

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

AMBASSADOR EDWARD L. PECK

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Careers after the Foreign Service
A career in the Foreign Service

INTERVIEW

Q: Ed, I wonder if you could give a little about your background before we get you into the Foreign Service.

PECK: Certainly. Los Angeles born and raised, of immigrant parents.

Q: Immigrants from where?

PECK: Russia.

Q: Russia.

PECK: Both of them. They didn't know each other.

Q: Peck doesn't sound . . .

PECK: Father always said that when he got off the boat, and they said, "What's your name?" and he answered, "Alexandroff Gregorivitch Pich," which became Alexander George Peck. His father came from Lithuania and migrated, for reasons which I've never known, down to the Odessa region, where dad was born, in a town called Akermann, which shows how the borders have changed. At the time of his birth, I think it was Romania. It later became Russia, an issue that the State Department focused on when I applied for the Service because one record showed Romanian birth and the other place showed Russian birth. They wanted to know why, I said, well, it's both, depends when you want to time it.

I was raised there in L.A. One sister, older. Junior high school, high school, in Los Angeles, then the U.S. Army at the end of World War II. I am a veteran of World War II, by law, but I never left the States. Went from the Army to college--UCLA, majoring in forestry because I'd been a very active Boy Scout, and in my high school summers I worked in the Sierras with the Forestry Service. The Korean War came, I was recalled to active duty, spent another two years in the Army, came back and went to college again, this time as a business administration major, indicating very clearly that I didn't know what I wanted to do.

In the summer between my junior and senior years, I participated in a program called, "Project India," in which an interracial, interreligious group of twelve UCLA students went off in two teams of six and spent the summer in India, financed in part by the

Rockefeller Foundation. A goodwill, sort of precursor of the Peace Corps, kind of thing. I spent eleven weeks in India.

Q: Where in India?

PECK: Mostly in the south, the area now called Kerala. Partly in the north as well, ten days in Lucknow, a few days in Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Puri, all sorts of places. Traveled extensively. I was fascinated by it and decided that I would like to go into the Foreign Service. Graduated from college. I went to work for the Mobil Oil Company in their management program. Was fired from that job. Went to work for Shell, at which time the call from the Foreign Service came, and I joined in November of '57, and stayed with it until April of this year (1989).

Q: What did you feel about the Foreign Service before you went in? I assume you'd done some reading about it and all. Did you feel that you were a Foreign Service type, or did you feel you were going to be somewhat different coming in?

PECK: Well, I hadn't really thought about that. What I really tried to come into was USIS, and it's kind of interesting because most people in the Foreign Service believe that anybody who goes into the USIS end of things did so because they failed to get into the State Department Foreign Service. I did it the other way, and that was largely because the people who took care of us when I was in India, who set up the programs and traveled with us, were branch PAOs from USIS, in posts which are now closed. They spoke the language, they knew the people, they were really living an interesting, challenging, rewarding, exotic kind of life, and I thought, boy, I'd like to do that. USIS found me unqualified because they were looking for people with backgrounds in USIS-type activities.

Q: Newspapers, media.

PECK: Media, that sort of thing, yes. So I took and passed the Foreign Service exam.

Q: Could you explain what the Foreign Service exam was when you took it? Was this the-

PECK: That was the one day--

Q: They'd switched over to that.

PECK: They had already switched over to it. It was also given in various places. I took it in Los Angeles. Before taking the exam I went down and dug out the books written by a company called ARCO, to look at what the Foreign Service exam was like when it was three days long. That's a company that did all sorts of books on how to take exams. Mail handlers, you know, all sorts of positions of that sort.

Q: Ah yes, yes. The civil service type things, yes.

PECK: Right. I took the book home. It just fell open on the section on geography. In those days the correct answer was worth a point, a wrong answer was a minus point, and a no answer was a minus half a point, which was an interesting way to do it. It fell open to geography and the first question, true or false, was: "In June the winds off the Malabar Coast blow generally from east to west." Well, I was one of those rare people who knew where the Malabar coast was because that's the part of India I had visited, but I didn't know which way the wind blew. Second true or false question was: "At noon on the fifteenth of November on the northern border of South Dakota"--notice that--"the sun is more than fifteen degrees south of the zenith." Well, you know. [Laughter] That's a different kind of exam than the one I took. I closed the book and returned it to its place on the shelf.

Q: I know before I took the exam--I took the three-and-a-half day exam couple of years before--

PECK: Oh.

Q: I was in the military and all I did was I sat down and memorized who wrote operas. I just thought this is a cultural thing, and no operatic question appeared on the exam.

PECK: When I took the written exam, they had a very heavy section on economics, because they had discovered that there was a dearth of people who could do that work, and there were a number of graphs and charts which destroyed all of the people from UCLA who took the test. To my knowledge I'm the only one who took it that day who passed it, and most of the people who were there were poli sci majors who had been aiming for the Foreign Service and didn't pass the test.

Q: But your business administration training--

PECK: They had one graph, on which fifteen multiple-choice questions were based. Well, I knew it instantly. It was a graph showing a pure competition situation: marginal cost, average unit costs, and I knew--you know, I had almost fifteen answers, bingidy, bingidy, bing. One other thing they did, they had a triangular graph. Did you ever see one of those?

Q: No.

PECK: It's a triangular graph in which each apex represents one hundred percent, and each opposite base is zero. They charted deaths from accidents, tuberculosis, and from all other causes on the three sides. And they had various little points labeled and dated. The questions asked, for example, "In which year were the deaths from tuberculosis ten percent of what they were from accidents in 1953?" I found that very easy to do. All around the room I could hear the people turning their exam books this way and that--It

destroyed them--because they'd never seen a triangular graph before. That was the idea, of course, to measure dealing with a new situation.

Q: There was a heavy emphasis for a while on economics. This was going to be the new wave.

PECK: Yes.

Q: We were going to get more practical in the Foreign Service. I don't think it made any great difference but that was the--

PECK: No, the test was not really designed to test your knowledge of economics. Somebody had misconstrued what it was those questions were supposed to do. But it was an interesting test, and I was very gratified that I passed it. I made the mistake of telling one of my co-workers in the management program at Mobil that I had passed it, and he told the supervisor, which was why I was fired. I was not showing proper loyalty to the Mobil Oil Corporation.

Q: Well, moving there, what sort of training did you get before you went out into the field? You came in, in 1957.

PECK: Yes, sir.

Q: What sort of training did you get?

PECK: Took the A-100 class, which--

Q: That's the basic officers class.

PECK: Right. Which was, in stark and glaring contrast to what they're doing now, highly impractical and--what's the word I'm searching for--invalid. As an illustration, everybody did consular work when they went overseas for the first time. We had a consular course, which consisted largely of people reading to us from the Immigration and Naturalization Act. Nobody showed us a visa--what a visa looked like, how an immigrant visa package was put together, where or how you signed the form--nothing like that. I forget how long it was, but it was very boring, a series of talking heads, all of them selected because of their positions rather than of any ability to teach.

Q: That continued for years thereafter.

PECK: It continues to this day, but there's far less of it--there's more focus now on people who are able to convey ideas and thoughts than there are really upon titles or positions. After that came language training. Pardon me--the A-100 class, I thought was really not very interesting, particularly since all of us who were there were fairly highly motivated.

Q: I wonder, could you describe a bit how you viewed your fellow classmates at this time in '57 coming in. Where were they coming from? What was their composition? That sort of thing.

PECK: It was a mixed bag, not only in terms of age--we had one guy who was three months over the minimum age limit (21). We had one chap who was six months under the maximum age limit (32). I guess that was standard. They'd come in for a variety of reasons, from a variety of backgrounds. The most visible difference was between westerners and easterners. If you went to somebody's dinner party, and they said, "casual," the westerners showed up in cut-offs and thong sandals, whereas "casual" to the easterners meant sports coat and club tie. We joked about it quite a bit, or I did because I'm visually oriented, and I was struck by the difference in the way people dressed, and in the way they behaved, and in the things that they considered to be important or significant.

Some of them obviously had a far more profound Foreign Service background than I did, in terms of understanding what it was all about, in terms of knowing what the good jobs were, where to get them, how to get them. I mean I had no ideas whatsoever about that. But the A-100 class is kind of a blank spot. I don't remember much about it.

Q: Well, two things. In the first place you said, "The guys." Were there any girls?

PECK: There were three.

Q: Hah.

PECK: There were three, and they were--I was struck by the fact that one of them was a Smith College graduate. She dressed in black constantly, wore horn-rimmed glasses and no make-up, was obviously very intelligent but almost a Hollywood caricature of a New England type. At the other extreme we had another young woman, active, intelligent, attractive, out-going, mixed easily with "the fellows," with everybody else. And then there was a girl in-between, who was kind of quiet and shy and didn't say much.

Well, our class went off-site at Front Royal. We had a poker game in our barracks one night, several tables. This was how they handled the rest room requirements. The Smith girl quietly excused herself; the middle girl said, "Where is the rest room?"; the out-going girl said, "Where is the john?" And I was interested in the way they did this. Two later got married and were of course obliged to resign.

Q: This is--

PECK: Yes. Those were the rules then. One came back in later, when the rules were changed. Her FSO husband is now retired, and she's still on active duty, at a much lower grade than she would have had, I think, had she been allowed to stay in. Very smart, very intelligent woman.

Q: One other thing--I'm saying this from my background as a former consular officer. What was the impression you got about consular work as a career possibility?

PECK: At that time the feeling was that if you really had it, you did political work. If you weren't quite up to the mark, then you did econ. If that somehow wasn't a success, then you wound up in consular. And, God help us, if nothing else worked out, then you went into admin. That wasn't something that anybody had to share a belief in, but it was sort of the unspoken--

Q: I was just going to say, it was there.

PECK: It was there. Oh, yes.

Q: Okay. Let me ask how you got into--you went into economic training before you went overseas, didn't you?

PECK: Yes. I was assigned to the Bureau of Economic Affairs as a trainee. It was a sixteen-month assignment, four four-month tours in various offices. I was an FSO-8, and I did the sixteen months in the old Navy building, which was on Constitution Avenue on the Mall side. We were on the top floor of this WWII building, and they had to close down a lot in the summer because it wasn't air-conditioned. You cooked up there. It was a huge bureau at the time, because it was heavily into economic development work. I did a tour in the Office of Petroleum Affairs, because of my Shell and Mobil background, I guess. I did a tour in the Office of Public Affairs, a tour in the Office of Economic Development, and a tour in the Near East and Middle East segment of the Economic Development Office. In two of those jobs I was kind of asked to sit in a corner and stay out of the way, because I was only there for four months.

Q: But it does sound like you were really getting a pretty good insight. This is not a bad way, or did you--

PECK: It's reasonable. In one office the guy had me spend six weeks doing tabs for his file folders. I cleaned out and redid his files. In so doing I reorganized it. I learned one hell of a lot about Middle East economic development, but that was a by-product of what I was doing there.

Q: Well, it does show sometimes the effect--somebody should really look at past history. We tend not to find out what was done by our predecessors and jump into something.

PECK: But you know why that is. No one's really interested. The predecessor didn't handle it right.

Q: Yes, yes.

PECK: What is the definition of your predecessor's competence? Low.

Q: Low.

PECK: Always. Not to mention your successor as well. Worse.

Q: Yes, yes. Didn't understand the situation.

PECK: That's right.

Q: Well, now your first assignment was Goteborg. Is that the way you pronounce it?

PECK: Well, if you're Swedish--it was one of the things that fascinated me--

Q: I want to spell this. G-O-T-G-E-B-O-R-G.

PECK: That's pronounced "Yuteboree."

Q: "Yuteboree."

PECK: That's Swedish. Now I've got to digress at some point and talk about my fights with the system. We have a place--a post in Denmark called Copenhagen. It isn't called "Shubenhaven." It's called "Copenhagen" because that's what it is in English. In English it's "Gothenburg." You've heard of it. In Spanish it's "Gotembourgo." In French it's "Gothenbourg." In Swedish it's "Yuteboree." So why shouldn't it be "Gothenburg?" The American Consul in "Gothenburg." No reason in the world. It's not "Moscova," it's Moscow. It isn't "Roma," it's Rome. Okay. But "Yuteboree" stayed "Yuteboree." I wrote memos and did various other things, to effect the change, but they just died.

Let me digress again for a second. The day in 1957 I reported for duty in the Foreign Service on Pennsylvania Avenue--there was a building there where personnel was, I came in the door and was directed to an office and met a middle-aged woman sitting behind a desk. I introduced myself, and she said, "Oh, Mr. Peck. I have some bad news for you."

I said, "What is it?"

She said, "Your household effects arrived last week."

I said, "That's good."

She said, "No, that's bad. Because you haven't been sworn in, you have to pay the one-month's minimum storage charge on those household effects. If they had arrived today, the State Department would pay for it." She said, "The minimum charge is one hundred dollars." Which was a week's pay.

Q: Oh, yes.

PECK: I was--

Q: We're talking about about four thousand dollars, or something like that.

PECK: I was making fifty-two hundred a year. A hundred bucks a week. Gross.

Anyway, I said, "But, but--"

She said, "Yes."

I said, "But you sent me out a huge package of stuff. Why didn't you mention this in the package?"

She said, "Well, it doesn't happen very often."

And I remember saying to her, "If it happens only once you should do something." I began to argue with this lady that one of the things that you do when you find a problem--listen carefully--is fix it. No, no that isn't what she thought was the necessary thing to do. We had a very heated exchange. I was really annoyed because I'd had eleven phone calls and half a pound of papers, not once did they say, "By the way, bear in mind that . . ." It's the kind of thing which got me consistently in trouble throughout the career. Like trying to fix Goteborg. It stayed "Yuteboree" till the day it closed. Why bother?

That was my first post. Most of my classmates went to embassies. I was looked upon as being unfortunate because I was going to a consulate-general. They all went to issue visas for two years, wherever they went. I went and did visas for six months, and then I did econ-commercial work for six months. Then I did citizenship and admin, and then I got into political reporting, and I did everything there my two years. Had a wonderful tour. Marvelous experience.

Q: Well, obviously we're going to move on to other parts, but what was your impression after you finished a tour there? I mean this was your first real foreign service. Was it the right business? What did you think about the Foreign Service at that point?

PECK: Well, I'm not sure I was thinking about the Foreign Service in the context of your question. I loved the work. I found it rewarding and fascinating. I was delighted to be in a foreign country, not that foreign mind you. But I enjoyed that part of it. Tackling the language which was quite a challenge--not because the language is difficult, but because Swedes all speak English, and very well, thank you. That hinders your efforts. It was a constituent post in the true sense of the word.

Most of the officers who served there while I was there had not made it very well. The boss was a man with thirty-one years of service, which I described privately as one year of service, thirty-one times. He was an FS-03, was very close to retirement--

Q: FSO-3 at this point is the equivalent to--

PECK: FSO-1.

Q: Now FSO-1, or in military terms, about a colonel.

PECK: Yes. He was a very timid soul, and I remember asking the next senior guy why the boss was afraid, being very close to the end of his career. There was nothing they could possibly do to him. Retirement was just around the corner. Number two said, "Well, he's always been afraid." He was not a very good boss, not a very good Consul-General, not a very good Foreign Service Officer. He had come into the Service through the commercial service, when they were amalgamated some years earlier. The Rogers Act? I don't know. I've forgotten.

But, gee, I thought it was a great place to live and work up there. I went with my first wife to the post with one small child, came back with two. My little boy was born there. I loved it, thought it was great. I was pretty sure I'd picked the right career because I did well at it.

I did very well at it in every way except one. I didn't get a very good efficiency report. I think the fellow was--I now think was incapable of writing a good one. But the big failure there was that most of the things that I wound up doing which were innovative, creative, and so forth, he tended to look upon as a negative reflection on him. And you've seen this sort of thing--I see you nodding: it doesn't show up on the tape!

Illustration: I had done full-time French at FSI, and morning Spanish at FSI while I was in the Bureau of Economic Affairs. So of course they sent me to Sweden. I asked the boss if I could set up a language program, and he said, "Yes, but just don't bother me with it." So I got in touch with FSI, got a small amount of money, went out and hired a student as the tutor, and taught him the system. We had, three mornings a week in my office, Swedish language training, myself and two other Americans. In order to do this right, Mr. Kennedy, I had the tutor sit behind my desk, and we sat three in front of it--because he was the guy in charge.

Q: Yes.

PECK: I thought that was symbolically very useful. The regional language officer came up, and he wrote a report saying "the progress at Goteborg is extraordinary," underlined, in red. My boss, in writing my final efficiency report--in those days the efficiency report had sixteen sections you had to work on. One of them was language: "Describe the rated officer's efforts to speak"--anyway. My boss said, and I quote, "Mr. Peck is participating in the language training program offered by the Consulate-General." Full stop.

"Participating actively"--no. "Successfully"--no. Just "Participating." I was really struck--I got a S3-R-3 rating in the language when I got back.

Q: 3/3 means . . .

PECK: Useful to the service.

Q: Useful to service level, which is quite good when you consider--

PECK: We did eighteen month's mornings! That was fantastic. I made speeches in Swedish. I was asked on occasion at dinner parties, where my wife and I were the only foreigners, to make the formal "thanks for the food" speech that is absolutely required in Sweden. I did this in Swedish.

Q: That's the thank you speech.

PECK: Yes. Anyway, I was very proud of this facility, this ability, and the Consul-General, who spoke English at perhaps the 2/2 level, was not going to give me any credit. That really hurt me.

Q: Well, first place, just to put this in time, you were there from 1959 to 1962.

PECK: No.

Q: No, excuse me, I'm sorry. From--

PECK: '59 to '61, yes.

Q: 1961.

PECK: December.

Q: Yes. Now I'd like to get you to your area of full concentration, which was the Arab world. How did this come about?

PECK: Interesting that you should ask. I returned from Sweden, having gone both ways on board the Gripsholm, this gorgeous boat that the Swedes had built after World War II as an ocean liner. What a way to travel. That's gone now. Anyway, I returned to Washington, and they said, "We have no onward assignment for you."

Q: That's very unusual for a relatively junior officer.

PECK: It wasn't right then. There was a bind of various kinds, and they said, "Go home. Take home leave. Take annual leave. Don't call us. We'll call you."

I said, "Well, but, but, but."

They said, "That's the way it is."

I said, "Well, can I look around?"

And they said, "If you can find something, go to it." One of the people I spoke with said, "Apparently, Peck, you have some facility with languages."

I smiled with ill-concealed pride, and I said, "Yes."

They said, "Look, we've got hundreds of people who can write reports but not very many who can master languages. How would you like to learn a hard language?"

And I said, "Sure, why not?"

They said, "Here's the list." Study Chinese, you go to China. Study Turkish, you go to Turkey.

Q: When you say, go to China, you go to Taiwan.

PECK: Well, yes, but I mean I looked at Arabic, and looked at the string of countries, all the way from Mauritania around to, you know, Iraq. And I thought, ah, wow! That's the language to take. So I said, "Sign me up for Arabic." And they did. And they sent me to Tangier, where they were opening a western Arabic language school.

Q: I was going to say, was there any choice? Because that was about the time, I guess, when we had the choice between the Maghrebian Arabic, which was western Arabic-- Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and what's the other one?

PECK: Eastern Arabic.

Q: Eastern Arabic, which is--

PECK: All the rest of it. Yes. The school opened with a group of six students--Bob Pelletreau was one.

Q: Who's now our Ambassador to Tunisia, and our negotiator with the Palestine Liberation.

PECK: Yes. Lannon Walker was one. Ambassador to Senegal now. Frank Wisner was one, the Ambassador in Egypt. Myself and two other folks, one of whom has died and one of whom, Bob Duncan, is off--

Q: He's in Thailand.

PECK: Yes, as econ counselor. We were the six who opened the school, and I was there for twenty-two months learning Arabic--I thought. In fact, we were all taught to speak a dialect which is fully usable within perhaps one hundred kilometers of Tangier, and since Tangier is on the northwestern coast of the continent, it doesn't really take in an awful lot.

Q: Why did this happen? Because I mean after all, this was not a--I mean we had a rather large language expertise in Washington. I mean people--we were not a naive country by 1962 in that part of the world.

PECK: It happened for a number of reasons. One of the key ones was the choice of person to head the school. He was not highly motivated, was not very interested, and in effect just let the school just kind of go on. For the last seven months of the spoken program, I worked with the tutors at night and on the weekends, writing all the drills and the vocabulary and the lessons themselves, because there weren't any. I did them. They weren't all that great, because I'm not a trained linguist, but there was an obvious need to have some way to go on with the spoken language. The other students there were more conscious than I was that what we were learning a rather outlandish dialect.

You see, Tangerine Arabic is the Arabic that's spoken in Tangier, which is heavily interlarded with Spanish and also has a lot of Berber. The dialects in Arabic are grossly different from country to country and within countries, and we learned a way-out dialect, which even in the south of Morocco was not well understood.

When I finished the program--and I got a 3+/3+, which was considered quite good--I was sent to Tunisia. When I arrived there, getting off the ferry boat from Italy--because again I'd come by ship--I said to the dockworkers who were unloading my stuff, "Oh, my brothers, in Allah's name, handle these boxes with careful attention. They contain many things of importance to me and my family. May God reward you."

And they all said, "Huh?" They said, "What?" They said, "Do you speak French?"

And that's what I spoke for the two years I was there. It was almost totally useless in Tunisia. I could read the papers but I could not speak with anybody.

Q: Well, did this continue, or were people blowing the whistle?

PECK: Yes, and getting themselves in trouble for it. David Korn--I'm allowed to mention names here?

Q: Oh, yes, sir.

PECK: David Korn, who has now retired--and his last post was as ambassador to Togo--came to the course about midway through my stay there and was appalled at what he saw.

He blew the whistle to the extent of talking extensively to the DCM in Rabat--who reported the conversation to the school director.

That's the way those things went. Most people said, "Hey, look, it's a two-year vacation. Take it easy, Peck."

And I said, "No, no, goddammit, I am here to learn Arabic."

They said, "But you're learning it."

I said, "But look at the pace. We're learning at half speed. Anyway, the school eventually closed. During the time that it was there, the fellow who was running it ran it the same way. Most of the students, I have to say, were not highly motivated to put in the effort that is required--you may know this--to learn a truly hard language. When I arrived--I thought this would be another Swedish, or another French, or another Spanish. My God, Arabic is a hard language. There are no cognates, whatsoever, of any kind, even false ones. There's nothing to hang onto. It is a very difficult language.

It was extremely badly taught. As an illustration, a new tutor would report for duty, and he would come in and say, "My name is Ahmed d'El-Harshdi. What am I supposed to do?" And we would try to sit him down and teach him what he was supposed to do, in class. The Director taught him nothing.

Q: In class. Well, now, one last thing before we leave there, a question that's always interested me. Was Tangier the sink of iniquity that I've heard it was?

PECK: Unbelievably. In today's world I suppose it looks kind of tame. Looking back on it through the perspective of all those years, twenty some odd years, it was astounding how inexperienced my colleagues and I were in terms of coping with that kind of situation. I must tell a story.

Q: Please.

PECK: There was a bar there called the Parade Bar, which had been written up in Esquire and Holiday magazines as a must see. It's a place that was run by a fellow who was called the Queen--[tape glitch]

Q: Would you say that again? I just accidentally flipped something.

PECK: He was a homosexual, but a charming, gracious man who ran a wonderful restaurant where everybody came, and the scenery was something out of a really good Hollywood movie, just extraordinary. I was there one night with my first wife, standing in a corner of the bar. We were waiting for our table for dinner. Two American men struck up a conversation with my wife, and a few minutes later at the other end of the bar, in

came Frank Wisner with some folks. And he waved at us, and my wife waved at him, and one of these guys said, "Who is that?"

She said, "It's Frank Wisner."

So--"I think I know him. I'm pretty sure I know him, but I can't remember where--"

So my wife, trying to be helpful, went over and got Frank and brought him over, introduced him, and we went on chatting and drinking and watching the show. A white-faced Frank Wisner suddenly materialized at my wife's elbow, and he said, "Goddamn you!" He said, "I had to fight my way out of that!" He said, "These goddamn queers backed me into a corner."

And he said, "For God's sakes Heather, don't you know a queer when you meet one?"

Very quietly, she said, "No." End of conversation. Frank had nothing more to say.

Q: We were very naive.

PECK: The things that went on. The things that we saw.

Q: You know. Going into a transvestite bar. I remember going into one, and I didn't know what this was, except I thought that the "girls" had rather angular jaws.

PECK: I can remember in the Safari Bar one night, watching two American airmen from the airbase we still had there--trying to pick up these two French lesbians and not understanding why it wasn't working.

Q: It was a different era. Well, anyway, let's go on. You were assigned to Tunis as the economic officer.

PECK: As an economic officer. As junior guy, yes.

Q: Who was our ambassador then?

PECK: Francis Russell, who died just a few months ago.

Q: Let's see, we're talking about--I always like to put time in. This is from 1964 to 1966.

PECK: That is correct.

Q: Francis Russell was one of our real pros in the business, wasn't he?

PECK: No, sir. He came into the Foreign Service as an FSO-1.

Q: So that's right at the top, equivalent to--

PECK: Yes, he came in at the top. He had been a speech writer. He had written the famous Truman speech that was used as the "Point Four" doctrine. He had written some other things, and he was from a well-connected New England family, and a man of considerable skills. So he joined the Foreign Service, and I think his first post was in Tel Aviv. His next one, he was ambassador to New Zealand, then ambassador to Ghana, and then ambassador to Tunisia. And he served in Tunisia for, I think seven years. Never even learned French. To my knowledge, while I was there, he never ever set foot in the AID building, which was across the street.

I considered him to be in some respects a classical illustration of the problems of "clientitis." We were not allowed to report anything that was in any way questioning what Habib Bourguiba was doing in Tunisia.

Q: "Clientitis." You might explain a little more for somebody who's not familiar.

PECK: He did not want anything to affect relations between the United States and Tunisia, so that efforts to talk about economic mistakes or political errors got erased from our reporting. I got lectured twice by Russell on trying to report things which, from my perspectives needed to be reported. I did the Biweekly Economic Review, which had short economic snippets, which he never read. The DCM referred to it as the "biweekly disaster report" because it was the only reporting from the embassy which talked about the clay feet aspects of Tunisia's marble statue. The people in Washington of course knew, but the embassy was never allowed to report any of the things that were being done incorrectly, and there were lots of them.

So Russell suffered from that problem. He never tried to understand or in any way manage the AID program, which was the biggest thing we had going there at the time, and which made some serious economic development mistakes. I did not care for him much, although he invited me as a newly arrived junior officer to a luncheon at his house, where an incident took place which became later important in my life.

Russell had been given a parrot by Kwame Nkrumah, the then-president of Ghana, when he served as ambassador. The lunch guests were sitting on the sun porch of the residence, when the bird began to do the one thing for which Russell had kept it: It could whistle off-key the first three bars of "The Star-Spangled Banner." The bird did that, and Russell told the assemblage what it was that the bird represented, a gift from Nkrumah, and I turned to the lady sitting next to me and said, "Just before leaving the States, I heard a very funny parrot story."

It so happened that the end of that comment fell into a silence, and Ambassador Russell said, "Oh, then you must tell it." And my wife turned pale. And so I told this parrot joke, which was slightly off-color--but very funny.

The lady sitting next to me was the Baroness D'Erlanger, who really liked the joke and took the trouble to make my wife and me her friends. Years later, when my family was evacuated from Algeria, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, my wife wound up in London. It was the D'Erlangers who took her and the kids in and helped them with various things, to survive the evacuation.

Q: Well, two things I'd like to ask. One, you couldn't report, except sort of surreptitiously, the dark side of the Tunisian economy. Was there a sort of a conspiracy to try to get these reports out, or were you writing--I mean not just you but the rest of the embassy--were there efforts to get what you felt was a more balanced or truer picture to Washington?

PECK: Yes.

Q: Now how did this work? I'm speaking you understand for a researcher who's not familiar with this, and they only have the documents to look at. What should they look at?

PECK: Well, let me step away just for a second because in later years--pardon me--I learned that one of the weaknesses under which my efforts labored was the fact that I was the new kid on the block and theoretically didn't know anything. Later on when I was myself a chief of mission, people would bring me in papers, and I would say, "No, no, you don't really understand the situation." And had them accuse me of trying to protect the regime. In that case of course, they were wrong. [Laughter]

In the case of Tunisia, some of the stuff that I suspected or discovered and tried to report--turned out to be correct while I was there. So the ambassador tended to look at me as a nice, you know, eager young whippersnapper who didn't really know a hell of a lot. That was part of it.

