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

AMBASSADOR EMORY C. SWANK

Interviewed by: Henry Precht
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INTERVIEW

Introduction

Q: These recordings are for the oral history project of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I am Henry Precht, a retired Foreign Service Officer. I am recording the views and recollections of Ambassador Emory C. Swank, who served as an FSO from 1946 to 1975. From 1970 to 1973 he was the U.S. Ambassador to the Khmer Republic (Cambodia). Subsequently, from 1977 to 1987, he was President and Chief Executive

Officer of the Cleveland Council on World Affairs. The recordings were made in January and February 1988 in Cleveland, Ohio.

Coby, perhaps you could say something about your life before Foreign Service and the reasons for your decision to enter diplomatic life, and what you expected to achieve in the profession.

SWANK: When still rather young, I received from my mother, Ruth Coblentz Swank, a graduate of Hood College and a teacher for many years of music and English in Frederick County [Maryland] schools, two books which aroused my wonder and curiosity about the world outside Brunswick, Maryland. They were V. M. Hillyer's remarkable companion volumes A Child's History of the World and A Child's Geography of the World. The idea of travel came to excite me. I remember being bitterly disappointed when my parents, for reasons never made plain to me, ruled against my accompanying an elderly cousin to Europe in the mid-'30s. As a high school senior in 1938 I recorded in the "life history" each graduate fashioned my desire to have traveled around the world four times before I died. Why "four" and not "five" times I do not know!

It was in the mid-'30s I first heard about the Service. My mother's sister Esther Englesing, a teacher, and her husband Frank, an engineer, lived for a number of years in Panama and Costa Rica. They talked to me about the U.S. Embassy in San Jose where they had met various officials, including H. Bartlett Wells. My mind must have filed away for later reference both his name and the possibility of a diplomatic career. As it happened Bart and I later met in the course of our careers, first in Helsinki in 1953 when my wife and I were en route to Moscow, and then in Bucharest in 1958 when I replaced him as Deputy Chief of Mission. Bart had only a vague recollection of my aunt and uncle, which disappointed me greatly, nor did he measure up to the diplomatic Apollo my adolescent dreams had fashioned. But I thought very little about the Foreign Service after my talk with the Englesings. In college I was active in dramatics and journalism and majored in English language and literature. I went on to Harvard to get a Master's Degree in English and was then drafted into the Army.

World War II was a turning point in my life, as in many others'. As the war progressed I began thinking about its causes and consequences and the importance of the post-war peace. I had lost my taste for the further education a Ph.D. in English would have entailed and the stultifying research into an obscure writer a thesis would have meant. And so I asked my good friend Herbert Herington, Assistant Professor of History at Franklin and Marshall College, to send me samples of FS examinations and other useful materials to help me prepare for the Service. I took the written exam, then a two-day affair, in Oberammergau, Germany, in November 1945, having traveled over snowy roads from Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, where my signal unit was then stationed. The results were not announced until the following spring. I traveled to Washington for the oral exam from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I had been teaching a semester of English at Franklin and Marshall. To my great pleasure I passed, with an admonition from the board to acquire on

my own, as quickly as possible, a better understanding of economics. I entered the Service in July 1946 at age 24.

Q: Tell me about your first impressions of the Service.

SWANK: The Service was at that time in the first year of its very significant and unprecedented post-war expansion as the U.S. took on commitments commensurate with its new role as "number one." Veterans had been given preference for the Service, and there must have been several hundred of us who entered it in 1946, 1947, and 1948. We were hardly a callow group, having been through the crucible of the war. But I recall with some amusement the deprecatory observation of a senior officer, Selden Chapin, whom I overheard lamenting that post-war entrants lacked the polish of prewar candidates. Our training course lasted three months, with heavy concentration on consular and commercial affairs. Most junior assignments were then being made by happenstance, matching bodies to vacancies. It was sheer happenstance that in the class preceding mine a young officer assigned to Shanghai had a pregnant wife and requested a less difficult and more healthful post. A bachelor in the next class named Swank was posted to Shanghai.

Q: This brings us to a new topic -- China. What was it like to be in China in the fateful years 1946-1949?

SWANK: It would be difficult to overstate how exotic Shanghai seemed to us in those years. Friends who knew Shanghai prewar said it was a pale shadow of its former self. But it was still a cosmopolitan city of large international business communities (especially British, French, and American), of European refugees of all descriptions, and of more than a million Chinese. The foreign powers had relinquished extraterritorial privileges, but their local representatives still lived in luxurious, privileged circumstances. As your reference to "fateful years" suggests, the political climate was depressing. The Chiang Kai-shek regime was collapsing, and many of our economic reports in 1984 began with some such sentence as, "The situation in Manchuria has deteriorated further." The inflation was grotesque: we had to carry suitcases of currency with us to restaurants. We had a strong sense of an era coming to an end.

