Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR MICHAEL PISTOR

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: June 6, 2001
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is June 6, 2001, D Day. This is an interview with Ambassador Michael Pistor - no middle initial?

PISTOR: No, or too many (T.F.).

Q: This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by Mike?

PISTOR: I go by Mike.

Q: All right. Well, let's start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family.

PISTOR: I was born in Portland, Oregon, in April 1930, but I was raised in Tucson, Arizona. My father had been born in Tucson; my mother was born in Red Lodge, Montana. I went through the Tucson school system, and then graduated from the University of Arizona, also in Tucson.

Q: Well, let's go back now. Let's talk a bit first about your father and then your mother. What sort of work was he doing and what was his background?

PISTOR: My father was a veterinarian, and he headed the Animal Pathology Department at the University of Arizona. He did a considerable amount of work abroad and in other parts of the U.S. as a recognized expert on hoof and mouth disease, among other things. He also served on the city council for some years, and later was president of Tucson's school board.

Q: The name Pistor, what's the background of that?

PISTOR: It's German, at least our part of it is. Much later in London when I was there with USIS, I had a letter from a lady in the west of England whose name was Pistor and who thought perhaps we were related, but she and I could find no connection beyond the name itself.

Q: What's your mother's background?

PISTOR: I'd like to talk about my father just a bit longer. His parents were both German. Both came to the United States in their youth; they met on a ship, as a matter of fact. My

grandfather had been to the United States, had established himself, gone back, found my grandmother on shipboard - she'd been in the United States to visit an uncle - and she later came all the way from Bitburg, Germany, to Tucson, Arizona in 1881 to marry this man. Growing up, I just thought she was a nice little old lady; I didn't realize that she was a true pioneer setting out for an unknown-- and what must have been a forbidding, if romantic– place.

As I said, my mother was born in Red Lodge, Montana. Her name was Virginia Pollard, and her father, Thomas Pollard, owned and ran the Pollard Hotel in Red Lodge. So my mother grew up in a Wild West town, but living in a hotel gave things a kind of city feel, she said.

Q: How did she get out of Montana and get together with your father?

PISTOR: She and he met at Washington State University when my father was doing his DVM and she was doing an English degree. Since girlhood she had been writing– poetry mostly– later she wrote plays and took up painting and sculpture, which continued to interest her for the rest of her life. She didn't seek publication or recognition, and that's a puzzle. She had the creative drive, but maybe not enough ego.

Q: Why were they both in Portland to have you?

PISTOR: My father joined a practice in Portland, but after two or three years realized that his heart was in research and in working on large animals. Nothing against dogs and cats, but he didn't see tending them as a livelihood. He then worked for the state of California in Petaluma , the "egg basket of the world." After a couple of years he took the university appointment in Tucson and came back home.

Q: So by the time you were going to elementary school, you were in Tucson?

PISTOR: I'd been in Tucson since I was five.

Q: At home until you sort of left the nest, it sounds like you had two very active parents. Did you have other family?

PISTOR: No I was an only child.

Q: How about sitting around the dining room table talking about events of the day or reading?

PISTOR: Indeed we did. My father had a modest but absorbing political life as well. He for some years was a city councilman, and then in the great Eisenhower sweep of 1952 all his friends turned out to be closet Republicans and knocked him out of office. It was quite a disappointment for him and a shock. Then later he was president of the school board for some years. My mother did the kinds of things you would expect: writing radio scripts for

planned parenthood, and doing some USO work during the Second World War. She also made many of her own clothes during that period.

Q: What about your reading? Did you pick up from your parents...?

PISTOR: I did. Because I was an only child, I had a chance to do more reading than I think you would if you had a sibling. We were I wouldn't say a bookish family - I think my parents were more active than that - but we were a magazine family. Remember in the '30s and '40s wonderful sets of magazines. *The New Yorker* was in our house as early as I can remember. New York itself was my destination from the time I began to think of a future. I never thought of myself as staying in Tucson forever, although I wasn't unhappy with the place.

Q: As you were a young lad in the mid to late '30s, what was Tucson like?

PISTOR: Tucson was about 50,000 population. It was a very attractive little city. It had the university and it had a spectacular winter climate, and the climate, dry desert air, collected people with weak lungs, people with problems of all kinds, arthritis, so the place attracted writers and painters and faculty members you would never expect to get otherwise. It was also a town, even in my grandmother's day in the early 1900s, late 1800s, where the Southern Pacific Railroad put Tucson about one day away from Los Angeles, which meant that the concert artists, the players, the people who had something to offer to a public, would stop in Tucson and do two performances, an afternoon performance and an evening one. After the evening performance, they could take the overnight train to Los Angeles and set up for a longer term there. So Tucson had a cultural life that was really quite surprising.

Q: How about elementary school? Do you recall any interests or aversions?

PISTOR: This was Sam Hughes School, and it was a lively place. I was not very good at sports, to put it mildly, and so in order to compensate, I guess, to a certain extent I was thought of as a funny, quick witted kid, not only among my peers but among the teachers and other grown-ups too.

Q: Do you recall any of your elementary school teachers?

PISTOR: Yes, I do. There are a couple things about my elementary school. You know, everybody takes piano lessons, everybody takes this or that. In Tucson there was a popular children's theater and a remarkable woman, Mary MacMurtrie, who embodied this children's theater and mounted quite large and elaborate stage productions each year, like Aladdin and The Pied Piper. Mrs. MacMurtrie produced and directed a weekly radio program for children, as well as teaching dramatics in her home. I took to the theater, and it turned out that I was good at it. When I was 11, I played the little boy in the play On Borrowed Time, staged by the Tucson Little Theatre.

Q: Oh, yes, he got trapped in a tree.

PISTOR: That's right, by Mr. Brink, death.

Q: Well, he got trapped in the tree.

PISTOR: He got trapped in the tree, and he coaxed me up in order to get my character's back broken so that...

Q: He was death.

PISTOR: That's right, Mr. Brink was death.

Tucson's two newspapers gave the play ecstatic reviews, concentrating on my performance. This kind of praise can turn an eleven-year-old's head, but my parents and my school mates kept me pretty much grounded.

At somebody's suggestion (Tucson had a number of movie people as winter visitors), MGM sent a man to Tucson to have a look at the play and me. The scout was a young director and son of a prominent Hollywood writer. He watched the play and the next day came out to interview me at our house . He said complimentary things, but later in a huddle with my parents in the kitchen he warned about the life offered to a kid going into the movies. My parents were sensitive to this kind of upheaval too, but they didn't have to take the big decision since a telegram came a few days later saying, " Regret Mike too tall," and life returned to normal at our house.

Q: The stories are replete of the horrors that went on in the studios in those days with child actors. You went to high school, again in Tucson?

PISTOR: I went to grade school, junior high school and high school in Tucson. In junior high I started writing, heavily influenced by Robert Benchley and James Thurber. I got great satisfaction from writing and dropped the theater to a certain extent and wrote for the little school paper, encouraged by my teachers. Then when I got to high school, for three years I wrote a column, a humor column, but which carried some comments on the events of the day. Sophomoric stuff, but then I *was* a sophomore. So during my high school years I made up my mind : writing would be my vocation come what may. I had vague ideas of writing a great American novel, along with every other 16-to-18-year-old who had access to a typewriter. These days it's computers and film scripts.

Q: You graduated when, in 1948?

PISTOR: Yes.

Q: Was the outside world - I'm talking about beyond the Pacific or Atlantic - passing by? Did it come across your attention at all?

PISTOR: Yes. I gave one of the senior class speeches in 1948, and I wish I had kept it, not that it was a good speech but that it had a pretty good theme, which was acceleration and our generation's challenges.. I was elected president of the school's World Federalism chapter (my friends greeted me with the fascist salute), which fizzled out after a couple of months. So, yes, the wider world did impinge on us.

Q: In 1948 you graduated. I assume you were on your way to college, that was expected. Did you have any thoughts about where you wanted to go?

PISTOR: I had very vague thoughts about going east to school, but we didn't have the money and I thought, well, I'm going to use whatever it is to write anyway, I might as well be here. I moved onto campus, moved out of the house, but leaving Tucson to go away to school was neither an expectation nor a serious goal. And I was certainly not a serious student.

Q: You went to the University of Arizona, I guess, from 1948 to '52?

PISTOR: And did ROTC. In the University of Arizona, ROTC was cavalry, but by the time I got there, there were no horses, only tanks. I went through the ROTC program, and so in 1952 at graduation I went into the army as a very green second lieutenant.

Q: Well, let's go to the University first. Any areas of study that particularly interested you?

PISTOR: It was English and political science, political science minor, and a sample of courses. When I was in high school, the second semester of my senior year, my English teacher gave me the semester off, and said, "Don't both coming to class. What I want you to do is write the novel you're talking about or at least get a draft of it." I failed her, never got around to the novel, but I had a guilty good time during those free breaks.

In 1948, when I went to the University, I edited the humor magazine. I had been very strongly against fraternities. I thought they had run their string and that they were objectionable in all kinds of ways, but I didn't have the courage of those convictions, because when I got there, I joined a fraternity. As a matter of fact, I joined the one that my father had belonged to, and told myself I was pleasing him, but I was actually giving myself a little advantage too, being able to meet girls and go to parties and so forth. So I had a social time at a social school. I had a couple of remarkable teachers, one woman who was serious about the transcendentalists, and also was awfully good on John Donne. I can remember enjoying enormously her seminars, and those of a couple of other teachers on the English and political science faculties.

Because my father was on the faculty, I knew faculty people and had grown up with them, so when I grew up in Tucson it was several different kinds of town– a ranching and farming center, a winter resort, a border town (52 miles from Mexico) And it was

certainly a college town.

Q: And you were a faculty kid?

PISTOR: And I was a faculty kid, that's right.

Q: How about your father's work on hoof and mouth disease? Did that continue?

PISTOR: Yes, it did. He used to go to Plum Island - I don't know if you know about that installation–- it's in Long Island Sound, and the government does experiments and research there on animal diseases. There was a serious hoof and mouth disease outbreak in the late '40s in Mexico, which meant that Mexico and the United States had a mutual problem (although it certainly wasn't shouted about in the United States). Because two or three of those very large Southwestern ranches of the day were transborder, my father was involved in helping the Mexican and U.S. governments and the ranchers down there.

One of my father's best students had gotten a summer job in Mexico on a program designed to eradicate hoof and mouth by destroying the livestock which had been exposed to the disease, killing and burning the animals, still the only sure way to stop the spread of the disease It was dangerous work. My father's student was pulled down from his horse and beaten to death by villagers. It had its effect on my father. So this present outbreak in Europe (summer, 2001) brings back painful recollections. But he continued until his retirement to search for less draconian ways to arrest the disease. He was as much at home in the laboratory as he was in the classroom, and he did a lot of work with animal diseases.

Q: Were you ever tempted in that direction?

PISTOR: No. I spent a lot of time as a kid playing at the university farm. I watched my father deliver calves out there, but I was never tempted to do veterinary work. I was always keen on writing, always keen on going to the big city.

Q: Was the big city Los Angeles at the time?

PISTOR: No, Los Angeles was Los Angeles. The big city was New York.

Q: By '52 the Korean War was still going on, and you were a green second lieutenant.

PISTOR: Right. I did not go to Korea. I fought the war in Camp Pickett, Virginia, and Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and Fort Knox, Kentucky. Fort Knox was where I first started to get some further officer training. I guess the first half of my class went off to Korea and the second half stayed in the United States.

Q: Well, there wasn't much room for tanks in Korea.

PISTOR: No, but they used tanks as artillery. It was kind of a nasty war for the tankers.

Q: I remember seeing pictures showing these tanks lines up on revetments more or less and firing away.

PISTOR: In classroom exercises and on maneuvers, we would be lectured by infantry and air force officers who stressed our vulnerabilities. I can remember one lecture in particular by an Air Force officer who was crowing about how we were just big turtles waiting to be bombed, rocketed and napalmed, and I remember that as he got more and more excited about the prospects of what would happen to us, I got glummer and glummer.

I began my stint in the army worried about my own lack of capabilities, and I was uncomfortable at the prospect of assuming command of soldiers if I wasn't really competent to lead them. I also wasn't sure about being able to adjust satisfactorily to the Army and Army life, but I learned a couple of things fairly quickly. First, I found that military service could actually be rewarding and instructive, and that those who chose it didn't fit the stereotypes I had been carrying around about blinkered, conformist neo-fascists. Second, to my great relief, I saw that everybody, even the most senior, experienced and competent officers could screw up, and did.

Therefore, my own fear of screwing-up didn't seem as consequential, which gave me some comfort and which even contributed to a certain confidence. I had a little less than two years in and came out a first lieutenant– reconnaissance unit commander– with a not bad record .

Q: By the time you ended up, where were you, at Fort Hood?

PISTOR: No, when I ended up, I was down at Camp Pickett, which is down in southern Virginia. We had just come back from a big maneuver in North Carolina. I was with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment Light. It was an independent unit, exactly the right kind of outfit to play aggressor in a field exercise, so that's what we did. At the end of that, then I came back to post and was mustered out.

Q: While you were in the Army, did you have any feel for what you wanted to do afterwards?

PISTOR: I still wanted to write.

Q: How did that go? You got out, I guess,...

PISTOR: In '54 I left the army and went back to Tucson and took two or three more university courses and did some radio work. I announced - I was a terrible disc jockey - and I wrote copy, preparing to go east. I was there for a year, husbanding my resources and getting ready to leave for New York. I had an uncle, my mother's youngest brother,

who'd been living there since the 1930s with time out for the war, and so I went to New York to seek my fortune, find a job, and bunk in with my uncle.

Q: You *were in New York from when to when?*

PISTOR: 1955 until summer of 1959.

Q: What were you doing?

PISTOR: Those were marvelous days in New York. I met my wife there and married, and then 10 days after she had our first child we left Manhattan and joined the U.S. Information Agency. When I went to New York, I thought (obviously) that I would go immediately to The New Yorker and that would be that. I did get an interview there, and they asked me to give them some work, and I did. I blush to think what I submitted. That was probably the very same week that they were vetting John Updike. Oh, well. And Salinger had already written it anyway. After my gentle rejection from The New Yorker I kicked around a little, and soon I was hired by an odd outfit called Great American Publications, which put out car magazines and crossword puzzle magazines and a couple of others. One was Ellery Queen. I became associate editor of Car Life, grand title, which meant number-two man on a two-man magazine. Car Life was aimed at the average car owner, not the hotrod crowd. I went to work for three people there. One was the publisher, who wore a wraparound camel's hair coat and was that kind of guy; next was a very bright editorial director who had done a lot of men's magazine work; the third was Sheldon Wax, editor of Car Life, a man a little older than I, highly intelligent, an extremely good editor, and a wonderful companion and mentor. We worked very well together.

During that three- or four-year period Shelly moved up from editor to editorial director of the whole group of magazines. I went from associate editor to editor of Car Life. By 1959, both Shelly and I were ready to move on. .

Q: Tell me about your great expertise in automobiles.

PISTOR: None.

Q: What did you write about?

PISTOR: You do an enormous amount of rewriting of people who know a lot about cars but not very much about sentences or about narratives, and you come up with ideas for them to write, and you do some writing of your own. When I first got there, one of my jobs was writing the letters to the editor and then the replies, so you could get an absolutely furious letter to the editor and you could tell him to go jump in the lake. I did something I probably shouldn't have. I put the names of some of my friends in Tucson and elsewhere as writers of some of these irate letters, and had a pretty good time at it. At a cocktail party I talked to a guy who said, "Oh, yes, I do that for *Newsweek*." I think he

might have been kidding, but I like to think he did write them.

Q: Obviously you were in a specialized publication, but did you get any feel for the publishing world?

PISTOR: Not so much a car publication as it was a men's publication. Many people I knew were either in magazine publishing or in advertising, people you had things in common with. I can remember what we would do was to spread a big blurb on the cover saying "Detroit Is Ripping You Off," and then you turn inside the magazine and the article would be headlined, "Is Detroit Ripping You Off?" and then the conclusion of the piece was, "No, Detroit is not ripping you off." This was something of a pattern. I tried to keep the publication honest, and one reason I was uncomfortable with it was that it was dependent on its sources in the automotive industry. We had a very good car tester, and we were honest as we could be, but the cover photographs and things like that all came from the industry. So I had to learn not only about publishing but about PR ploys and about the sometimes tricky relationships with the car industry, which made me uncomfortable . And it wasn't what I wanted to do.

Q: Did you run nose to nose with Consumer Report?

PISTOR: Yes, somebody who was serious about learning about the Dodge or middle-priced cars would buy not only Consumer Report for that issue on cars but would buy us as well, because our tester had a good reputation and a number of our articles would be useful for somebody trying to decide, "Do I want a Pontiac or do I want a Dodge?"

Q: Were there offers of reduced-price cars in order to get good reviews?

PISTOR: No, it wasn't that kind of shabby or shady. I remember somebody was trying to sell us a story about terrible truck accidents. It had to do with trucks carrying explosives and other things and had some juicy photographs, and it turned out that the guy worked for the American Railway Association. So you had to be careful all the time about this kind of thing, but our car tester couldn't be bought in the sense that he could get a better car or something, but he needed to be welcomed by General Motors or Ford in order to test their cars, so he couldn't be too rough. But he kept his integrity, even if was a little muted.

Q: While you were in New York, again did the international world intrude in your private life or social life?

PISTOR: Remember that in early 1959 Khrushchev came to the United States? Our publisher thought that we could do a one-shot publication on Khrushchev, his background and on what the visit itself might be like, and we'd get it on the newsstands just ahead of Khrushchev's arrival. So my friend Shelly and I took time off from the magazine and wrote this one- shot on the Khrushchev visit, and we had a lot of fun doing it. I don't think that any historian would want to use that as a primary source, however.

Q: This was done for the overall publication?

PISTOR: It was done as itself. Great American Publications would have its logo somewhere on the cover. You'd be able, because of your arrangement with the distributors, to get that on newsstands. Our magazine was largely a newsstand-sales magazine rather than a subscription- based one. I remember we had something like a 150,000 circulation, which was pretty good in those days.

Q: So we're moving towards 1959. What were you up to?

PISTOR: As I say, I was getting experience with this magazine, enjoying New York– and it was a wonderful place to enjoy, lots of friends, lots of people at the same stage in life, testing themselves and moving up or not. At the same time, on my way to New York in '54 I had stopped in Washington to see a friend of mine who worked for our senior Senator, and he said, "You know, you ought to think about working overseas." I said I would be interested, and he said, "You're just right for something called the US Information Agency." I had known a little about it, because our librarian at the University of Arizona had done a tour, I think, of three years or so in Latin America. It was just time out, like a sabbatical, as a cultural officer, and he had said what a fascinating kind of career it would be. So I had this in the back of my mind. I was married in 1957 and by 1958 I was looking to get out of *Car Life.* At the end of the '50s the magazine world was collapsing. The big general magazines were beginning - *Collier's* had folded...

Q: Look, Saturday Evening Post, Life...

PISTOR: That's right, and the segmented magazines, like the one I was in, were gaining because they were specialized niches. I was, as I said, a little uncomfortable with it because I would rather have been working for The Reporter magazine at that time. This was kind of a hard-nosed business, and I think we were doing pretty well. You learned how to be speedy and efficient.

But I was looking about for other magazines, and I was very close to a magazine called True– I don't know if you ever saw that– a large circulation men's magazine. But my wife and I decided to take a flutter on this foreign affairs thing, so I wrote a letter of application and filled out the forms and went down to Washington and took the tests and so forth. As you know, you wait forever, but at one point they called me up and asked me to come on down and take the oral exam.

Q: Before we get to that, you mentioned you got married. What was the background of your wife, and how did you meet?

PISTOR: My wife, Shirley Scott, was a school teacher from Tampa, Florida. She too was an only child. She was in New York because she had just finished teaching abroad, and Manhattan beckoned. Shirley had gone to Europe to teach in the American military

school system, and she taught with a friend of hers, who lives here still and is a good friend of ours, and that friend of hers went out with and then married my friend who worked for the Senator in Washington. Very soon after I got to New York, these two decided that Shirley and I should get together. We each, I guess, in turn said, "Oh, yes, of course," but didn't do anything about it. So the two of them got in a car, drove up to New York, put us together, and it clicked, so we married and two years later had our first child, Bill, named after my father.

Shirley and I were both only children. We both were interested in the world at large. She was from a very, very conservative Southern family, quite successful, but with all the prejudices you would expect those days, of a middle-class Southern family, professionals, but she had none of those prejudices. It wasn't because she'd had a liberal mother or father; it was because somehow she by herself had shucked the prejudices of her kind. It was really quite remarkable– and admirable.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions that came to you from the oral exam?

PISTOR: I can remember getting in serious trouble when I connected Gandhi and Emerson - it looked pretty good to me.

Q: You already had your transcendental workout in that university course in Tucson.

PISTOR: I started working this one right on the surface, just skimming along, and bingo! I remember the panel pinning me down, and of course, I didn't know what I was talking about. I was as facile as I hoped I was, but not much depth there. I remember that question all too vividly.

We candidates of the day not only had the written and the oral exams, but USIA was flush enough, had the money then, to have its officer candidates examined by psychiatrists– I don't believe the Department did so. Living in New York, both Shirley and I were sent up to Presbyterian Hospital Center in upper Manhattan and each of us had an hour with a psychiatrist. As he interviewed me, he took lots and lots of notes; he did with Shirley as well. Then we went downstairs and went to a psychologist who gave each of us a battery of tests. Ten days later we were to go back, and I went back and the psychiatrist had a sheaf of notes about this thick.

Q: About two inches thick.

PISTOR: And he started asking questions of me, and the one I remember went something like, "Do you feel guilty?" and I said, "Well, of course." He said, "Of course?" I said, "We all feel guilty." I said, "Well, there's the bomb." I remember this quiz very clearly. It bothered me because, well, Shirley and I got along fine and went through the process without any problems, but we lived in New York City, with access to probably the world's largest pool of psychiatric talent. I thought, what if we lived in New Mexico, for example, and the only psychiatrist they could find in Deming was a guy with a drinking

problem who did this kind of work for the court house.

That was the first thing that made me a little uneasy about the agency's method of selecting well balanced officers and suitable wives. My second question was, what do they do with this material when they finish with it. Years later – not years later, pretty soon after I joined USIA– I asked the Personnel people what had happened to that material, and they swore it had all been burned. Later I heard that it had not; they weren't using it, but they never throw anything away. That was the only real discomfort I had in joining the organization, and soon after, USIA dropped the psychological testing and reporting.

Q: What did you want to do or think you would be doing with USIA when you came in?

PISTOR: When I came in, I thought selfishly that I would gain experience in wherever they sent me and be there to explain American life and facets of American life and culture to foreign audiences and interact with intellectuals, cultural leaders, journalists and politicians. I really thought this was the way it was going to be, and as it turned out, it was. Very satisfying work. But I told myself, as I think a number of new officers did, that this was good for three years, maybe four, that I would have a tour, enjoy it and then come back to New York, probably to New York, and write, either pursue a journalistic career or– I actually thought I would do some serious writing. But each USIA assignment proved interesting, and Shirley and I got more and more acclimated to the life and I got more and more comfortable in the job, so after five or six years I realized we were in it for the long haul.

Q: Did you go into sort of a basic officers' course when you came in?

PISTOR: Yes, briefly, and it was very unsatisfactory, not at all well done. There was a lot of crude anti-Communist stuff. I thought if this is what I'm expected to talk about... But my fellow novices were all much less ideological than these gents, and the people we were meeting in the organization didn't seem like the people who were teaching this stuff. I don't mean to be too harsh, but it was very simple-minded. We also joined the Department trainees to do some of these courses and sit through some really, really sad films.

Q: You came in when?

PISTOR: September of 1959. Training has improved vastly since that time..

Q: This was sort of the end of the Eisenhower period.

PISTOR: That's right.

Q: Were there minorities or women in your class?

PISTOR: There were women in our class; no minority officers in our class of 14, but there were two women, one of whom stayed all the way through. USIA, it turns out, had a better record than the Department with minority recruitment, and once I got overseas I began to see African Americans and others in the mixture.

Q: When you came in, did you have any goal in mind of where you wanted to go?