Take, for example, when I was the acting chief of the econ section. He sent for me one day, having just come back from having luncheon with Cecil Hourani, the Lebanese man who was the cultural affairs advisor to President Bourguiba, Hourani had spoken at some length about the wisdom of Tunisia adopting an economic policy like Lebanon's, of permitting money to flow freely in and out of the country as a means of overcoming its relative economic weakness. Hourani had gone on and on about banking and transfers of funds and blah, blah, blah.

Russell wanted to report this to Washington, so he called me into his office and dictated to me about an eight-page telegram on the subject. I went back to my office and tried to write the message with a little less freshman enthusiasm, because if Tunisia had opened its borders to the free flow of funds--phew!--everything would have left. Because Tunisia was not Lebanon. All of the former French colonists, and all the other former residents, who had had their funds blocked, would have taken everything out the door the very same afternoon.

So I tried to shade the report a little bit. The ambassador took it and rewrote it in the way that Hourani had told him and sent it in as a priority cable. I tried to tell Russell, face-to-face, that economically this was not a sound idea--politically it wasn't either--and that he should consider that Hourani was a cultural advisor, and really wasn't an economist. Anyway, he sent the cable in, and Washington kind of snickered.

That was the kind of thing where, had he sent the cable in with a footnote saying, "As Washington is well aware, this might not work, yet it's nice to know that's what Hourani is talking about because he does have access to the president"--blah, blah, blah. We didn't do that. We sent it in as a great idea, that he, Russell, wanted to be authorized to encourage. Washington said, "No, don't do that."

Q: Well, were there other ways that you were getting back to Washington?

PECK: Yes. Through the Biweekly Economic Review I would stick little snippets in about the crop failures, or marketing programs that had gone awry, or the imposition of certain collectivization programs in the middle of Tunisia, which I suggested were not only going to be totally ineffective but could perhaps create some unrest. The political office x'ed out that last part, and six weeks later there were riots in Sahel region. You know the feeling: "Hey. Hey, guys, I saw it coming." I was sure I was smarter than they were.

But the embassy at large knew that Ambassador Russell wanted very much to keep a shining, glowing image of this perfect little country. The phrase that he used was one that Habib Bourguiba had said to him. At that time Tunisia had the highest per capita economic assistance program that we had anywhere in the world. Bourguiba said, "I know what America wants from Tunisia. It wants a little Tiffany window on Mediterranean Avenue." And that's what Russell wanted.

Q: Well, now the ambassador wanted this, but were people traveling back, I mean was--

PECK: Perhaps.

Q: --there other communication between--the thing of saying this is a bunch of nonsense, or--

PECK: No, not so much that, but the people in Washington tend to know, even if you're not reporting it, because it comes to them other ways. By travelers, by visitors, by other governments' reports, you know, from newspapers--they have an idea. You can't really close the door. [In fact if we ever get around to it, the tombstone of my own career was rubbing Washington's face in something that was not being reported directly from a neighboring country, and of course they knew all the time. They just didn't want to embarrass anybody by admitting it.] You can't keep those things secret.

Q: So that if somebody looks at the official documents, there's another element, I mean. One should not rely just on the official documents.

PECK: By no means. In fact there are always two foreign services. They're interchangeable. One consists of the people in Washington, and the other consists of the people overseas, and they change roles when they change jobs. So the skeptic from Washington goes out and becomes the supporter of what's happening overseas, and vice versa. So they know. There's a certain amount of skepticism and healthy reluctance to accept at face value everything the embassy says, because many embassies are reluctant to report the bad things.

Q: Well, it upsets your relations with the host government.

PECK: It can. It makes it difficult when you've written in, repetitively, that the foreign minister is an absolute dolt on economic development. Then when you go in and report that he's asking for more funds for other reasons, you've sawed the legs off your own proposition. Why should the U.S. help that dunce?

Q: Speaking of economic work--you're saying the AID program was the highest per capita at that point.

PECK: Yes, sir. I believe it was.

Q: And you said that we were taking the wrong course. Without going into great detail, could you explain where you felt we were off?

PECK: Well, it's the kind of thing that AID programs face worldwide. It wasn't just Tunisia. You wind up making economic decisions for political reasons.

Q: You were saying, economic decisions are made for political reasons.

PECK: Yes, you always do that. The countries do that with their own activities, and assistance programs do them for the same reasons. If you're going to build a sugar beet factory, it should be built near a harbor, because that's where you're going to ship the product. But you wind up building it on poor ground way inland because your trying to do something for the region. So the United States got involved in a couple of those programs, which were questionable at best. We had a massive, massive, program, thousands of acres being planted with fruit trees, for the purpose of letting Tunisia diversify its exports [which at that time were mostly wine, and the French, the major market, weren't buying any] without really exploring whether or not Tunisian fruits were going to be able to compete in the Common Market.

I got into a very heated argument once at an AID meeting. I was the embassy representative to USAID, and I brought up the fruit issue, "Do we want to continue to assist them in this?"

And someone said, "Dammit, if we help them raise hundreds of thousands of tons of fruit, they will be forced to find a market." I said to the guy--it was a big mistake--"You must be the guy who was in charge of the wine-making program"--Tunisia was pouring wine into the sea, with no place to sell it. I thought that was dumb, but I should not have personalized the attack. The ambassador paid literally no attention to the AID mission and its program, and it was the most visible, most active part of our presence there, at the time.

Q: Well, then, from there you went to Oran as principal officer, Oran in Morocco.

PECK: No, Algeria.

Q: I mean Algeria. From 1966 to '69. Did we have a post in Oran--

PECK: '68.

Q: '68. What did we have at post in Oran?

PECK: Well, if you look at the map, Oran is roughly halfway between the Moroccan border and Algiers. It was the capital of a region called the Oranie in French days, still called that today. That was the first assignment--no, actually it was the second assignment I ever manufactured for myself. The first one was language training. The second one was Oran. Because when I was on home leave from Tunisia--I had home leave and return orders--I discovered that the fellow who had been evacuated from Oran had not been replaced, and within twenty-four hours I got myself paneled into that job. There were four Americans stationed there: two at the USIS post, two at the consulate. It was there as a listening post. It was a political reporting post.

Q: What were you listening to?

PECK: Internal and external affairs, mostly focusing on internal. Oran was far enough away and was different enough that a lot of the things that were going on in Algiers were viewed differently and were happening differently in Oran.

Q: Could you describe the situation in Algiers in 1966?

PECK: The country had been independent for three and a half years. The government was still trying to consolidate its hold. The guys who'd fought the war had only recently been disbanded. The army had come in from its bases in Morocco and Tunisia. They had not fought in the war, but they'd taken over the country: trying to set up institutions, trying to establish control, trying to punish wrongdoers, trying to reward the militants. All kinds of turmoil and chaos in this potentially very wealthy country. Still recovering from a very bloody war in which some say up to a million people perished, and in which their

hundred and sixty years of French history had been destroyed. The French people had pulled out in the hundreds of thousands.

So the post was there in a lovely French townhouse on the cliff overlooking the Bay of Oran to listen and to report. You could not travel freely in the country in that day, maybe not even today. You had to have permission issued in advance. The local governors--certainly the one in Oran--sort of ruled independent fiefdoms, sheikdoms, if you will. The post was there and is still there to observe and report. It does far less reporting now. There was enough difference, Stu, so that on a couple of occasions the embassy chastised me for reporting things from Oran which were not in step with embassy reporting.

Q: Well, what were American interests in Algeria at that time?

PECK: What are American interests in any country? Algeria still had--at that time--a very prominent role in the third world. You will recall that President Kennedy, who of course was dead by then, had spoken out in support of Algerian independence when he was a Senator, which the Algerians never forgot. In fact the first president of Algeria, Ahmed Ben-Bella, had come to meet President Kennedy when independence came, and then he went right on to Cuba--which was a serious mistake--to meet Castro.

So we had interests in how are they doing, what are they doing. It was also a petroleum-producing country. There were major American interests there in petroleum exploration and in the natural gas liquefaction plants. That was at Arzew, very near Oran. We had the standard interests that we had with every country, plus the fact that Algeria was a fairly large, fairly populous, newly independent place in which we wanted to make sure that we were able to maintain good relations and know what was going on.

Oran was sometimes a thorn in the embassy's side because they would report something on the incredible power and control of the party, the FLN in Algiers, and then I would report from Oran that the party's activities were at best of secondary importance, because it was being run by the prefet.

Q: Prefet is P-R-E-F-E--

PECK: T. He is the governor--it's like the provincial governor. I was able to document my case on a couple of occasions, but I had a little trouble with the political counselor in particular, Fred Galanto, because my reporting didn't fit squarely with theirs. He didn't like that so much, I kept telling him, "Look, it's two different parts of the same country. You know, there are differences."

In 1967, June, there was a war between the Arabs and the Israelis. Almost all the Arabs, including the Algerians broke diplomatic relations with the U.S. The consulate building, which was two-thirds my house and one-third the office, was besieged thirteen times by mobs. I evacuated all the Americans, including my wife and two children, stayed on, put up the Swiss flag, closed the post, drove to Algiers through--I don't know--twenty-six

road blocks, and stayed in Algiers for five months while my wife and children were first in Spain and then in England. Then I went back with my family and reopened the post, initially under the Swiss flag, for the remaining eight months of my assignment. By that time, Fred Galanto was the acting DCM, and Lou Hoffacker, who had been the DCM, was the Chargé.

Q: Do you feel that there is an effort on the part--using Algeria as a specific--of a part of the embassy to try to rationalize un-rational areas? In other words, in political appointees--say this is all part of a piece, whereas they're really reporting from the capital, and constituent posts are reporting from a different perspective.

PECK: Well, this is exactly the point which came to a head when--there were two consulates in Algeria. One was at Constantine, the other was in Oran. When the war broke and relations were terminated, the two consuls evacuated everybody and themselves came to Algiers where they stayed. Embassy Algiers took the position that the two posts should be permanently closed, and recommended that step to the Department in a telegram.

Washington said, "No, we're going to keep them."

Embassy Algiers went in with a second message, with eight reasons why the two posts should be closed forever because they served no useful purpose and also were a bother.

Washington came back and said again, "No, we're going to keep them."

Embassy Algiers then did an airgram which went by mail, which the two consuls were forced to clear, listing in great detail the reasons why the posts should be closed.

Washington came back with a great long list and said, "No, we're going to keep them open." [Laughter]

Q: Well, let me ask you, on the airgram, where you allowed to--did you have to sign off?

PECK: I signed. In those days we cleared "in substance" or "in draft." There should have been a third clearance called "in extremis." You know, "The boss wrote this, what do you think of it?" "Oh, it's great. It's just great." I signed, what could I do?

The DCM/Chargé wanted to close the posts for a lot of reasons. (Constantine later closed forever; Oran has stayed open.)

The difficulties were that the Embassy felt embarrassed--if that's the word--when it would report something, the overwhelming control and power of the party, for example, and then I would come in from Oran and say not so. One of the things that the Chargé and the acting DCM said to me, after I was in Algiers with Oran temporarily closed, was "Look Ed, let's be honest. Anything that's happening in Oran can be reported from Algiers." I

made another one of those great mistakes, saying "Perfectly true. Let's go a step farther. Anything that happens in Algiers can be reported from Paris."

Which pissed them both off, I fear, instead of making the point. In fact, anything happening in Paris could be read out of the newspaper. From that perspective, who the hell needs a post anywhere? You know, I shouldn't have said that, but it's perfectly correct. The embassy was constantly hammering on the two consulates to travel more. Fred Galanto once said to me, very pointedly, "You cannot report what's happening in the Oranie just from Oran." "Yeah, if that's true, Fred, it also applies to the capital city, doesn't it? Things happening in Algeria you report from Algiers, okay?" But he missed the point. I perhaps could have been less contentious, but I felt that what I had to do was report it the way I saw it, and let the people in Washington work out the realities.

The embassy reported, as an illustration, that a very, very senior person in the party was going to make a swing through the country, going to four places to put out the party line. Well, he came to Oran, and the meeting was held in the Opera, built by the French. I went to that meeting. I dressed myself inconspicuously and went and sat in the audience.

When the meeting started, that fellow from Algiers got up to the microphone, wearing a cape, for God's sake, and was haranguing the audience in half French, half Arabic.

About ten minutes into this speech, the Prefet arrived. He walked out and clomped very noisily across the stage to his chair and sat down, and then shifted his chair around a couple of times and then sat there, while the distracted speaker was speaking. Two minutes later the Prefet got up, went to the rostrum, and moved the microphone farther away from the speaker. Looked at the result, nodded and smiled, and went back and sat down. I thought, now that's a demonstration of what I'm trying to tell you from out here. The Prefet later got up and left, clomp, clomp, clomp, when the guy was halfway through his speech. Hey, there's the message. Down here, it's the Prefet. It ain't that party hack.

That is what I saw and what I reported. I thought it sort of put my other reporting into very clear, visible perspective. The embassy did not like it at all. [Laughter] So, see I made another mistake. I titled my report on that incident "The FLN in Oran: Dynamic Apathy in Action." Didn't need to do that. Didn't need to do that. That was a gratuitous kick in the shins, to say, hey, you guys, in Algiers, read this.

Q: This is--I speak as a former consul-general in Naples. We used to chuckle at the reporting from Rome. It's a different world. As in Washington we now say, it's inside and outside the Beltway. And it's true.

PECK: That's right, but many people fail to realize this, as the embassy did. It's a different issue in the countryside, but we often suffer from a certain amount of psychic blindness ourselves. In any case, I could have done it less contentiously.

Q: Before we leave here--then I think we'll break for lunch--but the '67 war with Israel and Egypt and Syria and all, got you mobs and all this. How seriously did the Algerians feel about Israel? In Oran, let's say. I mean, were these rent-a-mobs, or was it fun, or was this a really emotional issue?

PECK: I think you've got to understand something, and I bring this up at this point because you've asked the question. We just talked for a moment ago about the realities of inside the Beltway, outside the Beltway. Even though our embassies overseas tend to ignore it, they know it's a fact. I think our own people, everybody in the United States should be able to understand a simple fact, that throughout the world, depending upon how big a bite you want to take, there's "we" and there's "they."

I lecture sometimes over at AID for new entrants on the subject of embassy/USAID relations. Most of the people in the program have served overseas with various kinds of contractor organizations or nongovernmental organizations. They're familiar with the subject.

I ask them, "What four-letter word would you use to describe relations between embassies and USAIDs?" Then I give them the answer: "Poor."

"Now tell me, wouldn't you use the same word to describe relations between the AID mission's controller's office and its agricultural branch?"

"Yes."

"How about between the engineers and the educators?"

"Yes."

Why? It's "we" and "they." You get it big enough, that's the Americans against the Russians. That's "we." You make it small enough, it's the GSO against the rest of the embassy. Knowing that this is true, why would Americans expect that other Arabs really don't care about Israel or what its done to Palestinians? Because they do. Any Arab can kick another Arab, and that's different than an Arab being kicked by a European or by an Israeli. Do they care? You bet your ass. But Americans, because it's easier, tend to want to try to delude themselves by saying, well, they give lip service to the subject, but they don't really care. You bet your life--they care about Jerusalem. They care about other Arabs.

I offer you an illustration. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, I was in Baghdad. And the United States sent out a high-level delegation for the purpose of drumming up support in all Muslim countries for a UN General Assembly condemnation of that invasion. We wanted the Muslim states to step up with us and roundly condemn the occupation of Muslim territory by outsiders.

And every one of the Muslim countries said "Great, you're ready to do that? Let's start with Israel.

"That's different," we said. "How is it different?" They asked. Well, it's not different to them. The Algerians care. Not necessarily on a daily basis, but it's there. The Palestinians are co-religionists, co-languagists and it's them other guys that are doing bad things to them. The other Arabs care.

By the way, the only place in Oran that was more heavily protected by the Algerians during the 1967 War than the American consulate was the Jewish synagogue. And President Boumediene said on the radio, "Our struggle is with the Jewish state of Israel. It is not with Algerians who happen to be Jewish."

Q: Well, now I want to take another aspect of this. You had gone through Arab language training--

PECK: Yes, sir.

Q: You had served in two Arab posts, Oran and Tunis. You were serving with other so-called Arabists but from the Maghrebian-type Arabist. What was you all's attitude towards Israel and our policy towards it? This is often a subject of some contention, and I'd like to--

PECK: Well, I lecture on this subject at the War College and at FSI.

Q: I want to know how you all felt at that time.

PECK: Understand, there is a natural tendency to be interested in and understanding of the people with whom you are working. Algerians in this particular case. I didn't really know a hell of a lot about the problems until I became an Arabist, because it was a hot issue in this country but not on the front burner all the time. The '67 war was a unique one, in which, if you remember, the Israelis in six days just kicked the living bejesus out of everybody they could lay their hands on.

And there was that wonderful poster that you could buy. I remember seeing it later on showing a Hasidic Jew with the hat and the side curls and the coat stepping out of a phone booth, and he's pulling open his black coat and white shirt and underneath you can see a Hebrew style red "S" on a blue background. Because here was little David kicking the crap out of the Goliath--the Arab world--and doing a hell of a neat job of it. I think probably then, in those days, lack of familiarity with the issues involved and partly that rather impressive victory, left me of mixed emotions.

Algerians are not the world's most loveable people. You may know that at birth every Algerian has his smile muscles cut. Did you ever see a picture of a smiling Algerian?

[Laughter] No. They are the only ones that are worse than the Iraqis, I think, but--as a group. They're dour. Or dour depending on how you pronounce it.

So at that particular point--I remember serving in Tunisia. The Tunisians had riots in the streets against--I guess it was the Egyptian embassy, because the Egyptians had attacked the Tunisian embassy when Bourguiba said that "Israelis and Palestinians ought to sit down and talk together." And that was thought to be a betrayal of a trust. So the mobs took to the streets in Tunis, against the Arabs, and I went out and joined the mobs, totally unafraid, to have dreamed of doing that in Algeria. The Tunisians are nice; the Algerians are not.

In later years I began to question more strongly some of the costs inherent in U.S. support for Israel, which has itself also modified somewhat, for similar reasons. At that time I think most of us felt that the specifics of our support for and involvement with Israel--which were not anywhere near as great--did not cost us so much.

You may know, that in those early days, especially before the '67 war, many of the Arabs were equipped by the Americans, and it was the French and the British who were equipping the Israelis. It changed after '67, so that the Arab view of Israel was not the same as it became in later years, when the US/Israeli relationship assumed the colossal proportions that it did politically, economically, militarily, every other way. The Arabs broke relations with the United States in 1967 because we were supporting Israel, but not because we were supporting it then the way we did in later years.

Q: Well, I think this is interesting because I think there is a tendency to think of the term Arabists--in some instances is used almost as a pejorative--

PECK: Sure.

Q: --way of saying if you're an Arabist, this means you're anti-Israeli therefore you're anti-Semitic therefore you're practically recruited from the Nazi element of the Foreign Service and the establishment.

PECK: It's a highly emotional issue, and trying to inject a little balance leaves you open to some of these charges. The years passed. I do a jump ahead. I was the director of the office of Egyptian Affairs when Israel invaded Lebanon in '82, and then the massacres in the Sabra and Shatila camps occurred, you remember?

Q: These were Palestinian refugee camps.

PECK: Right. And I was rushing to the cafeteria to take a lunch back upstairs, and a colleague of ours jumped up. He'd retired, and he said, "My wife and I, we are distressed. We're distraught over our blind support of Israel, which is costing us so much, and I can't stand the unbalanced relations"--and blither, blither--"What should I do?"

And I said, "Well, write down what you just said as a letter to the Washington Post, and when it's published, that morning you'll get two phone calls. One will be a death threat from the Jewish Defense League and the other will be an offer of membership in the American Nazi Party. Good luck to you."

Then, in 1967, the basis of my thinking about it, the issues in the United States had not become as strongly held, because it wasn't just us supporting Israel against the Arabs, as it was in later years.

Q: And also, there was this enjoyment of seeing a mighty power taken care of by a relatively small power.

PECK: Oh, yes, they were still the little guys then, you know. There was that, and it was a shattering defeat of Nasser, who was not very popular in the west. You remember all those pictures of the shoes left in the desert by the Egyptian soldiers. Phew.

Q: Yes, yes. I was in Yugoslavia at the time, and the Yugoslavs were great supporters of the Arab world, but the problem was that the regular Yugoslav took note that the leader of the Israeli tank forces had been born in Yugoslavia.

PECK: Oh, that's interesting.

Q: And there was great pride in this. Well, why don't we cut now for lunch, and then we'll come back. [Tape turned off]

We are now back from lunch. Ed, you now came back to Washington. You left in, what was it, 1968?

PECK: '68, yes.

Q: '68. And you were there until 1974.

PECK: In Washington.

Q: In Washington. What were you doing?

PECK: Well, that was sort of a turning point in the career because when I left Oran, I returned to Washington and was assigned to the Office of Intelligence Coordination, I guess you'd have to call it. The Deputy Director for Coordination in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. And I remember asking some friends in Washington what the job was all about, when I heard about it in Oran, and they said, "We can't find out but it's something hush-hush."

Anyway, it turned out to be what was probably one of the best jobs the Foreign Service had to offer to people like me, and a job in which I had some real successes. And it sort of

set my feet on the path which they followed for the next couple of years. The office was concerned with interagency coordination of the most sensitive intelligence programs. There was an organization which was then, even the name was top secret, called the Forty Committee. It was chaired by Dr. Kissinger at the White House. U. Alexis Johnson, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, was the State member. DOD, JCS, CIA, and Treasury (in the person of Secretary John Mitchell, representing President Nixon) were the other members.

And I was the Foreign Service Officer who was detailed to monitor, on a continuing--on a daily basis, what they called the Vulnerable Platform Intelligence Collection Program. I carried around my neck passes to various parts of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to CIA, to NSA, to NPIC--the National Photographic Interpretation Center, and I coordinated for State Department all of the programs involving ships, planes, submarines, satellites, for peripheral and overhead intelligence collection. I carried a series of separate compartmented intelligence programs around in a locked briefcase, and I started every morning in the Pentagon, in the Joint Reconnaissance Center of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, where I had a desk that I sat in for the first two hours to pick up what was going on, and the rest of the day I spent in State.

It was an absolutely fascinating job. I learned so much about technology and about programs which we were doing then, which still are unheard of, have never been mentioned. Because the office I worked in was small, they had four senior officers who were monitoring on a regional basis the CIA's covert action programs, whenever one of them went off on leave or something, I filled in, watching therefore also the CIA's programs. I was able, partly because of the job that I had, to modify, with the passage of time, the way in which the Forty Committee and particularly the way in which the State Department handled its approval of some of these programs. It was a wonderful exercise. I had very supportive, very interested bosses. The first year they gave me, for the first time in the career, a meritorious step increase. At the end of the second year, they gave me a meritorious honor award for having made some significant changes in the way the State Department handled and controlled approval of some of these programs.

Q: This is an unclassified interview, and we'll keep it that way, but can you talk about what was some--in a general way, how we had looked at it, and how you were able to make some changes?

PECK: Well, it was done--it was kind of pro forma from the Defense Department side. The main program that I worked with was this Vulnerable Platforms thing. And they did a whole lot of stuff in which the book I carried would have graphics in it, showing what ships or airplanes or whatever intended to do. Then there was a lot of appended computer runs for relatively routine stuff, which I also had them to put into graphics, so it could be looked at by State people who did not have access to the computers.

And I also--when I took over the job, on the CIA side of the house, the CIA would present a proposed covert action to the Forty Committee which included in it a statement that the Department of State had already approved it. I was finally able, after a long

struggle with my bosses, to convince them that that was not the way it should be done. What's the purpose of having the meeting? What's the purpose of having our membership if the CIA submits our vote? The paper shouldn't say that. Our vote should come out in the meeting. So when they changed the procedure to the way I wanted it, it forced people to take longer and harder looks at what the CIA was sending forward. It also put the State Department more firmly into the approval system. It was a long hard struggle.

There's some things I also can't talk about. There were things like--some years later the papers printed our successful efforts to pick up the parts of that Russian submarine that had sunk in the Pacific, you recall?

Q: Yes, that was the Globus, something . . .

PECK: That's right, the Glomar Explorer.

Q: Glomar Explorer, yes.

PECK: I'd been clued into that program years before, and they weren't going to clear but just one or two people in the State Department, outside of those who needed to know because they were processing the papers. I was able to get my bosses to secure Alex Johnson's approval to widen dramatically the number of people who were cleared for some of these programs. Because in those days--those were the early days of the Nixon years--we were doing things, remarkable things, which were being cleared without the upper working-level people being aware of them at all.

Q: Well, you know when I look back on the history of our intelligence activities, the State Department is often called upon to clean up messes that maybe we shouldn't have gotten into. I mean, you think of the Liberty, the ship Liberty which was sunk by the Israelis. The whole series of reconnaissance planes that were shot down doing ferret type work. You think of--the name escapes me--the ship off Korea.

PECK: Pueblo.

Q: The Pueblo and on and on. Because these things may sound wonderful and very technical but when things go wrong, and they always do at some point, the State Department has to deal with the problems, and sometimes it's best to know what we're doing before we do it.

PECK: Well, these programs had a lot of driving force behind them. I wrote a lot of papers back and forth on the subject. When we would turn down one of the proposals, the Defense Department would come back and say, "Why not? Why can't we do this?" And I'd say, "Well, why do you have to do it?" That's really the question: "Why do you have to do it?" Because you've already got the planes and the people, so you have to use them.

After the Pueblo was captured, there was another U.S. Navy ship that used to go around Africa, making port calls and collecting information and it was being approved routinely in State until I pointed out to them one day that it was the sister ship of the Pueblo and looked exactly like it. It was a Pueblo with a different name. People said, "Oh my God!" Because they'd never seen a picture of it before. They thought it was a Navy ship with clandestine capabilities. No, no, no, no, it was an overt intelligence collector. And someday, sitting in the harbor down there, you know, in one those African countries, somebody would say, "Hey, look at that! The Pueblo!" And then there could have been trouble.

It was a great job, and the fellow for whom I was working, three or four levels removed, was U. Alexis Johnson, and it was because of the job in INR that I wound up working as a special assistant for U. Alexis Johnson.

Q: Before we turn to that, I'd like to go back. From your observation, what were some of the dynamics of that push--were there different dynamics, say, from the side of CIA and the military than with State, as far as intelligence gathering and all? I wonder if you could discuss it as you saw it at the time.

PECK: Sure, the State Department is a non-rock-the-boat organization, or is a don't-rock-the-boat organization. State also suffered from a serious weakness, in that it did not really understand and didn't really care to know why we needed all these peripheral planes and boats and so forth. The Defense Department was vitally interested in keeping tabs on, for example, Soviet radar. Its capabilities, its range, its frequencies--they were interested in stimulating Soviet responses to the airplanes with interceptors, so they could track how they did it, what systems were used, how they communicated, in case of wartime need. We had some programs where we put submarines into various pieces of highly restricted Soviet waters for the purpose of sucking up information.

When you could sit down a group of intelligent State Department people, as I did from time to time, and bring over the NSA or the Defense Department briefers to show them what it was we had gotten, so they could understand the value as equated against the risk--risks in Defense's eyes were always minimal, you know, in State's eyes it was more so for the reasons that you've pointed out. But the State Department didn't really understand why you had to have all that stuff. And the question was logical because a lot of it was Mickey Mouse. A lot it was just--

Illustration. The White House directed that there be a study once of a program in which we were flying drones over North Vietnam. Occasionally the drones would go off course and crash in China, and the Chinese would accuse us of various things. So they asked for a study to be made as to the value of the program, and the people who ran the program came back and said, "It has two purposes. The first is to cover the IROL--the Imagery Requirements Objectives List. We target--we program our drones to give us coverage of the IROL. The second thing that these drones do, is they permit us to expand the IROL."

Got it? They go out and find more targets that you then have to cover, so then you've got to cover those targets, and then you find more--and on and on. And the sponsors said, "The only problem we have with the program is that we do not have enough photo interpreters. We've got a warehouse full of pictures no one's looked at yet."

Okay. Of course, that was Vietnam, where we did just about everything wrong. But it's hard--intelligence is a closed loop, difficult to find the end and the beginning. "How do you know there's nothing we could get that way, unless you let us try?"

The other aspect of it that was kind of funny, and I used to talk about this a lot, was when the CIA wrote up a program to fix the elections in Italy, as it did. They wrote it up as if the guys were going to do a "Mission Impossible" scenario, remember the old program, "Mission Impossible"?