My first job was as a general services officer. I was given a jeep and told to meet official Americans and their families arriving in Shanghai harbor and to arrange onward travel for them and their goods to the consulates of their assignment. I managed two commissaries, each with a separate set of books, and monitored incoming freight for the Consulate General. I was relieved to be able to escape from the chaos of this job after a year to the serenity of the commercial section. Socially, we led busy and exciting lives. We were young and resilient and there were many parties lasting to 2 and 3 a.m. from which we struggled to the office at 8 a.m. And of course, it was in Shanghai I met the woman who was to become my wife, Foreign Service Staff secretary Margaret Whiting.

Q: Were you married in Shanghai?

SWANK: No. In Qingdao (Tsingtao), the fine seaport and naval base in Shandong province, north of Shanghai. As soon as I had sufficiently recovered from a debilitating case of hepatitis in the fall of 1948, Consul General John M. Cabot informed me I was being transferred to Qingdao to assist with the evacuation of foreign nationals then occurring all over China. Qingdao was a major point of embarkation since the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps still had substantial assets of ships and personnel there. That November I began a tour of duty in Qingdao which was to last six months.

In March 1949 Meg and I became engaged during a quick visit I made to Shanghai. In April she flew to visit me in Qingdao the same weekend Nanjing, the capital, fell to Mao Zedong's forces. Meg decided to resign her position and remain in Qingdao with me. Otherwise, we might have been separated indefinitely since Meg's assignment still had a year to run and I was overdue for home leave. On May 12 we were married. Two weeks later we left China, orders for home leave "and return to post" having in the meantime arrived. We knew the "return to post" was illusory. Chiang's defeat was inevitable. Consul General Robert C. Strong (later Ambassador to Iraq) allowed us to depart, unaware that he was shortly to be transferred himself to Canton as principal liaison to Chiang Kai-shek and what was left of his government before they took refuge in Taiwan.

I was fortunate to escape the fall and occupation of Qingdao, which was simultaneous with that of Shanghai in late May 1949. None of us knew what sort of treatment Americans could expect from Mao since he had not clearly revealed his intentions. Many Americans, including businessmen, believed Mao could not be worse than Chiang. In the event, Americans who remained in China became hostages of the communists until the U.S. government and U.S. corporations paid outrageous sums for their release. By the end of 1950 the only Americans remaining in China were a handful of prisoners. I have often wondered about the fate of the particularly fine Chinese staff at the Consulate General in Qingdao. They were dedicated employees, with records of long, distinguished service, and they were better schooled in U.S. immigration law than any of us. I fear they must have had a hard time, if indeed they survived.

In 1949 and 1950 the burning political question here at home was "Who lost China?" In fact, China was never ours to lose. No dimension of U.S. aid, military or economic, could have saved Chiang or prevailed against the revolutionary tides bringing Mao to power. We wisely allocated our post-war resources where they could make a difference -- in Europe.

Q: You have been preoccupied with China for a good many years, even though you are not a Sinologist. Are there further comments you would like to make?

SWANK: The preoccupation has lasted most of my life. In 1953 while at Harvard preparing for service in Moscow I wrote a paper about "The Moscow-Peking Axis." It was an effort to analyze the Sino-Soviet relationship based essentially on a study of the Soviet and Chinese press and was published by the Department as an external research

paper. In the paper I discerned tensions within the alliance but found them subordinate to an overriding mutuality of aims. In 1953 I believe that was a pretty accurate judgment. Eleven years later when I was attending the National War College at Fort McNair, I returned to this theme and prepared a paper on "Economic Aspects of the Sino-Soviet Dispute." The split had of course occurred because of fundamental political differences, but I thought I could learn a good deal about the relationship by focusing on its growth and decline. My conclusion is that the Soviets were much less grudging in their support for China than has frequently been assumed. Stalin and his successors gave up economic and military privileges in Manchuria and Sinkiang and provided vital assistance to Chinese industrialization from 1950 to 1959. Beijing profited from this treatment politically and economically and came to be regarded in Moscow as a "junior partner." At a time when the Soviet economy could have used the resources at home, the USSR gave substantial aid -- hundreds of industrial plants, thousands of technicians. The assistance program continued even after the political dispute erupted in 1957 but was abruptly terminated by Nikita Khrushchev in 1960.

Since the split of the axis, there has been recurring speculation over future Sino-Soviet relations. It seems to me unlikely that we will witness again the congruity and amity that typified them during the unprecedented decade of the '50s. The relationship, except for that decade, has been typically one, through the centuries, of tension and distrust of rival powers confronting each other across a lengthy and disputed frontier. There is a history of conflict, competition, and racial antagonism. Relations can of course move from hostility to correctness, and a trend in that direction has been perceptible for some time. But the closeness of the '50s is unlikely to be duplicated in this generation.

