

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

HAYWOOD RANKIN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

Born in Washington, DC; raised in North Carolina
University of North Carolina
Clerk to Chief Justice of North Carolina Supreme Court
Entered Foreign Service - 1973

Tangier, Morocco - Vice Consul	1973-1975
State Department - Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Arabic Language Training	1975-1976
Cairo, Egypt - American University in Cairo	1976-1977
Cairo, Egypt - Staff Aide to Ambassador Concurrent duty as vice consul at Port Said Ambassador Hermann Eilts Anwar Sadat Political climate Ambassador Roy Atherton Egyptian military Sadat's Jerusalem trip Egypt's hopes Congressional visits Embassy evenhandedness	1977-1980
Oxford University - (Leave Without Pay)	1980-1982
State Department - INR - North Africa	1982-1984
Damascus, Syria - Political Officer TWA hijacking Hafez al-Assad U.S.-Syrian relations	1984-1986

Alawites	
Ismaili	
Syrian public	
Travel	
Environment	
Iranians	
Lebanon civil war	
Lebanon influence	
Israeli intentions	
Assad's health	
Baghdad, Iraq - Chief Political Officer	1986-1988
Iran-Iraq War	
Iraqi government spending	
Saddam Hussein	
Kurdish rebellion	
Closed society	
Reign of terror	
Public acceptance of Hussein	
Saddam as absolute dictator	
FSNs	
Operating	
Diplomatic corps	
Foreign press	
Travel restrictions	
Ambassador David Newton	
Environment	
Barzani Kurds	
Talabani Kurds	
Jim Hoagland and Kurds	
U.S.-Iraq relations	
Khomeini (Iran)	
Russian aid	
U.S. aid	
Iran-Contra	
Gas attack on Halabcha	
Contacts with Kurds	
Persona non grata	
Ambassador April Glaspie	
Saadun Hammadi's U.S. visit	
State Department - Near East Bureau - Oman Affairs	1988-1989
Muscat, Oman - Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires	1989-1992
Embassy chancery building	
Oman-U.S. military treaty negotiations	

Sultan Qaboos	
Relations with neighbors	
Buraimi	
Arab Baghdad summit	
Iraq's Kuwait invasion	
Schwarzkopf	
Seeb airport	
Omani reaction to Kuwait invasion	
Evacuations issue	
Ambassador Boehm	
Algiers, Algeria - Deputy Chief of Mission	1992-1994
Ambassador Mary Ann Casey	
Algiers airport bombing	
Elections canceled	
Army takeover	
Terrorist attacks	
Evacuation issue	
NEA alienation	
U.S.-Algeria relations	
Islamists (fundamentalist) issue	
Military	
Contacts	
State Department - INR - Director, Near East	1994-1996
Abidjan, Ivory Coast - Counselor	1996-1998
Political situation	
Environment	
President Bédié	
Opposition parties	
Ambassador Lannon Walker	
U.S. influence	
Elections - 2000	
Alassane Ouattara	

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 24th of July 1998. This is an interview with Haywood Rankin. This is being done on behalf of The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Can you tell me when and where you were born and a bit about your family?

RANKIN: I was born July 31, 1946 in Washington, DC, where my parents happened to be immediately after the Second World War. My father was associated briefly with the State

Department and the precursor of the United States Information Service.

Q: OWI or the equivalent thereof?

RANKIN: To tell you the truth I really don't know. I was a bit young at the time. I know that we went a year to Mexico but when I was nearly eight years old we moved to my father's home place area in North Carolina west of Charlotte. I spent the rest of my childhood and my adolescence there on our farm and forest. Then I went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on a Morehead Scholarship both as an undergraduate and in law school.

Q. A Morehead Scholarship is what?

RANKIN: It's a very good scholarship that is offered by the University of North Carolina. One of its graduates in the 1920s was John Motley Morehead who founded Union Carbide and made rather a lot of money and had fond memories of his university. This is its best scholarship. I went on to law school at Chapel Hill also on a Morehead scholarship but decided that I did not want to practice law. I had a year as a clerk to the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, William Haywood Bobbit. I took the Foreign Service exam in 1971 and to my surprise passed the exam. As I recall, I didn't even answer half of the questions. It was one of those exams (Perhaps it still is that way.), that if you guess wrong it is counted as much against you as if you get a correct answer. I decided to be very conservative and it worked. I then went on to succeed in the oral exam, which was really an oral interview, again somewhat to my surprise.

Q: Do you recall anything about the oral interview; any of the questions?

RANKIN: Yes. I don't think the oral session was as stressful as I believe it later became. There was no role playing. It was an interview format in 1971, but there were some tough questions. George Moose (who was later assistant secretary for African Affairs) asked me how I would respond to a congressman who wanted to abolish foreign aid. I responded in favor of foreign aid, but I recall my answer was extremely wishy washy and again I felt that I hadn't succeeded, but I did succeed. That's my history up to entering the Foreign Service.

Q: This is going to be a shortened interview rather than a full career one because you are going off to North Carolina. I'm not sure whether we could continue it again. Could you tell me though the dates of where you served, when to when, your various assignments.

RANKIN: My first assignment was as vice consul at the consulate general in Tangier, Morocco. That was 1973 to 1975. It was one of the most varied consular assignments anyone could have had, even if not a great tour for a political cone officer. Of course we no longer have a consulate, much less a consulate general in Tangier, although it actually was the very first American diplomatic post abroad. We have a museum there now, where the old legation used to be. Tangier remains very special to me, with its incredibly beautiful setting on the Strait and its wonderful mix of Berbers, English, Spaniards, French, artists, aristocrats, and drifters.

After Tangier I went into Arabic training at FSI [Foreign Service Institute], which then was in Rosslyn. I was meant to have gone to Lebanon but the Lebanon civil war was just taking on steam, so I was the first of the Arabists in the Foreign Service, for however long the school had been in Lebanon, who was not able to train in Lebanon. It has always been one of my regrets, talking to the old Arabists who had been trained in Lebanon and had all the bonding and networking and also extremely fond memories of that wonderful country. I came willy-nilly to Rosslyn for nine months. I did not particularly like to study Arabic at FSI. Four of us managed an interim assignment, before FSI set itself up in Tunis (of all places) at the American University in Cairo. I studied Arabic there for a year and came out with a 4/4 at the end.

Q: That's very respectable. You were in Cairo from when to when?

RANKIN: I was in Cairo from 1976 until 1979. After this year from '76 to '77 at the American University in Cairo I got a rather peculiar posting as the staff aide to Ambassador Hermann Eilts and also as the consul in Port Said. It was a two-headed job and very exciting. The old consulate had been reopened but only on a trial basis. Ambassador Eilts, who was a seven-day-a-week, 20-hour-a-day man, felt he needed some assistance but he wasn't sure he needed a full-time aide, and that is how this arrangement came about. I spent a good week per month in Port Said tending to our old office.

Q: I would like to pick up on this and then we'll go to Eilts because this is an important period. This is Camp David and all of that.

RANKIN: Absolutely. It was Sadat's trip to Jerusalem. It was a bit pre-Camp David but that's right, it was the beginning of that period.

Q: In Port Said what were you doing? It used to be people would sort of sit there and watch the ships go by or something, but what were you doing at that time?

RANKIN: That's the reason in fact that it was not made a full time job. The Egyptians wanted our consulates reopened in Port Said and Alexandria, after the long drought when our relations were ruptured after the '67 war. The Egyptians very strongly wanted to see both reopened as a symbol of a new relationship, but by then the State Department had already begun the eternal business of reducing, reducing, reducing. Even then, 1977, there were enormous pressures to close consulates, especially small consulates. There was beginning to be a sense in Washington that we no longer needed small missions all over the globe but only embassies. Our going back to Port Said was an experiment to see if there really was any business to be done there. I wrote reports about the local economy, on the Suez Canal of course, and did some consular work. We had some local staff.

But I have to tell you the post did close. One officer had preceded me, who actually had brought his wife and worked there full-time. He pretty well had already sealed the fate of the little consulate in Port Said by complaining loudly that there wasn't enough to be done to justify a full-time officer. I felt I was fully occupied as a "one-quarter officer" with a

superb little staff. But the era of small consulates - especially one-quarter consulates - was already a thing of the past. I was the last American diplomat assigned to Port Said.

Q: How about the relations while you were on the Port Said thing with the Egyptian authorities because prior to that the Nasser people weren't really forthcoming. There was a pretty heavy hand as far as their security people and all of that. Was this a sort of new era and things changed?

RANKIN: Enormously. There had been a sea change. I arrived in an Egypt in which relations with the U.S. and the west were improving daily. Part of the credit can go to Hermann Eilts whom I revere as one of the greatest ambassadors that I ever met. He was initially a proconsul. I compare the relationship that Hermann Eilts had with Anwar Sadat and the relationship that subsequent ambassadors have had with Hosni Mubarak. That was a period not only of coming off the Nasserist period, reopening to the United States and the west, it was also a time of hopefulness on Israel. Hermann Eilts was able to see Anwar Sadat on a moment's notice and did it several times a week. He had an extraordinarily close relationship with the President of Egypt, I would think extremely unusual in the history of diplomacy. The Eilts are to be compared with the rather arch, brittle and sometimes quite nasty relationship that the embassy today has with the authorities in Egypt, despite our huge aid relationship with Egypt. Aid is now pretty well taken for granted. The peace process, particularly in the last two years with the Likud regime in Israel, is going nowhere. To the Egyptian populace the bloom has gone completely off, whether the idea of rapprochement with Israel or a close political relationship with the United States. Times have changed completely; I was in Egypt at the time of great hopefulness.

Q: How did Eilts operate from your perspective as a special assistant?

RANKIN: I've never seen anything like it to this day. I have never seen a man who could work so hard and had such an incredible command of detail. That of course was before the days of computers. He had three secretaries in the outer office. Not two, but three. They all had to know shorthand and he would come in in the morning after a series of events every evening. I once reckoned that he had an average of four events an evening and that is seven evenings a week. He was like a laser beam. He would go into a reception and would talk to the people he needed to talk to and leave. He would know what information he wanted, get it, and leave for the next event. He would then come into the embassy in the morning early, he was always there early, and he would dictate. He would go from one secretary to the other dictating cables to the Department.

