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

ROBERT RACKMALES

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is May 11, 1995, and this is an interview with Robert Rackmales.

Bob, to start this off I wonder if you could tell me a bit about when and where you were born, and a little about your family.

RACKMALES: I was born in Baltimore in 1937. My father at the time of my birth had a small tobacco store in East Baltimore not too far from Johns Hopkins Hospital. I went to public schools in Baltimore. My father eventually went bankrupt and went to work for the Social Security Administration. I went to public schools and to Johns Hopkins. I lived at home until graduating from Hopkins in 1958.

Q: So your family was part of the German migration.

RACKMALES: Jewish.

Q: The German Jewish?

RACKMALES: No, East European. My grandparents both came from what would now be probably Belorussia, but in the Jewish villages in that part of the world. We don't have a lot of family records going back so I couldn't pinpoint even the names of the towns that they came from. I guess our best known relative was my paternal grandfather's nephew, that is his brother's son who is known as Kirk Douglas.

Q: Oh, yes, he was a movie actor. Danielovich was his name, or something like that. When you were at Johns Hopkins what was your field?

RACKMALES: History, primarily European history. My faculty advisor was Hans Gatzke, who later went on to Yale. He was a German immigrant who had left Germany in 1936 because he was appalled by Nazism. He taught first at Williams and later at Johns Hopkins and then finally at Yale.

Q: Did any of this point you towards the Foreign Service?

RACKMALES: Yes, particularly my getting a Fulbright after finishing at Johns Hopkins and going to Mainz for a year as a Fulbright student. Then I went on from there to Harvard where I did a year of graduate work, but decided that research was not for me. So I became a civil servant eventually when the Department of the Army Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland, and then took the Foreign Service exam two years after that.

Q: You graduated from Johns Hopkins when?

RACKMALES: 1958.

Q: What was your impression when you were a Fulbright scholar at Mainz of the system there? This is your first real look at Germany, wasn't it?

RACKMALES: It was a period of considerable optimism about the economic prospects for Germany. But there was a lot of anxiety and concern about Soviet intentions while I was in Germany. In 1958 there were scares over Berlin, and whether there was going to be another war over Berlin. And people were really quite anxious about that. I would say that that detracted from what would otherwise have been a feeling of confidence about the future based on the fact that Germany had come back so strongly economically. I remember my first conversation with a Foreign Service official, as it turned out it was a German FSN, because I called wanting to get on a tour bus that the university was sponsoring that went by road to Berlin. And, of course, you had to go through the GDR, and you had to show your travel document. At that period the government was discouraging Americans from doing that. The FSN I spoke to said, we can't take any responsibility for you, we prefer you not show your travel documents. So, being the cautious prudent type that I was, didn't go on that particular trip. I did get to Berlin on a trip sponsored by the Fulbright commission where they flew all of us for a meeting, and that was for me a very moving experience being in that place at that time. I remember seeing Willy Brandt who was coming back from an overseas trip landing at the airport while we were there.

Q: You came back, and you were at Harvard for a year, was that it?

RACKMALES: That's right.

Q: Was this pointed towards a Ph.D.?

RACKMALES: I thought so at the time, and I found that the life style didn't appeal to me.

Q: Just trying to capture some of this because part of this is, who are these Foreign Service people. How did you view the academic life style as you saw it at Harvard, which, I guess is the epitome of the life style. You're in the belly of the beast there.

RACKMALES: I had great admiration for most of my fellow students and the faculty. This is a very, very bright group of people. But it became fairly clear to me after three or four months of intensive reading, research, and writing, that a life devoted primarily to that didn't have the degree of interaction with others, and what, to use Foreign Service jargon, we call operational responsibilities. I would have a tendency to get too Ivy towerist, too caught up in just the reading. So I decided, why force myself into something that didn't seem to be giving me the kind of pleasures and satisfactions that I wanted. I tried, as I mentioned, being a management analyst for a while, a specialist.

Q: You went to the Department of the Army, is that it?

RACKMALES: That's right, and Edgewood Arsenal, which is, I guess still is, I haven't kept up with it, but at that time it was the headquarters for the chemical part of what used to be called the Chemical Corps. Then after the war they called it the Chemical Biological Radiological Agency. The biological part was in Fort Detrick, and the chemical part was working up nerve gases, and other chemical agents, was at Edgewood Arsenal.

Q: Where is Edgewood Arsenal?

RACKMALES: If you drive out the old route 40 from Baltimore heading east towards New York it's about 25 miles from Baltimore. It's less well known than Aberdeen Proving Ground which is just beyond Edgewood Arsenal. In fact the two installations may have since been combined into one. Aberdeen was the testing ground for munitions, and that sort of thing.

Q: What sort of work were you doing?

RACKMALES: I started as a budget analyst. It was under a program which existed in those years, maybe still does, to bring in management interns, and train them in the major administrative fields. In my case I started with budget and moved to management. Just backtracking for a second, you asked earlier about whether my studies at Hopkins, and my year in Mainz had awakened my interest in the Foreign Service. But actually I had first thought about it when I was much younger than that and had read a lot about the Foreign Service when I was even in junior high school. I had thought about going to Georgetown School of Foreign Service, that was before going to Johns Hopkins, and thinking that I would want to pursue an academic career. Anyway, those interests which

had been percolating in the background came to the foreground and one of the things that stimulated it was reading the Herter Commission Report.

Q: Could you explain what the Herter Commission Report was?

RACKMALES: The Herter Commission Report, I think, was issued in '61 or '62. It was one of a long series of commissions to study the future of the Foreign Service. Anyway, it rang a bell, because the Herter Commission in looking at what the Foreign Service was being called upon increasingly to do, came to the conclusion that they needed operational people, people who could run programs, people who knew management, people with administrative skills, and not just people who had studied foreign affairs. So, with my background, and with my recent experience as a management analyst, and I felt that program management was something I could take on successfully. In 1962 I passed the Foreign Service written exam. In the oral exam which was a lot more flexible in those days than the current one is, I packaged myself, as a person who fit the criteria the Herter Commission said that the State Department should be looking for, and I guess the members of the panel agreed.

Q: Just to get a feel for this, how did the panel operate when you did it? Do you remember any of the things that you were given to deal with?

RACKMALES: It was an entirely different from today's system. As I recall they asked first about my views on some current issues. Eichmann had just been grabbed by the Israelis...

Q: Adolph Eichmann who had was one of the prime Nazi managers of the holocaust.

RACKMALES: That's right. So I was asked in some detail about my views of the implications of kidnappings on foreign soil. I don't recall what I responded, but it must not have been too bad. They asked me geographical questions, which I did very well on. I mentioned that I had just been out in Davenport, Iowa on a trip. So they asked me to name all the states that bordered on Iowa, which I thought was a real softball since I had just been there. There were several questions on American history, and I flubbed the Missouri Compromise. I just couldn't remember what the content of the Missouri Compromise was. And they told me afterwards that that had nearly done me in. But the questions that got at my suitability for the Foreign Service were almost all geared towards the role of the administrative officer because of the way that I had packaged myself. How do you view the role of the administrative officer? What do you think the administrative does, or should do, and that sort of thing? Again, they must have been fairly satisfied with that answer to compensate for my having missed the Missouri Compromise.

Q: You came in in 1963?

RACKMALES: '63, that's right.

Q: Did you go into a training course?

RACKMALES: Well, not immediately. I came in in August, and the next A-100 class was in September, so they put me on the Canadian desk to help out. That was a very good introduction. I got to write a portion of a speech for the Secretary of State to deliver in Ottawa. He actually used my words. Our office teletype transmitted the address that he had just given, and I was proud to see the language that I had written.

Q: I'm trying to capture the times, you took the A-100 course, that's the junior officer course, that was about three months?

RACKMALES: That's right. It started in September. We were in A-100 when President Kennedy was assassinated. And we finished in December. One unusual aspect of our class is that because of a budgetary crisis which they had even back in 1963, there was no travel money. I had been optimistic about getting assigned to Helsinki. Instead a grim faced coordinator of the course came out on the day assignments were announced and said, "We're very sorry, we're embarrassed about this, but there are no travel funds. So we're assigning you to the passport office for about eight months until the end of the fiscal year." But anyway, from January until July or August we were all sent out to the various passport offices around the country.

Q: Just a little about the A-100 course. What did the people consist of? Can you characterize them at this period. This is the very end of the Kennedy era, this group that's on that wave of enthusiasm.

RACKMALES: We had both State and USIA officers. The group was about 80% male, and 20% female. A diverse group geographically...one of the things the Herter Commission had emphasized was geographical diversity. The ages ranged from 22, just graduated, to early 30s. I recall being impressed by the wide range of skills and the strong sense of dedication and optimism.

Q: What did you do in the passport office during this particular time?

RACKMALES: I was sent to the Passport Office at Rockefeller Center in New York. Beginning in the spring it's a huge passport mill. You had about 30 seconds to process each applicant. You were even told to skip administering the oath. They had sent eight of us up there, and from January until April, there was not much to do, so we would sit in the back and shoot the breeze. One of the games we had was flipping paper clips up into the light fixtures. Francis Knight was still the head of the Passport Office and she was scheduled to visit the passport office. We, the FSOs, could see the civil servants get very up-tight over her visit. We were much more relaxed. At one point the Director asked the FSOs to wash the walls. That split the group badly. One group said, "Absolutely not. This is demeaning, it's not why we were hired." Others said, "This place is a mess and why shouldn't we help clean it up." Whatever actually happened, the visit passed uneventfully.

Q: Francis Knight was quite a character, she and Ruth Shipley together more or less ran the passport office in succession for about 40 years or something like that. Did you get the feeling that Francis Knight was a power to be reckoned with?

RACKMALES: Yes. She had a forceful personality. I had the impression she was not a nice person particularly, but I didn't really have any meaningful contact with her.

Q: Your first post was Lagos, is that right?

RACKMALES: That's right.

Q: ...in Nigeria, and you were there from '64 to '66. How did that sit with you being assigned there?

RACKMALES: It was a good assignment from a personal and professional standpoint. From a personal standpoint, I met my wife in Lagos, we got married midway through my tour. From a professional standpoint, with the coup in January 1966 that overthrew the civilian government, it was a dramatic, exciting time.

Q: Maybe we'll come back to it. Let's talk first about when you arrived in 1964, what was the situation in Lagos?

RACKMALES: The city itself had a poor reputation although not nearly as bad as the deservedly awful reputation that it has had in later years. You did not have in those days the level of crime, certainly not crime directed at westerners. Areas of the city where American embassy people lived were much more pleasant than I had expected. Yes, downtown had open sewers, and you noticed smells that might be a little disagreeable, but I found it a vibrant, interesting place to be. I remember coming back from a trip to Kinshasa which struck me as a dead, morose city compared to Lagos. I found Lagos an exciting place to be.

Q: When you arrived it was what? A fairly full blown democracy, would you say?

RACKMALES: There was a civilian elected government. It was closer to a fully functioning democracy than has existed since. The thing that did it in though, the same thing that did in Yugoslavia, was that politics became purely ethnic. The political parties turned into engines for promoting nationalism or tribalism, whichever word you want to use. Tribalism seems to be used more in an African context, nationalism in European context, but it's the same thing. I remember one close exposure to this phenomenon. I had gotten to know the head of the Nigerian Timber Association who was British. He took me to some of the saw mills, so we got to meet with and talk to some of the workers in the midst of the 1965 election campaign. Their passions were so high that we were literally threatened with machetes and forced to say of course we were supportive of their ethnic party. These were regional elections in the western region, and I was given the job of following those closely. I was the only one working full time on these regional elections. I

wrote a long evaluation just before the election which went in and was commended by the Department, but my final conclusion got watered down by the embassy. My conclusion was that these elections were going to trigger large scale violence. The embassy fudged it because we were supporting Nigerian democracy, we didn't want to make it seem as if this was a country in trouble. So the prospect for violence was played down. In fact, large scale violence did break out, and eventually led to the coup that took place about six months later that overthrew the government. It was an early exposure, both to the force of tribalism/nationalism, and also to the unfortunate reluctance of some embassies to give Washington bad news.

Q: It's a strong tendency, and it doesn't always reflect you might say the considered thinking of the observers on the spot. Well, you don't know where this news is going to go for one thing. If you do say this, you become known as a doomsayer. It's much easier to paper it over. Who ran the embassy when you were there?

RACKMALES: The ambassador was named Elbert Matthews, known as Bert. I had a lot of respect for him, he was a gentleman. I was able to spend several months as his executive assistant when his executive assistant was medevaced. I served approximately six months in each of the embassy sections, and I was grateful for that. It resulted in changing my primary interest from administration to political work.

Q: Why was this?

RACKMALES: I found political work intellectually more exciting and challenging. Looking back at the end of my tour, I was proud that what I had done in terms of analyzing the election, and other events resulted in predictions that were pretty close to the mark. It was gratifying to have more access to the front office, sensing that I was working on issues that were of more concern to the senior levels of the embassy. I also enjoyed the admin work that I did. I didn't regret the time I spent there. I was put in charge of the motor pool, so that was my first significant supervisory experience because I had about 30 Nigerian drivers. I think that helped later on when I had other supervisory jobs. But I was not as taken with the content of the work, and also my impressions of most of the admin people that I was working with, the Americans in the embassy, is that they seemed to be not as broad gauged. I couldn't see most of them as ambassadors. I guess my perception was that that was not the path that led to the top of the Foreign Service.

Q: I think this is true. I mean there is a trend to shy away from the administrative side because of this, because of the people in it. They're not as intellectually as fun to be around. What was Matthew's background?

RACKMALES: A career man. He had had at least one other embassy in Africa, I think it was one of the other Anglophile.

Q: He wasn't parachuted into Africa.

RACKMALES: No, he was quite knowledgeable, a real professional, a gentleman.

Q: How did the embassy deal with this brewing storm that came about and the coup? You mentioned that at least to Washington they were playing down the possibility of major problems.

RACKMALES: Well, let me tell you about one episode that typifies it. In December of 1965 I was invited to a dinner party. One of the guests there was a young Nigerian engineer who was working for a French oil company doing exploration off the coast of Biafra. He had just graduated from Ibadan University where there had been serious tensions, and even a riot which was ethnically based. And this young engineer who was very open, laid out for me in some detail the fact that there was a group of young Ibo military officers who were plotting a coup to overthrow the civilian regime, because of their anger over the way that Federal troops had treated the Ibo students who were demonstrators in Ibadan. I thought that was a pretty significant bit of information, but still being new to the game the following morning, instead of just sitting down and writing a cable, I went first to the political counselor because I was kind of excited about this. He acted skeptical, and told me to talk to the military attaché and to a member of the station. The reaction of both was, "Oh, we hear rumors all the time, we're not going to bother Washington with this sort of thing." I was disappointed because I thought I had something and neither the political counselor nor the CIA person thought it was worth reporting. So I didn't. And a few weeks later the coup occurred, and I got an urgent request to tell the ambassador everything I could recall about that engineer. So, in effect, we had warning about the coup, and could have sent something in to Washington which would have at least indicated that the embassy was aware of something. The information was even detailed enough that Washington could have decided whether it was worthwhile to give the civilian government, which we supported, enough information that they could have broken up this group of young officers. The information was specific enough that you could pretty well identify who were the officers.

Q: How did the coup play out?

RACKMALES: It was bloody, it wiped out not only the top federal leaders, but a number of the regional leaders. It was a trauma. That in turn led to mass killings in the north where there were tens of thousands Ibos who were killed and an exodus of hundreds of thousands of Ibos who fled the north.

Q: They were entrepreneurs.

RACKMALES: They were entrepreneurs, but also civil servants, railroad workers, and had lived for generations in the north, because the north had a shortage of workers, and all of these people packed up and there were, of course, heartrending stories. We left in the summer of 1966 at the height of this trauma. Then there was another coup that took place later in the fall. Later the Biafran war took place as a result of all of that.

Q: When the coup happened, how did the embassy react to the initial part of the coup?

RACKMALES: It took the embassy totally by surprise despite my earlier (oral) report. What we would now call a crisis management center was set up. We quickly focused on the army command, since the coup plotters had managed to wipe out most of the top civilian leaders. The Federal army structure stayed more intact, so we looked to the army command to establish order. Within a short period of time they had taken the coup plotters into custody. I believe some were executed eventually. Of course ethnic relations went to hell in a hand basket as a result of this. We obviously were also focused on any risk to American citizens. I remember going out to a prison...It was hard traveling around in Lagos for several weeks because you had extremely jumpy military. I remember having a machine gun poked under my nose when I was trying to get around to check up on Americans. We had one young man in jail on drug charges. I remember it was very hard, once this happened, getting to see him. Our policy continued to be that we continued to report the unity of Nigeria. We recognized that in Africa once you start fiddling with the borders then where do you stop. So there was never much sympathy for Ibo separatism except in our consulate in Enugu, which became sympathetic to the Biafran cause. They actually transferred the consul there after he wrote one report too many that was sympathetic to Ibo separatism.

Q: Who was the consul, do you remember?

RACKMALES: If I remember correctly his name was Bob Barnett(?). He had been the deputy coordinator of our A-100 course so I had known him. He had gone out as principal officer in Enugu just around the same time that I went to Lagos. But he fell afoul of Ambassador Matthews, and he was curtailed.

Q: Did the embassy have much contact with the military? Actually you had a couple military, but at the time you were there. First there was the coup while you were there, then the military per se...

RACKMALES: That's right, they took over.

Q: Was there much contact?

RACKMALES: Well, I'm sure that the attachés had military to military contacts. I'm sure the military they were talking to didn't know about the coup. If they had, it wouldn't have happened. I can't speak to Ambassador Matthews' ties with the senior military leaders. I think he had known General Ironsi, who was the general who emerged as the first military leader. But I don't know what the nature of their relationship was.

Q: When you were in the economic section what was the feeling whither Nigeria at that time?

RACKMALES: There was a lot of interest in oil that was clearly...in fact, I think it was in that period that Nigeria first entered the top ten oil exporters. The oil sector was crucial. My own work...I mentioned that I had gotten to know the head of the Nigeria Timber Association, timber was a major industry at that point. In terms of employment it was larger than the oil sector, and it was an important exporter, particularly of hard woods to Europe. I also did a fair amount of commercial work, and got an early exposure to the kind of fraud that Sixty Minutes and others have been covering.

Q: Sixty Minutes being an expose TV.

RACKMALES: Right, but with serious journalists. Although I suspect the scale of it has vastly increased, I certainly saw as a first tour officer doing commercial work how some Nigerian entrepreneurs used tricks and fraudulent schemes, and could see how Americans could easily get caught up if they didn't approach Nigerian businessmen with a great deal of caution.

Q: How about corruption? Was corruption a way of life?

RACKMALES: Yes. I saw a lot in my first months as a consular officer. (Incidentally, just to show how much time has passed, I was the only consular officer. We had one American vice consul, and two FSNs, and that was the entire consular section of embassy Lagos. When I went back in the '80s, there were at least a dozen American officers, and many more Nigerians.) Even in that short time, I saw hundreds of fraudulent documents. Sometimes they were patently fraudulent, and sometimes they were a little more sophisticated. You had to check everything extremely carefully. At that point official corruption did not have the profile that it had later on. But I'm sure there was a lot of it.

Q: Did you have any concerns about the Soviet Union? Or were they involved there at that time?

RACKMALES: Yes. Part of it was through the labor movement. This was the area that seemed to cause the most concern to the embassy. There was a left-leaning labor movement, maybe it was even Marxist. But there had been some Soviet involvement, and our labor attaché was the lead person in trying deal with that particular issue.

Q: American interests at that time? How would you describe what were American main interests in Nigeria?

RACKMALES: The Peace Corps was very active there. It was still a new organization, still a lot of idealism. Just before I arrived in Lagos, there was the incident involving Margery Michelmore. You may remember that.

Q: This was the postcard. Could you explain what it is?

RACKMALES: This was a young woman, a Peace Corps volunteer, who wrote in a postcard a rather detailed description of the sights and smells of the city, not in a pejorative sense, but just, "this is what it's like." And since it was in a postcard it got read by a Nigerian postal employee who thought this was outrageous that someone should make comments about the sewers, and the smells. So it got turned into an incident. She had to leave, and it roiled the waters for a little while. I don't think it had a lasting effect. I know the Peace Corps volunteers were still glad to be there. I think most of them were enthusiastic about the experience of being in a dynamic country.

There was a strong feeling that we had a lot to offer. There was a large AID mission, a large Peace Corps. We thought that Nigeria was going to be a flagship country for all of Africa, the largest sub-Saharan African country by far in terms of population. And on the commercial side, as I mentioned, a lot of interest in the oil resources, and the commercial implications of that. I had certainly asked to go to Nigeria because I thought it was an important country. It still is an important country but I seem to end up in countries that start off as positive role models, and end up as negative role models, Nigeria and Yugoslavia being in that category.

Q: Speaking of Yugoslavia, you left Nigeria in '66, and went right to Serbian training?

RACKMALES: Right.

Q: How did that come about?

RACKMALES: When I was back in Washington on my mid-tour trip to get married back in the States I stopped by Personnel and they asked me what I was interested in. They asked if I would be interested in language training and an East European assignment. And I said, yes. Then they asked about which countries I would prefer, and I put Yugoslavia at the top.

Q: Why Yugoslavia?

RACKMALES: I knew it to be a country that politically seemed to be doing more interesting things, and I wanted to observe that first hand. I thought also it would probably be, in terms of quality of life, better to not be in one the hardline countries, where you're more restricted. I think it was mainly though the interest in the experiment in liberal communism, seeing where is it going to go.

Q: I was sucked into it by reading Black Lamb & Grey Falcon.

RACKMALES: I didn't read that until I had already been assigned.

Q: That's by Rebecca West, for the researcher. Could you talk a bit about your experience of learning Serbian because I think this is an indoctrination into the culture of Yugoslavia.

RACKMALES: Well, I did learn Serbian in fact although officially it was called Serbo-Croatian. Both of our instructors were Serbs, named Jankovic and Popovic.

Q: You learned...

RACKMALES: ...the purest Serbian.

Q: As an aside, I took that course too a couple of years before, and these are unforgettable. What was your impression of these instructors, and what they were trying to do?

RACKMALES: One of them was a good teacher, Jankovic, I had a lot of respect for him. He was an ideal language teacher, because he didn't force the students to use the language, but he did much more than Popovic who really wasted a lot of our time by launching off into long anecdotes in English. FSI let him get away with that. He was a character and as a cultural study, it was extremely interesting. You had to like him for his spontaneity, and sense of humor. But in terms of language learning, it left a lot to be desired. I think 80% of what Serbian we learned, we learned from Jankovic. But we did get a certain exposure to Serbian mores and way of life.

Since I was destined for Zagreb I had to fine-tune my language after I got to Zagreb because I arrived at the point when the first stirrings of Croatian nationalism were starting to manifest themselves and people became more sensitive about the differences between the language variants. You wanted to be sure you didn't use the Serbian variant if you could help it.

Q: You came to Zagreb in '67 to '69. What was the situation in Zagreb when you got there? I mean Croatia, well, Yugoslavia, how did you see it?

RACKMALES: We still supported the Tito half, as someone who helped keep the Soviets at bay in that region, and could also serve as an alternative model for the rest of Eastern Europe. So, we were inclined to be very sympathetic to the Titoist structure, perhaps as events finally unfolded more sympathetic than we should have been. However the real crackdown wasn't until 1971, two years after I left, when Tito eliminated both in Zagreb and in Belgrade the group of the more liberal politicians who were there. Basically a lot of the people who got shunted aside, or even arrested, were people who might have, had they stayed in power, moved Yugoslavia in a different direction than the violent disintegration that finally occurred.