I was fortunate to be able to return to China in 1982 and 1985 while working with the Cleveland Council on World Affairs. Each visit lasted about three weeks and provided interesting contrasts to my pre-Mao experiences. The transformation of China under Deng Xiaoping has been extraordinary and unforeseeable. In the period from 1979 to 1988 we have witnessed a decade of opening doors to the West, experimentation with a market economy, and rising standards of living in the countryside where 800 million of the billion Chinese live. We can only welcome this change in direction. In its current pragmatic phase, China seems to me to have the best chance it has had in this century to make the much sought but elusive transition to modernization. But two important caveats deserve the consideration of U.S. policy makers. First, the great nation of China, with a longer continuous territorial integrity than any other people, will go its own way, quixotically at times. In 1950 China embarked on a new course, as Barbara Tuchman comments in her history of Stilwell and the American Experience in China, "as though the Americans had never been there." We must recognize that our influence on China is marginal. Second, providing food and clothing for, and governing, a billion or more Chinese is a challenge of unprecedented dimension for any leadership and for a country of China's resources. Under the best of circumstances, China is unlikely to attain super-power status and economic prosperity for several generations.

Q: Coby, you consider yourself a Soviet specialist, even though you spent half your career in Asia. How did you happen to become a Soviet specialist?

SWANK: I suppose I acted on my perception that the super-power confrontation emerging from World War II would be the central foreign policy concern of my generation. The Soviet Union had enigmatic qualities -- I have always enjoyed puzzles -- and was intellectually challenging. How could one account for Stalin's extraordinary behavior and Soviet survival of World War II? Was Soviet socialism or something like it the wave of the future? In Shanghai I had employed a Russian tutor at my own expense, and in response to a Department circular I filed an application for Russian language and area training.

My next assignment, however, was to Batavia, Netherlands East Indies, shortly to be renamed Djakarta and to become the capital of the populous, resource-rich nation of Indonesia. My tour began in November 1949 and ended in November 1951. Those were turbulent years for Sukarno, who took power on January 1, 1950. He had few educated Indonesians to help him govern an archipelago of several thousand islands. He had to put down a hare-brained rebellion by die-hard Dutchmen and to combat insurgent Indonesians who would have preferred monarchic rule or an Islamic state. The U.S. Embassy, under Merle Cochran, who helped negotiate Dutch withdrawal, gave friendly support to the new nation. Sukarno had not yet moved to stifle political opposition, expel Dutch business interests, and promote active non-alignment.

My work in economic reporting was interesting -- Washington wanted basic data on the new nation's shipping, airlines, industries, etc., and so I immersed myself in the Dutch literature on these subjects. But my conviction grew that I was acquiring only superficial insights into Indonesia compared to officers who had been schooled in Indonesian language, history, and culture. I was therefore pleased to receive notice from Bob Strong (then in Personnel) that my application for Russian training had been accepted. Four of us (Frank Siscoe and Joseph Neubert, both now deceased, and James Leonard and I) began a six-month intensive course in Russian at the Foreign Service Institute in March 1952. Siscoe and Neubert entered Columbia University and Leonard and I, Harvard University in September 1952 for an academic year of area study. We were reunited in Moscow in summer 1953. Parenthetically, I strongly favor periodic sabbaticals of advanced schooling for FSOs. There is no better way to hone intelligence, raise morale, and equip them for better service.

Q: Tell me about your first tour in Moscow. As I recall, Stalin had died in the spring of 1953. It must have been an exciting period.

SWANK: Indeed so. The political process had congealed under Stalin, and we were witness to both a relentless struggle for power among his successors and a gradually unfolding transition to new policies. The best account of this period is by Charles E. Bohlen (Witness to History 1929-1969), who was the U.S. Ambassador. Chip Bohlen was a warm and vigorous man, a gifted briefer and conversationalist, and he took a particular

interest in young officers. Following the process of the "thaw" was fascinating. A major effort was made to assure the Soviet people that larger resources would be allocated to producing consumer goods. Political prisoners were quietly released from prison camps -- the Gulag Archipelago Solzhenitsyn later wrote about so eloquently. Externally, the new leaders moved out of the isolation of Stalin's years. They invited Nehru and others to Moscow, repaired ties with Yugoslavia, and made the first arms sales outside the bloc to Syria and Egypt. In a remarkable speech before he lost out in the struggle for power to Khrushchev and Bulganin, Georgi Malenkov, who had been considered Stalin's heir apparent, spoke of nuclear war as a conflict no one could win. Negotiations with the West over Germany and Austria were resumed. This period marked the first post-war "detente," evoked by the media as "The Spirit of Geneva," where the leaders of the U.S.S.R., the U.S., Britain and France met for summit talks in the summer of 1955.