Q: Oh, yes, yes. It was a TV program.

PECK: How it all worked [snaps fingers] on time, and just right, and just click, click, click. So the CIA would say, "To help defeat the communists in Italy, highly trained and skilled agents, at precisely the correct moment, will give the exact amount of money to the key person." Right?

So the two guys are sitting in the cafe with this fellow and one says, "Okay, Harry. Give him the money."

And Harry says, "I thought you brought the money!"

"No, you were supposed to get--"

Hey. The CIA wrote up things that were star wars. Some of them worked, a lot of them didn't. But you've got to keep trying.

Q: Did we have any--the fact that you were able to help get the State Department to have an active chop off on these things, did this have an inhibiting effect on some of the more outlandish--

PECK: No, not really. There were thousands of programs each and every month and some very, very, right out of the movies kinds of things in those days. I was able to get my bosses to agree that more people should be briefed into the programs, that more people should take a longer time to look at these things.

You may remember, there was an EC-121 shot down off the coast of North Korea in 1969. Twenty-two people were killed in that--the EC-121 was an old Constellation. They shot it down--I don't know--ninety miles off the coast finally. North Koreans came out and got it. It was a great big hullabaloo. I was sitting up in the operations center of the State Department, where there was a heated debate about this going on. Alex Johnson

was present, and the fellow who was the head of INR, Tom Hughes. Hughes said to my boss, William C. Trueheart--if you know Bill Trueheart--he said, "Goddammit, Bill, if you'd cleared that book with me, I could have shown you which flight was at risk."

And Trueheart was pissed off, and he turned to me, and took the book off my lap--it was about four inches thick--and he said, "Tom, I'll bet you can't even find it now." Hughes was going to tell us which one of these four hundred flights was going to be attacked? Nonsense. You can't second-guess, so you put a level of control on it that you think is--oh--sufficient to indicate that you're still involved. I mean nobody in the State Department followed it closely except me. We didn't do the--we didn't look at or study the takes, we didn't assess the risks--we just approved it.

But we had a much better handle when I was done.

Q: Well, then, let's go to your next job, which was special assistant to U. Alexis Johnson?

PECK: Yes.

Q: I wonder, to begin with, could you describe Ambassador Johnson's method of operation and his outlook? He's one of the major figures in the Foreign Service.

PECK: Alex Johnson and I have sharply different personalities and very different ways of going at problems and projects. I have enormous, enormous respect and affection for that man, which I suppose is typical between a special assistant and a big boss. But that guy was a professional. Did his homework, knew his stuff. He worked at it hard. He was tough when he had to be, he was flexible when it didn't work. He knew and was respected by everybody from the president on down, was a caring human being and a great boss, who also permitted me to--or encouraged me at least to get some things done that were not directly related to my responsibilities to him, but were related to a wider responsibility to the State Department.

He was our expert on political military matters. And he said, "Ed, you know, it's time to retire. I've gone through three generations of national military leaders." In those days, William Rogers was the Secretary of State, and Jack Irwin was--what was now called the Deputy Secretary.

And Alex Johnson ran it all because neither one of those two individuals was famous as an activist, a doer, an involver. In fact you may recall Rogers was highly, was extensively denigrated for letting Henry Kissinger run things. So Alex Johnson, with a staff of three--two special assistants and a staff aide--did it all. We did all the papers. I mean everything that went on. And it was an extraordinarily interesting time to be in that extraordinarily interesting job.

Q: Well, you've said all these pluses about him. Were there any weak parts or things where you felt that Alexis Johnson was not as strong as in some of the others?

PECK: Well, he was a Foreign Service officer of the old school, and by in large was not a wave maker. He was--it's a phrase that can be used in a pejorative--he was a consensus builder. That's a label that's been hung around some of the recently retired leadership of the State Department. And he was less confrontational than I would have liked. He wasn't as hard-nosed as I would have liked. So I would have to put that on the not-so-strong side. He, on the other hand, might think I was too much that way myself. But he was a man to whom you could always talk and explain things, and he would understand. But he was also very pragmatic and understood from the very beginning that you can't get State to fight with the Defense Department because they're two entirely different kinds of organizations filled with vastly different kinds of people.

He was not universally loved, but I think he was universally respected. He lost some ground with the Foreign Service when he had to castigate all those young men who petitioned against the incursions into Cambodia.

Q: Spring of 1970.

PECK: Yes, that could easily have been--

Q: I was in Saigon in the spring of 1970, so I recall--[Laughter]

PECK: Because he, in a sense, saved their careers. Whether they think that was a good thing or not, I don't know, but the White House certainly wanted their heads and so did the Secretary.

Q: Now how did he get along or work with Henry Kissinger, who was the head of the National Security Council?

PECK: He got along with Kissinger just fine. [Kissinger moved him out to put Bill Porter in. I stayed on to work with Bill Porter for a year.] They got along well. Kissinger respected Alex Johnson, I think, for a number of reasons. One, absolutely trustworthy, dependable, honest, career-dedicated, all the other words. Number two, he knew that Alex Johnson was not seeking any great office. He wasn't willing to cut throats, you know, or to climb up over dead bodies, because he'd gone just about as far as he could go up that ladder. And thirdly, because Alex Johnson had proven himself to be right a fair percentage of the time in the things that he worked on. He was a very, very astute man. Very low key, very quiet. Not a self-promoter, not a big bass drum beater.

But he kind of makes me think of people like Tom Pickering. I digress for a moment. When you realize--for those of us who know what these numbers mean--that Tom Pickering went from FSO-8 to FSO-1 in eleven and a half years, and that the longest time he ever spent in grade was as an FSO-8, then you realize that he went past an awful lot of people. Not one of the people that he worked for begrudged him the fact that he was

smarter than they were. Now there's a gift there that is very rare. Alex Johnson was the same way.

Q: I want to ask you what you did with Alex Johnson. I don't know how you operated. But before that, why don't we--you've talked about him. You worked with William Porter who is another man with a considerable reputation within the Foreign Service. Can you do a little compare and contrast, and how he worked, and that sort of thing? However--let me stop here.

I've asked you to describe William Porter as a man you worked with.

PECK: Bill Porter. I first met him when he was the ambassador in Algiers, and I came through as a language student, finishing up my studies in Tangier. I was given three weeks and two hundred dollars and told to see the world. Or maybe it was two weeks and three hundred dollars--I forget. And I wound up in Algiers and I asked to come in and see the ambassador.

So Ambassador Porter set a meeting on a Saturday morning, and I came in and met the gentleman for the very first time. This was 1964. The residence was right next door to the embassy, with a garden gate between them, and he said, "I suppose that you saw that the embassy is full of people."

I said, "Yes sir."

He said, "You know, I come in on Saturday because I live right here, but I don't have any clue in the world as to why they all come in."

And I remember thinking to myself at the time, that's a fairly un-astute thing to say, because it's obvious as hell to me why they come in, it's because you come in. As a matter of fact--I think to some degree that failing of his--maybe you could call it introspectiveness, introspection--was something that he suffered from on more critical issues. Because he was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs when the 1973 Arab-Israeli war broke out, and I was on duty in the office. It was a Saturday, and I called Ambassador Porter at home saying, "Sir, hope you're listening to the radio. The Arabs and Israelis are at war again."

He said, "I see. What's going on in the State Department?"

I said, "Well, the Secretary's in, up in his office." It was Kissinger then. I said, "And Mr. Sisco"--who was the Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asia--"Is in there."

And Ambassador Porter says, "Has the Secretary sent for me or asked for me?"

I said, "No, sir."

He said, "Well, when he does, call me."

And Kissinger never did. Within five months of that time, I think, Sisco was named Under Secretary and Porter was sent to Canada, which was some kind of punishment. Porter didn't understand that even at his level you've got to be there when important stuff is going on. Otherwise, somebody else is going to do it. It's a lesson that a lot of folks have a very difficult time in learning. Bill Porter did not do his homework like Alex Johnson did.

By the time Porter was Under Secretary, Kissinger was Secretary, and that office was no longer the key focal point of the State Department as it had been in Johnson's day. Part of that was a result of the fact that Alex Johnson had a heart attack, and for about, I think, two months or so, didn't come into the office at all, and then he came in at a reduced level, and everybody was afraid of giving him too much to do. So the office began to lose its primacy, and then Porter came, and then Kissinger came, and that was sort of the end of it all.

Q: Well, now, let's talk about you. What did you do? I mean, here we're talking about during the Johnson years when he was doing these things--what are the dates here?

PECK: I went to work for him I think in January of 1971, and stayed with him for two years, approximately. As I say, he had two special assistants and a staff assistant, but in a sense, if you've read his book--

Q: The Right Hand of Power.

PECK: The Right Hand of Power--where he was, Alex Johnson said that one of the things that he learned how to do early in the career was to use the system, so the whole State Department was his office. I think later on, when special assistants began to number eight or ten per under secretary, they had their own office, and they do a lot of the work there. Alex Johnson picked up the phone--he knew everyone, and he called people, and he dealt with them directly on the phone, or they came up. The special assistants and the staff assistants had areas of responsibility that they watched for him. I watched Africa, the Near East, Pol Mil, and economic affairs--because I had some background in these things, and intelligence. The rest of the stuff was also divided up so that we kept an eye on it for him. He also used us as gophers, you know, check on this, look for that. But the key to his success was that he used the whole department. They were his staff.

Q: So he--the lines of control and all that weren't--it wasn't so fully documented that he had to go to somebody's deputy. He could reach down and--

PECK: Oh, yes.

Q: Talk.

PECK: He would always pass through the chain of command whenever he could. He knew how important that was.

Q: You say you used to watch these various areas. What does that mean?

PECK: I used to look at the traffic and keep in touch with the people in the offices and on the staffs and so on. It was interesting because I am--if I were to say this in the presence of a certain group of people, they will all nod their head very sadly--I'm an iconoclast. And one of the things that has bugged me, when I had a chance to do this, was to sit up in Alex Johnson's office and watch how the secretariat worked its business. I was able to go down and tell all the bureau staff aides that I worked with, "Look, when you've got a paper for Alex Johnson, give me a drop copy."

I can get the thing approved for you before SS (the Executive Secretariat) gets it up to us. Alex Johnson does not care if there's a strikeover, or even if there's a pasteover. Alex Johnson has never measured the margins. Alex Johnson does not give two pinches of coon shit what the paper looks like, as long as it's easily readable, and as long as the document that he has to sign and send forward is proper. But the covering memo--pica type, elite type--he doesn't care. But SS does.

Q: Now this is the secretariat which acts as a--to make sure everything looks pretty.

PECK: Has to be pretty and proper format. I mean, yes, you have to have some kinds of controls, but I have seen--I once saw Bill Rogers' secretary hold a document up to the light and say "Ah hah! A perfectly concealed strikeover. Send it back."

Q: Well, that's when you allow the schoolmarms or the equivalent to take over.

PECK: Oh, you have to remember what happens to the people who go to work in the Executive Secretariat. They very quickly get caught up with their nearness to God. And I have always wanted to be in a position--it never came to me--to line up all of those people and say, "Let me remind you what your function is. You are a portable pneumatic tube through which papers pass. They are not for you. Your job is to facilitate and accelerate and speed the delivery of these papers, not to be obstructionist and nit-picking. Damn you." But when you work in a situation like that, you tend to become very egotistical--you've seen it.

Q: Well, this is the art of the clogging of the arteries.

PECK: I'll tell you how it worked. When Porter was announced as departing and Sisco to replace him, Sisco sent his staff up to talk to me. It was two guys--Ed Djerejian, who's now the ambassador to Syria, and Arnie Raphael, who died when he was ambassador in Pakistan. I knew them both because NEA was one of the bureaus I worked with, being an Arabist. They said, "Okay, Peck. You've been sitting up here for three years, and you are not universally loathed and detested. What's your secret?"

I said, "Hey, it's very easy. This chair in which I am sitting has access, clout, prestige, importance, and an aura of greatness; you have none of these and the minute you begin to confuse yourself with your chair, you're in trouble. Because people speak to the chair with respect and all that, including assistant secretaries, but they're not really talking to you, they're talking to the chair."

Q: Let me ask. Now, okay, one of your briefs was to keep an eye on Africa. There's a flair-up in Zaire or something. Now what would you do? I mean you saw something, maybe it wasn't major yet, but it had potential. How would you operate?

PECK: I would stay plugged in to the extent that I could. It's tough, you know, for one person.

Q: Explain what you mean by being plugged in.

PECK: Well, you read all the daily intelligence briefs and all the daily summaries, and then you also had people in the bureau whom you knew who felt that they could call me and say, "Alex Johnson will want to see item 6 on page 4 of Amman's 6212." Otherwise we might not have noticed it. We would highlight things for him or clip things for him. Or I would say, "Ambassador Johnson, you know, maybe it's time to have somebody come up to see you or send you a paper on this issue."

And he'd say, "Well, you know, not yet." Because he followed most of the important things a little. He was a professional, he was able to follow an awful lot of issues himself, but there would be a paper in preparation, and people would talk to me about how Alex Johnson wanted it! "Is it something he wants to approve or doesn't want to approve? Which way do we aim it? How many options do we give him?" And you could go in and discuss this with him before the paper was written, which really helps move things along. This is something which doesn't happen much anymore. Now you fire your paper up blind, not knowing what is wanted.

Q: When you're speaking about options, there's the story that the normal State Department paper has three options: (1) abject surrender, (2) go to nuclear war, or (3) do what they want you to do.

PECK: Kissinger complained about that.

Q: How did you find the options? I mean how realistic were these?

PECK: Well, Alex Johnson--Ambassador Johnson, I don't think I ever called him Alex in his life, in my life, that is to say--is the kind of person who would say, "I think we'll be able to do this," even if it wasn't option (a), (b), or (c). That's always another option, for the person to exercise his authority. If we get around to it, I want to talk to you about how Kissinger changed the AID program for Egypt that way, in its early days. So anybody at

that level has already learned, Stu, that in addition to the presented options, they can decide to do anything else they could think of: I think we should do this.

The paper should theoretically give you enough of an understanding of the problem so you could see what all the real options are. The bureau's paper says, "We recommend that you go with option (c)." Which is nuclear war--or abject surrender, whichever one you want. That's a slight overstatement. Kissinger always wanted a whole string of recommendations, then you put the good one, the one the authors want, in the middle so it makes good sense. There's no way around that dilemma. It faces every organization that ever existed. Including Momma's and Poppa's.

Q: Okay. Were there any particular crises that you were in where you saw the Johnson organization working?

PECK: Yes. Pakistan-India War, 1972. Alex Johnson's office was the command post, and all the traffic came and went through it. Afterwards, you'll be interested, the Office of the Historian sent up a man with tippy-top secret clearance who could sit and look at all the cables whose copies were only there, to see what instructions had gone out and come back in on how to deal with that issue.

Q: Here we have India and Pakistan fighting, the United States--what the bloody hell were we doing?

PECK: Well, this was a "category three" foreign policy problem, which is to say it's theirs to handle, and decide what to do, but we're very interested for fear that it could flame up into World War III. Also, we thought it was not in our interest to have dissension, chaos, war, insurrection, you know, damage, economic catastrophe. So that we, as a superpower, at that time as the superpower--it was a matter of vital interest to us.

Q: Well, what were you trying to do?

PECK: Defuse. You know, bring the hostilities to an end. Play the honest broker on both sides. It was hard to do with the Indians. Easier to do with the Pakistanis.

Q: Well, I mean what sort of things were Johnson and you doing?

PECK: Oh. God. There were meetings all the time going on in his conference room. In those days he had his own conference room. A big one--I think the under secretary for economics sits in it now. There were constant meetings, there were watch teams, there were people running in and out with traffic. Alex Johnson would be the final say on the clearance of cables. He was off to the White House to the meetings in the situation room there. He was the person that they called up. The NEA bureau kind of turned it over to him--or else he took it from them, I'm not sure which. Because he was sort of the chief operating officer for the Department of State. Irwin wasn't in it and neither was Rogers.

Q: Well, is this sort of what happens when there is a real crisis? You've got to put it all into one person who knows what they're doing and to cut out an awful lot of the clearances, options, and all this. There just isn't time for this.

PECK: That's right, when there's a crisis, yes, a lot of standard procedure goes out the window of necessity, almost by definition. That's what a crisis is, that and the Alex Johnson function in which you never, ever saw anybody running around. It was very quiet and low-key. He was that kind of fellow and affected people that way. But he was decisive, and he was forcefully decisive once the issues were clear and all that. As you point out, that was not our war.

But I was interested in the historian who came up, because he spent quite a bit of time getting dates, times, and names, you know, and who did what to document all of that for the Office of the Historian. Because that was the suite of rooms--if you remember the war, it didn't last very long, but there was--I don't remember many of the details myself any longer--but there was a point in which it threatened to become a major conflagration. And it didn't, for all sorts of reasons, one of which I suppose was the efforts of the United States to make sure that everybody understood the necessities of cooling it off. Staying the hell out of it.

Q: Well, let me ask you, this special assistant role. As someone who's never served as a special assistant myself, I look upon this as--and it's sort of known in the--those that observe career patterns. This is the road to get somewhere, and often the special assistants are sort of the SOBs who run around, the hunting dogs of whoever the great man or great woman is, and they are eventually rewarded with fine posts and upwards and onwards, although they may leave all sorts of resentment and everything else behind. I mean, how do you react to this? In your experience.

PECK: I had had my own dealings with special assistants, and they were much as you describe them. It was partly for this reason that I decided when I went to work there, that I would not fall prey to the game of referring to all the top people by their first names. "Alex thinks that Bill and Jack, you know, are going to be able to talk Steve into doing this." So I addressed everybody to whom I spoke, either in person or on the phone, as "sir" or "ma'am." Always.

Q: I noticed when talking to me you called me, "sir."

PECK: Yes, sir. It's a habit I've not been able to break.

Q: I haven't been "sir'ed" in a long time.

PECK: It's a habit I can't--I was up there for three years, and anybody who came in--I had that little glass-walled office just outside Alex Johnson's door, one of the prestige offices, you know, overlooking the Lincoln Memorial, all of that. Whenever anybody came into that office to talk to me, who didn't work in the office, I stood up to talk to them. Junior to

me, senior to me, secretary, messenger, whatever. I stood up to talk to them. I never talked to them sitting down behind the desk, in order to make myself consciously, constantly aware of the fact that I was only a portable pneumatic tube.

It worked. I was not hated and resented. Many of my associates were, because they'd say, "You! [snaps fingers] You! Over here, Kennedy. I want you to do this or that." Hey. I always said, "Alex Johnson would like to have you do--"

Q: You didn't rip papers out of the secretary's typewriter? I've seen this done by one of our major figures in the Foreign Service.

PECK: Jerry Bremer, I know him well. I watched him--

Q: No, this is Larry Eagleburger.

PECK: Oh, Larry, he's different. Because Jerry was a staff aide for Kissinger when I was there. Anyway, it's very easy to become swept away with the glories of it all, and it's a hard struggle, because you are--you sit in on meetings, you attend sessions, people walk up to you and they say, "Ed"--and it's an assistant secretary of state--"Ed, I really appreciate your help--"

"Well, Bill, I'll see if I can--yes, sir, I'll take care of it." You know, I mean, that's the only way to answer. So that's one of the reasons that Bill Porter asked me to stay on when he took over. He came in from Paris where he'd been doing the Vietnamese peace talks, and when he replaced Alex Johnson, he said, "Alex Johnson suggested that if I don't do anything else, I should keep you in the office."

I remember I told Porter, "Sir, I will give you one hundred and ten percent honesty, dedication, discretion, and effort, but I get lousy marks for reverence."

He said, "Dammit all, Ed. Reverence is the one thing I want from you." [Laughter] We got along fairly well, and I stayed with him until he left.

And when he left, I was out in the hall with my in-box. Just that quickly, no great onward job. No job at all.

Q: Well, now, before we move on to your next job--

PECK: Yes, sir.

Q: Did you deal with Joe Sisco? I ask this because you've made some reference to him, and he is a person of some controversy within the Foreign Service, and I'd like your viewpoint.

PECK: Interesting fellow. I first met Joseph Sisco when I came in to clear with him, as Assistant Secretary for NEA, a U.S. Navy sensitive intelligence collection program in the Mediterranean. The fellow I normally cleared them with, Rodger Davies, who later died in Cyprus, was not in, so I had to go see Sisco. He was sitting at his desk in his shirtsleeves, looking at some stuff. I spread out in front of him a map and chart showing all this Navy business, and I explained what the Navy wanted and why, and he looked at it and he said--and I quote--he said, "Fuck no." And he pushed all my papers across the desk and some of them fell on the floor.

So I picked up the papers and gathered up my stuff and I said, "Mr. Sisco, does this mean that you are not in favor of the program?" [Laughter]

He looked up and he smiled and he said, "Yes, essentially that's the message I'm trying to convey." And we got along rather nicely after that. Sisco is a very controversial chap. A lot of people resent him because he got to be a career minister without ever having served overseas.

Q: I remember the controversy about this.

PECK: The last time I really had anything to do with him personally was when the Egyptian ambassador had a luncheon for people engaged in Egyptian affairs, all the way back to Parker T. Hart, and Sisco was there. We're all sitting at the table and after lunch, people were talking, and Sisco said, "Well, you know, Ashraf" (Ghorbal, the ambassador), he said, "Having held the senior career position in the Foreign Service--blah, blah, blah"--and a lot of teeth could be heard grinding around the table. [Laughter]

Q: My eyebrows went up just when you said that.

PECK: Yes. Because he saw himself as the senior career guy. Well, a lot of people said, "Yeah, he was, but . . ." He was Under Secretary later on.

Q: Yes, but--I mean the whole feeling was that essentially he was a political appointee.

PECK: Well, I should mention two things. While working with U. Alexis Johnson, I was an FSO-4 at the time, equivalent to a 2, today.

Q: FSO-4 was about--

PECK: Major.

Q: About major, lieutenant colonel.

PECK: Lieutenant colonel, yes. I discovered to my intense surprise that the State Department did not have any set procedure of any kind whatsoever, or any collection of papers of any kind whatsoever, which were automatically and routinely used to prepare

people for ambassadorships. So that a successful parking lot operator from Cincinnati, coming in to be named ambassador somewhere, went through the State Department learning whatever people happened to remember to tell him or her, and went off to post without having gone through a set procedure to prepare them. Career or non-career. Nothing, zero, zilch, zip.

I proposed to Alex Johnson that something should be done to rectify this, and I gave him some proposals--I still have the paper--some thoughts on the subject. He encouraged me in this, and I was working on it busily when he left, and Porter stayed on, and I cleared it with Porter. And finally, in 1973, Tom Pickering was the executive secretary, I sent through Pickering to Kissinger a memorandum from me proposing that there be an ambassador's handbook, to contain the following materials, and to be sent out to every ambassador under cover of a letter from Secretary Kissinger, and under a separate memo to the head of every other executive agency with people overseas. I attached both kinds of letters to my memo.

He approved my memorandum, and he signed the two letters, and Tom Pickering said, "Okay, he's done it, now you've got to do it." So I sat down and did the ambassador's handbook on my own time. All the papers in it were assembled or written by me, and it was done up in five hundred copies, to be issued to all the ambassadors. The key ingredient in the collection was President Nixon's letter to ambassadors, in which he said, "I share with you my constitutional responsibilities for the conduct of relations with ---." The Kissinger letter said, "You have been armed with the strongest mandate possible in the executive branch. From the constitution to the president to you.

As the book was being prepared for issuance, after I had gone to Cairo, Nixon left the White House, and the book was never sent out. The five hundred copies were stacked in the Executive Secretariat where they were referred to as "Peck's Folly." Finally they were all shredded, all of them except one, which I kept. For that effort, the State Department gave me a Superior Honor Award as I left Porter's office.

The other thing I wanted to mention--I hope this doesn't sound like horn tooting--when I was sitting up there in Alex Johnson's office with access to all incoming and outgoing traffic, I was struck by the incredible number of telegrams with joint captions. Maybe you remember them. "Joint State/DOD/CIA/USIS message." I began to look at those and I began to realize that that was inappropriate because an outgoing telegram from State has the Secretary's name at the bottom. It's from him, and no other agency has the right to tell an ambassador what to do.

I saw instances in which it would say, "For the Ambassador. Joint State/Defense/Treasury/Commerce/USIS/Library of Congress message. Do this."

I said, "Wrong! Wrong. You can't do that." The main violator was DOD, with State/Defense messages, because everything that had any defense context in it, the State drafting officer would make it a State/Defense message. I said, "You can't do that,

because if you keep sending State/Defense messages to Egypt--for example, someday you send out one that doesn't say State/Defense, and the ambassador has every right to come back and say, 'Hey, should I do that? It doesn't show that Defense cleared it.'"

So I set out on a one-man, single-handed effort to abolish the practice, and it took me almost two years. The first people that I convinced, after repetitive importunings, was the Bureau of Pol Mil Affairs, with Ron Spiers as the director, and Tom Pickering as the deputy. The next success was at NEA bureau, where Sisco finally said, "Shit, you're right."

Anyway, finally I got a State Department worldwide position. The joint captions were out, except in those cases where the telegram was both to an embassy and to a separate military command, in which case it had to be a joint State/Defense message, or else the separate military command wouldn't do it. But if it was to an embassy, with an "Info" copy to a military command--no sir, it could not be joint.

Well, the Defense Department objected violently, and wrote a stinging, angry letter to the Under Secretary, who at that time was Kenneth Rush, who had been Deputy Secretary of Defense. I drafted the reply for Rush, and we now have a worldwide injunction. I also wrote the changes into the Foreign Affairs Manual, so that you can't do that anymore. For that effort, the American Foreign Service Association--AFSA--gave me the Rivkin Award. I was nominated for that by a guy I didn't even know really, but who'd watched this single-handed fight--the yellings, the screamings, the bitchings, and the shriekings--but I got that done, and it's still in effect today, but it's violated from time to time.

I used to tell people that I never really cared about the State/Defense caption as much as I was concerned about the lack of understanding of the people who used them, as to what the chain-of-command is. I said, "Try this." I said this to dozens of colleagues, "Try this. Let's get a message that goes only to a military command and get Defense to make that a State/Defense message. If you can do that, and you never will, then you can do it the other way." Because Defense would never permit a joint State/Defense message addressed only to a military command. Would they?

Q: No.

PECK: No. Okay, so anyway, that was a one-man, one-person effort. I was saying as we were going to lunch that I made some visible differences--that's one of them. The ambassador's handbook was the second one. It has now been revived and reissued. Just before I retired, I was finishing off the third edition, which is now called The Chief of Missions Handbook, which Spiers asked me to rewrite totally. Sorry.

Q: No, no, that's fine.

PECK: It's oral history. [Laughter]

Q: Well, you say you were out in the hall. What happened then?

PECK: I was actually, literally out in the hall with my in-box.

Q: We're talking about 1974.

PECK: That's right. I had no onward job. Porter had left without doing anything for me. It was in--I think it was January, so it was way off cycle, and it looked like I was going to be--

Q: I might add for the record the cycle is usually during the summer, when people want to leave because of the education of their children.

PECK: Right. But they've also been paneled several months before so they could move in the summer. And there I was totally out of cycle. And I sat for two months in a windowless storeroom in the Deputy Secretary's office, while I finished off The Chief of Missions Handbook, which was still being done up.

Let me back up a bit. While I was in Deputy Secretary Porter's office, after the '73 war and the discovery by Henry Kissinger and Anwar Sadat that they had many things in common, the State Department sent a three-man USAID team to Cairo to look at an economic assistance program. The head of the team was a fellow named Bill Templeton, who had been the USAID program officer in Tunisia when I was there. Templeton and his team came back and wrote a memo to Secretary Kissinger, through Porter, from AID and NEA, recommending a \$70 million assistance program for Egypt, bearing in mind absorptive capacity and budgetary restrictions. I looked the memo over for Porter, because that was part of my mandate, sent it to him and he sent it in to Kissinger.

It came back out "Approved," and it said, "Make it \$250 million. H.A.K." [Snaps fingers] Two hundred and fifty million dollar aid program, just like that. Three months later I was assigned to Cairo as the econ/commercial counselor. Largely because--this is the oral history part that maybe is interesting--largely because the ambassador in Cairo was a fellow named Hermann Eilts. Who wanted as his econ/commercial counselor somebody who knew about AID stuff. So he telephoned his former political/econ chief from Jeddah, where he'd also been ambassador, fellow named Fran Dickman. Fran Dickman had been my boss in Tunisia when I was watching the AID business there. Dickman said, "Take Peck," and so when Eilts was given a list of six names, the other five being honest-to-God economists, he took me.