Q: When you got to Zagreb, it's a consulate general, and it had Croatia and Slovenia, didn't it?

RACKMALES: That's right.

Q: We were pretty well committed to a unified Yugoslavia. In the first place, how did we view at that time, as you saw it, the Soviet threat there?

RACKMALES: I don't think there was a feeling that the Soviets were inclined to have a military confrontation with Yugoslavia. The concern was more at the risk of a political accommodation where the Yugoslavs for economic or other reasons, might move closer to the Soviets who could then exploit that over the longer term to gradually undo the Yugoslav experiment, and move Yugoslavia gradually back into their camp.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. We'll pick it up again. We've just started on the situation in Zagreb.

Today is the 22nd of May 1995. What was the responsibility of the consulate general in Zagreb when you were there? We're talking '67 to '69.

RACKMALES: We had the normal responsibilities of any constituent post including protection and welfare of American citizens. Our consular district, which consisted of the two republics of Croatia and Slovenia, and we provided the full range of consular services including visas. We did political and economic reporting. For a constituent post, we were pretty well staffed. We had a consul general, we had two political-economic officers, we had two consular officers, although only one was a real consul. We had an admin officer, and of course a well staffed FSN group as well.

Q: Now it's an embassy.

RACKMALES: The basic staffing has stayed almost the same.

Q: Who was the consul general when you were there?

RACKMALES: Bob Owen. My tour coincided entirely with his. He stayed four years and I think I arrived in his second year and left at the end of his third year.

Q: What was your particular assignment there?

RACKMALES: I was chief of the consular section, so I oversaw all of the range of consular responsibilities that we had.

Q: I know one of the things that gave me great pleasure was the fact that the autos trade, the so-called main highway between Croatia and Serbia when I was consul general in essentially Serbia was that you had two-thirds of the autos trade because a lot of accidents on the highways so you got a disproportionate number of the accidents as your responsibility, which did not give me any great heartache.

RACKMALES: Actually, I have to say that tragically I lost a good friend who had gone through language training, Hanna Woods.

Q: Yes, I knew Hanna. That was a terrible automobile accident, a very dangerous highway. What were the main consular things that you had to deal with?

RACKMALES: We had very active visa issuance. There were a lot of Croatians who traveled to the United States, and the immigrant visa operation was also fairly busy because of the large number of Croatians who had immigrated after the war, so there were a lot of family petitions. And then we had protection cases, a few of them come to mind as having taken a lot of time and effort.

Q: I'd like to get a feel for what this meant.

RACKMALES: I guess the most dramatic one was a man who was a writer, in fact had won the National Book Award in the early '50s, but had suffered from paranoia, and I believe some drug addiction as well. He was living in Rome, and was involved with a "clinic" that was apparently being used as a drug center. The granddaughter of the first post-war president of Italy, Luigi Einaudi, became involved with this individual and in the drug scene. Partly because of her involvement there was an Italian crackdown on this group. The writer got wind of it, and hopped in his car and fled because he knew that if he were picked up in Italy he would be put away for a long time. So he drove across the border into Slovenia. This was at night and since his lights were defective he was picked up by Slovenian police and had his passport taken. He started calling the embassy for assistance, and started trying personally to reach the ambassador, and I think the embassy very quickly recognized that this was not a normal individual and it was going to be very complicated. He wanted to go down to Belgrade but, of course, they said, "No, you're in the Zagreb consular district." He got down to Zagreb, and then we began a period--it seemed like months, perhaps just a month for all of this to play out, but it seemed interminable. He did have money, so he was staying at the Palace Hotel, coming into the consulate every day and spinning fantasies about how the CIA and everybody else was out to get him, and becoming increasingly agitated. I was trying to figure out how to resolve this in a way that would protect his rights as an American citizen, but at the same time get him out of our hair because he was starting to take up two-three or more hours a day. At one point he called me at midnight, woke me up saying, "There are some men here who claim to want to take me to a hospital, but I don't know who they are or what's going on. Will you come down and check it out?" I did, and he was right but shortly after I arrived they left. But There was another man lurking in the background who came up to me as soon as they left and introduced himself. He was an agent of the Einaudi family, and he said, "I'm sorry that you interfered with this little action of ours because we really do think he needs help." As we talked I could also sense that his real concern was protecting the Einaudi family. Checking with the embassy in Rome, I was told to have nothing to do with the writer who was considered potentially dangerous. The Italians had also put out through Interpol a look-out for him. What I finally did was, and this was skirting a fine line, to share most of what I knew with the Slovenia authorities. They had a foreign ministry because the republics had some nominal foreign policy responsibilities. I gave some of the background on the writer to the head of the office, Dr. Murko, and I

said, "This person's passport is being held by your magistrate, and I'm going to accompany him up there and hope you will do the proper thing." I guess my assumption was that with the Interpol watch, and the other indications that the writer could be a risk, they might decide to contact the Italians, or take him into some sort of custody. In fact, when I went up there we went to the magistrate, he said, "Oh, yes, Mr. Rackmales, I've heard from a subordinate." He sat down, asked a few brief questions and then said, "Okay, here's your passport." The writer was quite pleased, and as we walked out we looked at each other, and said, "Okay, now what?" I excused myself because I wanted to try to find out more, if I could, from Dr. Murko, who had clearly decided to decline the hot potato. He said, "We gave him his passport back, aren't you happy?" I replied, "If that's your decision, fine, we'll take it from there."

Shortly afterward the writer did decide voluntarily to go for treatment in a clinic in Switzerland, much to my relief.

Q: There's no real answer because you couldn't use restraints, and they could be dangerous. I mean both to themselves and to others, and yet your tools were essentially persuasion either with the person, which is not very good, or with the local authorities who also don't want to be involved at all, as you know. Get them moving.

RACKMALES: Yes, I suspect that was probably the basic motivation. They also didn't want to have this guy hanging around.

Q: Did you have problems with, particularly with Croats who had left before communist times, or fled during it, who became Americans, who came back and tried to agitate, and overthrow Tito and that type of thing?

RACKMALES: I think it was still considered too dangerous for them to do anything that would make them conspicuous. Around that time we saw the first evident signs of Croatian nationalism, and a slightly freer atmosphere. We did have a few cases of people who had left for political reasons, and who would come back and get picked up on the charge of having avoided the draft. One case in Slovenia involved a young man who had made a couple of broadcasts in the Cleveland area, and he came back and was charged, not with political activities, but with having evaded the draft. Eventually he was able to get out. I do not recall any cases of individuals actually coming back and trying to organize political activities.

Q: This, of course, on the record. How did you find dealing with the Croatian and Slovenia authorities? Not necessarily just on the consular side, but anything else.

RACKMALES: In general, in my first year until the summer of '68, the Slovene authorities were warmer and friendlier. The Croats that I dealt with correct, but a bit standoffish. That changed in August of '68 dramatically.

Q: Could you explain what August of '68 meant, and why?

RACKMALES: The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia shocked the Yugoslavs and had an especially strong effect in Croatia partly because a large number of Czechoslovaks were vacationing in Croatia at the time of the invasion. It was a popular vacation spot since the Czechs could not travel to the west, but were allowed to visit Yugoslavia. So there were something like 50,000 Czechs in Croatia when the invasion took place.
A few days after the invasion we were trying to cope with the long lines of Czechs and Slovaks who were trying to get to the United States because they didn't want to go back to their own country. We had planned a dinner party at which the head of the consular section of the Croatian Foreign Ministry was one of the guests. She had always been polite, but cool in her dealings with me but as soon as she arrived she rushed up and she hugged me warmly. I was a little startled for a second and then I realized there had been really a change of attitude, and things were much warmer after that.

Q: We always had a problem because Yugoslavia was open to the Eastern European countries, but the Eastern European countries weren't open to the west. So people would come from Czechoslovakia, Romania, East Germany to vacation and try to get the hell out to the west and claim asylum, and we were kind of in between. Let's say before and then after the Czech thing, what were your instructions, how did you deal with people who came in and requested asylum, or help?

RACKMALES: For those who were not of intelligence interest our basic message was, you're on your own hook, we cannot help you in any way to leave. Obviously, if the person appeared to have information that might be of intelligence value, then we'd arrange for them to meet with one of the agency types. Otherwise, we said, good luck fellows, you're on your own hook.

Q: I used to sort of say, well, if I were trying to get out, I certainly wouldn't try to go this way, but I might go that way, or something like that. We tried to do our best but it was a very difficult position for all of us. What was the view of you all in the consulate general, the officers sitting there looking at whither Croatia and its relations within the greater Yugoslavia. We're talking about '67 to '69.

RACKMALES: It's a tough question because I have to guard against reading back into my views, at that time everything that has transpired since then. I don't think that we were seriously concerned at that point of a breakup of the country, or anything like what in fact happened in the '90s. In Zagreb we were encouraged by the openness, and flexibility with which the Croatian leadership was handling the use of nationalism. We recognized the risk of violence, inter-ethnic violence in that period of the late '60s. Many soccer games between Serbian and Croatian teams would end in some sort of bloody riot. But I think we felt that the answer was in a more liberal leadership that would channel these emotions into politically acceptable forms. Of course, this was several years before Tito cracked down on nationalism and liberalism in '71. He purged the leaderships of both the Croatian and the Serbian party of those who had shown any tolerance for manifestations of nationalism, a misguided decision that helped bring on some of the later tragedies.

Looking back in those years, '67 to '69, the consulate general was tracking the impact of nationalism and on the whole felt that it was manageable in that time and in that context, and with a leadership that was showing a certain openness and flexibility in handling it, while staying within the broad parameters that Tito had laid down to that point.

Q: As the chief of the consular section, you're probably seeing more Croats and Slovenes than anybody else in the consulate. Did you get any impression from all the interviews you were having about how deep-seated the feelings were towards the communist system?

RACKMALES: I think people were still nervous in those years of engaging in outspoken anti-communism. People I was interviewing in my office would assume they were being recorded. I don't recall people sitting down and spilling their guts about how terrible things were. Also, the fact of an acceptance by the Croatian communist party of a certain amount of overt expression of a Croatian nationalism acted as a safety valve. So that it took the form of people expressing strong support for the then nationalist leaders of Croatia. In those years it was hard to dig underneath and find out just how strong anti-communism as opposed to anti-Serb as opposed to anti-Serb sentiment was. The latter was often expressed in ethnic jokes.

Q: Having been in Serbia, the Serbs took great delight in telling me how awful the Nazi-supported Croatian regime was. How did the Croats that you would talk to treat what happened during World War II from that respective?

RACKMALES: In most cases diffidence. Some would speak about how their families were persecuted and that sort of thing. There was a certain amount of joking over some of the language, the extremes. This was again a safety valve. You were not supposed to use any non-Croatian expression during the Pavelic period. So you couldn't say "telephone". You had to use a made-up Croatian term.

Q: Sort of like the Germans with their Fairenspectre.

RACKMALES: That's it. So there was a certain amount of joking and laughing, maybe to cover up embarrassment. But it was not a subject that people readily talked about.

Q: How about when you traveled around? Did you find that you were followed, or was it a problem or not?

RACKMALES: I was never aware of being followed. Usually when I would travel, it would be on pretty well defined consular business. We did a lot of social security investigations involving funeral expenses. We got to go to interesting places, some pretty remote. The most memorable of those trips was to a tiny little island off of Zadar. I had to go in a rowboat because there was no regular boat service to this place. I think there may have been 100 or 150 people on the island. The family of the deceased had submitted

receipts showing that so-and-so had been buried with a headstone. So I arrived in this tiny place and asked to see the priest who signed the receipt. I finally found him. He was obviously totally nonplused, and after opening pleasantries, I said, "Do you remember so-and-so?" "Oh, yes." "The Social Security Administration has asked me to check, so could I please see the grave?" And he looked totally abashed, and said, "Well, in fact there is no grave." Then he admitted openly that it was a fictitious receipt. I said, "Well, I'm terribly sorry, but of course this cannot be reimbursed." He said, "I understand. I'm terribly sorry, I understand." We spent thousands and thousands of dollars trekking all over Croatia-Slovenia, and that was the one time that in fact there was clearly fraud.

Q: One of my favorite expressions I learned was, take me to your marble monument, because everyone claimed they had a marble monument and we'd find usually a cement something with a name scrawled with somebody's finger in the wet cement. Interestingly, when I did this I saw a chart that we did and the real fraud was grouped on the Greek border. Greece had a lot of problems, and it spilled over into Macedonia for the most part. For the rest of it, they're pretty honest, non-conniving people. This is one of their problems, I think.

RACKMALES: To an extent there probably was fraud which we couldn't detect. The headstone is pretty tangible, but the traditional wake with sucking pig, slivovitz, and wine was harder to pin down. Sometimes the quantity seemed high but they would say, "It's the custom, you have to invite the whole village, otherwise..."

Q: You have to supply gloves and handkerchiefs too. Did you get any feel for Croatian and Slovene immigration to the United States, how successful it was, where the people were going to? Were there any patterns that you noticed?

RACKMALES: The Slovenes in the Cleveland area were numerous, and in Chicago also, and the Croats on the Pacific coast. There were a lot of Dalmatians because of the fishing industry. A lot of our tuna industry is in the hands of Croatians. They also have vineyards in the Napa Valley, the Grgick family, and others. So there are concentrations in some of the large mid-west cities and the Pacific coast. There was a big Croatian community from one of the islands who all went to Hoboken. In fact there were more people from that island living in Hoboken than there were living on the island. I was struck with the success, with the frugality, and the ability of these immigrants in a very short period of time to accumulate savings which far exceeded what most of us are able to save and you wonder how did they do it. But they were obviously very hard working, energetic people, who lived modestly and saved so they could then afford to bring in other members of the family. So I never worried too much about these people becoming a public charge.

Q: You left Zagreb in 1969, and where to?

RACKMALES: To a year of university area studies at Indiana University. I spent the academic year '69-'70 at Bloomington.

Q: How did you find Indiana? Did it have...often a university will develop a course, or specialty, and then the professors there will have almost a point of view and they try to indoctrinate their people. Did you find any of that when you went to Indiana?

RACKMALES: Let me preface it by saying that '69-'70 of course was the height of protests on campuses across the country, the year of Kent State...

Q: We're talking against the Vietnam war.

RACKMALES: Yes, that's right. Indiana was less affected than some campuses. It was one of the more conservative campuses. Obviously there were student groups who were opposed to the war, but there was not the degree of disruption that was experienced in some other places. But Vietnam was definitely the issue that overshadowed everything else. Eastern Europe was not an area where at that point there was a tremendous debate over what we should or shouldn't be doing. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia may have temporarily reduced U.S. interest, or the interest of the public at least on Eastern Europe, because it didn't look as if there was much in the short term that we could do about it. As luck, and poor planning by the State Department would have it, the people who were the core of the faculty in Balkan studies, Charles and Barbara Jelavich, were both on sabbatical during the year that I was there. I had planned to do a fair amount on Yugoslavia but ended up with a more scattered approach simply because the key people on Yugoslavia weren't around.

Q: Did you get involved in the demonstrations against Vietnam? Were you supposed to stand up for the government view? Or could you kind of keep your head down?

RACKMALES: I pretty much kept my head down. I didn't feel that the State Department had sent me there to defend U.S. policy. I certainly never got any signal to that effect. A couple of my professors in a friendly way said that emotions were so high on the subject that it was best to avoid it. That wasn't hard since I had my own questions and reservations about our policy.

Q: When you left in 1970 where did you go?

RACKMALES: Back to the Department as the desk officer for Albania and Bulgaria.

Q: Could you talk about...this would be '70 to '72, because Albania and Bulgaria hardly ever raised a blip on our radar which in a way was kind of fun because they were yours.

RACKMALES: That's right. I was the government expert on those two places, and none of my superiors had direct experience on either one. So on the few occasions when something came up that got the Secretary's or Under Secretary's attention, you were drawn on more than if you were the German desk officer, because then you've got all kinds of expertise in between. But with those two countries I would get calls from the

White House. I remember Senator Weicker had a very strong interest in Albania for reasons that escape me for the moment.

Q: Weicker from Connecticut?

RACKMALES: Connecticut, yes. He was trying to get into Albania, he wanted to go there. So I would go over and brief him on the situation there and suggest ways that he could try to get in. Of course I warned him that we had no relations, in fact there is no protecting power so if you run into a problem there's nothing we can do. But that didn't deter him from trying. During the two years that I was on the desk there was a shift in the mindset about Albania where it went from, hell no, we have no interest in relations, to the Deputy Secretary Rusk saying, we are prepared if the Albanians are interested to look towards the resumption of relations, which I don't think anyone expected because the Albanians in that period were in their most isolationist phase and would have seen it as a real threat to themselves to make any gesture to the United States. But I was in favor of that kind of shift in policy because I thought it was a more realistic approach than the one that simply ignored the existence of this little country.

Q: Were you privy at all to what brought around the changes? Just personalities within the State Department, or what?

RACKMALES: I perhaps played some small role in that. Dick Davies who was the Deputy Assistant Secretary at that point for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was supportive. A part of the attention in those years to Albania was prompted by a request that the Italian government made to us to trade property. We owned the building [in Tirana, the Albanian capital] which the Italians were using as their chancery and residence. They paid us rent, so they were our tenants. I think it was in 1971 they said, "We have some property in Bucharest which we don't need, or we're giving up, and we would be happy to swap that with you." Our embassy in Bucharest was very strongly in favor of it, and were lobbying very hard for us to accept the Italian offer. I was making the case that at some point we would want to go back in, that there are damn few suitable properties--in fact, no suitable property in Tirana, and that we don't want to give this up because at some point we'll need it. In fact, it is still the property, it is now the residence and the chancery, and I'm told the best property in Tirana. Anyway, my arguments carried the day, and it could be that there was a spillover effect because again it was one of the few times when you got some attention from the Seventh Floor.

Q: How did we deal with the Albanian government? Can you describe how we saw it, and any interest the Americans might have in the problems of the Albania situation?

RACKMALES: It was at a time when Stalinism had virtually disappeared from the rest of Eastern Europe. Albania was the last refuge of Stalinism. The human rights situation in Albania was far worse than anywhere else. The only comparison today would be North Korea. There was a feeling that ultimately the Albanians would have to reenter Europe, that their strategy of becoming an entirely isolated outpost supported by China could not

last. So it was a question of time. I don't think any of us expected any immediate change there because the control was so tight. The Chinese in those years hadn't yet gotten tired of supporting this tiny little country. So it seemed like a fairly stable situation. We were positioning ourselves for a future role.

Q: How about Bulgaria? There we had relations. What was the situation '70-'72?

RACKMALES: Relations were very limited. There were some commercial relations. I remember General Motors imported a lot of wine and this was the result of a deal whereby General Motors had shipped some either auto parts or factory components and took its payment in Bulgarian wine which I was told that they used as a component in making anti-freeze. Now it's marketed in supermarkets, but in those days it was pretty unusual. Political relations were obviously very, very cool. I guess the main thing that happened in the two years that I was on the desk was the beginning of a more active customs cooperation designed to impede the flow of drugs through Bulgaria. There was a visit to Bulgaria by the head of U.S. customs, who was very well received by his Bulgarian counterpart, and at least the customs officials were quite happy with the beginning of a more active Bulgarian participation in the anti-drug efforts. Beyond that I think we sent the astronauts to Bulgaria on a goodwill visit. Around that time the Bulgarian embassy was shaken when their third ranking person got picked up for shop lifting in Woodies.

Q: This Woodies is a department store.

RACKMALES: The ambassador was an old party hack who invited my wife and me regularly for dinner with some of our State Department colleagues. The yogurt was great. I don't believe they had a very active embassy because of the ambassador's age, and lack of fluency in English.

Q: How about our representation in Bulgaria? What was your impression of our embassy and what it was to do there?

RACKMALES: We obviously had little leverage with the Bulgarians, trade wasn't significant, there was no political leverage because they took their orders from Moscow. We had a small embassy given the level of work, but I think they did a competent job. We had a series of professional ambassadors. John McSweeney was there when I started on the desk, and then Tully Torbert was the ambassador for the second half of my tour. I helped him go through the confirmation process, and visited him the second year I was on the desk.

Q: Was Turkey a problem with the Bulgarians?

RACKMALES: Not in those years. Not too many years after that you began to get the crack-down on the Bulgarian Turks, the banning of Turkish names, etc., but that happened in the '80s. There probably were tensions even then in the Turkish areas but we

had very restricted access, and I don't recall if we had any Turkish language officers in the embassy in the early '70s as we did in the '80s. In the '80s we had some very fluent Turkish speakers who facilitated our access there. I went back to Sofia in '86 at the height of the pressures and the concern about the Bulgarian Turks. In fact, when they were fleeing by hundreds of thousands from Bulgaria. But in the early '70s I just don't recall our having focused on that situation.

Q: How about Macedonia as a Bulgarian issue? Did you find yourself clashing with either the Yugoslav or Greek desks?

RACKMALES: In the early '70s one of the ways the Soviets, when they were annoyed at the Yugoslavs, would show their annoyance would be to let the Bulgarians publish something about Macedonia. I think there were one or two episodes of that in that period. The Bulgarians would piously say, this doesn't represent any political move, these are just historians writing and it has nothing to do with claims on another country. But the Yugoslav Macedonians would be furious, and say that's nonsense, these are all state employees and they couldn't do this without permission, that sort of thing. I don't think we got overly excited about that particular thing because it was viewed more as a way the Soviets had of conducting a little war of nerves.

Q: Did you have the feeling at that time that the Soviets were pretty much calling Bulgaria's foreign relations?

RACKMALES: Yes, I think that was pretty much a given. There might have been regional issues where the Bulgarians would be given some leeway, but on all of the major issues they stuck to the Soviet line.

Q: Was Bulgaria seen as a Balkan military power?

RACKMALES: No, I don't think so. Because I don't think anyone ever foresaw that operating independently so that if it came to any military conflict which would have involved Bulgaria there was a much stronger force there. The attachés, I'm sure, followed the question of the size, capabilities, because that's their job. I don't think it was ever viewed as a kind of separate, independent variable as opposed to the capabilities of the Soviet Union militarily.

Q: You left the Department in '72 for a garden spot. To Mogadishu. You were there from '72 to '73?

RACKMALES: That's right.

Q: This is the Somalia Republic.

RACKMALES: That's right. Actually one of the reasons they asked me to go to Somalia was that General Siad, the Somali leader, was becoming closer and closer to the Soviets.

The Soviets had stepped in after the army coup in 1969. Somalia had tried to maintain a balance and to remain neutral, so they asked western countries to train its police force, and the Soviets to train the military. Well, that turned to be a rather fateful choice because it gave the Soviets great entre when the military took over in a coup. In '72 - '73 when I was there, they were the dominant foreign power. I would qualify that by saying that the Somalis remained extremely xenophobic, they mistrusted the Soviets as well as the West. This was not a loving relationship. We got to know some of the Soviet embassy people reasonably well and they would speak frankly about certain issues, and one certainly was that they all felt very uncomfortable there. They were treated with the same suspicion as diplomats, as we were. But they were providing the Somali military with the wherewithal to try to recover eventually what they viewed as lost territories in the Ogaden.