A memorable precursor of that meeting occurred in Moscow on July 4, 1955. In an unprecedented gesture of cordiality, the entire Soviet Politburo turned up en masse at Spaso House, the American residence, to help celebrate Independence Day. As protocol officer for the event, I recall being increasingly intrigued as the evidence mounted in the form of phone calls from the Foreign Ministry that "the Russians were coming." U.S. officials had become accustomed to consider themselves fortunate when a Deputy Foreign Minister such as Andrei Gromyko appeared. No more striking manifestation of the changes occurring in Soviet policies could have been devised.

Q: Did you enjoy your tour in Moscow?

SWANK: Those of us who spoke the language found Moscow exciting. But life was full of hardships, even for diplomats with privileged access to a country dacha, food imports, and occasional tickets to opera, the ballet, and the theater. We lived in cramped, poorly constructed apartments. Soviet personnel and listening devices in the walls spied on us. For eight months of the year markets contained only cabbages and potatoes. Cuts of meat were either unavailable or unrecognizable. Winters were long and dreary. The Soviet people were sullen and generally fearful of foreigners. If not fearful, we immediately suspected them of being agents. Soviet media, literature, and art parroted the Party line. Foreigners were under round-the-clock surveillance.

As a consequence, we experienced an exhilarating feeling of liberation when we left the country. West Berlin, itself only an island in a Soviet sea, seemed to us paradise after six months in Moscow. Visitors to the USSR still experience this uplift on departure. I accompanied a group of American business executives to the Soviet Union on a two-week visit in 1983. When our Finn Air flight left Moscow, they breathed a sigh of collective relief. It was as though a blanket of hostile suspicion and surveillance had been lifted.

Q: Before we leave Moscow, may I ask another question? In addition to attendance of Politburo members at the July reception in 1955, were there other indications in your

relationships with the Russians that a new era had begun? Do you recall other significant events?

SWANK: Let me make the point that few of us mistook the "thaw" for genuine friendship with the West. Soviet actions reflected the conviction of the new leaders that the country could exploit its potential as a great power only by moving out of Stalinist isolation. In unguarded moments they even articulated this motivation, as when Khrushchev announced to a startled U.S.: "We will bury you!"

My following assignment was as an analyst (1955-1957) in State's Division of Research and Intelligence for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Its chief was Boris Klosson, a civil servant (later an FSO) specializing in the Soviet field, and my immediate boss was Frank Siscoe, Chief of the External Branch. Because of the recent summit and innovations in Soviet behavior, there was intense high-level interest in Soviet affairs. Klosson briefed Secretary Dulles weekly on Soviet developments. The Director of CIA was Allan Dulles, John Foster's brother, and this amity at the top was reflected in close working relationships between State and CIA personnel. My job in State was to write about the accelerating Soviet economic and military aid "offensive" and Soviet efforts to coordinate and develop the economies of the Warsaw Pact nations. I also served as a staffer of the Watch Committee, an interagency group in the Pentagon which had access to all the intelligence available to the U.S. on the USSR. The Committee produced a highly classified weekly document circulated to the heads of concerned departments and agencies in which it assessed Soviet capabilities and intentions in crises that could lead to involvement of U.S. forces. The period was rife with crises, including the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt and the Soviet invasion of Hungary.

I was promoted to Chief of the External Branch in 1957 and anticipated spending another year or two in Washington. I enjoyed being privy to special intelligence (although since retirement I have found that one can be remarkably well informed with access to the multiple unclassified sources that are available), and I developed a much crisper writing style and improved analytical skills on the job.

Q: What was your opinion at that time of the analytical strengths of the American research and intelligence establishment?

SWANK: The analyses of Soviet bloc developments were first rate. The CIA in particular had people who took a level-headed and non-ideological view of Soviet developments, an approach which I approve, and it seemed to me that the estimates they made were usually on the mark.

Q: Were there occasions in which the American intelligence establishment was caught out -- that is, failed to see developing trends -- that you would like to recall?

SWANK: No one forecast that the revolution in Hungary would develop in so dramatic a fashion. But the coverage of what was happening in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was

excellent. The problem there was that no one could read Soviet intentions. We had not penetrated the Politburo.