He also had large staff meetings every day and his staff bitterly resented the practice, but he insisted on it. He was again like the laser beam with all the members of his country team, honing in on each one of them. He might be called to the telephone in the middle of a question, but he would come back to exactly where he had left off. He was a gentleman but a man of extraordinary intensity with a photographic memory. He could recall cable numbers that he had sent out four years previously.

In the course of the morning he would go out. Typically, or not unusually, he would see

Sadat himself or any of his ministers and then he would come back. He would do the same thing, the same round with his secretaries dictating messages. He put out an extraordinary amount of cable traffic every single day. We always used to say Hermann Eilts did not need an embassy, he was the embassy. He had a DCM, Freeman Matthews, who really had no function. He was a capable man, but he took to drinking, understandably. Eilts was so hard working and had such a comprehensive knowledge and was so detail oriented there was scarcely anything left for his DCM to do.

I was there very briefly for the advent of Roy Atherton, who came in May 1979 while I departed in September. Atherton was a wonderful man as well, a brilliant man in a different way, with a much more easygoing type of manner. I don't mean to imply that he was less focused, but he was a more typical human being who did have need of a DCM and knew how to use him. He was not the sort of person who would work 20 hours seven days a week. Hermann Eilts was reluctant to leave the embassy, to leave Cairo for trips, or to attend chiefs of mission conferences which he felt were a total waste of time. He was completely focused on that relationship with Sadat and the Egyptian government.

Q: Again we are going through your perspective which I realize that you are the briefcase carrier and all that but often this is very important from the historical point of view. Can you give your perspective on the role of the embassy and how we felt? How the other officers were talking about Sadat and how the embassy felt about him beyond Eilts. And also the role, particularly of Eilts, on the trip to Jerusalem of Sadat, how did this come, what was the reaction?

RANKIN: There was of course the sense that you would get any time Americans deal with an all-powerful type of leader. There was a sense that Sadat was much too much a one-man show. We felt he was trying to become another Nasser, even if a different kind of Nasser. He coveted the powers that Nasser had arrogated to himself, even if Sadat had a different mindset in terms of socialism and in relations to the Communist Bloc. He didn't have the charisma of Nasser but he wanted Nasser's power, and this ambition was something that Eilts and the whole embassy worked full time to try to combat. With what success it is always hard to say. One should not overblow the influence that we Americans ever have on any foreign leaders, even with someone as capable as Eilts in charge.

In those days, and subsequently as well, I believe, we never broke in very well into the military sector and never got into the minds of the Egyptian military. The military was a key power base for Sadat. The eternal problem that we have as Americans in places like the Arab world or Africa or the Far East is supporting a regime that is pro-U.S. and yet is very different from us in its democratic values.

As for the trip to Jerusalem, my recollection is that we knew very little about it in advance. It may be that Eilts had a few hours' warning, but I don't think any great forewarning. Sadat, in contradistinction to Mubarak, was more emotional, more spontaneous kind of a person, capable of a grand gesture, while I think Mubarak would have never dreamt of going to Jerusalem on the spur of the moment.

Q: What was the feeling when you heard this? Did you feel that the Israelis would respond? I mean this was the Begin government which was as orthodox as you come I suppose. I mean a difficult government to deal with.

RANKIN: I was astonished that Sadat would go, and there was some pessimism in the embassy that his act would be properly reciprocated, particularly with Menachem Begin in power in Israel. The whole difficult history of the Camp David process was then set in motion. I think the Egyptians, and this worried us all, the Egyptian people tended as a people to be more like Sadat than like Mubarak in the sense of [being] emotional and given to swings of optimism. This was a hopeful period and they had the illusion of immediate results. The process that the Jerusalem trips actually set in motion was one of niggardliness, of arguing and arguing over every little thing over a period of years, and this tedious haggling taught the Egyptians hard lessons about dealing with Israel and the mindset that we have seen in subsequent years. It's a mindset that says, never, ever expect anything of the Israelis and if you do get something you know you are going to have to pay an extremely heavy price. I don't think we will ever see again that euphoria that Sadat set in place with that trip.

Q: You were sort of new to the scene, and so I'm talking about when you were taking Arabic and also working in Cairo, one of the charges that has often been laid is that the Arabists, the people who have studied Arabic in our Foreign Service, tend to have a bias against Israel. How do you feel about that?

RANKIN: I always was perplexed by this attitude. I certainly know that among the great professionals whom I met, like Ambassador Eilts, their desire was to serve the United States of America and its interests. They had a vision of how you could bring about a lasting peace in the Middle East - which wasn't just Pollyanna - which would have involved concessions by both sides.

I remember when I first arrived as Eilts' staff aide, there were many, many, congressional delegations coming through Egypt to see how we were spending all that aid money. Of course, our much larger gifts to Israel involved no oversight. Some of the congressmen, staff members, and wives whom I met at a reception were so ill informed and so antagonistic to Arabs in general, in a way that I found crude and prejudiced that I tried to set them a little bit straight. The next morning, I was called first thing into Ambassador Eilts' chamber and he dressed me down in a quiet and nice way. He said, "Last night I was spoken to by Mrs. Congressman So and So from New York, and she said that you had condemned Israel" and so forth. And I said "Sir, that's not the way I recall the conversation at all." I tried to defend myself, telling Eilts that I had simply corrected some gross factual errors. He said, "Haywood, don't do that again. We are not in the business of trying to set facts straight to congressional delegations. It is essential that you always convey sympathy and evenhandedness." Then he told me how he met similar situations always with an emphasis on Israel's security and all the ways that he had striven over the years to enhance Israeli security through building a peace process, which is one of the most complex and difficult things to accomplish. It is a long answer to your question.

Q: Oh no, but it is an excellent answer because it shows the sensitivity particularly of a place like New York where there is a large Jewish population and they hear one side. Anybody in the political arena isn't going to make any points by saying there is an Arab side to this problem too.

RANKIN: Ambassador Eilts tried to convey to me that we must never hint at taking the Arab side or Israeli side. Our job was the incredibly difficult art of diplomacy in the midst of very, very high emotions, both in the Middle East and back in the United States. Our job was to help people build bridges in an incredibly arch and fraught situation. I learned many lessons from Hermann Eilts. In all the years I was following Arab affairs, the allegation of pro-Arabness continued to dog me but I always remembered the lessons that he had taught me. The odd thing is that, personally, I have always had to fight a certain revulsion to Islam, particularly to what I perceive as its narrow-mindedness. My greater sympathies were always with the Israelis, because I found them more energetic, hard-working, and, to speak frankly, "like us."

Q: In '79, you left Cairo and went where?

RANKIN: For three years I took off to go to Oxford University where I studied geology. That was three years of leave without pay. I was not pursuing Middle Eastern, or even political affairs for that matter. I married and returned to active service in 1982. I served for two years with the Bureau of Intelligence and Research as the analyst for North Africa. Earlier, there had been two analysts, one for Libya and one for the Maghreb countries, but there was a reduction in force, and I took on the two positions as the North Africa analyst.

Q: What took you to Oxford? This is rather unusual to move out and to be able to get the State Department to agree to it, too.

RANKIN: I agree with you. I doubt in today's world that the State Department would agree to such a thing. I actually went with a year's leave of absence but I asked for an extension for a second year and then an extension for a third year to complete the course. I wanted to do something different, a mid-life crisis perhaps you would say. I wanted to get to know England and I wanted to get to know Oxford. I wanted to see if I could make it in geology. I actually earned a high second in my final exams, and it was one of the most extraordinary periods of my life. However, I decided at the end of it that it was the study of geology that I loved rather than the practice of it. Becoming a professor of geology would have required many more years of immersion. By then, I was in my mid 30s and I missed the human dimension. It was time to go back to diplomacy. Fortunately, the door was still open.

Q: Because we're moving, I thought we might skip over the INR period does that make sense to you?

RANKIN: Fine, yes, except to note that I deeply valued those two years in INR. It was in INR that I got a complete overview of the Arab world (Iran and South Asia, too) and it was in INR that I really learned how to write. That team of writers in the Near East/South Asia office was the most brilliant I ever worked with.

Q: Normally we'd go into this but then you left INR when?

RANKIN: In 1984 I was assigned as the second political officer in Damascus, until 1986. The ambassador was Bill Eagleton who had just come over from Baghdad where he had been principal officer (as we didn't have a full-fledged embassy in Baghdad at that time). The deputy chief of mission in Damascus was April Glaspie, whom I had known briefly in Cairo and is a dear friend of mine. She was deputy chief of mission for a year. Subsequently, it was David Ransom. The chief of the political section was David Welch who is now the principal deputy assistant secretary in NEA. It was a remarkable two years. The TWA hijacking took place, and it was a difficult time.

Q: Could you explain what the TWA hijacking was?

RANKIN: The '84 to '86 period in Syria was relatively calm in Syrian terms. Hafez al-Assad was there, he's still there, perhaps he will always be there. Events in Lebanon were incredibly fraught in that period and I would say the apogee of terrorism was the hijacking of the TWA aircraft in Beirut in 1985. When it was finally resolved, the passengers were brought to Damascus. We had a small embassy in Beirut, even after two horrible bombings of that embassy. As second political officer in Damascus, I always had my eye on Lebanon, but David Welch did most of the Lebanon-related work and I was more directed toward internal Syrian affairs.

This was the period just after Hafez al-Assad had had health problems and Rifaat al Assad, his brother, had made a push to take over and had failed. The history of Syria since 1970 is one of Hafez al-Assad being in power and there haven't been many real threats to his power. I came into the embassy just after one of the few had occurred so it was a period of his reconsolidating power in his hands. It was a pretty frosty period in U.S.-Syrian relations, as it was a frosty time in Israeli-Syrian relations. It was also the time when the Iran-Iraq War was going on and it was a time of frosty relations between Syria and Iraq.

Q: What was our feeling about how he kept his power? He came from basically a small tribal group didn't he?

RANKIN: Yes and this was one of the main focuses of my work as the political officer for internal Syria. The country bumpkins from the mountains, the Alawi Mountains of the northwest, had come to power, and you're right, they are a minority. But they were a minority who even going back into the period of the French mandate had a presence in the armed forces far greater than their proportion of the population would have suggested. This was a way forward for the poor, illiterate mountaineers.