Q: Let me backtrack just a bit on this. Can we talk once again about the contacts...

RACKMALES: Very limited contacts. Any ordinary Somali who would be seen talking to Americans would be at the very least questioned very harshly, and possibly imprisoned just for having talked to us. Our cook, for example, got thrown into jail for three days for defending United States in a bar. Generally speaking we could not meet with ordinary Somalis. We had very limited official contacts, but had to rely primarily on official statements for day to day information. There was an official news service. With other diplomats we would share at cocktail parties the limited amount of information that we had. The Italians had the best contacts, in fact better than the Russians because Mogadishu had been an Italian colony and a lot of people still spoke Italian. They had a slightly larger embassy than we did and had known a number of key Somalis for many years. So they had the kind of depth that was very helpful.

Q: Would you mention again, because we missed it on this tape, about Hargeysa?

RACKMALES: We had a consular problem in Hargeysa and I tried to use it to get up there myself, and also make a side visit to Berbera which was the big Soviet base. Berbera is a city on the Red Sea. The Somalis turned that down, so I sent the consular officer just to Hargeysa and they did allow him to go up, but he reported back that everyone he talked to had been called in immediately, and some of them arrested. Hargeysa was a particularly delicate area for them, the whole north was, but there was also a general policy that they didn't want people talking to foreign diplomats.

Q: Here is this relatively unsophisticated country, but they certainly had a very sophisticated police organization.

RACKMALES: We, in fact, had to rely on that sophisticated police organization in the aftermath of the assassinations in Khartoum of Ambassador Noel and his deputy. There were several countries in Africa where PLO-connected terrorists suddenly appeared and started casing American missions. That happened in Kampala and Mogadishu. The group that was casing us moved in directly across the street and made no particular attempt to disguise their activities. So we went to the Somali government which was fully

supportive, and greatly stepped up the protection afforded the embassy. We were driving around with Somali escorts. And one of the things that struck us was that, although there had always been beggars in the general area, a new "blind" beggar suddenly appeared in front of the Embassy. We were told quietly that he wasn't really blind or a beggar. So they were using a lot of different techniques. They called the Palestinians in and questioned them very closely. Eventually they expelled that group. But that activity did result in shortening both my own and Ambassador Looram's tour because his wife was a Rothschild, and I am also Jewish, and the security people came out in that context and recommended that the threat was too high to continue the normal tour of duty.

Q: Before we leave this would you talk again about your one contact?

RACKMALES: I noticed in the news bulletin there was a new official who apparently had the United States as part of his responsibilities. So I called and somewhat to my surprise I was able to get an appointment, because usually requests for official meetings required an extremely clear reason, no courtesy calls or anything like that. But in this case he did agree to meet with me, and we had actually a pleasant conversation. He was a bit guarded, but otherwise friendly. So we did end up, myself, the ambassador and the DCM, the three of us were sharing this one useful contact.

Q: This shows how hungry reporting officers can be, because you have to have somebody. When you left Somalia how did you see it? In '73 where did you see American interests at the time, and how did you see things developing there?

RACKMALES: There were colleagues in the embassy who said, "Why are we here? It's pointless, there's almost no real business, why don't we just close up the place?" My reply was, "This current arrangement is not eternal, the country is going to change in ways that we can't foresee, and we have to be positioned so that when things do change we can react appropriately." And in fact only a few years later there was another military coup, this time in Ethiopia. The Soviets said, "Ha, we have a juicier prize here." They were realistic enough to know that you can't have both Somalia and Ethiopia as clients. So they dropped Somalia unceremoniously. We picked up Somalia, maybe a little too eagerly in my view, but anyway we did. So there was long term benefit in having it even under conditions when there was not a lot of work...I remember that our office hours were 7:00 to 2:00 five days a week and 7:00 to noon on Saturday. And at 2:00 Ambassador Looram would come around and direct you to stop whatever you were doing, saying, "How can you possibly be so inefficient." This was a credit to him and extremely important given the isolation, and the fact that the medical facilities were terrible. So at 2:00 we shut down, we went to the beach houses, we swam, played bridge, etc. Despite the stress from social isolation, and poor medical facilities, Mogadishu was actually quite a pleasant place.

Q: Was drinking a problem?

RACKMALES: The spouse of one officer had a serious drinking problem. I don't recall that most people had severe problems with alcohol. There was one problem where there

was a severe marital problem of someone whose spouse had gotten involved during a trip to Asmara, and this person had a friend in Asmara who sent him a message back. And I remember that turned into a crisis where I had to go with the nurse because the spouse, when confronted with this, had taken an apparent overdose of something. It turned out, fortunately, that it was not a serious enough overdose to threaten her life. But she was distraught, and needed support. It was not always an easy post for families.

Q: Then your next post you went to Trieste.

RACKMALES: Right, talk about a change.

Q: Yes, from '73 to '76. Well, it's on the water. What were you doing there?

RACKMALES: I was the principal officer. Trieste, right after the war was quite an important post because in the uncertainty about the long term status, it was a free city for a while, and then there were negotiations which were concluded in 1954 and set what eventually turned out to be the final boundary between Yugoslavia and Italy. But that was not formalized until 1975. In 1968, as part of one of the wave of reductions in posts for budgetary reasons the State Department announced, that Trieste would be closed and its functions transferred to Milan. The Italian government reacted so strongly to that that their president personally intervened with President Johnson. So we canceled the plans to close the post, but it was reduced in size, At the time I arrived, there was only one American employee, the principal officer, and six Italian employees. I was able to get a second officer assigned in my second year.

Q: Was the reason for saving it...I've always thought it was it sort of a political one because if we closed the post it would show we were no longer interested in Trieste, and the Italians wanted to keep this as a territory and we were instrumental in their getting it. So it was almost internally political, rather than just the convenience of doing consular work.

RACKMALES: Keeping it open was primarily a gesture to the Italians. But in early 1974 the Yugoslavs decided that they were not content with the provisional status of the borders, so they put up signs that said you are now entering Yugoslavia. This was a technical violation of the London agreement of 1954 because under those agreements you were not entering Yugoslavia, you were entering Zone B. The Italians naturally strongly objected and you had right wing groups in Italy holding rallies, in Trieste and elsewhere. It looked for a time as if it was not out of the question that there would be a military clash. The Yugoslavs started moving tanks up near the border, and took other steps that was probably part of a war of nerves to convince the Italians that they were serious. So they were putting in bunkers and things like that. And we were able to do some good reporting despite the fact that we didn't have any classified reporting capability. The Navy sent a destroyer at that time up which docked in Trieste just to reassure the Italians and remind the Yugoslavs that Italy is part of NATO. With that ship in port we were able to step up our reporting which I think was very useful to the Department at the time. The

dispute was finally settled in 1975 with the Treaty of Osimo, that confirmed what was obvious to most people, that the borders weren't going to be changed, and that they are the official state borders. So the sign at that point became legitimate. Even the disintegration of Yugoslavia didn't change that although it changed the wording of the sign. After Osimo it probably was just a question of time before Trieste closed. I think it was finally closed around 1985, about ten years later. By that point there was not a lot of either commercial or other activity. Trieste isn't a major tourist center, American businesses don't have much of a presence there. So in an era where there are continuing rounds of closing of posts, it would be hard to justify keeping Trieste open.

Q: Obviously the Italians were quite open, I mean, you could deal with anybody, I suppose.

RACKMALES: Oh, absolutely. As I said it was a total and dramatic contrast from Somalia. The issues that I started out concentrating on were not so much the Yugoslav issues because domestically Italy was going through a period of great ferment. The divorce referendum was the first sign of a big secular change in Italy. Trieste was among the areas that kind of led the trend towards moving Italy into the mainstream European moderate secular consensus. It was a shock to some when Italy voted to abandon its previous divorce laws, and then abortion followed.

Q: Did you find...I'm not sure of the term, is it Triesteni, the people of Trieste were a breed apart, or not.

RACKMALES: Oh, yes, very much so. Many of them longed for the Austro-Hungarian empire. Of course Trieste's glory days were when it was the principal port for the Austro-Hungarian empire, and when it lost its Slovak hinterland a lot of its economic rationale disappeared, because it's way off in a little corner of Italy next to Yugoslavia. It continued to be an important retail center for Yugoslavs. You remember I'm sure, the busloads of people from Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. On weekends you couldn't move in downtown Trieste because the Yugoslavs were everywhere buying jeans and other western goods. But it was not a very balanced or healthy economy. The city was the oldest city in Italy because a lot of the young people would leave for better employment opportunities in the rest of Italy, particularly Lombardy. As the American consul, I was pressured to join the Rotary Club which I did. It had maybe a hundred members. There were two of us under forty, and there weren't more than half a dozen under sixty. And I would say that fully half of the members were over eighty. So the meetings were not especially lively, but it reflected an aging city. We were always treated very graciously. We had complete access and entre to everybody.

Q: Did the embassy use you much? Or did you exist on your own?

RACKMALES: I think at the beginning I was pretty much on my own, but there were two times when I had very intensive and close coordination with the embassy. First during the crisis, if that's the right word, with Yugoslavia which lasted for a couple

months in 1974. I was pleased that given the sensitivity of the issues the embassy did not try to censor or tell me what to report and I think they were fairly pleased on the reporting on that. And then later the earthquake that hit the area in 1976.

Q: Was it in your area, in your district?

RACKMALES: Oh yes, very much. The epicenter was probably about a hundred miles northwest in the part of the Friuli north of Udine. The earthquake was strong enough that there was significant damage even in Trieste. We were in a restaurant and we heard a sound that sounded like a train passing nearby, and suddenly the chandeliers started to sway. I had never been through a real earthquake before so it took me a few seconds longer than some to realize what was going on. I had been scheduled to leave the following morning to give a talk in Florence. I woke up early and I turned on the radio and it was very clear from those early broadcasts that this had been a major earthquake, and it was in my district so I called Bob Gordon, the principal officer in Florence, and I said, "Bob, I can't come down today, we've had a major earthquake and I have to stay up here." So we started immediately checking our registration files to see what American citizens were in that area, and trying to reach them. The vice consul focused on that, and I was able to arrange with an American who worked for Bell Helicopter and had a helicopter in Trieste, and I got the embassy's concurrence to rent the helicopter. We flew over the damaged area for several hours, landing in some of the worst-affected zones. I think we gave probably one of the best early reports on the earthquake. When I realized the scope of the tragedy I moved from Trieste to the Aviano Air Force Base because it was right in that area and had excellent communications and spent the next three weeks doing nothing but earthquake related activities. We had a visit by the vice president several days after the quake and the U.S. Congress provided $25 million in earthquake assistance.

Q: The Vice President was...

RACKMALES: Rockefeller.

Q: How did the population respond to the earthquake?

RACKMALES: The Friulani are sober, hard working people who tend to be stoical. The first thing that strikes you when you land in an area that's just been hit by a catastrophe, is that people are still numb and in a state of shock. I was tremendously impressed though by the resilience of people, by their determination that "we'll ride this out, and rebuild, and we'll start again." I worked very closely with the Italian government's earthquake commissioner. He established his base in Udine, and I spent a lot of time with him. He was good enough afterwards to get me the decoration of Commendatore, the equivalent of an OBE from the Italian government. And then just to finish off that little sub-segment, when there was an earthquake south of Naples in 1980, a few months after I had arrived in Rome, the DCM remembered that I had been involved in '76 and said, "Go down and see if the consul general needs help."

Q: I was just thinking you're talking about the reaction of the people up there was completely different. I was down in southern Italy, and it was not impressive. They did not respond with dignity and waited for someone to come and help them.

RACKMALES: Anyway, well actually you were there when I walked in.

Q: It brought Zamberletti down. No, that was considered the Alpini organizations that were quite helpful too, weren't they. The alumni of the military Alpini were very much involved in rescuing...

RACKMALES: That's right, yes, they were. And actually it was a kind of race. There was a lot of outside assistance, the Germans were quite active, and each country sort of adopted one area.

Q: Today is June 30th, 1995. Bob, you were with INR from when to when?

RACKMALES: I think I started in August of 1976, and I left in April of 1978.

Q: Where did you work there?

RACKMALES: I was in the Office of East European Research and Analysis, and my primary responsibility was for Romania and the GDR, German Democratic Republic.

Q: First, how did we look upon the GDR in this particular period?

RACKMALES: Well, as a close and integral part of the Warsaw Pact it was a country that was totally aligned with the Soviet Union that contributed a lot of technological skills and a high level of industrialization to the Warsaw Pact as economically one of the stronger members of that alliance.

Q: Did we see it as a threat that could blow up, and this would be the place that would drag us into World War III?

RACKMALES: Not very much during the period that I was there. I think we tended to defer a lot to West German perceptions and their sensitivities over the issue. It was not, as I recall, one of the more eventful periods. There was a limited amount of domestic unrest, mainly involving intellectuals, but they would usually end up in the West. So it was more or less business as usual, meaning our own limited bilateral contacts. One of the few surprises that I encountered as an analyst was that there was actually more leeway for American diplomats to have contacts and do reporting on the GDR than there was in most of the other Warsaw Pact countries.

Q: Where was your best information coming from, CIA, State, otherwise?

RACKMALES: The embassy was by far the best source of information. I was struck by how much people were able to get around. Having Romania as my other country, we were much more constrained, despite the fact that our bilateral relationship with Ceausescu, on the surface at least, was much stronger. Given the kind of regime that Ceausescu ran, that didn't translate into our embassy having good access to a wide range of Romanians. Whereas in the GDR there was actually quite a bit of that.

Q: When had we established relations with the GDR?

RACKMALES: You mean opened our embassy? It was not a brand new mission.

Q: Did we feel that the Soviets were pretty well calling the shots?

RACKMALES: On specifically German issues, the Soviets would sometimes defer to the sensitivities of their client, probably on the theory that they were closer to the issues so they didn't always insist except on obviously matters that were of fundamental importance. So there was a certain maneuvering room. They never tried to call 100% of all the decisions up and down the line. So the East Germans had a certain limited countervailing influence on the Soviets, but on all major issues it was strictly Soviet interest that dominated.

Q: Did we feel that the East Germans were in many ways the most effective tool of the Soviet Union overseas. I always think of the East Germans having, one, one of the best intelligence services; and two, being able to establish very good counterintelligence services, or anti-spy services in countries such as Libya, Syria, they were sort of good advisers for those repressive regimes.

RACKMALES: That's right. There was a kind of division of responsibility among the satellites of the Soviet Union and one of the roles that they asked the GDR to undertake was intelligence, and often police training in third world countries. So they were active in a number of places. If I remember correctly they had a program going in Somalia as well when we were there.

Q: Moving to Romania. The period you were there, Nixon was out by this time wasn't he?

RACKMALES: That's right. When I started Jerry Ford was still president, and then Carter came in in the beginning of '77. It was perhaps slightly more eventful following Romania in that period than it was following the GDR in the sense that we were starting to see some of the first significant signs of opposition to Ceausescu, and some of the results of the very repressive kind of regime that he ran. I recall that there was a miners' strike that started in '77 that surprised a number of people. It started some questioning as to whether our warm embrace of Ceausescu needed to be modified in light of the dismal human rights record of the Romanians. You remember that when the Carter administration came in, human rights were going to be a major priority of the administration. Romania presented them with a hard case because they were inclined to

agree with the previous Nixon and Ford's administrations approach to Romania which because of its willingness to stand up to the Soviets that it was important to give them as much support, give Ceausescu support, give him payoffs and rewards for his independent policies. But starting in 1977, because of signs of human rights based opposition in Romania were the first timid rethinking of priorities, and a slightly more critical stance towards Ceausescu.

Q: Were you in INR called upon to produce think pieces about both whither Romania, and Romanian human rights and this type of thing?

RACKMALES: Yes, that was our essential job to write analyses of significant events. I recall doing several on the miners' strike. I don't think we were at that point foreseeing, and this turned out to be correct, in the short term a threat to Ceausescu's control. His control was absolute and the miners' strike was simply an embarrassment for him, and not a threat to him. But it was a kind of turning point, I think. And then as the years went on, and as his political and economic policies showed up more and more bankrupt internally, then of course...and I'm leaping ahead now with a number of years when the Soviet grip over the rest of Eastern Europe slipped badly. Then of course it became obvious that there was no reason for us to continue a positive support. And we began withholding most favored nation, and taking other punitive steps towards Romania. That in 1977, I think, would have seemed probably premature to just about everybody following the issues.

Q: Was it sort of the feeling that the Soviets might try to move back into Romania by force?

RACKMALES: That question was raised, but I know that I and my colleagues in INR, and I think the intelligence community, felt that there was little likelihood of that as long as Ceausescu maintained control. The more likely approach for the Soviets would be to try to identify some sort of alternative leadership to replace Ceausescu with, rather than trying to move troops in. But, given the very, very tight internal security, any Soviet moves to promote an alternative leader were doomed to failure.

Q: So you left there in...

RACKMALES: '78.

Q: And then where?

RACKMALES: I joined OES, a relatively new bureau. It had only been established as a bureau for a short time. It had been previously the Office of the Coordinator for Science and Technology.

Q: OES stands for?

RACKMALES: Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

Q: What were you doing there?

RACKMALES: Initially I would say I had a somewhat vague mandate, but fortunately I joined just at the time that Congress was passing, in the State Department authorization bill, significant legislation relating to science and technology in foreign policy. It mandated that the State Department play a leading role in ensuring that science and technology was given due attention, and would coordinate the activities of other agencies. The new Assistant Secretary, who just came in shortly after I joined OES, Tom Pickering, asked me to coordinate the Department's response to Title V, which had two main dimensions to it. One was that I served as the executive secretary of a task force that otherwise consisted of three senior Foreign Service officers, Dirk Gleysteen, Frank Perez and Richard Johnson. The task force was charged with preparing the report to Congress that was called for in the legislation. It was due within six months of the passage of the bill. The bill was passed in June, if I remember correctly, which meant by January we had to have the report in. And it had to spell out what the State Department was going to do in the fields of training, personnel assignments, planning, etc. Each of the three gentlemen I referred to had one major segment of it and I was supposed to pull their contributions together in a unified document, and deal with OMB which had a very strong interest in this because of funding implications and because the other agencies involved were looking suspiciously at the risk of the State Department trying to oversee their activities. Organizations like the National Science Foundation, and some of the cabinet departments had a long tradition of running their own international programs without a lot of interference from the State Department. That was one dimension.

The other was to serve as executive secretary in an inter-agency committee called the CISET, Committee on International Science, Engineering and Technology. I think there were 23 agencies represented. Tom Pickering was the chair and I was the executive secretary. We tried to get the other agencies to assist us in improving communication among the agencies so that everybody knew what everybody else was doing in the international arena. So from my personal standpoint it was interesting and rewarding than just doing analysis on fairly stable foreign policy issues. And I got a much better sense of how things worked in Washington, working with OMB, working with other departments.

Q: Going to this period, in the first place where was the impetus for getting this coordinating role--was it Congress, was the State Department after it? Do you know where that was coming from?

RACKMALES: Franklin Huddle, if you had to mention a single name. He was a senior staffer at the Congressional Research Service in charge of their science and technology, and he had a very strong belief that science and technology needed to be more important in foreign policy. It was an approach made to order for an activist Assistant Secretary like Tom Pickering.

Q: You were saying that Tom Pickering was a particular type of person who could take this job.

RACKMALES: He had a lot of credibility with the Department leadership, and I think a less dynamic Assistant Secretary would have let an opportunity slip. I think the State Department, in the wake of Title V, was able at least temporarily to carve out a larger role.

Q: What was the problem as it was seen at that time? That all these various agencies had international exchange programs, and assistance programs, and nobody knew what the others were doing?

RACKMALES: That's right. That was part of it was that the agencies didn't seem to be under any kind of control at all. In Frank Huddle's view a part of the problem was that the State Department had no significant in-house science and technology capabilities. He put great emphasis on creating a cadre of career Foreign Service officers who knew something about science and technology, preferably who would have advanced degrees in scientific or engineering disciplines. But that has not happened, I think, to the extent that Huddle or others would have liked. Our personnel system doesn't easily adapt itself to bringing in and keeping, or creating any sizable group of specialists. But we do have more such people, there is a sub-cone of science and technology specialists and they fill probably between a third and a half of science attaché, or science counselor positions in embassies overseas, which is probably higher than it was before. We now have a few more Foreign Service officers who know enough to be science counselor in Bonn, or London, and places like that.

Q: Did you find any of the various agencies you had to deal with particularly forthcoming, or the reverse?

RACKMALES: I think the biggest problem, and one that is inherent in our system, is the budgetary process. Each agency prepares its budget with a view towards its Congressional constituency, towards its own bureaucracy, and I think what they resisted particularly was State interference in that process. We didn't make a lot of headway during the time I was there, and I'd be surprised if very much more has been made since then, in getting much of a say in budgetary submissions. We tried to get agencies to include us in their actual budget preparation and they said, "No way."

Q: Did you go to the Board of Examiners, for example, and try to see if they could do a little more recruiting of science people?

RACKMALES: That was part of the series of steps that we put in our initial report to Congress that we would do more recruiting specifically and I think some of that was done. I can't give you any numbers. It's very difficult to tell a highly capable physicist, for example, that he'll do better as a Foreign Service officer. His concern would be that he would very quickly fall behind his competitors in the field. And obviously we didn't want

to recruit people who were not very successful in their field. I think that's the reason why the size of the cadre in the State Department of highly trained scientists remains extremely small. The career path of the State Department would not be attractive to a lot of people whose primary interest was in pursuing a career in science.

Q: Tom Pickering is a major figure. He's ambassador to Russia right now, so the trouble shooter. In this period how did he operate from your observation? What was his method of running something?

RACKMALES: He was the most dynamic manager that I've ever worked for. In fact, I would say he was well ahead of anyone else I encountered. He had tremendous energy. He also had excellent personal ties to people in the Department leadership and great credibility with members of Congress. His taking over OES was a tremendous plus for the bureau. You could see the difference in terms of attention in the rest of the building paid to OES when he was there.

Q: It sort of proves the point that one can draw up all sorts of diagrams of responsibilities in the State Department as with most other organizations. The personalities play a major role.

RACKMALES: Absolutely, no doubt about it.

Q: Did you find it was easier to deal with other departments knowing that the Pickering could be called upon.

RACKMALES: Yes, very much so. Even Tom couldn't overcome the bureaucratic self-interest of keeping the budget process pristine. That was too hard a nut for anybody to crack. But he handled the leaderships of the other agencies beautifully, and I think they had a high respect for him.

Q: You left there when?

RACKMALES: In 1980, and went on to Rome as the political officer responsible for the Italian communist party, and Italy's relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Q: So you were in Rome from when to when?

RACKMALES: 1980 to 1983.

Q: What was the political situation would you say in Italy in that period?