I was not to remain in DRS more than 27 months. In the fall of 1957 I received a call from Wallace Stuart, then in Personnel, asking if I would be prepared to go out as Deputy Chief of Mission to Bucharest, Romania. (Wally had been a cabin mate on the Army transport Admiral Benson which had transported us to Shanghai in 1946.) I was naturally pleased at the prospect of enlarged responsibilities as DCM. In the event, Romania turned out to be a backwater post, lacking the excitement and bustle of Moscow and Washington. But I nonetheless found it of interest. We had a slow resumption of cultural exchanges. We had the beginnings of negotiations on Romanian debt to the U.S. and Romanian assets the U.S. had frozen when relations chilled after the war. During my tour the Soviet Union pulled its occupation forces out of Romania. I have always believed that Soviet Ambassador A. A. Epishev, later promoted to top political commissar in the armed forces by Brezhnev, had recommended the move to the Politburo. He was on excellent terms with Romanian leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and had possibly concluded that internal controls were repressive enough to make a Soviet military presence superfluous. My tour preceded Romania's later maverick behavior in foreign policy, but even in this period an Israeli Minister was actively promoting Jewish emigration, a development not paralleled elsewhere in the bloc.

Our chief reporting vehicle was the WEEKA, a required weekly compilation of developments that received wide distribution in Washington. My colleagues and I occasionally had problems identifying items worthwhile reporting. Personally, Bucharest was a pleasant post. The legation was small and permitted friendships to be developed in some depth. This tour was the start of a lifelong friendship with Clifton R. Wharton, the first black career officer to be promoted to Chief of Mission. Following Romania, Clif was named Ambassador to Norway. He and I lamented the poverty of our contacts with influential Romanians. We were never able to obtain any insights into the workings of the Politburo or the circumstances that propelled Nicolai Ceausescu's subsequent rise to power.

Q: Your next Soviet-related assignment was some years later, I believe.

SWANK: Twelve years, to be exact. My second tour in Moscow lasted from June 1967 to May 1969. After two years in Laos, I was sufficiently disenchanted with the situation in Southeast Asia to write Ambassador Foy Kohler requesting he consider me for the position of his deputy in Moscow. I explained that I was anxious to reestablish my connections with Soviet affairs after a series of assignments elsewhere. Foy approved my assignment but was in the meantime reassigned himself to Washington. The new ambassador, Llewellyn Thompson, graciously accepted me as his DCM although he was not well acquainted with me. Tommy Thompson's second tour as Ambassador in Moscow -- he had served there with distinction from 1957 to 1962 -- was a disappointment to him. He had been persuaded by President Johnson and Secretary of State Rusk, somewhat against his better judgment, I always believed, to return to Moscow. He was troubled by a

stomach ulcer that sapped his vigor and resilience. But the main cause of his depression was boredom. He no longer had the entree to the Kremlin he had enjoyed with Khrushchev, the Brezhnev regime proving to be both dull and impenetrable. Serious external distractions also weighed against progress in bilateral relations, notably the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The favorite preoccupation of all Soviet watchers was to speculate whether an invasion would take place. Tommy confided to me his personal doubt that Brezhnev would be able to stomach Dubcek for long, but he nonetheless decided that he might as well take a deserved vacation from Moscow. He was absent in August when the invasion took place. As Chargé d'affaires I adhered to the NATO-agreed policy of abstaining from contacts with the Soviet Foreign Ministry and of suspending bilateral programs -- the extent of the sanctions the West was prepared to impose. Within two to three months, normal contacts were resumed.

The framework agreement on construction of new chanceries and residential quarters for the Soviets in Washington and U.S. personnel in Moscow was negotiated in this period. Many of my visits with Georgi Korniyenko, then Director of the American Section of the Foreign Ministry, dealt with the principles which were to govern construction in Moscow. An agreement was signed on May 16, 1969, just before I left Moscow. Almost 20 years later, the Embassy offices are still unoccupied in Washington and Moscow because of overriding security problems that have emerged over the intervening years.

I suppose I am more philosophical than incensed about this development. I have the impression from media coverage of the problems that some U.S. officials may be looking for perfect security for our buildings in the USSR. Perfect security is an illusion. We will always have to proceed on the assumption that new technological breakthroughs will occur and that Soviet efforts to penetrate our mission will be unremitting. Our ultimate security rests less on technology than on the loyalty, common sense, and disciplined discretion of our officials in Moscow.

Q: What was the situation with respect to security at our Embassy during your 1967-1969 tour?