Q: This was true even in our armed forces for a long time. Particularly in the old days with the poor southerners that's where they went.

RANKIN: That's a very good analogy. You could think of the Alawi Mountains as being the Appalachia of Syria. These "Appalachians" had seen the army as the natural way for

them to get out of their mountains and to find work and a career. They are Ismaili. They are a type of Muslim which is different from the mainline Sunni Islam that had always dominated the country going back to the Turkish era. The relationship between the Sunnis, particularly of Hama, and the Alawis had been masters toward servants and peasants. The Alawis had their own religion, effectively, and a strong sense of their own ethnicity. I think that has been the main secret to Assad's holding power. Even though there have been tensions and competition within the Alawi community, they have known that the minute they lost power, there would be a blood bath in which they would be the losers. Despite all of the jostling within the Alawi community for power and the occasional rumors one would hear of coup plots against Hafez al-Assad, at the end of the day there was a strong sense of ethnic unity and self-preservation. They were very secretive. It was very difficult for me to get to the root of this. The Alawis were very strong in the military, very strong in the intelligence services and very hard to get at.

Q: Could you get out and around much?

RANKIN: I got out and around all over Syria. I was arrested a couple of times for being where I shouldn't have been - once for being too close to the Israeli border, once too close to the Jordanian border. But being detained didn't bother me much. Very often one was stopped at various places. We were supposed to apply to the Foreign Ministry for travel and Ambassador Eagleton and the DCM always did when they traveled. I always made a point of not doing it. We somehow got by with it. I traveled a lot of places where I shouldn't have traveled, some places that were dangerous. But I found Syria and the Syrians, Sunnis and Christians alike (if not the Alawis), to be very open. They were willing to talk to you, particularly one-on-one. They were remarkably hospitable, and Syria has got to be one of the loveliest countries to travel around in. It has so many layers of history and it is a diverse country geographically and topographically. Those were two of my family's happiest years in the Foreign Service.

Q: What was the feeling in the embassy of what Syria wanted in Lebanon?

RANKIN: It was already pretty clear to us that Hafez al-Assad wanted absolute control in Lebanon just as he had in Syria itself. I must say looking back in retrospect, he certainly succeeded. It was he who had brought in the Iranians. They transited Damascus on their way to Baalbek. It was through Hafez al-Assad's role as intermediary that this Iranian support for the Shia in Lebanon developed. I remember writing a cable predicting that the Iranians and Lebanese Shia would be Assad's undermining.

I was wrong. Assad parlayed his relations with the ever-warring factions in Lebanon incredibly cleverly to a point that today the civil war in Lebanon is over, but it's over on Hafez al-Assad's terms. He is able to continue to manipulate the still feuding chieftains in Lebanon, to manipulate the legislature, to manipulate the president and prime minister in Lebanon. I really thought that Lebanon, particularly the Shia, would in time prove too big a tiger for Hafez al-Assad to be able to control.

The thing that so struck anyone in Damascus in those days, and I suspect that it is still true

but somewhat less, was the extent to which Lebanon (small as it is, poor as it is, desperately undermined by civil war as it was, and still undermined by feuding as it is today) dominated Syria in an intellectual and cultural sense, and even in an economic sense. Most of what we imported into stodgily socialist, centrist, inefficient Syria came from Lebanon. If you wanted a radio, you had to go across the border and smuggle it in from Lebanon.

Here you had this cultural, economic, intellectual, and materialist domination of Syria by Lebanon but a domination of Lebanon by Syria in a military-political sense. I thought at some point that this imbalance could not continue to exist. Hafez al-Assad could not continue to dominate Lebanon. I believed that at some point the incredibly delicate game that he was playing would collapse, particularly with the Israelis also there desperate to undermine Hafez al-Assad.

When I arrived in 1984 it was on the heels of his deterioration of health in 1982 and '83. We thought his days were numbered. As we had seen with the Shah of Iran, when you are an absolute ruler and your health begins to give way, then you can no longer keep all the balls juggling in the air at the same time. You begin to lose control, particularly with a game as complex as the one that Assad and the Israelis were playing in Lebanon. Here we are today in 1998, you're talking about 14 years later, the man is 14 years older. He still has all the diabetic problems that he had then, and he is still the workaholic that he was then. He is not a well man and yet he has succeeded brilliantly in this game. If I understood the blood disease he had, it should have sapped his energy. And it is energy that an autocrat needs more than anything. I was wrong and he is still there and he is still going strong. Extraordinary.

Q: You left Damascus in 1986, what then?

RANKIN: Direct assignment to Baghdad.

Q: I almost take it that when you came back they said, okay, you had your fun at Oxford now get back to the real world.

RANKIN: I really liked those assignments to tell you the truth. Looking back in retrospect, that would have been the moment in my career to leave NEA and to seek a different bureau. The fact that I am now being separated from the Foreign Service without reaching ambassador level is at least in part a function of having chosen extremely difficult and hardship assignments without wider geographical experience. The Department never rewards officers for hardship. I loved being a political officer in the fertile crescent - but you cannot remain a political officer or remain in the fertile crescent for long. Not in our service.

Q: You were in Iraq from '86 to when?

RANKIN: It was meant to be a three-year tour because I went as chief of political section. However, I was thrown out of Iraq in November 1988, and so it was only a two and something year assignment.

Q: Could you describe the situation when you arrived in Iraq in 1986?

RANKIN: It was the middle of the Iran-Iraq War. Iraq had managed to stave off the Iranians. You recall the history of that incredibly bloody war. Saddam had invaded Iran. Iraq had plunged fairly deep into Khuzestan, the Iranians had turned the Iraqis back and then crushed the Iraqis but had not themselves been able to cross the Shatt al-Arab and press deeply into Iraq. From early on, I suppose '81 until I arrived in '86, there was a grinding World War I-like stalemate. The thinking at that time was that although Iraq had successfully held back the Iranians, Iraq could still very well be defeated by Iran. By the time I had left in November 1988, it was the Iraqis that had defeated the Iranians, Khomeini had thrown in the towel and given up the war, but when I arrived in the summer of 1986, the perception was quite different. One forgets these things but the perception was that Iraq could be overwhelmed by Iran.

Iraq had run through its resources horribly. This is a country which had had something like 35 billion dollars in reserves and was spending it on a vast scale in 1980: extraordinary palaces to Saddam Hussein, great public buildings, great highways, huge infrastructure expenditures, diversion of the rivers in the south, draining of the swamps, and that sort of thing. By the time that I had arrived, they were at least 35 billion in the red. They had managed to go through at least 70 billion dollars. This is a country which when I arrived had a population of only 14 million people you understand. Kurdistan was never really controlled. There were still problems down in the marshes. People rising in revolt and never really trustworthy down there. There was always the question, will the Shia (who represented a majority of the Iraqi population) remain loyal? These were the sorts of questions that we constantly had to ask ourselves.

I must say it was quite something going from Damascus to Baghdad on direct transfer. I figured that if I could survive the autocratic system in Syria that I wouldn't have any problems in Iraq. Which is true. I survived the autocratic system in Iraq, but there was and I think there is no comparison between the two systems. They are both autocratic but there the similarity stops.

The society in Syria was relatively open; its people were relatively free. They certainly were very open in their private conversations. As a political officer, it was a joy to be in Syria. You could talk to the Christians and Sunnis for hours one-on-one. It was amazing how openly critical of Hafez al-Assad they were. And, yes, the Mukhabarat, the Alawi intelligence services, were everywhere, but you could usually recognize them. They tried to go around in casual clothes but they were always a little too casual. It was something in the way they swaggered you just knew instantly who they were. Syria was not a country in which everybody was spying on everybody. It was not a country of terror. The elite was relatively sophisticated. There was the heavy hand of autocracy and of the centrist socialism. That was sad because one knew that Syria had a lot more dynamism than was allowed to be expressed, but basically it was an open society.

Iraq was a closed society. It was a society of cops and terror and fear, and I was ill-prepared

for it when I arrived. I was wrong in my theory that being in Syria would prepare me for Iraq. In the first instance, it is because they are very fundamentally different countries historically. Iraq is an Asiatic country; Syria is a Mediterranean country. Iraq is a closed country with an eternal history of bloodletting. It is a plains country facing the mountains to the north and to the east. Iraqis are suspicious and inward-looking. Syrians are Mediterranean, a trading people, used to traveling and to travelers. They are much more lighthearted. Just a completely different psychology.

But leave all the cultural things aside, the system is totally different. Saddam Hussein had managed to create a reign of terror in a way that I think Hafez al-Assad could never even imagine. To this day it is amazing to me, and mysterious to me, that anyone can achieve an unrelenting reign of terror. I think it has not been achieved all that often, thank goodness: Hitler in Germany, North Korea comes to mind, perhaps China under Mao. But I think the only place in the Arab world where that has ever succeeded in happening (maybe Libya to a certain extent, but Libya is such a different country) is Iraq.

Some years later when Saddam had invaded Kuwait, and then we launched our quick and successful counterattack and then the war effort was stopped, there was all this talk about letting the Iraqis overthrow Saddam Hussein. At that time I was in Muscat as deputy chief of mission. I was very perplexed because this was an assessment of an Iraq I had not known: the idea that the Iraqis would overthrow Saddam Hussein, even under the duress of having been badly beaten in Kuwait, was completely strange to me! I had been there in '86 to '88 at a time of extraordinary duress in which the Iranians were launching Scud missiles into Baghdad virtually every week. There was an enormous sense of fear of defeat of Iraq. I am here to tell you that there was no thought of the Iraqis rising up to get rid of Saddam Hussein. Ever.

I concluded that if you want to be an absolute dictator, you must do it absolutely, leave no stone unturned, and make it a total full-time job. That is what Saddam Hussein has done. He trusted no one. Ruthless, ruthless in every cell in his body. A killer and somebody who I think would expect anybody that he met to be of the same type. I think it is hard for us as Americans, with the soft life that we lead, to imagine this type of person. Mafia perhaps, a godfather type, that's who he is. He used the techniques that Hafez al-Assad and Qadhafi and others have mastered, of multiple intelligence services, vertical systems that don't talk to each other and that only report directly up line. But he perfected it with a system of neighborhood spying networks and so on.