RACKMALES: It was the aftermath of the kidnapping and murder of the Prime Minister which took place in 1978, and terrorism, the Red Brigades were still a major problem. In fact, during the time we were there was a major episode of terrorism directed at the United States when the Red Brigades kidnapped General Dozier, and held him prisoner

for several months. So terrorism was a major concern. Also, whether the center-left coalition, which governed Italy, could maintain its cohesiveness. There was still great concern in Washington that as the result of differences among the coalition parties that the Italian communists which at that point were the second largest party in Italy in terms of popular support, and which had very strong and stable base in central Italy, would enter the government. So our reporting on the Italian communist party got a lot of attention in Washington, and there was continued concern over that. Fortunately, we were in a period where we could exercise greater flexibility, and have wider contacts. It had only been I think in the mid-'70s, that we began low-level overt contacts with the PCI. We had always had some people in the station who surreptitiously would meet with some members of the party. But it was only in '75, as I recall, that there was an overt channel between one of my predecessors, Marty Wenick and a member of the communist party. It started with someone who had no official position, but was a journalist. It was considered too sensitive to meet with someone who was in the formal structure of the party. The ground rules eased by 1980 so that my predecessor had had called on some of the lower level officials of the party. And then Dick Gardner, who was the ambassador when I arrived involved himself in this, caused some people some heartburn, but he would go to social events which were arranged so that he could meet with Giorgio Nanolitano, who was one of the three or four most important leaders in the communist party at that time. That was done quietly, and his reporting on that was not shared with the embassy staff. But he was sympathetic to broadening our contacts with the parties. So in my first few months I established contact with many more of the officials of the party including several members of their top executive body, the executive committee, it used to be called the Politburo. Perhaps my best informed contact was Aytonio Tato, the party's press secretary, who doubled as personal assistant to Enrico Berlinguer, the top communist leader, Tato's office was just on the other side of Berlinguer's.

Q: We're talking about a small room about ten feet away.

RACKMALES: Yes, basically ten feet away, so you had to pass through his office to get to Berlinguer's.

Q: Berlinguer was the Secretary General.

RACKMALES: General Secretary.

Q: I went down with him on an elevator one time. He didn't say anything to me, and I didn't say anything to him during the earthquake time in Naples. This was, what was it national communism was the term at that time, and Italy was supposed to be different. I'm talking about the 1980s when he came out there. How did we see the Italian communism?

RACKMALES: We saw them in that period as threatening our strategic interests in the area. In other words, even though we had a more sophisticated understanding of the fact that these people were not simply tools of the Soviets we were convinced that their values

and priorities indicated that if they were given power in Italy they would be extremely unlikely to support the kind of policies in the Mediterranean that we were trying to implement in the wake of the Soviet deployment of the SS-20s. If you remember, that was the period when the Reagan administration...

Q: ...medium range, a missile which was very threatening to Europe and was destabilizing.

RACKMALES: Right, and Italy was really in the forefront of the countries that accepted U.S. proposals to put countervailing forces in, cruise missiles. And offered a base at Comiso in Sicily. And that was opposed by the Italian communists, so here we were again, although we understood that the Italian communists were not simply tools of the Soviet Union, and I think the assessment was that objectively the policies they would have followed in power given their opposition to confrontational policies in Europe; the fact that yes, we don't approve what the Soviets did but let's handle this in a negotiated way, let's not ratchet up tensions by putting more arms and weapons in. And that was taken as threatening to our objectives, the idea of an Italian communist government, or a government that had significant Italian communist influence would have worried a lot of people in Washington.

Q: How did the embassy assess Berlinguer and particularly the...were they different or...

RACKMALES: Well, my own assessment of Berlinguer, which I guess was the embassy's assessment because nobody quarreled with the stuff I was writing, is that in some ways, if you have to have a very large communist party, potentially a lot of electoral appeal, Berlinguer was probably the least bad kind of leader for that party to have. He was essentially a status quo kind of politician, and he did not like to rock boats. And what that meant was that he was depleting the enthusiasm of the ideologically committed communists who viewed him as far too cautious. He was a reassuring figure to the Italian population as a whole because he wasn't threatening. He seemed, and probably was basically a fairly honest, decent person. So what you got was a gradually declining Italian communist party which I argued was in some ways in the Italian context a safer situation than a dramatic split in the party, or something which would cause a party which instead of having 30% of the vote, might have only 20%, but it might be much more militant. So it was not a bad solution for Italy at that particular time to have this rather cautious bureaucratic Enrico Berlinguer, an able politician in some ways but not someone who was going to fundamentally change the direction of the Italian communist party, which was in slow decline.

Q: What was the analysis of why was 30% of the Italian population voting communist? I always used to have a problem. Every time I came over from Yugoslavia and see these signs in your old area of Italy saying, "Vote the Cominista," and I would think, "Good God fellows, just go across the border and take a look, it doesn't work very well." What was your analysis?

RACKMALES: Well, for starters, historical reasons, the communists in many areas helped form the backbone of the resistance movement to Fascism. There were also Christian Democrats and Socialists who were anti-Fascists, and also there were Christian partisan elements as well as communist elements. But, as in neighboring Yugoslavia, it was the Italian communists who formed probably the largest, most active, and in some areas the most successful units, and who actually took control in some areas until Allied forces arrived. It was Italian communists who captured Mussolini for example and executed him. So the first part of the answer is that at the end of the war you had a lot of Italians who had fought with partisans, or appreciated what the partisans had done. The party had an able leadership and were well organized. Their dominance in the labor movement was very strong. Even into the '70s the communist segment of the labor movement was by far the largest. And they had a strong base in central Italy. Their record there of governance was good, and in fact it mostly continues to be governed by leftist coalitions. As far as I can recall, there had never been a non-communist government in either Tuscany or in the Emilia-Romagna, two of the wealthiest and perhaps best administered regions in all of Italy. So that added to their appeal as well. They were much less strong in the south, and in the northeast, in Friuli, for example, they were not a significant force. So basically they had a strong regional base that they had inherited as result of the war, and as the result of taking over a lot of local administrations, and running them fairly well.

Q: You're a little off to one side so you weren't as caught up as maybe in the CDU--we're talking about the early '80s.

RACKMALES: The CDU was very much caught up with internal power concerns. It was really a coalition of factions. The Italian communists had their factions too, but at that time they played much less of a role than the CDU factions did. My colleagues who worked with the CDU were struck by some of the things that ultimately came to undo the party, corruption being one. And as I say, these personal power struggles among the barons of the parties who seemed to spend more time figuring out how to get one up on their fellow CDU member as to competing with other political parties as any kind of a united force.

Q: How does an embassy...I mean you being where you were in Rome, treat the issue of corruption? Corruption is a major force, it can also very much undo a government, it's a sign of weakness among other things. But at the same time if you over-report on the thing, it can have consequences you really don't like back in Washington. I mean, you can play that note too often. It can mean you almost can't deal with the government. Did you find that you as one of the reporting officers find corruption a problem?

RACKMALES: Even then there were occasional episodes of communists in local administrations involved in bribery and more have come to light in the 90's. But to my knowledge no national PCI leaders were implicated in the line of corruption that has so tarnished the socialists and (former) CDU. I will relate one episode that goes back to 1976 when I was in Trieste. Aldo Moro, subsequently murdered by the Red Brigade, was

then Prime Minister and was making overtures to the Italian communists, that caused us concern. And I remember that all of the principal officers who were down for a principal officers conference in Rome, and they called all of us in to a secure room, and the station chief said, "We of course don't want this passed on to anybody, but you guys should know that Aldo Moro is involved in..." and he described some episode of corruption, or apparent corruption. And we left figuratively sort of scratching our heads, and finally came to the conclusion that we were not supposed to take seriously the part about "now of course we don't want you passing this on," because there was otherwise no reason for him to tell us this information. But it showed that we were prepared to use corruption allegations against people who we thought were endangering aspects of our policy, even if they were the Prime Minister and a member of a party that we otherwise supported.

Q: It sounds like this was the CIA trying to get an undercurrent of people on the official side to kind of mutter about...

RACKMALES: Yes. I have to assume though that since there was not much else said at that brief meeting, he had gotten clearance from the front office to do that. I'm not sure he would have done it strictly on his own.

Q: How about the communist party and the Red Brigades, in other words the extremists. Really very vicious at that time. We were having murders and kidnapping.

RACKMALES: You mentioned the communist party, and they were not...

Q: I know, but how did the communist party relate to these, because these people most of them were coming from the left. I won't say most because there was that very bad explosion that came apparently from the right. Was it Milan?

RACKMALES: Bologna. Yes, that was a rightist group. The Italian communist party, I think, was as genuinely concerned about the Red Brigades, viewed them as a threat; would even share information to the extent that they had any, not that they had a lot of detailed information on the Red Brigades. These extremist leftist groups were as suspicious of the Italian communist party, as they were of any of the other big parties, viewed it as having sold out long, long ago. One of the first telephone calls that came in when General Dozier was kidnapped was to me from one of the top leaders of the Italian communist party who was their expert on terrorism to express shock and dismay and offer any support and help they could provide. They regularly denounced it in their press, and I think that they genuinely saw it as a threat to themselves. There might have been a few people who thought there were surreptitious links. I never saw any evidence of that or believed it.

Q: These relatively new links that were between the American embassy and the Italian communist party; what were they getting from you, and you getting from them?

RACKMALES: What they were hoping to get from us, and got to a limited extent in those three years, was simply a sign that they were no longer considered beyond the pale. In other words, a sign of a degree of respectability because they knew that a part of the obstacle that they faced in increasing their share of the vote, was that a lot of the Italians viewed a strong Italian communist party as incompatible with good relations with the west, and with the United States in particular. And anything that could soften that image and indicate that we viewed the Italian communist party as a democratic party at least to the extent that we accepted their participation in the political process, was in their view helpful. So one of the things that happened in that period was that for the first time an official Italian communist party got invited to the ambassador's Fourth of July big, huge reception. That was actually not so much my doing because I didn't have strong feelings one way or the other. My boss, the political counselor was adamantly opposed. Gardner had brought over Joe LaPalombara, who stayed on after Gardner left. Joe had been the head of the political science department at Yale and was considered one of the leading, if not the leading, U.S. experts on Italian politics. And he had a particular interest in the Italian communist party. And he made the political counselor extremely uncomfortable because he suspected that the ambassador was using Joe as an alternative conduit to the Italian communists. So one of my tasks given me by the political counselor was to keep an eye on Joe, keep him honest.

Q: What was his position?

RACKMALES: Cultural attaché. But his background was not in cultural affairs, it was political analysis. He had written a number of books on the Italian political process. One of my sources of satisfaction in my three years there was, I think, despite Joe's academic background and really much longer in-depth experience in Italy...I think I stayed at least a step and a half ahead of him on developments in the Italian communist party. I remember making a bet with him at the time of the Italian communist party congress as to how it was going to come out. It was a pleasure to collect.

Q: What were we getting from our contacts?

RACKMALES: We were getting a much better sense, I think, than we had before of what this animal was like. We were exposed to a wider range of the leadership. I think our reporting became much more focused and accurate. We were able to call election results pretty closely. I remember predicting that the Italian communist party would lose a couple of percentage points in the '83 elections, and this was within a percentage point or two of the actual results. So we had a better sense of the party. They had some awfully smart and acute people and I think we gained insights, not only into the party itself, but over the whole spectrum of the Italian scene. So I think it was very helpful to have been able to tap into some of their key people.

Q: Did you get out into the field and talk the iron belt, the red belt, to the communist leaders out in the field?

RACKMALES: Yes, yes. I did. I never went south partly because the Italian communist party in the south was not that strong, and also just time. But I did get to the party's strongholds. And I would go out to Milan and together with the deputy principal officer up there to meet with communist party officials in other areas. So, everywhere the party was strong I tried to visit and get a sense of the party at the grassroots level.

Q: Within the communist party at this time was there anti-Americanism because we were the great opponents of communists around the world.

RACKMALES: I would say among the minority of the party that affiliated with leaders who opposed Berlinguer, such as Ingrao, where base of support were industrial workers in large factories who tended to inherit a kind of late 1940s conventional communist thinking about the world. You know, the good guys are Soviets and the Americans are the bad guys. That was the branch of the party that we had the least contact with, and it was then and has remained a minority and one that Berlinguer was able to contain, and not have to make too many concessions to because they had nowhere else to go. The people who got too fed up would join one of the small fringe groups. That was the only part of the Italian communist party where there was any strong anti-Americanism. I think within the groups who affiliated with the center, or the social democratic wing of the Italian communist party, there was probably a lot of sympathy for the United States as a democracy. They would be critical of aspects of our foreign policy, Vietnam for example was strongly opposed by the Italian communist party across the board. And there was concern about Reagan when he first came in. In fact, I remember...

Q: This was 1981.

RACKMALES: 1981, and one of their senior officials wrote a signed commentary in L'Unita, the party organ, calling it a black day in human history. I called my closest contact who was a member of the executive committee, and I said, "Look, you guys are trying to change your image, and trying to show that you're not extremists...and this is the kind of thing you people are running." The very next day there was an unsigned and therefore more authoritative front page editorial in effect apologizing for that statement, and saying we're not going to rush to condemn anybody, and essentially withdrawing that commentary which indicates that they were in fact quite sensitive to our perception of them, and willing to make at least symbolic concessions to the point of backtracking publicly, and in effect apologizing to their readers for an overly harsh judgement which was kind of interesting.

Q: One of the most burning issues was with the missile business, whether we could put in these essentially medium range missiles to counter the Soviet missiles that came in. Again all of Europe was upset because even though the Soviets started it, they didn't like the idea of more nuclear weapons being put on the continent which we were doing. So Italy became the key place to get acceptance. Did you get involved with this as far as dealing with the communist party on this issue?

RACKMALES: Although they would never use these exact words, it was pretty clear to me from my contacts with them, and in discussions on this issue, that the party, while not supporting deployment in parliament and making speeches saying this is not the right response to Soviet misbehavior it was in fact conducting a soft opposition. They did not get people out in the streets or use inflammatory rhetoric. There were some local groups in Sicily that tried to conduct sit-ins and that kind of thing. But it was obvious that the communist party was not putting anything like a full press against deployment. It could have complicated life for us and the Italian government had they gone all out. But either because as part of their respectability campaign, or because they had their own misgivings about Soviet actions, their opposition to the deployment of the Cruise missiles was a very muted, soft opposition.

Q: Did you get a feel for the attitude of the communist party towards the Soviet Union at this time? The Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan, and Brezhnev who was the leader but he was obviously failing, and he was very unimpressive, and disillusionment even within the Soviet Union of the old system. Were you getting any of that?

RACKMALES: They were very disillusioned, and had no illusions about the future. One of their top leaders told me that the relations with the Soviets had been on a downward spiral for a number of years. And he said, "I think it's going to continue to go down," because he did not see any signs they viewed that Soviet leadership in many respects in the same way as we did in terms of sporadic, you know, out of touch with reality, etc. So they were not inclined to listen to any messages that the Soviets might have wanted to send them, would have been received with great skepticism.

Q: What about on the economic side? If they were going to take over, did they have plans to turn everything into a Soviet model?

RACKMALES: They were realists who saw the failure of the Soviet model clearly. They pressed for greater emphasis on promoting technology, but showed no hostility to the private sector at all. They would point to the fact that in the areas of Italy where they ran regional and local governments, that the private sector was doing very well indeed, thank you. They weren't going to change that at the national level.

Q: How did you find Richard Gardner who was a political appointee, that had a wife with Italian background, and was a professor of economics and law at...

RACKMALES: ...Columbia.

Q: How did you find him as an ambassador?

RACKMALES: I worked with him well, I think. He called me in my first day or two to say how happy he was I was there and that I was working in an extremely important area. I mentioned that he gave me broad flexibility to take initiatives, which I appreciated. An extremely intelligent man, had an acute sense of the Italian political scene. He was

complimentary and used my reporting well. Bear in mind that he left only six months after I arrived. I guess the one major complaint I would have was that he was reluctant to share very much of what he got from his own meetings which he told me that he had, but was always very, very careful to keep any of the content of it pretty much to himself. So I had no more of a good feel as to what was coming out of these meetings, than anyone else in the embassy.

Q: How about with Maxwell Rabb who was a completely different type of person. Could you give a little bit of his background, and how he dealt with the situation?

RACKMALES: Yes. He was an attorney who had been in high government positions. He had been secretary to the cabinet in the Eisenhower administration, and obviously was a senior person in Republican party circles. When he picked up the phone it was usually to call the White House, not to call the State Department. And it was, of course, very useful to have an ambassador who had very good White House ties. He made no pretense of having the kind of feel for the Italian political scene that Gardner had. And he made a couple of early missteps that even he recognized almost immediately were missteps. For example, he agreed to meet by himself without anyone else from the embassy present with Bettino Craxi, the leader of the Socialist party. Almost immediately after the meeting the Socialists started circulating accounts of what was said by both sides at the meeting that caused consternation. The ambassador was saying, "I never said that," and his staff, the political counselor, and the DCM said, "But when you go to meetings and there's no one from the Embassy taking notes, there's nothing for the record to indicate that what they're saying isn't true." So I think he got that point very quickly. Like a lot of people with his kind of background, they want to try it on their own. They're a little suspicious of the career people. They think they're too cautious, that the other side won't be as open and frank if there's an embassy person there, and they have great confidence in their own negotiating skills and think that maybe it will work better if I don't take someone from the embassy. I think he learned a lesson from that episode, and, at least to my knowledge, that didn't occur again.

I'll mention an episode that at the time caused me some moments of slight discomfort, and looking back now I have a slightly different view. We went to pay an initial call on the Soviet ambassador. The Soviet ambassador was just handling it as a courtesy call, and Rabb started what sounded to me like baiting him a bit about Soviet policy, and how stupid it was for the Soviet government to do the things that it was doing because they couldn't afford guns and butter, while the U.S. could. The poor Soviet ambassador obviously didn't know what to say because he didn't want to respond in a confrontational way, or perhaps he privately agreed with Rabb. The points Rabb was making, of course, sounded quite on the mark in light of what subsequently happened through the '80s.

Q: What did you feel about the political reporting on the political scene there? I was not an Italian hand, and I had only a little time in Italy but I was always rather dubious about the exquisite reporting on the permutations within the chamber over who was on top. It was pretty much the same people for the last 40 years almost, and we seemed to

get down and report this with great delight and I felt that maybe a young attaché could have taken care of it as there was no real change or something like that. What was your impression?

RACKMALES: Well, I think your point about our having perhaps more resources devoted to the day-to-day tactical situation than was necessary is probably right. We were the only embassy to have one person doing the communist, one person doing the Socialists and another person doing the Christian Democrats. That's not counting people who were doing political-military affairs and a lot of other things. Almost every other embassy would have usually one mid-level political counselor and a junior person under him. The Germans, French and the others, weren't quite as well informed of all of the details, and they would often check with us. We were kind of a resource for all of the NATO embassies because we were following things in more detail. But they kept adequately informed. Today finally I think there is serious attention being given in the State Department to cutting back on the number of reporting positions in western Europe given the fact that there is so much information out there from the press and other sources, and if they're democratic countries why do we need to follow every twist and turn of their internal politics. I'm certainly sympathetic to that.

Q: One last question on your time there. You'd been through the northern earthquake and you came down to the southern earthquake. This was the earthquake of November '80 in Ayellino and that area that killed about 2,000 people. This is your first real look at the south in action.

RACKMALES: In the South I was not working directly very much with the local officials. In Friuli I knew the regional officials, they were people I had worked with already for two and a half years prior to the earthquake so there were no big surprises there. I guess I just didn't have enough of the kind of contact with Southern mayors and that sort of thing to make valid comparisons. Zamberletti, of course, I knew from my previous assignment. He was a northerner, and not a southerner. So because I was dealing mainly with federal officials and not so much with local officials I probably didn't get a sense of that.

Q: You left Italy when?

RACKMALES: 1983.

Q: Did you have any feel whither Italy when you left?

RACKMALES: I felt that at least for the time being the situation would not change dramatically. I mentioned the fact that I didn't see the communist party as in any position to make any kind of move to take over. I probably didn't appreciate fully the potential strength of extra party movements based on primarily regional concerns like the Northern League. Interestingly enough in my old area, the Trieste area, where there had been a small movement that was outside the traditional parties, and that did well. We were not

tracking that closely at the time. Maybe that was a mistake, maybe we should have been looking at it because in the '90s it has certainly become a focal point. But that's post-dated, I mean the important elements of that, post-dated my tour in Italy.

Q: Where did you go when you left Rome?

RACKMALES: To Kaduna.

Q: You were there from when to when?

RACKMALES: '83 to '85.

Q: Kaduna being what?

RACKMALES: It was a consulate when I got there and became a consulate general a few months later. It's our only post in northern Nigeria which covers geographically about two-thirds of the country, and in terms of population, I think it's over half the population of the country.

Q: You were what--principal officer?

RACKMALES: That's right.

Q: In Kaduna, what was the political situation when you were there in '83 to '85 in Nigeria?

RACKMALES: Well, for the first four months approximately September through December 31st of 1983, there was a civilian government in Nigeria, and civilian governors in each of the provinces. On January 1 there was a military coup. I seem to time my assignments in Nigeria to arrive with shaky civilian governments, and to witness coups. The coup was a complete surprise. We had gone out on an overnight camping with a number of the members of the British military advisory group. The British had quite a substantial group, I think they had, 40 or 50 military advisers near Kaduna training the Nigerian army. We stayed overnight, we got back early on January 1st, early in the morning and there's my vice consul waiting for me saying that radio broadcasts had announced a military coup. I said, how is that possible, I was just with the British military advisors. They were quite embarrassed about how they could have missed it since the coup was led by their present or former students. So from then until the time of our departure there was a military government which then in turn got overthrown by another faction, another military coup took place just after we left.

Q: This northern part of Nigeria, what made it tick? Economically and tribally.

RACKMALES: Well, of course, it's the Islamic area. The northerners were used to a much greater extent by the British as local rulers. The British tended in the southern part

of Nigeria to establish a more direct rule, meaning that Britishers had the key administrative positions. When they conquered northern Nigeria, they felt that the northern administrative tribal structure lent itself to their playing a much more indirect role. So they would give the northern Emirs and other rulers a lot of leeway in running matters. So the north felt that they had, compared to southerners, much more of a tradition of rule, and the history of Nigeria has largely revolved around southern reactions to northern attempts to call all of the shots in the whole country. This north-south rivalry has basically triggered all of the coups because the army has tended increasingly to be dominated by the northerners. So that's kind of a long way to answer your question.

Q: What sort of relations did you have when you first arrived with the civilian government?

RACKMALES: Quite good. I should preface that with a brief description of my actual arrival because that, I won't say set the tone, but I got off literally with a bang as the result of an explosion that occurred while we were in the air between Lagos and Kaduna. The consulate was installing a new fuel tank for the generator in the back of the house and the workers managed to blow up the tank. Three people were killed, two of them consulate employees, the third was the welder who was actually doing the welding. The house burned down, so it was a difficult arrival but we got full support from the local authorities, including from the representative of the Nigerian security service which is usually quite secretive and only would meet with designated liaison people. There was no problem with any anti-Americanism. They were primarily concerned, at that time, with their election process, which turned into one of the factors that helped precipitate the coup that took place the end of December. Just prior to the coup we had the up-grading of the post and the move...

Q: From consulate to consulate general?

RACKMALES: That's right, and also in that same period in my first four months I was concentrating on moving us out of the building that we had been in since the consulate opened which was in terrible shape. Some FBO people came and said it was the worst Foreign Service facility they had ever seen. There were enormous cracks in the walls, it was a bad location. All of the services were in terrible shape. I had been asked by the African Bureau to see if I couldn't do something to break the impasse that had lasted for five years of trying to get out of that property. So that is what I was heavily focused on in those first months, and I did succeed and we inaugurated our new consulate building I think literally days before this coup. It was in December, so between September and December we were focused heavily on these administrative tasks and moving the building. And then we had an entirely new group to deal with. The governor was fairly approachable, the new military governor, but everybody was extremely nervous and uncertain for a number of months, and a lot of things had to be put on hold.