SWANK: Security was a daily preoccupation. It took up at least a third of my time. The Security Officer, the Technical Security Officer, and I worked closely together. Monthly reports were submitted to Washington recapitulating suspicious actions by Soviet personnel or other Soviet contacts which might be efforts to recruit Americans. There were never fewer than 20 such suspicious incidents a month. I spent much time reviewing these penetration attempts, keeping the staff informed of their responsibilities to report incidents promptly, and handling major provocations, some of them inevitably of a sordid character. I shall cite just one of these, involving an FSO who was accompanying a prominent U.S. politician on a trip outside Moscow. The officer was unknowingly photographed by the KGB in a sexual act in a hotel room with a woman whom he had met on the flight from Moscow. Some weeks later a Soviet writer acquaintance of the officer confronted him with the photographs and sought to recruit him as a spy. To his

credit, the officer made a clean breast of the incident to the Ambassador, the Security Officer, and me, and of course to his wife as well. We arranged for his prompt departure from Moscow with his wife and family and recommended that he be continued in the service because of the personal courage and honesty he had demonstrated. The officer served with distinction for more than ten years afterwards.

I'd like to make a comment on listening devices, which have received perhaps undue attention in the media. Everyone assigned to a Soviet post or to a post where Soviet clandestine operations are presumed feasible is thoroughly briefed on the likelihood of acoustic monitoring. In the period 1967-69 the U.S., British, French, German, and Canadian Embassies, to my personal knowledge, were equipped with special acoustically secure rooms for conversations of some import and delicacy. But these facilities were limited, and we had to rely basically on the individual's good sense and discretion. Officers did not use dictation; confidential family discussions were held in places that could not be monitored. I have always doubted that much valuable intelligence is picked up through listening devices. This doubt was fortified when I read British intelligence expert Peter Wright's book Spycatcher. He confirmed that MI5, British counterpart of the FBI, received little useful material from its monitoring of Soviet and satellite diplomatic establishments in London.

Q: Could I ask two questions on security? First, in the negotiations of the agreement for the construction of offices, was there adequate concern on our side for preventing technological penetration of the structure?

SWANK: As I recall, the agreement provided for continuing access by Americans to the structure during all phases of construction.

Q: Second, with reference to the recent problems of Marine guards in Moscow, can you say a word about how they were dealt with during your tenure?

SWANK: They were very closely supervised by the non-commissioned officer in charge of them, and both the Security Officer and I paid continuing attention to their morale and their social activities. They were excellent men. I cannot help but attribute a good measure of the recently publicized problems -- which appear, by the way, to have been exaggerated as to their degree of seriousness -- to inadequate supervision by Embassy staff.

Q: Your second tour in Moscow, like your first, lasted two years. Is that customary?

SWANK: For junior officers, yes. For senior officers there is greater discretion. Meg and I had hoped to remain a third year, particularly since we had known and worked with Jake (Jacob D.) Beam (who replaced Tommy Thompson in March 1969) in Djakarta. But as soon as he arrived in Moscow, Jake informed me I was to return to Washington to become a Deputy Assistant Secretary in European Affairs with responsibilities for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

May I offer at this point some reflections on U.S.-Soviet relations? They are based on almost 40 years of observation and study, including the decade since my retirement. I have several points to make.

First, it is highly important that State maintain a corps of Russian-speaking specialists with service in the USSR. Comparable English-speaking Soviet specialists on the United States are, I believe, more numerous than ours and better trained in English than our men and women are in Russian. They also tend to remain in their American specialization longer than our officers in Soviet specialization. If anything, our corps of Russian-speaking specialists needs to be expanded.

Second, as promising as the Gorbachev reforms appear, it is prudent to recall the cyclical nature of both Russian and Soviet history -- repression - relaxation - repression. The record of other than centralized autocratic rule in Russia is nonexistent up to this point, and overmuch decentralization could threaten the cohesion of the Soviet empire, just about the only empire still extant. For these reasons, we should welcome glasnost and perestroika but retain some skepticism as to their durability and their impact on Soviet society. I am among those who hope for an eventual evolution of the Soviet nation into a country we can live more comfortably with than we do now. But it is bound to be a long and tortured process. We must be patiently hopeful.

Third, having expressed this skepticism based on history and experience, I must also note with optimism signs that we may now be at the beginning of the end of the Cold War. There is some prospect that the new Soviet leadership perceives limits to the utility of a continuing over-allocation of resources to military purposes. As early as 1955 I remember asking myself why in a society still so poor so many resources went to the military. Since then the U.S.S.R. has reached rough military parity with the U.S. and is by far the strongest nation in Eurasia. There is no longer any legitimate Soviet military concern other than avoiding the disintegration of the empire. Perhaps Gorbachev perceives this and is ready to negotiate some reduction not only of nuclear but also conventional forces. The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan also bespeaks a new realism in Soviet policies.

Fourth, experience suggests that Americans need patience, prudence, and steadiness in dealing with the Soviet Union. We and our political system are not overly endowed with these qualities. Maintenance of military parity between West and East is essential as the Soviet Union goes through its transition to an undisclosed future. Both potential adversaries have been kept prudent by the perception of mutually assured destruction (MAD), and MAD will surely continue to be the governing strategy over the next generation, even if nuclear arsenals are reduced and even if a limited strategic defense is achieved. So we need a Soviet policy for the long haul, one based on the concept of an uneasy, half-truce between us.