Saddam is also similar to Hafez al-Assad in coming from a minority. The minority mentality says that if we don't have full control, then not only I will be killed but there will be a blood bath for my entire minority. There are some differences obviously in the minority, but it's a minority mentality which deepens the determination and the will to maintain this type of extraordinarily repressive society.

Q: How did you operate as a political officer?

RANKIN: Good question. It was not easy. I did make some contacts and I had some Iraqi

friends but I always felt guilty about it because I knew that anybody I talked to would be reported to one of the many secret services. At a moment's notice, people I talked to could disappear and be killed and their family members killed. It was a very heavy responsibility for me.

We had working on our staff a senior political FSN who was a pretty clearly a paid employee of the Iraqi secret services. I had many FSNs working for me over the years, but no one who came so close to admitting he worked for the other side. He actually provided some incredibly good information. Obviously, it was information that this FSN was fed by the secret services, but it was nevertheless useful. There were some other sources like that that I tapped into. Obviously, we had to take what they told us sometimes with a grain of salt and sometimes not, and making this judgment was not easy.

There was of course the diplomatic community and each diplomat had maybe one or two good sources. It was, I have to say, the most satisfying diplomatic community I ever worked in. For some reason everybody who had embassies in Baghdad, and there were a lot who did (even the Australians and Brazilians had embassies there in Baghdad), tended to send some of their best people. So there were a lot of very bright diplomats in Baghdad, and surprisingly a lot of Arabic speakers. I say this in comparison to other places where I have served where the diplomatic corps was not much to talk about. Circumstances pushed the diplomats very close together because there was real fear. The general fear in the air plus the wave of Scud missiles raining on Baghdad. It was very difficult to get out of the city and travel, so diplomats were thrown together. It was a very intelligent, very energetic and very able diplomatic community.

I knew many good journalists as well. Lots of journalists passed through Iraq. It is amazing how many. The best journalists in the world passed through Baghdad because the Iran-Iraq War was still going on. They got a lot of information and they were always interested in talking to me. I was the point man for the journalists that came through and I must have seen a journalist a day. I am talking about the best there was in the world from Le Monde, to the Times, to the New York Times, whoever, wherever, they came through, and saw me. Very often they were traveling under great danger to places like Kurdistan that I couldn't even get to. Or they had just been in Iran and seen things from the Iranian standpoint.

Finally, I did get out of Baghdad. It was not easy. One had to apply two weeks in advance. I almost always got the authorization. You had to say where you were going. I usually took my family and my small daughters with me. First, because I loved them and wanted them always to be with me. Second, because it tended to help break the ice and make people less suspicious. The Iraqis after all were Arabs and, being Arabs, they were very family-oriented, so it made things look a lot less suspicious. We really did get around the country. Everywhere except the remoter regions of Kurdistan we visited. I was always talking to people and getting a sense of how they were bearing up. We got to most of the great ancient sites, both Sumerian and Akkadian. We were even able to visit Babylon before it was recreated in the image of Saddam Hussein. When I ask my wife today what was our favorite assignment, you'd be surprised to learn that she would probably say Iraq, although it was incredibly onerous.

We were lucky. Our principal officer, who was elevated to ambassador, was David Newton. He was a very gentle man, a very learned man, a very able diplomat. He manfully resisted the Department's inevitable urge to evacuate families and reduce the size of the embassy in the face of the Iranian Scuds. The frame of mind of the State Department today is that we take no risks ever about anything. The dominant questions today are, "What if we are sued? What if the Washington Post asks how could we have had family members?" There is no way in today's Foreign Service we could possibly have had families in Baghdad because during my two years there, we probably had 150 Scuds hit Baghdad. There was never a single foreigner killed and we always knew that the moment any diplomat was killed, we would face evacuation, but it never happened.

It was unpleasant to live in that kind of an environment. And you may well ask how could you have possibly have had your family with you under these conditions? That's the old Foreign Service. In the old Foreign Service you went to dangerous places. You went to difficult places and you had your family with you because you were a family and your family faced these dangers with you. That's the way we did things and if I had to do it again, I would do it again that way.

Q: What was the sounding you were getting from the diplomats, from your own sources about the Kurds? Did you see the Kurds as being a force to be reckoned with up in northern Iraq or did you see this as something that was under control?

RANKIN: During the period I was in Iraq, the Kurdish rebellion had two focuses. One was in the far north and one was in the far northeast, one led by the Barzanis and the other by Jalal Talabani. The rebellion was ongoing, but it was very much relegated to pockets. The regime had full control of the principal Kurdish cities Sulaymanian, Arbil, and Dohuk. Some of the outlying Kurdish cities were also under government control.

I remember making a trip with Ambassador Newton toward the end of his time, toward the end of the Iran-Iraq War. We went deep into Barzani terrain to a town that was theoretically under government control, but the escort we had was truly a military escort. Every time we stopped for a pit stop, we had 25 soldiers jump out and form a ring with their guns pointed around us while we did the necessary. This illustrates the kind of government control Iraq had in the far, far north, in the countryside.

You have to understand that the Kurdish rebellion had been waxing and waning for many, many years. It was largely under control but by no means did the government have control of the areas along the Turkish border and the Iranian border and leading up to that tri-junction. One would never have imagined just getting in a car and traveling along there, particularly at night. Certainly the Kurdish cities were under Iraqi control and I was able to visit them and in fact that was my later undoing. When I was PNGed, made persona non grata, in November 1988 it was ostensibly because I had made a trip to the Kurdish cities.

Q: Was our analysis, yours and talking to people, that the idea of a Kurdish state just didn't seem to be in the cards?

RANKIN: Yes. I don't think that there have been very many people in the State Department for a great many years who, on knowing the Kurds, and I think I can even speak for Ambassador Eagleton, who probably knew Kurds better than anybody, who felt that it was realistic to talk about a Kurdish state. That's even leaving aside the extraordinarily fierce opposition to such an idea on the part of the states involved, particularly Turkey.

That is because the Kurds themselves are so incredibly badly split. If you were to hand them their independence tomorrow, they would be unable to sustain it. This virtually happened, as you know, after the Gulf war when we took over Iraqi Kurdistan and essentially said to the Iraqi Kurds, "Here you are. Please set up the state." Of course, we didn't say those words and we would never admit to such a thing but that's effectively what happened. They were totally unable to bring it off. That's just with Iraqi Kurdistan. Imagine trying to unite all of Kurdistan. These are mountain people. They have preserved their own language but they have never had any kind of unity. The individual Kurdish leaders have all been incapable of compromise. That has been the story for years, and years, and years.

Q: That's true of the Caucasian states today.

RANKIN: Very similar. Absolutely.

Q: These little states that came out of the Soviet Union are not really getting it together. It depends what valley you are from.

RANKIN: It depends what valley you are from. The sense of national Kurdishness is just not there. Your individual Kurd will have his own dialect and his own chieftain, and that's about the extent of his sense of allegiance. People like Jim Hoagland romanticize about the Kurds. He must write about the Kurds at least once a month.

Q: The newspaper columnist?

RANKIN: Yes, with the Washington Post. He must have had a lovely interview at one time with the old Barzani before he died and has always dreamed of a Kurdistan without, I think, much realistic understanding of Kurdish disunity.

Q: While you were in Iraq the war was going on and here were two states which we didn't like. The one we didn't like the most was obviously Iran because it had not done us well with taking hostages from our embassy and all. There was supposedly a certain amount of cooperation with Iraq. Sharing limited intelligence with satellite pictures, I don't know. Did you have any feeling that we were slightly tilting towards Iraq or were we just kind of hoping these two people would bloody themselves and continue to do it? How did we feel?

RANKIN: We were tilting toward Iraq, but without any enthusiasm. Iran seemed to be winning the war. Iran had committed an extraordinary outrage against us by taking our diplomats as hostages. Khomeini was still in power. His whole vocabulary was incredibly anti-American. We in the United States had a deep loathing of the prospect of this clerical

regime domination the region, particularly one both as repressive and as anti-American as Khomeini's. An Iraqi defeat seemed all too possible.

There you have it. There you have one of the most terrible foreign dilemmas that we have ever faced. I saw this every day as political officer in Iraq. No one in our embassy had any illusions about Saddam Hussein. It was obvious that he was a horrible dictator and we hated everything about him. But we wanted Iraq to stop an advance which would not stop with Iraq but would keep right on going right through the Gulf once it got going. The only way to stop the Iranians was through Saddam Hussein. Now there was a classic diplomatic dilemma. In the future, if I have the opportunity to be a lecturer on the art of diplomacy, I will cite that as your classic damned if you do and damned if you don't.

There we were. We tried to be realistic. We saw that Iraq must not be defeated, must not be overrun by Khomeini. That much was clear and yet we were obviously not going to be providing Saddam Hussein any of our armaments and materiel or military assistance. The French were there, selling the Mirage and other advanced military equipment. The Soviets at the time were very much there. Iraq was a huge, huge market for Russian armaments. Our arms were not needed. Even though Iraq was going deeper and deeper and deeper into debt, the Russians were on the hook to continue to provide stuff. The Russians for their part were no more interested in seeing a resurgent Khomeini than were we or the French or anybody else. So, the Soviet Union and the United States were to some extent on the same side in this one. We were not able to benefit commercially from sales of arms, but we certainly saw it as a good thing that somebody was arming Iraq, not Saddam Hussein, but Iraq, against Iran.

You ask about military intelligence. The subsequent condemnations of the Reagan and then Bush policies were founded on both military intelligence and on a substantial agricultural sales program. The answer to both of those is yes, we had very substantial agricultural sales and we had something of a military intelligence link with Iraq. I am not an intelligence officer and I didn't know that much about it but it was there as far as I know.

I never thought intelligence-sharing helped Iraq that much. Looking at it from a political standpoint rather than a military standpoint, we hoped it would give us a little leverage with Saddam Hussein. How much leverage and to what end could we use that leverage? It was the same question with Hafez al-Assad. How do you influence a dictator? In Saddam's case, a horrible dictator. How do you influence him to be somewhat less of a horrible dictator? The theory was if you had a little bit of an intelligence relationship and if you had a substantial food relationship, then you had a little bit of leverage with this horrible man perhaps to make him a little less horrible.