Q: What was your impression of a Nigerian type military rule at that time because some military rules are one way, and some are quite another. How did you find the Nigerian form at that time?

RACKMALES: Well, being in Kaduna, a northern city where a number of the leading businessmen, and others, were in fact close to the people who had carried out the coup, and somewhat sympathetic to the coup. I suspect the reaction to the coup was very different if you were in Lagos, Ibadan or in Enugu. I think there was a feeling that the civilians would be able to influence the military there. This would be a transitional period, and that it would redound to the benefit of at least that region. I didn't find many people there in Kaduna who were saying, isn't this terrible. And also since there was not a great threat emanating to the new leadership from that area, it was probably less harsh in terms of the impact on the population. But I think that as months wore by, there was more and more a grumbling about the military leadership which was eventually, as I mentioned, overthrown in 1985, and you began to see signs of a kind of paralysis, and stagnation. So the elite of Kaduna, the business elite, and some of the religious leaders were becoming more and more openly restive about military rule. The Nigerian army is a lot better at seizing power than in figuring out what to do with it after they have seized it.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

RACKMALES: Tom Smith.

Q: How did he operate as far as your relations with him?

RACKMALES: We had excellent relations. I had worked with Tom in Nigeria in my first assignment. Tom was the number two in the economic section, and we got along quite well. He was an excellent ambassador, traveled frequently to the north. We were always delighted when he and Jane came to stay with us. He had an excellent manner with the northern Nigerians. They appreciated his dignity, his bearing was very sympathetic to the northerners. I think they looked forward to and welcomed his visits as did I.

Q: Did we have anything such as Peace Corps, AID projects in your area?

RACKMALES: We had cut off aid, including Peace Corps in the 70's when Nigeria's oil revenue started rolling in in a major way. So our AID mission was essentially eliminated. I don't recall if there was one person there from AID who was more of a regional person. There may have been a tiny AID office, but there were no AID programs to speak of, and there was no Peace Corps.

Q: How was the oil revenue working when you were there? Was it getting to the north, or what was happening?

RACKMALES: They had used it to build a good road network, much better than when we were there, but for the most part it was squandered either on showy buildings, or

simply going into peoples' pockets and then out into offshore bank accounts. And you would still find even after these tens of millions of dollars of oil and revenues had flown in, you would still travel into villages and see terrible poverty and no sign that the poor were receiving any benefit at all from this, except that it was easier to get there because of the roads.

Q: What was your major job besides getting yourself re-housed, which is always a problem, but as far as American interests there.

RACKMALES: We had a trade fair. It was actually the largest in Nigeria, and we had a full-time commercial officer. So promotion of commercial activity was one of our primary tasks, but that activity dropped off considerably following the coup. Reporting on the political situation, our other primary task, also became more difficult. Even though the governor would always see me, getting him to speak frankly was hard and his civilian aides were pretty much, I think, kept in the dark. The Nigerian military do not put a lot of confidence, at least on sensitive matters, in their civilian staffs. So it was difficult to get inside information. Probably our best sources were again, some of the business elites who had dealt with westerners before. Many of them had spent years in the UK, or the United States, knew the west and although they were not necessarily privy to inside thinking they usually had some access to these people and could give us some of their impressions. So that was helpful.

Q: Was Islam a major factor in your area? I'm talking about from a political point of view because fundamentalism has become quite a concern of ours. How about it in Nigeria at that time?

RACKMALES: Well, again, I would differentiate between the civilian period when I think the role played by the Islamic leadership was to undermine confidence in the secular political process. So indirectly, I'm not saying that they directly encouraged the military to take over, but in terms of public attitudes they helped lay the groundwork for a reaction against civilian rule. Anything that would threaten in their view the Islamic character of their area of Nigeria, they would be strongly opposed to. So any kind of a multi-party system they viewed with great suspicion. During the period of the military leadership there were indications that some of the military leaders were close to some of the senior religious leaders, but how that played out was hard to say. And I had the feeling that for the most part the military were calling the shots themselves, and not relying heavily, but would pay deference to the more prestigious of the religious leaders.

Q: Could you make contact with the religious leaders?

RACKMALES: Yes. I would call regularly, for example, on the Emir of Zaria who was the most influential leader in the area near Kaduna. The person who was the preeminent religious leader for all of northern Nigeria was in his 80s, if not 90s, and extremely ill throughout the period I was there. He took a long time dying, and that was one of the factors that reduced somewhat the influence of religion because there was a vacuum there

at the top. He was moribund, and everyone else was jockeying for position to see who would replace him.

Q: You left there when?

RACKMALES: The summer of '85.

Q: Were there any other events that may have happened then that I haven't hit on?

RACKMALES: There was some inter-communal violence that took place. Again, there was a history of inter-communal violence in Nigeria between northerners and southerners, and there was one episode of that that took place I think in '85, shortly before we left. Beyond that, no, I think we've covered the main trends. It was a period that began the steady deterioration that Nigeria has seen to this day. Nigeria today is a country that we no longer have good relations with. It's a country that continues in a state of political stagnation and paralysis, and that process really got underway in that period in '85. So we were basically frustrated observers of that. We had no particular levers to use to improve the situation. We had no AID programs as I mentioned, and we would report on what we saw, what was going on, but there wasn't a lot we could do.

Q: In '85 where did you go?

RACKMALES: To the National War College for a year.

Q: So we'll pick it up then.

Today is the 17th of July, 1995. Bob we're picking up, we're now in 1995, you had gone to the National War College, did you go there as a student? I like to catch the feel for these war colleges. What were you doing? Which of the war colleges were you at?

RACKMALES: I was at the National War College at Fort McNair. I was taking their national security program which is essentially the same program given to military officers at the colonel and lieutenant colonel level who were considered particularly promising, and civilians with foreign affairs agencies. We had people from State, CIA, NSA, Commerce, Treasury, the Library of Congress, and a few others.

Q: From '85 from the War College perspective, what was the world you were looking at like?

RACKMALES: I think that a lot of the focus in those years, that of course was in the midst of the big defense buildup that started in the last year of the Carter administration, and intensified in the following years with the Reagan administration. At the same time there was a growing debate, a debate which is still going on, about when is it appropriate to use U.S. military force. Caspar Weinberger had come out with a series of criteria which I think that George Shultz felt were too restrictive, related to such things as ensuring that

there was full public support. A lot of the program was designed to give military people a broader exposure to the factors that impinge on national security policy, and some of that is old hat to Foreign Service officers. What sticks in my mind from that year were the debates over whether we were buying the right things in the framework of what the missions for the military were going to be. There was a lot of ferment over the 600 ship navy, and of course you get a bit into inter-service disputes. But I think was perhaps the most relevant in terms of what has happened since then, and my own involvement in issues like Bosnia, were the issues that Weinberger was addressing in those years, mainly what criteria are we going to establish, what degree of public support, when should the President decide that our national interests are so much involved that we will put American troops...this, of course, an aftermath also of the Vietnam debate, and that whole experience.

Q: Were you getting any feel at that time about how the military looked at the Soviet Union? Although nobody knew it, it was the twilight years of the Soviet Union. It had about four more years to go, I guess.

RACKMALES: I don't think that anyone foresaw the kind of dramatic changes that began happening just in years immediately following '85, '86. What I recall is the concern as to whether we were using our resources wisely in terms of what the future challenges to the United States were going to be. Star Wars was another big focus.

Q: You might explain what Star Wars was.

RACKMALES: Star Wars was the project, the program that the Reagan administration introduced to put up an anti-missile defense shield, sort of an ABM defense, terribly expensive. In the discussions we had at the War College I would say there were probably more criticisms expressed than very strong support. I think the subsequent events indicate that it was perhaps not a wise investment shall we say. If I remember correctly Edward Teller played a big role in convincing President Reagan that this was something that would work, and that would free the United States from the specter of a massive inter-continental attack. Well, we spent a lot of money on it. I'm not sure how far it ever got, but you never had much protection...we spent tens of billions on it.

Q: In other eras, sometimes there was a certain separation between the Department of State and the military, and how they looked at things. I'm thinking of Vietnam, there was some of the military thought, gee, you guys got us into this thing, get us out, or something like that. How did you find it when you were there? Any problems?

RACKMALES: I didn't encounter any strong hostility. I think certainly nothing compared to the hostility that our military colleagues expressed towards journalists. I was struck by how deep and pervasive the hostility towards journalists are. I think they viewed us as colleagues who often served in dangerous, difficult places, were at risk. They were sometimes a little puzzled that our personal styles were sometimes different from what they were used to. I think they tended to relate more to Foreign Service officers who had

themselves had military experience, could speak the military language. One of my State Department colleagues had been a helicopter pilot in Vietnam and he was immensely popular. Most of us were viewed as professionals who sometimes espoused sort of strange ideas, or things that didn't come across in a straightforward, forthright way that the military likes. But I didn't sense any hostility towards our profession per se.

Q: Was there any attempt on the part of the War College to deal with the problem of the press. In other words to say, the media is here, and we're just entering the age of CNN which is news network television which is everywhere. Wherever you battle from now on it's going to be fought under its eye. I was wondering how they were dealing with it.

RACKMALES: They devoted a lot of attention to it, and they were of course aware that most of the people in their audience had anti-press feelings. They were trying to counteract that to some extent because they pointed out that the press is a reality, its virtually a fourth branch of government, and it's not in the interest of the defense department or of the United States government to do anything but relate to the press in as positive a way as possible. So they tried to give some pointers, held lectures, seminars on that subject. They brought Sam Donaldson in who bravely stood up...I think a lot of the military still, and it goes back to Vietnam, blame the press for part of the tragedy there, which I think is wrong. But that's the way they feel.

Q: You graduated in '86. Where did you go then?

RACKMALES: I went to the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs as director of the Office of Human Rights.

Q: This is in mid-Reagan wasn't it?

RACKMALES: That's right. That would have been '86, in the middle of his second term.

Q: So how did you find the Bureau of Human Rights? I mean what role was it playing at that time?

RACKMALES: The Assistant Secretary, who had replaced Elliott Abrams who had moved over from Human Rights to the Bureau for Inter-American Affairs, was Dick Schifter, a neo-conservative Democrat who had served previously as a senior official in AIPAC, American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, I believe it's called. An extremely skilled lawyer. He was in a major Washington law office, I can't recall which one, but was a senior partner, and came with a very strong commitment, I would say to human rights and to pursuing a human rights agenda. He tended to be highly focused in certain areas, and the Soviet Union was certainly his first and foremost preoccupation. So we spent a lot of time dealing with the issues at the period of political prisoners and the other human rights issues, reuniting families, treatment of dissidents, and that sort of thing. That was probably our single greatest preoccupation, but he was also interested in assisting in the development of human rights in the third world, particularly through

institution creating, trying to get assistance both setting up of stronger human rights institutions, but also he was a proponent of police training, working with police forces, military, and that sort of thing.

Q: You were mentioning your focus in your job in human rights was...

RACKMALES: Okay, let me just briefly explain the organization of the bureau because that will help. We had three offices when I was there. One was an office that dealt with the political asylum issues, they were fairly self contained. Another was an office that dealt with what were called multilateral issues. They dealt with United Nations, human rights, meetings and concerns as well as institutions like the International Committee for the Red Cross.

Q: The High Commission for refugees.

RACKMALES: Our office was the office of human rights and is now called the Bilateral Affairs Office. We monitored human rights situations on a country by country basis. We had human rights officers for each of the regional bureaus, African, European, etc. They were our regional and country specialists, and were the resources that the bureau would turn to when there was a bilateral human rights issue, whether it's political prisoners in the Soviet Union, alleged human rights abuses by the Contras in Nicaragua, what was happening in Peru. Anything that had a bilateral focus was our responsibility. That's why at that time our office had the broad overall title of Office of Human Rights. Eventually the other offices complained, so it's now the Bilateral Affairs Office as opposed to the Multilateral Affairs Office, which is maybe a little clearer.

Q: What was the role of some of these independent agencies. I'm thinking of Amnesty International, America's Watch, and I'm sure there are other ones who deal with this as well as the media.

RACKMALES: First of all we relied a lot on some of the information that they were providing, even though I think all of us to a greater or lesser extent, Dick Shifter perhaps to a greater extent, felt that there was a degree of bias in some of their gathering. There's no question that they did very often draw our attention to things that might otherwise have gone unreported. And they often had highly professional people, and a good network--in some cases better than our embassies networks--of people who were reporting on human rights abuses. They were also our most consistent and sometimes severe critics. The lawyers committee for human rights would put out each year a critique of the State Department's human rights report in which they would sometimes commend us for having done a good job in a given country, but often would take us to task usually for letting other foreign policy considerations cause us to ignore, downplay, misrepresent, eschew, a human rights situation. During the time that I spent in HA...

Q: You were there from when to when?

RACKMALES: I was there from June of '86 until I think June of '87, and I can say a brief word regarding my early departure from there.

Q: We'll come to that, let's stay with...

RACKMALES: I think the area where we were getting, and justifiably, beaten on the head and shoulders, was our reporting on Central America where for foreign policy reasons, some legitimate, some maybe not so legitimate, we did in fact have a double standard of tending to downplay, ignore, justify, human rights abuses on the part of official organs or groups like the Contras which we viewed as countering threats to democracy. Not all of the criticisms were always fair and some probably stemmed from ideological bias. Still it's certainly safe to say as a general rule that we were harder on human rights abuses by the left. I should note that Dick Schifter was a close personal friend of Elliott Abrams, and would always consult with him on controversial issues. They both came from the same matrix, they were both neo-conservatives.

Q: What's the name of the magazine?

RACKMALES: Commentary.

Q: And Abrams was a son-in-law...It was the New York Jewish democrat neo-conservative movement of the time.

RACKMALES: Yes, and Dick was very close to that. He would even say there are very important foreign policy considerations, and I think he would check with Elliott Abrams. And I think that if Elliott felt strongly that we should back off from something, then I don't think there was much resistance.

Q: Did you find in this position were there any battles that you were having either with Schifter or with the desks that you noted particularly?

RACKMALES: Let me preface that by saying I have the highest regard for Dick's intellectual skills and commitment. He's obviously an outstanding lawyer and negotiator, and he now has a high position in the National Security Council as you probably know. I read that he's been appointed as our negotiator now trying to help resolve, I believe it's the Cyprus issue, one of the Aegean area disputes, and in that kind of context I think Dick can be superb. In his job as Assistant Secretary for Human Rights his relationship with the other Assistant Secretaries...I mentioned that he was very close to Elliott Abrams and friendly with Chet Crocker, but I think with the others the relationship was more at arm's length, and they frequently took umbrage at a lack of consultation. Now, that may seem contradictory with what I described with regard to Latin American affairs, but it's a fact that that was an area that was unique because of personal ties and shared viewpoints. On other issues that he felt strongly about, and particularly the Soviet issues, he did not have a high opinion of what the regional bureau was doing. I think that Assistant Secretary Roz Ridgway understood that, sensed that. I'm sure she got indications of it in various ways.

So I would say one of the big problems that we had was a constant battling over what we should say, what our priorities should be with regard to human rights in the Soviet Union.

At a certain point that concerned me so much, and I felt the friction that was being created was becoming time consuming, and a diversion. So I asked Dick Schifter if I could try to negotiate a policy approach that both the European bureau and HA could live with, a charter or an understanding. A pact as it were between the two bureaus with an agreed set of priorities. I think he was a little bit skeptical that it could be done but he said, well okay, I understand what your concerns are and if you guys can come up with something, that's fine. So I spent a fair amount of time with the person in the Office of Soviet Affairs designated to negotiate this with me. It was the head of their bilateral office, Louis Sell, and we spent many hours laboriously working on a series of drafts of a human rights policy towards the Soviet Union. EUR agreed that this would be a desirable thing, and nobody wanted to continue with sniping back and forth.

Q: I take it that up until then it had been pretty much on a case by case thing and when it would come up it would be a new battle each time.

RACKMALES: That's right, and as we progressed with a series of drafts, because I was not empowered to do anything other than come up jointly with a document that both Assistant Secretaries could live with. So I would come back and show the drafts in progress to my immediate boss who was a Deputy Assistant Secretary, and to Dick Schifter, because I knew that we had to keep Dick on board for this thing. Anyway, he would look at these drafts and say, okay--not show a great deal of enthusiasm, but also not often say, change this. Each time he had a specific concern, and say, I can't live with this, we would go back and fix it.

To make a long story short, after spending a lot of time on this, and coming up with what looked like a very good solid document which went all the way up and was enthusiastically approved in EUR, when it reached that point and he looked at it--and there was nothing there he hadn't seen before--he said no. So at that point of course I felt that my credibility with EUR was shot. They understood what had happened, and didn't personally blame me, but at the same time I felt that I had been put in an impossible situation. So shortly after that I was approached by someone from the Bureau of Personnel about working there. I agreed.

Q: Let me talk a bit about Schifter and human rights. Here is someone coming out of AIPAC which is almost a vehement supporter of anything Israel wants to do. He comes from the New York Jewish community which is a strong supporter of Israel. He's concentrating heavily on Soviet problems which are very much Jewish dissidents, not completely but there is a very strong Jewish element. How did he treat the problem of Israel? Its human rights record has always been a cause of concern. We're talking about how they treated the Arabs within their country, and also the Arabs in the occupied areas of Palestine.

RACKMALES: He devoted a lot of very close attention to it. Usually the chapter of the country human rights report, which was the most difficult to negotiate, even more so than the Soviet one, was the chapter on Israel. That was again something that I this time more successfully worked many, many hours with the NEA Bureau, with the Israeli desk. With regard to Israel he was certainly prepared to be critical of actions that resulted from errors, mistakes. For example, cases where Israeli troops had used excessive force, he felt very strongly that they had to do a better job of disciplining their troops, and using non-lethal means. He was prepared to have critical language inserted when Israeli troops had not used all non-lethal means to control a crowd, resulting in fatalities among the Palestinians. In other areas though I think he tried to dampen criticism of some Israeli practices. I think that he was less willing to criticize the Israeli legal system which some of the Palestinians felt was biased against Palestinians. He was not an out and out 100% defender of everything the Israelis did by any means.

Q: How about China? We're going through a very rough patch with the People's Republic of China right now. I mean China has been recognized for some time, a few years by this time; one, were you able to get much information, and two, did we pussy foot around it, not to overemphasize, or was there any problem with China?

RACKMALES: I don't recall China engaging Shifters attention, or the bureau's attention, to nearly the extent of some of these other issues that I've been mentioning. It was not ignored. A lot of the attention in that period focused on Tibet and what was happening there. A lot of our actions were generated by congressional interest. In fact, that was true of a great deal of what we did; interested congressman would often be the stimulus for our looking into something. But it was, of course, nothing like the intensive interest in Chinese human rights that happened as the result of events leading up to Tiananmen Square, and what happened somewhat later.

Q: How about politically another issue that gets going in American political life gets reflected, northern Ireland. Did that cause problems?

RACKMALES: I don't recall that as one of the areas where we came under particular criticism as a bureau for our approach. There were no major turning points during the period that I was there. And again, it was one of those issues that was on the screen but not with a high profile for us.

Q: You were in Personnel from when to when?

RACKMALES: I got moved over to Personnel in June of '87, and was there until May of '89 when I started some brush up language training to go to Belgrade.

Q: What were you doing in Personnel?

RACKMALES: I was in charge of the office that counsels mid-level political cone officers on their assignments and their careers.

Q: What did you find were the major thing that you were doing?

RACKMALES: My arrival there happened to coincide with the first year of full implementation of a section of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, which you may recall, had the new up or out provision whereby, when you reach the O-1 (colonel equivalent) level you had to make a decision as to whether to compete for the senior ranks. If you competed for six years and were not promoted into the senior ranks, then you had to retire. And when that first went into effect in the early '80s a lot of Class 1 officers, and particularly political officers, did not realize how intense the competition would be for those promotions. So virtually everybody at that time, whether they were highly competitive, (almost everyone thinks they're highly competitive) were only somewhat competitive, and even some who were clearly not competitive, applied for promotion because it was considered somewhat shameful not to. It was not the macho thing to do. I think there were even people who were afraid that their failure to apply would get around and that they would lose out on good assignments. So almost everybody did it, and as a result in 1987, which was six years after the law went into effect, there were I think 106 O-1 officers of ages ranging from the mid-40s through the mid-50s who suddenly were out. A number of these, had they not applied at the first opportunity, would have still been able to stay in the Service. And some, of course, could even have been conceivably promoted later on. I was given as my first extracurricular assignment working with these officers, and with the grievance staff, and with other bureaus, to find employment for them pending their separation. A large number of them filed for what is called prescriptive relief. They could file a grievance against their separation and ask for prescriptive relief in the form of an interim assignment, something that they could do until their grievance was acted upon. And I was the person in the bureau who was responsible for finding gainful employment for these approximately 100 officers, of all cones, they were not only from the political cone, although the political officers constituted about half of the entire group because they were disproportionally hit by this.

Q: Did you find real work, or was it...

RACKMALES: Yes, actually in most cases we found work. In a few cases it was actually work which fully utilized their full range of skills. In other cases it was jobs in Freedom of Information or other areas which was work that otherwise the Department would have to use contractors. So it both provided some gainful employment and also saved the Department a certain amount of money since we had to, under the grievance system we had to keep these people on board, had to continue to pay their salaries. It was better to have them working than not.

Q: Were you dealing with the problem of women officers, or minority officers?

RACKMALES: Not so much with the issues concerning the women's class action suit because there were other people in the bureau who were dealing with that. In my first months I prepared a proposal that was accepted regarding bringing minority officers'

interest in certain jobs to bureaus attention. In other words, creating a system which by no means guaranteed, or reserved certain jobs for minorities, but it made sure that bureaus would learn and would be advised of a minority officer's interest in given jobs. It kind of put the bureaus in a position where they could come back and say, well, look, we have an officer who we feel is better qualified because of this, that or the other thing. But they would have to go through that exercise of giving a reasonable basis for the preference of non-minority officers. So I think it was somewhat helpful in implementing the affirmative action agenda, which has since of course become very controversial. It was less so at that time.

Q: You were dealing with this group of officers who were caught by this new act. You were sitting there taking the temperature of a significant number of people. What was the feeling about how the system was working among the people you were dealing with would you say at that particular time?

RACKMALES: Obviously, many in this group were bitter, felt that they had been ill served by the system; for various reasons that they should have been given a better sense earlier on of what promotion opportunities were going to be like. Many identified real mistakes that had been made. One of the things I found working in Personnel is that the record-keeping was terribly shoddy. When I did a close check of performance files prior to promotion panels meeting, I found that one-third had such serious deficiencies that they could form the basis of a successful grievance. Missing awards, in some cases missing reports that were not accounted for, and that sort of thing. One-third is an unacceptably high percentage. When I would come across something like that, I would inform the officer involved. You were not allowed to tell someone that they had a winnable case, but you could advise people that they should consult with either the grievance staff, or the grievance adviser at AFSA to get an opinion on that. Career development officers can alert people that there is a potential problem, that they should follow up on.

Q: Looking at the system, where was the problem as far as these missing things? Was it just shoddy work in the file room?

RACKMALES: I'm sure there were a variety of reasons. When a piece of paper has to go from an overseas embassy, and go through usually a bureau first, then over to performance evaluation, and then into a file. Sometimes a file would be...if you have two people with similar names, would be put into the wrong person's file. There are hundreds of ways that a piece of paper can go astray.