Q: May I ask a question on your reflections on the Soviet Union over your tenure? Would you say that the pragmatic view -- so I would describe it -- that you have of the Soviet Union and its relationship with us has been shared by most FSOs, or were there people who held views to the extreme hard-line right and soft-line left?

SWANK: Virtually all the FSOs have been pragmatists. If you opt for Russian language and area training and are prepared to live in the Soviet Union, you are open-minded enough to "deal with the Devil." Conversely, no one can live in the Soviet Union and ignore the oppressiveness of the society and the significant failures of the system. They are an antidote to the fallacies of the soft-line left. Apart from Alger Hiss, who like the British defectors shared an ideological affinity with communism, no American FSO has gone over to the Soviets.

Q: Would you say, then, that the pragmatism of State was shared in defense and CIA?

SWANK: By working professionals, yes. Political appointees are another matter. Anti-Soviet attitudes were pronounced and apparently unshakable in several Reagan appointees to the Pentagon.

Q: Why haven't we done better in training our officers to serve in this important post? Is it a failure of length of assignment, training, or motivation?

SWANK: I would not agree that our personnel policies have failed. I have known many Soviet specialists over the years and almost all of them were top caliber, representing as good men and women as the Service could offer. The problem rests at the political level, with our leaders unwilling to trust career officers in important positions such as those held by Bohlen, Thompson, and Kohler. In degree, the diminished position of the Department of State vis-a-vis the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, and the CIA may also be a factor.

Q: Is it your impression language and area officers are adequately rewarded? Does their dedication and hard work pay off?

SWANK: I cannot cite any officers who have suffered from Soviet specialization. Many assignments are open to them outside Washington and the Soviet Union because of the active role of the USSR on the world scene and the centrality in U.S. policy of East-West relations. At one time there were limited assignment opportunities for Chinese language specialists. That has never been a problem for Soviet specialists.

Q: One more question on Soviet affairs, Coby. When Gorbachev took power and began to institute reforms, the American community of Sovietologists seemed taken by surprise. Based on your experience, how well do you think experts within the government really understand the Soviet Union? Obviously there are great difficulties reaching an intimate under-standing of such a closed society. How well have we managed to get around these barriers and obtain an in-depth knowledge of the workings of that system?

SWANK: We do not have an in-depth knowledge of the Politburo. We would give a great deal to penetrate its processes, which are kept very secret even from Soviet citizens. The Russian Tsars operated in much the same way, with a passion for secrecy. Having admitted this important shortcoming, I think that the academicians, journalists, and diplomats who constitute the main body of U.S. Sovietologists have excellent insights into Soviet behavior. Several journalists have written exceptionally perceptive books about Soviet society -- Hedrick Smith, Robert Kaiser, and David Binder, to name only a few. Nor is there any country in the world that is the object of such intense scrutiny by our intelligence community. Concerning your question about Gorbachev, his rise to power was anticipated but the scope and rapidity of his proposals for change astonished many of us. In general, Sovietologists share varying degrees of skepticism, based on experience and example, that the reforms are going to work. On the other hand, most of them are heartened that he's making such an effort to restore dynamism to an inert society.

Q: Now let's move back a step or two to your assignment as Special Assistant to Dean Rusk. Could you give us the particulars as to how you came to that position?

SWANK: I'll be happy to. The assignment with Dean Rusk lasted from December 1960 to July 1963. It was the most revealing and instructive of my assignments. The Special Assistant has a remarkable vantage point from which to view policy makers in action at the highest level of government, and I came to appreciate the immense burdens on our leaders, their failings and inadequacies as well as their strengths, and the many ironies that attend the policy-making process.

In the spring of 1960 in Bucharest I had received orders to the Air War College that were countermanded by a message assigning me to the Department Secretariat, the group responsible for the flow of decision-making paper to the Secretary and his associates. Walter J. Stoessel, then understudying Arch Calhoun as Executive Director of the Secretariat, wanted me to join him in that organization. I had first met Walt, who was to become the first career officer to serve as "number two" in the Department, when preparing for my first tour in Moscow, and I had great respect for his ability and integrity. In due course he expected me to become his deputy in the Secretariat, and we spent the summer of 1960 learning how the administration worked in Eisenhower's last months as President and continuing to provide liaison for State with the White House, in particular with Colonel Andrew Goodpaster and John Eisenhower. The White House staff dealing with foreign affairs was minuscule compared to that later assembled in Kennedy's and subsequent administrations, a tribute to Eisenhower's confidence in John Foster Dulles and his successor, Christian Herter. These were the last days of the undisputed reign of the Secretary of State.