When I got to Cairo I found out why. Eilts said, "I wanted you, Peck, because I am not going to have an AID mission. You are going to run the program. Why did you turn pale?" He said.

I said, "It's a two hundred and fifty million dollar program!" [Laughter]

He said, "I know it'll be a lot of work."

I said, "No, no--uh, oh, eh, Mr. Ambassador, I can't do it. The commodity import program along is seventy million dollars."

He said, "So?"

I said, "Well, if the Egyptians will order one little thing that doesn't have to have specifications and a call for bids, and its worth seventy million dollars, I can handle it. But if they order a hundred and twenty-six different things, with specifications and delivery and breakages and late shipments--"

He said, "No AID mission." So.

Q: Why this aversion to an AID mission?

PECK: He wanted to have a small embassy. When I got there, Stu, President Nixon came through on what turned out to be his farewell peregrinations, in June of 1974. The entire embassy staff was able to fit into a two-bedroom apartment for the wheels-up party when Nixon left.

Q: Better explain what the wheels-up party is.

PECK: Oh, that's after that thing is over, everybody who's left--the plane is off the ground, you get together, relax, and enjoy yourselves. By the time I left Cairo, Eilts was inviting for his Christmas reception at the residence four nights in a row so he could get everybody in. I think I was the thirteenth American when I got there. When I left, I was one of three hundred and twelve.

But Eilts wanted to have a small embassy. It was an effort that was doomed from the start, but he didn't want a great big AID mission. The problems were greater than he was, because after I'd been there for about four months I was required to write his submission to Washington for the next year's AID program. I wrote a sixteen-page first-person telegram for the ambassador to send in, and we requested \$300 million, up from \$250 million. Washington approval came back for \$700 million.

Shortly thereafter, Ambassador Eilts had to give in, and a six-person AID mission came out, at the head of which was Bill Templeton, my old buddy from Tunis. By the time I left--when I went to my last AID staff meeting--there were ninety-three people in the AID mission. They built up to a hundred and forty-four later.

Q: What were you doing?

PECK: I was econ commercial counselor the rest of the time. We had a huge economic assistance program and enormous efforts to help U.S. companies make investments. We

had delegations--Bill Simon (Treasury Secretary) was out there twice--all kinds of programs trying to save the Egyptians from themselves. It was in that assignment--I am by this time an FSO-3, having been promoted while I worked for Porter. While I was there I got promoted to FSO-2. Took three years, I guess.

Anyway, I had another one of those chances to make a little bit of a difference. Certainly from the career perspective, but this was what we were talking about earlier, in terms of reporting. I'd been there for some months, and I still had not yet earned Eilts full confidence, which I later enjoyed. He called me in to tell me, for my ears only, that the IMF was coming in to sign an agreement with Egypt.

Q: International Monetary Fund.

PECK: Yes, sir. An agreement with the IMF was sort of the seal of acceptance on the Egyptian economy which would encourage donations from other countries that just didn't want to pour their money into the sand. To do an agreement with the IMF means you've made some hard decisions to get your economy back on the path to eventual solution of its major problems like unemployment, inflation, capital flight, and so on. Budgetary deficits. And he said, "Just for you to know." I went back up to my office, and I wrote a telegram. It was fairly late at night--there's a sideline to that story--saying that there would not be an IMF agreement and laying out the reasons why. I left that with his secretary, and I went upstairs again, and my bride of three months arrived, so we could go out to dinner.

The next morning I found a security violation on my desk. I'd left my safe open. The security officer, who was one of those hard-eyed guys said, "You're required to fill out this form, and specify what steps you're going to take to ensure it doesn't happen again."

So I wrote it, I said, "In the future, when my bride of four months arrives in the evening to accompany me on our social obligations that follow the work day, I will have her wait downstairs while I change clothes." [Laughter]

The security officer said, "You can't say that."

I said, "That's what I'm going to do." I'd forgotten all about that safe.

Anyway, Ambassador Eilts invited me down and said, "Now wait a minute, wait a minute. The Egyptians have told us that they're going to sign an IMF agreement. The IMF says they're going to sign an IMF agreement, and you say it's not going to happen."

I said, "No, it's not going to happen."

He said, "Well, how the hell do you know?"

I said, "They haven't told Anwar Sadat what it's going to cost yet. These are the ministers of Economy and Finance talking to IMF delegations."

Well, we argued about this a while, and finally, Eilts--this touches on other things we talked about--sent a cable into Washington, making it EXDIS, saying, for whatever it's worth there's a voice of dissent out here. It's the only voice, but you should know about it.

An IMF delegation came out, and the delegation went away, and they did not sign an agreement. Every other embassy in town, and there were eighty of them, all of those that cared, had been reporting the forthcoming IMF agreement, and the only guy who said there wasn't going to be one was right. People became much more interested in what I had to say. The IMF came out again in 1975, exact same scenario, and I was right again. The IMF came out a third time in 1976, and again I was right.

Q: What was the--the essential problem was that Egypt had to straighten itself out financially--

PECK: Reduce subsidies, you know, on all kinds of--consumer goods, begin to talk about closing factories and non-productive enterprises.

Q: All these political no-nos.

PECK: This is a standard thing, yes. I was home on consultations in December 1973, yes, and in early January, just before my leave was over, I was called in to the State Department to talk to the deputy assistant secretary in NEA called Sid Sober.

He said, "Ed, you have been predicting civil unrest for months."

I said, "I've never predicted civil unrest. I have reported that the conditions under which civil unrest might take place are increasing. Then the last thing in the world they're going to want to do is sign an IMF agreement."

He said, "There's a delegation out there right now."

I said I'd known about it.

Well, they signed the agreement as I arrived back in Cairo on the 15th of January, 1977, and on the 17th they had the food riots. They burned buildings and turned over streetcars, and the police opened fire and all kinds of stuff. They unsigned the IMF agreement, okay. So I was right again, they weren't going to do it. They couldn't do it.

It was a marvelous experience working there. I had the enormous gratification of being any number of times right on with what was going to happen, although I was the only voice that was saying it.

For example, Egypt was going to allow foreign banks to open. Eleven American banks sent people out there, ready to go, and I kept saying, "You guys ain't going to be able to open for awhile." The Egyptians are not ready for the competition yet.

Finally, a group of them went to the ambassador, who sent for me, and he said, "Ed, these bankers think that you are partly responsible for them being unable to open."

I said, "Aw, I'm just telling them what's going on. At the very earliest, the very earliest, September of this year"--that was in February--"September of this year (1975), maybe one or two of them will be allowed to open."

Chase finally opened its doors in August. They wanted to know, "How did you know?" I just knew, I could tell. It was a wonderful experience loved Egypt, loved Egyptians, loved the crowds and the noise and the traffic and the dust. Loved the work. Fascinating, rewarding. They laid a Meritorious Honor Award on me when I left there.

Q: Well, now we had this AID program on which the ante kept being increased from what the ambassador or anybody else wanted by, I take it, it was Henry Kissinger? Why, and then how effective was it, as you saw it at that time?

PECK: I'm glad you asked because I wanted to talk about it and forgot. Because I use this in my lectures over at AID. Henry Kissinger, shrewd and astute statesman that he is, saw that the real purpose for the AID program was a very visible quid for Sadat's quo, or vice versa, I forget which comes where, of peace with Israel.

Q: This was--had he (Sadat) made his trip to Israel at that--

PECK: No. That came in '77. But he'd already--they'd made peace. There were various things going on. So Kissinger felt the assistance was the reward for that. But Kissinger made the kind of shattering mistake that a shrewd and astute politician and statesman can make at that level, because he turned over the implementation of this political program to an organization that's dedicated to economic development. AID does not and will resist to the death doing something for political reasons. (Israel is the exception, where the money goes and there's no AID mission there to oversee how it is spent.)

AID sent over hard-working, dedicated, knowledgeable, experienced, trained, long-term economic developers. That means studies and overviews and papers and documents. It means you don't do much of anything for a long time. So that by the time the program had been in operation for just a couple of years, they already had a couple of billion dollars in the pipeline, because AID does not do quick, short, sharp, down-and-dirty stuff. Even if you want to order coking coal for your inefficient, Russian-built blast furnaces, it takes eighteen months to get it. Because you've got to have a call for bids, and then tenders, and then you award the bid, and there's an injunction and a lawsuit, and then the company maybe goes broke, and they're finally shipping the material, and it's late. A year and a half.

It took over three years to get the new buses, which were the one "impact project" that AID would agree to. I left before the buses ever got there, and I was there for three years.

When the buses were finally delivered--the contract was awarded to a company which actually went broke, they were a disaster, unable to handle the way they're used and taken care of over there. It's a shame to see those hulks driving around with the handclasp on the door, you know, "a gift of the American people." Broken, sagging, torn apart.

Anyway, the problem is that when AID gets its teeth locked into assistance, it becomes a long-range economic development program, and don't you forget it. I fought bitterly and viciously along with people like Art Lowrie and April Glaspie and others to get AID to put in some flexibility, make it responsive. No, no, and no.

So that Sadat and Mubarak, on their state visits, years later, when I was country director for Egypt, they said, "That's all we want from you. All what we want is some response to our needs and some speed of disbursement."

Q: Is there any way within our system as it was then, and perhaps today, that one can make a fast response?

PECK: Sure. The Israel case, in which we open a letter of credit and they buy stuff, and we pay for it, and it goes as fast as they can spend it, for whatever they want. There's no AID mission there. You know, it's AID money--the AID legislation restricts the kinds of countries to which you could give assistance. Israel's an exception because its per capita income is much too high to justify an economic assistance program or military sales, as far as that goes. But for political reasons, we give them a blank check. They could, if they wanted to, order forty million subscriptions to Penthouse. We would pay for that. Or four shiploads of pornographic movies. We'd pay for that. Because there are no restrictions.

The Egyptians cannot do it that way at all. Some of the money they get does not have to be repaid, but they do not get cash. They never get cash from us.

Q: But you saw, then, as a political exercise, that didn't work.

PECK: Oh, yes. By the time Mubarak came to Washington, and I wrote the paper to President Reagan from Secretary Haig on the visit, which was cleared by everybody, including AID, it said, "The economic assistance program, far from accomplishing any of the economic goals that either country had at its inception, has in actuality become a political millstone around the neck of the relationship." And AID agreed with that.

Q: Well, then, why don't we move on. I don't know, how's your time going? Should we quit at three, maybe?

PECK: Oh. Yes, let's quit at three, good idea, thank you, sir.

Q: All right. Well, in 1977 I have you listed as getting a very interesting job. How did this come about?

PECK: A standard way. That is to say just by fluke. I left Cairo--

Q: Wait. I want to stop here.

PECK: Yes, sir. Sorry.

Q: Okay. So we were saying, how did you get your next assignment?

PECK: Ambassador Eilts agreed with Roy Atherton, who was the Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and South Asia Bureau, that I would go back to Washington to be the country director for Egypt, a job I did not want, but nonetheless that was going to be the job. The wrinkle was that the incumbent had to stay in position until Roy Atherton found a good job for him. It was Dan Newberry, and Dan did not yet have a good ongoing assignment. So my selection to replace him was being kept quiet. Nobody knew about it outside of Atherton, Peck, and Eilts.

So I came back to Washington on home leave and consultations and was here on the consultations part of it before going off to California with my wife. The day I left the building to fly west I bumped into a man named Charles Martinson, who was at that moment the PER assignments person for NEA.

Q: PER being personnel.

PECK: Personnel. I said, "What's the matter, Charles?"

He said, "I have just found out that my wife will not be cleared for overseas duty."

I said, "Oh, my God. That's terrible, where were you going?"

He said, "I had gotten myself the principal officership in Baghdad, and now I can't go."

I said the right things and went out the door, and they caught up with me in San Francisco. I called my sister to tell her when I was arriving in L.A., and she said, "Oh, they're trying to get you from the State Department, Ed."

I said, "Baghdad", and she said, "No, the name was Christensen." [Laughter]

Okay. I called Christensen. He said, "Would you like to go to Baghdad", and I said, "Yes."

So Charles Martinson got Egyptian Affairs, and I got Baghdad.

Q: Dan Newberry probably ended up back in Turkey, didn't he?

PECK: Oh, Dan Newberry went from that to be, I think, a deputy assistant secretary in CU and then to Istanbul after that. A wonderful guy, Dan Newberry.

Q: Now what was the situation--what were our interests and what was the situation vis-a-vis the United States in Iraq? We're talking about 19--

PECK: '77.

Q: 1977.

PECK: I didn't go for a couple of months because they had to work out some details, some problems. The fellow who had been the principal officer there, who'd gone off to be ambassador in Oman, Marshall Wiley, was recommending very strongly that he not be replaced, as a signal to the Iraqis of U.S. displeasure over the fact that the embassy's longest--one of the embassy's senior local employees, a driver, had been taken out of Marshall Wiley's official car, and the Iraqi police called and said to collect the car, which was parked on the side of the road. And they ran the driver off into seclusion. He was a Kurd.

Anyway, Marshall Wiley suggested that he not be replaced, and the State Department was feeling that he should not only be replaced, but that the person who replaced him, Peck, should have the title of Minister-Counselor, instead of just counselor in the Belgian embassy. So while that was being thrashed out, I was held in Washington, waiting to go.

By the way, I should mention in passing that I have served overseas under three flags: the Swiss flag in Algeria, the Belgian flag in Iraq, and the American flag. I missed the Spanish flag in Cairo by about three months. I still have my I.D. cards identifying me as a Swiss diplomat and as a Belgian diplomat.

Jimmy Carter had announced several times publicly that he wanted diplomatic relations with every country in the world, and had specifically mentioned Iraq on more than one occasion. So this was an issue of some concern to the administration, because they wanted Carter to be able to do it. Throughout the two and a half years of my tenure in Baghdad, we were constantly being nattered at by Washington about the reestablishment of relations. And every time a foreign minister or prime minister or chief of state came through, the ambassador from that country would immediately call me and say, "Ed, Ed, wonderful news! You know, my prime minister--or king, or whatever it was--spoke to Saddam Hussein about having relations reestablished with the United States."

I said, "Yes, thank you very kindly." That was one of the big interests. We wanted that because Carter felt it was something important. I wrote some dissenting telegrams saying, "Look--"

Q: He felt it was something important really for almost geopolitical terms, in other words, we talk to everybody.

PECK: He didn't really understand what the situation was, and I wrote a number of telegrams on this issue, pointing out that the American government representatives in Iraq had as good access to the host government, which is to say, bad, as most of the other people here. If you're not French or East German or Russian or Kuwaiti, you don't get in to see anybody anyway. So we do perfectly well. The presence of a flag and somebody with the title of ambassador will not change a goddamn thing. We tell the Iraqis everything we want them to know. They tell us everything they want us to know, and this is the way it is here. You don't need to keep running around, "Yap, yap, yap," about a flag and an ambassador. Let's be honest. It won't make a goddamn bit of difference. But the White House wanted it.

Q: Well, I might say that this represents some of the ideas that come often out of campaigns and all. I was in South Korea at the same time when Carter had said, well, we're going to withdraw our troops from Korea. This absolutely made no sense.

PECK: Yes. It's the kind of thing in which once you've said it, it becomes a fact and it's a- it was a source of some distress to me. But anyway, that's how I got the assignment. Notice the key things, for anybody who's listening to this, who really knows the system. Had I been assigned as the Director of Egyptian Affairs, I would not have been available to go to Baghdad. It's only because, although already picked, I had not yet been assigned-- so when you push the button to get a list of people who are available to go to Baghdad, beep, beep, beep, here's Peck. Otherwise I would have been assigned to Egyptian Affairs. My name would not have been on the scope, and Nick Veliotis, the senior NEA deputy, would not have been able to say, "Yes. There's your guy."

Q: I might add that in a certain number of these interviews, not of your era or my era, but an era before, I can't tell you the number of interviews I've had, "How did you get such and such as assignment?"

"Well, I was in the men's room, and Loy Henderson came next to me and said, 'Where are you off to?' And then he'd say, 'Oh, you don't want to go there, why don't you go here?'" Or he'd meet him in the hall.

PECK: When I worked for Vice President Bush on the Terrorism Task Force, the former Chief of Naval Operations, Jim Holloway, was my boss. He said, "In the Navy, at Harvard, The New York Times, the State Department, anywhere, your career depends partly on what you know, partly on who you know, but above all, where you happen to be standing when they need somebody." And it's true.

Q: Oh, it is.

PECK: It's absolutely true. That's how I got that Oran job. When I came through from Tunis, they were desperately trying to find somebody to fill the job. If I had been three weeks later, they would have found somebody. If I had been three weeks earlier, they

wouldn't have been so frantic. I walked in and [snaps fingers] got the job just like that, which was a wonderful thing.

Q: What did you do? Well, first place, what was the situation in Iraq at that time while you were there?

PECK: Well, at that time the Iraqis were the big threat to the future and stability of all the kings, princes, and sheiks in the area, because they have an expansionist foreign policy based on their Baathi ideology, which means that the Arab world, in order to deal with its problems, must be unified. And how do you unify it? Forceful and violent overthrow or armed intervention.

So all of those people in the Gulf were scared shitless of the Iraqis, who were very rich and very aggressive and who was it that held the Iraqis back?

Q: Our great ally.

PECK: The Shah of Iran! Who said, "Don't you be after touching me boys down there." When the Shah fell, you had a big role reversal. The big danger became Iran, and the big protector became Iraq, because it was suddenly in Iraq's best interests to keep all the sheiks and princes and emirs from falling.

Q: Well, before we move to the--putting this in perspective--let's take the first half of your tour there, while Iraq was the big threat. First place, Saddam Hussein--could you--your impression, your perspective of this gentleman who still is in power, I might add, today.

PECK: I became the U.S. Government's ranking expert on everything Iraqi, by definition. The day I definitively left that job, I no longer had any standing whatsoever. The guy who took my place got the title and all the prestige, so nobody ever spoke to me again. "The king is dead, long live the king." When I came back on consultations, however, I went to the White House, the CIA, Defense Department--when I came back at the end of the tour, nobody had the time of day for me. It was kind of interesting. But it's happened thousands of times before.

Iraq was very, very wealthy. They were spending money by the quart. A lot of companies were making a lot of dough, selling and building things for the Iraqis. The American interests section had three buildings over which the Belgian flag flew. It was the former Romanian embassy, because the American embassy had been taken over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They had expropriated it. The residence was their School of Foreign Service, in the back of the compound.

I should digress for a second. Jack Jernegan--had been the ambassador in Algeria when I was the consul in Oran, had earlier served as ambassador in Iraq. I was able to write to him and say that I inherited, along with his majordomo and houseboy, all the furniture that had been in his residence.

We had a lot of interests there because they were a powerful force in the region, because they had a lot of money and a lot of oil, because they were an implacable foe, as we saw it, of Israel. They threatened all of the nice little guys in the area that we thought were good fellows.

Q: We're speaking particularly of Jordan, Saudi Arabia--

PECK: Kuwait.

Q: Kuwait.

PECK: Yemen, Oman, all those folks down there. The Iraqis were active everywhere and had limitless money to use. Extraordinary amounts of money. So that there were, I think, thirteen Americans assigned there at the time. We had a fairly heavy consular workload--an awful lot of Iraqis trying to get to the States, for one reason or another, with a very high fraud rate. We had a lot of business goings-on. We had the usual political and economic reporting. Things like that. It was an interesting little fiefdom to have, because it was my own country. I'd already had my own little post, you know, in Oran, but now I had a whole country to work on, and the nice thing about serving in Iraq was that there was no pro-Iraqi voice in the United States Government, and so we were allowed to say the nastiest things we wanted to say, but nobody gave us any flack for it.

Q: Were you getting instructions from Washington: do this, protest that, or something?

PECK: Oh, yes. When I went there we didn't have communications with Washington, you see. We didn't even have a telex, and most of our stuff was either double-talked over the phone, or it was sent down to and came up from Kuwait by courier. I was able, before I left, working with Under Secretary Phil Habib, to shake loose an effort to put in the world's only one-way communications system, in which we, by using the Voice of America receiving antennas on the roof of the building, were able to receive our telegraphic traffic from Athens, but we couldn't send anything back because we weren't allowed to operate radios. So we sent all our message traffic out either one-time pad, which was terrible, or we sent it down to Kuwait and they transmitted it.

Q: A one-time pad being a coding device--

PECK: Done by hand. We sent some stuff out by the telex we finally got, but it was very slow and laborious. By the time I'd been there for, I think, eight months we had one-way communications, and they went to two-way shortly after I left. But it worked.

Q: Well, now, let's go back. What was your impression of Saddam Hussein?

PECK: Saddam Hussein was a village thug who wore Pierre Cardin suits and had lovely bridgework and a nice mustache and all that. I always thought that one of the nicest things

that could happen for the Palestinian cause, if you're interested in nice things happening to the Palestinian cause, would be to have Yasser Arafat meet Saddam Hussein's tailor and barber. Because Arafat looks like a thug and really isn't, and Saddam Hussein doesn't look it but really is. When I got there he was the number two man to a fellow named Ahmed Hassan El Bakr, the "founder of modern Iraq." Saddam Hussein had been number two for about ten years. The people here in Washington made a great big thing about El Bakr's health, and they wanted me to report on it frequently. I told them, flat out and repetitively, that I would not become involved in something like the 20 years of Tito-watching. You know: "Yes, he's staying. No, no, he's going. Yes, he's going. No, he's fine." I said, "When there's something to tell you, I'll tell you, otherwise I ain't going to say a goddamn word."

So in--I think it was May of '78, I've forgotten--I sent a telegram to Washington, the only one I ever sent on the subject saying, "He is going. Been watching him on television, the man is failing fast."

Twenty-eight days later he resigned. Okay, hey. [whistles] Cigar. "I told you so." He resigned and the expected took place, Saddam Hussein's smooth transition, except that two weeks later he machine-gunned twenty-five of his closest associates. Because I think that they felt that now it would be a little more collegial, and he wanted to make sure that they understood that it wasn't going to be at all collegial. He squashed that one very quickly, and he ruled Iraq with what can only be described as an iron hand.

It's impossible for people to understand what that meant until they went to a place like Damascus, also ruled by a tough guy, Hafez El-Assad.

The streets of Damascus were filled with sandbagged guard posts, half tracks, armed patrols marching down the road in step, barricaded buildings, tanks at the street corners. I never saw an armed soldier in Baghdad. Not once. Some of the journalists who had been there at the time, said that when they had census day in Baghdad, you were supposed to stay at home. The streets looked like the final scene in On the Beach, if you remember the movie: there was not a living person in sight, anywhere. Just as if they'd all been vaporized. That country--you don't step out of line or you are gone.

Q: Sounds like North Korea.

PECK: Well, I hate to--it's kind of a Germanic people, yes, like North Korea. They're very, very--they don't smile either, you know, Iraqis. And they have nothing to do with us. They were afraid to come close to us because that was dangerous. As long as you don't step out of line the Iraqi Government never bothers you. Free schooling, free medical care, free housing--free all these nice things, you know. Group liberties, no individual liberties. Freedoms, I should say. But boy, they controlled that place--it was scary.

Q: How did they control it?

PECK: Just by a knowledge that if you stepped out of line, you were a dead man. And the people are controllable. I mean it's, you know--when the stoplight turns red in Iraq, everybody stops. In Egypt they drive up over the sidewalks and around the policeman. It's a different approach. There are these cultural differences--between the Swedes and the Danes. Between the Germans and the Dutch. There are cultural differences.

Q: Well, did you have any dealings with Hussein?

PECK: No, never saw him in my life. But I knew him very well. I watched him a lot on television. If you're a careful observer--I would sit in my little house, especially the last six months I was there because all the dependents were evacuated, and I was there alone. My wife couldn't come the first six months because she was pregnant with our first child, and she was evacuated the last six months because the hostages were taken in Tehran.

But Saddam Hussein would do some interesting things, Stu, which were insightful. When the Shah fell, and Iraq--which has a high percentage of Shiites in its population, concentrated down at Basra, and that was a source of concern. Saddam Hussein went down to Basra, and Iraqi television followed him everywhere, driving his own Chevrolet down the street.

He would stop and get out, wave to the people, and he would walk into a shop on the streets of Basra with the thugs and the goons and the TV cameras and the floodlights coming in right over his shoulder. Inside, selling light bulbs and switches and wires and stuff, some poor guy with his turban on, looking up, you know, horror--here comes Saddam Hussein. And Saddam Hussein would sit down across at his little desk, and he would say, "My name is Saddam Hussein."

"Yes, yes, I know."

"What is your name?"

"Ahmed Fulani."

He'd say, "Well, Ahmed. How are things here?"

"Oh, they're fine, fine."

"Well, do you like the way the government is running things?"

"Oh yes, yes, yes." [Laughter]

"And do you approve of the steps we have taken to--"

"Oh yes, yes, yes, yes."

And then Saddam could announce to the country that, "I've spoken to the people, and they're all in favor of what we're doing." Saddam, you could see in his face, honestly believed that the shopkeeper sitting there was leveling with him. Oh, Saddam, uh uhnnn. That ain't how you find out.

Two nights later Saddam called a meeting of the revolutionary command council, and there'd be twenty-six guys there, all of them mustached, several of them in uniform, sitting around this room, and Saddam Hussein, at the head table, with his Fidel Castro cigar and his Pierre Cardin suit and Louis Jourdan necktie, would say something ponderous. Then he would stop and just look at them for twenty seconds. It's a long time. And for the next twenty seconds he would take a big draw on and exhale smoke from his cigar, and for the next thirty seconds, he would just look around the room without a change of expression and without saying anything. And the camera would pan around looking at these people. None of them were scratching, or shifting, or moving. They were sitting like graven images.

The next night he would have a meeting of two thousand cadre to announce what he'd told to the command council, what he'd seen in Basra. Same approach, the same awesome display of raw, naked power. In the middle of one of his long silences in that large theater, somebody would jump to his feet and scream, "Long live Saddam Hussein! Long live the Baathi party! Long live the Arab revolution! Long live the--"

And the people sitting next to him and in front of him wouldn't even look up. They would all sit staring at the front of the goddamn theater. They didn't even look up at the guy next to them. It was extraordinary.

I said, "Hey, this tells me something. I'm a trained observer, and this place is being run! Saddam Hussein would come into the presidential guest house to greet a visitor. They had a lovely palace there. He'd come in wearing a thobe, you know, it's a black gold bordered cape-like garment, over his western suit. He would come in, and the cameras would be on him, and he would take the thobe up off his shoulders and just throw it backwards, and there was always somebody there to catch it. Just like Cecil B. De Mille sitting down on the movie set? You know, there's a chair under him. Saddam didn't look back to see if anybody was ready--he just threw it. They were there. The man was a king, he was an emperor, he was a prince, he was a god.

When I was getting ready to leave Baghdad, I sat down and wrote a half dozen summations of what I had learned there, which got very nice reviews from my colleagues. In one of them, I think it was the final one, I said, "There is one single issue on which every knowledgeable observer in the city of Baghdad will agree. To wit: there is no logical reason whatsoever for Iraq to go to war with Iran."

And people attacked me afterwards, when the war broke. I said, "But notice what I said: there wasn't any logical reason, and I was right, even though logic's got nothing to do with it." Saddam Hussein discovered an immutable law of international relations. It is easy to

start a war, but it's a hell of a lot harder to stop it. Saddam Hussein has nobody in his country to advise him who has lived anywhere or done anything or learned anything, which is supposed to give them the experience to avoid that kind of mistake. [Not that they would because America replicates its mistakes anyway.] But there is no think tank, no voice of the press, no university, no nothing except Saddam Hussein, who says, "Anybody not in favor of what I've just suggested? Please step up to the wall and put on your blindfold. The rest of you are excused to carry out my orders." But he won the war, sort of.

Q: Well, how did you deal with the government?

PECK: Whenever possible. We were allowed to see officials up to a certain level, depending on the issue, but not too frequently. The highest level I ever got to was when I was asked to deliver a message from Jimmy Carter to the Foreign Minister of Iraq, whom I had met in New York but never saw afterwards, Sa'dun Hammadi. He was a Ph.D. graduate of the University of Minnesota, I think.

I was asked to make a demarche to demand protection for the American interests section in Baghdad after the hostages were taken in Tehran. I was directed not to accept a lower level meeting, so I made a hell of a fuss about it. I told the assistant chief of protocol, who was a woman, a graduate of the George Washington University, "If you do not get me an appropriate meeting, I will call Saddam Hussein and believe me, I have his number. And I know he takes calls from people in the country."

