Peter Constable was Deputy Assistant Secretary in NEA. Peter and I were

both SAIS types, and old friends. We entered the Foreign Service at the same time. His wife, Eleanor, was in our entering class, too.

Q: I remember both Peter and Eleanor.

LAMBRAKIS: Yes. Anyway, that was the main thing that I did for three years. Then I went into the Senior Seminar, Executive Seminar as it was then known. After that I stayed on in FSI, did research on Lebanon and the U.S. relationship with Lebanon, which nobody had written about. I have now got a Ph.D. dissertation on that story from 1946 to 1976. I also did two short assignments as Chargé d'affaires, stepping in briefly when ambassadors left both Guinea Bissau and Swaziland before I retired.

Q: All right you retired in 1985.

LAMBRAKIS: '85 I retired. I went on to establish international fund-raising programs at Brown University and at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, after various other adventures. I now teach and administer at American University in London and Paris.

Q: Okay, well we will stop this here. Thank you very much.

End of interview