Q: I'm a Charles S. Kennedy, and I used to get mail for a Charles A. Kennedy. I've never really done a personnel check, maybe I should. You left there and went to what was going to be a very challenging position. You left there in?

RACKMALES: '89.

Q: Your next job was what?

RACKMALES: Deputy Chief of Mission in Belgrade.

Q: And you served there from when to when?

RACKMALES: I arrived in September of 1989, and I left in July of 1993.

Q: Obviously you had the background for this. How were you selected to be DCM?

RACKMALES: As soon as I saw that job on the list of openings in 1989 when my tour was ending in Personnel, I got in touch with Warren Zimmermann who I had learned was going to be the new ambassador there. Jack Scanlan was still there but was already slated to depart. Fortunately I had gotten to know Warren through our common interest in some of the Soviet human rights issues. Before taking a trip out to Moscow as director of the Office of Human Rights which (I probably should have mentioned this when I was talking about, but it was the first time that a senior representative of the Bureau of Human Rights had been received in a friendly and relatively open way by the Soviet bureaucracy, and it astonished the embassy when that happened.)

Q: Tell me a little about that. This is what year?

RACKMALES: This is July "86, so it was just shortly after I had joined the bureau. I had only been in the bureau for six weeks, or something like that. We of course asked the embassy to set up appointments with human rights advocates, dissidents as well as with the Soviet Foreign Ministry people dealing with human rights. My predecessor had visited two years earlier and I think had gotten one meeting with a fairly low level type in the ministry, and was treated quite coolly.

I had not gotten word of what appointments had been set up until I arrived at the Embassy. I went in to the political section and my control officer said, "It's amazing." I said, "What's amazing?" They said, we had asked for an appointment with the person we considered your counterpart, who was a division chief. And they came back with an appointment two levels above that, an assistant secretary. And they said, we can't recall when there's been that kind of pumping up on their part, usually we're lucky to get the appointment at the level we asked for. They said, more than that you're also invited to a lunch in your honor at the VIP facility that they have there, the Foreign Ministry's VIP guest house, and they invited several other embassy people. And they said, that's rarely happened with anybody and certainly not in the human rights area, maybe in an economic area that's of interest to them. So they were quite intrigued, and were also intrigued during my meetings with Soviet officials that there was much less of the usual Soviet defensiveness when I raised issues of political prisoners and other contentious issues. My interlocutors never resorted to the argument, well that's just propaganda. They tried to engage to some extent in serious discussions and accepted that these were legitimate subjects for dialogue. It was quite a different atmosphere, although when I returned Dick

Schifter was skeptical that it would go much beyond atmospherics. He saw it as part of a charm campaign. My sense, and I think in the embassy too, there was a certain feeling that sentiments were shifting and that they might in fact start to take some concrete actions, which they did start to take soon afterward. They started to release some people who had been held up for a long time, and increased the Jewish emigration numbers substantially. So it was the beginning of the Gorbachev human rights revolution, that was one of the earliest signs of it.

Q: Had you run into Warren Zimmermann at that time.

RACKMALES: That's right. His job at that time was as Ambassador to the CSCE talks in Vienna, and human rights were a major concern in that particular venue. So I consulted with Warren. He asked me to do certain specific things while I was in Moscow, particularly with some personal friends of theirs from the years that they were in Moscow. We also addressed some groups together on issues of Soviet human rights. So I think he had a generally favorable view of me, and I certainly did of him. So it was to my advantage when the choice came up of DCM in Belgrade. We both expected human rights to be a major point of our efforts there.

Q: Then you arrived in Belgrade when?

RACKMALES: September of 1989.

Q: What was the situation in Yugoslavia in September of '89?

RACKMALES: It was a period of great optimism. When I arrived it was the eve of the first high profile visit of the new Yugoslav Prime Minister, Ante Markovic, a Croat who had been chosen earlier that year. The reason for the optimism was the events elsewhere in Eastern Europe that made it clear that communism was crumbling. The Gorbachev revolution had taken hold. Communist regimes had crumbled in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The same would happen in Romania just a few months later, in December. There was a feeling that Yugoslavia was very well poised to a model and in the vanguard of East European countries that were shedding communism. Markovic was already starting to allude to having multi-party elections in Yugoslavia, which already had the most open economic system in Eastern Europe. They had had a more western orientation, more of their businessmen had been exposed to capitalism. So there was a feeling that Yugoslavia was going to be the first East European country to join the Common Market, and was going to help to show the way to the others. Well, how wrong can you be.

Q: What was the embassy and the consulate general in Zagreb...what did we have there?

RACKMALES: In terms of staffing?

Q: Staffing, and you're in charge of running it. What was your appraisal of our presence there?

RACKMALES: We had a sizeable embassy given the size of the country. Yugoslavia had always attracted a lot of U.S. attention over the years. Initially in '48 because of its break with the Soviet Union. A lot of the programs that we were running, like the Fulbright program, were among the largest in Europe. I think only Germany had a larger Fulbright program, and on a per capita basis ours was way way ahead of everybody else. And they was a lot of coming and going, Americans liked to come to Yugoslavia for a number of reasons. So it was a busy, active embassy. We had about 100 Americans in Belgrade, and about 350 Yugoslav employees. In Zagreb they had about a dozen Americans, and maybe 60--I'm not certain now of the number of FSNs. So these were sizeable operations that we were running there.

Q: To go back to September of '89, how did we view the problem of ethnic diversity division at that time. What were we seeing?

RACKMALES: Even before '89, there had always been concern over the viability of the system that Tito left behind, whether it could contain centrifugal forces which were obviously strong. There was growing hostility between Slovenia and Croatia on the one hand, and Serbia on the other. Tito's system as it evolved in the years since his death, had given more and more power to the individual republics and less and less to the federal government. To the point where we all knew that the greatest threat to the optimistic scenario I just described was in the unwillingness of the republics to allow the federal government to implement coherent policies. So our efforts in 89-90 was to try to bolster Markovic, whom we saw as the best hope, maybe the last hope, because if he failed the prospects were very gloomy. He seemed at that period, in the summer and early fall, to have the kind of leadership abilities that gave him a fighting chance to overcome the systemic problems of heading a government with very little power, with only the powers that the republics were willing to let him exercise. He went to the United States and made a good impression. As a person he was dynamic and knew how to talk to westerners. The only doubts were would he be allowed to carry out a meaningful reform program in Yugoslavia. And in the succeeding months it became clear that it probably wasn't going to happen.

Q: Something you said, we wanted to support Markovic. How do we support somebody? What does that mean?

RACKMALES: First of all by having him meet with the President. That's one way of showing support to a leader of a...

Q: This would be George Bush at this time.

RACKMALES: That's correct...through the kinds of things that the spokespersons for the administration say about him. In succeeding months as he got more and more embroiled

in difficulties there were other attempts. For example, at one point I remember Bush calling him up to express his support for him, and that information was released publicly that the President of the United States had called him. And we did begin in those months preparing an aid package for Yugoslavia. I remember going to Vienna to a regional meeting of all Eastern European DCMs, and AID directors, to discuss what kind of an aid package would be appropriate. The amounts earmarked for Yugoslavia were not very large. I had been, as DCM, in charge of preparing the recommendations for what areas we were going to assist. But even at that point, even in December of '89, I told the chair of the meeting who was Bob Barry, who was in charge of the office that was established to implement AID programs in Eastern Europe, that we should not actually dispense aid yet for Yugoslavia until it became clear that the severe breakdown in relations between the republics and the federal government showed some signs of improving. Because otherwise you were giving money to an entity that was not functioning. And in fact in succeeding months things got worse instead of better so we never really went forward with any concrete aid. That infuriated Markovic because he kept saying, what good is your rhetorical support if you can't come forward with hard cash. But it's very hard to justify in a situation where the IMF and other international institutions, and our own analyses, were that the federal government was impotent. It reached the point, for example, where Slovenia was not turning over to the federal government the customs duties that it was collecting for goods that were entering Slovenia. They were keeping them.

In late November of '89 the Serbs instituted an economic boycott of Slovenia. This within a country that is nominally united. In my own mind that was the clearest evidence that Yugoslavia was probably on a rapid downward spiral in terms of unity.

Q: On the political reporting, were we in touch with the governments of the various republics, and if so what were we getting from them? What were they talking about?

RACKMALES: There were three groups of republics. On the one hand there was Slovenia and Croatia who at that point were starting to head hell-bent towards independence at the earliest possible date. There were the first free and open elections took place in Slovenia and Croatia in the spring of '90, and both brought into power groups that were clearly headed in the direction of independence. Even before those elections it was clear that that's the way things were trending, but the elections intensified that process.

Anyway, you had those two northern republics. You had Serbia which basically would have liked to have been rid of the northern republics, felt strong enough to dominate the remainder, and so was not about to pay a price to keep the country together.

And then you had the other republics who basically were terrified of what a breakup would mean, Bosnia, Macedonia, and Montenegro. Montenegro was too much in Serbia's shadow to really do much more than wring its hands. But the two leaders who worked the hardest to try to keep a form of Yugoslavia together were Izetbegovic in Bosnia who was

elected in November of '90, and Gligorov who became the leader of Macedonia in '91. Unity became more difficult to maintain with the demise of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia which formally broke up in February of '90. Its power crumbled very rapidly, but the underlying interests of the republics at that period were more or less as I've described it, namely two who only wanted to leave. One which was somewhat happy to have them leave provided in the case of Croatia that they didn't try to take Serbs with them. The Yugoslav constitution provided for secession but not secession of republics. Secession of ethnic groups, of nations as they called it, narodi. The Serbian argument was if Slovenes as a nation wished to leave Yugoslavia it's in the constitution that they have that right. If Croats want to leave, essentially as Croats, that's fine. But, and this becomes now one of the root causes of the wars that sprung up, that they do not have a right to take Serbs with them. The Serbs have the same right of self determination as anyone else. That in a nutshell was the Serbian position.

Q: Were you seeing the rise of Serb nationalists around? Before the cry had been brotherhood and unity. Were you seeing this as being sort of the ethnicity of being...this first thing that allowed politicians to get out there and make a mark for themselves. I'm a Serb, or I'm a Croat. Did you see this becoming a political ploy?

RACKMALES: That was really what Milosevic used to gain unchallenged power and in Serbia the nationalist drive was initially focused on Kosovo. That was his first dramatic moment was when he in a speech in Kosovo made a very impassioned statement about Kosovo and the Serbs, and Serbian pride, etc. It had a great resonance in Serbia. Up until that point he had been viewed as a typical apparatchik. Maybe a little more professionally qualified in the area of banking than some of the others. By the way, I don't know if it's generally known that he had had an IVP grant in the field of banking back in the mid-80s I think, he went to Chicago and other cities. But his primary focus was always political, and he pursued power in a very single minded way, ruthless way. He used nationalism as the means for this.

I think most of the analysts see this as opportunistic on his part. In other words, that he simply made a calculated decision that here was the right button to push. I do think there is a somewhat of a messianic streak in Milosevic, that he genuinely sees himself as a kind of savior of Serbia. He is an extremely skilled cold-blooded politician who combines that, contradictory as it may sound, with a genuine feeling that there is no one else who can defend, protect, promote the interests of the Serbian nation other than himself.

Q: As these forces are beginning to gather, you're sitting in the embassy, you're reading more about politics, and whatever the papers are, you're watching TV and meeting people, were there times when you and Warren Zimmermann, and maybe others in the embassy, would sit together in the glass bubble, or the plastic room, and talk about whither Yugoslavia, and what were American interests?

I might just put in a qualifier, prior to that, American interests when I was there, and when you were there the first time, we didn't want to see Yugoslavia split apart because

this would give an opening for the Soviet Union and could mean World War III because it was one of those places as long it held together, and was somewhat out of the Soviet orbit, it meant that they wouldn't be attracted, and we wouldn't be attracted and we wouldn't get into fighting with them. A very clear interest, but now things are changing.

RACKMALES: That's right, and what we eventually came up with to replace the former Trinity, which consisted of independence, unity, and territorial integrity (through the '60s, '70s and most of the '80s, we would repeat that as kind of a mantra) was a duality-unity and democracy. As we saw it, if either were suppressed or shattered, you couldn't have the other. In other words, you could not in the context of a split, a destruction of the Yugoslav state, you would not have democracy because it could not happen peacefully given the ethnic tensions, given the structure of the country. You didn't have groups neatly in areas that if you drew borders around them, they'd be more or less content to be there. In particular the Serb and Croat population was scattered and the Muslims were intermingled, not in a well defined separate area. Anyway, we argued forcefully that our policy should be based on support for both unity and democracy, and emphasizing the interdependence of the two. At that time, the Slovenes and the Croats were making the argument that what Milosevic wanted to do was to impose a non-democratic system. While he may talk a less communist game now that he sees the handwriting on the wall for communism in Eastern Europe, he's basically a Bolshevik at heart, so you should view Serbia as a threat to a democratic Yugoslavia. There was certainly something to be said for that argument. But what we were promoting was the concept that you could not have a survival of democracy in a chaotic breakup of Yugoslavia. Unlike the CIA's analysis that got into the press which said that a breakup of Yugoslavia was inevitable within 18 months. (It turned out to be pretty close to the mark.) Our view was that a breakup of Yugoslavia was not inevitable but was a strong probability. In February 1990 I told Ambassador Thomas in Budapest that the odds were 3 to 1 against Yugoslavia staying united at that point. But, CIA felt that there was a chance of getting a peaceful agreement on separation. We were very skeptical of that in the embassy. We felt it almost inevitable that we were going to have widespread violence which would, of course, undercut democracy.

As the months went by the process of the republics taking more and more away from the Federation accelerated. Milosevic badly mishandled the political process, to the point where he antagonized all major groups except for a small number of intellectuals. His leadership became very faltering and uncertain. So he was a political ghost long before he formally left office.

In those last months you had the visit of Jim Baker, Secretary of State. It was widely seen as a last ditch attempt by the United States and the European countries as to what policies to...

Q: This is very interesting. What were you getting from the other missions there? I'm thinking particularly of German, French, British, maybe Italian, and at that time it was still Soviets.

RACKMALES: Some in the United States thought we were hanging on too long to a forlorn hope that Yugoslavia could stay together. We were actually the first of the major missions in Belgrade to draw attention to the seriousness of the possibility of the disintegration of the country. I remember, for example, calling on my counterpart at the Soviet embassy who was one of their most experienced Yugoslav hands. He had spent at that point something like 12 years in the country, and was five years into his current tour as their DCM. He told me that the harsh rhetoric the various ethnic groups were using was just Balkan hotheadedness, and should not be given too much weight. He was convinced the army and other federal institutions would ensure that the country stayed together. That was the basic assessment of most other missions in '89 and '90. By the end of '90 and the beginning of '91, it was becoming very clear that the country was falling apart. Warren and I had good relations with the heads and the deputies of all of the western European missions who came to see things more or less as we did. One exception was the Austrian DCM who had an animus against Yugoslavia, so he was rooting for it to fall apart, saying its an artificial country it should never have been existed. I think he took assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand personally. He was an odd man out. In the light of what happened from the middle of '91 until early '92, and the role that the Germans played in pressing for early recognition of Croatia-Slovenia, it's interesting that that was strongly opposed by their ambassador in Belgrade. And according to articles that I've read, and other information that I've gotten, also by all of the professionals at the foreign ministry...

Q: Was it because there's a Croatian community in Germany?

RACKMALES: It was a little more complicated than that. It was based in the first instance on personal biases of some very influential friends of Kohl. The editor of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, whose name escapes me at the moment, had been a correspondent of the paper for Germany in Belgrade in the '50s and had developed a deep and abiding dislike of the Serbs, partly based on some unfortunate encounters that he had had. The German media in general seized on developments in Yugoslavia which was familiar to many tourists. As the fighting started, the public started seeing scenes of refugees, scenes of some of the atrocities that started happening at the time. We're still seeing them today, the kinds of scenes that caused great public anguish. So the combination of this one influential newspaper's strong pressure combined with growing public outrage over the things like the bombing of Vukovar, and the shelling of Dubrovnik, which were creating a climate that facilitated Germany's going against what would otherwise have been a consensus of NATO countries. To the genuine dismay of the French, British, and ourselves the Germans announced unilaterally that they were going to recognize Croatia and Slovenia.

Q: I must say that when I heard this as an observer, there is nothing that would raise the Serbian animosity level than Germans and Croats getting together. You'd have thought that Germany would have played it smart, as you'd have thought the Pope would have

played it smart, who also got into the act. The rise of Tudjman in Croatia, how did we view him, and what were we seeing with him?

RACKMALES: Here there were probably at least some differences of emphasis in terms of the views of our consulate general Zagreb, and the embassy in Belgrade. Although the consul general, Mike Einik always reported professionally, there was naturally more sympathy for the emerging Croatian argument for independence. As far as the activities of Tudjman's party, what was most disturbing was the reliance on arming party members. The argument was that the Serbs were arming in their areas, and that this was just defensive. I suspect there were some areas where there had been clandestine Serbian arms shipments, but the scale of the Croatian action, and the fact of its having official blessing greatly ratcheted up the tensions, and caused an increase in the arming on the other side as well. So it represented a major shift in the direction of a violent outcome.

Q: Did the embassy try to do anything with Tudjman and Milosevic?

RACKMALES: Well, the problem was not that Tudjman and Milosevic were not getting together. The problem was that they were getting together. In a secret meeting that we only found out about subsequently they met in Serbia and agreed to divide Bosnia between Serbia and Croatia. We confronted both men with this. They made somewhat halfhearted denials that they did anything like that. But the information was pretty solid, and reliable, and nothing that happened subsequently would lead me to question whether the reports we got of that meeting were not accurate. My feeling was that each played off and benefited from the other, so each would have been dismayed had the other been replaced by someone else. I mean, for Tudjman, Milosevic was the ideal leader of Serbia. He was viewed as a communist which made Tudjman look good by comparison. He could portray him as the bogey man, and used that to discredit attempts to deal with in a serious way the grievances of the Serbs--how can you deal with these Bolsheviks, and that sort of thing?

At the same time Tudjman felt he could deal with Milosevic on issues like Bosnia. It was kind of the equivalent of the Nazi-Soviet pact over Poland really, they quietly agreed to divide it up. And from Milosevic's standpoint it was kind of the same thing. Tudjman delighted in evoking memories of Croatia's unsavory past and his anti-Semitism and authoritarianism made him unpalatable to many. So each one was a polarizing figure for the other side. At the same time I think Milosevic felt some contempt for Tudjman, and felt that he could wrap him around his finger whenever the two of them did get together. I remember a west European diplomat who had traveled back with Milosevic and the army leadership from one of the series of meetings that were arranged by the European community among the presidents of the different republics, and he said that Milosevic was being very open about how stupid he thought Tudjman was, and how he had completely fooled him in these talks that they had just had. And he and the army leaders were laughing about Tudjman, they had very little regard for his intelligence or abilities. I must add, though, that in Bosnia, Tudjman played his hand more shrewdly than Milosevic, avoiding sanctions while pursuing essentially identical policies.

Q: Did you notice at the time...something that has become either apparent, or at least seems to be apparent, that is the complete lack of veracity or the interest in veracity on the part of the leadership. At least I get that feeling. Did you have that at the time?

RACKMALES: I had served six years in Italy, and I never assumed veracity from any quarter any time. But there is a difference in the grade. I would have to say that with long experience, I think, there's no question that Milosevic could look you in the eye and tell you something that you knew, and he probably knew that you knew, was outright falsehood. I mean he would have no compunction in doing that. So the only way around that is to find out enough about the issues he was talking about to do a kind of reality check on what he was saying. The point is certainly true that neither of those two men hesitated from, in some cases, denying what was obvious or generally known. Tudjman for a while denied that Croatian troops were in Bosnia when there had been dozens of credible reports that they were, and I think he finally admitted that perhaps they were there.

Q: Before this thing really blew up were we sending out our people around the country and to find out whose doing what to whom? What sort of reports were we getting?

RACKMALES: Both we and Zagreb were sending people into some of the areas which seemed to be flashpoints, into the Krajina area, for example. The consulate general did an excellent report. We sent people a number of times into Bosnia. The problem with reporting isn't that we didn't go out, is that it was hard to really get at the areas where some of the worst problems were happening, which were not in the larger cities. In other words, we had a pretty good take on Banja Luka, Mostar, Sarajevo obviously. But if I had to assess the overall performance, it's that we didn't get enough of a sense of the village level realities, because it's hard both in terms of time, in terms of communicating with peasants who just aren't used to talking to foreigners. If you went to a city you can find a lot of people who were interlocutors. The extent to which the conflict became an urban-rural conflict is described by Misha Glenny in his book, which I think is the best...

Q: What's its title?

RACKMALES: The Failure of Yugoslavia. It starts off at the very beginning saying that Tudjman himself missed that reality, he was relying on what he heard from Serbs in Zagreb who were not in touch at all with Serbs who were down in villages in the Krajina, that he was simply out of touch with that reality. I think that was largely true of the diplomatic missions as well. You tend to talk to people who are more accessible. For example, the majority of the Serbs who lived in the larger cities, and tended to be the more articulate, and who tended to be the ones that western diplomats would talk to, would say reassuring things, things that would give you a more optimistic view of what things...

Q: That's true of our reporters today. It's very difficult to understand, to go into small towns, and understand the gun lobby, for example, or other things. To go back a little on the time, Secretary of State James Baker came to Yugoslavia when?

RACKMALES: June of 1991.

Q: And Yugoslavia was still together.

RACKMALES: That's right, barely.

Q: And how did that visit go?

RACKMALES: Badly. Baker felt that his message was basically not getting through. I know that his people felt very strongly that the Yugoslavia issue was a can of worms, that it was worse than the Middle East, and there was absolutely no inclination, I think, on the part of Baker or his people to put the United States in the lead role. I agreed with Baker's decision to let the Europeans run with the ball, because at that period the European community was trying to hammer out a common foreign policy, and they viewed this as their first opportunity for the European community to take a lead role on a major international crisis, and to help solidify and forge a unified foreign policy for the community. Unfortunately, for reasons that I've partly alluded to already, that unity fell apart rather quickly. At that point, I think, Baker's attention, the President's attention, was really focused elsewhere and there was no inclination to step in, which would have been hard to do anyway, and say, okay Europeans, you've blown it.

Q: Larry Eagleburger, who had been ambassador and served there, and certainly he was what, Under Secretary of State at the time?

RACKMALES: He was Deputy Secretary.

Q: Was he playing any role?

RACKMALES: Yes, very much so. In fact, one of the ironies that I often mention about this crisis, is that we had probably never had the degree of expertise at the highest levels of our policy-making structure as we did for the Yugoslav crisis. There was Eagleburger who had served there for something like six years. He had been there as a junior officer, had been ambassador, and followed it very closely as Assistant Secretary. And you had Brent Scowcroft as the National Security Adviser who had served there as a military attaché back in the '50s. So you had two experts at the very top which is almost unheard of. It certainly wasn't true in Vietnam or any of the other major foreign policy crises. And I think Eagleburger would be the first to admit that we did not produce, despite that expertise, we were not able to devise a policy that ameliorated the situation.

Q: As this thing was going, you and Warren were sitting there looking at this, did you see a policy? I mean really the role of the United States. I mean we can huff and puff, but did

you see something that made sense that maybe we could have done, or the Europeans could have done?