She said, "You have no right."

I said, "I have my instructions."

So I saw an under secretary. He said, "Please do not be frightened."

I said, "I am not frightened. I am carrying out my orders."

"Don't be nervous."

"I am not nervous. I carrying out my instructions to demand protection for my installation and my people."

Anyway, normally we dealt with them on a low-level basis which reflected, amongst other things, fairly severe and--I'll use the word again--basic hostilities, disagreement on various issues. Israel, you know, was one of them. The Palestinian cause was another, closely related issue.

Recognizing what this tape is for, let me say this. The Americans have an exercise they go through with their embassies abroad called "goals and objectives." I received mine for Iraq, and I had to laugh. The number one objective, goal, sent to a man in a country with

which we did not have diplomatic relations and in which we had in fact very, limited low-level official contacts, was to "persuade the Iraqi Government to abandon its hostility to Israel." [Laughter] Which I thought was a worthwhile objective but somewhat unrealistic under the circumstances.

And I sent a telegram back to Washington, which I wish I'd had somebody smart enough to advise me not to send. I said, "I am offended and insulted. Don't you want to make my number two objective to persuade Saddam Hussein to become a Hasid?"

Q: A Hasidic Jew, right?

PECK: Yes, that's right. I mean, you know, shouldn't my number one objective have been "Endeavor to open a dialogue with the Iraqi Government?" Number two to "Establish some form of proper communications." I said, "Can I assume that my Iraqi counterpart in Washington has a message which says, 'Get the United States Government to abandon its support for Israel?' And is that any more realistic than what you assholes have asked me to do?"

Anyway, I wasn't quite that intemperate. But I got a message that said, "Shut up and carry out your orders."

It was ridiculous. For Christ's sake. The number one issue on which the Iraqi government's effort are based was hostility to Israel. And I'm going to change that? It was an entirely commendable and worthwhile goal, but totally unrealistic.

Q: Reminds me of a friend of mine who was deputy chief of mission of Dublin, whose ambassador, as he was leaving, was unhappy that he'd been unable to solve the northern Ireland question, and my friend was afraid that this might reflect on his efficiency report.

PECK: "Despite my instructions, he failed to solve"--you know, that's the kind of asinine thing you can get into.

Q: Things must have taken quite a dramatic turn for you as far as everybody's outlook on the area when the Shah of Iran fell, and there was the hostage crisis. It started to crumble around '78, wasn't it?

PECK: Yes.

Q: '79 the Shah left, and the hostages were taken--

PECK: Taken in November of '79, and we evacuated all the dependents. Yes, except that some people assumed that other people wouldn't make the kinds of miscalculations they actually made. Saddam Hussein announced that he went to war with Iran to topple the Ayatollah. The Ayatollah said his reason for fighting back was to topple Saddam. You

know, they were out to get each other. I had already left when the war broke out. Things were tough enough, when I was there.

Q: But you say logic was saying there's no reason for Iraq to attack Iran. Do you think-- was the problem of navigation on the Shatt-al-Arab a real issue?

PECK: No, Saddam Hussein was very concerned because the Ayatollah and his people were spending a lot of time and effort and money trying to get the Shiites of Iraq to rise up against the Baathi regime, which is a secular regime.

Q: The Shiite being one of the two--Iranian more or less branch of the--

PECK: Well, I used to call it that, yeah.

Q: Not quite, I mean--

PECK: For the purposes of this discussion. So the eastern branch. Saddam Hussein felt that when he went to war, that the Arabs of southwestern Iran would rise up against the Ayatollah. Neither one of these uprisings occurred for various reasons, but it was the kind of miscalculation that even the best-informed, intelligent and experienced government can make. Saddam did it, but there was no one to say him nay. He felt that he was being provoked by all the broadcasts and the rest of it, and he also felt that he could do something about it. He was partly right.

The American embassy by that time had built up a little bit. We had a--USIS was in there. The CIA station had opened--commerce wanted to put in commercial service people, because they'd taken one of our positions from Foreign Service and converted it--I think it was fifteen Americans there then.

I might mention, just in passing, because this is my recording, that another Meritorious Honor Award came out of that assignment, in which my boss, a fellow named Maury Draper, wrote in my efficiency report that "The reporting program from Baghdad, which is based only on secondary and tertiary sourcing, is as good as that which we get from any country in the Middle East, including ones in which the embassy people are practically living in the palace." You know, like Jordan and Saudi Arabia. He said, "It was a dynamite program."

I got promoted on the basis of that assignment, again, from FSO-2 to FSO-1 in three years.

Q: Well, how did this work, I mean let's talk just for a minute before we close this down for today. You had to go secondary, tertiary sources. I mean how do you report? You watch TV and watch how--

PECK: Watch TV, you talk to the Swiss, you go over and call on the Japanese, you go in to see the Saudi, you visit the Syrian--he'll talk to you, you know. You walk down streets, you listen to radio, you listen to the East German and analyze what he says. You talk to the Turkish military attaché. You go to a cocktail party and spend a half an hour jollyng up the Bulgarian and the Russian consolars. Back and forth, and you listen, you experiment, you discuss it amongst yourselves, and then you distill what's happening. This is factual, that's not. This is suppositional, that sounds pretty close to being on. So we were able to tell, with remarkable success. I had a crackerjack team of people.

Q: Could you name some of the names?

PECK: Sure. David Mack was my first deputy. He went on to be DCM in Tunis, and he's now ambassador in the United Arab Emirates. He was replaced by Elizabeth Jones.

There's a story there. I was back in Washington and I had already had a hand in getting David Mack's DCM position. Hal Saunders, who was the assistant secretary said, "Ed, can David Mack be replaced by a woman?"

I said, "The answer to that question is a question. Who?"

He said, "Beth Jones."

I said, "Yes. Yes, Beth Jones could replace him." Some other women couldn't. There are also guys who couldn't. You know. But he asked the wrong question. Beth Jones, yes. She's an Arabist, I worked with her in Cairo, she's bright. She's now the DCM in Pakistan.

Ryan Crocker. He's another Arabist, who is now the political counselor in Cairo. Alan Kieswetter, another Arabist who later wound up as political counselor in Yemen. David Robbins, another Arabist, who's now the econ counselor in Rabat. Whitney Brunner, another Arabist, who's now the political counselor--I mean I had more Arabists there, by fluke, than they had in either Egypt or Saudi Arabia. Hard-working, bright, intelligent. It was a nice, congenial group, and we did dynamite reporting, but using our own intelligence, our backgrounds, reading papers, watching traffic, talking to people, sorting out the wheat from the chaff. And it worked.

Q: How about the Soviets? How did we view the Soviet threat to American interests there? I mean here was a place that was supplying almost everything, and we've often painted these areas, you know, in pink if not in red.

PECK: But that is so self-deluding. The last people in the world that the Iraqis would ever want to get closely involved with a governmental basis are the Russians. They'd much prefer to buy their stuff from us, but we won't sell to them. I'm talking about armaments now. If you can't buy from the U.S., who's the only other supplier who can give you the full range? The Soviets. But the minute they had the money to do it, they began to buy

from France, from the U.K., and elsewhere. Anywhere they could afford. They don't want to fotz around with the Russians.

Q: Why not?

PECK: Because they're afraid of them. There's no clandestine Republican Party in Baghdad waiting to overthrow the government, but there's a communist party there. We don't pose a threat of an internal kind. CIA is a little different sort of business, but--the Russians are not popular, are not liked. In Egypt, I mean Sadat threw them out as soon as he could. If you don't have any other option--I once suggested, only semi-facetiously, years ago, that the way we could guarantee Israel's security, while not losing our Arab friendships, was to switch sides and go with the Arabs, because the minute we did that the Soviets would be forced to come in and take care of Israel to balance us. Let the Russkies worry about Israel. As I say, that's semi-facetious. But it works like that.

The Russians were big suppliers on the military side, very big, they had some access because of it. But the Iraqis are terribly xenophobic. They didn't deal closely with anybody, and they didn't let the Russians get any closer than they were required to in order to maintain the military supply. To keep that inflow coming.

Q: Well, did you find yourself intervening during the Carter Administration? Obviously, human rights was a major issue, and the Kurds were being--

PECK: The Kurds--well, that was largely over. Barzani was here in the States.

Q: Barzani being the leader of the Kurds.

PECK: That's right. He was here in the States, and the Kurdish revolt was pretty much over. The Kurds were already being resettled. You'd drive up to some of the places, and you could see their former villages and the new ones. People were being kind of quiet about it, and it was not a front burner issue. Iraqis still patrolled, and there were occasional shootings and fires, but not any worse than the kind of stuff that the Basques were doing in Spain, or the IRA--

Q: So this was not something you were finding yourself with pressure from Washington.

PECK: No, very little pressure on that score. They liked to know what was happening, but they'd pretty much written it off. That the revolt was over when the Iraqis began to get the helicopters and the tanks from the Soviets in large numbers and developed the skills--they were able to take care of the Kurds. They couldn't fight in those mountains anymore, successfully. So that was not an issue, but civil rights were an issue because we were doing human rights reports.

The report on Iraq was terrible in terms of our view of individual freedoms. They don't have any of those. But on the other hand, as all the diplomats say, nobody died in Iraq

because they couldn't afford medical care. And nobody had to give up education because they couldn't afford it. That was all taken care of. So from that perspective, their belief that individual freedoms are not so important, and collective freedoms are, put them at cross purposes with us from our human rights perspective.

Q: Did you have problems about the fact you'd send in a report, and that would be published the next year, in a report to Congress?

PECK: No.

Q: I mean they just didn't give a damn.

PECK: The Iraqis didn't care. They didn't care. The Iraqis also had some human rights problems in that--you may remember--I'm sure you don't--that a lot of Christians were trying to get out of Iraq. A whole planeload of them were transiting through the States, and there was a lawyer waiting for them. The plane landed, and they weren't allowed to get off, but they fought their way off and claimed asylum.

The Iraqis called me in, and the Director of the First International Directorate, which includes Europe and the U.S., a graduate of UCLA just like I was, named Mohsen Zahaway, called me in to lecture me about this.

I said, "You know, your people have already announced in the press and on the radio that this was a CIA paid-for plot to embarrass your government. Do you know what you did? You just made them certifiable refugees. Because now we can't possibly send them back. Otherwise we would have, because we don't accept their claim as grounds for refugee status, but now you've made them refugees! We're not going to send them back now when you've accused them of involvement in 'A paid CIA plot'" beep. That's it. Forget it now.

But there were large numbers of Iraqis trying to get to the States. The Coptic Church here, some of the other eastern churches, have big major programs to get them in under refugee status.

Q: Do you have many American women who've married Iraqis, trying to get children and American women out?

PECK: No.

Q: That had been taken care of before.

PECK: Americans had a rough time. There were a couple of them. The only one I could think off-hand married to an Iraqi was an older woman. He was a doctor, and their kids had grown up and gone away long since. Interesting you should mention that because I'd never really thought about it. We didn't have any--

Q: We've had this trouble in places like Ethiopia.

PECK: Kuwait and Egypt.

Q: Egypt. And when I was in Saudi Arabia it was a problem, too.

PECK: I'm sorry about that. I'm embarrassed about that, sorry. Anyway, that was not an issue there. The American community there, the only woman that--our embassy nurse was married to an Iraqi, and they had some kids. She was still with him--there were no problems.

Q: Why don't we call this to an end for today?

PECK: That's fine. Getting hoarse.

Q: Yes, we're both--you particularly. Okay, and so that sort of ends the Iraq side, doesn't it? Or is there anything else you'd like to say that we might forget?

PECK: If I think of it, I'll call it to your attention.

Q: Okay.

PECK: Thank you sir.

Q: Ed, let's do just a little--not catching up, but you'd mentioned two things that I'd like to ask you about. One, in our earlier interview, you talked about your problem with the captions, the State Department/Defense. This was actually giving the Department of Defense the equivalent to a veto power over our messages, and you had fought this.

PECK: Well, see, it started as an agreement between State and Defense that certain messages would be jointly captioned as coming from the two organizations. And that was required, so that a message which originated in and was sent by the State Department could also be acted upon by a military command which received that instruction, because it came from both organizations. This was done through the Bureau of Pol Mil Affairs. Well, State/Defense captions were attractive. And what happened with the passage of time, as it only could I think in the Foreign Service, is that it became a method of indicating who had cleared your cable. So that State/Commerce was next, and then State/Treasury, and then State/Commerce/Treasury and Defense, and by the time I stumbled over this thing, and I have a wonderful collection at home, you could have as many as thirteen organizations appearing in the joint caption, including such organizations as the Library of Congress and the Atomic Energy Commission.

Well, as this grew, you began seeing messages come in from posts which would be joint embassy/USAID/Defense attaché/USIS messages, these organizations of course all being part of the embassy. And I fought this because I thought it was terribly untidy, but principally because it seemed clear to me, Stu, that the people who used those kinds of captions did not understand the roles and functions of an ambassador overseas and the Secretary of State in Washington.

As an example, I would talk to an ambassador as a junior officer, saying, "Sir, you sent in these joint embassy/USAID messages."

He said, "Why not?"

I said, "Well, I've never seen a joint embassy/political section message."

He said, "Of course not, Ed, don't be silly, the political section is part of the embassy."

And I would just let him sit with the silence, you know, to see if he got it, and most often, he didn't. USAID is not a separate organization, you see, its also part of the embassy.

Well, I had a number of concerns. One was, as I think I mentioned earlier, that a post receiving joint State/Defense messages could eventually receive a message just from State and be perfectly justified in coming back and saying, "Excuse me. Are we supposed to do that? It doesn't say Defense-cleared." The idea was to go back to basics, that if an instruction went to an embassy and a separate military command, it had to be a joint State/Defense message, but under no other circumstances. Well, when we finally fixed it, I had to go so far as to say in the messages that I wrote for worldwide dissemination over Ambassador Johnson's clearance, that you could not put in the text of a message, "This is a joint State/Defense message," because that was the next step down. Because Defense would insist they had to be in it, even if it was a message from the Department of State to six embassies, with info to four or five military commands. Defense would insist that they had to appear, in the messages, having cleared the message.

And I said, "No! You cannot do that. You cannot do that when it's from me to the people who work for me. I tell them what to do, and nobody else has to know who cleared it."

Q: You mentioned that this was not done when telegrams were sent from Defense to the military commands.

PECK: Heavens no! They would never consider it. Anyway, this was a long and bloody struggle in which I finally prevailed. And as I said to you before we started the tape, what distressed me was the number of people in my own organization, for whom I have respect and compassion and all that, who never understood what my concern was. And learned, intelligent, competent people would say, "Well, now, what's the problem?" I mean, people who literally, to this day--many of my colleagues have joshed me about this--don't

understand what I was trying to do. That I found not only incomprehensible but frightening.

Q: Well, I find it frightening it, too. Because obviously we are talking about giving up power. In an organization when you give somebody else the veto power, you know . . .

PECK: Yes. Not just the veto necessarily, because you diluted your own authority by putting in clearances, references as to who had cleared. When the message goes out, signed "Kennedy, Secretary of State," by definition that is the distillation of the U.S. Government's policy, and he does not have to list in there all the organizations that sat in on the meeting and what they cleared and which sentences represent their inputs. It is my message. I tell you what to do, and you don't have to say to me, "Ambassador Peck, did the AID director clear this?" That's a poor parallel. Say, "Ambassador Peck, did the DCM approve this as well?" Hey. You don't do that. But our folks, to this day, most of them, don't understand. Because every once in a while, we have to reissue the instructions to remind people that they're not to use joint captions for reasons which seem to me so shatteringly obvious that it is compelling that many of my folks, to this day, still don't understand it. By the way, I brought that up only because it was a crusade at which I succeeded, only because of where I sat.

Q: Well, I think too, you're pointing out something else that I've noticed. Anybody who tries to say the Foreign Service, thinking of the Foreign Service as a unity all thinking the same way, has got a terrible mistake.

PECK: Yes, that's true of all organizations.

Q: I found this. I think one of the important things is to come back to Washington to find out how differently, comparable officers of more or less comparable experiences, come out looking at things in quite a different way.

PECK: Let me digress for a moment. I consider myself to be a scholar of foreign affairs and the Foreign Service, not in the sense of books but in the sense of people and systems. There are really two Foreign Services in the United States. They are made up of the same people. One group is that part which is serving overseas, and the other group is that part which is serving in Washington. Their perspectives, their focuses, their thrusts, their understandings, change when they move from one situation to another. And it is not unusual to have a message--I exaggerate of course--come in from a post saying, "Six weeks ago I asked the Department to get Congress to change this rule, and despite my importunings, nothing has happened."

That same person comes back to Washington, changes jobs, and drafts message to post saying, "Six weeks ago we asked you to get the government of France to change its trade policy, and you still have done nothing." There seems to be a total lack of understanding, mutual and interchangeable, when you go from one side of the water to the other. People suffer from that automatic and abrupt transition in the same sense that a person living in

Washington, fully self-sufficient, arrives at post and is no longer able to hang pictures unless the GSO section sends out a three-man team to do it.

Q: Well, I think there's another element there that is one of the problems of the Foreign Service. I'm talking about particularly the desk and the other side, that is both the desk and the field, for dealing with, say, other governments and all that, and that is the "can do" attitude which we as Americans think is fine, but in other words, it's very action-oriented. There's not much time to reflect and really think about it. They see this as we have something to do, let's get it done, and the hell with anybody else. And whether it's changing the French Government or changing our government--how do you feel about this?

PECK: Well, that certainly touches on one of the words that I always use--these days, now that I've retired--when I ask Americans to whom I lecture to pick the one word which best describes the basic encapsulated thrust of American foreign policy. And I always tell them, don't think too hard because I have the word for you, and that word is "arrogance." Because we do know the best way for every country in the world to deal with everything. That's going to have to change a bit now, because there was a time when we could tell them, and now we can't. But whether it's animal traction or family planning or imports or management control spans, whatever it is, we're prepared to tell you how to do it best. And it would not surprise you therefore to discover that Americans sent overseas to represent their country are quite often given tasks which are not really achievable. I think we've gone through Baghdad, haven't we?

Q: Yes, we have. We're just ready to go into Egyptian Affairs.

PECK: I did talk about the "goals and objectives" that I had in Iraq?

Q: Well, why don't you repeat them here.

PECK: I forget sometimes whether I've done it in a lecture. When I was in Iraq as the head American, I received a set of "goals and objectives" from the State Department. The number one objective was to get Iraq to abandon its hostility to Israel. That's--we touched on that because that's the kind of thing which, while laudable and commendable, is not terribly realistic. It's a little arrogant, in fact, if you want to use that word.

Q: And it's stupid.

PECK: Well, all right. [Laughter] The captions--coming back to that briefly--touches on something else. Foreign Service officers are by selection and by training--that's a whole new subject--not supposed to be aggressive or abusive in their behavioral patterns, especially in their personal behavior. I can cover this one I think by talking about an effort that I made to get Alex Johnson involved in a struggle with DOD. The senior special assistant, John Getz, a man who went on to be an ambassador, came into my little cubicle when he learned of my effort, and said to me a phrase which is engraved indelibly on my

mind. It seemed to me to be so much of what I was concerned about in the Foreign Service.

He said, quietly, "Edward, you must never, ever, under any circumstances, get Alex Johnson involved in a fight that he might lose."

I said, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. That means he's lost. If he doesn't get into the fight there is no chance that he can win. If he does get into it, at least there is a possibility."

He said, "No, Ed, Ed. Never, ever get him in a fight if he might lose it."

And that is appalling, but I think it represents, perhaps only subconsciously, the thinking of a great number of Foreign Service people, who find grappling not only unseemly but an admission that you have not been a good diplomat because you have not negotiated away your rights.

Q: Yes.

PECK: Pardon me. I don't wish to monopolize this overly. I used to talk about it a lot when I was in that particular job and since. Let's assume that there is an issue between State and Defense, and so a meeting will be held to resolve it. To the meeting goes Lieutenant Colonel Lance Steele, who, on the basis of his military training and his combat experience and his leadership experience, on the basis of everything that he's been taught, everything that he's seen, on the basis of his role models and his colleagues, and above all, Stu, on the basis of his instructions, he goes to win if he can.

To the same meeting, serene and confident in his certainty that two rational people working together can find some way of accommodating their differences, strides H. Protocol Underling, who is under instructions to negotiate.

Now look, how many people does it take to negotiate? One, not two. Because if you're prepared to negotiate, we'll have an agreement on my terms. If that's what you want to do, negotiate, and I want to win, you will negotiate, and I will win. Foreign Service officers negotiate, especially with other agencies. They don't go in and say, you know, "In your ear" or its negotiating equivalent. They go in to come back with an agreement. Nobody in the State Department says, "Kennedy, go over there goddammit and win." They don't. And the worst thing that can happen to you is to have senior Defense people call the senior State Department people and say, "You know, this Peck is a little abrasive." Ohhhh! That's like flunking your Wassermann in the old days or not passing your Aids test these days. And so we don't go out and, forgive the expression, kick ass. It's tougher against Defense because at one point, when I was trying to get State to fight with Defense, Alex Johnson circled a piece of information that came out of a magazine--I've forgotten which one. It said that the 1972 graduating class at West Point had a membership in which sixty-eight percent had been captains of high school contact sports

teams. Those are tough people for State Department bridge and tennis players to go up against. No offense to bridge or tennis, but it's not the same thing.

Q: No, no. One other thing, and then we'll move back to the chronological thing.

PECK: Yes, sir.

Q: I'd like to pick up another point because as I told you our audience I feel will eventually be researchers not too familiar with the State Department and how the documents are produced. And this may be an aside, but I think it has some value, and that is, would you talk a little about how humor is viewed in reporting? Because the documents tend to be pretty dry, and yet you have people who really have a rather good humor most of the time. I mean they're good raconteurs.

PECK: The Foreign Service is an organization which I think is justly described, if not criticized, as being humorless. Foreign Service officers tend to wrap themselves in dignity, authority, very conscious of the fact that they represent a great nation and a great people, very conscious of the fact that they're an elite group. And they tend to be pretty dry. Any organization, whether it's Georgetown University or the Catholic Church or the Foreign Service, tends to have certain socializing tendencies, in which people observe role models and tend to make themselves most like the people they admire, or people who have been successful, even sometimes their superiors. Humor in the Foreign Service, on the basis of myself having a very strong streak, humor is often equated with a lack of serious purpose. I have always taken my work terribly, dreadfully serious, but I refuse to be overly serious about it. But that's my own personal predilection, and it shows up in reporting messages. Quite often you find people who are trying to inject humor being cute or banal. It's ill-timed. It can't be ill-timed, and so one must be very, very careful. I think it helps to be a little introspective.

Illustration. When I went to Oran, for the first time in my life, and as far as I knew then for the last time, I was able to write first-person messages. So I did all my reporting from Oran in the first person: I, me, my, my, mine, me, mine, mine, whatever. After I'd been there for about six months, I sat down and pulled out all of the airgrams that I had done. I didn't do any telegrams from Oran, really, because of the problems with using one time pads. I was struck by the preponderance of the use of the first person. It was just everywhere. I thought it was grossly overdone, and made a very rapid and total adjustment doing everything in the third person for the next four or five months. Sat down and looked at those, and it was obviously a contrivance, "The reporting officer did this, said that, etc." Thereafter I thought I got a reasonable balance. I did all of the substantive part of the reporting in the third person, and the comment part, if any, in the first person but controlling the use of it. That was much better.

With humor, the same way. I tried to inject a small amount of at least lightheartedness so that the things weren't ponderous to the point of, you know, dusty, dry archives. I was criticized by my embassy for being too negative and so tried to put some light stuff in,

and the man who replaced me, a close colleague, to this day, whenever I see him, still jokes about having found in the files when he took over an airgram entitled, "The Bright Side of the May Floods." Which he thought was a seriously skewed effort to make a difficult thing look pleasant.

Well. Foreign Service reporting, if you put the humor in the wrong place at the wrong time, can undercut what it is you're trying to say, which is the most important, and secondly, it can cast you, if you're the person that they know wrote it, as a lightweight. It's a very delicate issue.

Q: I know in interviewing Ambassador Dick Parker, who was ambassador to Morocco and Lebanon and Algiers, said that Warren Christopher, who was under secretary of state, had no humor, and he was sure that this did not help him at all. I mean Parker's relation with him. Because he said, in a very difficult situation, particularly in Lebanon, you shouldn't have humor. It depends on the person who's reading the telegram.

PECK: It depends on that, and it depends what you're talking about as well. Foreign Service people also tend to become, if they're not careful, automatic denigrators of things that they see in foreign countries and foreign cultures, which can also leap up and bite you when you're not looking for it. Balanced reporting, I guess, is what you want. That's why someone like Roy Atherton--I mention him here by name because he was extraordinarily gifted in his ability to do balanced, straight reporting, without taking advocacies either pro or con, did so well.

I personally felt--this is a major digression but we're coming to it--one of the greatest mistakes that American foreign policy ever made was to send Sam Lewis, a strong-minded, active advocate, to Israel where we didn't need one, and Roy Atherton, the balanced, analytical officer, to Cairo where we could have used an advocate. They went to the wrong places in my mind. I think that that's contributed a little bit to where the United States may have gone wrong in the Middle East. Yes, sir.

Q: Okay. Well, why don't we move on now to where we broke off last time. Let's see, we're talking about--you left Baghdad in 1980, and you became the Director of Egyptian Affairs.

PECK: Yes.

Q: And you were there until 1982.

PECK: Yes, sir.

Q: First place, could you explain what the Director of Egyptian Affairs does, and then would you explain how we saw the situation in Egypt in 1980?

PECK: Yes. Sadat had gone to Jerusalem in 1977, which was one of the things that really I should have mentioned earlier, putting the kibosh--whatever the word is you wish to use--on U.S./Iraqi relations. It split the Arab world wide open, Egypt on one side, and everybody else on the other.

When my tour in Baghdad was coming to a close, after two and a half years, I received a call from Washington saying I was going to be country director for Egypt, a job I still desperately wished to avoid for a number of reasons which will come up in the course of this discussion. I asked for anything, anywhere.

And they said, "Ed, you know, you can't have your own Embassy yet."

I said, "Okay, I'll be a DCM, you could send me as DCM to a lot of places." At one point I was talking to Morris Draper, who was then the deputy assistant secretary of state in NEA, and said, "Maury, for goodness sakes, what about Scandinavia? You are talking to the State Department's foremost Swedish and Arabic speaker. How many Swedish and Arabic speakers do you have?"

There was a pause, and Maury Draper said, "Ed, we don't really need very many." Which I thought was a neat line. I think it was the last relatively humorous comment he and I ever exchanged.

The Office of Egyptian Affairs--the country directorate for Egyptian Affairs--was, in theory at least, part of the NSC system.

Q: National Security--

PECK: National Security Council system. The key focal point in Washington, at which could be pulled together all of the many threads which had to do with American foreign policy affecting a country Egypt for example. State, Defense, Commerce, CIA, AID, USIS, the National Science Foundation, and the Social Security Administration--everybody, supposedly was coordinated through NEA/EGY, the office of Egyptian affairs. It was a huge operation, being run by a very small office. One of the reasons for this was that--I don't want this to sound overly harsh, but I use it because it conveys the picture: People have often said that the Israeli tail wags the Middle Eastern dog as far as U.S. policy is concerned.

Q: I don't think there is any doubt about that.

PECK: Well, it was certainly true in the Egypt/Israel relationship. The key country was Israel. Not that Egypt was ignored or set aside, but the major, the dominant force there was the U.S. relationship with Israel, in every imaginable way. That was part of it. Secondly, with the passage of time, a series of country directors in that office had unsuccessfully fought the loss of control to Defense, to CIA, to AID, where there were

major programs going on in Egypt, and on which it was very difficult to stay fully informed and up-to-date.

Illustration. When I arrived to take over that office, against all my better instincts, I was fascinated to discover that EGY was no larger in numbers of people than it had been before relations had been reestablished: when the embassy was tiny, when there was no AID mission, when there was no military assistance program, when there wasn't all of the other thousands of things that had grown up in the intervening five years. It was the same size staff.

I made what was the first of many critical mistakes, because I arrived and immediately said, "Hey, you know, we're too small."

They said, "How can you tell? You just got here."