PISTOR: No, I was ready to go anywhere, and so was my wife and so was our three-month-old son.

Q: I'm sure he had a big say.

PISTOR: In those days not only did USIA have the money to hire psychiatrists, they had the money and the luxury of sending their junior officers for their two-year training tour to two separate parts of the world. My two years were split between a very large post and a very small one. The large post was Tehran, which was an absolutely fascinating place to be.

Q: This would be '59/'60.

PISTOR: '59, we got there just before Thanksgiving of '59, and in December --- I think it was December– Eisenhower made that famous trip across...

President Eisenhower made his famous trip to Iran and India, and then they had to cancel Japan, so my first test of what you did in the big time was to be a runner and a pencil sharpener for the press center set up for the Eisenhower visit to the Shah.

Q: You were in Iran from, I guess, '59 or '60.

PISTOR: '59 and '60; for about 10 months. Eisenhower was President. The august Julius Holmes was ambassador, and Stewart Rockwell was the DCM. I don't think I ever saw the ambassador, maybe shimmering away in the distance, but certainly we saw quite a bit of Rockwell.

Q: What was your impression of our operation in Iran at that time?

PISTOR: It was enormous enterprise. AID seemed and was a separate organization altogether. Not only AID but there were big construction projects going on there with dams and roads and all kinds of stuff. We were into everything.

USIS itself occupied– to the brim– a seven-story building with a large printing plant in the basement, where we turned out a monthly magazine and all kinds of pamphlets and periodicals. On the top floor were recording studios where Iranian actors and directors and script writers put together two popular soap operas boosting our aid projects. We had 11 railroad cars fitted with movie projectors, small exhibits and portable libraries. USIS

Tehran was enormous. We produced the Iranian government's official newsreel.

As a junior officer I was able to voice the English version of the newsreel, talk on the Voice of America, tie the ribbons on programs for a big film that USIA produced called Legacy of Cyrus- -huge– all of this to shore up the Shah at this very delicate time and, I think, to help push along the white revolution so that this huge economic and political bet we had made on Iran was going to be rewarded with some prosperity and stability. How successful these efforts ultimately proved to be is doubtful, I know, but it certainly was a wonderful place to learn the techniques.

One thing I was able to do while I was in Tehran -- I'm giving myself a pat on the back-- was that during that time, the American radio officer left on leave and I was put in his chair for a couple of weeks. I had the Press Office translate the Radio Iran program schedule that our radio people were providing me so I could have a cross reference. It turned out that the two schedules differed widely. We discovered that the senior local radio man was also producing at our expense a third weekly program with the same actors and script writers. Our senior radio local– a talented man– pocketed the money. This wasn't American propaganda; it was just a soap opera. There's a lesson there about Persian entrepreneurship. And a much more important one about the need for language capability on our part.

Tehran was a very interesting place to be, and socially I must say Shirley and I mixed not only with the American community but with the British and other embassies. It made the Foreign Service seem about the most glamorous life you could lead: parties in the evening with carpets and candles and trays of food. Just a dazzling picture. But over time the atmosphere felt darker. You could sense the tensions affecting even the well to do and the well connected. Maybe *especially* the well to do and the well connected, because that's whom we saw.

Q: What was the impression that you were getting about the Shah?

PISTOR: Just before we got to Tehran, maybe five or six months earlier, Edward R. Murrow had been in Iran and USIS had helped him set up. The resulting CBS special was titled, accurately, Iran, Brittle Ally, which mirrored the unofficial assessments of the embassy officers. If people would ask, "How long do you think the Shah will last?" I could say truthfully, "Anywhere between two weeks and twenty years. You just can't tell."

A look at the villages showed the wretched conditions of these poor people in these stony, rocky places trying to eke out a living, and you'd think, somehow somebody's squeezing enough money out of those people to live in royal style, which the big landowners did, so you got a real sense of the great chasm between the rich and everybody else.

The American view, just the dinner party view, was that the revolution would come from the left if it came, (and it probably would), and that the people were going to stay in their

pitiful villages and city slums, prey to the mullahs who were venal and backward, and whom everybody was trying to shake off, the Shah on one hand and the Left on the other. Of course, we turned out to be dead wrong about who was going to end up on top.

Q: Did you have much connection with Iranian society at all, or were you pretty far down the line?

PISTOR: I was far down the line, but I got a chance to see more Iranians than other junior officers because I spent a good deal of time at the Iran America Society. There were some intelligent things being done there, and Shirley and I had the chance to see some students, some young journalists. But we were really just scratching the surface and you couldn't tell exactly who you were talking to and why they were talking to you. I had a good friend, Sean Sweeney, who had been a student at Harvard and was recording poetry recitals and storytelling sessions in the cafes for the Widener Library, and he got much closer to the "real people". One of Sean's friends was Galway Kinnell, who is today one of America's major poets.

By 1959 Kinnell was already making a literary reputation. He was handsome in a movie-star way and crumpled, always had a button off his shirt, and women just wanted to sew that button. He was just amazing, a magnet. He didn't speak Farsi, but he spoke very good French, and so the Iran America Society people held a poetry evening in which Kinnell translated his poetry into French Then the young Farsi poets who knew French but no English translated their Farsi poetry into French, and they met to discuss the works. It was very effective device, and made for a memorable evening.

This was the only time you got a chance to see people whose knuckles had been smashed by Savak, the Shah's secret police. We were seeing real political activists who could come, take the risk – because their names were being written down – take the risk of coming into the Iran America Society for an evening of this kind, poetry. So I think we had some contacts. Whether we were able to do anything with them was something else.

Q: Did you have any thought about where you wanted to go, or was that in the laps of the gods?

PISTOR: It was kind of in the laps of the gods. We enjoyed Iran because it was so exotic and so interesting. The first post, you know how it is– just wonderful. When the time came, we got a telegram that said we would now be going to Kampala, and I said, "Well, that's either in the Far East or in Africa," and discovered immediately that it was in Africa. I know that all of our friends in Iran just blanched and thought this was just going to be a terrible place, it's awful, and "What are you going to do?" But we went, Shirley and I and our little baby, and Shirley was pregnant with our second child, whom we had in Uganda. We moved from a very large, sophisticated operation to a very small two-man post.

Q: What was Uganda like at that time?

PISTOR: It was a transition year during which Uganda changed from a Trust Territory to a fully independent nation. The British were giving up control. They had retained foreign affairs and finance, but the legislative council was elected, the first prime minister was elected, and the government was taking shape. During the time we were there, just before we left in 1962, came the flag ceremony which unfurled Uganda's national flag as the Union Jack descended. But in the months before the Independence Ceremony the majority party, Milton Obote's party, had boycotted the election and refused to take part in the political process . They just stayed at home and would have nothing to do with it, so that the small Catholic party won the election, but everybody except but the Catholic party's leaders knew it was going to be in power for a very short time. And it was– crushed by Obote's popular and powerful party once independence was reached..

Uganda was never a colony, but it displayed colonial trappings. The Governor came to the last Empire Day parade in a white uniform with egret feathers and gold braid, and the bishop was African but was wearing a black cassock and a solar topee. On the parade ground was a statue of Queen Victoria, and we saw the soldiers, African soldiers, from the First World War in their medals and their ragged old uniforms. What a marvelous thing to be able to see the very end of the Empire and with all this pride and sentiment.

We arrived in Kampala one day after Louis Armstrong got there with his small band, and we stayed in the same hotel as Armstrong and his wife Lucille. Shirley and I were able to go with him to the palace of the Kabaka, the hereditary ruler of Buganda, home of the country's largest tribe. We were entertained by the Kabaka's royal drummers, fed by the Kabaka's many servants, and bowed to and smiled at by his wives and court officials. Louis Armstrong gave us the chance to see this royal house still intact, still operating just as it had in the Nineteenth Century with ceremonies borrowed from the Court of St. James's mixed with Baganda's own royal rules and customs. It was absolutely riveting to see this before it all disappeared. Just a few years later the Kabaka – known as King Freddie by the expatriate community– and his loyalist soldiers were attacked by government troops, the palace bombed and burned out and King Freddie driven into exile in London. But during our time the Kingdom was still as it had been.

The PAO, who was expecting me to be a public affairs assistant in a bookkeeping and clerical sense, was very disappointed to see that I was just as ignorant of government accounting systems as he professed to be, and that I was eager to plunge into whatever cultural and information opportunities Uganda offered. The PAO definitely didn't see– or want– me as a sidekick. But he and I did a film show together at the Royal Palace, at the Kabaka's command or request. Nobody could be taller or higher than the Kabaka, so the courtiers and visitors crawled on the floor in his presence, except the PAO and me. (Americans don't grovel). When do you get a chance to see literal kowtowing like that?

Q: You never do really. What was the outlook for Uganda when you got there?

PISTOR: Thank God I had no money and no influence anywhere, because if I had, I

would have used my own money to bet, or the United States' money to lavish on Uganda, because this was the country that was going to lead Africa. It didn't have the colonial hang-ups, it had a very good civil service, it had a marvelous university, Makerere College. The minute you landed in Kampala, there were people you could talk to, who enjoyed talking to you about real things. They weren't kidding. They were interested, lively, educated people, and those who weren't educated wanted to be educated. I really thought Uganda was really going to take off and show the way to success at least to East Africa if not the rest of the continent. Our daughter, Julia, was born in Kampala. Her doctor was an Englishman who taught at Makerere. The hospital was small, plain and surrounded by plantains. When Shirley was taken to the delivery room, I was told to wait on the verandah just outside the door. Shortly, I heard a loud yell from Shirley and then a wail from the baby. A couple of minutes later, the door opened and I was invited in for a cup of tea with Shirley and baby Julia.

Q: Was there any repercussion from the events - I can't think what the name of them were - in Kenya?.

PISTOR: The Mau Mau.

Q: ...the Mau Mau in Kenya.

PISTOR: In Kenya in the 1950's the British colonial government had fixed on the independence leader Jomo Kenyatta as the principal designer of the bloody Mau Mau rebellion. Because Kenyatta had a large following in Kenya and throughout East Africa, they couldn't just throw him in prison without risking serious nationwide disorder, so they isolated him by sending him deep into the hinterland under house arrest, a judicial practice known as "rustication." The demand for immediate independence became so insistent that the colonial authorities were forced to move Kenyatta from "far rustication" to "near rustication." They'd had him out in the absolute wilds, and the popular pressure was so great that when they brought him closer to town they had to begin dealing with him as a legitimate negotiating partner.

This was happening during our time in Kampala. Everything in Uganda itself was on hold because of Obote's boycott of the election.. The British were pulling out, and Benedicto Kiwanuka, of the Catholic party– who was the prime minister of the day– was himself the only person who thought he was going to be able to stay in office. Everybody else knew that as soon as Obote said, "Okay, I'll join the race," that was it.

And this poor little Catholic party began almost immediately to tear down the constitutional safeguards that would make radio independent, for example, or any of these latter-day British guarantees: freedom of assembly, of speech and of the press, because he wanted for his government to be able to seize the initiative and run the place without bothersome democratic hindrances. It was very sad to watch. We thought that Uganda's five big tribal entities could transform themselves into regional party organizations, that they could move from inherited tribal animosities into nation building, and it just didn't

work.

We had wonderful audiences for our programs. We were there at the time of the Kennedy-Nixon debates, and we received them from Washington on kinescope and put them on in our dingy little auditorium and library in Kampala, and people lined up all around the block to watch them. These were not sophisticated people from the university, although there were some of those too. These were just guys from on the street. Partly they'd heard there was something interesting to see at USIS, so they stood in line and came in and saw it. Some of them didn't speak English or didn't speak it well enough. You know, Kennedy is easy to hear for us, but that New England twang and rapid delivery is very difficult for somebody, say from Kampala, to grasp at first, but it didn't matter. His animation, his manner, so affected this crowd that there were cheers and applause.. He certainly won that debate in Kampala.

Q: What about Idi Amin? Was he just a non-com somewhere?

PISTOR: I guess he was a sergeant major and a boxer. I remember Shirley and me being invited to a boxing match. I wish I could say that Idi Amin was boxing, but he wasn't. There was, however, a boxing match, and we went in black tie. Local friends said, "You know, if you have mosquito boots, wear them, because you'll be nipped at the ankles." Black tie and mosquito boots— a wonderful remnant of British colonial style. I imagine it was one of the last matches with the fight fans in tuxedos. So in Kampala we had the\ chance to see the end of an era, a definitive change in the pattern of an old, strong relationship, a transition that appeared to be without serious rancor or resentment on either side.

That's why I say I would have bet on success. There was so much excitement in that country and so much hope for the future and so much talent, so many bright people in jobs already that were making a difference, and then the whole thing just went up in smoke and blood.

Q: Were you able to look at sort of the means, the media, there? Was it a good solid media?

PISTOR: No. There were two media. There was the one daily newspaper, edited by an Englishman. It was a solid paper, part of the Aga Khan's Argus Group. Then there was the indigenous press, which we also cultivated, but it was mostly about how many bottles of beer could they wring out of us. Guys sat around and got awfully drunk and then told stories about white guys and black guys.

Q: Was there much of an English or British expatriate community there, because one thinks of Kenya and it's a real problem?

PISTOR: They didn't have the problem because expatriates didn't own land. There were no white settlers. Anybody who worked in Uganda was an administrator or a contract

employee– nothing permanent-- in private companies like the United Africa Company and Ford Motors. Most were British and some of them were certainly colonial in style, but they didn't have the bite or the power that the colonials did. We were in Kampala when John Kennedy was elected, and almost the first thing he did as President was to make G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams (former governor of Michigan) Assistant Secretary of State for Africa and send him off on a good will trip.

Williams went first to Kenya and then to Uganda. In Kenya he answered a question posed by a newsman which made the headlines. "Williams Says Africa for the Africans," caused an international furor. When he got to Kampala, the British tabloids had sent cables to their stringers saying in effect, "Jump on this one." There were about two stringers in Uganda, both of them boozing English guys who had been there forever, and one of them got this wonderful cable which could have been written by Evelyn Waugh, listing a set of embarrassing questions to ask Williams. The stringer didn't want to ask them, so he handed the cable to me and I pocketed it.

When Williams and his entourage got to Kampala, they were still somewhat shaken from a nasty little incident in Kenya. Mrs. Williams had a birthmark on her forehead, not a serious one, but noticeable. She was in a reception line in Nairobi shaking hands with members of the (all white) city council and one of them said to her, "Ah, I see you've been kissed by Tom Mboya."

Q: Tom Mboya being the black African labor leader.

PISTOR: That's right, and an independence leader in Kenya. Williams himself was in a conversation with some old- time white settlers and some younger African politicians, altogether a group of five or six.. One of the elderly colonials was holding forth and he pointed at one of the Africans and said to him , "I remember your father when he was dressed in feathers." So this gave Williams a glimpse at what colonial Africa could look like. Now, we didn't have that in Kampala. There might have been such things said behind closed doors, but nothing public. As I say, the expatriates in Uganda were temporary residents and didn't have the resentments the settlers felt at the prospect of the enormous changes already taking place

Q: After that, did you feel that this idea of a year and a year was a pretty good one?

PISTOR: It was pretty good. It's not affordable any longer, but to be able to give somebody a chance at two different cultures and two different-sized operations, with two different sets of problems or opportunities, really was a wonderful thing.

Q: Where'd you go after this?

PISTOR: Then we were sent to our first two-year assignment, and that was Douala, Cameroon in West Africa. First we came back to the United States on leave. I was given 12 weeks of French at FSI, and then we moved off to Douala. Douala was a branch post.

A consulate was just opening and so was a USIS post, so I was there to open it. A marvelous opportunity for a junior officer.

Before I describe Douala though, I ought to note that when we were in Kampala I did have a chance to go for three months, taking my wife and children at my own expense, to Usumbura (now Bujumbura), in what was then Rwanda- Urundi, to warm the chair of the new PAO who was to be there. He'd landed, left his suitcases, and gone back to get his family, and USIA needed somebody there to open the place, so I was it. That was a fascinating thing to do, because the Belgians were just leaving and every morning we sat on our front porch having coffee after breakfast and watched the Belgian paratroopers drop between our suburb and town. There were drops every day to show the Burundis not to get funny.

Q: That they'd be back.

PISTOR: Yes. It was such a small place, and we were there for the election of the first prime minister, whose name was Prince Louis Rwagasori, and he came to the opening of our little cultural center within days of taking office. We had a glass of champagne with him. Two weeks later he was assassinated. It was such a small town that we had met both the Prince and his assassin. The assassin was a Greek butcher or grocery store manager who was so badly in debt that he did it for money. Of course, he was picked up immediately. But that was such an astonishing thing to happen, just to have that little snapshot of Belgian colonialism. I thought then if I'd been smart I would have kept the phone book, because the phone book for Burundi was the phone book for the Belgian Congo, and you could trace exactly how the whole thing functioned from the center out. It was a remarkable thing. The Belgians were very different from the British in their administration and their attitudes.

Q: Was there sort of a feeling of the Americans that the British are probably going to leave something behind, the Belgians really haven't made much of an investment here...

PISTOR: No, the Belgians had made an extraordinary emotional investment. They thought they were going to stay forever, and they were very embittered when they discovered that they couldn't make a deal and actually run things, that these Congolese, Burundians and Rwandans would hand the economic and political keys to their Belgian betters. After all, the French retained a grip on their African former colonies. The Belgians thought they'd do that too. They were absolutely astonished when they were booted out.

Q: You were in the Cameroons from when to when?

PISTOR: In Cameroon from 1962 to '64, and we were there at the time when East Cameroon, which had been under French tutelage from World War I on, joined with West Cameroon, which had been the Southern Cameroons under British tutelage. We watched these two former separate countries come together. It was remarkable, because their

attitudes were so different, the attitudes both of the politicians and the people you talked to. On home leave in Arizona I ran across a young man whose father was a distinguished politician in Cameroon of the English persuasion, and this young man was at the university in Tucson. We had a meal together, and he said, "Well, you'll find that East Cameroonians refer to us in West Cameroon as 'according to's,' because when we're approached by a policeman or a gendarme , we say, 'According to such and such law, you can't do this, and according to that such and such regulation.'.. On the east side they just go 'Pow' and hit you on the head." So there were enormous differences in attitude between the two, inherited from their colonial masters.

My boss, the Country PAO in Yaounde, assigned me the southern region of East Cameroon and the whole of West Cameroon to look after, so for two years after setting up the post, I traveled back and forth to West Cameroon. You could see traces there of the earlier German colony-- there was a fountain with a bas-relief of Bismarck in the port city now called Victoria. The solid, thick-walled administrative buildings which had been built by the Germans at the end of the nineteenth century had been used by both the British and their Cameroonian successors. The government house in the little hill station of Buea was still called the Schloss because that's what the Germans had called it. There was even a huge Bechstein grand piano in the Schloss that must have been head-loaded from the Coast. You could see the bones of two different colonial eras and the beginnings of independence, all in one place.

JFK was assassinated when we were in Douala, and I remember going to the newspaper and alerting them. The paper had already gone to bed. I sat with the French editor of the single daily newspaper in Cameroon and I had the Voice of America on my portable radio. I translated in my execrable French what the Voice was telling me in English as the story was breaking, and then he wrote it up and was able to get into the paper in the morning. Then a couple of days later my wife and I were in our house listening to the radio, tuning into the radio, while we were getting dressed to go somewhere when Jack Ruby shot Oswald. Now, the French and the Cameroonians that we had known immediately jumped to larger conspiracy, and I tried to explain we've got a lot of crazy people but we don't have a lot of big plots, or successful ones. But the minute Oswald was shot, I wasn't able to talk to anybody at all ever about saying this is not a conspiracy; you're paid to say this.

Q: Did you feel part of a developing core of Africanists by that time?

PISTOR: I did and I didn't. You know, I yearned for Europe too, just like everybody else did. What I was doing was fascinating, it was absolutely fascinating work, but by the time we got to Douala -- and Douala was much less pleasant than Kampala-- we began to see the outlines of the post-independent troubles ahead. In the southern part of Cameroon where we were, there had already been a couple of panga (machete) attacks on movie theaters and some guerilla activity in the countryside. After being freed from colonialism Africa was entering a tortuous period of transition from which it hasn't emerged yet.

USIA's African Area director had come to see us in Kampala, and he sat on our front porch and said, "You know, we're really pleased to have you here and we think you're doing a terrific job. We try to send people down from Europe, from France and Germany. They come down here and they whine and they complain and they just hate it. Now we're developing a whole bunch of people who don't know any better, who don't know anything else." I kind of thought, well, that means that I'm here for the duration. Douala was so damp, so wet, so miserable in climate-- it was in a mangrove swamp-- and I thought I can't get out of Africa, but maybe we can go north where the desert is, maybe Morocco or somewhere, at least to get some sea and some dryness. So that's what I put on my wish list when the time came. I sent it off and waited, and what came back was that not only was I not going to Morocco, but my family and I were going to London . I was to be Student Affairs Officer at the London embassy. I thought, that might be damp but I'll take it.

Q: So you went to London when?

PISTOR: I went to London in 1964.

Q: And you were there until when?

PISTOR: Well, this is kind of a secret. It used to have to be a secret because people would kill me. I got there in 1964 and I left in 1969. Then I went back in 1973 and lasted until 1977.

Q: Well, let's talk about the five years you were first there.

PISTOR: It was a wonderful job.

Q: What was your job?

PISTOR: It was called Student Affairs Officer, with an office in USIS separate from the regular USIS program in the U.K. The program was directed at African, Asian and Middle Eastern students getting their degrees and further education courses in the UK, at universities and institutions there. It meant that my first contacts were with the National Union of Students and with the student unions of the universities and with the student organizations of African and South Asian, Middle Eastern and a few Latin American organizations, some of them very radical, as you can imagine. Many of them were affiliated with African political parties and rival independence movements, like ZAPU and ZANU in Rhodesia. There was a place in London called Africa Unity House, funded by the Russians and the Egyptians and run by the Ghanaians and the Egyptians, where every (figurative) bomb-throwing, government upending, freedom fighting foreign - student organization in London had a telephone and a desk. So it was pretty interesting stuff, adding the fact that both Vietnam and U.S. race relations were on the boil. Plenty to talk about, if anybody wanted to listen.

It turned out that we were able to develop some relationships over the five years I was in the job that proved useful and even instructive for a number of the students, teachers, journalists and British politicians, with whom we worked. Not only did we have the Vietnam War going on, which made things difficult and dicey in some ways, especially with the student population, but we had a civil rights revolution going on in the United States, an almost gleeful radicalism burgeoning on our campuses, and challenges to traditional authority busting out all over, so my little office was able to do a lot of facilitating. We arranged seminars and speakers, and developed visitor programs for student leaders from the developing world studying in Britain , sending them to the U.S. to see for themselves what was going on.

I had a big break when I first got to London, because we arrived in September and in November I learned that Martin Luther King, who was on his way to Stockholm to accept his Nobel Prize, had been invited by the Dean of St. Paul's to read the lesson or give a sermon in the Cathedral, which no foreigner had ever done. So I called USIA and said, "If Dr. King is coming here, is there any chance of our getting him to meet African students?" They said, "Well, we can't do anything about it. Why don't you call the Southern Christian Leadership people down in Atlanta?" They gave me permission to jump over the government, and we got an agreement from Dr. King and his people. He had a very tight schedule. He was going to stay at the Hilton, and he wouldn't have any time except the morning after his arrival, and any meeting would have to be in the hotel. So I hired the ballroom of the Hilton and got a lot of little gold chairs and went through the National Union of Students and the African Student Union and got the president and the secretary of every African student organization in Britain that I could find, a couple of hundred people. They packed the room for Dr. King to come in and see them.