You can say that's totally naive and ridiculous and subsequent events have proved that this was totally naive and ridiculous but how else precisely do you operate, if I may ask, in such a situation? How else can a diplomat operate? Do you not try to have a little bit of leverage even with the most horrible people in the world? Especially if you have to deal with them. And especially if you not only have to deal with them but if you actually need them in your own interests? Our own American interests as we perceived them at the time were not to

have a victorious Khomeini. I submit that that was indeed our interest and it made sense to give Iraq a little help.

Q: The timing I'm not sure but did the Iran-contra business come up when you were there?

RANKIN: Yes.

Q: Could you talk about that? Could you explain a little bit what it was as far as what your particular area of the world was and also the repercussions.

RANKIN: This was all learned by me, and I suspect by my entire embassy, after the fact. It was in the latter days, the second term of the Reagan administration. One learned that the Israelis, despite their fervent condemnation of Khomeini, still maintained certain relations with Iran, a holdover from the days of the Shah. There were Israelis who were close advisors of the NSC and President Reagan.

As I looked at it myself it seemed a bit crude. I am certainly not an Iranian scholar or expert but it seemed a very crude way to have tried to develop a relationship with the Iranians. In Baghdad, we were of course analyzing it from the Iraqi standpoint. I can't say the Iraqis were surprised by it. Saddam Hussein, as I said, has to be one of the most suspicious people in the world, and I would think that he would expect even his best friends in the world to be hobnobbing with the devil. I think that is the way Saddam Hussein is.

If anything, therefore, the Iraqi reaction to these revelations was much milder than I expected. I think they kind of enjoyed it in a way because it actually made it easier for them to develop a relationship with the U.S. that might be more useful to them. I think that's how they viewed it. That's the sense I got from the high level Iraqis that we dealt with. I am talking about the Nizar Hamdous and Riad al-Qaysis and Tariq Azizes that we dealt with. Those very sophisticated international types that Saddam Hussein used and continues to this day to use as his face to the world, as his link to the outer world. Saddam himself is someone who understands the external world very poorly, but he has been smart enough to take some of these very, very able western-educated types and to use them. They were the types, of course, that we tended to see the most of. We as diplomats, our ambassador, we ourselves. My sense from them was that they saw Iran-Contra as an opportunity to eke more out of us.

Q: How did you get kicked out?

RANKIN: Things began to change quickly in the summer of 1988. The Iraqis suddenly had defeated the Iranians on the battlefield and were positioning themselves to recross the Shatt al-Arab. Khomeini sent up the white flag in July of 1988, and the war suddenly was over. About the same time our new ambassador arrived, April Glaspie, and a new deputy chief of mission. It was a small embassy and I was effectively the institutional memory, having served at the post for two years. I really looked forward to a year with April whom I had known in two previous assignments and with the new DCM whom I didn't know, Joe Wilson, an Africanist. It was a very hopeful moment.

We had had one black cloud on the horizon already in the spring in March when Saddam Hussein had used chemical weapons against the Kurds in a town called Halabcha. Halabcha had already begun to shake our theory that if you have a little bit of leverage with a dictator like Saddam Hussein he will be a nice guy and when peace comes you will find that he is going to become more democratic and use civilized methods. The gas attack in March on Halabcha, it turned out, was a correct signal. Shortly after Khomeini ended the war in July, in August, Saddam, instead of doing what he should have done - consolidate his international position and his victory, try to refurbish himself as somehow a "nice autocrat" along the lines of Mubarak - instead of doing that, he used his newly amassed chemical weapons against his own Kurdish population in substantial attacks on northern villages with results that were gruesome.

His first priority, as always, was absolute power. One of the first things he wanted to do after defeating Iran was to defeat the Kurds, to get that Kurdish rebellion finally off the boards and control Kurdistan once and for all. The easy way, if you like, was to use gas, rather like our use of atomic bombs. Gas didn't involve a lot of his own troops dying. It would scare the Kurdish population. What Saddam didn't understand - because Saddam has always had a weak understanding of the rest of the world - was that the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds would be the beginning of the end of his relationship with the United States and to some extent with the rest of the civilized world.

As political officer it was my job to investigate as well as I could on the ground what had happened and how the Kurds felt about it. That was my job to do. The earliest opportunity I had for that was in October. I put in requests to visit two Kurdish cities. I'm not talking about remote Kurdistan, I'm talking about Dohuk and Arbil. I didn't even attempt to go to Sulaymania. By then after two years I had developed a certain little network of contacts up in Arbil and I knew people who were associated with the Barzanis and Talabani. I applied to the foreign ministry to travel to the north and got permission to do so. I also contacted my network of people who are Kurds and let them know that I would be wanting to see some of their people in the north.

I even went with a British colleague called Charles Hollis who had newly arrived. I did not take my family on that but I did take Hollis. We met a lot of Kurds both in Dohuk and Arbil and I learned even from Kurds who were traditionally bought off by the regime that they were really horrified by the use of gas. My political reporting was basically to say that Saddam Hussein had managed to humiliate even his own Kurdish allies in Arbil and Dohuk.

It was not until November that we got the news. Suddenly, April Glaspie, the ambassador, was called into the foreign ministry and was told that Mr. Rankin would have a week to leave. The ministry cited my trip to Kurdistan as the pretext. She was irate and did everything in her power to drive home the message that this would be another body blow to the American-Iraqi relationship and hoped that they would rethink it, but they didn't. Within a week, we were gone.

In retrospect, as I look back on it and taking into account the time it took the Iraqis to arrive at their decision, my suspicion is that my expulsion wasn't a reaction to the trip I made to the north. They would have expected me to talk to the Kurds. I'm a political officer and when they gave me permission to go to the north it was perfectly obvious what I was going to do. They always knew whom I talked with and I actually talked mostly to Saddam Hussein's bought-off Kurds, even if what they told me was actually extremely interesting. What burned them was the American reaction to the use of gas against the Kurds.

One of their senior advisors to Saddam Hussein, Saadoun Hammadi, had traveled to the United States in September. He was to have met Secretary of State George Shultz. When he arrived he was treated very coldly. He did not get his meeting with the Secretary. He was fobbed off on the head of Iraq-Iran Affairs, as I recall, or perhaps the Assistant Secretary. That very same day, Charles Redman, who was the State Department spokesman, read out an announcement which could not have been more critical of Iraq. We had chosen that moment to tell Iraq that we totally opposed what it had done. Saadoun Hammadi, who was actually a graduate of an American university, was humiliated. Saddam Hussein was angry.

This is now only my speculation, but given the amount of time it took Saddam to act - and Saddam Hussein is not usually one to take time to act - I suspect he probably had considered PNGing April Glaspie. (End of tape)

We were talking about my expulsion from Iraq and my own speculation on what I believe to be the real reasons why it took Saddam Hussein a while, more than a month, six weeks actually, to decide upon it and why it was me. I was saying that I think judging by the amount of time it took, his first inclination must have been to expel the ambassador, April Glaspie. On further reflection he decided that that would be an extreme thing to do and would really set in concrete the downturn in American-Iraqi relations. Throwing me out made good sense because there had been such a turnover in the embassy in the summer and I was then the institutional memory. I was the logical person to throw out. I was the closest substantive advisor to the ambassador and I had had this trip to the north which served as a perfect pretext if they even needed one.

I returned to Washington as a hero. I was even in the papers for a very short while. It was the high point of my career. Little did I realize things would go downhill in my career from that moment. I had just received promotion into the 01 rank.

Q: It's approximately the colonel rank?

RANKIN: That's right, the colonel rank. That is what I have just retired as, as well. I did not make it into the senior service. I was subsequently to have two DCMships, as we say, postings as deputy chief of mission at two missions as well as deputy director of an office in the State Department. Things did not go so very well for me professionally although I continued to have extremely interesting assignments.

Q: And in a way that's what counts.

RANKIN: That's true.

Q: In '88 what did you do? What did they do with you? It was '89 probably.

RANKIN: It took me some time to get myself collected after this departure from Baghdad. I almost immediately interviewed with Richard Boehm who was meant to have gone out to Muscat to be ambassador to Oman. He was caught up in the longest, what's the word I'm looking for? Ambassadors are held in limbo after they get agrément, they've been named and then Congress has to do its thing. Richard Boehm had previously been ambassador to Cyprus and this was to be his last ambassadorship. He was meant to have gone out before the elections in November 1988 but for some reason he didn't get through the congressional process either in the summer or in the fall. Congress finished and he didn't make it. The whole process had to start all over again and the man finally arrived in October 1989.

He was looking for a DCM. He was interviewing a lot of people. I happened to arrive in Washington at the perfect moment, December 1988. I see in retrospect that I probably should have gone somewhere other than NEA to get bureau diversity. I was offered also the consul general job in Belfast and I would have been wise in retrospect to have taken that posting. But I wanted to use my area knowledge of the Arab world and my linguistic knowledge of Arabic. I liked Ambassador Boehm from the first moment, despite his reputation as a still, "old school" ambassador. I thought he had a superb sense of humor, but it certainly is true that Dick Boehm did not suffer fools lightly.

I had just been made into an O1 and wouldn't it be great to be immediately made a DCM? In retrospect, I think it is unwise to be a DCM too soon after becoming an O1. What happens is, and I only know this in hindsight, people look at you after you've been a DCM once and then you're DCM twice and they say he has already been DCM. He hasn't made it to ambassador, he hasn't made it into the Senior Service, we don't want him. If you go too soon to DCM, you can find yourself in trouble. That's not a substantive issue but it is interesting to show you how the Foreign Service works.

Q: You went out to Muscat when and how long were you there?

RANKIN: I was six months on the Arabian Peninsula Affairs office doing Oman, being deputy director of that office off and on.

Q: Were you involved in the flagging business? That was already over by that time so the Arabian peninsula was rather quiet wasn't it at that point?

RANKIN: That's right. It was between the wars. I was able to use that six-month period to get acquainted first with Oman from the Washington standpoint. It was a great advantage going out to Oman knowing the Washington perspective not only on Oman but on the whole Arabian Peninsula. This was very, very useful because I had never served in the peninsula. Then I went out in the summer. Still Ambassador Boehm was held up. I found

myself in the remarkable position of arriving as chargé. I was chargé d'affaires for three months.