RACKMALES: Are you talking about my view now, or are you asking me to...

Q: No, at that time, now we're 1995 and its much worse than its much worse than it has ever been.

RACKMALES: When you're looking back, when you're trying to recall what your views were at...I mean, you have to be careful you don't read back into your views at that time conclusions you have subsequently come to. And I did not keep a journal, I don't have access to notes, or reports of my views at that time. As I say, we did support the policy of allowing the Europeans to try to work out a negotiated peaceful solution to this, and we were dismayed at the German position. I was dismayed that we had not been more active in helping the majority of the EC counteract the Germans. In fact, within the State Department, and one of the very, very difficult things that the Yugoslav crisis brought to light...every organization that tried to deal with it almost immediately became embroiled in internal arguments and disputes over what kind of policy to take. And within the State Department there were people on the desk in key positions who were very sympathetic to the German view, saying the Germans are right, we should recognize the Slovenes and the Croats. That was not the formal United States policy, but at this point Baker did not want to embroil himself with Yugoslavia.

Q: We got you to Yugoslavia and you were mentioning that there were a series of crises you had to deal with, you being the embassy and State Department. Could you enumerate the basic crises and then we'll go back and look at each one as it developed. I mean the major ones.

RACKMALES: Let me say first that I arrived in September of 1989 when there was some cautious optimism that with a more dynamic and westward leaning federal Prime Minister Ante Markovic, that there was a chance for Yugoslavia to stay together. Markovic led a group of sort of western oriented reformers who primarily focused on economic reforms, were hoping that in the context of a post-cold war Europe a united Yugoslavia could be first of all be in the vanguard of Eastern Europe economically and politically. Markovic within a few months after my arrival was openly calling for multiparty elections which the United States strongly supported. Markovic's only trip to the U.S. in October 89 was disappointing for him because he didn't get much in the way of concrete indication of U.S. help, which showed that Yugoslavia was not very high on our list of priorities. But he got some expression of goodwill and he had a meeting with the President, and he got photo ops. We in the embassy were supportive of Markovic, despite his faults. We believed that if he failed he was probably the last chance, and things looked mighty dark after that because we didn't see any other Yugoslav leader who could keep the country together.

Now you mentioned the individual crises. The one that was probably at that time, both for the embassy and for Washington number one, was Kosovo, where violent confrontations had occurred between Serbian authorities and the Albanian majority.

Q: We're talking about 90% or 95%?

RACKMALES: Yes, 90% roughly at that time. It was an extremely emotional issue for the Serbs. It was the issue that Slobodan Milosevic had really come to power on. So I think until the actual outbreak of widespread fighting two years later in connection with the Slovene-Croatian declaration of independence, Kosovo was still an area that got a very large proportion of our attention.

Q: You say attention, what did the American embassy do about it, and what general instructions were you operating under?

RACKMALES: First of all one of our main tasks was to accompany congressional delegations. There were several key members of the Congress, and in the first instance Senator Robert Dole who on his visits to Yugoslavia, and Yugoslavia was the subject that he took a very strong interest in, and still does to this day, as you know. Kosovo was one of his main focal points, and he had on one of his visits which had occurred just prior to my arrival, but which still had repercussions long afterwards, he had addressed what turned into a mass rally of Kosovo Albanians, and that led to a riot.

Q: How did that come about? Dole addressed the mass rally?

RACKMALES: Yes, he spoke and of course Albanians...his message was one of support for the Albanians in Kosovo. It was a message that the Serbs didn't like, and that the Albanians of course reacted very positively to. But in the context of the tensions that were down there, it was understandable that the Serbs did not view Dole with the greatest degree of...

Q: This is the conflict between the Albanians and the Serbs and Kosovo goes back at least to 1379. But anyway, did you talk to Dole? He's a presidential candidate now but looking at it at the time why would a senator from Kansas get involved in such fiery issue, in a local issue?

RACKMALES: I can't fully answer that, but one factor as we understood it is that he has a very senior staffer who was very close to him. I do not recall her name, its been years since I've heard it, she's a Croat but also has very close ties to the Albanians and she had influenced him. Also I would say the Serbs do have a way, almost a genius, of turning people off, of treating them, or reacting to them in a way that further reduces even a small amount of sympathy they might have for any arguments the Serbs were putting forward. The Serbians had stripped the Albanian majority of the autonomy that they had been given under Tito. Kosovo had been an autonomous province, had an Albanian leadership, a communist leadership, and in the last analysis they were responsive to what the national

party decided. But in Kosovo itself the Albanians once they had real political power were no more kindly towards the Serbs than the Serbs had been towards them earlier. So in that part of the world you tend to use power to help your own so the Serbs did have some legitimate grievances which they tended to overplay. Still, any fair-minded person would say it was hard being a Serb in Kosovo during the time when the Albanians were riding high.

Anyway, this was a burning and emotional issue for the Serbs. It had the practical effect, and here I would relate it to the other crises, it had the practical effect of cutting off our access to Milosevic because when...well, one of the first things that happened after Warren arrived, Warren Zimmermann, arrived in March '89 as ambassador, and then on June 28th Milosevic orchestrated a major commemoration in Kosovo which was designed to celebrate a number of things. It was done on the anniversary of the...

Q: 1389.

RACKMALES: So this was a big deal and Milosevic had worked very hard and through political pressures, had managed to get the other leaders of the republics in Yugoslavia, to agree to constitutional changes that in effect ended the autonomous status of Kosovo and returned it to simply being a province within...

Q: MIlosevic's position was what at this time?

RACKMALES: He was the head of the communist party, but everybody looked to Milosevic as the ruler of Serbia. He was never Prime Minister which is not a very influential job, but he later became president of Serbia. Anyway, he was able to get the entire federal establishment, and the heads of Slovenia and Croatia, etc., all of them signed off on these constitutional changes and agreed to come to this big celebration. But the western ambassadors boycotted the event which got some news coverage, cast a shadow over this glorious moment, and as a result for a long time after that Milosevic refused to see Warren in particular. He rarely met with other western ambassadors either so it's not as if...I think he held a grudge against the whole group. But he had a particular grudge against Warren because in his view, and there was some indication of this, in his view Warren had organized the whole thing. So he was definitely enemy number one, and Milosevic absolutely refused to have anything to do with him. So that somewhat cut us off to the extent that Milosevic would have in fact shared any of his real thinking with Warren.

Q: When you arrived what was the situation vis-a-vis Milosevic as far as the embassy was concerned?

RACKMALES: No contact.

Q: Sometimes the DCM is not as tainted you might say with policy. Could you go at a secondary level or something like that? I mean below Milosevic?

RACKMALES: You mean if we had something to communicate, or we just wanted to meet with him?

Q: I mean do we have any ties to Milosevic?

RACKMALES: Well, to some of his people, yes. In other words, the political section, or I would sometimes meet with people who were rumored to be close to Milosevic. But Milosevic had very many few real confidants. There were a lot of bureaucrats who worked for him. It was not hard getting the official line. That was easy to get. We could meet with Serbian party officials and get the official line anytime we wanted. We were inundated with the official lines. Getting some kind of genuine personal insights was much more difficult. We tried but we were for a long time not successful.

Parenthetically I was interested to see that Bob Frasure had been able to establish what the press called a good rapport with Milosevic. He was the special envoy who tragically was killed in an accident a few weeks ago. I met with Milosevic one-on-one on two or three occasions and was with other senior U.S. officials who called on him, such as Cyrus Vance, U.S. senators, Reg Bartholomew when he was special envoy. I don't think that any of those meetings could be really characterized as having good rapport with Milosevic. I felt that I could have written the script before the meeting. Nevertheless, it is important with someone who has the power and the influence that Milosevic has, to have that direct contact. And you know, that I am pleased that apparently one part of our current, more active, policy is to frequently see Milosevic and try to build a rapport with him.

Q: But at this critical time...

RACKMALES: It was his decision, we were not boycotting him. In fact Warren was repeatedly looking for opportunities but Milosevic was adamant that he wasn't going to have anything to do with us.

Q: What was our judgment at that time. Who is this guy Milosevic? What motivated him as far as we were looking at him at that time?

RACKMALES: We did not feel that his nationalism was necessarily genuine, but that he was simply using this to increase his own personal power. His background had been as a communist apparatchik, and a very able one. Nobody underestimated his political skills. I think we probably viewed him as far and away the smartest of all the political leaders in that area. But he was also viewed as unburdened by any values that we thought were important, human rights, for example, or his fomenting of distrust among various nationalities. His technique was often to stand back and let others do the dirty work. For example, when Serbia announced the economic boycott of Slovenia (this would be equivalent to Texas declaring an economic boycott of New York) Milosevic never said a word. It was done by subordinate organs in Serbia, the Chamber of Commerce, I think was the one that first announced it. Milosevic would often stay in the background. That

was his style. Anyway, our attitude towards Milosevic was that he was a negative influence, but a formidable one.

Q: About with the Albanians, if we're still looking at Kosovo, did we have people we could talk to in the Albanian...I'm talking about the Albanian minority. How did we treat them?

RACKMALES: Yes, we met regularly with them. Warren would go down regularly. I went down initially a bit less often because Warren was traveling there on a fairly regular basis, as was the political counselor. But I also went from time to time and met with the leadership, especially Ibrahim Rugova who still today is the acknowledged leader of the Kosovo Albanians. We kept up a regular dialogue with them. Our basic message was that we supported their human rights, that we encouraged them to use all legal means to try to advance those rights, that we were sending the same message to the federal government, and to the Serbian government. But at the same time we were strongly discouraging them from acts of violence which we felt in that context could only cause suffering, and not improve their lives.

Q: Did we feel that the Albanians...Albania now being a different type of country after the communists had left, were they too busy with their own problems, or were they fishing in these waters? Or how did we feel about this?

RACKMALES: There is a complex relationship between the Albanian government and leadership, and the Kosovo leadership. Ethnic affinity is one important element of the dimension that a certain mutual mistrust is also there. As I understand it a lot of the leaders in Albania are somewhat nervous and a little apprehensive of the Kosovo Albanians who because they lived in a more sophisticated country are much more widely traveled, have more political experience. The Kosovo Albanians were in effect self governing at a time when the Albanians were suffering under Hoxha. Despite these differences, the government in Tirana tends to call for strong steps against Serbia, and advocates the rights of the Kosovo Albanians. But I think they would be very nervous about an early amalgamation of the two entities.

Q: At this time, we're talking about '89-'90, were we running around looking for human rights violations?

RACKMALES: Oh, sure. First of all we have to because of the annual human rights report. We were always very careful not to take anybody's allegation at face value. We knew that whether it was the Kosovo Albanians, the Krajina Serbs, or anybody else, that there was a tendency to exaggerate. So we would always look for credible objective collaborating evidence. But there was no question that the Serbian policy in Kosovo, and I would say at a slightly later date, Croatian policy in Krajina, stripped people of rights that they had enjoyed up until that point. In other words there was a real setback in terms of ability to organize politically, right of free speech, employment rights, education rights of the minority in their own language, were stripped away for a time. So the human rights

situation was abysmal, no question about it, and that was documented in great detail in the human rights reports.

Q: Did this have any affect in Yugoslavia on embassy's operation.

RACKMALES: I don't want to give the impression that Slobodan Milosevic was the only Serb who questioned our heavy emphasis on the Kosovo. I think probably all but the very small and uninfluential group of Belgrade intellectuals who identified with western European values and who usually got about one percent of the vote in Serbian elections, felt that we were obsessed with the Albanians, and the issue again of a double standard came up. It was an issue that has haunted us through all these crises, and if you saw today's Washington Post, Tony Hall, a congressman from Ohio, has a very interesting piece in which...he's one of the few, Jimmy Carter was another, who draws attention to the fact that we have tended to have a double standard in the human rights area, to focus almost entirely on Serbian transgressions, and to ignore, downplay, or excuse similar things when they're done by others.

Q: You were there from '89 until '93, Kosovo never really blew up.

RACKMALES: That's right. There were a couple of tense moments and a few fatalities. Had those happened a few years earlier it would have been more dangerous. As we went from '90, which may have been the point of maximum danger, as we went into '91 and '92 and '93, some might have predicted that as fighting was taking place, violence was happening elsewhere, that Kosovo would have gotten more dangerous. In fact, it got less dangerous. My last visit to Kosovo, which I think was in April of 1993, there was less police presence, you saw almost no policemen. Whereas the first time I had gone there on every block you had two Serbs with machine guns walking around. And I think that's one of the ironies, one of the paradoxes, of the whole series of crises in that area is that the explosion of violence in Bosnia had the effect, I think, of sobering the Kosovo Albanians. The other factor that I think has dampened tensions is that, while in every formal respect Kosovo is still a colony in terms of the formal power structure, the Serbs have tolerated a parallel Albanian structure, including schools, hospitals. Basically there is a functioning, even though it is illegal, Albanian government there, and the Albanian community goes about most of its business, including a very thriving involvement in smuggling. You see a lot of BMWs driving around, and they're not being driven by Serbs for the most part. So Kosovo which we looked to as the most likely flashpoint in 1989 is now maybe the least likely flashpoint as of today.

Q: Let's turn to sort of the west. I'll let you tackle it however you want.

RACKMALES: Okay. Let me organize it by using as a focal point the visit of Jim Baker, Secretary of State, in June of 1991 because that was the critical period from May-June '91 through probably the fall of '91, the key decisions were taken by everybody that led to the explosion of violence, first in Slovenia-Croatia, and then later in Bosnia. First of all, he came not just as the Secretary of State of the United States. This was a period in mid-

1991, and we as an embassy had been working towards this, and it reflected, I think, the high degree of cooperation that existed among the missions. Everybody was beginning even as late as I would say mid-'90, in some cases towards the end of '90, some major embassies were still pooh-poohing the idea that a breakup was imminent, or that if it happened, that it couldn't be handled in a fairly peaceful way. I think we were the least complacent of the embassies, but our views were pretty closely shared by the major west European embassies. So when Baker scheduled his first trip to Yugoslavia, it was one of the last times that we and the Europeans were on the same wavelength. And the policy was to send the following signals: was first of all to the Slovenes and the Croats who had announced that they were about to declare their independence unilaterally, and damn the consequences of that. The message was, that we would not support unilateral steps to break up Yugoslavia. That they needed to try to come up with a political solution, and preserve some form of Yugoslavia. If that was not viable, then they had to still continue to talk until an agreed dissolution could be achieved. That was the first part of the message, and that was aimed primarily at the Slovenes and the Croats.

The other message was addressed to the army and to the Serbs, was; you must not use force to keep Yugoslavia together. I think in those two messages, there was a contradiction that has bedeviled us all along and the contradiction is the following:

That it was not fully appreciated that except for Slovenia, all of the successor states to Yugoslavia were also multi-ethnic states. Bosnia was in the worst position because there was not even a majority ethnic group. So if you are let's say a Serbian senior military officer what you're hearing from the west is that we don't think that a multi-ethnic state should use force against a minority that wants to break away and form its own state. What would go through his mind is fine, if Croats want to leave Yugoslavia, the Yugoslavia constitution gives them the right as Croats. What it does not do is give them the right to take Serbs with them against their will. The Serbs have the same right not to be part of Croatia as the Croats not to be part of Yugoslavia. The underlying question, when is it justified for the international community to provide arms or other support to a multi-ethnic state facing a minority insurgency, is one of the most vexed of our times. But the foundations of our policy as it emerged vis-a-vis Croatia and Bosnia were shakier than we liked to admit. It helps explain why so many statesmen have been struggling with this. There are other aspects of it obviously but it's one that has never been resolved, and that may only be resolved when finally sadly, tragically, as a result of the war populations are moved so that new boundaries can be drawn and everyone throws up their hands and says okay.

Q: How was Baker received when he came there?

RACKMALES: He was very unhappy with the whole experience. I was on the bus with some senior NSC staffers and their attitude, and I believe that this reflected his as well, is that, first of all, the Yugoslav crisis was horribly complicated. One of them called it worse than the Middle East. Secondly, there were no good guys. Baker was not happy with any of his interlocutors, he thought they were all to a greater or lesser extent, mostly

greater, lying to him, dissembling. He also felt that he had gotten some assurances from the Slovenes that the Slovenes later said was just a misunderstanding on his part. So when the Slovenes a few days later went ahead and announced their independence, he felt personally betrayed. At that point he was probably more angry with the Slovenes than any others. But his basic judgment (which I remember thinking at that time, and still do think was correct), was that, boy, if the Europeans want to take this one on, let them. He saw nothing good to be gained by the United States trying to play the lead role in finding a way out of that maze. And the Europeans at that point were trying to forge a common foreign policy. This was a period of some optimism that a more united Europe could be...

Q: It was sort of at the beginning, and I mean this was going to be their baby. They'd show what a united Europe could do.

RACKMALES: That's exactly right. I don't want to get bogged down in the details of how the European Community went astray. Although I agreed that we should let the Europeans take the lead, I didn't think we should withdraw completely from the fray. I thought we should help the EC if they came to have problems. We should be quietly supportive. But that unfortunately we didn't do, or we didn't do very effectively because there was an important conference in Ochrid within a month or six weeks of Baker's visit. It was kind of the first really acid test for the Europeans, and they had hammered out a political agreement which five of the six leaders had agreed to. The holdout was Tudjman.

Q: Who was the Croatian.

RACKMALES: And I remember trying to get the State Department to weigh in heavily in support of the European position, and bilaterally with the Croats to warn them that they should not walk out. And I got a wishy-washy response saying, well, we think the important thing is to stop Milosevic, and we think Tudjman's concerns may be justified, we don't see any reason to weigh in.
And Tudjman walked out of the meeting, the meeting broke up, and the fighting spread dramatically within the weeks after that.

Q: On the mission, you became Charge at that point?

RACKMALES: I happened to be at the time of that particular conference because, although Warren was still ambassador, he was away at that time. I did not become the permanent Charge until May of 1992.

Let me just wrap this segment up by saying one word about our coordination, or lack thereof with our European friends. I mean the hostility, the backbiting that erupted between the Germans and the other Europeans over the issue of recognition of Slovenia and Croatia was very damaging to the European Community. I felt that one of our greatest risks was of allowing this to do the same between us and the Europeans. We haven't avoided that entirely, particularly when Clinton was forced to unilaterally announce that

we would not observe, or monitor, the arms embargo, when we unilaterally withdrew our ships. I thought that was terribly misguided. activity. Anyway, we seem at the moment to be back in a bit more cooperative relation with the Europeans but throughout this we've been dogged by the fact that, I guess for political reasons, we feel the necessity to criticize the activity of allies who are carrying out United Nations' mandates that we in many cases pressed, as far as I know, nothing that's happening on the part of any of the UN agencies in Bosnia is happening against, or in contradiction to the series of United Nations security council resolutions. All of which we either drafted or played an important hand in shaping. It's unfortunate, I think, that we have sometimes taken the easy way out, and tried to point the finger at allies who are taking a disproportionate share in Bosnia of casualties and expense and risk.

Q: What was Larry Eagleburger? He was number two in the State Department at that time, and had been ambassador and had served there, so probably was our most experienced hand in Yugoslavia, and here he was sitting right underneath Jim Baker. What was your impression, and maybe of the embassy, of Eagleburger's role at this time?

RACKMALES: Eagleburger came to Belgrade in 1990. It was the only time in the four years that I was there he came. His personal conclusion at that time was that Yugoslavia was finished, and he anticipated the embassy on that one. I think all of us knew that there was certainly a good possibility, a probability, that it would be. But all of us were also concerned about the policy consequences of acting as if it was hopeless, and there was nothing we could do. In other words, even if there were only a 10% chance of keeping it together it was so important because the consequences of a disintegration were so serious that we had to still act as if, and to take whatever steps were possible in order to try increase that 10% chance, which was the policy line that we continued basically up through the Baker visit. But I think Eagleburger concluded a year and a half before the visit took place that say what you like, the place is going to fall apart, which was also the conclusion of the National Intelligence Estimate that got leaked to the press, which again had the effect of helping the self-fulfilling prophesy. If you give up on a country, then its prospect of surviving is further reduced. I give credit to Eagleburger, even though he himself was somewhat apologetic when I called on him on one of his last days in office, when he was Secretary of State. He said something like, "I'm sorry we haven't provided you much policy support." Eagleburger has taken a lot of heat for this, but I happen to think he was right in characterizing what was going on in Bosnia as a civil war. The popular view is that it's simply Serbian aggression, and this is a fault line that divides many of the commentators, and the people who are strong advocates of military action to stop Serbian aggression, and people who view the conflict as more of a civil war in which we should not take sides. And that is a fault line that is still very much there. Sometimes people move from one side to the other. George Kenney who was the first to resign from the State Department if you remember back in '93, on the grounds that our policy was immoral because we did not use force, and were condoning aggression, etc. He has now crossed to the other side. There's no organization, no government agency that is not divided within itself between proponents of those two basic points of view. I watched a few months ago on C-span a debate over Bosnia at the Heritage Foundation, a

conservative think tank. All four of the debaters were conservative foreign policy specialists--Jeane Kirkpatrick, Patrick Glenn, and two others. You had the same basic division, this same inability to come to an agreed framework of analysis. The debate has often been highly emotional, and usually there's a lot more heat than light thrown on the issues.

Q: Let's turn to the Slovenia and Croatia. Let's say when you arrived in '89, what was the view of Tudjman?

RACKMALES: Tudjman wasn't really on the scene very much in '89. He had been living in semi-seclusion in a think tank. He had left the communist party and become an anti-communist. It was only in the run-up to the election when he formed a party that made an overt appeal to Croatian nationalism, that made no attempt whatsoever to appeal to Serbian voters. Their platform and their party activities would have alienated and antagonized even the most moderate Serbs. They basically ran against the former communist party which had become even more liberal, had shed its communist ideology and re-named itself, and other small mainly multi-ethnic parties. And of course there was the Serbian nationalist party which was kind of a Serbian counterpart to Tudjman's party which obviously won overwhelmingly down in the Krajina. A lot of the urban Serbs who lived in Zagreb voted more for the ex-communist party or for some of the new parties which tried to model themselves on west European parties.

Q: This election was when?

RACKMALES: The Croatian election would have been April of '90, and the same pattern emerged that we saw even more strongly in Bosnia later that year, and which was very ominous, namely that when you introduced democracy and multi-party systems, you were fragmenting society on ethnic lines. You had a polarization around the parties that appealed to one ethnic group, and that was certainly true of the HDZ, and it was certainly true of the Serbian party that ran in the Krajina. And in Bosnia, where of course Izetbegovic and his people have to support a multi-ethnic Bosnia, but that was not the campaign they ran in 1990. Their party was actually in ferment allied with Karadzic's party. Oddly enough people forget that.

Q: Karadzic being the Serbian, the Bosnia-Serbian leader. They are certainly enemies at this point.

RACKMALES: That's right. All three of the ethnically based parties in the Bosnian elections ran, if not exactly joint campaigns, that agreed among themselves, listen, we won't attack each other, what we will attack are these multi-ethnic parties because Markovic, the federal prime minister, had encouraged the growth, and even announced something called an alliance of reformed forces that he hoped would galvanize western oriented economic reform based on political parties. So he was working in Bosnia with intellectuals and others who shared those values. Well, all of those parties did miserably.

They were attacked by the nationalist parties who did not attack each other. So it's one of the many tragedies and ironies of this whole situation.