Dr. King's organization was not tightly run, and it was hard to find a way to get him down to the ballroom. His traveling companions were up in a room, in a suite, trying to phone back to Atlanta for something and he was tied up, but I was up there in the corridor trying to see when he would come down to see my restive 200 people. There was Dr. King, there was Dr. King's father, there was Mrs. King, there was a whole host of people, and there was one young guy who said to me, "I know you've got a problem, so I'll come down and I'll warm up the crowd a little bit." I said, "Thank you very much." He walked downstairs, went to the ballroom. We had a table set up for Dr. King to sit behind. This man came and sat on the front of the table and talked a little bit about the history of Dr. King and the movement, and he was absolutely superb. I've never heard anybody better than this young man was, just so relaxed and talking confidentially to these people. Then Dr. King came in and gave kind of a version of "I Had a Dream," a wonderful rip-roaring thing but very different from the informal approach of the "crowd warmer," who, it turns out, was Andrew Young. He gave a marvelous start my tour as Student Affairs Officer, and I've never forgotten it.

I also had the chance to see Malcolm X before he died. He had made a trip to the Near East and he had been particularly struck by what he had seen in Egypt, with the erasure of the black-white divide, which shook his ""white devil" approach to race, and it was said

that was changing his mind a little about how to wage the struggle in America.

Q: Yes, he was going through sort of a metamorphosis.

PISTOR: I had a very good friend, a South African student leader, who thought he could never go back to South Africa. He said, "Would you like to meet Malcolm X?" I said, "Sure, but I'm not certain Malcolm X would want to meet me." He said, "Oh, no, it's going to be fine. Come on. I'll meet you in the pub across the street from this house," kind of a nationalist Africa organization house, and he said, "I'll meet you there and then we'll go over across the street." I said, "Fine," so I met him and he'd been drinking. So we walked across the street and went in and Malcolm X was there and I've never had a more glacial greeting, because he sized it up right away. Here was this white guy from the American embassy and his African friend he's obviously gotten drunk. But still you don't get a chance to meet Malcolm X, whatever the circumstance, on or of f his own turf.

That's the kind of job student affairs was at the beginning. As I said, it got better because we got more and more people involved. The King-Young '64 beginning was bracketed at the end in '69 by a Nixon -Kissinger visit. Just as he came into office, President Nixon made a trip to eight countries in Europe and he had with him Dr. Kissinger and some others, Kissinger being the one who was really important. They came to the embassy. The telegrams in advance had wanted kind of a "one of each" meeting: a conservative politician, a labor politician, a business man, a labor leader, a youth leader, and a leader from the ethnic minority groups in Britain. Well, my office had the youth and the minority, and we had good contacts on the labor side, so I was able to get into this group three people of my acquaintance who got to talk with incoming President Nixon and the as yet not terribly well known Henry Kissinger. That was just before I finished my tour.

Q: What was your impression of how the British educational system was dealing with both foreign and domestic minorities, particularly the blacks?

PISTOR: At the university level they were doing very well. Education was free -- I can't remember; you didn't have to be there very long before you could get a council grant to go to a university or a college -- so a great number of African and American and other foreign students were able to take advantage of this, and they brought with them the money from the council grants for the educational institutions, and they were pretty well integrated. There was a large student Left in Britain, and so the minority students were largely welcome. There were lots who didn't think one way or another politically, and they were comfortable there, too.

But at the level below that, very often in Britain class trumps race. The things we noted very much, not so much in the student population but in the population at large, was the absolute denial that there was any race problem at all. "You have problems; we don't." And, of course, they had terrible problems festering. Happily, there were some, young politicians particularly, who knew and were quite interested and concerned about how we were facing the problems, our mistakes and some of our successes. So it was a real two-

way highway.

Q: How did our Civil Rights Movement, including the assassination of Dr. King and other things, play while you were there. Were you spending an awful lot of time explaining...?

PISTOR: Yes, an awful lot of time, very often explaining to deaf ears too. It was more a British problem than it was an African student problem. It was just agony. Neither Johnson nor Nixon traveled well; that is to say, their personas on television and elsewhere just didn't work in Britain, especially Johnson. He couldn't get a break. The only time we were ever successful marketing, if you can say it, Johnson was just to remind them that he was as tough as he said he was. But the Nixon thing didn't happen until my second time in England.

Q: Well, we won't touch that.

PISTOR: You know, Dr. King's assassin was apprehended in London when he escaped, and I think the British in an odd sense we shared the shock of murder with the British. It was an awful thing for everybody. I had African students and especially South Asian students to whom I talked, who instantly believed the conspiracy theories all set up for King and then, of course, for Robert Kennedy It was a very difficult time for us, and nobody believed anything we said about these assassinations At the same time the war in Vietnam was heating up. There were all kinds of things going on in the Anglo-American relationship, with plenty to talk about, including the cultural programs that we did. When I had the student- exchange programs, we sent as many as 45 African students a year to the United States on three-week tours of the United States.

Q: I thought this might be a good place to stop. Before we leave your time in London, which was '64 to '69, we'll talk about the cultural program and also - I'm putting this at the end so we'll pick it up - whether you got entangled in defending the Vietnam War and all that sort of stuff.

PISTOR: I can talk about that. I did, and it was very uncomfortable, because you didn't want that to swallow up the rest of the dialogue we were pursuing– civil rights, for example. I tried to use surrogates to help handle the Vietnam defense, such as it was.

Q: Okay, we'll talk about that.

PISTOR: I'd get State Department and USIA officers who had served in our Saigon Embassy to talk to the student and faculty groups who requested speakers from the Embassy, but who really wanted only a whipping boy. In order to remain credible on other subjects, I tried to stay out of the Vietnam line of fire myself, with only partial success.

Q: Are there any other major things we might talk about on this London thing before we

move on?

PISTOR: I'll think about it a little bit.

Q: Also, how did you find dealing with sort of the standard Brits, too, whether this was a problem or not.

PISTOR: They were kind of special Brits really. They were people concerned about African independence movements, and others who were supporters of our efforts in civil rights. Some were senior politicians, generally labor and leftist Tory politicians (if there was such a thing, and there was), and also our Foreign Office contacts. They're very close to being, not a brotherhood exactly, but you know, there are a lot of connections around in the British elites. Some of them are family, some are institutional, some of them are school. So you never know exactly what the relationships are between public and private, and who has nominal power, and who has the real thing. You could call our student-affairs partnerships cozy, friendly and rewarding. On the British side, there was almost always reserve behind the charm. .

Q: Okay. So we'll pick this up the next time. We'll talk about the London time cultural program and how you dealt with Vietnam from that point of view, and then we'll move on.

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This is June 2001. You were saying there were two major subjects.

PISTOR: Two major subjects for these youth programs– some of the youths were not all that youthful, as with most programs of this kind. As I have said, there were MP's, other politicians, journalists, British and American students, teachers at universities and elsewhere who participated in these programs as well as the students from other countries, particularly from Africa. We got money for the program from USIA's geographic offices. The two subjects, as I said, were Vietnam, which increased in intensity- - it started in '64 when we arrived, and by the time we left London in '69 it was a raging fire. British universities were modeling themselves on ours, with teach-ins, protest marches and building occupations. No chance whatever for rational discourse.

But our other subject, which went extremely well with even the most radical student groups, was the civil rights revolution going on in the United States at the time. There were lots of successes our target audiences didn't know about, and lots of lessons to be learned from things we were doing wrong, as well as lots of things we were doing right. We were lucky enough to have the right people travel to the UK to talk about the issue. You found some curious anomalies like when Roy Wilkins, real civil rights leader, was jeered at the London School of Economics by white Americans students , who were avoiding service in Vietnam in a sense and were so righteous in their indignation and their condemnation of the United States that they would take on a genuine civil rights

hero. There were some absurdities, but mostly the lessons were interesting. The young leaders I started to talk about, the African students whom we sent to the United States on 45-day visits, found that nothing they wanted to learn about was denied them. They could go to a Black Panther house in Chicago. They could go just about anywhere that they wanted to go. We had one student who came back, one group of four, said their escort was white and they were invited to a kind of black nationalist house in Chicago, got to the door, and a guy came to the door and said, "You can't come in," to the white guy, and the students said, "If he doesn't come in, we don't go in." There was then a conference and he went in. So they had real experiences in the United States.

Q: The American civil rights problem, I would think, would be considerably different from that concerned with African students. They're trying to build up an infrastructure and all this. Did they seem to relate to this, or was this just sort of an interesting, peculiar manifestation of the United States?

PISTOR: I think they related to the revolutionary aspects, the excitement of it and, just as British students or any students reading about the United States, were tempted to either dismiss or to decry what the United States was doing, not believing that there had been serious legislation, serious attempts, and these African students picked that up right away and did it very well. Also, they confronted, by virtue of the color of their skins, some of the questions that they had been thinking about. One group was stopped as they were walking down the street in San Francisco and slammed up against the police car and frisked. When the policeman discovered that they were students from Africa, he was very apologetic, but obviously because they were four black young men walking together, this guy jumped them almost automatically. An Indian friend of mine was interested in police matters, and in Chicago in 1968 at the time of the Democratic Convention, he spent the morning with those in the Police Department concerned with minorities and minority rights, and then in the afternoon he was hit over the head by a policeman whose badge had tape over it so he wouldn't see the number. There were excitements, there were lessons. A major lesson learned, and one that we taught extremely well, was the openness (and the risk taking) with which we put together these 45-day trips across the US. We made it clear that we didn't guide people to only the " nicer" places.. We didn't push them into the bad places, but we were open and we followed their suggestions as well as we could. It made an enormous positive impression on these students and on the people they talked to.

Q: Were these coming back through Great Britain and staying in Great Britain for a while or…?

PISTOR: Indeed they were. We chose them from British universities, and we chose them partly through their own student organizations, partly through their professors and their colleges. These were top-flight students. The ones we interviewed and then selected were people who were doing postgraduate work often or degrees at British universities, students with excellent records and political savvy as well.

Q: Did you get any feel for what happened when they came back to the universities? Were they saying, you know, "The TV and the newspapers - I've been on the ground and I've seen what they're trying to do," or did you get much feedback?

PISTOR: I got feedback about the second time I talked to them after their return, and that would be when we were in a pub at the university or something and people were starting to tell the stories. Rather than tell what lessons had been learned, they told the stories or described the personalities they had met. I got the feeling that it had been-- I wouldn't say life changing– but certainly idea changing and eye opening for these people, and I think they did spread word of their experiences and their more informed view of the US when they returned to their universities. The question was would they retain the same positive views when they got home, and were there lessons learned for Ghanaians returning to Ghana, Nigerians returned to Nigeria, and so forth. There we got some evidence from people we had seen later, but not a lot.

Q: Of course, too, these are seeds that are planted that may not bud for years.

PISTOR: That's right, and just the fact of having an experience in your youth that exciting and that interesting is bound to affect something in your attitudes. The other influences I think we had, because of American openness and the interest of American professionals with whom we worked - I'm talking about Congressmen and staff people, members of the government of Lyndon Johnson's administration, journalists, American experts traveling abroad. They were all so open and all so concerned and interested in all these problems that those we could tap for dinner discussions, three-day seminars, however you get people together, had a real effect on significant numbers of influential young Britons.

As I think I said earlier in this tape, when we had Martin Luther King address the African students on our dollar, he then kept that ballroom for another meeting, which launched the Council Against Racial Discrimination in Britain, which became the UK's largest race relations organization. I had some quite good friends who came to the United States on grants at one time or another. They drafted the first civil rights legislation in Britain, and I think our program helped stimulate and helped guide what they were doing

Q: Did you get any feeling that there were those in the British government or press or something who felt that we were creating a bunch of agitators who were going to come and stir things up?

PISTOR: There were always those. But the government officials with whom we worked were happy with what we were doing and cooperated with us in several projects. What we were doing was open, and there were people, of course, who objected to what they saw. I found a few of them on university faculties, but not in the Foreign Office or the British Council. These people objected to so much about the United States anyway, that it didn't make a hell of a lot of difference; it was just another harrumph. I don't want to dismiss this disapproval, but it wasn't serious and it didn't build up in things like the Daily Mail

or anything.

The only time we got real publicity was in a publication called The Black Dwarf, edited by an all-round radical, Tariq Ali, who's still on stage in Britain as an international radical; and he gave us the compliment of saying that we were able to bring Nigerians together who were at each other's throats in the Biafra War. Of course he thought we were CIA, and you just had to accept in the beginning that people would say that, and then be as open as possible to show that it isn't so.

Q: Did you ever, while you were doing this, tap into and monitor what was going on at the, was it, English-speaking union, was it the Oxford Debating Society?

PISTOR: Yes, the Oxford Union. And indeed toward the end of my time as student affairs officer, Henry Cabot Lodge who had been ambassador to Vietnam and then-- remember, there was a time when he was a kind of an advisor and not doing much – Johnson was nervous about him and didn't know what to do with him, and the Oxford Union asked him to come and debate the Vietnam question. He did, and he made a ghastly speech. I didn't accompany him in the car to Oxford; our press attaché did. We don't have the tradition of debating that the British do, and along with Lodge on our side of the debate was the Foreign Secretary in the Labor government, who had been an Oxford debater in addition to having been a veteran of many years of House of Commons rough and tumble.

Henry Cabot Lodge started with one of the shoulder-to-shoulder stories about Winston Churchill -- you don't do that at Oxford – he said something Churchillian about US-UK solidarity and the whole audience went, "O-o-o-o-h!" and started after him from the very beginning, and he froze to his script and he said something about, "The war will be over when the Viet Cong soldier, instead of reaching for his rifle, would reach for a coconut instead." Well, the Foreign Secretary, who spoke later, mopped the floor with the Opposition and did a brilliant job of defending us. But the thing is, Cabot Lodge was so unnerved because he wasn't used to this kind of thing. In those days, in the '70s, we started heckling our own politicians; but before that our politicians generally spoke to the convinced; they didn't have any experience of boos and catcalls, and of course in Britain all politicians get that. So he was terribly shaken getting into the car, and my friend Jim Pettus, who was press attaché at the time, said that at the beginning of the drive back to London, Lodge was kind of trembling and then as he got farther and farther away from Oxford and closer and closer to London, he began to think that he had done a fairly good job, and by the end of the trip he said, "I think we did that very well."

I didn't speak, except once or twice, to college audiences on the subject of Vietnam, not because I was afraid of it but because it wouldn't do much. I must say that USIA Washington sent us some zealous partisans, who did an awful job because they got so furious at the first hint of disagreement, and of course the disagreement was violent, and also youthful, which kind of guaranteed disastrous results. So we tried as hard as we could to maintain serious conversations among journalists, university lecturers and people

in the British government who were really concerned and had come back from and would be able to talk rationally about the problem. I felt during my time there that our only gain in explaining the Vietnam War would be to convince people– if you could get that far– that the United States was not a malign power. They might feel that we were completely wrong, that we had gotten off on the wrong foot and didn't know how to get out; that all of those things might well be true but that we were not in Vietnam to grab the resources of the Vietnamese and grind our heel in their faces. It was a hard sell in the United States at that time among the youth and a hard sell in the UK, but it's the closest we could come to convincing anybody of much else.

We had a USIS officer in London who had served in Vietnam and who was our designated Vietnam speaker, and we sent him to speak at a teach-in at the University of Sussex, in Brighton. Just by chance I was the press duty officer at the embassy on that Sunday when my friend went down to Brighton, and he took his teenage daughter with him because it's a lovely spot and was a beautiful time of the year in the spring. His name was Bob Beers; gone now, but he was a wonderful guy. When Bob and his daughter got to Sussex University, it turned out to be real trouble. The teach-in was going on in one building, Bob was in an adjacent building awaiting his time to speak and there were students and a few newsmen lining the path between the two. The press was out there because they were pretty excited about what might happen, and it was a bigger event than we had planned on. Bob sized up the situation, and he decided to leave his daughter in the first building – he didn't want her to have to run this gauntlet - and he dashed with a group of students and professors to the other building, and some kid had a can of red paint and sloshed it on Bob. At the embassy I had a call from one of the tabloids describing what had happened, and asking for a comment. I said, "Bob Beers is not as bad as he's painted." It didn't make the paper.

Poor Bob took away from the incident more than a ruined suit; he rightly decided not to participate in any further emotion-charged runaway meetings. So after that experience we didn't do a lot of confrontational things. As I say though, when people saw that the United States did have social programs, was engaged in a struggle for civil rights among all our citizens, did have political winds blowing that people elsewhere hadn't known about, we almost always got a respectful hearing and positive interest in the societal changes taking place in America. We had other staples to talk about as well. The federal system, for example, which people don't understand, not only African students but British professors, who had a lot of harsh things to say about what was going on in the United States then, and I think we provided a valuable corrective. It was a fascinating five years. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

One more anecdote about my years as Student Affairs Officer. We programmed a number of civil rights figures, and one day Langston Hughes turned up– a hero of mine.

Q: The Harlem poet.

PISTOR: …the Harlem poet and playwright and short story writer, and nurturer of talent.

He was in the UK with a protégé of his, a young novelist named Paula Marshall-- she's since become very successful. Hughes was a kindly, gentle, quiet person who'd seen it all, but he hadn't become embittered. We booked him at Africa Unity House, and he drew a large and radical audience, young Africans, Asians and British. The British ranged from communists to just agitators of no particular stripe, but they didn't like us much. Hughes described the work he had done over the years and tried to talk about the history of the civil rights movement, but the restive crowd was really not interested because he was too mild and too polite.

Paula Marshall, who on the book jacket for her first novel, *Brown Girl, Brown Stones*, had a kind of page-boy bob, but by the time she got to London she was wearing a full afro. This change of hair style, it turned out, summed up her political attitudes. She was sitting next to her mentor and she said, "We've been sent here by the United States government. There's a government representative right out there" - and she pointed at my wife and me. Then she said, "It's a funny thing. The United States government doesn't care what you *say*, just as long as you don't *do* anything." She brought the house down. But it wasn't very fair to Langston Hughes, and I think the Langston Hughes's and the Roy Wilkins's and the real workhorses and pioneers in these movements got entirely undeserved rough treatment from "revolutionary" youth in those days, and we were scalded by the increasingly heated Vietnam issue that season, as it began to affect all our relationships.

So that was it. In early 1969, at the end of my time as student affairs officer– I think told you earlier– I was asked to provide one youth leader, one "minority activist" and one British MP involved with race relations, for a kind of one-of-each meeting in London with incoming President, Richard Nixon, and his recently appointed Foreign Policy Advisor, Dr. Kissinger. It was an interesting way to wind up my assignment.

At the same time, Walter Annenberg, our new ambassador, chose as the subject of his first public speech, student violence in the United States, because just as he arrived in Britain there were headlines in all the papers about a situation at the London School of Economics. The Director of the LSE had put his foot down; well, he put his foot down for about 13 minutes and then his foot was pulled out from under him and the poor man lost control of the institution. But at that point Annenberg thought he had won the day and wanted to compliment him on his firmness and resolve.

The Ambassador's personal assistant came to see me, knowing that I was the student man. When he showed me the transcript of the speech, and I said, "I think he's making a terrible mistake about this subject at this time, because Britain is nervous about its own student problems, and it would look like interfering." One of the things the speech said was that Governor Reagan, confronted with riots at the University of California, had sent helicopters to tear gas the mob– resolutely imposing a final solution that ended student unrest on the campus. At first I tried to argue the assistant out of the speech altogether, with no luck at all. Then I said, "Well, at least you've got to take out 'final solution.'" He said, "Why? The ambassador wrote that himself." I said, "Here 'final solution' means

only one thing." He said, "Oh, my God." Our only success was that they took out that phrase. The Ambassador got a little cuffing from The Guardian and a couple of other papers about that speech, but it didn't stir up much criticism. I must say, Mr. Annenberg did a very good job as ambassador from then on. So that was the end of that.

Q: Did you get any feel - I can't remember if we covered this before - because this was the time when these groups were emerging; I'm thinking about the two groups, minorities, coming up; one would be the people coming from the Caribbean, and the other would Pakistanis and Indians but particularly Pakistanis because I think they were a little lower down on the socioeconomic...

PISTOR: You're talking about in Britain?

Q: In Britain, yes.

PISTOR: The Indians and the Pakistanis (who had originally been Indians) had from the 1920s on been pretty well organized in Britain as radical kind of semi-revolutionary people, and they had friends in the Parliament and in the radical press and had been organized for years. I did quite a bit of work among Indian students; the Pakistani students were at sixes and sevens. They wanted to be a radical anti-government force, but their fight with India kept getting in the way, and Islamic pulls were coming even as early as the '60s. Of course, the Pakistani students I knew were not Islamist by any means; they were red radicals and proud of it. But, yes, we worked with them.

Some of the most vociferous civil rights voices in Britain were West Indian. The West Indians could be divided into two sets of community representatives, one very good, practical, pragmatic politicians, and other made up of verbal bomb throwers-- the same thing you'd find here– but there was also a strain of Black Nationalism, which wanted to identify as brothers with the African students and African revolutionaries, and some of these guys could be very nasty, intimidating and even shooting people. They were disowned by most of the West Indian community, but they were part of the mix.

Q: Did we shout at all to these groups?

PISTOR: Generally my office did more of this than anybody else in the embassy, because these groups gravitated toward the programs we were doing. So, yes, I'm quite proud of the work that we were doing.

Q: Well, then, you left there when?

PISTOR: Left there in the summer of 1969.

Q: Whither?

PISTOR: When I left London, I didn't have a job. They were threatening me with

something they called the suitcase job. I worked for the European area in USIA, and they had a position in which the incumbent was stationed in Washington but traveled constantly to the NATO countries. It was an awful assignment, everybody told me; they called it 'the suitcase job', and I was to be named to it. But during my time in Britain, toward the end of my stay, the USIA officer who was the head of the African area, John Reinhardt, stopped in London on his way to Africa; the airline lost his luggage, and he had to wait until it was retrieved. We showed him a student seminar we were doing, and he sat in my office for a while, and we got along very well. I was able, as a matter of fact, to get him a good place on the steps of the embassy when Ambassador Annenberg, the incoming ambassador, went off to see the Queen to present his letters of credence, with carriages and all that, so it was quite a nice, flashy day.

Anyway, a few days later I was sitting around with no onward assignment with my wife and two children waiting to take a ship home, and the phone rang and it was John Reinhardt. He said, "I've been talking to Bill Weld," who was the Area Director for Europe, and he said, "We've decided that you'll come and work for me." I said, "I'd be delighted," and he said, "The job is Program Coordinator." I said, "Sounds good"; I had no idea what it was. I hung up. I went upstairs to see the PAO, very nice guy, Bill King– he'd been around for years, a very courtly, Deep South man – and I said, "I've just been offered a job." He said, "Oh? Wonderful. What is it?" I said, "Program Coordinator." He blanched and said, "Oh, my God! My God!" I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "That's the budget, that's just figures! Oh, Mike!" I said, "Well, okay." But I gulped.

And I went back to Washington with some trepidation. It turned out to be a marvelous job. It was indeed program coordination and it did have to do with the budget, but there was a very good budget officer on the African area roster so I wasn't in that kind of trouble. My job was to husband resources and move them around Africa to a place where they'd be able to be used better than another, and so forth, and to settle disputes and this kind of thing. It was a wonderful job. I had had no promotions in London and I had no job prospects, and I'd think, well, the reward is having been in London. How could I argue with that? But I then had a wonderful, phenomenal string of lucky breaks when I got back to Washington. The first one was just John Reinhardt himself and this job. You know, every once in a while you can write something that matches exactly what the other person would have written. I'm sure that in every career which involves writing, once in a while something just clicks, and this is exactly what happened. John had me do a short paper, "Africa in the '70s." It was to set out his agenda as African Area Director and get us into the next decade. I wrote it and it pleased him (and me), and it marked the beginning of a very satisfying professional and personal friendship. I enjoyed the job immensely and got to see the Agency at a level I hadn't seen before. After that first year I also put together three PAO conferences for John, one in Nairobi and two in Tangier.

At some point during that whirlwind year, the Area Director for the Near East and South Asia, David Nalle, another marvelous officer, was looking for a deputy. He told John Reinhardt that he wanted to do something unusual, to select someone other than a member of the senior officer cohort, most of them somewhat long in the tooth, so he

asked John Reinhardt if he thought I would fit the bill.

I had no idea this was going on; they cooked this up together and then sprang it on Frank Shakespeare, the Director of USIA, and Henry Loomis, the Deputy Director. They both liked it, largely because I was a Class 3 officer and it was about as big a stretch as you could get. Loomis particularly was something of a buccaneer with that piratical spirit; he and Shakespeare thought, this will shake them up. And it did.