I said, "Well, look. We have by far the world's largest economic assistance program--not in terms of dollars because Israel gets more--but in terms of people and programs. The Israeli program has nobody there. Egypt has an enormous program with billions of dollars in the pipeline and hundreds of people in the field. It has an enormous military assistance program, the largest by far because of all of the people we had there with training teams and missions, all the programs." (Israel, again, gets more money but has no U.S. personnel involved. It handles its own program.)

I said, "Despite all this we still have a dinky little office." It took me just about a year to get the staff increased. One of my greatest achievements was getting the extra people into the same office space. We did this by--I joked about it--having bunk desks, where people had to work one above the other.

This was vindictive of the overall problem. I was told by two of the people who brought me into the office that one of the reasons that they wanted me in charge of Egyptian affairs was that I had a reputation, not necessarily a desirable one--as a shin kicker. And they wanted somebody to come in and pull everything back together in one place. I think it was at that point that my superiors made a serious mistake.

Q: Who were your superiors?

PECK: Well, the assistant secretary at that time was Hal Saunders. My immediate superiors were Morris Draper and Michael Sterner. Sterner's specialty was the Egypt-Israel peace process. Draper had Egypt as part of his regional fiefdom. But the error was that they forgot what shin kickers do. Shin kickers kick shins.

Having started out by kicking shins over the size of the staff, I got even further askew by making a tremendous fuss over something that I thought was vindictive of the problem. The Israelis and the Egyptians both had forces in the Sinai along the cease-fire line, or the

peace line, and the United States was engaged in monitoring the two sides to ensure that they did not cross over or build up too close to the line.

All of that was handled by the Office of Israeli and Arab/Israeli Affairs, known as NEA/IAI, so that if the Israelis complained that the Egyptians had a troop movement or an airplane or an overflight or something, the complaint was made by the Israelis to the embassy in Tel Aviv, which reported to State, and the instructions to Cairo were drafted and sent from the Office of Israeli and Arab-Israeli Affairs.

I came in and said, "Hey, that message is to Cairo."

"That's right."

"I do messages to Cairo, right?"

"Wrong."

I went to Mike Sterner, and I said, "You can't do that. It's to Cairo, it's to the embassy in Cairo, and it's being drafted out of IAI and it shows somewhere in the cable. In those days it showed who had made the classification, you recall that period?"

Q: Yes, I recall that. Yes.

PECK: It would show David Korn as drafter. Everybody in Cairo knew that David Korn was Director of IAI. So I told Sterner that the system had to change.

"No, that's the way I want to do it", he said.

I would arrive in the morning for work and find a comeback copy of a telegram, "Secret No-Dis from Sec-State to Embassy Cairo, for the Ambassador," calling Atherton back for consultations. Drafted and sent from the Office of Israeli and Arab-Israeli Affairs. I said, "You can't do that. All of the officers in my section and elsewhere see that cable, and they see that it was drafted and sent without being shown to me. You are undercutting the very functions you want me to perform: To take charge of Egypt."

"That's the way it's done here."

Well, I fought that, gently, quietly, relentlessly, you know, unsuccessfully. Shortly after I arrived in June, the November presidential elections took place and Reagan came to power. In January of 1981 we had a new team in the bureau. Nicholas Veliotos came in as the assistant secretary for NEA, Maurice Draper and Mike Sterner stayed on. Peter Constable, the senior deputy stayed on.

Nick Veliotos was an old associate of mine, and I picked up the cudgels again, trying to establish my primacy in the State Department by pointing out to my superiors that

elsewhere in Washington, by tenacity and abrasiveness and abusiveness and competence and energy, my officers and I had really gotten back into the saddle in terms of managing Egyptian affairs, but the one place where we had failed was in the State Department. I was unsuccessful, and a lot of things happened which were unfortunate.

As an illustration of the kind of problem that I had, Ashraf Ghorbal asked to come in to see the Secretary of State.

Q: Who is this?

PECK: Pardon me. Ashraf Ghorbal was the Egyptian ambassador, a Harvard Ph.D., extremely competent, very gifted, very aggressive, very energetic, very assertive, very well-connected, very much respected and liked. He had access everywhere. Other people in the Department of State would process long, lengthy papers asking for a meeting with the Secretary of State. In the case of Ghorbal, I would get a call from the Secretary's office saying, "He's coming in to see the Secretary of State two days from now. Give us a paper."

So I would call Ashraf, "What's it about?"

I did a paper once covering a meeting that Ghorbal wanted to have with the Secretary in which I listed the five topics he wanted to cover, one of which was the refusal of President--by this time--Mubarak to go to Jerusalem to meet with Begin. Mubarak said he would go anywhere else, but not to Jerusalem. The Israelis were very upset.

So I sent the memo forward, fully cleared from all sides, to Secretary Haig, from Nicholas Veliotis, saying here's what Ghorbal wishes to talk about. The next morning when I came in, and the meeting was early in the morning, my deputy showed me, without comment, a copy of that memorandum, which had been totally rewritten. Haig apparently had caught it late at night and had sent a request down for more information on the Jerusalem aspect. The bureau had called in the IAI Director, who totally rewrote the memo, focusing on only one issue, the Jerusalem visit, and had resubmitted the memo. My bureau sent it forward without ever telling me what was happening.

I went immediately to Peter Constable, the senior deputy, and said, "You know, goddammit, you cannot do this and expect the person who occupies the chair in my office to function as the country director for Egypt, when you guys, right in here, will do something like this." I berated him, I think, and probably should not have.

He remained silent, and I left. Went down the hall and berated Draper, my immediate supervisor, who had cleared the message. I said, "You're cutting"--forgive the expression--"you're cutting the nuts off the very guy you're expecting to try to run that office. You cannot do that, you bastards." Or something along that line. Well, it cost me.

Egypt was a key country. The United States was hamstrung in the relationship by a number of our own failings, one of which was the primacy of Israel in that bilateral relationship, and regionally as well. Many of the things that we might have considered doing for Egypt, if it had been in North Africa or somewhere else, we could not or would not do because of the concerns of Israel as reflected or as modified by the optic of the Israeli lobby in the United States.

The Israeli lobby, by the way, I define as everyone--and there's an awful lot of folk--who believe very strongly that it should be that way. I don't limit it to Congress, I don't limit it to fundamental Christians, I don't limit it to Jewish-Americans, I don't limit it to anybody. It's a great accretion of people and forces. But this was the major inhabitant.

The second one was that Egypt, despite the fact that everybody loved Anwar Sadat, who was, as I said once in a press briefing before he came to this country, sort of the Walter Cronkite of the Middle East. When I made that comment at a foreign press briefing, a member of the Israeli press who was present, broke in and said, "Mr. Peck, if Anwar Sadat is Walter Cronkite, who is Menachem Begin?"

I restrained a very strong tendency to say, "Attila the Hun," and I said, "I haven't thought about that. I don't work on Israeli Affairs."

But Anwar Sadat was a great fuzzy puppy, loved, revered, respected and admired by almost everyone, not terribly "apt," not exceptionally competent, but certainly, as far as Americans were concerned, a wonderful guy, who, in addition to being a charming, open individual, had made peace with Israel. I mean he had no enemies in this country, except some people who saw him as a danger to the existing American-Israeli relationship, because he was such a nice Arab.

Anwar Sadat sort of exemplified for me the problems that we have faced in the Middle East, because I was terrified when I was watching TV in Baghdad and saw Menachem Begin, Jimmy Carter, and Anwar Sadat sitting down at Camp David to do Middle East peace. The reason I was concerned was fairly simple in my mind. Jimmy Carter wanted peace and love and brotherhood and understanding and friendship. Anwar Sadat wasn't really sure what he wanted except something different than what he'd had, and the only person in that triumvirate who knew precisely what he wanted and had known for a long, long time, was Menachem Begin. This ties in nicely with my earlier discussion.

Q: I was going to say, yes.

PECK: Because Menachem Begin went through those two guys like a dose of salts. He knew precisely what he wanted to get, and by the way this is not in any way to be considered a denigration of the man. He had known for a long time what he wanted. And Anwar and Jimmy didn't. Jimmy Carter, I still remember, a wonderful man, a nice guy, he could have been a Foreign Service officer, being terribly distressed and upset when he

discovered after the accords were signed that Menachem Begin intended to build more settlements. You remember that great dust-up?

Q: Yes, I remember.

PECK: Carter said publicly many times--

Q: These are more settlements in the occupied areas.

PECK: Carter said--he didn't use these words--"I've been betrayed." "No, no, read what you wrote. Read what you signed," Menachem Begin said. "Yes, we were going to stop building settlements for the next seventy-two hours"--whatever it was--"and then go right on with it." Carter and Sadat, from the perspective of what they hoped to get, were seriously had by Menachem Begin. Because they didn't really know and Menachem did.

Anyway, by the time I got to the Office of Egyptian Affairs, things were pretty much of a mess, and the relationship was beginning, if not to sour, was beginning to lose the bloom. The Egyptians unthinkingly, unrealistically, kind of expected that when they had their new relationship with the U.S., all of their problems were going to be solved. I stood on the roof of the Nile Hilton Hotel in June of 1974, when Anwar Sadat and Richard Nixon crossed the bridge from Garden City into the heart of downtown Cairo, through Tahrir Square, which the Hilton Hotel overlooks. It was wall-to-wall Egyptians as far as the eye could see, and the reaction was extraordinary. They lifted the roofs off buildings with the cheering and the shouting and the love and the power, and up on that twelfth floor roof we could feel it. You may recall that Nixon said later, "You can turn people out, but you cannot turn them on." Had I been Richard Nixon, I would have carried that moment--perhaps he will--to the grave.

Because it was extraordinary, it was unbelievable Stu, and it was unrealistic, because the Egyptians said, "At last, peace with Israel (damn them), friendship with America, and aid programs. Alhamdulillah, all of the bad days are over." Egyptians are not particularly practical when it comes to those kinds of issues any more than Americans. The Egyptians expected us to do everything. We announced, as I think I said earlier on, millions of dollars in assistance, which the Egyptians never saw, really. We announced billions in assistance, which in Egyptian terms is a drop in the bucket, even if we'd given it to them in cash, which we didn't. Even we had used it to provide them instantly [snaps fingers] with things that they could see and use. Which we didn't.

When I came to the country directorate, everything had become fairly routine. It was no longer that exciting that they had peace. Anwar Sadat was a known factor. He'd had his long television interviews with Barbara Walters, with Walter Cronkite, with everybody. He was available, he was open. When I was in Cairo in '74 and '5 and '6 and '7, we had hundreds of Congressmen, hundreds of Senators and cabinet officers came through--and he saw them all. Repetitively and openly. Talked in his open, warm, intelligent, you

know, dignified, capable way of his dreams of various things. Well, the bloom was off the rose.

The American Embassy was enormous. It was described then as the largest overseas mission. No one really knew how large it was because people were coming and going by the score.

The biggest problem I suppose was with AID, which had managed by that time to have a couple of hundred people there, and a list of projects that was so long that really computers alone permitted us to keep track of what they were, let alone of where they were, what was happening with them, the status. The fight to make AID responsive to Egypt's needs from within the embassy had long since failed.

As the result of Egyptian demands, the Secretary of State had designated one American official, Maury Draper, to oversee ten high-impact--which is to say rapid implementation--AID projects. By the time I got to the desk, the first five or six meetings or seven meetings had passed, and they'd had papers written, and it had just kind of evaporated, because by their very nature AID programs are neither rapidly moving nor fast disbursing. American and Egyptian bureaucracies deserved each other, and the AID approval process was something that had to be seen on paper to be fully believed, let alone understood.

I came in to, had to, rejuvenate this effort, and was unsuccessful. Draper is an extremely competent, very, very capable officer, who wasn't able to devote the kind of attention that he perhaps should have to the AID program, and never really understood what it was he was dealing with. At one point he raged at me when I suggested that even commodity purchases under the AID program took eighteen months to arrive in country. He could not accept that fact, and he said, "Don't be ridiculous," and literally did everything except throw me out of the office. I had to come back and show him the messages explaining that eighteen months was indeed extremely rapid delivery of a commodity purchase, and that quite often it went over two years. He'd never gotten far enough into the business to understand this. By the time Sadat came, in June--

Q: Visited here.

PECK: Yes, sir. He came as the first of the Middle Eastern visits to the Reagan Administration. He came in June of '81. I was able to clear a paper from Secretary Haig to the President on what it was all about, that visit. And to say in it, with a clearance from AID, that the economic assistance program, far from achieving the economic goals which either country had set, has actually become a political millstone.

Q: Ed, you were saying about the visit of Sadat to Reagan in '81. About aid not producing what people thought it would.

PECK: It didn't, and I guess it's one of the central factors in that relationship. Not the only one, but it's worth a reference because it underlies some of my concerns about the fact

that our foreign policy formulation and implementation is fortunately, I guess, a kind of a diffuse, diversely oriented effort, and I forget whether it's on one of these tapes or in one of my lectures that I've talked about the mistake that Henry Kissinger made when he set up a huge aid program--

Q: That idea that it would be--it was a political rather than a--

PECK: Yes, and we had no means of implementing it other than going to AID with it, which has other reasons for existing, and if you will permit me to say this, a different agenda. I mean that's a part of its mandate. But the AID program was so difficult to get hold of, so huge, hundreds of people, thousands of telegrams, messages, teams back and forth, that it was impossible for the Office of Egyptian Affairs, which had one economic officer, to try to keep track of what they were doing. Out at the American Embassy, where the AID mission was larger than the embassy--State Department component--by a magnitude of eight to one, they couldn't keep up with it either. There was no machinery for saying, "Hey, wait, wait, wait. Don't do that." Until all of a sudden you discovered that they were doing it, or, in some cases, had done it. Making decisions, signing contracts, sending people.

I offer you a microcosmic illustration of the problem. Draper, a very forceful, dynamic officer, called me in shortly after I arrived to show me a telegram from Roy Atherton, of whom there are fewer competent men.

Q: He was ambassador to Egypt.

PECK: He was the ambassador at that time, having been assistant secretary. He said, "For the Lord's sake, stop the flow of visitors. Everybody is up to their collective asses taking care of visitors. We can't get any work done." You know, with escorts and teams and cars and drivers and hotels, airports, the usual business. He said, "Do not forget that we have a presidential directive that all executive branch visitors to Cairo have to be approved at the State Department.

So Draper said, "Peck, get in there and get a handle on the visitors." We had a presidential directive to all executive branch agencies, says you can't go unless you get approval. Well, how do you do this? You set a shin kicker to work, and I had schedule boards and timing charts and tables and all kinds of stuff in no time.

What I discovered instantly was that if I shut off another delegation from Defense by refusing permission, Defense would call up the Ambassador, who would say, of course, come.

I got my trusses sawn off by the embassy so many times, that I got on the phone finally at one point to the DCM, Henry Precht, to say, you know, "You bastards! You're urging me to stand up here and stop these people, but you won't help me do it." I would stop

somebody, and they would call someone in the Department, or one of my bosses, or somebody in the embassy, and just run right around me.

I was never really able to stop anyone. I sent some messages out to Cairo, which was being buried in visitors from all the military commands in Europe, who flew down with their own airplanes and fifteen people on board and all the rest, and I said, "Look, it's a very simple thing to do. When you get a telegram from Lieutenant General Glotz, tell him that the General and his staff, consisting of two people, may come, but no airplane."

And they said, "What'll that do?"

I said, "Well, then he won't come." Because Defense will say, "We cannot afford to buy airline tickets, but we can afford to send down a four-engine plane with all the people on it." The embassy was complaining bitterly that the attaché's office was spending all of its time taking care of the passengers and crews, and the security details, and also there was a very unconscionable U.S. presence always at the airport, with the big planes out there and all the uniforms running around.

I said, "Stop the planes, and the people won't come, or if they do come, it's manageable." But the embassy wouldn't do it. So I said, "Well, then, goddammit, don't bug me anymore." I shut off a three-man photographic team from OPIC--Office of Private Investment . . .

Q: Corporation or something.

PECK: What is OPIC? Overseas Private Investment Corporation. Anyway, they wanted to go out and photograph potential site, for two weeks. So I stopped them, and OPIC called up and got an okay from the embassy. Anyway, it was a hopeless fight, in which whatever I did, it was wrong. But I was constantly being berated for trying to stop people and constantly being upbraided for not stopping people. It was highly frustrating for someone like me who cared, you know. [Laughter]

Q: First, before we move past this, what was our reaction--not just the initial reaction, but the reaction of the Office of Egyptian Affairs and of the State Department when Sadat was assassinated and Mubarak came in?

PECK: Let me get to that in one second. Because I forgot to touch on one of the key things. One of the frustrations that I had. When Sadat came, Assistant Secretary Veliotis told me that he had secured the Secretary Haig's concurrence in the fact that the--what they call the scope paper, the very short paper that went from Haig to President Reagan on the visit, would only be cleared in the Department by NEA, by the under secretary for political affairs, and by the secretary himself, period.

Well, I wrote the scope paper. It was a pretty good one, and I cleared it throughout the Washington bureaucracy. So it tended to be a little bit of a waffle.

I want to digress for one second. I got into a great fight with a political appointee who'd come in to be a staff aide to one counselor. I sent him a paper on Egypt once, and when I got all the clearances in, I did the final paper and sent it forward with copies to everybody. This guy called me, no names in this particular case, and he said, "Goddammit Peck, you sent that message, that memo forward."

I said, "Yes, I did."

He said, "You did not make all my corrections and changes."

I said, "I make substantive changes only, not linguistic changes. No "happy" to "glad" or "large" to "big"."

He said, "I had some good phrases in there."

I said, "So did ninety-three other people. I'm not going to sit here and put together a composite message written by twenty-six different offices. You cleared the substance; the message went."

"Well, goddammit, I'm going to see about this."

I said, "Well, you better hurry", and hung up. Because I haven't got time to let people play with words. Everybody changes words. I'd spend the rest of my life fixing it.

Well, back to the Sadat paper. Veliotis came in to EGY and told me, "I'm sorry. We have to get two more clearances within the Department. The paper has to be sent to the Office of the Counselor, who was--"

Q: Technically number three person in the Department, sometimes.

PECK: Pardon me, no, the counselor to the Secretary, whose name was Bud McFarlane. And to the Office of the Policy Planning Council, run by Paul Wolfowitz. So I took this fully cleared message and sent it to those two places, and it came back with one major change. I bring it up now because I thought it was kind of interesting at the time and I still do.

I had written that "Anwar Sadat will seek three things from his meetings with you, Mr. President. First, the establishment of the close personal relationships that he has had with your predecessors and which are very important to him, both personally and as the leader of the Egyptian nation. Second, an indication that the United States intends to continue its economic and military assistance programs at something approximating current levels, at a minimum. Third, some sign that the United States Government remains committed to a solution to the Palestinian problem."

That last phrase had been crossed out in both copies that were returned to me and substituted therefore was a phrase which said, "Third, the United States remains committed to improving quality of life on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip."

Well, I called the people involved in the clearances and I said, "Hey, look. Perhaps you're misunderstanding. I'm not making any value judgments or recommendations on whether the United States should or should not be committed to a solution of the Palestinian problem. I'm only trying to tell the President what Sadat is looking for."

"Well, I'm sorry you can't say that."

I said, "But I'm not really saying it. I'm saying it because the President should know that--"

"The language stands as changed."

Well, I went to my bosses and my bosses' bosses, and the changed language stood. And I thought to myself at the time that that was an incredibly inept and unsanitary way to handle U.S. relations, because you could have added a phrase just saying, you know, "Sadat stupidly seeks" or "incorrectly expects" or "something that we have no intention of doing." You could do that. But I thought it was unseemly at least, to remove what everybody agreed was one of Sadat's objectives. One of the people involved told me, "You cannot use the word Palestinian in that paper." Which I thought, boy, now that's dangerous and dumb. Well, realistically speaking, that is, of course, the way politics--and foreign affairs are a form of politics--that's the way politics work. You sweep certain things under the rug.

It was the first time that I had had my face rubbed into it so drastically, because--I don't mean to be boasting about it--but I fought that. I went upstairs and got into voices raised discussions with the people involved and lost, because they were not going to let me say anything about a U.S. commitment, or U.S. interest in, or U.S. awareness of.

I said, "How about an increased U.S. awareness of his (Sadat's) desire to get the Palestinians--"

"No."

I could not find a formulation which carried in it a modicum of truth, that would satisfy the two people who had a lock on what that paper was going to say. I found that distressing. Perhaps I should not have. People who were senior to me, who understood what was happening, were somehow better able to say, well, you know, that's the way it is. Actually, I suppose the White House knows better.

Q: But of course this shows how the bureaucracy can work to ill-inform a president.

PECK: Yes, sir, but it wasn't the bureaucracy in this case. The people involved were outsiders.

Q: Well, the outsiders--I mean they were still part of the bureaucracy. They were put in on top of bureaucracy.

PECK: They had a separate agenda, those two individuals, and they felt, rightly or wrongly, that that kind of phraseology, or the concept which that phraseology embodied, threatened--forgive me, I don't mean to overstate the case--the future and security of the state of Israel and the well-being of its citizens.

Q: Well, now, in the first place we're talking about Bud McFarlane as the counselor, and who was the other one?

PECK: It was not Bud himself, it was his office. And Paul Wolfowitz, it was his office. I'm sure they saw the language, sure they saw the language.

Bud McFarlane--I digress. Bud McFarlane met with all of the country directors of the key Middle-Eastern-end-of-the Mediterranean countries, because he was asked by Al Haig to take a special role in the area. And now I will recount an incident, as I recall it, from a meeting that I had--that meeting with Bud McFarlane.

He said, "Ed, you were recently in Baghdad."

I said, "That is correct."

He said, "Surely, surely, Iraq's leaders have enough sense to see that the real threat, the only meaningful threat, comes from the advance of godless communism, and that their best hope for salvation lies in lining up, arms linked, with Syria and Israel to stand against this hostile challenge."

And I said, "Uh. Well, no, not really. They don't get on well with Syria and Israel."

He said, "But that's what they have to do, cast aside these little, you know, the petty little things of the now, and get set for the big one."

And I said, "Well, um, that's not very likely."

And he was literally unable to understand or accept the fact that the leaders of Iraq for one, and of Israel and Syria for the other two, didn't see it that way at all. I was quite distressed to perceive--well, my perception of his very limited ability to understand, you know, real politics if you will.

Q: Well, I might mention Bud McFarlane later became the National Security Advisor.

PECK: That's true. He became Deputy National Security Advisor and then went on to become the National Security Advisor and resigned just before the Watergate scandal unraveled.

Q: The Iran-Contragate.

PECK: Pardon me, that's what I meant to say. Did I say Watergate? Goodness gracious, shades of fading memories. The Iran-Contragate. Yes. Poindexter replaced him.

To go back. The point I mention about that paper was vindictive of the kind of problems that I referred to earlier in the Egyptian-U.S. relationship. It was driven by other mechanisms. Sadat had an extraordinarily successful visit from the personal perspective up on the Hill. I went with him a number of places, and everywhere he went he was revered and loved and respected, trusted, a man of dignity, compassion, intelligence. I wrote for the president the toast to use at the White House dinner. By the way in those days, largely because Al Haig, with his military background understood these things, country directors went to White House dinners. They don't anymore.

I wrote a toast which was great. It had some phrases in it that rang. "Trained as a soldier, you have indelibly inscribed your name in the history of achievements as a man of peace. Proud of your village heritage, you will be remembered as a man with global vision, etc." They trashed all of that and put in some nice film analogies and things instead, and they threw out this wonderful stuff which I thought was what the Americans thought about when they thought of Anwar Sadat. The military villager who'd become a statesman. Anyway, I thought it was great stuff.

Anwar returned to Egypt and on the sixth of October, while he was viewing the Independence Day parade, he was assassinated. Kwhap. And his place was immediately taken by the fellow who survived, standing right next to him, Hosni Mubarak. Incredible. He was well-known in this country, having come several times while he was vice president, and had received, in his own right, any number of people as visitors in Cairo. The transition was, you know, fairly smooth, it was--except for that assassination and the troubles down in Assiut and elsewhere, there wasn't much bloodshed. Wasn't much. And the transition took place. Three former presidents, I think, three of them, no two of them.

Q: No, three: Nixon, Carter, and Ford.

PECK: Ford. All three went, as did Secretary Haig, to the funeral and afterwards. We had a task force up in the seventh floor Operations Center when Sadat was shot. After he died, we went back downstairs, and we had to do all the papers for these three former Presidents and a Secretary of State and this big delegation going to Cairo. The office was frantic, and all eight phone lines rang incessantly as people all over the country called up to find out about the status of their friends or their relatives. Since there was no task force, all the telephone calls came to the Office of Egyptian Affairs, EGY.

I went to see several people, saying, "For God's sakes, cut those lines! Snip those lines. We can't get a damn thing done with the phones ringing just constantly."

They couldn't do it.

So I said, "Well, in that case, give me three people just to sit in there and answer the telephone so we can get on with the work"--and they couldn't do that, either.

This Drove home personally a complaint that I've always had, that the State Department is a little bit like that famous cartoon just before World War II broke out. It showed a calm Uncle Sam at one end of a lifeboat, with the Europeans at the other baling wildly as waves labeled "Axis aggression", come in on all the sides, and Uncle Sam is saying, "Thank heavens the leak is not at my end of the boat."

Okay. Because at the State Department, you know, most people go home on time, even though one end of the building is fighting fires frantically as Latin America, Afghanistan, or whatever it is, goes down the drain. The Office of Egyptian Affairs was going stark staring apeshit, and there was no place in the entire Department of State where they could produce three people capable of saying, "No, everyone is fine. We have no reports of problems!"

Q: And I have to say at this point, I know because I was one of them, and they had people walking the halls with no real assignments.

PECK: They could have pulled people out of FSI--anywhere--just to come in and say, "No, we have no reports." Anywhere! They could not do a goddamn thing, and it drove me wild. But of course, we just took the phones off the hooks and unplugged the consoles. It was really a source of great distress, because we had ninety-five papers, all of them thirty-eight pages long, or so it seemed at the time, to get done in three days. The inability to shift resources to where they are needed, as they are needed, is a great management failing at State.

Well. The relationship continued essentially unchanged with Hosni Mubarak. The United States had already done, seriously, all of the things that they could have done to undercut the relationship. During Sadat's regime they insisted that something be done prominently visible to show a commitment to Egypt's ability to protect and defend itself. Because when the Russians left, they took with them all their technicians, and the Egyptian military began to unwind as spare parts and maintenance began to play a role in making it ineffective.

The United States stepped up and sold Egypt a squadron of F-4s, the world's most sophisticated fighter-interceptor aircraft. The Egyptians had no one trained to fly them, to maintain them, to repair them, to check them out. So that was a serious problem. The Egyptians were horrified to discover that we had sold them those airplanes, using military

assistance money set aside for Egypt, at a price higher than we had paid for the same F-4s when they were new.

Well, you see the reason for that, Mohammed, is that we have to replace these because they're coming out of inventory, and they cost more individually now than they used to. But since the U.S. buys a large amount, they cost us less individually. So you have to buy the old ones at the cost we initially paid for them, but we're replacing them with new ones which cost less than the old ones you're buying.

Uh, Stu, the Egyptians didn't like that. They discovered that the Israelis were also getting new F-4s for less than they were paying for used ones.

Q: The Israelis were buying more.

PECK: Yes. That rankled. That really ate into the core of the relationship, because the damned planes wouldn't fly, the Egyptians couldn't fly them, they could not maintain them, they're incredibly sophisticated. They had no technicians. They weren't used to that kind of airplane. It was a serious blow of a long-term nature in the relationship. They really didn't like that. Politically it was a savage, savage kick in the shins. Highly corrosive, because they still talk about it. Just as they talked about the fact that the highly touted aid program essentially went to line the pockets of American consultants. It's the kind of complaints that you hear now in Washington about what consultants are for.

Q: And with great validity.

PECK: Yes. Long-term studies of studies of studies. Very little that they actually could see or touch. The constant, as they perceived it, kowtowing to Israeli desires and Israeli issues and Israeli wants. During my tenure, the final Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai took place, and towards the end it became clear that there was quite a political turmoil within Israel, and the embassy kept reporting, like writing the press, about the agony of Israeli withdrawal. Finally, Deputy Secretary Walter Stoessel was sent to Israel on sort of a hand-holding mission to ensure that the Israelis actually went through with the final withdrawal, because they had some settlements--remember Yammit?

Q: I remember this.

PECK: The settlers at Yammit had barricaded themselves and were going to fight to the death to stay.

Q: Barricaded themselves, and they were--yes, yes, I remember that, it was on the TV.