Q: And to a certain extent it helps justify the feeling that they asked for it, and let's not get into the middle of this.

RACKMALES: That's right. It raises again this issue that I mentioned of the double standard. When Jimmy Carter went last year in a rather forlorn, and I think misguided effort to try to bring about a more stable peace, if you remember he met with all the parties, and he made one public statement for which he was roundly criticized, namely that he thinks the Serbian position is not widely understood. But he's right. The Serbian position has...and I'm obviously not talking about Serbian atrocities but the political basis for the Serbian argument which was that the Bosnian constitution, which stated at that point that no important decisions could be taken except by consensus among the three national groups. That principle has now been reinstated in the Dayton accords. It's because of Bosnia's unique status where there is no majority group. That was the one thing that set Bosnia off from all the others. All of them except Slovenia were multi-ethnic, but in all of them except Bosnia there was one group that had 60% or more of the population. In Bosnia the Muslims had about 43, the Serbs had about 34 roughly, and the Croats had the rest. The Bosnian constitution had said that no major national decisions can be taken except by a consensus of the three groups. So when the Serbs said, hey, wait a minute, what is more important than a decision to leave one country and declare independence. And it kind of got brushed aside by the international community. But their argument deserves more consideration, I think, than its gotten.

Q: I want to go back to your time, and your experience. Tudjman wins this election in Croatia, how were relations? We have this thing where Milosevic basically has cut us off. How about when Tudjman came in?

RACKMALES: Well, relations were strained with Tudjman too because what immediately happened is that...and he had some very unsavory characters coming in, he brought some people back from the United States with World War II backgrounds...

One of the first things they did was to in effect fire all of the Serbian police down in the Krajina. At the same time there was widespread firings in factories of Serbian managers. A whole series of steps that caused us to focus on Krajina in the human rights report. To Warren's credit he would confront Tudjman with these. Although Tudjman would always see Warren, Tudjman knew very well that his only chance of achieving independence was with a degree of western sympathy. So he would never have stiff-armed the United States the way Milosevic did. Nevertheless, Tudjman put into the Croatian press some extremely nasty criticisms of Warren for his criticisms of Croatian human rights issues. So we were not beloved by either of the two major protagonists because we called the human rights situations as we saw them.

Q: How about in Slovenia? Slovenia has sort of passed over our radar so much that one doesn't think about it anymore. How did we see that situation?

RACKMALES: The Slovenes were always the easiest to talk to. We, of course, knew that they did not have the kinds of internal problems because they were a homogeneous society. We tried to encourage them with very limited success to stay involved. We also supported Baker's message that a unilateral declaration of independence would set off the Croats but the Slovenes basically didn't give a damn about the Croats or anything else. They wanted out, they didn't care particularly what the consequences would be, and they wanted to simply go their own way, and the less they heard about the subject of Yugoslavia the better. So basically they would listen politely, and then shrug.

Q: How about the intra-embassy situation in Belgrade during this time? Did you begin to sense differing views. Particularly I'm thinking of the Germans more than anyone else.

RACKMALES: No, the Germans were arguing basically the same things we were. The problem is that their government was not paying much attention, they were in fact going their own way to the great distress of the German embassy. Its been reported now widely that not only the German embassy in Belgrade, but the German foreign ministry at the most senior professional levels tried desperately to get Genscher and Kohl off of their premature recognition kick.

Q: When this happened what was the analysis from our embassy when Germany made...when was it?

RACKMALES: I talked to Vance about the German push for early recognition. He knew Genscher pretty well, and he said I don't know why he's doing this. I can't talk to him about it; he's totally closed off. Vance was deeply distressed when the Germans and other Europeans announced their plans to recognize Slovenia and Croatia, and then was even more distressed, and Warren and I were the ones who actually broke the news to him, that the United States and the Europeans were going to recognize Bosnia. He literally turned pale, and shook his head and said, there's going to be terrible tragedy as the result of this. He had argued as forcefully as he could against recognition because it undercut his role as a negotiator because recognition was the one thing that...

Q: Recognition of Croatia?

RACKMALES: That's right, Slovenia and Croatia. It was the strongest lever that the west had to help try bring about a peaceful solution.

Q: I was wondering with the German recognition of Croatia, particularly of Croatia...I'd come from Yugoslavia in an early era and had not had to deal with the problems you had, but one is certainly aware of the unholy alliance between Nazi Germany and Croatia during the war that every Serb remembers, that was mother's milk, and no matter what the other problems were, this one must have set off every nerve jangling, didn't it?

RACKMALES: Oh, absolutely. Many Americans would make fun of what seemed to us exaggerated Serbian fears of Germany, and yet I believe the Serbs were not just blowing smoke. Although their fears in an objective sense were exaggerated, popular feeling was genuine. Also, the credibility of the European community was shattered. The European community was getting whiplashed between Germany in the north who had their own policy toward Croatia and Slovenia and were not about to go with the consensus that the British and French were trying to build and the Greeks in the south, who had special interests in Macedonia. The Greeks were able to block any sensible policy not only on the part of the European community, but on the part of the United States which is hampered by the clout of the Greek lobby and the Greek members of Congress.

In 1991 the European community gave to a group of wisemen called the Badinter Commission, now mostly forgotten, the task of setting guidelines for what criteria should be used on which to base decisions to recognize successor states to the former Yugoslavia. I think they did an excellent job. Under their criteria Slovenia easily met the criteria. No big human rights problems, overwhelming consensus on the part of the population. They gave a kind of green light. The next state which came close to meeting the criteria was Macedonia. Macedonia because the two major communities, the Macedonians and the Albanians, were both involved in the parliament. The Albanians took part in political life, and both groups basically supported independence. The Albanians had some grievances but these are being addressed to a greater or lesser extent. So Macedonia would have been the next country. Well Macedonia is still unrecognized because of Greek objections over the name which helps destabilize that area.

Croatia did not meet the recognition criteria because of what the commission felt were serious human rights concerns, and the fact that a major component of the population, the Serbian minority, had justified fears of their equality within the state. The Croatian constitution was the only one that explicitly said, this is a country of the Croatian people, and there are also some other nationalities who live here as well. It's not very reassuring if you're a Serb.

And then Bosnia was at the very bottom of the Commission's list because of the lack of even a true majority consensus. The vote that was held after the EC asked the Bosnians to hold a plebiscite on independence was in some ways a farce because the Serbs boycotted and the and the Croats voted for it, but not because they genuinely supported a multi-ethnic country. They quickly went as far as the Serbs did, and created their own separate mini-state which flew the Croatian flag, and used Croatian currency. But tactically Tudjman knew that in order to get western support he had to appear to support a multi-ethnic Bosnia. So he told his people, you will vote for an independent Bosnia, and then afterwards we'll take care of you. It was kind of a farce, the plebiscite, and again that was at the root of many of the problems we're facing today.

I mentioned that Vance was arguing very strongly against recognition of Bosnia, and I think a number of the European countries had misgivings about it, but the debate did not

focus on the issues that the commission raised. What the debate focused on was: how can we dissuade Serbs from in effect unilaterally seizing Bosnian territory. So the decision was based on the idea that the Serbs would be dissuaded because of fear of international reactions. So the act of recognition was really one of a series of disguised threats of force, or if you will, bluffs.

Q: This sounds like a Washington type of...

RACKMALES: No, I have to say that it was also the view that the embassy by and large was also putting forth. I was not there for all of that debate because I was on home leave for a key segment of that. But my recollection is that we were, and Warren and most of the embassy staff, felt the way that I've just described, namely, that there would be more chance the Bosnian Serbs would refrain from violence if Bosnia were recognized.

Q: I'm thinking really you might say the policy; working people, political section, maybe the economic section, the station chief; was there a division? How did you sense the embassy when these various elements came up?

RACKMALES: We had a full range of policy differences. We had the people who wanted the United States to get involved with at least air power against the Serbs, not many proponents of sending U.S. troops, never have been as far as I could see. But we had people who wanted the Air Force to start bombing. But other Embassy officers were strongly opposed to any U.S. military involvement, thinking that all it would do would be to expand the fighting, cause more death and misery, and still not result in a viable multi-ethnic state. So, we had the full range. One of the achievements that I am particularly proud of is that despite all this, which would come out in our discussions in country team meetings, we continued to function as a team very effectively. We did not, I think, let our policy prejudices or preferences, however you want to characterize it, affect our reporting which I think was outstanding for objectivity, and Washington told us that we were far and away the most objective in reporting on the situation. I don't think anyone whether they belong in camp A, camp B, or somewhere in between, was particularly happy with the way U.S. positions were unfolding. What we were often doing was talking as if we were going to do something that would make camp A happy, and then in fact behaving as if we were really in camp B, so people were always off balance. I remember going back to Washington at a time early in the Clinton administration when the people in camp A, the proponents of bombing the Serbs now, were saying, now it's going to happen because of what Clinton said in the campaign. He's strongly committed to this. Some of the new administration's pronouncements about lift and strike tended to reinforce that. A message that they sent to Milosevic reinforcing one that Bush had sent that sounded very bellicose, almost like the kind of ultimatum you send when you're really about to take action. I remember when I went back to Washington in spring, 1993 and camp A was saying: they're going to be evacuating us, and we're really going to hit the Serbs. I was skeptical and as a result of my consultations in Washington it became clear to me that we were no closer to a decision of that kind than we had been in the final months of the Bush

administration. So I came back and shared my impressions with my colleagues, and there were some very disappointed people on the staff and others who were relieved.

Let me just make one brief point about professionalism if I may because I think it's appropriate. I was one who was unhappy with the American Foreign Service Association. For a period of several months around the time of the resignations, George Kenney, Marshall Harris...

Q: Three or four mid-grade Foreign Service officers dealing with the greater Yugoslav affairs.

RACKMALES: I have nothing against George Kenney, nothing against Marshall Harris. I think the crisis is one on which even professionals can have very different policy views, and I also respect someone who feels that the morality of the situation is so clear cut and one sided that they can't in any way be associated with a government or an organization, or the State Department, that pursues an immoral policy. That is their right, and I respect them for that. What I did not like was the editorial line, and the whole treatment of this issue by the American Foreign Service Association. Tex Harris wrote an editorial in the Foreign Service Journal saying that these resignations represent the highest form of professionalism. That I don't agree with because it implies that it was less professional not to have held the policy preferences that these people had. I know that there are people who felt just as strongly as Marshall Harris, who continued to work on at great psychological costs to themselves, but worked on very professionally. That to my mind is the height of professionalism. I don't mean that as a criticism of Marshall, but the Association's standpoint was implicitly a criticism of the people who did not meet this highest standard of professionalism. There was a kind of... glorification is too strong, but certainly a feeling that the State Department should take a special pride that we have people who leave because their policy is not being followed. So I wanted to just get my own view on the record.

Q: I agree with you on this. In the first place, Pope John Paul II made an announcement, and again being outside I shuddered when I heard this about supporting Croatia because if the Germans were particularly bad over Serbia, the Catholic church was almost as bad during World War II, the equivalent of pogroms, or whatever you want to call them against Serbs. How did that hit?

RACKMALES: Well, I think you characterized it correctly. I think it was very short sighted to turn the crisis into implicitly a religious struggle in which you side with one of the parties who happens to share your religion. There were many contradictions and ironies. The Catholic bishop of Sarajevo was a proponent of ethnic cooperation in Bosnia and was working to promote reconciliation. Unfortunately, he was living under a severe death threat in Sarajevo and couldn't even leave his residence. Who do you think was threatening him? Nationalist Croats. Croats whose views were like those of the Archbishop of Mostar, whom I had called on at the time of the Bosnian elections. I never met a more nationalistic Croat than the Archbishop of Mostar. He bragged about the fact

that 98% of his flock were members of Tudjman's party. He was a fire and brimstone nationalist.

Q: Croatia declares independence. Slovenia declares independence. Macedonia declares independence. We recognized these...not Macedonia. What happened to the embassy because this was the embassy to Yugoslavia.

RACKMALES: In the case of Slovenia and Croatia, once the fighting had started, it became very difficult for us to keep in close touch. Even though Croatia did not become an embassy for a number of months, our oversight of them became a formality, and an administrative fact rather than a political fact because they became a de facto embassy and were getting some of their guidance directly from Washington, although we were always kept in the picture and could comment. And then, of course, with recognition our role ended entirely. We would continue to give a bit of administrative support because it was a very small embassy and needed help. But even that quickly shifted to Vienna and Budapest because of the practical problem, you just couldn't get from here to there.

On the other hand with regard to the other republics, with regard to Macedonia we had not set up any kind of an office there until almost a year after I left. So we were still fully responsible for contacts with Macedonia. In fact I traveled down on average every six to eight weeks, and met with Gligorov. Within three or four months of my becoming Charge, we got an extra person to actually live down there in a hotel in Skopje, and report through us. He would either FAX or come up from time to time and write reports. He was an outstanding officer, and that was very useful.

Q: When did Warren leave, and how did he leave?

RACKMALES: He left in May of 1992. He left within a day or two of the European ambassadors. This was another example of the frequent breakdown in communication and coordination between the Europeans and ourselves. Neither the resident ambassadors of the European Community in Belgrade, nor the United States Government knew, although there had been vague rumors, that in fact at a meeting of European Community foreign ministers, the issue was being discussed of withdrawing EC ambassadors. So the first that anyone learned of this was when Genscher left the meeting which was still going on and announced to the world that the European community was withdrawing ambassadors from Belgrade. I heard that Jim Baker picked up the phone and gave Genscher hell for the lack of consultation. Maybe Genscher's defense was that the EC ambassadors had not been told either. Even though Baker was angry, he realized that there was no way that we could keep an ambassador there once the Europeans had withdrawn theirs.

Q: What precipitated this?

RACKMALES: The fighting in Bosnia had begun, and the situation was rapidly getting worse. There was no sign of any Serbian responsiveness to the concerns of the

international community, and also of course at that point Serbia was not recognized. The Ambassadors were not accredited to any recognized entity. Primarily it was done as a sop to public opinion, which was outraged over the carnage that was occurring, and demanding some response.

Q: How did you deal during this time as Charge, which is really a very long time, with the Serbian government?

RACKMALES: From June to December, 1992 the person who headed the Serbian government, the prime minister, was a Serbian-American businessman, Milan Panic. Panic had been brought in by Milosevic. Despite that, he told Eagleburger that his plan was to get rid of Milosevic. In other words, he was going to turn Serbia around from an authoritarian communist state, to a western oriented democratic friend of the United States. I was quite skeptical about his chances of accomplishing anything. I was also very nervous about having a United States citizen as prime minister. I was worried about freedom of information, what could I say about him in cables that he and his lawyers could access, so I tended to report in a very back channel way at first. Later on I got some reassurances, and I put more into the front channel, although it was always with a limited distribution. I did see Panic regularly. I don't think he ever had any chance, even if he had been politically more savvy than he was, of unseating Milosevic. Milosevic is an extremely astute operator. He would not make such a dumb mistake as to bring someone all the way from the United States who is going to threaten him in any way. It was naive of Panic to think it could be otherwise. Any small chance that he theoretically might have had were undercut by his complete ignorance of the Serbian scene. He didn't know the players or even speak the language very well. He relied on a few advisers, including a former FSO, Jack Scanlan. Jack had been ambassador before Warren, and was working for Panic in a dual capacity. One was a business capacity as Eastern European representative for Panic's chemical corporation. The other was as a foreign policy and political adviser. Unfortunately, even though Panic certainly needed advice, he didn't always listen but when he did the advice he got was not always sound. One of the worst mistakes he made was to try to cozy up to one or two of the senior military people who I guess he and Jack felt might help swing the Army around to his side. And it ended up in a humiliation for Panic because the primary person whom they were targeting was playing a double game. So when Panic, shortly before the Serbian elections in December, nominated his supposed buddy to be Minister of Defense, the guy responds by issuing a press release saying no self-respecting Serb would ever work for Panic. That shows what a mismatch the Milosevic-Panic contest was.

Despite Panic's poor prospects we closely followed the Serbian elections, because if there was any chance of bringing in a more western oriented Serbian government, we couldn't ignore that possibility. And at the same time at that point UNHCR was operating in Bosnia out of Belgrade. The CSCE had monitors set up. We were involved in extremely intense multilateral contacts with UN agencies, with the CSCE, with our European colleagues trying to deal with the humanitarian crises. It was around the turn of the year,

or early the following year, when we started getting the U.S. relief flights dropping supplies in eastern Bosnia.

Coming back to our role in Bosnia vis-a-vis Zagreb's, more and more as we went into 1993 organizations like UNPF, which had been headquartered in Belgrade moved their headquarters...

Q: This is United Nations Protection Force.

RACKMALES: It was headquartered in Belgrade during the period I would say roughly from June-July '92 until sometime in the early spring of '93. I spent a lot of time with the UNPF commander and his chief civilian deputy who were excellent sources. Most of the organizations that were actually in Bosnia, since we didn't have any official Americans except for a few communicators with UNPF units there, we were relying on UNPF, UNHCR, for reporting on Bosnia and we did a lot of that. Gradually, some of these shifted their operations up to Zagreb, so that put more of a burden on Zagreb. So basically there was an overlapping of responsibility until we actually set up the embassy there. Then I heard, this was after I'd left, but I heard that there were still some conflicts between Zagreb and the embassy in Sarajevo as to who was going to do what.

Q: One of the things that precipitated resignations and tremendous emotion in the United States and all of western Europe were atrocities. Being in an area where the government with which you were working is involved, at least was seen to be involved in really horrible atrocities against others. How did you deal with this in these reports?

RACKMALES: By trying to report as fully as we could, as accurately as we could, as credibly as we could, not taking every initial account of an atrocity at face value. There is a long tradition in that part of the world to use claims of massive abuses, atrocities, etc. as a political weapon. It's a difficult subject to discuss calmly and objectively because by its very nature an atrocity seems to call for strong emotional response. That came up with regard to the first of the mortars that fell in the Sarajevo market in '93. In the western media, of course, there was no initial doubt expressed that this was a Serbian atrocity. When the Serbs denied that it was their shell and accused the Bosnian government of shelling their own people, I would say that 99% in the west said this is absolutely outrageous and ridiculous. Here are these poor victims and now you're accusing them of murdering their own people. On the other hand, the UN personnel in Sarajevo who investigated the incident were highly suspicious of the Bosnian government, as David Binder pointed out in an excellent Foreign Policy magazine article, using the cynical (but not always wrong) Italian yardstick of "who benefits from this action." The results are straightforward. The Serbian side doesn't benefit, they get bombed and the international community comes down on them, while the Bosnian government gets more support, including military support. What worries me the most is that these atrocities, whoever is causing them, tend to drive policy. For example, the Bosnian government called for Holbrooke not to come to Sarajevo, to stop the peace process, because of an atrocity. That is comparable to Israelis and the Palestinians not talking to each other because of bus

bombings, which are also atrocities. Often atrocities are carried out in order to disrupt peace process. Both the media and the administration would often apply a double standard perhaps because there were many more Serb atrocities which came earlier in the Bosnian conflict. Our Embassy for example, strongly complained following a Washington Post front page story reporting that Croat forces had come in and massacred several hundred Muslims in a town in central Bosnia. In contrast to the usual reaction to reported Serb misdeeds, the Department spokesman failed to condemn the action.

Q: We're talking about the time you were in Belgrade, did you feel this was not an even handed way of doing it? You're nodding your head. You know the Croatians in the United States has always had a much stronger political lobby. For one thing they're allied in the Catholic church, and both of us know going back to the old days in Yugoslavia they can get things really cranked up in Chicago and Indiana and other places where there is a large Croatian Catholic community. And the Catholic church would side with the Croatians, even some of the nastier things that happened during World War II. Did you feel this was a factor, or was it just that we had thrown our lot with the Croatians and we didn't want to get into a plague on both your houses. How did you feel?

RACKMALES: I don't think the lobby was a primary influence. The lobby was there, and I mentioned for example that someone like Senator Dole I think was influenced by having someone who was a key member of the Croatian lobby on his staff. But I think the main thing was the perception which the media fostered because they were mainly seeing the war from the side of the people sitting in Sarajevo. I think they bonded emotionally with them, understandably. I might too if I were there, although it is interesting that many western military in Sarajevo had an opposite reaction. Early on people became convinced that the Serbs were the sole villains, that this is a white hat-black hat sort of a thing, that they precipitated this in order to form a greater Serbia, that they conquered territory that belongs to others, that they are a ruthless people with no respect for human life. I'm not sure that I fully understand the reasons why the public reaction to the shelling of Sarajevo was so much stronger than the Russian shelling of Grozny, which was ten times more intense, that caused many times more casualties, mainly elderly ethnic Russians who were being killed. It was also a violation of the rules of war.

Q: It has always been discriminatory.

RACKMALES: And what the Croats did to the Serbs finally in Krajina what had been done elsewhere by the Serbs people said, they had it coming to them.

Q: Yes, it was not ethnic cleansing, it was expulsion. You left when, and whither the Balkans at that time, and also with your staff, how did they feel about the situation?

RACKMALES: I left in July of '93, I had been four years and frankly felt at that point somewhat exhausted by the whole thing. I could see that what was driving policy was not the reporting or the recommendations of the embassy. Once a crisis reaches that point of political sensitivity, where the President's image and domestic political considerations are

concerned, that the best thing the embassy could do at that point is simply to continue to report as honestly as they can. And I made clear before I left to everybody in EUR that I had no interest in continuing to work on that crisis. I felt after four years I needed to get away from it. I really was in effect burned out at that point in terms of trying to come up with new suggestions.

My biggest disappointment from an institutional standpoint, is that at that point our policy was in the hands of one of Clinton's worst appointees. Steve Oxman was the Assistant Secretary. I think it became clear that he was so inept, incompetent that he basically became an embarrassment to the administration, and he was forced to leave in '94.

Q: What was his background?

RACKMALES: He was a lawyer. He had served in the State Department for a while under Warren Christopher as some sort of special assistant, or staff assistant. But his main claim to fame, I guess, that he had been either at Yale or Oxford or both with the Clintons, and I think knew Hillary. The first sign that this was not going to be a guy who could address these issues effectively occurred when I came back to DC shortly after he had been named. I was in Washington for a week, and of course put him high up on my list of people to see. I would set an appointment and then he would find some reason to move it. In the meantime I had seen Peter Tarnoff, I had seen people at the Under Secretary level in several agencies, and I'd seen Lee Hamilton and other key people. My final appointment with him was on Friday morning, my last day in DC, at 10:00 or something like that. I sat in his outer office and his secretary said, I'm sure he won't be long, he's got a woman in there interviewing for a job in the bureau. So I waited 15 minutes, and I waited 20 minutes. In the meantime she had called him twice. And the secretary at that point after about 20 minutes was literally in tears, she was crying. She said, Mr. RACKMALES, I don't know what to do. I had another appointment outside the building, so at that point I couldn't wait any longer. I never got to see him.

Q: What was his position?

RACKMALES: Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, replacing Tom Niles, preceding Holbrooke. Holbrooke was brought back from Bonn. Holbrooke, to his credit, and I gather from a New York Times story to his regret because he has the same malaise over the issue at this point that everybody who has tried to tackle it. To Holbrooke's credit he, I think, has done probably the best that anybody could do given the constraints. I think that's something we all have to bear in mind as Foreign Service professionals that in the last analysis it's the President and what the American people will put up with.

Q: Okay, thank you.

RACKMALES: Thank you, Stu, I appreciated the opportunity.

End of interview