That's what I got to do, be Dave Nalle's Deputy for the next year. I also got involved in some Washington things like being on the board of the American Foreign Service Association when Charlie Bray was chairman and John Reinhardt was a vice president.

Then at the end of the year David went off to Russia, and I became Area Director for the Near East and South Asia. At that time , 1971 or 2, we opened up the Persian Gulf posts— Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Dubai–- and Yemen as well. It's hard to do cultural programs in some of these very difficult places. But the information programs and the direct personal contacts cultivated by our PAO's were very valuable. I must say I had a marvelous time. I can't remember anything I did that changed the world or that even made a mark on the area itself, only to note that we deployed some exceptional officers, wrestled with interesting and always current, problems, and took an almost anguished look at the troubling relationships between Israel and her neighbors through that time.

Q: No matter what administration , the Arab-Israeli thing seems to dominate the Middle East and also often the regular news. Did you find the resources and the work time and everything else as being sort of sucked into this Israeli situation?

PISTOR: Quite a lot of it, but not as much USIA money as you might expect, because we were expanding in the Gulf and elsewhere. We had lean operations everywhere, but the Israel-Arab States tensions and brush fires certainly took an enormous amount of our time and attention, and also this was an area in which we drew a lot of Congressional interest. In those days the area directors appeared before the House and Senate Foreign Relations Committees, and we were sympathized with by Fulbright and Wayne Hayes. It wasn't so much that we were being praised; it was that we were being pitied because we had such big headaches to deal with. So we got that kind of break, and I think we got a pretty good break during that period on resource allocation as well.

It was an interesting time, as I say, but often very disheartening. You could see the beginnings of the settlement business in Israel. On the other side, when you traveled from Beirut Airport to Beirut itself, you'd see these festering camps that were going to cause the next generation to be what they ended up being. You could see it in the lack of attention on the part of the Lebanese and others who just didn't want these problems and didn't like the Palestinians anyway, anywhere. So it was festering on both sides of the void..

Q: You say that there was sort of a different approach in the Islamic world, the cultural

side was sort of downplayed?

PISTOR: Well, it wasn't so much it was downplayed as it didn't have much of a chance to get explored. You certainly had cultural exchanges and education exchanges - those were meat and potatoes - but if you were to….

Q: You were saying people really noticed.

PISTOR: I don't think it's that we duck. It's the problem of our hosts saying, "We can't talk about this here". You had to be careful about the sensitivities. In difficult societies you would have people, university people, for example, who wanted very much to have serious conversations about cultural differences, governance, literature– and then you had the people watching them from the government who didn't want them to play, so you had to be careful about people you might put in danger, or at least in trouble. In any regime there's that kind of rigid custom and ideology, whether it's theological or secular, so you have to be very careful about your clientele and how they're being seen by the authorities. And the authorities, as you know, in some of those countries are very, very tough.

Q: Did you almost have to avoid sending guest speakers to particularly the Arab world?

PISTOR: No, you could send speakers; you just had to be a little bit careful about not so much the context but the subject that they were going to do. Some would draw and some wouldn't. And again we tried not to smother speakers, so we took some risks there. But people who want to go to the Middle East generally have enough savvy to be a little careful and a little wary themselves about protecting the people they're seeing against recriminations from a government or a faction. But, as I say, it was a fascinating time.

Also, as the programs grew in the Gulf, it was good because the Trucial States were just emerging from having been protectorates of the British. On my first trip out there, discussing the opening of these small posts, I had the chance to talk to one of the last of the British political officers, who really didn't like us being there at all. He was retreating; he didn't have a job anymore, but he knew everything there was to know about the place. A kind of sour, beached-up T.E. Lawrence. I'll never forget him, really the last of the Empire.

Q: These were called political agents.

PISTOR: That's exactly right, and very good, very sharp. They knew enormous amounts of things. And this guy was so worried because it looked as if we were muscling in, and we were in a sense. I believe USIS officers there were probably more aware of being guests rather than guides for the next wave of outside influence. Some of our commercial people and others were so eager to get into the picture that I think they were seen as – and they kind of acted as if they were– the next influential bunch rather than a friendly power respecting the independence and different mores of the area.

Q: Did we sort of avoid Iraq at that time?

PISTOR: I think, yes, we did. I traveled in Iraq, but that was in the '80's during my second stint as Area Director, and after the Iran-Iraq War. I'm sorry to say - I did the Near East twice - I get those trips confused.

Q: What about dealing with Iran? Was that sort of taken of elsewhere?

PISTOR: No. As I said, my very first post in 1959 was Iran, and we had an enormous program there. When I went back as Area Director in the early '70s, we still had a large, but not lavish, program. We published a magazine; we were doing radio, we had a lot of stuff going. We were, I think, working fairly effectively in the universities and we were also supporting the AID efforts. Ours was a good program in the sense that it had goals and it proceeded toward them,

American activities in Iran were watched obviously by the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and other neighbors, because they were concerned about our influence, as they were about the Soviets in the area. But we made a bet on the White Revolution in Iran, and in a sense set up the Shah as the policeman of the Gulf. President Nixon sold an awful lot of arms to Iran, and with the arms came an awful lot of people you could see quite visibly all the time, people from Boeing, from Bell Helicopter, trainers and maintenance people. The American presence was large and conspicuous. Some of us in USIA were uncomfortable with that but couldn't do anything about it.

I had been NEA Area Director for about two and a half years when Frank Shakespeare , who had put me in the job in the first place and who was still Director of USIA, called me up and said, "You can do this either way, but there's an opportunity for you to go to London as PAO. Would you like to do that? I talked it over with my wife; we certainly didn't have to talk it over for very long. I replied with an enthusiastic "yes!" and went off to London for another four-year assignment, this time in 1973.

Q: So you were in Washington '69 to '73?

PISTOR: That's right, at a pretty interesting time in USIA's history, and certainly it was fascinating for me. So we went back to London. Things had changed. When we left in 1969, the Conservative and Labor Parties were going back and forth seeing who could govern for the least amount of time. By the time we returned, they had adopted decimal currency, and the worldwide inflation had hit Britain. The political climate was clouding, and Margaret Thatcher and her allies were moving up through the Conservative Party senior councils.

The big thing that USIA wanted us to emphasize in our programming at that point was the coming bicentennial celebrations in 1976. But real life kept breaking in. Just after Dr. Kissinger declared 1973 "The Year of Europe," OPEC made it the year of oil shortages instead. President Nixon and his administration were falling apart. Vietnam was still on

the boil. There were serious discussions going on between Britain and the United States, not only at the official level but at the foreign policy establishment levels, concerning weaponry, defense posture, the special relationship: Do we have a special relationship? Is it the same as it was? What about Britain and the rest of Europe? Is the UK turning toward Europe instead of across the Atlantic as it had done traditionally.

All of these interesting questions were in the air, but the kind of fervor that we had seen in the '60s where it looked very much as if the left wing, if you could call it that, of the Tory Party and the right wing of the Labor Party had more in common than they had with other elements of their own parties, and there was some expectation it that they would join in some combination, together with the Liberal Party perhaps. The passion had cooled by the time we returned in '73, but some of the principal proponents of political change, Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams and others were trying for a kind of 'third way'– I hate to use that phrase now; they certainly weren't using it then– but some different way of getting away from the prescriptions of the socialist Left in the Labor Party and the rigidities of the Conservative Party to move into a kind of social democratic territory. At the same time, the civil rights movement in Britain was actually moving forward, propelled by pressure and sensible legislation. So the UK we found on our return in '73 was quite different from what we had left in 1969. My wife and I had some adjusting to do. And of course I was taking up a very different job, which took some adjusting too.

I had the great good luck to inherit an absolutely splendid Super CAO. I don't know if anybody's discussed with you the concept of the Super CAO, which USIA has applied in some countries, bringing out of academe a recognized expert to head the cultural program. When I was in London the first time, we had Cleanth Brooks, the great American literary critic, as CAO. When I returned in '73, our CAO was a Columbia professor named Wayne Wilcox , an academic rising star who was an expert on South Asia, well know around the world, and a defense expert who was one of the challengers in the discussion of what the American defense posture should be in the next decade or so.

On my first day of work in London the political counselor, whom I had known in earlier days, asked me to come in and talk to him. He had with him a manuscript, and the manuscript looked like a porcupine it had so many paper clips in it. It turns out the manuscript was of an article the Royal Society of Foreign Affairs, Chatham House, had asked Wayne to do. The political counselor was so disturbed by what he considered an invasion of his territory that he said, "Wayne doesn't listen to me, and you've got to do something." So we were off and running right then. I talked to Wayne and said, "You really upset Bill,' and he said, "I know it,' and made a few cosmetic and courtesy changes, which satisfied (barely) the political counselor. The two entered a fairly amicable truce, and I didn't have to referee any further contests.

Then, the post suffered a terrible tragedy. Wayne did some lecturing on the continent, and after Christmas he went to Europe, made a lecture or two, met his wife and their two eldest children in Paris, leaving two younger children back in London. One of them was

to have a birthday the day after they were to come back. That day, there was a British Airways strike, and they wanted to get back right away so they could be there for the birthday, and they took the only flight available. It was a Turkish Airlines DC-11, which crashed and killed everybody on it. That was a devastating blow to us at the Embassy and to the American community as well.

After a time we got a new, very good Super CAO, Charles Ritcheson, a well regarded historian with many ties to England. Then, to free him from the thickets of government bureaucratic procedures, we were sent somebody I'd known from the NEA days to serve as Deputy Cultural Affairs Officer. Four or five months after he got settled in London, he had a heart attack and died. At about the same time our press attache was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer, and was flown immediately to the United States for treatment. That story had a happy ending because it turned out not to be lymphoma and he came back and finished out his tour. Then our program officer got cancer and had to leave. So we had our share of trouble and the kind of trouble that takes a lot of your time and energy. It was a marvelous assignment, a wonderful job, terrific challenges, good people, but these terrible losses did dampen the spirit.

Q: Vietnam….

PISTOR: Just before leaving the United States for London I was, like everybody else, at the office glued to the television set watching the Nixon Watergate hearings. We went to London and it turned out that everybody was watching exactly the same thing, only six hours later, at night. People were spellbound just as they were in the US. So as I started my tour as Public Affairs Counselor in London, I had two big, unrelated, things in front of me.

We had the celebration of the 200th anniversary coming up, and then we had the problem of the impeachment of the President of the United States. He had not been unpopular in Britain. They knew "Tricky Dick" and all of that because the press picks up the can and kicks it down the street in Britain just as it does in the US, but so far as foreign policy concerns were concerned, President Nixon got a pretty good audience in Britain and so did Dr. Kissinger. But in USIS London we still had Vietnam to contend with, you know, because we hadn't wound it up, and the growing Nixon scandal to think about and to react to, respond to.

Q: How does one respond to the President being attacked, and probably rightly so?

PISTOR: Well, it was difficult in the U.K., but again one of the things we had to explain was our system of government, because in Britain or in any other place in Europe they would have shrugged off this man right away. They wouldn't have the Nixon scandal, because he just would have resigned and that would have been the end of that.

Q: A vote of no confidence….

PISTOR: That's right, and the other party would have come into power and that would be that, so they just could not understand why this disgrace couldn't be dispensed with. "What in God's Name is the matter with you?" they were saying to us. We could then explain a good deal about our system of checks and balances, and people were interested, and some were half-way convinced that our system wasn't loony.

Also, during this time Dr. Kissinger was busy practicing shuttle diplomacy, and he almost always stopped in Britain and briefed and got advice from the party in power, either party, and he did very well with those, demonstrating that the government was functioning energetically (at least in his area). We had this important dialogue going on at the top, which could filter down into our talks with journalists and academic people– foreign affairs establishment people.

Still, Nixon was a very tough sell, and we had an ambassador in the person of Walter Annenberg who was a great Nixon loyalist– and a dignified one. On the week he left London, he had a lunch at Winfield House with 24 members of the American press. I was there at one end of the long table and he was at the other, and there were all these news guys, 12 along each side, asking questions. His answer to the inevitable question about Nixon was, "He has given me the greatest honor in my life in asking me to represent the United States here, in the United Kingdom, and for that I will be forever grateful to President Nixon." It was a really a quite nice, modest little tribute. Walter Annenberg, who came into his Ambassadorship through a storm of ugly stories in the British press and television, went out with a nice pat on the back and feeling good.

But the Nixon mess was a constant embarrassment to all the others of us in the embassy, because you'd meet your friends and contacts just after having seen a television thing in which he said, "I am not a crook," so unconvincingly. And then all that bizarre business of the serial firings. I remember that Gene Kopp, a lovely guy who was at that point the Deputy Director of USIA, was making a trip through Europe and he was in London at the time of the Saturday night massacre with Nixon and Elliot Richardson and William Ruckelshaus and Archibald Cox and everybody. It was my duty to call Gene in his hotel room periodically throughout the night to announce yet another firing or resignation. It was astonishing.

We just had to let the Watergate debacle play out, and we gave or arranged backgrounders to get press and political people to talk to Senators and Congressmen who were traveling and could report first-hand about what was going on in Washington. We were trying to be fair to the President and also demonstrate the toughness and the resilience of the system. I think it wasn't so much that we were convincing; it's that the system did work and proved itself.

Q: Your duties were essentially what?

PISTOR: As PAO?

Q: Yes.

PISTOR: I was in charge of the USIS programs in Britain. This would be the cultural programs, educational exchanges, an excellent reference and research library, and to a certain extent, productions, cooperative arrangements, in the arts and the humanities, lecturers and discussion groups. The information section provided the British press with speech texts, background material, press conference transcripts and the like. Our information section played a special role in helping the embassy avoid an embarrassing incident during Nixon's final months in office.

At that time the President was hunkered down and depressed, and the White House photographer, Ollie Atkins, I believe, wanted to cheer him up, and he put together a photo exhibition that was sent to post offices around the United States– pictures of Nixon at work and Nixon with children and Nixon with the great and Nixon the sympathetic listener and so forth; a project designed just to buck up the boss. Then somebody in the White House had another bright idea: why not send the exhibition overseas? This at the time when Nixon was within an ace of resigning; it was awful timing. They decided that the two places to send it would be London and Paris.

I tried to wriggle out from under it, but I didn't succeed; somebody in the White House called Ambassador Annenberg and said, "Listen, there's somebody on your staff there who's not entirely happy about this exhibit." Annenberg was a very decent man and he just let me know that he thought this was an interesting and worthwhile exhibit; he didn't say, "What the hell are you doing?" So there we were. My colleague, Burnett Anderson, the PAO in Paris, was on the phone saying, "For God's sake, what are we going to do about this?" I thought it could be a serious problem in public relations for the U.S. embassy, giving the London press a wonderful opportunity to give Nixon another poke in the eye.

The White House crowd didn't trust us to mount the exhibit respectfully, because from the White while Ollie Atkins himself didn't come to London, he sent one of his senior staff to London to help set up the photo show. I thought the best thing to do would be to have mount the exhibit in the embassy itself, rather in a more public place. We had adequate space to show it in the USIS end of the building, and I would call it "White House Photographer." Atkins' office sent captions like "Pathetic Deaf Child Listens to President." They were just terrible, terrible captions, and so the first thing we had to do was get rid of captions altogether. Then we numbered the photographs and provided accompanying fact sheets that gave technical data about them. Finally, we held a reception for the photography editors of the news papers; they don't get free drinks as often as the other editors.

A lot of these photography editors were old friends of our local press section employees, who had worked with them for years. The photo editors turned up happily, joined by our press staff, packing the house. Then we called Ambassador and Mrs. Annenberg downstairs and had their picture taken with the exhibition. It got about a quarter of an

inch in one of the papers, and nothing at all anywhere else. My Paris colleague thought he might try this too, but by the time the exhibit was shipped to Paris, Nixon had resigned..

Q: When you first went in '73 and '74, with Vietnam - by '74 we pulled out - how did this play?

PISTOR: What I think we don't remember is that successive British governments, both Labor and Conservative, stood fast with us on Vietnam, and it became uncomfortable for them, what with major portions of the populace vehemently denouncing the war. So Downing Street shared some of the heat. British public opinion, like US public opinion, was fixed on the Nixon-Watergate drama. After the uncertain conclusion of the Paris peace talks our USIA Public affairs strategy was uncertain, too. It was mostly, in Britain as in everywhere else, a question of how we were going to get out, and then we had the terrible collapse, and I think that was just played. I don't think there was much for us to do except let it play out.

Q: Let it play out, yes.

PISTOR: There was no adequate explaining possible. We could only witness the tragedy that was in play.

Q: With the sort of collapse of our involvement in Vietnam, was there a noticeable collapse of interest on the part of the left wing in British society, politics, against the United States, or did they shift to other targets?

PISTOR: In Britain it isn't just the Left; it's as if anti-Americanism is rocks in a pool and, as long as the water level is above a certain depth, things sail smoothly. But when the level drops, you hit the rocks, and those rocks are always there. As I say, the Right can be just as poisonous as the Left, and it isn't Vietnam or Watergate, or our involvement in Chile or Pakistan in '73. These issues were trundled out by people who didn't like us for any reason, anyway. They didn't like us in World War II– the business of, what was it, 'oversexed, overpaid, and over here.' There is always an element of that in our relationship, and you can see why. Here's a former great power, no longer so great, and here's another great power getting bigger and getting more powerful. So we always have this under water resentment to contend with, and while our British (and other) critics might have changed targets, we can always count on running into this dyspeptic view of us.

President Johnson got a rough ride in the British press; he didn't travel well internationally, but later I think the interested British public got a chance to see some of the social legislation that he had put through, and that helped soften his image a little bit. And the Left itself in Britain was having real struggles, largely because of the hard-nosed attitudes and tactics of some powerful trade union leaders.

Q: There was the left that was talking about international solidarity and saying the red

flag for…

PISTOR: And by the '70s I didn't see as much of that. It was there, but the problems in Britain were becoming internal, the question of education, of making available a better education for more people, and we had things to say that would be useful in that regard. Yet I know during the time I was PAO in the UK we didn't have the resources to work with secondary schools at all. We did quite a lot of stuff at the university level. By the way, some of those who were most inimical to us were professors of American studies. At the same time, some of our staunchest defenders were American studies people.

Q: We were going along about the various groups that supported us and didn't support us, but when you're saying the problems were getting internal, of the increasing militancy of the trade unions too, which eventually ended up with Margaret Thatcher knocking him out of the ballpark.

PISTOR: In the UK, Labor was in power when Jimmy Carter was elected in 1976, and the first thing the Carter Administration did, so far as we were concerned in Britain, was to send Vice President Walter Mondale on a quick around-the-world trip, starting in London, within a day or two of Carter's inauguration. At that point our Ambassador was Ann Armstrong, a Ford appointee. She had been a counselor in the Nixon White House, and she was thought of as extremely conservative. But she was a real charmer, and she got along brilliantly with the Labor Left as well as with the Conservatives. The intellectual leader of the Labor Party was the Foreign Minister, Anthony Crosland– who since his Oxford student days had been representative of the intellectual Left, and he got along famously with Ann Armstrong. Let me tell a little story out of school. I might want to edit it out.

Q: You can look at it and see.

PISTOR: In preparing to take office, the Carter team had sent a cable to our ambassadors in England, France and Italy, where Mondale was to stop, instructing them to make themselves scarce, to go somewhere, go golfing or fishing, just get out of the country during the time of the visit, because the Vice President wanted to talk in private with the right people in each government.

Ann Armstrong sent a message back saying that, if requested, she would resign and leave the country, but she would not leave the UK temporarily to be out of the way; she was still the representative of the President of the United States in Britain. Challenged, the Carter people backed away. She stayed. The reason I'm saying it's a story told out of school is that Ambassador Armstrong kept entirely mum about that clumsy and demeaning slight; no leak, no story.

I think it did get out at the upper levels of the UK government, because Anthony Crosland, the Foreign Minister, when Mondale arrived at the airport and it was pouring rain and everybody was under umbrellas, greeted him and there were speeches on both

sides, Crosland's speech was a ringing endorsement of the marvelous job Ann Armstrong had done for the President of the United States and for her country. It was one of those little gems that I would have liked people to know. Well, that's a digression.

Q: Well, but when you hear something like that - a new administration comes in, you get a bunch of ideologues and people don't really understand how things work and they want to control things, it's just completely inappropriate.

PISTOR: Sure, and they never learn, neither party: I've never been through a change of office when the incoming crowd wasn't heavy footed. All those young guys who didn't know anything about anything except that "this must be Cleveland and the mayor has to be Democrat or Republican or whatever I am, and they better damn well do what I say." They do it every time. It often happens, or happens enough, when it just goes from President to Vice President of the same party. It's just astonishing.

Q: I will say this: the Bush Jr. Administration told the Clinton ambassadors that had children to stay on until June.

PISTOR: That was nice.

Q: It was well done. Somebody paid a little attention. Normally…

PISTOR: That sounds like Colin Powell.

Q: It sounds like Colin Powell, yes.

PISTOR: Because he seems to be the one with the sensitivity.

Q: How about with the media? Did you have much to do with the media there?

PISTOR: We had a press attaché and we had a press section chief, two Americans. The marvelous thing about being a PAO– it's a wonderful job, or used to be a wonderful job— is that you can encroach on your colleagues' responsibilities. If you are good at your job, you don't overdo it, but you pinch a little over there where it's fun on the cultural side and you pinch a little over in the press section where it's fun. And of course the same thing happens elsewhere in the embassy; the political counselor tries to do that and the DCM tries to do that, but as PAO you have a pretty good range of options in choosing activities or targets to develop.

The thing to do is develop some relationships that don't cross those being nurtured by your press attache or cultural officer or even some of the local employees. So I would say that I had good relations in the press side, both with the television people and with the newspaper editors and columnists. This being Britain, these contacts are often– almost always– interesting and entertaining people ; so it's quite a pleasure to work with them, and there's always something to talk about, because we always have issues or interests in

play between our two countries. You can bank on that. And during my time in London, we also had the Bicentennial celebrations, which unexpectedly brought us together. As I say, it turned out to be something that the British enjoyed and did extremely well.

Q: What sort of things went on?

PISTOR: One of the big pieces was a large exhibition designed and mounted by Charles Eames. The exhibition was for showings in Paris and London, and I think Eames had Paris in mind when he created the thing. It was called "The World of Franklin and Jefferson," and it aimed to show how their words helped transform America from a collection of insecure colonies to a thriving nation. The history of the two men unfolds in panels and displays, culminating with the Louisiana Purchase. The final display was a stuffed bison. I wanted the London version to have a somewhat different ending with less emphasis on the French connection– perhaps the founding of the University of Virginia. Naively, I thought I could convince Charles Eames. In the first of several Eames visits I thought that we could negotiate. He pretended that he was willing to negotiate, but he wasn't going to negotiate for a second. He knew exactly what he wanted to do and he did it. It took me a while to understand this, that all I could do was roll with the punches and have a good time.

I had a good friend in the Foreign Office, their cultural man, John Morgan, and the two of us tried to restrain Eames from some of his enthusiasms, generally without success. The first thing he wanted to do was to put the London exhibition in the Banqueting Hall at Whitehall, you know, the Inigo Jones building with the Rubens ceiling. It's a gorgeous piece of architecture. The British didn't much like the idea of mounting a major exhibition there, but they reluctantly agreed to it.

I remember that we then had a meeting at the Banqueting Hall itself with senior mandarins from several British government agencies-- suave men right out of "Yes, Minister." What Eames said, to the group was "You know, we have banners that have to stretch across the room with quotes from Jefferson." (These would obscure the Rubens ceiling.) "Also, we're going to have to have the lights over here." The officials' eyes widened and their lips pursed, because the lights would have to be attached to a delicate balustrade. Eames waved his hand toward the throne at the end of the room and said, "We will have to move that throne out." That throne was a special project of the Queen Mother's. She had actually done some of the throne's embroidery herself, we were told. And the mandarins weren't going to take that throne out at all. Ever. I suggested to John Morgan that we have the sculptor George Segal put a statue of George III on the throne, looking bemused, but he thought nobody would buy that solution. The officials' icy response to Eames's demands meant that the Banqueting Hall was out of the question.