PECK: Yes, big thing. The Israeli Army painfully had to remove their own settlers and all this kind of business. The settlers said, "By God, this is Israel. We fought for it, we bled for it, it's ours, we made the desert bloom."

There was a joke in the Middle East about the Israeli phrase, when they say, "You know how you make a desert bloom? First you make a desert."

Anyway. So Stoessel went off to do this, and telegrams came flooding back, written by my good friend Morris Draper, who accompanied him, and who talked endlessly about the agony of Israeli withdrawal. There was one telegram which I thought was highly illustrative of the problem, reporting a conversation between Walter Stoessel and Arik--Ariel Sharon, a real hawk.

Q: Was he minister of defense?

PECK: Yes, he was at that time.

Q: Of Israel at the time.

PECK: And I quote this as I remember it. He said, "Walter, these Egyptians are not reasonable, they are not rational, they are not people that you can deal with, they are not people you can have discussions with. They won't even let us keep a little tiny piece of their country!" He was talking about Taba, at the peak of the Sea--one second.

Q: The Gulf of Aqaba.

PECK: That's what it is, thank you, yes. Gulf of Aqaba. Which the Israelis just recently finally gave up.

Q: We're talking about--it was in 1989 I think that they finally gave up that. It was a piece of beach.

PECK: Piece of beach. The Sinai border came all the way down in a straight line, then, the Israelis said, it made this little hook around the tourist hotel and beach. Anyway, took them all those years to negotiate that out. But that was Sharon's line.

When the people came back, I made another one of those classic mistakes of my career. I berated Draper, my boss, for all of those telegrams. I said, "In the eyes of everyone else in the world, the withdrawal was a fantastic moment for peace, and brotherhood, and justice, and decency, boding well for the future of all mankind, and all you guys could talk about was the agony of the Israeli withdrawal." I said, "Talk about an altered optic, and a misbent focus. For God's sake, you guys never once put that into perspective or even made an effort to do it. The agony of the settlers withdrawing from the Yammit. It was a great, historic moment, you guys. It was not a horror and catastrophe."

Heavy silence. Heavy breathing. Dumb thing to do. However correct. However astute. Dumb.

I went on two of the final negotiating sessions for the Egypt/Israel Peace Treaty in 1982. It was a team headed by Michael Sterner, a good friend with whom I still play poker frequently. Mike Sterner had a permanent team, and I went along twice as the country director for Egypt. They thought it would be nice to throw somebody in. It was the final two sessions: one in Jerusalem, one in Cairo.

In the Jerusalem session, we arrived the day that the Israelis bombed the nuclear reactor in Baghdad. The embassy met us and said, "We're not even sure the Egyptians are going to show up."

They did, embarrassed, but disassociated themselves from (a) the fact that the meeting was in Jerusalem, and (b) the fact that the Israelis had just bombed Iraq.

While I was there, I took an afternoon--I think a holiday occurred of some kind--and one of the drivers that the team had said, "Come with me, because most people won't drive, for reasons which have nothing to do with our religion, but they think they do. Let me take you for a drive."

And he did, and he drove me to an Israeli city on the edge of the Mediterranean called Netanya, not far from Tel Aviv.

He said, "Mr. Peck, you see those hills right over there?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "That used to be Jordan. They could sit up there and fire right into this city, and they did." He said, "Mr. Peck, no Israeli will ever take the chance"--not Jordan, pardon me, the Jordanians were there, it was the occupied territories--"No Israeli will ever take the chance of letting that happen again. Just remember that Mr. Peck."

I said, "I can understand what you're saying. From your perspective it certainly is comprehensible and understandable."

He said, "Let me take you now to Yad Vashem." Which is the Holocaust Memorial.

I said, "I don't think I want to go there."

He said, "That's why I want to take you there, Mr. Peck."

I can't remember this man's name, but he's well-known to the embassy. He drove me up to Jerusalem to Yad Vashem. That's a pretty grim place to which to go, it does violence to you internally.

When I went there, I had a young son who was perhaps three years old. Just inside the door, they had a large, very large blowup, very grainy photograph of the first efforts by the Einsatz Gruppen?

Q: Yes. Einsatz Gruppen. These were the special units.

PECK: Special German units who were killing Jews in occupied Russia as far as they'd gotten. As the beginning of the final solution. It's a photograph of a group of people standing at the edge of a very large open grave which is partly filled with bodies. And one of the people, almost the central figure, at least he was in my memory, is a man standing holding in his arms a perhaps three-year-old child and turning the child's head away from the firing squad, which has the rifles aimed at them. And that just goes right through your heart.

Q: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

PECK: Right through your heart. I looked at that picture for perhaps longer than I should have because it's indelibly engraved, you know. The reason I put this unpleasant part in, is that I guess I want to get some balance in here. It's not easy--change that totally. It is not at all difficult to understand why a Menachem Begin is a Menachem Begin with his background, with his history, both personal and that of his people. It's easy to see how he turned out the way he did. And you cannot, you know, forget that.

My concern with the Arab-Israeli question was that we always--or so often, in my mind--wound up doing things which may have been good for Israel but were clearly not good for us. So that when I get into discussions, when I go out to speak, and talk about American-Arab-Israeli relations, I always said, "Every country has the right, however misguided, to do what it sees as being best for itself. Israel does. So should America. In some cases we've not done what's best for us, because we've wound up doing things which people feel are good for Israel. I think that's a mistake."

In any event, I did have a chance to get into those negotiations and watch Egyptians and Israelis at work, and it was kind of a microcosm of the Sadat-Begin-Carter thing that I referred to earlier. The Egyptians, you know, just wanting peace. The Egyptians being like Foreign Service Officers, wanting to negotiate, wanting to find some rational means for resolving issues. The Israelis, like Defense Department people, going with a single-minded focus to get everything they possibly could. There is no negative value judgment inherent in that statement. Surely they have the right to do that, and they did.

Q: Before we move on, Ed, were you on the desk of Egyptian Affairs at the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon?

PECK: Yes.

Q: How did you and your fellow colleagues see that, and how did you see the role of the Secretary of State at that time? This was, I'm not sure, I can't remember the exact date, but this is when--well, you might explain what happened. But how did you all see that at the time?

PECK: It's strange that you should bring that up--not at all strange--it triggers some memories. The Israelis invaded Lebanon for a number of announced reasons, something that we had tried to talk them out of doing, because it was fairly clear that it was coming, and the United States made clear--to use that word again--on a number of occasions that they did not think it was in anybody's interests for Israel to do so, but Israel did it in the hope that they could do a quick, clean, you know, surgical--

Q: Surgical strike.

PECK: Well, people always try to do those things, and one of the outgrowths was they got bogged down in various activities. They did not succeed in destroying the PLO, although they sure kicked the crap out of them. In the early days they went through it like a hot knife through butter. And one of the outgrowths of this was the massacres--by Lebanese--of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila camps.

Q: But with the apparent, at least, benign acceptance by the Israeli forces.

PECK: Yes, the Israelis were there. The Israeli forces had control of the area, and they let the Lebanese go in and kill large numbers of men, women, and children, just bang, bang, bang, bang, in the streets and the houses without doing anything to stop them. It is not difficult to see why the Israelis might have overlooked that sort of thing from a national policy perspective.

But it brought down enormous amounts of wrath and anger and disgust and shame on their heads from around the world, including here in the U.S. I forget whether I've already told the story of running through the cafeteria, grabbing a quick lunch while that was going on, and having a former colleague jump up from a table.

Q: I recall something of this nature.

PECK: And he ran over and he said, "Ed, Ann and I have nothing against Israel, but we think it has gone too far. We are shocked and shamed at what's happened with the killing of these helpless people, and we want to register our beliefs that America should find a more balanced approach to the Middle East. What should we do?"

And I said, "Write that down on a piece of paper, send it in to the editors of the Washington Post. On the morning that they print it, you'll get two telephone calls: a death threat from the Jewish Defense League and an offer of membership from the American Nazi Party." And that's the quandary that you'll find yourself in.

So it was at this point I think that my career took its final, negative turn. Because a meeting was called by an acting deputy assistant secretary in NEA, whose name was Charles Hill. Hill was also the director of the Office of Israeli and Arab-Israeli Affairs and was filling in for Maury Draper, who was somewhere.

He called us all in, all of us who were country directors for the Arab world, and he said, "The Secretary wants a memo today, to the President, detailing all of the advantages and benefits accruing to the United States as a result of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. So you come up with all of the things that you can think of on the good side, in terms of U.S.: how it's viewed in the area, in terms of our access and our control and the role we play, and write all of this up."

I went out of that meeting and never went to a meeting in NEA again, except for those that were held on a daily basis for the staff. I was so appalled and so distressed that anybody could think that there were any benefits that derived in the Arab world, or that we would, you know, manufacture--well, a paper went forward, talking about our balanced approach. I thought that was absolutely awful, because there wasn't a goddamn thing that we gained and an awful lot that we lost in the big picture because of that. I thought that was appalling.

Q: But this showed--you feel that this really came from Haig.

PECK: Yes, I'm pretty sure it did.

Q: And so this is management from the top down.

PECK: There are many people who believe, and they could be right, that a solid, strong relationship with Israel is the best thing that America could have in the Middle East. But you can see advantages and disadvantages, you can see strengths and weaknesses in that approach. What he was trying to do was to ensure that the President was aware that it wasn't all down sides. Regardless of the press, regardless of what kind of mail you're getting, chief, there's benefits to be derived from this. I could see none. I was also coming to the end of my tour.

Q: Okay, let's move on then to your next assignment. I'm not sure whether it was--I mean to be an ambassador is always a step up, but at the same time Mauritania doesn't strike one as being the greatest place to go. Do you feel that you were put out to pasture, or was this a movement forward?

PECK: It was both. One of the things--I don't want this to sound overly self-serving. It's always a question of timing, you know. That summer that I was picked for Mauritania, two--well, Mauritania is an Arab country. It's a member of the Arab League and all the rest of it. There were three Arab posts that came open that summer. One of them went to a country director who was from that area. One of them went to a deputy assistant

secretary who had earned it. And the third one went to me, but it went to me illustrating the problem.

The fellow who'd been named to go there two years before was Henry Precht, the DCM in Cairo. He was named, went through the long process, and then he was turned down by the Senate, and his name was withdrawn. To replace him they picked a fellow named David Korn, who had been the director of the Office of Israeli and Arab-Israeli Affairs. So he was going on, that was his reward. He went through the process and got turned down by the Mauritians.

Q: I might add, Precht got turned down by the Senate mainly because he had been country director for Iran, and there were problems there. Korn was a--was he Jewish or not?

PECK: No, I don't think Korn was Jewish.

Q: I was wondering whether this--

PECK: He had served in Mauritania before, and he was known to them. He also was married to a very well-known Jewish activist and, thirdly, there was some confusion over the fact that there was a man named David Korn who was a senior advisor to the Secretary of State for Israeli Affairs. And David Korn had been the director of the Office of Israeli and Arab-Israeli Affairs, and the Mauritians are pretty goosey on this kind of business. In any event, they never turned him down, they just never accepted him.

So there had to be a long pause to teach them a lesson, and then I was picked for the job, and I went through an inordinately long process, partly because a political appointee came into the process and then dropped out. So that between being told I was going to get the post and actually going, eleven months passed.

So Mauritania. As Nick Veliotis said, "At least you are getting an embassy." I did not come out of NEA smelling like a rose. Much of that was my fault. Part of it was the system under which I was working. Thirdly was the fact that I'd been, you know, beating a dead horse, trying to get Egypt--the desk--back up into the system a bit more. I did not come out as a shining star.

So Mauritania was a sideways move at best, but it was an embassy. When I went there, there were fifty U.S. direct-hire Americans at post; I was astounded. From a career perspective, being a reasonably objective individual, I could not have gone to a worse post at a worse time for me, personally. For a lot of reasons.

Mauritania is a small, underdeveloped, largely desert country with a small population, and is jerked around by all the major powers, including those Muslim and Arab countries that give it the money on which it subsists: Saudi Arabia and others. It also had been, until not too long before I arrived, involved in a war in which it had no business being.

When the Spaniards withdrew from the Spanish Sahara, Mauritania and Morocco partitioned the country, Morocco taking the top two-thirds, and Mauritania the bottom third. Then they both got involved in a war against the Polisario, which was, depending on to whom you spoke, either displaced Saharawis fighting to reestablish themselves in their homeland or Algerian mercenaries. After a long and for them costly and bloody war, the Mauritians said, "Hey, we want no part of this," and backed out of the territory. The Moroccans took it all, looked down upon the Mauritians for having betrayed them in this effort, and the Mauritians devoted themselves to trying to overcome the effects of the world's longest and most savage drought on a country which had been just barely Sahelian up to that point.

Q: Sahelian referring to the creeping desert that was happening in the Sahel.

PECK: The Sahel is a band across the northern part of Africa, taking in Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, the Sudan, and so forth. The northern part being Saharan, and the bottom part being Semi Arid, animal grazing, minimal rainfall, you can raise certain crops and so on. Moving down into Africa, you get to the bottom of that band, which then takes in Senegal and the lower quarter of Mauritania. The drought had been going on for so long that Mauritania, which had been three-quarters Saharan had become nine-tenths Saharan, that is, just plain desert.

By the way, a digression. Sahara, in Arabic, means "desert". So the Sahara Desert is the desert desert, like the Rio River in Spanish.

Q: Ed, you were talking a bit about the situation of Mauritania and American interests therein.

PECK: Well, I'll take the American interests part. They're the minimal ones that you find the Americans had or have in all countries, you know, to prevent worse things from happening. The country was deteriorating badly. We wanted to ensure that didn't provide an opportunity for the bad guys, whoever they are, to come in. And you had various humanitarian programs and political dialogue on all sorts of issues, and it was a presence. The American presence, which was--you could say, in the best of terms, sort of a knee jerk. It was reflexive. Because there was a country there, like the famous mountain climber, you know, who claimed "because it's there." The Chinese, for example, had a huge mission, an enormous aid program, left over from the days when they were trying to compete against the Russians in international affairs.

Well, several things happened that set the stage for my performance. First was that Mauritians, at the time of the Shatila and . . .

Q: Massacres in Lebanon of Palestinian--the Israeli--

PECK: Massacres, yes. That we just talked about. They demonstrated against the American embassy in Nouakchott, as did lots of other people around the world, and had some very, very nasty anti-American editorials in the local newspapers, which at that time had been infiltrated by people who were funded by, or at least believed in, Libyan anti-Americanism. So crowds went out and they stoned the embassy. I remember joking at the time, I was still here, that that was incorrect, because they could "sand" the embassy, but unless the stones were imported, you couldn't really stone it. Anyway, the American chargé d'affaires, who had been there for almost two years as chargé because there had not been an ambassador for that long, sent in all kinds of negative reports--and the Americans, here in town--

Q: In Washington.

PECK: Yes, in the Department, called in the French-educated Mauritanian ambassador on three separate occasions and slapped him around the office. I exaggerate of course. A deputy assistant secretary of state, twice, and a country director, once, gave him direct, focused tongue-lashings and reported this back to Nouakchott, with what I can only describe, as I watched it, not yet being confirmed by the Senate, something like glee.

And I remember thinking at the time that the reason that they were doing this, was that they could not do it to the Algerians or the Indians or the French or the Australians or the Swedes. Barring the demonstrations, they were doing and saying the same vile and terrible things about the U.S. all over the world. You couldn't call in those ambassadors and give them a tongue-lashing, but you could do it to the helpless Mauritanian, because nobody really gave a damn about that country. And you could work out your macho fantasies, "Yes, we had a talk--I really laid into him. I really gave it to him."

And they really did light into this--you've never met him--very quiet, very soft-spoken, very dignified gentleman who doesn't speak English, by the way.

Shortly afterwards, the Mauritanian Government declared two members of the AID mission persona non grata, they did it because the minister of rural development accused the deputy director and a project officer of having accused him of being involved in a recently-discovered bit of corruption involving an AID-financed project. There had been some money and some supplies lost.

The Mauritanians were very upset about this, and the Americans canceled the project because of the \$29,000 dollar loss. Inadvertently, the project officer, whose French wasn't so good anyway, did not carefully look at the translation into French of his report on the losses, which was sent to the minister. He wrote in his report a phrase to the effect that, "It is clear that some Mauritanian officials were aware of or perhaps involved in" the corruption. The translator wrote, "Il est évident que les responsables Mauritaniennes," meaning Mauritanian officials, but "les responsables" means the people in charge, and the minister took it very personally.

Q: The person responsible.

PECK: Yes. Les responsables, the responsible persons. The translation wasn't checked anywhere in the AID mission. I didn't see it till long afterwards when I got there. The deputy director of the AID mission, an unusual man to find in an AID program, a former Green Beret, very macho, tough guy, kick ass kind of fellow, was going to cocktail parties and diplomatic functions telling people that he was going to get that minister, because he was a vile, no good, lousy, dirty, sneak and a crook and a cheat. The minister, French-educated as well, had him declared PNG. I had not yet been declared as the candidate, and was still working in Egyptian Affairs, in fact.

I heard about this and I said, "Oh, boy, those guys have got to go." Everybody in the West Africa country directorate, AF/W, agreed, but AID wouldn't hear of it. Messages came in from the post saying both of these men are innocent, they're pure and pristine and virginal and decent and all of that.

So therefore AID had its way, and a message was sent out to the chargé--a different chargé by now, my chargé, my future DCM--telling the Mauritians--I remember the final paragraph--it said, "It would be unfortunate if a country suffering the effects of a ravaging drought would underestimate the potential impact on assistance programs that it vitally needs by carrying out this unfriendly act" (the PNG action).

Which is called blackmail in the trade, I think. Anyway, I saw that final paragraph, and I was outraged. And I went to see the country director and I said, "Jesus, who cleared this?"

He said, "Well, the deputy assistant secretary, the fellow who called in the ambassador."

So I went to see this chap, and I said, "That is unseemly and unsanitary and indecent and not in keeping with the standards"--we had quite an exchange about it. Anyway, he essentially threw me out of the office.

Three days later a memo came down from Larry Eagleburger, clipped to a copy of that message saying, "Who wrote this?" And Eagleburger--

Q: Larry Eagleburger was--

PECK: Was under secretary for Political Affairs, and he said, "You don't send this kind of message." It was another one of this macho, "we'll show these little brown bastards" kind of thing. Anyway, it was just an awful business.

Well, the chargé had the good sense not to use the last paragraph. He didn't say he wasn't going to do it, but he didn't. Anyway, they forced the Mauritians to swallow the PNG action over the violent objections of the minister and his coterie--saying you can't let these arrogant, overbearing Americans do these kinds of things. Anyway, the Mauritanian Government was ripped open, but we had made it clear that if the Mauritians carried

out the PNG we were going to cut the aid program. So they swallowed it, with real gnashing of teeth.

Four months later I arrived, and two months after that we cut the aid program.

Q: Completely or cut . . .

PECK: Seventy-five percent. The AID mission director had gone in to see that minister of rural development, and they'd had a diatribe again. The minister was a very, very touchy, very feisty guy. And he spoke beautiful, elegant French, and the AID mission director spoke what AID called a 3+--

Q: Which was a supposedly working level--

PECK: More than.

Q: A little more than working level.

PECK: The AID Director, an extremely competent and pleasant man, spoke French very badly. In any event he did something to offend the minister, and they had a heated exchange, and the director came out actually in tears, he was that distressed. And Washington said, "Okay, by God, we're going to cut all the programs."

I sent in messages saying, "Wait, before you do this. By some mechanism, which I do not attempt to describe or dissect, the United States Government and all its parts concluded that this country was worth about so much in economic assistance, in order to achieve the purposes which we as Americans have for the country and the region. Nothing has changed of which I am aware except that two people involved in the program have had a heated exchange. Now the proposal is to cut the program by seventy-five percent. That seems to me to be petty, irrational, nonprofessional, and not at all in U.S. interests as they existed seventy-two hours ago."

The reply came back and it said, "Shut up, and go tell the President." I sent a telegram in and I said, "Let me deliver the demarché to the Prime Minister, a man with whom I have spoken a number of times, and a man with whom I have discussed the problems that we're having with the assistance program, and who will understand."

They said, "No, you are to go and see the President."

Q: This was coming from the same person who--

PECK: Yeah, essentially. Well, AID had a big hand in it. They were very outraged and the rest of the State Department didn't care. What the hell is Mauritania? So I went to see the president who greeted me with a smile, and then I lowered this boom on him, and I

showed him where he was going to lose about twenty-six million dollars in overall assistance. And he was just devastated. "For what--what--why--wh-who?"

The main problem was that I'm a take-charge kind of guy, and the post had fractioned, in the two-and-a-half years since an ambassador had last been there, as individual fiefdoms sprang up. By the time I got there, there were lots of totally independent groups. I'll illustrate the problem. We had something there called the American Employee's Recreation Association of Nouakchott--AERAN. It had a clubhouse, leased by the U.S. Government, which also paid the utilities and provided the furniture, and you know, other support. AERAN ran the restaurant, a bar, they had bridge night and dances, they had one of these enormous TV screens.

Q: Back-projection.

PECK: Yes, and a VCR, and all that kind of thing: Ping pong, and pool tables and everything. It was run by a five-member elected board, three employees and two dependents, who also ran the commissary.

I'd been there perhaps six weeks, and one morning saw a flyer in my in-box which said, "AERAN presents 'Porno Night'. Through the good efforts of Steve and Gladys Jones, we're going to have "Up this" and "In that" and so on. Come early, get a good seat, get a good sandwich--dadadadada."

I called in the DCM and I said, "We have foreign diplomatic members, we have some Mauritanian members, this is Mauritania, its a US Government building, you can't have a "porno night" in the American club."

So he called together the board. He said, "You can't do this."

And they essentially replied, "Who the hell says so?"

And he said, "Well, the Ambassador says so."

And one of the dependents said, "Well, who the hell does he think he is?" [Laughter]

And the DCM said, "Well, I have the distinct impression that he believes he's the Ambassador."

They said, "Well, he doesn't have the right to tell us what to do."

He said, "Look, you can show this in your own home, do this in your own home, but you're not going to do it in the club."

Well, the outrage that ran through parts of the community, because somebody was telling them what they could and couldn't do was incredible.

The DCM had to come and tell me about another problem, which I only select because it outlines the situation. Big compound there, the embassy buildings and the American school, four residences, two swimming pools, a tennis court, and a huge play area. One of the swimming pools was in the back yard of the residence, one was over behind the tennis court. One was the community pool, one was the ambassador's pool. For two and a half years both pools had been community pools, because the residence had been the guest house and the transient quarters, where they gave parties and banquets and balls. My wife, when we first saw the place, said of the furniture in the living room, "We're going to have to send this stuff out to have it scraped." Obviously they'd had a lot of barbecues and had forgot to pass out napkins, because the upholstery was really gross.

Anyway, I had two small children, and just before I moved into the house the admin officer closed the pool on my behalf. Outrage in the community. The AID mission director came to see me, and said, "I understand that you're going to close the other community pool."

I said, "What other community pool? There's just one." [Laughter]

He said, "Yes, but we swim in that pool all the time."

I said, "Well, you know, it's in my back yard for a reason." Very, very stressed they were that this ass came in and thinks that our pool is his pool, just because its in his yard.

A number of things happened which afterwards led me to discover that I was being blamed for a number of contentious decisions reached by the AID mission director, or his bosses. This seriously undercut my relations with the AID mission staff. I illustrate the problem--I hate to take up too much time with this because it doesn't sound like foreign affairs and yet it is, in a sense, as far as oral history's concerned. The AID mission director and I sat down and agreed that the deputy director had to be transferred, because his working efficiency had been seriously impaired by the failed PNG exercise, since many Mauritians would no longer deal with him. We agreed that he would leave on the thirty-first of March, 1983. I got there in January. Thirty-first of March. So I wrote a telegram to Washington telling everyone this, and "The AID mission director has fully participated in the preparation of this message, and has cleared it herewith." Sent that in, and we agreed that we would together tell the deputy director.

So we three went out to the beach one night, having martinis watching the waves break on the sand, and I turned to the deputy director and I said, "after a long introduction, we've set the date of the thirty-first of March for your departure." And the mission director immediately turned to me and he said, "Oh, Mr. Ambassador, surely we can let him stay longer than that."

In the silence which followed, I realized why ambassadors get extra pay. I had just been stabbed in the back, as it were, by this guy, who was trying to protect his own relationship with his deputy and the rest of AID.

Shortly thereafter, the AID mission director went to Washington on consultations. Ten days later a message came for the AID deputy director from the assistant administrator for AID, telling him that because of all the other things he had to do, he shouldn't plan on leaving until about the twenty-fifth of April instead of March 31st. I found out later that that message had been written by the AID mission director, back in Washington.

I called AF/W and said, "Hey. He's supposed to leave on the thirty-first of March. I have spoken." They said, "Ed, don't fight this one. AID is really dug in." So I had my, you know, part of my ambassadorial authority shot off right there.

Mauritania had a lot of problems which I worked on, one of which was that relations with the U.S. were not very good, for a lot of reasons. One had to do with the fact that I had told the foreign ministry that the AID deputy was leaving. They had asked me to move him out as early as possible, and I'd reported this to Washington. They wanted him to leave because it was an embarrassment to them to have him there, and couldn't we please, now that we had forced them to compromise their honor by letting the man stay, reduce the shame and the residual internal strife by moving him now that he had permission to remain. I had told them he was leaving on the thirty-first of March, and then he didn't. Anyway, the whole thing was very bad, but overall relations I worked on as best I could.

I traveled a great deal in that country, which is very hard to do. I slowly hammered the various disparate parts of the embassy into shape. This was a lot easier as people were transferred out, you know, new ones came that didn't think of the ambassador's pool as being theirs, and so on.

But it was not a happy post for a number of reasons. It's not an easy place. In the first eight months I was there, we had five people sent home for psychiatric reasons, three of whom came in and lasted periods of five to seven weeks and then left, you know, in plastic bags. It was really a difficult time in a difficult place.

The most unbelievable sandstorms I have ever experienced. One of the guys I served with in Baghdad went from there to Nouakchott and I spoke with him before I went there. I said, "Come on, is Mauritania really as dusty as Baghdad?" He said, "Ed, you're going to laugh when I tell you, but Mauritania makes Baghdad look like Colorado Springs." And I laughed, but it does. Baghdad is dusty, but Mauritania is unbelievable. I have never in my life experienced anything like it. Terribly isolated, extraordinarily limited opportunities to do anything except sit in sandstorms. No places to travel, nothing to see, nothing to do. No restaurants, no hotels, I mean, it's a very difficult post. Some people love it. My wife and I did. Other people can't stand it.

Because it's a hard place to staff, some elements of the U.S. Government tend to send people who can't be placed anywhere else. We got one wonderful State telegram telling us, "congratulations, we are finally sending out a new communicator. He has just finished the alcohol awareness program and his divorce is final and he'll be there on Friday." He was there for six Fridays, and then we had to physically put him on the plane and fly him out, forever.

Q: There's a tendency to feel that if you have an alcohol program, they send them to the most unsuitable post. I had a friend of mine was sent to Dublin after he had gone through the alcohol program.

PECK: Well, personnel people, this is one of the syndromes every organization suffers from personnel people have to fill slots. There, that position is now filled, and that takes care of that. [Wipes hands] They say, "We sent you a guy, now don't bother us anymore."

So it was a difficult place, but I was already very crossways with Washington, a relationship I was unfortunately able to maintain and even foster in the ensuing months. A terrible, terrible, relationship which had largely to do with the fellow who was the deputy assistant secretary, with whom I was never able to get along personally and with whom professionally I had nothing but--

Q: Can you give a name? I mean, uh--

PECK: Yes, James Bishop, who is not famed for being a warm fuzzy puppy. But with me, we just [slaps hands] didn't hit it off at all. He saw Mauritania as a place where he could work off certain other frustrations. I saw Mauritania as a place in which the United States was doing a lot of dumb things for a lot of dumb reasons. And we just did not hit it off at all.

As an illustration of this problem, when the AID mission director was eventually replaced, the man who took the job was not terribly "ept", and spoke even worse French. He brought in to me one day, shortly after he arrived, a letter that he wanted to send to the minister of health, a man that he had not yet been able to meet, in which he flat out accused the minister of selling US-furnished medical supplies for personal profit.

And I said, "Oh, good Jesus Christ, you can't do this! That's what got us into the trouble a year and a half ago. What's this all about?"