It was the only tour in my entire Foreign Service career in which I served for three years. I had been three years in Egypt but one year was Arabic language training. I actually filled a three year tour. I left Oman in '92.

It was a wonderful assignment. Wonderful for me as a student of the Arab world. Wonderful for me as someone who likes to get out-of-doors and meet people. Because it was a rather small embassy I as deputy chief of mission wasn't completely saddled with management. It was a small enough embassy that there was time enough also to be, to some extent, a reporting officer and have time to continue to think in political-economic terms as well as administrative terms. Obviously as the deputy chief of mission your first job is management and your first role in management is administration. It was the first time in my career that I became familiar with all the complexities of administration.

We had just moved into a 55 million dollar embassy. I was a bit sad that we had left the embassy in old Muscat. The building was still there and I would visit it from time to time. We moved into a brand new, extremely expensive, extremely beautiful embassy. I don't think we are building much of them like that anymore. It met all of the greatest security standards and it was built like a fortress. A beautiful fortress, but certainly a fortress. It should be the envy of anyone, that lovely plot in Muscat right by the Gulf of Oman.

The three years in Muscat were punctuated by two very significant events. One was the renegotiation of the Omani-American military treaty which had first been negotiated in 1980. It was time to renegotiate. Why is that important? It so happens that Oman was, and I suppose remains, the site of a multi-billion dollar military armaments prepositioning effort by the United States. We had a huge amount of materiel positioned principally out in the desert in a place called Thumrait. The other big event during my tour there was the Gulf War. The renegotiating of this treaty was March 1990.

Q: Why don't we talk about that first?

RANKIN: This negotiation proved to be extremely important because of all of those armaments that were prepositioned and all of those facilities that we had helped build. We built huge airstrips that were far, far, far more than anything Sultan Qaboos would ever need. Why did we do that? All of these things were in constant use a few months after we renegotiated this treaty. Of course we didn't foresee that at the time but it just goes to show that sometimes things can work out well.

Q: What was the political situation? What was the situation in Oman when you arrived? Then you can talk about the negotiations.

RANKIN: Sultan Qaboos is an able, wise leader of his country and I could speak to you at length about that. It is a small country, less than two million people. The southern edge of the Strait of Hormuz is actually part of Oman and is known as the Musandam Peninsula.

Therefore Oman is a neighbor of Iran. It was a difficult relationship but one that had been managed very sagely by Sultan Qaboos. He was able to be a close ally of Britain and the United States and yet maintain a non-hostile relationship with Iran. That is already an extraordinary accomplishment.

He had on the other side the PDRY, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, a staunch Soviet ally and very hostile in any ideological sense with Sultan Qaboos. There was a problem with ethnic groups that straddle both sides of that border. Then you had Saudi Arabia, a country with which he had long had problems: territorial disputes and religious disputes because the Saudis are Wahhabis, the most fundamentalist Sunnis. The Omanis are borderline Sunnis, Ibadhis as they are called. They are looked down upon by the Saudis as not being proper Muslims. Finally, the various Emirates of the United Arab Emirates, some the Emirates themselves disputing territory with Oman.

This was the international context I found on arriving in Oman. We had a treaty that had been negotiated by a younger Sultan in 1980, which had been the subject of much criticism in the Arab world and by Iran. The treaty gave the United States the right to use air fields, to build huge air strips and to store materiel for the use against whom precisely? If you are PDRY, you think it is against you. If you are Iran, you think it is against you, correctly may I say. The instigations for the treaty were the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian hostage crisis, and the rise of Khomeini. The Sultan went very far out on a limb as far as Iran and most of the Arab world were concerned.

Now 10 years had gone by. The Iran-Iraq War was over. Khomeini was still there, but now the Sultan was much less nervous about his relationship with Iran. Somehow the Iranians and he had come up with a modus vivendi. Relations were also better with the PDRY. The Sultan had come to power when his father, Sultan Said, was teetering and there was rebellion in southern Oman (which is called the Dhofar). In 1970, there was a general fear that the PDRY was about to take over Dhofar and bring down the whole house of Said. Now instead of being 10 years from the searing memory, we were 20 years from it and much less concerned about the PDRY. The Saudis had been a big problem during the Buraimi crisis in the 1950s.

Q: The Buraimi Oasis was disputed territory there?

RANKIN: Actually just inside Abu Dhabi. Those disputes always lie there latent, but it was another ten years since there had been any problems on that score. Now you are saying to yourself if you are Sultan Qaboos, do I really need this treaty? It is causing me a little bit of flack. I still get people throwing darts at me saying you are a stooge of the west. I have been a brilliant diplomat. I have controlled all of these international problems. Do I need these Americans with all their armaments and stuff here? How does it serve Oman and what am I really getting out of this?

Of course we had to pay. We had to pay rent and we had an aid relationship which had grown up out of the 1980 treaty. Do we really need all of this, we asked ourselves. Did he need any of this, he asked himself. Meanwhile, we have back in Washington people saying

this is a country that receives our aid, is not poor, is doing nothing for us, and has the audacity to want more from us. So from both sides there was pressure to reduce the relationship. That is the background to the renegotiation of the treaty.

In fact it was a brilliant success. We agreed to increasing some of the rents, but we maintained that relationship pretty much as it was. When August then rolled around, there were a lot of people who were incredibly grateful that none of this apparatus had been dismantled, that we could still rely on all of it and rely we did. That was the next phase of my presence there.

Q: Was it with Oman or the United Arab Emirates that we had come up with in the summer, a small air exercise, air refueling, or something like that which aroused Saddam Hussein? Does that ring a bell with you?

RANKIN: Yes, we did various kinds of exercises with countries all up and down the Gulf. Actually the Emirates were the hardest to get to play ball with us on those sorts of things. You are right but I can't remember exactly who it was with but it wasn't with Oman. There was, and I don't think it was the UAE, an issue there.

What we began seeing through that year, 1990, was Saddam Hussein increasingly being hostile to the United States. He was increasingly flexing his muscles.

There was an Arab summit convened in Baghdad in, as I recall, April of that year. It looked as if the Arab world were crowning Saddam Hussein as the greatest of the Arab leaders. Everybody went to that summit, all the Arab leaders - with the exception of Sultan Qaboos of Oman and King Hassan of Morocco. It was a pretty disgusting spectacle, to tell you the truth, that all of these Arab leaders did obeisance to Saddam Hussein. Sultan Qaboos did not go. He was very willing to develop civil relations with the Iranians and maintain them with the Iraqis but he wasn't going to go to Saddam Hussein's party and he didn't. Even Sheikh Zaid of Abu Dhabi went, amazingly enough. Sheikh Zaid is the richest man in the world, and he thinks he is the most important man in the world, but he went to do obeisance to Saddam Hussein but Qaboos did not.

Q: How did the invasion and seizure of Kuwait hit you? Were there indicators? Here you are at the embassy and what happened?

RANKIN: No, there were no indicators before it happened. In fact April Glaspie had come down to us for a visit in March of that year. She and my family went all over the lovely mountains of Oman and of course we talked about how things were going in Iraq. They weren't going well. She herself had never even had a one-on-one meeting with Saddam Hussein. Obviously it was an uphill battle. We were seeing all the things we had most feared happen with Saddam Hussein, the repressiveness, the megalomania were all becoming worse rather than better. Having, as it were, won the Iran-Iraq War only brought out the worst elements in Saddam Hussein.

You could say that we all should have foreseen the invasion, but whether we should or

shouldn't, I think we operated in the only sensible way we could have. April Glaspie obviously did not foresee what was to happen in Kuwait. It was clear that Saddam had been flexing his muscles for months, but I defy anybody to say they precisely foresaw what was to happen.

The invasion occurred and we went on, just like the Department of State, a 24 hour basis of working. For months it was full-time. We had an enormous military presence in Oman that quickly developed. A lot went on. We had a lot of visits. Even General Schwarzkopf came down. Ships were passing by all the time. Our embassy became one of the support missions for the developing operation. We also even were the locus to which our embassy from Mogadishu evacuated in January 1991, believe it or not.

Q: I've interviewed Jim Bishop.

RANKIN: He came through Muscat and I was the person who arranged for the offloading of our Mogadiscio personnel, along with hundreds of other evacuees, from a massive troop ship. General Schwarzkopf was calling his ships up into the Persian Gulf for the operation that was soon to take place. It was no time to be evacuating embassies down on the Indian Ocean coast so rather than sending the ship down to Mombasa, as originally planned, Schwarzkopf said, "I want you up here and you can just drop those folks off the first place you can." The first place was Muscat.

It was an operation that involved frenzied activity over several days. Omanis don't like to operate that way. They don't like sudden things. They don't like a lot of strange people coming to their shores. We had little advance notice, but we managed.

Q: I would have thought that one of the major problems you would have had would be one of the stipulations of the treaty that you had with Oman. Sure there'll be a couple billion dollars worth of military equipment in the country but you are not going to have a lot of Americans running around. With a war on I imagine a lot of Americans came, didn't they, including our female military people?

RANKIN: The way we did this was pretty wise going back to 1980. Our major airstrips were on a desert island off an isolated part of the coast and Thumrait in the Arabian Desert, a long way from where anybody can see. The tricky point was some of the prepositioning that we had in Muscat, actually north of Muscat at their airport called Seeb. Even that we had made a pretty low-key operation. Most of the flights in and out of Thumrait were just in and out of Thumrait. Most of the populace couldn't see them. That was all part of the intent from the very beginning.

We pressed them, and they agreed, to setting up a military hospital at Seeb airport. We had all kinds of construction activity going on for a few months, but it was all temporary. We had a whole tent community set up out there. I was surprised that the Omanis would agree to a visible presence at their international airport, but they did. The Seeb operation did bring in a certain number of American personnel into the Muscat metropolitan area, including females. We never saw any particular negative reaction to that, none that we

could measure. Again it was testimony to the Sultan's willingness to be helpful when the crunch was on.

Q: When Iraq invaded Kuwait was there a problem? Did the Sultan see immediately that this was the danger and was he on board or was there persuasion? How did this work?

RANKIN: There was a certain amount of persuasion although I think the Sultan was on board from the very beginning. The Omanis tend to dislike the Kuwaitis intensely.