We then decided that the next best location would be the British Museum, and so that's what we did. Charles Eames, John and I went to the British Museum, and Eames parleyed with Sir John Pope Hennessey, who was no slouch himself at negotiating; it was wonderful to see these two pros sizing each other up and seeing what each could do to

further the project. Anyway, we had that marvelous exhibition at the British Museum and we had the reception for it in the Elgin Marbles Room.

Q: The Elgin marbles.

PISTOR: That's right, where the marbles are. The speakers were the Vice President of the United States, who was at that point Nelson Rockefeller; Prime Minister Harold Wilson; the Foreign Minister; and the American Ambassador, Elliot Richardson. The opening was a great success. One thing that nobody ever knew somehow was that in the great babble of voices in that vast, echoey hall– the sound system failed. So you had the Vice President of the United States, the Prime Minister of Britain, the Foreign Minister of Britain, the American Ambassador, all talking to a dead microphone, and nobody cared. I've never seen anything like it, and I've never told that story before. "The World of Franklin and Jefferson" received enthusiastic reviews and drew large crowds

The British loved the bicentennial, and there were some extraordinary scenes with American groups who would come to Britain. The head of the British-American Bicentennial Committee was the Marquess of Lothian, Lord Lothian. His uncle had been ambassador to the United States and an ancestor had been in the court of George III at the time of our revolution. Peter Lothian is a very charming, very pleasant, very modest man. I remember a group of people from the 13 original colonies came to Britain, from the United States to present something and Lord Lothian was the designated recipient of such commemorative gifts. The senior delegate of this American group kept talking about "the Lord," as in, "We thank the Lord for this occasion," and "the Lord knows best." Peter Lothian was very good about this kind of thing.

I have to tell you one more bicentennial thing. Soon after I got to London in 1973, the Cultural Affairs Officer, the wonderful Wayne Wilcox, had a call from the Earl of Perth-- I'm not going to tell many stories about lords-- the Earl of Perth called and asked Wayne if he'd like to come over for a drink. He said, "Sure. I'd like to bring my friend Mike Pistor." He said, "Of course." So we went to this lovely apartment in London and there was the Earl of Perth. He stood and poured drinks for us and we sat down, and he had a proposition. His ancestor Lord Dunmore, who was the last British governor of Virginia and was run out, had a folly built on one of his estates in Scotland, known as the Dunmore Pineapple. It was indeed a small building in the shape of a pineapple, and what the Earl of Perth wanted was for the Williamsburg Foundation to have an association with this, so American tourists in Britain and Scotland could go see the Dunmore Pineapple. He had sent a picture and a letter to the people at Williamsburg and he never got an answer. They just ignored it entirely. So Wayne and I said we'd do what we could, and we never could do anything. I think he finally got an acknowledgment, a kind of a no-thanks acknowledgment. It's just a peculiar little story. He wanted us to be involved with the Dunmore Pineapple, and David Wills, who was the heir to a huge tobacco fortune, wanted very much to send a carillon that would chime every hour and he wanted an American radio network to use it. We could never explain to him that our radio was not the BBC, that there was NBC and ABC and they're not going to get together and ring

those chimes. There were some little frustrations that were more amusing than others in my four years as PAO in London..

There were real sadnesses in that four years because of the deaths of friends and colleagues, but there were great rewards, too, in the assignment, some amusing, some really inspiring moments in the relationship reflecting 200 years since our breakaway from the mother country, and then the opportunities of Nixon and post-Nixon and the winding down of the Vietnam War, all of these, and then again the European questions that were beginning to really haunt us. I remember in 1973 just as I got to Britain, it was when Kissinger announced the Year of Europe, and Europeans including the British were furious saying, “Every year’s a year of Europe. What are you talking about?” But no sooner had he said, “This is the Year of Europe,” than the “Yom Kippur War” caused the OPEC countries to pull themselves together for the first time in their history and then we had all of that. So we always had a lot to think about and talk about in Britain.

Q: This might be a good place to stop. So in 1977 where did you go?

PISTOR: Back to Washington. I had a call from John Reinhardt asking me to come back. I was to come back in the summer, late summer, anyway of ’73, but when he became Director of USIA in January of that year, he called me up and asked me to come to Washington and work for him.

Q: All right, so we’ll pick up in 1977 when you came back to work for John Reinhardt, for the Director of USIA.

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This is the 11th of July 2001. Michael, John Reinhardt, how was he as somebody to work for?

PISTOR: He was a marvel. I mentioned earlier that I worked for him was when he was Assistant Director for Africa, and we meshed exactly. We had worked so well together that I think that’s why he said it would be good for me to get into his office while he began the changes and reorganizing he had in mind for USIA, so I hopped to it.. I left my family back in London because John wanted me to come as quickly as possible, and I did. I was living in the basement of one of those apartment hotels around the Department, on temporary duty, while he organized his office. What he wanted me to do was to write the paper that would define USIA for the new administration and the new Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance.

I started the paper but it didn’t come together. It didn’t quite work. John was not angry but you could tell this wasn’t what he wanted. “Go back and do it again.” It got to be pretty tense for me. Just about that time Charlie Bray, who had been his deputy in the Department, came into the picture- - John told me confidentially that Charlie was to be his Deputy Director at USIA– so I worked with Charlie a little bit, and we just couldn’t

get this thing straight.

Q: What was it? Did you have different ideas?

PISTOR: No, I think John wasn't exactly sure what he wanted; he was hoping he would know it when he saw it. I was less and less sure of what he wanted. It was a question, I think, of style and phrasing and just this question of 'Can't we get it together?' It was very odd, and my own confidence ebbed by the day. I was simply not producing the goods.

Q: What were you trying to do?

PISTOR: Trying to spell out in a short message what it was that the United States Information Agency was doing for the government and for the Department of State, more specifically how it would relate to the interests of the incoming Secretary of State.

Q: USIA had been around for a long time.

PISTOR: That's right. It was, I think, related a little bit in John's mind to the paper we had done on Africa some time before, in 1969, when he wanted me to do "Africa in the '70s," which I did and which worked out. That was the paper he wanted to provide the floor for the activities we were developing in Africa. The later, painful question of what to tell Secretary Vance, was resolved by Charlie Bray, who sat down and wrote it himself. I must say, because I had been singed a little, I didn't think Charlie's work was all that much different from my own efforts, because these things do tend to be a little alike.

Q: You can't get very far from what you're doing, the purpose of the thing.

PISTOR: I think it was a disappointment to John. It was certainly a disappointment to me because I wanted to do what he wanted. He was very polite about the failure, but it cooled off our relationship for the time-being. Charlie having fixed the problem, John went on to other business, and I left his office. What I did then was go back to London to get my family and return to Washington. John then put together an interesting assignment for me. It was a combination of the public liaison office and the Congressional relations office, and the combination lasted for just the length of time I remained at USIA headquarters, which was three years.

Q: That would be what, '77 to '80?

PISTOR: That's right. So we had a combined office of public and Congressional liaison, and it worked well.

Q: What sort of things were you doing?

PISTOR: We were talking to staff members much more frequently than with Senators or

Congressmen about what USIA's purposes were. and what this reorganization meant, because we had absorbed the Department's cultural and educational office, which produced a good deal of unease among its constituents, the university communities particularly. And they had connections on the Hill as well, so we found ourselves doing a lot of explaining and a lot of reassuring about what we had in mind with the reorganization.

Q: Were you having problems with the change of titles of the agency?

PISTOR: Oh, yes, we went from a lot of assistant directors….

Q: But I mean it was called….

PISTOR: Oh, you mean the name of the agency changed. That was quite stressful for most USIA officers, because they were used to and happier with the name " USIS" themselves and they thought they were losing a brand and losing identity. There were political reasons for changing the name, I think, none of them ever spelled out precisely, but because the cultural people from the Department felt they had been swallowed by USIA, John Reinhardt, I think, wanted to reassure them and their constituencies that we were a new organization, not a " USIA, the propaganda arm," grabbing the cultural and educational functions.

John believed that he was starting a *new* organization. His background had been as cultural affairs officer, and he wanted to put a new emphasis on the cultural and educational parts of our work. He thought the best way to emphasize that would be with a new name. The words "information" and "culture" had to be included in one form or another. Eventually, through the process of elimination, the awkward acronym, USICA, emerged, standing for United States Information and Cultural Agency. I remember that John assembled a small group to think up names. We worked with all kinds of names and finally came up with USICA, which nobody was terribly happy with, but we thought it would do.

There was an effort to retain the name USIS for the overseas installations because it was known locally, and posts were proud of it and wanted to keep it. We thought we had convinced John that this was a good idea. It would be USICA in the United States and USIS abroad, which would be easy enough. I remember we believed on Friday that this was settled. But on the weekend a cable went out instructing everybody to call it USICA and dismissing this idea of USIS. I never did find out exactly what it was that changed his mind on that weekend. So it became USICA, getting a few guffaws around town. It's too bad because John's was, I think, an excellent organization scheme, muddied a little by this kind of trivial thing over the name, which was very offensive to an awful lot of people inside USIA and caused morale problems that it shouldn't have. As you know, it was changed back with the next administration.

Q: Well, you don't mess with names or flags or symbols without real consequences.

PISTOR: It wasn't done cavalierly, but it was done clumsily, and you shouldn't do it clumsily, especially in an organization like which prides itself on knowing just this kind of thing, what symbols mean, what names mean.

Q: What sort of work did you find yourself concentrating on most when you moved over to this Liaison Office?

PISTOR: Again, the reassuring of constituency groups; we made and organized a number of speeches and conferences and regional seminars around the country to bring together university people who'd been involved with USIA programs, bring in the organizations that put host families together with incoming exchange students. We had to be very careful because there are very strict rules about propaganda within the United States, so we didn't do it blatantly but in explaining what we did, we explained ourselves and I think we did a little selling. In the three years I was in the job our meetings in regional centers would include at least a university, a major museum or other cultural institution we had been in liaison with, and organizers of active exchange programs. Then we mounted seminars in which we brought together university administrators, officers in these organizations, and people from our own USIA, and returned students. Some of the most valuable people in these seminars were our own PAOs and CAOs who had come back to this country, who talked about how they had reflected American culture abroad.

We did two or three of them, and they were lively, honest discussions of American cultural life abroad and the explanation of how the United States was seen in these contexts abroad. It turns out to be a fascinating subject to Americans who don't know they have this kind of work being done in our embassies around the world. I thought those were the most gratifying parts of the Public and Congressional Liaison assignment. The rest was a lot of liaison work that was meat and potatoes with the Hill, with staffers, answering questions and this kind of thing, nothing awfully dramatic but the question-answering stuff.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Carter Administration? Was it different in a way than other administrations from your perspective?

PISTOR: It turned out to be a little awkward. It was like an organization that didn't quite have its act together. It was surprising how insular– I don't say this of John Reinhardt; he was one of us-- I mean people you met, the White House people whom you met. The political people who came to "USICA", were intensely more political than we thought they would be. Of course, what also happened at this time was that the Carter Administration brought in– speaking within the USIA context– greater numbers of political appointees. USIA, because it was a small organization, had not had many political appointees: Director, Deputy Director, Director of the Voice of America, and some assistants. In the Carter Administration the level of political participation grew and went down several layers, so we had more political people in the organization. Since we weren't used to them, some of them provoked a kind of " them-and-us" feeling that

hadn't existed before.

Q: I assume, when you're talking about a professional organization, you can take so many, but if it gets down too far, it really begins to interfere, if the people aren't knowledgeable in what you're doing.

PISTOR: The ones that the Carter Administration brought us were not bad, but the fact that there were now people in the lower levels meant that in administrations to come there would be some who weren't very talented and were a little too seized with their mission as direct representatives of the President and 'we're going to move this organization this way and that' to cause some difficulties for the people running the activities and programs. Is that clear?

Q: Yes, it is.

PISTOR: It began with Carter. He didn't bring in bad people - nobody brought in bad people - but the level of talent that came in later wasn't commensurate with the jobs. You can't get anybody to be Director of USIA, much less two levels down from that, if they think they're going to get a big job in Washington because of whatever they did for the incoming administration. So you get more--- and this happens in the Department as well at those lower levels-- you often get people who are legacies of people who are important but not the important people themselves.
Q: Then in 1980 you left.

PISTOR: In 1980 I left to go to a wonderful job, which was PAO in India.

Q: You did that from 1980 to?

PISTOR: To 1984, four years.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

PISTOR: When Shirley and I arrived, the ambassador was Robert Goheen, who'd been president of Princeton and had been born in India. He was very ill, so he stayed with us only a couple of months before he came back to the United States. . After an interim– we got very lucky and Harry Barnes was named as our ambassador. Harry Barnes is a dedicated officer who doesn't take 'no' or 'maybe' for an answer if he has his mind set on something.

I think he in a sense almost single-handedly brought Indians and Americans, each of whom had a lot to say about the other, together. It was a remarkable feat because the Indians have feelings about the United States that make it difficult to communicate clearly, and Americans certainly have those same feelings about Indians. This was true in the foreign affairs establishments in both countries, and Harry just cut through a lot of that, convincing his people in Washington, I think, that this was a serious country that

needed to be treated a little differently than it had been. We also had the very good luck of having at that time an equally direct, effective career Ambassador to Pakistan, Ron Spiers.

Of course, we had couple of months, less than a year, left of Carter before we had the Reagan Administration. Somehow Mrs. Gandhi, who had just come back to power, sensed that it was necessary to warm up relationships with the United States a little more than they had been. She met President Reagan in Cancun early in his administration and actively flirted with him. It made good copy in the papers, batting her eyes and so forth, and he was a great charmer himself. So both countries, through the personalities of their leaders, decided that we'd have a friendlier, at least a less barbed, relationship than we had, muting the problems of Pakistan, China, Kashmir and the others. It was a remarkable time to be there and a good time for us to have an ambassador as active as we did with Harry Barnes.

In Pakistan, Ron Spiers talked candidly to the Pakistanis. I think maybe nobody had done that before. So having these two men who were, both of them, a little bit on the maverick side but both of them clearly intent on pursuing US policies vigorously and clearly, made our job some days entertaining, always interesting, and sometimes with that wonderful kind of frustration you get in India - impossible. The USIS program was a very large one, and remained a large program because of the rupee situation– they were running out, but we still had lots of this PL-480 money; it was in rupees and the idea was to spend it. This meant that the USIS programs in India weren't pinched. I don't think we were extravagant, but we were able to do things that we couldn't have done in other countries, where our program budgets had been steadily declining.

Q: What was the role of the Soviet Union during this period?

PISTOR: They still considered India really their best independent friend. The Indians felt themselves to be more independent of the Soviets than we thought. But it was fraying some. The goods that the Indians got from the Soviets weren't terribly good in their eyes, and the goods that the Soviets got from the Indians weren't all that good in *their* eyes. Neither country made terribly good toothpaste, for example. I think what it was was a formal and professed friendship, and the profession was stronger than the actuality, and the coolness between the United States and India was really less than its actuality. We found ourselves agreed more than we thought we would in a number of ways.

Q: In this '80-to-'84 period did any issues sort of come to a head between the United States and India that caused problems?

PISTOR: There was always the nuclear problem, and we were telling them, "Don't experiment, don't do this," until we heard that rumble. Also, there were always tensions between India and Pakistan which always drew us in some way, so there were tensions. But Mrs. Gandhi did try during this time to be friendlier than she had been to the United States and to not use us as an international whipping boy.

I think we too during that period were less testy than we had been with India. And Mrs. Gandhi was having an awful lot of increasing domestic problems. Punjab was on the boil. I finished my tour only two or three months before her assassination. That trouble in the north had been brewing for some time, and you could watch it happening, and the same thing was true with Kashmir, which was giving her terrible headaches. So while we had tensions, she was much more concerned about what was going on in her own country. She made a trip to the United States that was a pretty good one. I don't remember the time exactly. Again, she was trying to….

Q; There had been this Indira Gandhi and the Kissinger-Nixon team had never gotten along.

PISTOR: They'd never gotten along, and this was a time to put that behind us. Also, we had George Schultz as Secretary of State, who made the first Secretary of State visit in years, and George Bush as Vice President also made an Indian stop, and other dignitaries, Congressmen and Senators also made trips to India. They went to Pakistan as well, of course, but they made this Indian stop, so things were looking up in our relationship.

Q: What was your impression of dealing with the Indian media?

PISTOR: The Indian media during the time we were there was changing. The Indian magazines were getting better, and we thought that part of this was because our own magazine, *Span,* had shown the way for quality journalism.. *India Today*, a magazine modeled on *Time,* was objective and very well edited. Even the cheesier magazines, which remained cheesy in content, were less so in production. So things were getting better. The major newspapers, the ones we saw, were well written, but (unsurprisingly) contentious.

There was no overt censorship in India, press censorship, but there was this curious business that the international wires came into the Indian government which then decided what stories to put out on the wire in India. But the larger newspapers' editors and columnists and senior writers all got news from abroad. They were reading British and American papers, so you would find editorials about a big international subject that nobody else in India knew anything about. The government was able to limit the circulation of news it didn't or didn't like, by manipulating the flow through its official news service. Another device was the allotment of paper for newsprint. If a newspaper displeased the government, it could find its newsprint supply reduced, constricting its circulation and therefore its revenue. So while there wasn't formal censorship, there was a government hand in the preparation and dissemination of the news.

: Did you have any problems dealing with the media?

PISTOR: No. There were some editors and columnists I wouldn't trust as far as I could throw them, and there were others who were very trustworthy and very professional,

sharp journalists, interesting, open minded and well informed.. They didn't all agree with one another, so it was an open and lively area. But there were some quite senior journalists whom you had to be very, very careful about, because they would stick the shiv in as readily as not.

Q: In some ways they were creatures of a different era.

PISTOR: You're exactly right. Some of these senior ones had been there throughout the Nehru and…

Q: Krishna Menon.

PISTOR: That's right. We used Krishna Menon and John Foster Dulles, who were very much alike, as examples. We used to say to Indian friends, "One reason our countries don't get along is that we are so closely related. We tend to have the same faults as well as the same virtues, so we're each preaching to the other and neither likes it." This is very true, and it's also one of the things that made it fun to be there. It was not only that the establishment was changing but the elder ones had been LSE….

Q: The London School of Economics, its influence was much worse than Marxism throughout the colonial world.

PISTOR: Well it's certainly stronger. Of course, Krishna Menon, for example, was one of the inventors of pocket editions, indeed Penguin Books, as a Londoner. Of course, I think I benefited from having been Student Affairs Officer in London in the '60s, getting a taste of Indian intellectual life at the LSE and elsewhere.

Q: Did you find yourself up against what the British would call the chattering class, the French call intellectuals, a group that not only talked a lot and played with ideas but also had some actual influence on the government? Did you find that in India?

PISTOR: Yes, but to a lessening degree because the new generation of the educated elite was more pragmatic, less Left-leaning than its elders, but also less sophisticated, less worldly in the European-American way. They had always been there in the Indian political mixture, but they were getting more and more vocal and stronger. And the chattering- class types weren't so much dying out as being less influential. I'd love to go back now and see how they're doing. Some members of the chattering class were more than entertaining; they were serious intellectuals. Some of the magazines reflected this. But they were often wrong and sometimes ignorant, a word they would never accept, ignorant about the United States. They tended to think of us as flawed Englishmen, as less sophisticated Englishmen, and they were dead wrong.

Q: How about the exchange program? This is particularly designed to get leaders who might have this erroneous idea to get to the United States and find out who are we.

PISTOR: I think it's been through the years a successful program, attracting people who may not have made it to the cabinet, but people who would be chancellors of the universities or heads of departments, or senior civil servants working their way into the political and administrative mix, who have had their eyes opened about the United States through the exchange program. We also had the advantage - this was just the beginning in the '80s - of the immigration into the United States of middle-class, educated Indians in our own institutions. So it was a time of change where the chattering classes were not paramount and not as cocksure as they had been and where the energetic Indians in the professions, including the foreign service and the civil service, and in business have adjusted their views of the United States and indeed adjusted their views of the market and their views of the polity generally.

Q: Was there much in the way of American studies in the universities? This has always struck me as being one of the problems of the residue of sort of European education and colonial things where American studies has... They know a lot about "home," being either France or Great Britain, but they don't know much about the United States.

PISTOR: Again changing, but you're essentially right. This is the history of their association with us. But there have been active American studies programs in India for 40 years, and there is an American studies center in Hyderabad. But the problem has been that it has attracted people who are into literary studies and not those who are historians or political scientists or economists, and that's what we wanted in American studies, to be able to get people studying these subjects to get involved, and that was one of our efforts, to stimulate interest among the professions so the center wouldn't that it wouldn't be primarily a place of literary studies.

Even then, not so much now but then, there was a terrible snobbery about what university you had gone to. It had to be British to be really worthwhile in the eyes of a lot of people, and there was constant chivying about how to rate, how to rank and how to compare. I think we've done good work since in that regard.

Q: Was it beginning sort of to penetrate Indian - we're talking about upper classes, the ruling group - in particularly the fields of business, business administration, technology? Electronics and computer was just really coming to the fore, which the Indians have taken to like a duck to water.

PISTOR: They used to do it then too when they could.

Q: The United States is the place to plug into, not England or….

PISTOR: In my day, the early '80s, we could sense the change of direction. It was the time of a shift from that elder generation with its fixed ideas, the chattering classes of those days– anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, anti-United States, all of apiece, and again under the influence of the London School of Economics and old fashioned British socialism. Those people were fading and indeed young people of the educated elites were

more apt to want to go into business or technology than into the liberal arts. They wanted to make money and make an individual mark. The United States was indeed the place to go, and they certainly knew it then.

Q: Was there or had there really been much Soviet influence within Indian society, or was this something that was strictly a government-to-government thing?

PISTOR: I don't think it took very well. The effort was there. But go to Calcutta, as communist or radical Red governments had close relationships with Soviet officialdom and intellectuals and so forth, but Bengalis remained Bengalis, however Red. They didn't cotton so much to these northerners. They seemed much more at home with Americans than with Russians. The Russians really were quite foreign and didn't know how not to be foreign and were therefore awkward.

Q: Well, Americans have had a very long relation with India, from missionaries to business people. It goes back really to….

PISTOR: So American informality and directness connect in India certainly better than the Russians.

Q; Speaking of connecting, obviously you'd be sort of on the front line of dealing with people as Public Affairs Officers. Indians get exasperated with us and we get exasperated with them. You must have gotten preached to a great deal.

PISTOR: Oh, indeed, I did, and that's why I used Krishna Menon and John Foster Dulles as examples. But don't forget I had all that experience in England too, and if you've ever been preached to, it's by members of the chattering classes in England. The British have no compunction about telling you– always exempting you yourself– that you come from an appalling kind of society. These members of the chattering classes in India took on these same attitudes. In a sense it was familiar, but, yes, we got preached to, preached at. But we Americans are, you know, pretty preachy as well.

Q: Despite the fact that Ronald Reagan and Indira Gandhi were doing their best to be nice to each other, I would have thought that Reagan, in his first term - here he was a Hollywood cowboy - talking about a bigger Navy, etcetera, etcetera, this would have allowed the Indians to say we're such a warlike people.

PISTOR: Oh, yes, and I remember when we had the little problem with the island of Grenada. There was a real furor in the Indian press about our imperial adventure there, and I remember talking to a man named Indir Malhotra, who was one of the editors of the Times of India. Indir was somebody you absolutely know would be on the side of castigating the Americans for these dastardly deeds and this imperialist move, and he said, "When are you going to leave?" And I said, "Just as soon as we saw off the end of the runway." Grenada caused a furor, but the Indir Malhotras of the press were sanguine about the Russians in Afghanistan. Generally, however, because Mrs. Gandhi wanted to

get along, we got along. And because of the undercurrent of private cooperation and understandings, we didn't have the split that we otherwise would have had.

Q: How did you find the American nongovernmental agencies there? There are a number, Ford and others, who have had very long experience in India. Was there any feel of cooperation, or did they do their thing and you did your thing and that was that?

PISTOR: There was a great deal of cooperation with American business interests in India. And of course we had very cordial relations with the foundations, Rockefeller, Ford and the others. We cooperated with them and with their representatives in India in all of our branch posts, too.

Q: What about your various posts? Did you find a library was a major plus?