He told me some of his people suspected medicines were being sold, and I said, "No, no. You can't write that for God's sake." So I sat down and wrote the letter the right way, indicating that America, very concerned about Mauritania's problems, was helping in every way it could and wished to underline once more to the minister, very much regretting that his absence from the capital had prevented a meeting up to now--this is now a letter from the AID mission director--wanted to reemphasize that should any of

this medical material being sent ever be misused or misdirected, it could have the most serious consequences for the program.

"Well, here take this", I said, "And get it fixed up and send it."

And about four days later I got a copy of a letter from that minister to the president of the republic, saying, "I cannot in good conscience as a loyal servant of my country and my people, permit some foreigner to address me in this accusatory fashion."

I called the AID mission director. I said, "What did you do? Did my letter cause that reaction?"

He said, "No, I didn't use your letter. My staff convinced me that we should use the one that I showed you."

Here was this insulting letter from the AID mission director, which had gone to the minister of health, who had written to his president. The Counselor of State for Ministerial Affairs, who sat outside the president's door, was the former Minister of Rural Development, who had himself been down that road once before with AID.

So I sent a message to Washington saying, "Oh, God, here we go again." Reported the problem, went to see the president, went to see the minister, brought in the AID mission director. He apologized in halting French, which helped to make it very clear to the minister that he didn't really know what it was he had signed, castigated the AID mission director for failing to carry out instructions and for not behaving in a proper fashion.

There were various repercussions and relations took another serious dip because the Mauritians, like any impoverished people, are very proud and certainly don't want to have guests in their country accusing them in writing--which their staffs also see--and on and on. All the reasons you can think of.

Well, I reported some of this, and after several weeks I got a NODIS cable from the State Department, saying "We've been reading your reporting on this issue with some interest, and should you feel that the AID mission director should perhaps be sent home, the State Department would back you up, Mr. Ambassador."

Well, I guess that cable in a sense marked the nadir of my relationship, because it looked like wimp Peck didn't have the guts to be able to do it himself. They'd forgotten I had told them that if I sent him away, the guys who had already written two offensive letters would be the ones left in charge, number one. Two, I couldn't send them away because the AID mission director was a helpless, blundering incompetent, and they were the only good people he had on his staff. And thirdly, I'd already tried to send somebody out once before, and they had told me to stick it in my ear after I told him he was to go. So that message really upset me, because obviously I had not communicated any of these things appropriately.

By the time I left, after two and a half years, relationships with Mauritania were pretty good. There had been a coup. I was able to describe on a firsthand personal basis all of the individuals who came in to replace the guys who left, because I had traveled and met them, and knew them and had established relationships with them. I had been able to go in and get the Mauritians to stop doing some things which we thought were unfortunate. I'd been able to get the Mauritians to alter marginally but visibly their U.N. voting habits, which had been the source of some concern for some parts of the Reagan Administration. I'd been able to get the Mauritians to do some things to shove the Libyans out. I'd been able to do all kinds of things. I traveled up into the war zone.

Anyway, it was a nice thing going and by the time I left, relations with Mauritania were good, relations with the Department of State were poor, especially on a personal basis. And when I came out of Mauritania it was without an on-going assignment. I had been able to fight, semi-successfully, some of the dumber things that we were doing in the field of economic development. I lost on a couple. I was able to get the Peace Corps relaunched and refocused. I was able to get a pretty enthusiastic, rather pulled together bunch of people at post. Done all kinds of things which I thought were useful, but I had essentially put the kibosh on the career, because I had been out of NEA for some years, and I had soured the relationship with the Bureau of African Affairs, so I came out to a non-assignment, which as you may know, happens to an awful lot of people when they come out of embassies, or DCM-ships, or consulate generalships, or counselor-at-embassy for this or that. You come home and, you know, there isn't anything.

Q: And once you've lost the momentum--I speak from good solid experience myself. I went through that. You came back, and you were called, what, the deputy director on terrorism?

PECK: Well, I was called back--

Q: This was 1985.

PECK: We're in 1985, while I was still in Nouakchott, I contacted the Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs to point out that Nick Veliotes needed a DCM, in Cairo.

Q: In Egypt.

PECK: Yes. He was ambassador to Egypt, and Arnie Raphel, who was the senior deputy in NEA, said, "Now that is very interesting." He called me back later to say, "Nick has already picked someone"--which may or may not have been true, but he said, "The job is filled."

Later I saw Nick and he said, "Hell, Ed, you can't come out from being an ambassador and be a DCM."

I said, "You can when you come out of Nouakchott. It's very hard to be imperial in a place like Mauritania."

I made another mistake there, which, if we have a moment, I'll touch on very briefly. It's a subject I bring up a lot when I do my FSI talks on Foreign Service reporting, on intelligence and foreign affairs, and when I talk to the Middle East area studies program. Morocco has a long and close relationship with the United States, and, as can happen in some countries, with the passage of time, the Americans in Rabat reported to Washington exactly what the Moroccans told them--especially when it had to do with the Polisario, and Algerians, and Mauritians.

So I had one of those unfortunate experiences which I always thought I would be able to avoid. I sent in a telegram from Nouakchott in which I reported on a meeting that I'd had with Colonel Taya the minister of defense, who later became president, because I wanted to secure from him--and I did--permission to fly up in the visiting attaché airplane to a place called Bir-Mogrein, which is way up north in Mauritania, on the border with the former Spanish Sahara, and a place through which the Polisario used to do a lot of stuff.

In talking with the minister of defense about that, he said, "Oh, you know, since the Moroccans have had such extensive success in building that berm along the border to keep out the Polisario, they have succeeded--"

Q: A berm being sort of a, not a trench, but a wall.

PECK: Sand wall. Which they'd fortified. They did it for the purpose of keeping out the Polisario, and they'd been largely successful. The minister said, "In fact for the last couple of years, the Polisario no longer keeps bases in Mauritania. They've gone back to Algeria. Occasionally they come through on small incursions, which we stop and send back whenever we can catch them, but there are no bases and the incursions are very limited in number. The Polisario is essentially gone.

I reported that conversation, and five days later got a cable from Rabat with info to everybody in the civilized world, saying, "We are surprised that embassy Nouakchott would send in such an obviously self-promoting conversation as that reported in REFTEL. As Embassy Nouakchott is well aware, all of our holdings here indicate that Polisario control of northern Mauritania is so pervasive and of such long duration that even relatively senior officials, such as the minister of defense, must request permission themselves well in advance, before they can travel into it."

That outraged me, because there is nothing more unseemly than embassies criticizing each other's reporting. That is a distinct no-no. It is the worst form.

Q: And it does show the "localitis" at its worst rampant stage.

PECK: That's it. It's the worst form of localitis. Well, I got a telegram from Charlie Bray, who was ambassador in Dakar, saying, "Looking forward eagerly to seeing a copy of your reply."

Even though it took six people in my embassy to hold me down, I was not going to get into one of these public fist fights. They are terrible.

So I sent a telegram to Rabat only. I had to revise it six times because my DCM wouldn't let it go. It said, "Hey, look, you guys report what you get, and I'll report what I get, but the last thing in the world that you want to do is criticize my reporting in an open channel message."

And I got a response, Stu, that said, "Honesty, decency, and a regard for the laws of man and God require us to reveal to the world the baselessness of your reporting."

Ahhhh! But they sent it only to me.

And I went back and I said, "Don't you ever do it again." The ambassador was a man named Joseph Verner Reed, a political appointee.

Q: Wasn't he renowned for--he's now chief of protocol.

PECK: That is correct.

Q: But he was renowned in the Foreign Service for having taken a vacation at a rather critical time in--

PECK: No, he became famous because he was vacationing when the king of Morocco announced a union with Libya. You could never criticize him for that because the king made it clear he would never have told the Americans because the Americans would have said, don't do it. But what he was criticized more for was the shameless clientitis from which he suffered. He was castigated by an American senator, in print.

Q: He was called a blithering idiot I think, or something like that.

PECK: Which is unfair, because he's a very intelligent man. He suffered from a rampant, almost terminal case of what many Foreign Service Officers suffer from--clientitis. When he visited me in Mauritania, he corrected members of my staff, "Ah, it's not Morocco, it's the kingdom of Morocco. Ah, it's not Hussein, it's his majesty king Hussein."

And I said, "Joseph, not here. Maybe not even there, but not here."

But when I visited him, I saw a microcosm of the problem in the embassy auditorium, which had on it a lectern, which had on it a sign which said, "Kingdom of Morocco." No,

no, that was the Embassy of the United States. But in the eyes of Ambassador Reed, who could easily be right, it was the Kingdom of Morocco that he was representing.

In any event, I then made my classic mistake, which is worthwhile in terms of a broader study of the field of foreign affairs. I went back to Washington, shortly after this dust up to which I refer, and I asked Washington before I got there to set up an all agency, all source briefing on the Polisario and Mauritania, and they did. And a number of people from the State Department attended--from INR, from NEA, from AF--as well as CIA, NSA, DIA, NPIC--if you know what that is.

Q: Yes.

PECK: The overhead photography people--everybody, everybody came. We had this full briefing with charts and maps and overlays and viewgraphs and everything. I sat down and drafted a telegram on the basis of that meeting, which I cleared with everybody present and with all agencies represented, and it said, "There are no Polisario bases in Mauritania, nor have there been for the last several years, since the construction of the berm. As far as U.S. sources are able to tell, Polisario incursions across Mauritania into Morocco are small in volume and few in number." I sent that telegram to everybody in the known world. One of the addresses was Rabat.

The silence from Rabat on that issue from then on was total, as shattering and compelling as it was ominous. The ambassador flew back to Washington for the same briefing and got it, after I had left to return to post.

I paid a terrible price for doing what I did. Here I was an experienced, relatively competent, relatively knowledgeable, fairly senior Foreign Service Officer, with many years of service abroad, who failed to realize a basic truth of the system, to wit, the people in Washington knew the facts all the time. The reporting coming out of Rabat was ignored. It was, to use the military expression, "shit-canned" in terms of its veracity. Everybody knew that what I was reporting from Mauritania was much nearer the truth. I did not need to come back and rub everyone's face in the fact that no one was telling Rabat to shut up, or else endeavor to obtain better info.

Q: This is a very important lesson that is very hard, because one takes it personally, and in a way, it's not almost understanding how the system really works.

PECK: It became vindictive. No less a personage than Ed Perkins--

Q: Who's now the director general of the Foreign Service.

PECK: Who was at that time the director of the Office of West African Affairs, said, "Ed, I've got to tell you, that was a pretty tough cable." (The one I sent from Washington.)

And I said, seriously, "But Ed, you cleared it."

He said, "Yes. I cleared it. There wasn't anything in it that was untrue, but it was a savagely vicious cable. You didn't need to go that far."

And I didn't realize at the time just how right he was. Because Morocco has a lot of friends, and the people working in the embassy went on to different and other things, and they also had a lot of friends. And I did myself serious damage by forcing the world to face the truth. I shouldn't have done it. I shouldn't have.

But this is emblematic I guess of the problems that dogged my career. I'm a reasonably outspoken, fairly assertive individual. Those are not boasts, necessarily. A lot of my friends, were they here, would shake their heads as they hear me say that, in agreement. A lot of people who are not as much friends would nod their heads in agreement, because those were poor traits at a poor time in a poor place.

I offer as a further illustration of the workings of the Foreign Service a similar problem, quickly. Because Mauritania has few paved roads, I issued an edict that when the U.S. Government's four-wheeled drive vehicles, of which we had a lot, were not in use, on weekends, American Government employees could use them to go up country and off the road, if they didn't have their own four-wheeled drive vehicles, to see the country a bit.

Several months later I discovered, to my horror, that AID had modified this policy so that their people could drive down the fully-paved road to Dakar, for an R & R or whatever, leaving in the garage their air-conditioned Peugeot station wagons and taking an air-conditioned Mercedes off-the-road vehicle--we had four of them, those are wonderful machines--using U.S. Government diesel fuel to do it.

I said to stop that, and the AID mission director came to see me, with his executive officer, saying, "This is causing a lot of concern in the mission--you shouldn't do it."

I said, "I'll tell you what. You write me a letter, saying that you think that procedure is an appropriate use of U.S. Government property, and a proper expenditure of U.S. Government funds, and I'll withdraw my stop order."

He said, "I can't write you a letter like that."

I said, "That's why I can't let you do it. I've got the inspectors coming in four months."

Well. Several months later, a senior State Department official was in my office at the embassy, saying, "Ed, we heard about this vehicle thing. Caused a terrible ruckus back in Washington."

I said, "It did?" And I told him the story as I've told it to you. When I'd finished, he said, "Well, I only have one question."

I said, "What is that?"

He said, "Why did you get involved in that?"

I said, "If you have to ask that question, you are not going to understand the answer." And he didn't. I said, "Because I was the ambassador."

Look, Stu, when I got to post, every single AID wife was employed. Every single AID wife had a contract paying at or over twenty-five thousand dollars a year. Several of them were working in offices run by their husbands. Not one of the jobs had ever been advertised, or competed for, or had set levels of requirements, standards, or interviews. It was all a cooked deal.

I came in and I stopped it. I had to grandfather all the existing contracts, but I said, "You cannot do that."

The AID mission director said, "I don't think you have the authority to say that."

I said, "Well, let's find out if I do, because you've got to follow U.S. employment practices,"--you know, a job and standards.

So I set up an interagency committee. The first jobs AID proposed to the committee were going to have three salary levels: one if it was a local, two if it was a foreign national, and third and highest if it was an American.

I said, "That's not how you do these things. That's a violation of the laws. America has laws about that." [Laughter]

Well, a terrible ruckus ensued, that the ambassador was trying to control whether Mrs. Smith got hired by her husband to do a job at thirty thousand bucks a year, working in his office cleaning out files. Damn! It was a terrible thing. I felt it was my right to do it, and I certainly felt it was my responsibility to do it, but it cost me dear, because most places guys don't do that. It was dumb. But it was right, and I'm not sorry I did it. Perhaps I could have done it some other way.

Q: Well, you were breaking some rice bowls.

PECK: Lots of rice bowls. You know what a JAO is? The Joint Administrative Office?

Q: Yes.

PECK: All the other agencies there did not have personnel or travel sections or separate GSOs--the embassy did it all jointly. The fellow who ran it was an AID employee, a man for whom the word feisty had been created. When I got there, he was very unpopular because he would issue JAO directives, saying, "Effective immediately, all Americans

will stop doing this and start doing that, and you can't do this, and you can't do that. Signed, Carl Mahler, JAO Director."

I came in and said, "Whup. Stop. From now on they are embassy directives, and it's signed "for the ambassador"."

And he said, "No."

And I said, "Yes. You don't do anything except in my name. You don't have the authority to tell the AID mission to do this or stop doing that."

He felt he did. They felt he didn't. I did. I took it over. Broke his rice bowl. Pissed him off.

Q: Ed, we've got some time constraints on us. You had several assignments when you came back to Washington, and the first one was from 1985 to '86. You were the deputy director on terrorism, with the vice president, who at that time was George Bush, who's now president. Could you give an idea of your perspective on George Bush, how he operated, how he knew the subject, and his interest?

PECK: There probably has never been as visible a man. When he ran for president he came much more into the limelight than he had when he ran against Reagan in the Republican primaries.

Q: That was 1980.

PECK: 1980, yes. Everybody has accurately described him as he is, because there's very little subterfuge. The Vice President's Task Force on Terrorism was presidentially mandated. It came in 1985, after a whole series of pretty violent and certainly very attention-getting terrorist incidents, which had taken place around the world but mostly in Europe and the Middle East, including that very well-publicized hijacking of TWA Flight 847, you remember, all around the Mediterranean.

So the task force was established to take a look at whether or not there were any enormous gaps in the system that the U.S. had set up to deal with the problem, and to ensure that everything that could be done was being done. So Bush was asked to chair it. All the heavy hitters were on the task force. It was cabinet level. You had the attorney general, Mr. Meese, the national security advisor Admiral Poindexter, the director of CIA, Bill Casey, the head of the FBI; the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Secretary of Defense; the Secretary of the Treasury, Baker; Secretary of Transportation Mrs. Dole, Secretary of State, Shultz--it was big stuff.

That was the task force. The working staff was headed by an executive director named Jim Holloway, who had been chief of naval operations. Good friend of Bush's, retired. I

was his deputy, and then we had a team of, I think, eight people, professional level, from the armed forces and one from the CIA, who were the workers.

Bush took a great interest in it, not only because he was asked to do it, not only because it had a fairly high profile and politically that was important, but because he was interested. He's an honest-to-goodness human being. I sat in on several meetings of the task force that he chaired. I sat in on several meetings of the agency representatives' panels that he chaired. I sat in on essentially one-on-one meetings with him and Kissinger, with him and Brzezinski, with him and numbers of other people. I read all the reports of meetings that he had that other officers went to. I sat in with him on a couple of issues in which he met with delegations coming in to talk about terrorism, and I got to know him, and he got to know me, too, which is less significant, because he does this with people. He was able to identify and speak to me by name at gatherings where I wouldn't have risked the same thing for fear of getting the name wrong or something, you know, Fred Beck or Clyde Cleck or something. A very sensible, reasonable, down-to-earth kind of guy, a very human being kind of person, very people-oriented, considerate and thoughtful. You see that now that he's president in all of the things that he does. They joke about his thank you notes and all of that.

He had the working group to his house for a Christmas buffet, and I remember being impressed with the other guests, Supreme Court Justice White, and the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Crowe, and all kinds of really pretty powerful folk. And included in this group was this bunch of far lower level people all the way down to colonels, from his task force--he did that--with their wives. And they took time, he and Mrs. Bush--to meet us all and talk with us all. It was quite impressive.

The terrorism thing was a little different because terrorism by its nature is something you can't do a great deal about. Especially when it happens overseas. It was a very eye-opening experience though, to see some of the schemes that people come up with to deal with the issue, some really off-the-wall ideas as to what it is you're supposed to do, ranging all the way from stepping up and killing anybody you think was involved in a terrorist act, wherever you can find them, to launching a very seriously made long-term proposal to change the way that the Shiite clergy think, so that they would stop encouraging their people to seek martyrdom, because that's something that seems to foster terrorism. Not going to be effective this week.

But that was the experience with Bush. When I left the task force, when the task force ended in March of 1986, it was a fantastic achievement. Jim Holloway took that group--we did a report to the president, cleared by all those other heavy hitters--in five and a half months from zero to finished report. It was a very, very interesting thing. Fascinating experience.

Let me digress for a moment. We made a couple of field trips we did not want to. The Vice President said, "Do it. You have to, to add credibility." I went down to Latin

America with two officers, one a Navy SEAL and the other a Marine. The Marine, by the way, was a Rhodes Scholar.

In Bolivia and El Salvador I saw how American diplomats live, and that's not the Foreign Service I came into, you know. The threat, the guards, the barricades, the armored vans, the chase cars, the changing of the route and the hour by computer. My goodness, gracious. It was bad enough where I was, you know, with flies, heat, dirt, and diseases and stuff, but to be targeted hostilely that way is something that's pretty wearing I would imagine. Maybe you get used to it after a while. I was over there for a couple of days in each place.

Sorry, I digressed. The terrorism report--fifty-one recommendations, every one of which was adopted. They've all been implemented with varying degrees of success. Some of them were not easy in implementation. You know, like changing the way the Shiite think--that was not one of the recommendations.

From that I came back and went to work in the Office of Management Operations, which was sort of a think tank, in-house, for people like the under secretary of state for management, so that he could put small teams of experienced folks to work on various problems that came to his attention. I was put in that office because the secretary of state wanted to do an overseas staffing review. At the President's request, a major effort was going to be made to cut down worldwide on U.S. diplomatic staffs. Because some of the staffs were too large; further, they sometimes made much too much of the American presence; and third, it was very expensive to try to protect them all with that big security drive that was coming on as a result of the Inman Report.

So I spent five months working on that doomed study because you can't really tell anybody else to cut their forces back. It's a terrible struggle. It was interesting because my particular package were the regional staffs, groups of people assigned overseas in one place but they have duties elsewhere. Markedly little success in getting those cut back, although some of them are enormous, just enormous. A lot of the agencies were not terribly concerned, either because this was just after Graham-Rudman, and the State Department was looking at a huge budget cut, but other agencies weren't and were not the least bit concerned about the fact that the State Department was.

The only reductions we were really able to make was in the State Department complement overseas. I remember Price, Ambassador Price in London, who was a golf-playing chum of the President's, came in with a message, and he said, "You know this place is huge here. I'm glad you brought this up. Because there are the following people that should be taken out because as far as I can see they do nothing here." Everyone of them is still there. It's tough to do. It's a lesson in how bureaucracies work. When I finished that job, Spiers asked me to take over a rewriting--

Q: He's the under secretary for management.

PECK: Yes, sir, under secretary of management, Ronald Spiers, to undertake a rewriting of The Chief of Missions Handbook, which had really been deflowered in the years since I had done the first edition. This was now the third edition. It was enormously large, it was terribly verbose. I think I found three active verbs in the whole thing. It was weasel-worded and waffled all the way through. It was terrible. Spiers said, "It deserves the lack of attention it now gets. Rewrite it."

So I set out to rewrite the thing from top to bottom and change the format and the distribution system and the classifications. And I put it out for clearance to thirty people that I selected in various parts of the State Department and FSI and so forth, to take a look at it, to change the text, and make recommendations.

And the book was totally approved except by the five regional assistant secretaries. They insisted that the handbook have in it the same kind of language that they had managed to put into the still extant goals and objectives cables, to the effect that ambassadors work for assistant secretaries for regional affairs and take their orders from them and are responsive to them. You cannot have an ambassador be the personal representative of the president, which is the only real authority an ambassador has, and work in writing for an assistant secretary of state. They really do, in effect, but you can't put that in writing and codify it, otherwise you cut the nuts off your ambassador, be he a he or be he a she. Can't do that. So I fought with the assistant secretaries back and forth by memorandum form, did not succeed, and so we put the book, the ambassador's handbook, into storage until a new administration came in and we could refix it.

At this time, I was asked by Under Secretary Spiers and Director General Vest and others to take on a desperately needed problem. They wanted me to set up an outplacement training program for what we referred to in the Foreign Service as "Cohort One," the first group of Foreign Service Officers to be mandatorily retired, either for time in class or for failure of promotion or for failure to get a limited career extension. And let's not explain on this tape what that is.

But there were going to be about a hundred and forty officers who were going to be retired involuntarily, and the Department of State said, "Peck, this is the number one priority. This is the top, urgent thing we have to have done now above all others, including peace and brotherhood in our time. Do this job." So I took the job, and never heard from any of them again, and was allowed to become the Oliver North of the outplacement business, because they gave me some money and they said, "Here, go fix it."

So I did, and I spent the next, almost two years, setting up and running what turned out to be a dramatically successful and enthusiastically received program to help people make a second career. We expanded it to take in everybody retiring voluntarily from civil and foreign service. We had classes and lectures and seminars and panel discussions and practice this and, you know, all sorts of things in which we teach them the basic tools for the job search.

The focus of the program was to take mandatory retirement and prepare people to face the results of it and be satisfied with their ability to face the results, as differentiated from any feelings they had about mandatory retirement itself or the institution that had done it to them. That would be a different thing. So they would feel, okay, I'm not terrified or horrified by this abyss yawning at my feet. Worked very well.

Now, this is a personal note, because we're talking about luck of the draw. I was asked to come out of that job and be the deputy director of the office of management operations, the place from which I had come. Spiers approved it, Vest agreed to release me, and the guy who was the director, a chap named Edward Dillery, wanted me for the job. When I was called and told that I had it, I called Director General Vest and I said, "You must immediately pick up the phone and call my deputy here in career transition and ask him to take my job. Because six weeks from now, Cohort Three, seventy-five officers, arrives in this program, and as of today it's my program, and it has to be his. We've got a few weeks--I can be here for four of them. Ask him to take the job. He will accept, and I will today become his deputy. I'll be here for four weeks to make the transition."

So he made the call, and that same afternoon I sat in my former office, along with the other members of the staff, while the new director told us what he wanted to do. It was great. It worked out fine.

Four weeks later I stepped out to go into my new job and discovered that I hadn't gotten it, because it was at the deputy assistant secretary level, which meant that it had to be approved by the deputy secretary's committee, on which sat Mr. Spiers and Mr. Vest. Mr. Vest called to say, "Ed, I have bad news for you. You did not get the job." And he wouldn't tell me why. He said, "Please, just let it go at that. We'll find something else for you."

Well, I was able to ask around, and finally I found out that what had happened was that the secretary's special assistant had sat in on that meeting, a man named Charles Hill, who had been the director of the Office of Israeli and Arab-Israeli Affairs the last year that I was the director of Office of Egyptian Affairs. He killed the assignment in that meeting, for whatever reasons, and, as of that moment, which was July of 1988, I became a homeless officer, literally, with no place to sit, no place to put a coat, no phone number to give out.

For the remaining months of the career, I was overcomplement in the truest sense of the word but not unemployed. Ron Spiers asked me to come and do a study for him on the overall process of retirement, as differentiated from retirement, which I'd been working on before. Spiers also asked me to do the first draft of a new presidential letter to all ambassadors, and to hook it in with finishing up and getting ready to go the new Chief of Missions Handbook. I worked on those three projects, finished a draft of the presidential letter, turned that in, finished The Chief of Missions Handbook, turned that in, finished a very well-received study on the process of retirement and how to make it less painful,

with a number of recommendations, and turned that all in, and just as I was finishing those things off, got the offer of my current job, and retired at the end of April.

Since that time I've discovered that the president's letter has been rewritten by a committee and looks like it. Still hasn't been issued. I've discovered that one of the people involved with having to make some changes to put the retirement plan into work objected, and they wouldn't make him do it, so that's in the air. And The Chief of Missions Handbook still hasn't been issued. So, "plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose." Go ahead, sir.

Q: In looking at the retirement process, this is somewhat afield but not necessarily, where did you find that the normal Foreign Service Officer might point him or herself in looking for another job?

PECK: Another job? Oh, that kind of retirement. So much depends upon what it is you've done. If you are able to do so, you should merely change employers. People who do that are people who continue doing the same work in some other organization. Classic example, an accountant. If you're a budget and fiscal type and you're a qualified accountant, you go to work as an accountant, everything you've done before is applicable. If you are an astute political observer and reporting officer, you've got to find yourself a new career. That's a lot harder, a lot harder. So it depends on what you've done.

Second, the key question is, what do you want to do, and where do you want to do it? Because there's no sense sitting in Washington trying to do a job search in Seattle. And there's no sense sitting in Washington doing a job search if you're going to move to Des Moines. So those are determinants. We've had Foreign Service Officers wind up doing all kinds of things. If you've got a great name that you've earned, it's a lot easier for you. Tom Pickering, when he retires, won't need any help from the office I used to run. On the other hand, somebody who's spent his life polishing his skills in Urdu-speaking, but who's going to move to Des Moines, has got a real problem. People wind up doing everything from real estate to office management to international sales to adjunct professorships to--well, name it: private consultants, writing books, you know, they do all kinds of things. It depends on who they are, where they are, and what they've done. And above all, timing.

Q: Well, Ed, I know that you've got a parking problem and all this.

PECK: Big issues. [Laughter]

Q: But the last question I'd like to ask, a young person comes to you, man, woman, says, "Mr. Ambassador, would you recommend a career in the Foreign Service to me?" We're talking about 1989. How would you reply?

PECK: Answer's absolutely, depending on who you are. I cannot imagine, doing anything more interesting. Pardon me, I can't imagine doing anything more interesting with my life than the Foreign Service. Was it perfect? Nah! Were there problems? Yes. Is life like

that? Right. Was it rewarding? Uh huh. Was it interesting? Yes. Was it fun? Yes. Was it a good way to invest your adult years? You betcha. Is it for everybody? No. It wasn't then, and it isn't now. But if it's me coming along, asking an older me, should I do this, the answer is, "Without question, it's great!" And even discounting for the nostalgia part of it, because I haven't been out that long--it's been just four days over two months--with the riots, and the evacuations, and the diseases, and the household effects damage and, you know, all the other problems.

Maybe I would have been happy living in the same house and driving down the same street to work in the same office at the same job for thirty years. But I don't think so. The change--it's different, this is different, it's time to move on again. You know, you could feel that it offers--it's a different life now than it was for a lot of reasons. Diplomacy is different. America is different. Without an instant's hesitation, I would say that--for the right person of course--it is the best thing you could possibly do with your life. Go for it.

Q: At that, we'll close, and I thank you very much. That's fine.

PECK: Don't you feel that way?

Q: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

End of interview