Q: I think all the Arabs do.

RANKIN: Omanis for years before oil was discovered in Oman, back to the days of the old Sultan, had managed to escape from the country and had tended to go up the Gulf and very often they went to Kuwait. They worked as laborers, especially dock yard workers, and they were treated very badly. There is this deep memory in the Omani consciousness of the high-handedness of the Kuwaitis. I never met an Omani who didn't say the Kuwaitis had it coming.

Of course Oman is the further away of the Gulf countries from the locus of activity. The furthest you went away the less intense was the concern and fear. Nevertheless, the Sultan was in fact on board from the very beginning. As you can see, he was helpful even in ways that contravened his basic policies. His policies always were to keep any trouble making or trouble makers out of the country.

Q: Did the Omanis contribute troops to the force?

RANKIN: A handful, a symbolic handful, and it was nice that there was a symbolic effort there. Of course we spent a lot of effort on making that happen. The symbolism of it was important to us. Any participants that we could add to our efforts were useful.

Q: More flags.

RANKIN: More flags and it was very important for Jim Baker to be able to say here is my list. We expended a lot of diplomatic and military effort to make that happen. In my role as the DCM, one of the vexing parts of the problem was the issue of evacuation. Most of the embassies in the Arabian Peninsula, except Muscat, were evacuated.

Q: Well no, oddly enough Riyadh didn't either. If Riyadh had gone, that would have meant the American oil workers in Dhahran would have gone and so we needed these Americans there.

RANKIN: You are absolutely right. Even though there was an incident in Jeddah where a bus was attacked with Americans in it.

Q: There were Scuds coming in too in Dhahran. It was an interesting situation.

RANKIN: The State Department evacuated all those other countries, even the UAE much to my astonishment. I think in the case of Abu Dhabi and Dubai it was voluntary but this voluntary evacuation business is not very pleasant either. First of all, you send a poor political message to the host country. But worst of all is the effect on families that take up the offer. Families can't just turn around and come back when the danger is over. It can take the State Department six months before it finally decides that the coast is clear. It is a tricky business.

In Muscat we were confronted with people at the other end, in the State Department, broadly hinted that maybe we should go to some form of evacuation, in this case voluntary. We were also confronted by a few people in the embassy, nervous nellys, who said we ought to evacuate. I am old school and the issue of evacuation was my ultimate undoing in Algeria, which is the next chapter of this. I am old school, I just don't believe in it, and in Oman it didn't make any sense at all.

Curiously, it was only the CIA and the military who lobbied for evacuation within the embassy. The military are used to being separated from their families, and they want to be separated from their families if there is the slightest whiff of danger. This is sort of a military family attitude. I don't know how to explain the CIA attitude but we, the ambassador and I, had pressure from the Agency people to order a voluntary evacuation.

There was the political dimension to our thinking, to be sure. We did not need to do this to Sultan Qaboos, who had such a close political and military relationship with us and had bent over backwards to be helpful in ways that were essential to American interests. But the bottom line was that it didn't make any sense. We searched with a fine tooth comb all the intelligence that we were receiving from the self-same CIA, which was telling us we ought to authorize an evacuation. There simply was no evidence to suggest there was a threat. They couldn't even fabricate evidence that would stand up to scrutiny.

The fact of the matter is Oman is a remarkably airtight country. The Sultan and his services had for years and years and years done wonders in keeping Palestinians, Lebanese, Jordanians, Iranians, ne'er-do-wells of any kind, shape, or form out of the country. Of course there is always a risk and that was a risk that Ambassador Boehm and I were than willing to take. We did not make friends among the CIA and military. If people wanted to leave that was fine but we did not feel it was justified for Uncle Sam to have to pay their way.

I suppose in today's world of a military which will not send its men to be killed under any circumstances or even put them in the slightest bit of danger, and of a State Department which is unwilling to face the slightest danger anywhere in the world, this must seem to be a very strange attitude. But that is how I came up through the Foreign Service. It was a different Foreign Service.

Q: I think we'll go on because I'm looking at the clock here. You left Oman in 1992, we're doing short shrift of this but still, then where did you go?

RANKIN: I went on direct assignment to Algiers.

Q: You were in Algiers from when?

RANKIN: I was in Algiers from 1992 to 1994. I was deputy chief of mission to Ambassador Mary Ann Casey.

Q: This is an interesting period. I think we ought to hit this and then maybe stop at that point. Can you describe the situation in Algiers in 1992 when you arrived?

RANKIN: I arrived at a moment that was beginning to be difficult and gradually got worse in the course of the two years I was in Algiers. I was meant to serve a three-year tour but served only two years. I arrived with my family at the beginning of September 1992. On August 26, just a few days before we arrived, a massive bomb had gone off at Algiers International Airport killing nine people.

Algerian history leading up to my arrival bears a little review. In December 1991, legislative elections had been held and it was meant to be a two-tier election. A further set of elections was to be held in January of '92 but, on the basis of the December results, it appeared that the Islamists, the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut), were going to win those elections. When I say win, it was with a minority of the votes.

The FLN, the dominant party at the time under Benjedid, had so stacked the rules that a plurality of the vote would give them a vast majority of the seats. The FLN assumed they would get a plurality, as they had been in power since independence. This is a very common way that ruling parties over the face of the world try to maintain their power when they feel pressure - i.e., external pressure from the U.S. and Europe - to establish legislatures and a multi-party system. It is a well-known trick. Well, this is a trick that massively backfired on the FLN. It was the FIS that won the plurality. The army panicked, canceled the elections, and threw Benjedid out. The army took power and that is the scene when I arrived.

When I arrived there had been a number of terrorist incidents. You were beginning to see unrest throughout the country, an incipient type of civil war if you like. My family and I knew when we went that we were going into a difficult situation.

Within a few weeks of our arrival, Ambassador Casey - under enormous pressure from the NEA front office, in particular Mark Parris, then the principal deputy assistant secretary who had Algeria directly under his wing - took the decision to evacuate children. That was the way it was stated. Children.

It so happened that, curiously, the American mission in Algiers was very much a family mission. There were a lot of families, a lot of children, many families with four children. On the face of it, an evacuation of children was odd since the American school was located within the American mission compound and therefore relatively safe. The real reason for focusing on children was that it was a way to cut the American embassy presence in the

country dramatically.

My own background - Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War, which was certainly much more dangerous than Algiers in October 1992, and Muscat, where we had confronted with this issue as well - strongly inclined one to disagree with Parris and Casey. I was cast in a very difficult position. Leave aside the fact that I hardly wanted to have to part with my family, I as deputy chief of mission wanted and was required to be loyal to an ambassador who was a great friend and whom I deeply admired, and also loyal to the orders of the State Department. At the same time, I had to commiserate with families who were about to be broken up and who passionately opposed the evacuation order.

I argued with the State Department that the way to go was a voluntary departure. The State Department was concerned about covering itself in case some American got killed or injured. I argued that the point is if you are trying to cover yourself, then you've covered yourself by offering people an opportunity to leave. The Department's response to that was, "We know in Algiers that nobody will leave." There simply was no perception in Algiers of danger. It was the polar opposite of the situation in Muscat. In Muscat, there had been no danger but a few people could have jumped at the chance to evacuate. In Algiers, there were the first inchoate signals of danger, but not one single family would vote to leave.

At any rate, it was decided that what was essential was that people leave and the only way to do that was to order people to leave. The choice then was do you order families to leave, or do you order some staff to leave, or what? The decision was made to put it in terms of children. Obviously the mothers would also have to leave. So in fact a substantial number of people were made to leave, including my own family.

It caused a bitterness such as I have never encountered in the Foreign Service among all those officers who were left there without their families at a time when nothing was happening against foreigners. Most of those, in fact all of them except for myself, did then curtail and left by the next summer. They were all replaced by officers without family members.

It was not until exactly a year later that you began to see actual killings of foreigners. When that happened of course the temperature changed enormously in the fall of 1993. By December 1993 we actually had to call for another stage of evacuation in which the embassy was reduced to a small corps. By that time it was obvious to everyone that a rigorous evacuation was called for.

Q: Sometimes, I've had this at other times, particularly the situations in the Middle East there is a tendency to cover your ass back in Washington. There have been more evacuations than really were deserved because back in Washington nobody really wanted to face Congress.

RANKIN: This was complicated by the fact that we had a female ambassador. Mary Ann Casey was the second female ambassador in NEA. The first one was April Glaspie. I subsequently learned from the executive director and others in NEA that the great motive

for this precipitate, very early, and unusual ordered evacuation was that the NEA front office, and in particular Mark Parris, wanted to take absolutely no chances with NEA's second female ambassador running into another set of problems. NEA had put its second female ambassador into what NEA had thought was a relatively tranquil country, which was indeed the case in the summer and fall of 1991. It was just bad luck that things were falling apart under this second female ambassador, and NEA was taking no chances.

Q: Can you talk a bit about the background of Mary Ann Casey?

RANKIN: Mary Ann Casey is one of the brightest, most able diplomats I have ever met. She is an excellent Arabist and also very fluent in French; a very fast riser in NEA and an extremely hard worker. She loved North Africa. We were both junior officers in Morocco together, she as the vice consul in Rabat and I as vice consul in Tangier. She then served on various desks in NEA. She was a political officer in Tunisia and then became head of our North Arabian Affairs office during a very difficult time in the Middle East crisis. She was someone who had risen very fast and done extremely well. She had never served as a DCM and this was her first ambassadorship. Subsequently, she was to go out to Tunisia as ambassador, after Algiers. Her external career was entirely North Africa. She is an extremely able person, whom I like and admire enormously.

I felt very much for her in this period, October 1992. I think the last thing in the world that Mary Ann wanted was to create the terrible distress that she caused and to engender the animosity that she did and had then to suffer through for the next year. It was very unfortunate.

I did my best to support her even though I disagreed with her. I should say I totally disagreed with the NEA front office. She and I have remained good friends since. I can't say the same for NEA. NEA never forgave me and I never had another assignment with NEA. It was the end of my career. I curtailed in Algiers after two years. I think two years is enough to be without your family, especially a family that is as close as mine is. I could no longer get an assignment with NEA. I went on to become deputy director and director of INR's office for NESAs (Near East and South Asia). My last assignment was as political-economic counselor in Abidjan, an assignment I loved very much.