PISTOR: Yes, and as USIS libraries were being wound down in other parts of the world when the Agency decided that they weren't as effectual as they had been, Indians who can read English have continued to patronize our libraries, which have always been enormously popular with serious readers. These libraries in India have continued to provide comfortable and familiar venues for the other things we do, the seminars and the lectures and the cultural events and discussion sessions. Calcutta also had a student center of many years standing in the university area, a little walk-up place that was not pretentious but was awfully good. Convinced communists who wanted to meet a real American would hang out at the student center, which was (and is) very lively and percolating all the time.

Q: Did you get involved at all with Bollywood?

PISTOR: I didn't get much involved in that. One of the things we did in India: you could always pull in the intellectual crowd for film festivals of one kind or another. We did one on John Huston and John Huston's movies based on novels or short stories. One of them was The Man Who Would Be King. The Indian actor Said Jeffery had been one of its stars, and he and I hoped we could arrange for him to go to Mexico to interview John Huston on videotape about this and his other movies. We almost made it but we didn't– the project fell through. That's as close as I ever got to Bollywood. Our branch post in Bombay, however, had quite a number of Bollywood connections of one kind or another.

Q: What about Charlie Wick and his influence during the time you were in Bombay?

PISTOR: I was already in New Delhi when Charles Wick became director of USIA. Our first experience with his style was a big film extravaganza of his– other people must have talked about this, too– *Let Poland Be Poland*.

Q: Yes, we've had people talk about that.

PISTOR: We got these imperious telegrams from Washington saying, "Put this on." Well, India was not the place to put it on. It would have been entirely counterproductive. I don't

think Wick understood this, but Jock Shirley, who was his senior career man there in Washington, had been posted in India himself, understood the delicacy of the thing, and we were able to finesse it so we didn't have to show it. Wick was scheduled to visit us, but it was scratched and he went to Morocco instead. I was furious because, you know, you can rent Morocco. You can get those policemen with the goggles and you can get the horsemen and you can do all this stuff, but in India things can go off the rails easily, so it's difficult to demonstrate its exoticism without risking disaster.

Then we had a visit from the Secretary of State. The gorgeous embassy residence is not big enough to take a Secretary of State and his entourage, and also I think George Schultz, a modest man, didn't want to bother people, so he was booked into the Sheraton Hotel, which had just been remodeled. The hotel was putting him in its grandest suite and they swore that the suite would be ready in plenty of time, no problem, for the Secretary of State. Of course, the day came and the suite was not ready, and they had to put him somewhere else in the hotel.

At USIS we noted that disaster, and in its wake we got a telegram saying Wick was coming after all. I was afraid that when he got to the airport the customs official would not recognize his passport or hold up his luggage, for starters. But things went swimmingly. And also, because we had seen the experience of the Secretary of State, we put Wick in the grand suite too, but we had our own paint crew and our own carpenters ready if the need arose. Because we wanted to leave nothing to chance, we went over the Wick needs two or three times with the manager of the hotel and all of the relevant hotel staff. The Wick suite was in splendid order. Charles Wick had a very good time in India. He visited Mrs. Gandhi, who batted her eyes at him a little bit and sat kind of close to him on the sofa, or leaned toward him on the sofa, which is a good sign in the newspaper pictures. Everybody looks at the paper to see how far she is away from the visiting dignitary. So the cozy pose was very pleasing to Director Wick.

There was in India a wonderful big organization, which I haven't talked about, the Indo-US Subcommission on Education and Culture. It had a lot of PL-40 money, and members on the American side were PBS, the Metropolitan Museum and the Rockefeller Foundation, among others. On the Indian side were the National Museum, the Ministry of Education and as Chairman to represent Mrs. Gandhi, a senior member of this group you've been talking about: an LSE-trained Socialist Brahmin chattering- class leader, who in all his active years had been staunchly opposed to the United States but was quite a charming person.

I must say that the Indo-US Subcommission on Education and Culture did a number of noteworthy things to celebrate our two cultures. They brought Merce Cunningham and his dance company, who also brought with him John Cage. You might ask what did the Indians think of Merce Cunningham and John Cage; again, India's a big enough place so that you can find the an appreciative audience for even the most esoteric production.

Q: Would you explain the type of dance?

PISTOR: Merce Cunningham runs an internationally celebrated avant garde dance company. He has been a well known dancer and choreographer himself for many years. John Cage is a very well-known and always controversial American composer who uses things like radios and airplane propellers and whatever you want, very avant-garde. He and Cunningham were also in partnership with American painters. Jasper Johns was one of them. So was Robert Rauschenberg. We had other, not so avant garde, cultural exchanges as well. There are Indians crazy about theater, and there's active theater in India itself, and we brought to India plays by John Steinbeck and Sam Shepherd. Cultural ties were active and interesting in those days..

Wick's arrival coincided with one of the Subcommission's large projects, India Week at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and concurrent events in Washington. Part of this was to be not only the marvelous exhibition at the Metropolitan, but a tour through India by the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta. Not only these events, but a wonderful exhibit called "Aditi" which was - how would you put it?– peasant sculpture and design and street musicians and entertainers, scheduled to come to the United States and perform or demonstrate their crafts on the Mall.

But before they came to the States, I approached Aditi's director-coordinator with the idea of a Subcommission party for Wick at one of the Mogul sites in New Delhi, which could preview Aditi. He and I described the idea to the Subcommission's Indian Secretary, who was very tempted, but after some time reluctantly turned it down. So I thought, since they're not going to do it themselves, I will, so we had the party at my house, which had a large lawn.

As he stepped out of his car, Wick was greeted by a man who jumped through a flaming hoop, and then was escorted by costumed horsemen on pretend horses. We had actual snake charmers, we had puppet snake charmers, we had a levitator, we had dancers, we had musicians. The Aditi party was a spectacular success. And provided Wick with a great introduction to India.

Q: Did you have a Fulbright program there?

PISTOR: We had a very large and respected Fulbright program of many years' standing. Also, along with the established Fulbright program, there was a new initiative– the Hubert Humphrey Fellowships– one in which senior, mid-level and a little above, professionals would go to the United States for a year. I met some recently returned Fellows, among them a regional railway chief and a senior veterinarian. The Humphrey program attracted stimulating and very interesting professionals on their way up. .

Q: It sounds like you hit it at the right time.

PISTOR: I certainly did. It was just a wonderful time.

Q: Because we've had some real ups and downs.

PISTOR: We've had some real downs when nobody would talk to you, nobody would come to your house, but it was an open time when we were there and people were eager to see us.

Q: Did you run across problems of the closed economic system, it's hard to bring things in and all that?

PISTOR: We lived in pretty much privilege.

Q: I was just wondering whether, on the intellectual side, bringing books or movies or that sort of thing, and I'm talking about the cultural exchange between two countries. Was this a problem?

PISTOR: No. As I say, one of our great successes was film festivals. The American MPAA has had some difficulties with India, and people are worried about copyright infringements, so we have always had problems, but there was an Oxford University Press in India, Reader's Digest had an Indian version, and Doubleday and others had arrangements. We always had to be alert to piracy, but the legitimate organizations thrived there. American textbook people were regulars at the book fair in New Delhi, for example.

We'd find sudden problems, because the Government of India is often arbitrary and the place itself is often arbitrary, so you'd find you couldn't do something and then you'd have a problem to work out. But the question of films, exchanges with books and magazines and so forth was pretty easy.

Q: On the cultural side, was there any American TV show or things?

PISTOR: Television was just in its infancy there, but it would show old Hopalong Cassidy movies. Whatever was cheap and syndicated you'd be able to get. Also, New Delhi had a film festival which they hoped to rival Cannes. The festival organizers invited Robert Wise, the veteran American director. I guess he's best known for The Sound of Music, and he did other important films over a long and distinguished career. He and his wife went to India on the Festival's ticket. We didn't see him at first, didn't even know he was there. But suddenly we did know he was there because the Indians, when they realized he was not Robert Wiseman, who did the "Kitticut Follies," a documentary about a mental hospital, cut him off. They said, "What are you talking about, Sound of Music, for God's sake!. We're intellectuals."

And so poor Robert Wise, this wonderful director, got to New Delhi and found himself with no lecture to give or anything. They actually just dumped him. Fortunately they dumped him into our lap. He's a wonderful man and he had a lot of good stories to tell, including the fact that he was the editor of *Citizen Kane*. We organized lectures for him

and he did very well.

Manny American artistic or intellectual notables went to India under somebody's sponsorship or another. I remember again when we had a problem because sometimes Indian sponsors didn't follow up terribly well, and so we had Dan Boorstin, the Librarian of Congress. He got to New Delhi and his program had fallen apart, and he was not a man to take that lightly. I think he called the ambassador or somebody. Anyway, we were able to get him connected again, and he lectured then under our auspices, which was wonderful for us, and he was very good at it. So we had a lot of exchanges and then you'd have sudden glitches, but they tended not to be serious ones.

Q: I guess you were all used to it.

PISTOR: Yes, by that time..

It was wonderful to be in India because we had the resources to do creative things, including the mock-up of the space shuttle, that toured India and went to a number of scientific institutions, which burned the Soviets terribly. They were very upset over that. And the large-scale model was a credit to the imagination and skill of our local Indian staff.

Q: Well, in '84 you're off.

PISTOR: In '84 I went off to do something that was really about as much fun as I've had in the government, and that was to not be in the government for a year. In '84 my wife and I left India and went to the Fletcher School at Tufts and spent a year, '84-'85 academic year, as something called the Edward R. Murrow Fellow. It was a wonderful opportunity. We lucked out and got a condo on Harvard Street. A Fletcher professor was taking that same year on sabbatical, so we were right there 10 minutes from Harvard Square and right in the middle of this wonderful place, this Boston environment, and I just had a wonderful time being a pretend teacher for a year.

Q: What were you doing?

PISTOR: Public diplomacy, doing a, seminar course on what we do for a living in USIS. I had between 12 and 15 students. They were graduate students interested in international affairs and diplomacy, and this fit in right well talking about us and how does a country project and connect with audiences abroad (influence multipliers) through its cultural and educational programs; in what ways does the government either project or assist in projecting some understanding of who we are and why we act as we do in the world. I had very good students, and I enjoyed the assignment thoroughly. Then again my wife and I had such a good time in Cambridge and around.

Q: Also, this was not a time of great challenge to people who worked for the government, unlike the Vietnam time.

PISTOR: No, that's right.

Q: Well, then after this sabbatical…?

PISTOR: I had a wonderful sabbatical and then went back to Washington in '85 and took on something I hadn't done before. I was made director of USIA's press organization, known as IPS all these years, with our magazines, the daily wireless file, which you are familiar with, pamphlets and posters, and books. We had a whole series of magazines and very good professional people doing them. Originally USIA ran three big printing plants, one in Beirut - you know what would have happened to that - one in Manila and one in Mexico City. Just before I took on the IPS job, the printing plant in Mexico City was very badly damaged in an earthquake, and so we closed it as a printing plant but kept it as a distribution center.

The IPS assignment was especially interesting because it was a job that brought me together with domestic professional USIA people, who were very good in their fields, journalists and editors, and who were civil servants, so I got acquainted with the civil service end of the work and got to see some of their problems. The work brought with it some management puzzles and problems like what to do about this damaged center in Mexico City.

Q: What did you do?

PISTOR: We closed it and got out as much equipment as we could, sold it, and kept the building as a distribution center.

Q: Who printed?

PISTOR: Then we made printing arrangements with commercial publishers.

Q: Is this more or less the trend?

PISTOR: Yes; this is the general trend. anyway, so we did that and then used it as a distribution center. We also had a number of internal problems. One of them was getting rid of a nasty little situation. We had a big photo division, left-over stuff that would have been much more important in the '50s, and it had become difficult, with drug problem s and missing equipment– things like that, which involved a number of personnel problems.

Q: These were people who were probably under-realized.

PISTOR: Under-realized and ignored, and that leads to all kinds of boredom, so we had to finish that, clean it up. This brought union representatives into the picture– they were very helpful, even if they were on the other side of the table. This was all new territory for

me, and I found it absolutely fascinating. Did IPS for a year or so.

Q: ’85 to ’86 about.

PISTOR: Yes, and there was a kind of shuffle and I kept that job and I also then became the acting deputy in the office of the Associate Director for Programs, and did that for a time, maybe a year or so. Then I went back and headed the Near East-South Asia office again while I was waiting to become Counselor of USIA. I had three years as Counselor. The job itself is the senior career job in the organization. I served a year as Counselor with Wick, then two years with Bruce Gelb.

Q: ’87 to ’88.

PISTOR: That’s right, and then after that….

Q: How did you find working with Charlie Wick?

PISTOR: I didn’t have any trouble. First of all, he had a wonderful deputy, Marvin Stone, who had been editor of *US News and World Report* and came to the government as a patriotic duty really, and he did it very well. He got along with Wick as well. Wick was in the final year of his tenure – he had been in office for almost eight years– and he had other things on his mind. By this time he was much more comfortable with the organization than before, and I think he just trusted us to do our work, so we didn’t have any of those earlier problems. Then, as Wick retired and we moved from Reagan to Bush, we got a new Director of USIA, Bruce Gelb, who came from New York and had had no experience in government at all, and it fell to me to introduce him to our organization and our organization to him. I was with him until 1991, and maybe in the next session I can talk about that.

Q: All right. Well, we could maybe stop at this point. Okay. So we’ll pick this up next time when the Bush Administration comes in and you as counselor of USIA, what you were doing working with Bruce Gelb. We haven’t talked about this at all.

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Today is the 23rd of July 2001. Mike, are we starting at the beginning of the Bush Administration?

PISTOR: At the end of Charles Wick’s tenure in USIA, as Counselor I was responsible for putting together the transition material for the new director, whoever it might be, and worked very closely, as I had been doing, with Marvin Stone, the Deputy Director, who stayed on for the transition period.

The first thing we did was to try to find out who the next man was going to be. That’s always interesting. We heard through the rumor mill, as you generally do, that the man’s

name was Bruce Gelb and that he was in New York with Bristol-Meyers. We went immediately to the *Who's Who* and could not find him. We found Richard Gelb, who was President and Chairman of the company, with a list of things that he had done, charities and so forth, but no mention of a Bruce Gelb. We put out feelers and discovered that Bruce Gelb was the Deputy Chairman of Bristol-Meyers, and was the younger brother of Richard Gelb, but we couldn't find anything about him.

We checked with people who might know and heard only that he and his wife were very private people and weren't public figures, didn't want to be, and were quite pleasant but didn't have a track record with charities or other organizations. He'd just been with the company from the beginning, and that was that. So Marvin and I had lunch with Leonard Marks and said to him, "Can you get a lead on our new director?" He said, "Well, I'll see what I can do," and he did. Then he called us back and we had lunch again. He said, "I get two Bruce Gelbs. There's Bruce Gelb the terrifically nice guy, bright and funny and peppy and energetic. Then we get the Bruce Gelb who is infuriating, tends to the tyrannical, has a screw loose, has a terrible temper, and berates people all the time." He said, "There seem to be both these Bruce Gelbs in the same person."

Marvin and I talked and decided somebody ought to go up and meet him and see what kind of person he was. So I went up to New York to meet the incoming director of USIA, and I met the Bruce Gelb who was pleasant and funny and relaxed and with no side, but who didn't seem to know much about or have any experience in any kind of international work except a few business connections.

Q: Did you get a feel for having lobbied for the job? Why was he picked?

PISTOR: The family was close to the Bushes. I think the elder brother was quite a good friend of George H. W. Bush, and Bruce Gelb– and he told this story right away, told the story to me as a matter of fact in that first interview– had been a freshman at prep school and he was being picked on one miserable afternoon. An upperclassman, handsome, well respected, strolled in and said, "Stop doing whatever you're doing to this kid, and let him go," and it turned out to be Poppy Bush, who was an upperclassman.

Q: That would have been an Andover.

PISTOR: It was at Andover, that's right. So Bruce had always admired and had always wanted to do whatever he could for George Bush, and I guess this admiration had lasted, I'm sure, to this very day. And he seemed, as I say, pleasant enough but didn't have too much grasp of what we were doing, and didn't ask a lot of questions. It was a very pleasant, almost social occasion. So I went back and reported to Marvin, and we waited for him to come. The first day he was in the office, he brought his brother Richard with him. We never saw the brother again, but that very first day he was in the office, Bruce came in, showed the suite of offices to his brother, and the brother departed. Then we started our time with Bruce Gelb as Director of USIA.

Q: How long was he there?

PISTOR: He must have been there two years, I think. As with many people who don't know the government, Bruce was suspicious of it, not so much of us but of the government generally. He felt, and his business friends had encouraged him to feel, that the upper-level civil servants wanted to control these organizations and not let the "politicals" come in and make their mark, and he was determined to do what the President wanted. Of course we've encountered this kind suspicion a lot. You have it with ambassadors, who get educated quite soon generally and find that the people who are working for them are not working against them but trying very hard to do whatever they can for them.

We've had that to a certain extent with directors in USIA but much more strongly with Bruce, I think largely because he had a relatively narrow business background and had this suspicion of government and therefore of perhaps this organization he's joining. So we had our work cut out for us in trying to get him to see what we were doing and what it could do for the country, and what he could do. Right at the beginning he told me perfectly openly that his friends had told him to beware of the people who were running this organization and that he just wanted me to know that he was in a sense on guard– but he was not unpleasant and was ready to be proven wrong, I guess. I tried very hard to get him to start off immediately by going abroad and seeing some USIS posts before he talked to the Senate committees that he was scheduled to meet so that he would have some feel, some background, some knowledge of the organization.

So I outlined a trip that he and I would take, which he initially agreed to, and then thought maybe he ought not to do it. Then he finally said, "Oh, what the hell. Let's go ahead." The object of the trip was to get him around as much as possible in one quite big trip. We started in London and went from London to Berlin. At that point there was an East Berlin and a West Berlin, so we saw both of those countries, and then went to Israel and then to Egypt. We were able to see everybody including Hosni Mubarak. Frank Wisner was the ambassador in Cairo, and he used Bruce to ask some delicate questions of Mubarak. (Bruce performed very well). It was a very interesting and eye-opening trip for him. He got candid opinions about US relations with the countries, and he saw cultural programs, and some of our press and information work, and he really had a good look at it all. Our people were open and direct with him. I don't believe Bruce thought he was getting a guided tour that was only going to show him the good stuff. At the very end of the trip we went to Paris. Paris was the last stop, and we were there, I guess, a day and half. Bruce called me up before we went out to dinner and said, "I'd like you to come on over to my room if you wouldn't mind." I said, "Fine," and went over. The door opened and he had a bottle of champagne and two glasses. He popped the champagne, poured the glasses, and said, "You know, I was suspicious when I started this. My friends said that you're going to be taken for a ride and it's just their opportunity to get you out of town while they lock things in back in Washington." He said, "But I think this trip has been wonderful and I've learned a good deal, and here's to it." That was very nice.

Then he went back to Washington and became increasingly suspicious and even paranoid about the organization, so we had some difficult times with him. I have to say that he was never uncivil with me. He didn't blow up at things, he wasn't demonstrative, but he was very suspicious. He said that in his business before– Bristol-Meyers– as Vice Chairman he had cultivated a group of people who weren't the chiefs or the heads of section but were people within those sections who knew what was going on. Bruce had a little private group of people who could tell him the truth about things.

And in USIA he found a little bunch of people who were only too eager to go up to his office and tell him what they thought the real scoop was, and then he would use what they had told him to find out if those of us who were the " regulars" were telling the truth about things or misleading him. I discovered, working against this suspicion and to a certain extent, paranoia about the organization, that he also had developed some likes and dislikes about people. It was very difficult for him to let go of preconceptions about given officers. It was a stressful time not only for Bruce, but for those of us around him. He ended up really not talking to Marvin Stone. After Marvin left, we got a wonderful guy who had been Deputy once before, Gene Kopp, who was a superb Deputy and a loyal person who would certainly try to do what the Director wanted him to. Bruce took an immediate dislike to him and even changed the locks on his office. He changed the locks to the whole suite, so one morning Gene couldn't get into his office and he couldn't get into the men's room that they shared, and, as I say, Bruce wouldn't talk to him. So for a period, I had to be to a certain extent, a go-between between the Deputy and the Director of USIA.

Q: Was this a personality quirk, or...

PISTOR: Bruce had a curious habit of pulling you in, making you a confidant, and telling you things about his own background and his own emotional troubles, so that he'd pull you in like this and be much more personal than you wanted him to be, about his analysis and a lot of this and that.

Q: It would strike me that, given the situation, you and others at the top would be spending a great deal of effort and all trying to figure out how to be effective when it wasn't a team.

PISTOR: The thing is, though, that the team was a team. He had his own little back-room group, and everybody knew who they were. He had a secretary who had been with him some years before, who thought we were all trying to do Bruce in. The two of them would go into her office together and then come out again, throwing dark looks around. The main thing to do was to keep him from doing anything precipitous or self damaging in his dealings with people and in the meetings, and to keep some of the more difficult sessions from the rest of the organization. I think we were successful. There were a few of us who were in his early morning meetings who knew just how suspicious he was and how volatile things were with him, and I believe we kept the lid on pretty tightly.

Q: You were coming away from the Wick times. Wick had had very fine relations with particularly Nancy Reagan and was able to get kind of what he wanted. Was there a thrust of USIA at that time trying to do anything?

PISTOR: You mean different that would use Gelb's relationship with the President or...

Q: Were you launching out new initiatives and things like this?

PISTOR: It was not really a time of great initiatives because you had difficulties at the top. Bruce had a very serious breach that finally did him in, and that was with the Voice of America and the VOA Director at the time. You could see it as it was beginning to happen. Our Foreign Press Center in the National Press Building arranged a meeting with the foreign press about the Voice of America and some problem in the Middle East. I can't remember exactly what it was but our Press Center decided to invite both Bruce Gelb and Richard Carlson, VOA Director, to talk to the foreign journalists about the relationship between USIA and the Voice and the good works they were doing.. Richard Carlson had a background in journalism, in radio and in television, and he had some political experience too. He had run once for mayor of San Diego. He was a good public affairs person. He liked making speeches and he made good ones boosting the Voice, and he was always very careful about the VOA-USIA connection.. There's always been some jealousy between directors of USIA and the directors of the Voice of America, who worked for them, and Carlson was very good about this and scrupulous about giving USIA credit. When he'd go to Cincinnati or Seattle to make a speech, he would always say what the USIA was: "It's our parent organization and its Director is...," Dick did good stuff in that way, I thought. When you saw the news clips come in, you could see he was making an effort.

But when they got together at this meeting with the foreign press, Carlson had, as I say, a radio and television background, which gave him a kind of orotund delivery. It was a radio man's voice and the assurance of a radio man's personality came through as he was answering questions. Bruce looked at that and got it into his head just then– I was standing in the room and could see it – that Dick Carlson was patronizing him and was and trying to dominate the meeting, and he got just completely twisted up about this; it began to show in his annoyed answers. Carlson, I think, at that point was trying to find a way out – "I don't mean to be offensive." Anyway, that ended badly, and Carlson, thinking it over, decided he wasn't going to be pushed around by Gelb, so we had these two people across the street from each other having a royal feud. Gene Kopp and I went over to talk to Carlson and tried to smooth things over, but he wasn't buying it.

Behind Carlson was the whole Voice of America, which is a volatile organization anyway, and people were beginning to jeer and say ugly things about Gelb. It got to be a real mess. This was a little tempest in a teacup, but the teacup was boiling over.

Q: The problem with somebody who maybe - I'm using probably a gross term - when there's a touch of paranoia about how things are doing, all of a sudden a conspiracy in

an organization is going to grow up of people trying to smooth this over, get the work done, and to avoid this, which means that there is a conspiracy, which really isn't directed against him but to get around him. This is true in any organization.

PISTOR: That's exactly right. When you get paranoia at the top, you always get this, if it hasn't crumbled.

Q: If it doesn't dissolve, or assassination.

PISTOR: But if the organization is trying to do its work, trying to produce, then you will of course get people talking to one another and saying, "Let's see. How can we contain this, and how can we reassure him? What can we prove to him that will make him feel less offended. But the fight between these two men got bigger. USIA does not get any ink in Washington papers, but it got a couple of little barbed notices in the papers about this problem. It ended up that both men left. Bruce Gelb was offered the job of ambassador to Belgium and took it, and had a very successful tour there. Dick Carlson was offered ambassador to the Seychelles– there isn't much to do there– but he then came back to Washington and became head of the Public Broadcasting Corporation and earned a solid reputation there.

During Bruce Gelb's tenure as USIA Director there were three or four people who were especially effective and discreet. They kept their heads throughout. The coolest of them, and the most helpful to Bruce in particular, was Rick Ruth, special assistant to the Director. Rick had been special assistant to Wick, then served with Bruce , and after him Directors Catto and Duffy.

Q: Who is that?

PISTOR: Rick Ruth is a superb officer, and a keeper of secrets. He was awfully good at it, and there were difficult moments. Two or three other stalwarts met with Bruce every morning, chief among them was Mike Schneider, whom you should interview if you haven't. One particularly good officer, who didn't regularly attend the early morning meetings, but was there when it counted, especially as regards the Voice of America, was Bob Coonrod. Carlson thought so well of him that he took him with him to the Public Broadcasting Corporation, and now he's the head of it. He came up kind of through the ranks, which is very unusual.

These were awfully good people who kept the Agency on a pretty even keel. As I said, Gene Kopp was a superb Deputy and kept the ship afloat, and Bruce kind of hovered around at the top. He didn't penetrate the Agency much. Your question was how did we do; the answer is we did pretty well because we had a steady Deputy who wasn't in touch much with the Director, but the Director wasn't in touch much...

Q: In other words, you almost sealed him off.

PISTOR: As much as we could.

Q: We're talking about organizations and how they survive. What was USIA or USIS doing during this period? Was this the beginning of a diminution in services and all?

PISTOR: Its relationship with the Department was a little rocky, but it had been losing resources already. As I say, Bruce was only there a couple of years, and for those of us who were close to him, that was a long time, but for the rest of the organization that was just an interval; people hardly remember him now. They remember Duffy and they remember Wick as a character and a powerful man, but most people don't...

Q: Well, Henry Catto took...

PISTOR: Yes, a decent person. I left at the same time Bruce and Dick Carlson did. I went off to be ambassador to the Republic of Malawi, which turned out to be as gratifying as anything I've ever done in th service. I was in Washington long enough to greet Henry Catto and meet him but not to work for him. I liked him a lot. He was a very affable, forthcoming person and just the ticket after this period of active paranoia.

Q: Were you hearing from your colleagues in the State Department or elsewhere "What's with this guy Gelb?" and that sort of thing, or was this strictly insulated?

PISTOR: No, at the Department too, because he was eccentric. They knew who his brother was, they knew there was a Bush connection, so you don't just seal the guy off altogether. But they also handled him a little the way we did. They just were good to him and kind to him and wouldn't pay any attention to what he had to say.

With all his faults, Bruce was a very intelligent person and he had a generous nature. I was the Counselor in Wick's last year and that last year he was not in the office much of the time. Marvin had a bout of bad health. The major connection at the higher levels of USIA with the Department was the Secretary's daily meeting. If the Director couldn't attend, the Deputy Director went. With both of them out, I represented the Agency. It wasn't a formal arrangement; it just happened . When Bruce Gelb became USIA Director I told him about what our points of contact were and mentioned that the Director or the Deputy Director went to this meeting and that as Counselor I went some of the time but not as a matter of course. He said, "Well, let's make that a matter of course," so he called up somebody and said, "I want to make sure that the third name is on the list all the time and is the counselor"– a very generous gesture, important to the bureaucracy. Bruce didn't attend every time either, so I filled in a couple of times, but one of the political appointees at USIA's upper level said to Bruce, "If you're not there and the Deputy Director isn't there, why should a career officer go to the Secretary's meeting? It really should be one of the four Associate Directors who have Senate approval." But when my friend the political guy continued to work on him to get things changed, Bruce realized, well, this is a gift that I can bestow. The next time an opportunity came up, Bruce tapped the political guy as the anointed substitute, and nobody at the Secretary's meeting knew

who he was. This annoyed Baker, who said, “From now on, only the Director and the Deputy Director will attend,” and the career service lost a perk... That’s a long little story but...

Q: But it gives a feel for...

PISTOR: And also in that period a corrosive “them and us” attitude grew among our political appointees, increasing as the number of political appointees increased in the Clinton administration. .

Q: You left the counselor job in ‘91 and you went as ambassador to Malawi. Could you explain how that appointment came about?

PISTOR: Yes. The Director General of the day talked to me about it. When the position of Counselor of the Agency was instituted, it was thought that at the conclusion of his term, the Counselor should retire or leave USIA. A suitable ambassadorship seemed appropriate . Directors Wick and Gelb endorsed the idea; my predecessor had been given an embassy. In my case, I was told that I was in the running and that Ed Perkins, the Director General, thought the idea was a good one and would support it. I think the Department decided that it would be one of the African posts. My own experience had been in several parts of the world and Africa had been where I had started, so I was perfectly happy with that.

But at one point in the process somebody appeared who felt he was more deserving of the appointment. He had an excellent record and a lot of African experience. He was a fellow career officer, who approached Bruce Gelb and said, “This shouldn’t just be automatic, that the Counselor gets this ambassadorship.” And what he did was work on Bruce, who then changed his mind a little bit and thought maybe he would submit that man’s name.

Q: How did that work out?

PISTOR: It worked out that he didn’t submit that guy’s name and that Perkins and the African area and everybody else prevailed, and Bruce backed away. It was a very peculiar time.

Q: It does seem like something like this and having somebody at the top there who is susceptible to influence allowed, you might say, discipline to break down. To have one professional officer try to knock another professional officer off does not speak well for how things were operating.

PISTOR: No, but if you knew the officer, he was a very talented, effective officer with a lot of experience. He also felt that there wasn’t much better. It wasn’t all that surprising. It wasn’t that the discipline broke down at the top. This guy was a hard driver who thought maybe he could do this. He certainly thought that he deserved the post. But you’re right, if you get somebody susceptible like that as Director, then somebody can try

to use him. I think I'll edit that whole thing out.

Q: But it does give a feel. I don't like to see things end up a pablum, because one of the things we're trying to do here is to give people outside the profession and understand the role of people, how things worked within the bureaucracy. It's not different than an academic institution or anything. None of this is surprising. It just shows...

PISTOR: With this thing, with this person who said he ought to have that job and started working on it, Ed Perkins, the Director General, said to me, "What you ought to do now is don't be shy. Start working yourself." So I took his advice and had a conference with the Assistant Secretary for Africa and a couple of other people and got back into the running. I had held back. I didn't know exactly how you campaign. I've always been grateful to him for his pertinent – and pointed– advice at the time.

Q: Did you have any problem with your confirmation?

PISTOR: None whatsoever.

Q: Okay. Could you describe were Malawi is.

PISTOR: Malawi is in southern Africa and was part of the Federation of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and what then became Malawi, Nyasaland. It's a landlocked country with the same population as its neighbors Zambia and Mozambique, about 10,000,000. It had a fascinating history because the Federation was a post-World War II white-settler affair, trying to hold these countries together as a unit, and the independence leader for Nyasaland, Dr. Hastings Banda, was one of the pioneers in Africa's independence movement, and he broke the Federation.

Banda caused the Federation to fall apart, and then became, first Prime Minister, and then President of the new country of Malawi. He graduated from President to Life President of his political party to Life President of th country. Then he established a 30-year dictatorship.

Banda was a medical doctor, trained first– his undergraduate work– at the University of Chicago. He did his MD at Meharry Medical School in Nashville. Then he moved to the UK, and began his medical practice in London. During World War II, Banda was a very successful doctor with a good practice who bankrolled people like Nkrumah, Kenyatta and others when they were struggling in London.

He was called home by the young radicals pushing for independence because he was a solid middle-class leader, a Presbyterian elder and– as it turned out, a ruthless dictator. He was also a friend of the West, so he was odd man out in that part of the world when the independence movement really got going. His country had a relationship with South Africa when no other independent state would, and he said, "I'd rather deal on the table with these people than under the table." He jeered at people like Nkrumah who thought

they had the troops to fight the imperialists, and he said, “You must be joking. They’ve all the strength and you’ve got none, and so you’d better treat with them.”
Banda was a practical man. In his early years, the first year he was actually in office, some of his most fervent supporters, the young radicals who had brought him to power, tried a coup, and he dispatched it (and its instigators), and never had any trouble again. So he was the West’s friend and he was South Africa’s only friend, but, as I say, his human rights record was abysmal and his control of the people was absolute. By the time I got there he was almost 90 years old.

Q: On the economic side, so many of the rulers took the left-wing, socialist, Fabian socialist London School of Economics course or the French equivalent and really destroyed their economies. I think of Tanzania and Ghana and other ones. Where did he fit in?

PISTOR: He ran the whole thing pretty effectively and made a lot of money out of it. It was as if he had a large business, mostly agricultural. It’s a dirt poor country, but it was always a good aid recipient because it did what it said it was going to do, so it always got substantial aid money. He exhorted people to be self sufficient and grow maize in their own gardens so that they wouldn’t depend on having to buy it elsewhere.

It was very difficult to separate what he did as a business person and what the country did as a country. You sometimes couldn’t tell the difference. He did such things as build, as a private entrepreneur and in total control of the country, quite a large business building in Blantyre, the economic capital and then rent it to the government for offices for ministers. It was not the capital, it was the commercial capital, so the cabinet ministers used to travel back and forth from Lilongwe, the capital, down to Blantyre. Their offices were in his building. The government therefore paid rent to Banda the private entrepreneur..

He didn’t have the stain of corruption that many of these other countries did, and he wouldn’t stand for things like customs officers being on the take and things like this. He would really come on hard, throw people in jail and throw away the key, so the petty corruption, while there’s always some, was nowhere near what it was in any of the neighboring countries. But at the very top, the fact that what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is mine as President for Life, extended to favored people, who stayed in favor by being good to him and doing what he said, who made money and lived very well but not in the ostentatious way that you see elsewhere. President Banda, of course, lived extremely well himself.

I had the luckiest break you could have in a small and somewhat obscure country, because I got there just at the time when we could help the Malawians throw this man out of office in a peaceful way, and that’s what happened in the three years I was there. First came a referendum to allow a multi-party system. Then a year later there was a general election in which the President for Life lost,, and he left office voluntarily.

Q: You were there from when to when?

PISTOR: 1991 to 1994.

Q: When you went out, what were American interests there?

PISTOR: American interests in Malawi were few and not terribly important to the United States. It was one of those countries that had some coffee, tobacco-- American tobacco companies did well there--and tea, but Malawi's importance to us was more political than economic, not just to us but to the West generally, because Banda had nothing but contempt for the kind of socialist regimes around Africa. He espoused the virtues of the West and the free market, although his country was not much of a free market. He relied also on a lot on expatriates to run organizations and his big farming enterprise for him. The United States and others used his vote in the UN, his moderating influence where it could be felt in other parts of the world as a friend of the West and a special friend of the United States. But this friendship had begun to cool at the time really of the end of the Soviet empire and the political...

Q: There was no longer a game to be played in Africa.

PISTOR: No. Nobody said that out loud. Also, it was a time when we were beginning to pay real attention to the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa. Again, it was not so much that the Cold War had disappeared, but practically speaking you looked at it and saw you just couldn't tolerate that kind of repressive regime if you were going to be giving a lot of aid, and that's what we said to the Malawians: "You can do whatever you please, but there are an awful lot of people looking for the aid that we can offer, and there are standards that have to do with human rights and the rule of law. We preached that, and it was understood.

Q: When you say human rights, what were you talking about in that context?

PISTOR: Well, there was no freedom of assembly. There was certainly no freedom of the press. Banda owned the one daily newspaper, and that was that. There were some pretty well educated and, to a real degree, well intentioned judges and lawyers, but the system obeyed the President, the police were ruthless, and people were afraid to speak out loud. Expatriates, if they said things in their houses against the President or against the country or any criticism of Malawi, would find themselves told that they could no longer remain in the country and were out of there very quickly.

Malawians of whom somebody said they were saying things that they shouldn't have said, were put into jail and not even put on trial; they just stayed till they died or till they at some point were let out years and years later. The prisons were not nice places to be in. It's a poor country, and they couldn't feed prisoners very well and malaria was rampant and you didn't have a lot of chances there. Political opposition or the thought of political opposition was immediately snuffed out and people disappeared or were thrown into prison.

Q: When you arrived there, did you meet Banda?

PISTOR: Oh, yes, right away.

Q: And what was your impression, and what were you getting from people? You say he was moving along in years.

PISTOR: Well, he was a very old man, and people marveled at how spry he was and how quick he was. One of his specialties– he made all his speeches in English and they would be translated into the local language. He did this deliberately to set himself apart from ordinary men. He always wore a three-piece suit and a Homburg hat and they didn't look ludicrous on him. At the great celebrations of one thing or another, his birthday or the country's independence day, the stadium stands would be packed. Women's civic groups, actually political organizations, would dance for him, singing songs of praise, and he would come down from the stands himself and dance with them, waving a fly whisk and prancing slowly and carefully. People admired his stamina and cheered him enthusiastically. But they were frightened of him, and they had every reason to be.

When I presented my letters of credence to President Banda, I had to wear a morning coat and striped pants and, if had had a top hat, carry it, but that wasn't usually required. I think there were about three top hats in the country. I presented the credentials and sat and talked with him for a little bit. His favorite American President was John Kennedy because Kennedy had received him , and he had been disappointed by others. But he spoke of his experiences in the United States, a coherent conversation but a very formal one. Then when it was time to get up, he told me it was time to get up and that I should get on his left or his right as we left the audience room, skirting a stuffed lion at the door.

I talked to Banda several times after that. On one of those occasions he told me that he really did not appreciate the United States interfering in his business and in his country, and I said that we were taking advantage of an old and close friendship to speak frankly, and that's what we were hoping to do. That was interesting, that we were able to talk directly with him when it counted

The major interlocutor for me and for the other ambassadors was the Secretary to the President and Cabinet, the country's senior civil servant. The Cabinet members and the three or four people who were close to him were also quite approachable. You could have them to dinner or lunch or breakfast and push them, which is what we were doing. I developed a good partnership with the British High Commissioner, who was a wonderful man. We didn't plot together, but we did march together in increasing pressure on the Malawians. I had a very good AID Director too; she did a brilliant job in pushing for change, with the threat of curtailment if we didn't see improvement in the human rights area. Had I explained the human rights situation enough?

Q: Yes. Well...

PISTOR: While my wife and I were in Malawi, some of the people who had been in prison for years were sprung, and a political opposition took shape, and the country had two national elections in two years– flawed but clean elections. In some districts there had been some hanky-panky, and there were areas in which there had been some threats, but overall... We donor countries insisted on international supervision and observation. Every day was interesting . Members of the Catholic hierarchy in Malawi were vilified in speeches by officials of Banda's political party, and a bishop in the north who was an Irishman was threatened. So I took the Ambassadorial car with the flags and all that and went to pay a call on him; it was pretty heavy stuff. I had a small embassy but very good people in it, and they too got really involved in reporting and looking at what was going on and making new contacts.

Q: Who was your DCM?

PISTOR: I had two DCMs. The first one was with me just for a year and was in a sense a left-over. He'd been chosen by the previous ambassador, and he was a very pleasant, likeable man, but he didn't have an awful lot of judgment. He left after a year, and then I had a really superb guy who is now, I guess, right here in the Department. Greg Engle.

Q: Were you being a gadfly while you were there, saying, "Why can't you get your human rights thing," bringing up cases?

PISTOR: Yes, absolutely, and at several levels, most particularly and most frequently with the Secretary to the President and the Cabinet. I'd say, "We know of Mr. So-and-so or Mrs. So-and-so. Where are they? What's happened?" Before I went to Malawi, I had meetings with a number of people in human rights organizations. Amnesty International had a big, thick dossier on Malawi. Members of Amnesty International were not allowed in Malawi, so they had to get information second hand. And then we had the human rights reports that the State Department does. I wanted to be sure that everything got wrung out as much as possible so we weren't counting on rumors or unsubstantiated charges, because the human rights organizations, wonderful as they are, are apt to go for the most lurid accounts. Amnesty International will substantiate as much as they can, but not as thoroughly as our government would want. You don't want to get caught talking nonsense, so we squeezed as dry as we could and got as factual as we could. I did that, the British High Commissioner did it, the German ambassador did it, and we eventually put together a donors' club.

We met frequently and compared notes so that the donors were pretty much in sync.

Q: The British High Commissioner was playing the same role.

PISTOR: Yes, he was. He was a little out front of his government, not far but some; he was awfully good. I had the real backing of the Department at that time. This wasn't the most important country by a long shot, but the Assistant Secretary, George Moose, was

very supportive and read our cables. So the British High Commissioner and I had more freedom to do something and then report it rather than request something and then do it. We didn't get too far out of line, but we were comfortable with our relationship with Washington or with London so that there were more embassy initiatives than there would otherwise be. You could tell that this was very different from the French, the Germans, the others who were more constrained by their Ministries. They used that as an excuse as well, when they-– especially the French– wanted to stall. But it was actually true that they had to phone home. .

Q: Well, with the French and Germans, then they were somewhat lagging behind?

PISTOR: The Germans were not. The Germans had a little stiffness in their relationship with home, but they were big donors and they were very concerned about human rights and about the rule of law, so they were in sync, but they were not quite as free-wheeling as we were.

Q: The French?

PISTOR: The French ambassador was a charmer. I liked him a lot, but he was so intensely French. The French had a trade relationship that they didn't want to have messed up in any way. They knew Africa well, and they always played just a little different, but they were after the same goals, so our efforts were in harmony.

Q: Were you getting any reflections of what was happening in Zimbabwe?

PISTOR: One thing more about the French: The British High Commissioner and I drafted a memorandum that we were going to present jointly to the Government of Malawi. He and I thought it was a good idea and so did the German Ambassador, but the Frenchman said, "We're a European organization and the Americans are different, and so it's all right if they want to submit this separately, but we can't do it together," which was too bad. We did it separately, but it didn't have the same effect it would have.

Q: This is, of course, that peculiar French thing.

PISTOR: It was wonderful to have them there being so French. It was wonderful. Everybody was pretty much as you would hope he would be as representative of his country. I'm not talking about stereotypes but of attitudes and postures that couldn't be confused between one country and another.

Q: Were you getting any reflections of what was happening in Zimbabwe at the time and Mugabe holding onto power and that sort of thing?

PISTOR: Yes, we were getting some of that. The African States were trying to use Mugabe to press Banda to liberalize his regime. There's rich irony in that. Something else that was terribly important to the United States and the international community

throughout this period and earlier was the terrible Mozambique war. Malawi had a 10,000,000 population and it had 1,000,000 Mozambican refugees. Malawi was in a sense a go-between for the warring factions. The apartheid South African regime also had a lot to do with the Mozambique business, as did many white Rhodesians. You had a lot of mysterious stuff going on. Before my time, I think, much of the international emphasis had been on what the Malawians knew about the situation in Mozambique, and to a lesser extent, Angola.

Our concern for the moment was Mugabe, and what moderating influence he might have– if any– on President Banda. A forlorn hope. Mugabe was enlisted in a sense to get Banda not to be quite so rigid and maybe to give a little bit. At that time Mugabe was playing it safe. Also, South Africa was changing quickly and well.

But we had further help, I have to say, in pressing change on the President for Life. Within two months of the time I got there, we had the first visit ever by a Vice President of the United States to Malawi, because Dan Quayle was making an African trip and Zimbabwe was on the schedule but had to be scratched because of a hotel explosion. So we got Vice President Quayle and his wife and the Secretary of Health, Education and Human Services and his wife, and a supporting cast of hundreds. The President didn't travel from Blantyre, where he had his main palace, and the capitol was in Lilongwe, where all the rest of us were.

Quayle arrived at our house in Lilongwe late in the night, and I had a breakfast in the morning with the senior officials around Banda, the Minister of Finance, the Foreign Minister, the Secretary of the Cabinet, the person who was the kind of shadow leader. Dan Quayle said clearly and unambiguously, "We're looking for change." They said, "Well, we have our own kind of democracy. It's African democracy." Quayle said, "Well, I would consider that a basic tenet of democracy would be to have an opposition, a protected opposition, and we don't see any of that." He really did it well. Malawi is probably the only country in the world where Dan Quayle is thought of as a dangerous revolutionary. Also, Senator Dennis DeConcini came to town not long after, and gave the same message to the same assembled notables.

Q: Banda, you say ,was up in his '90s. How did he, while you were there, have an election and change things? How did that come about?

PISTOR: It just was amazing. He made a serious mistake, and that was he thought that when he called a referendum the people would be with him, because he had preached that you had to have a strong single- party government, because if you didn't, the country would descend into tribalism and chaos. He said, "This is the only way we can continue our growth and our prosperity. As Father of the Country, I will always be able to protect and guide you." We were pretty much convinced he thought if he had this kind of snap referendum, the people, his people, would fall in line. The donor group was pressing him to allow a multi-party system and to get political opposition going and loosen up the press, so he suddenly announced, "We're going to have a referendum, and the question is

do you want a multi-party system or a single-party system? Do you want me or do you want chaos?” And they voted for chaos.

It surprised him. For almost a day you didn’t hear anything from the palace, and it was pretty dicey, you know. After about 18 hours he made a little speech on the radio saying that, “The people have spoken and said they want a multi-party system, so I am requesting the parliament to draft legislation that will enable us to have other political parties, and within 12 months of today we will have an election.” I think he then thought the party was strong enough to be able to win the election, but again they lost, and he stepped down without fuss after 30 years in power. My wife and I left within a week of that second election. My time was over, but I couldn’t have been more gratified with this conclusion.

Q: Were you able to do much sounding out about how people were feeling because of the situation? Did people talk to you?

PISTOR: It was amazing. The attempt to muscle the Catholic hierarchy backfired, and people did begin to talk more openly. The donors were going to cut off money-- we didn’t, but we made it look as if we were very close to it– and this emboldened the political opposition even before they had the parties, and so people would begin to talk to you who had not talked before, and talk to one another, and several newspapers sprang up. One of the senior leaders of the party who had been thrown in jail 15 years ago was let out of jail. His wife had continued to prosper. He put together a newspaper and was on the hustings again. This happened with several others as people were getting out jail, as people were beginning to organize. One of the things that fueled the opposition was that people who worked in businesses were able to use the faxes, and you got things being circulated that had been faxed from one place to another. It was really quite remarkable because freedom was in the air and people were really serious about it. As I say, the system allowed this because there were some pretty well trained judges and lawyers and business people and others who were able to carry on.

Q: Did you see, or were you concerned about, a return to tribalism?

PISTOR: Well, you’re always concerned about a return to chaos of one kind or another when the reins are loosened wherever you go, and so we were concerned, but it hasn’t happened. Also, Malawi doesn’t have the intense tribalism that some of these other countries have, and the resultant quarrels. There’s more intermarriage; there’s less north, south, west tribal associations. There’s tribalism but it isn’t the same as other places.

Q: What about the white settler type people, the managers and all? How did they feel about change?

PISTOR: Mostly they didn’t like it much. Things had been fairly cozy. The settlers felt a little oppressed themselves all the time. They were always looking over their shoulders. But the tea people and tobacco people and the coffee people who had managed to make

their compromises with Banda and have a pretty good living didn't need change. They knew something was coming, though, because the old man was keeping the whole thing together himself. It was a personal triumph, and some time he was going to die, and they didn't think all that well of those who would succeed him. So I think they weren't in opposition; they were just apprehensive.

Q: Did you have any problem with American tobacco people? I'm thinking almost of moral grounds.

PISTOR: No. There were Americans in and out, but generally American Tobacco and the others who were buying there used their agents in South Africa. The tobacco people would come up when it was time to have the sales and so forth. Tobacco brought some measure of prosperity to that desperately poor country, so for the moral question of tobacco you'd have to put up another moral question which is starving to death.

What our very bright and savvy AID Director, Carol Peasley, did was to break into the market, which had been controlled by big shots, and get peasant farmers into the production and sale of tobacco so the small farmer could make some money off it. This was the kind of thing that would make somebody able to buy a bicycle or a lantern. It was a very good breakthrough, and the AID people were deservedly proud of it.