Q: What about the Algerian government? Did we have much contact with them? How were our relations with them during the '92 to '94 period?

RANKIN: Our relationship was open and good. The military regime was always perplexed at the American government's attitudes towards it. It is true that the American government could never quite make up its mind. On the one hand, I think the majority attitude in the State Department and elsewhere, people that actually followed Algeria, was that we really did not want the Islamists taking over in Algeria. There tends to be a negative view towards Islamists which dates from our Iranian exposure.

Yet here is a military regime that brought to an end the democratic spring in Algeria. These are military officers with very poor political instincts. They are trying to deal with the

Islamist problem with a sledge hammer rather than with political finesse. So here again was this ancient dichotomy. These are thuggish types, military types, trying to deal with a political problem that they made a total mish-mash out of one the one hand, and Islamic fundamentalists on the other.

In the State Department and elsewhere in the U.S. government, one tended to see constant contradictoriness. We had people in senior positions that tended to say, "Let's go with the known quantity, the military types. The one thing we don't want is the fundamentalists to take over. So far, the military has managed to hold back this tide. Let's stick with them." On the other hand, there were senior advisors who said, "Maybe not all Islamists are bad. Maybe we would find that if the democratic process were to go forward, even if the Islamists were to succeed, their regime would be better than what we are seeing now." You saw this dichotomy inside the State Department, in the academic community, in INR and the CIA, everywhere. Of course the regime itself would see manifestations of this dichotomy and be perplexed, sometimes angered, sometimes hurt, and it would express its perplexity to us.

But I have to say that for the most part they were open with us, they realized they were in an incredibly bad position and could hardly be demanding toward us. That was the nature of the relationship as we went on. We had relatively little to offer them. We didn't have much leverage with them. The principal theater was the French-Algerian theater which was an incredibly complex relationship. It became even more complex during this period. Our relations were pretty open. After having served in Iraq, and even having served in Oman, because the Omanis were very covert and unforthcoming, I found the Algerian people and even the Algerian government to be amazingly open. Again it was very difficult to get inside the military. Very difficult. It was a very opaque military.

Q: Towards the end there, how much constraint was there as far as getting around because there were attacks, particularly on the French, weren't there?

RANKIN: There were attacks on all sorts of people. Actually the first to be killed were two French geologists but then Spaniards were killed, Croatians were killed, Russians were killed. It became a campaign to kill any foreigners. I think the last trip I made outside Algiers was in November of 1993. After that there was no traveling except to the far south. I also went to the far south in November. But the far south is the middle of the Sahara desert. It is just a question of getting to the airport and getting on a plane. As far as I know, the unpleasantness never reached into the desert.

Q: Were there any attempts made to contact the fundamentalists, the Islamists or whatever you want to call them?

RANKIN: No, not within the country. I as DCM and my officers, the political officers and so on, had relations with Islamists who were not part of the FIS. But we were never permitted, the State Department never allowed us, nor frankly did I want, to develop any type of relationship with the various arms of the underground FIS. It would have been incredibly difficult and dangerous and it was hard to see how we could have utilized such

an overture. There was contact both in Washington and in Germany with some of the FIS members abroad. That was another source of some consternation on the part of the government but we just had to grin and bear it. We always said that we are interested in everybody's points of view. We never pursued within Algeria itself.

Q: Let's sort of again skip; should we just touch the Ivory Coast? You were in the Ivory Coast from when to when?

RANKIN: I was deputy director and director of the INR office for the Near East from '94 to '96. It was an incredibly interesting period (I even got to Israel and Lebanon, thanks to INR.), but we can skip over that.

My last assignment was on direct transfer from Washington to Abidjan. I was the counselor for political, economic, and refugee affairs from 1996 to just now, 1998. My one and only assignment in sub-Saharan Africa was an assignment that I really loved. Now in retrospect, I would advise a young officer to serve in a second bureau sooner than I did. I arrived in the midst of some pretty severe downsizing at the large embassy in Abidjan, and that is true everywhere I am sure. I replaced both a political and an economic counselor. I had an economic hat and the refugees coordinator was also in my section.

I had all of those under me, but I in fact, one of the things I particularly valued about my Abidjan years was I was able for the first time since Baghdad to get back to writing and not be in the business of managing. Frankly, being a State Department manager and especially being a DCM where you have neither the glory of being the ambassador nor the time really to think and write, is a tough job. If I were to address the DCM class I would have words to that effect.

Here I was back for two years doing what I love best which is getting out, making contacts, and writing. Côte d'Ivoire, Ivory Coast, is a particularly satisfying country in that regard. It is a country in transition from absolutist rule to somewhat less than absolutist rule. It is a country which is remarkably open. It was a pleasure, I have to say, after all those years dealing with Middle Eastern affairs to have the burden of the Israel question lifted from my shoulders. Half the population of Côte d'Ivoire is Muslim, but I hardly ever heard Israel mentioned.

I traveled extensively in West Africa all the way from Senegal to Benin, but I am not an Africa expert. What I really know is Côte d'Ivoire. I was particularly struck by how the Ivorians (and West Africans resident in Côte d'Ivoire, of which there are many millions), are so open and have very little chip on their shoulder. I was able to travel to all parts of the country and was received with a simplicity and a warmth which surprised me. I think that is also true of our French colleagues. Of course France is far and away the most important external country in regards to Côte d'Ivoire. You might think there would be something of an anti-colonial attitude, but there is very little of that in Côte d'Ivoire. I have often tried to explain that to myself, but I have no good explanation.

Q: Who was the president there?

RANKIN: Houphouet-Boigny was the president from independence in 1960 (and had been the great power on the scenes since long before independence), until he died as a very old man in December 1993. When I came in 1996, the president was Bédié. Bédié is a lackluster, noncharismatic leader, whose choice as successor to Houphouet-Boigny can only be explained by this greater-than-life father figure wanting to ensure that no luster would be removed from his shining memory after his death by the presence at the top of anyone with any charisma. The many times I met Bédié, I was struck by his corpulence and his high-pitched whining.

The fundamental issue that I had to deal with in my two years there was this: is this country, which was dominated for so long by a single man, and by a single party which he created as his instrumentality for maintaining absolute power, going to open up or not? In his last days beginning in 1990, Houphouet-Boigny himself had had to open up. For the first time, he allowed opposition parties, opposition newspapers, and opposition trade unions. You saw a truly monolithic system until 1990 and then suddenly in 1990 there were some important changes. From that period, there was not much further change. Were we going to see any further positive change? Or were we in fact going to see retrogression?

I remember the day after I arrived, Ambassador Lannon Walker, a very great ambassador, and I had a long chat. He set out for me his benchmarks and concerns. At that time, the summer of 1996, he was concerned that Bédié would actually put the opposition leaders in jail, suppress the newspapers, and essentially go back to the Houphouetist monolithic model. Those negative things did not happen and I believe that Lannon Walker played a role in stemming those worst instincts of Bédié and of the hard-line PDCI, the dominant party in the country.

Q: How could he do this?

RANKIN: Lannon Walker? I think that the tools that the United States had to bring to bear, the direct tools were limited, so we had to rely on acute diplomacy. We don't have a large developmental program, a magnificent aid program on the scale of Egypt, or anything like it. We only have small pots of money. However, Bédié and his men have, I think, always had their eye on the United States. The United States of course plays a key role in the IMF and the World Bank. We do continue to have an influence even in countries like Côte d'Ivoire where we do not have large aid programs, but having influence requires a deft diplomatic practitioner.

In Lannon Walker, we had an extraordinarily able ambassador, indeed our most able serving African expert. He had been ambassador in Nigeria and Senegal, he'd served as deputy assistant secretary, and earlier times had taken him to central and southern Africa during extremely difficult times. Lannon Walker knows Africa I think better than anybody else actually functioning in the State Department today. Of course, now we have a 34-year-old woman who has become Assistant Secretary who has never served in Africa. This gives you the sense of the direction in which things are moving.

It took a great diplomat of the stature of Lannon Walker to help an autocrat like Bédié suppress his natural autocratic tendencies. Bédié and his minions didn't understand the United States despite the fact that Bédié had been ambassador to the United States back in 1960. Here is a case where an ambassador who speaks perfect French and who had a deep immersion in Africa could penetrate an African potentate's stubbornness and meanness. I don't want to overemphasize these things because there is in fact much more that Walker would have hoped to see Bédié do, but I believe things would have turned very sour in Côte d'Ivoire but for Walker.

Côte d'Ivoire is an African country, above all others, certainly in West Africa, that could really go places. It has severe constraints, enough to justify great pessimism. This includes, first of all, tremendous population growth on account of both immigration and the high birth rate. It has limited resources and it has potentially explosive ethnic and religious divisions. But it has had many these years of stability. It is the one country that has had neither a military coup d'état nor a civil war of any kind. There has been strife all around its borders. It is a country which would have a hope for prosperity if it moved towards a more open and democratic political and economic system. Alas, I don't think it is going to happen despite our best efforts. I don't think that Bédié has the right instincts, and no amount of cajoling on our part is going to persuade him to do the right thing even if we had much greater influence. He may not backpedal, but he won't go forward.

The elections in the year 2000 I predict are going to be very difficult. Bédié's main opponent is the deputy director of the IMF, Alassane Ouattara. Ouattara is still here in Washington, but he has let the entire world know that he is going to return to his country in 1999. Fearing this return, fearing Ouattara as the person who can most stand up to him and gain a national following, Bédié and his minions in the PDCI have manipulated the laws to make it more difficult or impossible for Ouattara to run, on grounds of nationality and residence, and they have made it difficult in any number of other ways. They have given themselves a way out to call off the elections at the last minute "legally." Bédié is manipulating the constitution and seizing none of the opportunities that were available for constructive dialogue to ensure that elections would be above board. He has shunned every chance to create a fair electoral system. Instead, it is basically business as usual: a highly corrupt system, rampant pay-offs, pervasive irresponsibility. You can say Côte d'Ivoire is the least bad example on the block but it is unfortunately still pretty bad and a long way from what it could and ought to be.

I left my last assignment in Côte d'Ivoire sad at failed potential in the West African country that ought to have been the most successful.

Q: I thank you.

End of interview