The UNICEF office in Lilongwe which was run by an American woman, an ambitious person, who took on this tobacco business as a crusade and preached against AID and its approach, and talked about child labor in the tobacco fields and so forth. She had a scheme or two for getting out of the tobacco business into something that was unrealistic. I found myself opposed to her and her point of view. She launched a little campaign at the donors' meeting in Paris, where we went once a year. As I say, we had a terrific AID director who was able to refute point by point the allegations and kind of steady things so it didn't blow up into a danger to AID for using tobacco revenue to get the small farmer a little money. They'll have to abandon tobacco soon enough and grow something else because of its obvious risks. But in this transition period, I think to snatch it away when you didn't have anything else to substitute would have been to push poverty-stricken plow holders into starvation.

Q: What about social life there? How did you find that?

PISTOR: Constricted. It's a small place, but I was so interested in what was going on, the political thing was so interesting, and I thought the diplomatic community wasn't dull at all so my wife and I enjoyed what social life there was. We had Malawian friends and, as I said, people became more and more open as the times changed. It's a beautiful country; we did a lot of traveling and we met a lot of people, so the social life was not stultified in that 'pass the canapés; oh, my God, there's another embassy do'. We didn't do a lot of that. There was a big Peace Corps effort in Malawi, over 125 Peace Corps volunteers, so we saw a lot of them. There was also a large missionary group of Americans scattered around the country. Each year we held regional town meetings to tell them what the

embassy was doing and what we expected would in the country over the next several months. These get-togethers, part business, part social, were very successful. We had big parties on the 4th of July when we mixed the missionaries and the Peace Corps, some drinking beer and some having hot dogs.

Q: Did you have any problems with the Peace Corps or the missionaries getting tangled up with the government or that sort of thing?

PISTOR: No. We had a couple of tragedies with the Peace Corps, because the roads were bad and you had a couple of awfully nice kids killed on the roads. The Peace Corps was well run. There was a risky time when the Catholic hierarchy, the bishops, had sent a notice that they thought was polite and respectful about what changes there ought to be in the country, and the government was infuriated. That's when people started threatening the bishop up in the north, the Irishman.. The Peace Corps people, of course, would have been right there getting copies of this letter, and maybe some of them even passing them out. We had a Peace Corps meeting, all of the Volunteers collected by a quite formal, tie-wearing Peace Corps director, who seemed a little of a stuffed shirt, but as it turned out, he was awfully good. The question came up: "Well, what about the dangerous piece of paper?" and the Peace Corps Director reached into his pocket and said, "You mean this piece of paper?" which helped the Volunteers realize that we were all on the same side.

We weren't preaching and we weren't getting involved in the country's politics, but we understood what was going on. The Peace Corps Volunteers kept to their assigned work, and the government didn't try to sling them out. They'd been thrown out once before in the '60s, when somebody tried to get a dissident out of the country in the trunk of his car. Naturally this infuriated Banda and he threw the Peace Corps out. It was reinstated later, but the Peace Corps itself yanked its Volunteers because of the restrictions imposed by the Malawi Government. Then, third -time lucky, they were back in great numbers, as many as 125.

At the end of my three- year tour in Malawi, I was able to attend the inauguration of the country's second president, whom I had known from my first week at the post. So I came to the end of a very gratifying assignment. There wasn't a day that wasn't interesting.

Q: Well, then you left in '94. What had happened? In South Africa Mandela had taken over.

PISTOR: Mandela had taken over. We in Malawi had our elections first, and they had theirs second. And all of southern Africa was changing.

Q: In '94 you left?

PISTOR: In '94 I was 64 years old and I was to retire in April of '95. We left Malawi in midsummer of '94. But before we wrap up these interviews I want to talk a little about what Joe Duffy and company did. to do with one of the political leaders in Malawi who

had been a darling, and almost a creature, of the AFL-CIO and then got to be known in Malawi as the American candidate. It was very difficult for us to get out from under that. Joe Duffy, who's nothing if not politically aware, was very close to the AFL-CIO. I'll talk about it later.

Q: Joe Duffy was the head of USIA.

PISTOR: That's right.

Q: All right. Well, maybe this is a good place to stop. Essentially we've finished with Malawi.

PISTOR: I want to add just this point: the Joe Duffy initiative during this time of transition, which took us by surprise, had much more to do with American politics than with Malawi.

Q: All right. Do you want to pick this up next time? Okay.

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This is the 2nd of August 2001. Mike, you wanted to talk about Joe Duffy.

PISTOR: I wanted to talk about how American politics, in a peculiar way, came to Malawi. You'd think it would be quite a stretch. It generally would be. When I was preparing to go to Malawi and had my appointment set up by a very good desk officer at the Department, one of the places I visited was the AFL-CIO African Institute . For a long time it had been very active in trade union activities and, therefore, political activities in Africa. I arrived at the African Institute office and, lo and behold, there was a trade unionist, maybe *the* trade unionist from Malawi, in an elegant sports coat, a very Western guy, who was the representative of the AFL-CIO African Institute in the region and had just recently moved to Malawi. It was interesting that the Malawi government allowed him to be posted there, since it was very nervous about any kind of union activity.

When I got to Malawi, I discovered that my DCM was very friendly with this union man. He himself had been labor attaché in Kenya earlier and had kept this friendship going; it was quite cozy. I was apprehensive about the closeness of the relationship since the man was already so close to the AFL-CIO, and I said, "Let's keep a little distance." Actually what I said was, "He's already in the lap of the AFL-CIO; he doesn't need another daddy." The DCM took some heed, but not enough. He was a holdover and he left after my first year.

But as the political situation heated up in Malawi and as the pressure on President Banda increased, this man himself became more and more active politically. He left for a conference in Lusaka. He announced he was going to come back to Malawi and make a statement, a kind of manifesto, at the airport, and he had circulated word of his intent so

he could get stimulate some notice on his airport arrival. I had word that the Malawi officials would probably arrest him there and I tried to talk to the senior-most people in the government to say, "It would be intelligent of you to just let him get off the airplane, make his statement and go back to his house, and I presume that's what you're going to do." The senior-most official said, "Yes, probably so," but what actually happened was that they did exactly what the union-based politician wanted them to do, they arrested him, and his manifesto got widely distributed. He took a real chance going to jail in a place like Malawi, but it turned out he was martyred but not bruised. But he was one of several politicians who were pushing the envelope. I wanted to make sure that we knew them all and that we didn't play favorites, naturally, so it was a little dicey.

I then discovered that Lane Kirkland, the head of the AFL-CIO, was interested in this case, and that he was a good friend of Joe Duffy, the Director of USIA. He was also a very good friend of Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, Robert Kennedy's daughter, who was the director of the Robert Kennedy Award, which is given to political heroes who are in prison or who have been threatened with prison. She decided, or they decided, that this man would be a good candidate for that award, and it was making him increasingly visible with a very strong American connection. At one point I learned that Kerry Kennedy Cuomo and Lane Kirkland had made a call on Director Duffy to find out what might be done to help this case. What Duffy decided, without consulting us out there in Malawi, was to do a very unusual thing, to suddenly air on the VOA a half hour of broadcasting in the Chichewa language, one of the country's major languages. This, of course, didn't get broadly listened to, but it certainly was listened to by those who were curious about this U.S. initiative and wanted to know what the connections might be. As I say, we heard about it and had no part in it at all.

Q: Kathleen or...

PISTOR: Kerry Kennedy Cuomo came out to Malawi to give the award that year to this politician. By this time he was out of jail and was running for office pretty strongly as one of the factional candidates. Naturally we had her to lunch and dinner and tried to get her together with other politician-candidates as well. Then at the big award ceremony, the politician put me up at the front table, naturally, and then gave me effusive praise and asked me to speak. I was very careful to praise Kerry Kennedy Cuomo and her efforts over the years for people showing political bravery and talked of the changes in Malawi and this and that, but tried to stay well this side of praising individually or separately this politician. But it was a difficult thing and it dogged us throughout the rest of the election season and beyond.. Even though we were also close to the man who eventually became President of Malawi, who won the election, we were tagged by many as the power behind the union man, backing him with special attention and maybe, you know, with money. It was a very difficult time, and it could have been resolved if somebody just listened to us. I guess this happens with some regularity, but it was really kind of a shock.

Q: I'm afraid it does. Somebody gets the ear of somebody, and they have somebody they find very attractive in another country, and so they think that this is going to solve

everything, if we get good old Joe in. Good old Joe may be fine or good old Joe may not be fine, but they then push and they have no idea of the range or the policies...

PISTOR: And really don't care much.

Q: ...and really don't care much.

PISTOR: I think this one was a very good illustration. Over the years I'm sure you've seen as I have that kind of activity on the part of the AFL-CIO. They've been very active, and they often don't coordinate and often you find that they're deeply involved in the political matters of a county in which we're represented. They've done some good and they've also caused some embarrassment.

Q: I think it's important for anybody to understand American representation abroad in that we have to worry about other elements, not just within the government but other people. Sometimes you have Congressmen or even the staff of a Congressperson rushing out on their own, basically on their own policy, and all that and tainting whatever they do with American influence, which often plays against the cause, the person, or American interest.

PISTOR: People abroad have plenty enough difficulty just understanding our system, the difference between the Congress and the Executive Branch and who speaks for whom and with what authority and to what extent. So that a Congressman or a staffer, even if he's not being at all mischievous, if he's there and has opinions about domestic politics in the United States, will cause often confusion among his listeners. One of the good things that USIA did over the years, in USIS posts around the world, was to continually use practitioners, Congressmen, Senators, staffers, Executive Branch members, and get them in discussions, get them working alongside people who come from other political systems, and you achieve some understandings that you wouldn't otherwise get.

Q: Well then, you left Malawi when?

PISTOR: Left Malawi in the summer of 1994, and I had 10 months between that and retirement.

Q: So what did you do then?

PISTOR: Came back to Washington and filled in. I had been back a couple of months, I remember, and had a phone call from somebody at CSIS.

Q: Center for International Strategic Studies.

PISTOR: Really the creation largely of David Abshire. It's one of the think tanks and a good one. I was asked to go to lunch with Diana Dugan, Diana Lady Dugan, who ran their communications program and was looking to retire as chair and director and just become

chair and see if she could get a director. We talked, and she was hoping that USIA would pay my salary and I would join her, and after that, when I retired, I would turn into a staff member there. I talked to our lawyers to see if that was possible or possibly illegal to do it. It turned out, with this or that caveat, I could do it, so I went over and joined CSIS for several months. But as I got to CSIS I found that my wife had to have a couple of operations and my life was changing and I didn't want to do a 50-hour week again, and I saw that was exactly the way to do this job well. I found a successor, a retiring USIA officer, and convinced Diana that he would be a good successor (he was) and I left. At that point I retired from USIA. Since then I've done some inspections through an arrangement that many of my colleagues have in the Department with the Inspector General's Office, and I've done inspections in Germany and France and out here at FSI.

Q: Let's talk a bit about these inspections. We're now talking about the late '90s really, aren't we? The tenor has changed a couple of times. They used to be what we know as the old inspections, the Foreign Service one, and then when the new inspection corps came in, it seemed to be focused on finding waste, fraud and mismanagement and it seemed to be sort of an adversarial type thing which wasn't very helpful. By the time you got there had that changed?

PISTOR: It hadn't changed, but there was terrific tension between the old way, our way, the inspection by peers, and this sniffing after waste, fraud and abuse. The inspections themselves turned out being done largely by Foreign Service Officers or by civil service officers who were familiar with the Department of State and the other agencies. The inspections remained useful; they still looked for improvements and they'd shine a spotlight on problems, of course, but "wrongdoing" wasn't the exclusive passion that it had been with this other, punitive approach, which cooled down when its proponents couldn't find much waste, fraud or abuse of any consequence.
Within the inspection corps, as I say, there was a mixture of approaches. In France we had a junior inspector who dug with Javer-like intensity to find out who spent the money for the washing of the tablecloths that were used by ambassador for parties, and who wanted to grill the OECD ambassador about how much she spent for flowers as opposed to food at her receptions. This junior inspector would go harrying off to his lap top and make several recommendations about this, but the rest of us were looking at, I think, a little larger picture.

Q: When you went out, without maybe mentioning names or anything, did you see any real problems or situations?

PISTOR: Of the two overseas I did, the first one was Germany and it wasn't a full inspection; I was part of a team of three inspectors and three auditors reviewing an inspection of the previous year which had been controversial.

Q: When you say controversial, what do you mean?

PISTOR: It slammed particularly the US Information Service and said they weren't doing

their job, they hadn't defined their job well. Then it was very harsh about embassy administrative practices largely having to do with this terrific series of moves the embassy had to make. Our task was to take a look at those recommendations and see how fair they were. We found an interesting thing about the USIS part of the It The inspector who drafted it, a USIS officer, had handed his report and recommendations to the deputy team leader for review. The report was then drastically changed, from positive to negative without further review or discussion. When I came on the scene, I had to be careful not to be USIA- proud and had to be as objective as possible, but to restore some balance to the report.

The next one we did was Paris, and there I wrote the USIS section. The embassy was going through a transition period, with an ambassadorial change which brought it an enormous change in not just style but in direction. The previous ambassador, Pamela Harriman, had died at post, and her successor was Felix Rohatyn.

Q: Two very different people, one very social and one very task oriented, economic, banker.

PISTOR: That's right; Rohatyn came with a completely different set of priorities, and the post responded to him, but some responded better than others. It was a little unfair to the departing PAO, who was retiring at that time and had loyally served the predecessor, was willing to loyally serve the new one but Rohatyn hadn't been there long enough to find a comfortable working relationship with him. But the new PAO was closely attuned to Rohatyn's thinking, and adjusted quickly and successfully. I think our inspection was useful, because it mapped out the territory and showed some of the weak points, and was useful to Ambassador Rohatyn and to the Department.

Q: Looking at Germany and France, and this was towards the end of the century, or at the end of the century, I've heard much said that we no longer can count on the generations that we had before who remembered World War II and the aftermath and the Marshall Plan and the Cold War and that we've got a job to do in the younger generation coming up but we're cutting funds and sort of going under the assumption that our good relations will follow through. Were we looking at that as a concern?

PISTOR: We were looking at that. In Germany we inspected in the aftermath of a dynamic and often unsettling tenure of Richard Holbrook as ambassador, who was aware of the changes in generations, of the differences between East and West, and how they were getting, the prospects for the youth of both parts of the country. So the answer was yes, the embassy was aware, the USIS mission was aware and I think working well– as well as you can with fewer and fewer resources. The problem was generally not in the country, because an ambassador and his staff would get to understand who was speaking for whom and to what extent, but Washington is often a little deaf to this need because they've been so desperate for money that they had cut back.

There was the generational question too, in France but Rohatyn felt that our embassy had

concentrated too much in Paris itself and had taken the point of view of the French elite, which is that Paris is where the action is. He said that this is not where the commercial action is, this is not where a lot of the entrepreneurial action is; that's out in the provincial cities and they're getting stronger and so forth. He tried to get the embassy components to get out away from the Metropolis, and he even wanted the commercial and the USIS people, cultural people, to actually move back into the branches, which had been the case before, and I think he was dead right. It does make you think that things are a little cyclical, doesn't it?

Q: Yes, it does. So much of our apparatus is basically a post-war apparatus, and that's an old generation. It's essentially gone now, people are gone, and we have to be looking at a new group.

PISTOR: Over the years we've made some bets through our exchange programs and others on people of this next generation, those who don't have the World War II experience or were only children during that time, and I think they've been mostly successful in introducing us to generational patterns that are different from the ones we expected. I can remember way back when I was in London as Student Affairs Officer that older Americans were expecting that the British would act in the way we thought they would in the kind of Atlantic Union Anglo-American solidarity we believed in, shoulder to shoulder. Well, there wasn't all that much shoulder to shoulder; indeed it was elbow against rib often. Even in Britain, which is our staunchest ally, and certainly everywhere else you go, you find that it isn't exactly as you thought it was.

Q: Particularly in Germany and France, were we looking at how we were, particularly through USIA and public diplomacy, however you want to call it, doing well with making good contact with the green parties or the greens, the environmental people, who are more than just environmentalists?

PISTOR: I think we've attempted it. I'm not sure how successfully, but we've assisted and maybe even stood out of the way sometimes when there are green to green contacts, and more and more we find that environmentalists have an international outlook, meet one another, go to conventions and meetings - I don't mean just in Seattle.

Q: It's much more of an international...

PISTOR: I think in the old days we would have introduced them to one another or we would have explained ours to theirs, but now I think often we perhaps are working on the margins of increasing understandings or maybe helping them understand the government a little better.

Q: I'm just wondering whether we have almost abdicated playing a role?

PISTOR: No, I don't think so, because again these are topics that are on front burners at universities and organizations who would be concerned about the environment or any of

the other issues, and we represent not just the U.S. government but we represent the United States and, therefore, we find ourselves in the conversation helping with the seminars or whatever it is that are built around this, so that the subjects that are chosen at the embassy level by the staff and submitted largely by the public affairs/public diplomacy people, these are the issues, these are the misunderstandings– here are the needs for explanation or undergirding, and this is how we propose to go about it. It's a pretty professional approach and it works pretty well.

Q: Then you did an inspection of the Foreign Service Institute?

PISTOR: That's right.

Q: This has been a great time of change all over, particularly in education and distance learning through Internet connections and all that and different theories on language an all. What were you looking at? Were you really looking at the education thing or just sort of how it ran?

PISTOR: All of the above. You can' look at an organization as feisty as a large organization that teaches a lot of language without having to examine a number of things: staff relations, institutional relations, money. We found that the management of FSI was helpful, open, and wanted to use us in a sense to represent them and their importance to the Department. What you found often is that the Department itself, and I mean by that the Department leadership, which is largely of political officer background, tends to pay a lot of lip service to the importance of training, not just language but professional training and area studies and trade craft. They say, "It's terribly important," but it turns out if you press, "Well, I don't have time to do that myself." In that mind-set training is what you do for people who don't have anything to do right now, the officer who isn't sought after right at the moment to go somewhere.

Q: I was in Personnel, and we would call some officer training officers. They were the officers that were sort of at loose ends, and you'd send them off to get trained, rather than somebody who very definitely needed the training.

PISTOR: That's right. And we pressed those points. Our inspection really dovetailed with an inspection done some months earlier of the personnel system in the Department, because each asked questions about the same general thing. I thought it was a useful inspection. We had a good team. As I say, I think they benefited here at FSI and welcomed some of the criticisms and corrections, but generally the Department couldn't, for a number of reasons that were perfectly legitimate, connect as closely as we thought they should with the whole idea of training. When you look at what happens in the military, when they're not fighting, they're training.

Q: And we haven't had that many wars, so you've got an awful lot of time. I was in Bosnia as an election observer, and technically they were on active duty but basically they were training. Nobody was shooting at them, so they were running patrols, learning

how to run patrols, and doing things of this nature.

PISTOR: And their officer corps are going up through PhD's and special learning of various kinds.

Q: You were inspecting during a time when it was probably almost the worst we could remember as far as money goes, and a lot of positions were empty, all of which would mean that it would be very difficult to break people loose to train.

PISTOR: It was just at the end of that terrible period when they cut back on the numbers of officers, and then you had this odd business of the pipeline and how it was so malformed. You had a lot of empty places and you had a lot of people deciding that you'd better get so-and-so there rather than put him into training for any length of time. Also, training doesn't do that much for an officer. Where's the reward? You need that. If you don't have that built in... And that happens in the military.

Q: Well, they build it in in the precepts for selection, but I was on a selection board and it doesn't count for much.

PISTOR: People have had a bad conscience about it forever and they try to correct it by putting it into the precepts, but when reality hits, that's what slides off. It happens with anyone of us. If we're faced with a problem of staffing a particular place over a period of five years and we don't have very much money, who's going to train for how long and to what purpose? It's going to drop out.

Q: Being with the Information Agency, you're used to the problems in the Voice of America with people from different countries using their language skills. Did you see any reflection of problems within the language training area, or maybe it just wouldn't lend itself to that?

PISTOR: What do you think? All those years in Britain I'd seen the same thing at the BBC, and those are all just bubbling away. So FSI had a great many things in common with VOA and the BBC: the jealousies, the difficulties, the differences in cultural approach, the fear, the paranoia that you find in some of this stuff. It's all containable, but it has to be recognized that these places are just seething caldrons. Good managers can ameliorate it, but you'll always get that kind of mix. These are professional people and jealous of their qualifications. Yes.

Q: Are you still doing it?

PISTOR: I was scheduled to lead a team to do the PA Bureau, the Public Affairs Bureau, in the Department - that was stopped; it's going to go forward how - because there was a new kind of convulsion in it, in the Inspector General's Office. The Inspector General of the day left to go into the private sector - a very good job - and she left just at the time when she had directed a look at the whole Inspector General's Office, tasks and how they

should be allotted and priorities, so there was a lot of confusion. There's a new person in now, it's settled, and the people I know who have kind of ridden out the storm are doing well. They are the people I would have chosen to do the jobs they're doing in the hierarchy. I still have a contract, but I'm not doing it these days because of some home difficulties. My wife is still ill, and I can't take a full day.

Q: This is 2001, and in a way it's still early days, but you're an old hand at this. How do you see the melding of USIA and the State Department. Now 'public diplomacy' is the watchword. But how do you see it going, and what do you think of the pros and cons?

PISTOR: I think it started badly, partly because the job of amalgamating the two was given to administrative people and it wasn't taken all that seriously by the Department. The Department people had a lot to do, and they were perfectly willing to take this thing on, but they didn't give it the importance that I think it should have had as a subject and as a set of issues to be addressed. At the same time, the USIA staff reacted just as any small organization would react if it were taken over by a larger one. I was gone, but people felt betrayed by their leadership, they felt shrugged off by the Department leadership, because, after all, the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright did this and what she was really looking for was for Senator Helms to give her the money to be able to pay off the arrears in the UN and get a couple of other things done and USIA was just simply a pawn in this essentially political game. What Helms wanted was USIA and AID, AID being the bigger prize. But it escaped, and so this one got swept under. USIA officers felt that they hadn't been stood up for by their own leadership and that they had been just kind of thrown aside as an important part of the foreign policy establishment by the Secretary of State.

Individual USIA officers have, I think, probably gained or are gaining with reorganization, because USIS officers have had often earlier management experience than their colleagues in the Department and they've made some reputations and I think they've gotten a number of good jobs out of this. I think what has to be done is for them to teach in the Department, just as they taught in embassies overseas, the worth of what they do. Foreign Service Officers in the Department of State at embassies have to be convinced by the PAO and his staff that what they're doing is not just frivolous or an inessential extra, and if the programs are good, then that's seen.

I think that same education has to take place in the Department, and I believe it inevitably will. Public diplomacy is a very facile phrase, and it's a facile concept unless you really start looking at what's being done, and these things are done not just by USIS officers and by public diplomacy specialists but by everybody. Economic officers and political officers should be using these skills and should be hooked into the programs. As you know, over the years in a good USIS program they are. You always use the talent of your colleagues and get them involved, and they find it useful because of contacts and cultural advantage

I'm hopeful about the relationship between the two organizations as one dissolves into

the other, but it will take four or five years to percolate.

Q: The thing that really concerns me, and I don't know how it's working, is with the USIA function or USIS function you have people starting out as branch PAOs running centers and coming up the line, and they really knew their trade, they could deal with the press, could understand these exchanges and all these businesses, and to see a free interchange at different levels between them and, say, political officers as just different jobs, a lot of people aren't going to have the body of knowledge and familiarity and really ability, which is learned; it's not innate.

PISTOR: That's true, but there will always be the specialty and there will always be the programs, or one assumes. You have a public diplomacy cone now, so you'll still have the specialists but they'll pull in the others. I've always felt that the other members of the embassy team, the people who have to work among members of the host country, should get involved in and help lead the USIS programs. These programs become more important as they're used right.

Q: Well, Mike, I guess this is a good place to say, "So long, Auf Wiedersehen, Sayonara."

PISTOR: And time to start thinking about the editing of this thing.

End of interview