We come now to the Kennedy transition. After his election he proceeded to announce his foreign affairs appointments in somewhat curious fashion -- first, G. Mennen Williams as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs; second, Chester Bowles as Under

Secretary of State; and third, Dean Rusk, President of the Rockefeller Foundation, as Secretary. One would normally have expected the Secretary of State to have been the first appointment. In early December Loy Henderson, the much-respected career officer serving as Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration, walked up to my desk in the Secretariat and asked me in his quiet but direct way whether I would be prepared to serve as a staff assistant to the Secretary-designate, managing the flow of paper to him in the temporary quarters he would shortly occupy on the first floor of New State. Stoessel graciously released me for this assignment, and I spent a good deal of time before inauguration drafting replies for the Secretary's signature to personal letters from well-wishers and monitoring the flow of action paper to him. Action paper presented problems, not only because Mr. Rusk was not yet Secretary of State but because he as yet had no real sense of the President's priorities and positions. As I recall, he had not met the President before the election and had met with him only twice before his appointment as Secretary.

Mr. Rusk moved with his small staff to the seventh floor suite (that Secretaries and their staffs still occupy) shortly before inauguration. We were the first group to use the suite, Secretary Herter having decided to spend the last days of his term in the old office building. The new people with the Secretary were readily identifiable throughout the building: fluff from the newly laid beige carpeting clung conspicuously to our shoes. The Secretary's immediate staff remained rather small. In addition to myself, it included Personal Assistant and Appointments Secretary Phyllis Bernau (later Mrs. William B. Macomber), who had served in the same position for John Foster Dulles and who was extraordinarily knowledgeable and efficient in the ways of a Secretary of State. We worked together in harmony and understanding in any number of trying situations, and I have lasting admiration for her deft and perceptive management of the Secretary's schedule. Another very close associate was the Staff Assistant, who helped me manage the flow of paper to the Secretary and accompanied him on trips outside Washington when I could not do so. The first incumbent was Walt Cutler, near the start of his distinguished career, and William Knepper was the second. The three of us were supported by two, occasionally three, excellent secretaries and receptionists, and a rotating staff of security officers who accompanied the Secretary at all times. I remember all of them with affection and nostalgia. We worked under the general supervision of the new Executive Secretary, Luke Battle. Our function was administrative, with an eye for substance. Management of the paper flow took virtually all our time, and neither Cutler, Knepper, or I could have sat in on substantive meetings involving the Secretary. It never entered our minds to seek to replace the action bureaus in their indispensable roles as substantive advisers.

Q: You are too modest.

SWANK: Let me turn now to the Secretary's preoccupations when he took office, not so much in policy as in responding to the many demands on his time. Ernest Lindley, a journalist, compiled a remarkable set of statistics about the Secretary's first nineteen months in office which were included in Winds of Freedom, a selection of the Secretary's

speeches, January 1961 to August 1962. In that period he traveled 161,000 miles on foreign missions, attended 15 major international conferences, testified 47 times before congressional committees, held 40 press conferences, appeared on 20 TV and radio programs, and held uncounted bilateral talks, one on one with visitors. His working week was seven days, nine to nine weekdays, nine to six Saturdays, often ten to three Sundays. He took almost no vacations. I was impressed by his vigor and stamina and the little time he had to reflect on policy. His schedule was a compendium of people who had to be received or called upon, hasty reviews of policy papers that required hasty decisions. Fortunately, he was what is known as a "quick study" -- experienced, intellectually gifted. My association with him so deeply etched in my an understanding of the preciousness of time that it influenced the rest of my life. Time -- the disappearing, priceless commodity! A Secretary of State never has enough of it.

The Secretary's substantive preoccupations were principally with the East-West confrontation -- such special concerns as Berlin (the Wall was erected in 1961), Laos (the agreement to neutralize Laos was signed in 1962), and the Cuban missile crisis (October 1962). The best account of that crisis I have read is in a chapter in George Ball's book The Past Has Another Pattern. Neither I nor others on the Secretary's immediate staff was privy to the tightly held deliberations on the crisis, but George Ball was one of the players, and his account is first rate.

Q: Coby, could you address the Secretary's relationships with the President and others in the administration?

SWANK: Richard Rusk, the Secretary's younger son, once told me that his father himself described the relationship with Kennedy as "a close official relationship." This suggests that they perhaps never developed close personal rapport. The question has been raised whether Kennedy, had he had a second term, would have reappointed Rusk. I do not know. What I can say is that the Secretary was loyal and uncomplaining in an administration noted for the number and variety of actors in foreign policy. The Secretary also had extraordinary respect -- even reverence -- for the Presidency -- that lonely position at the pinnacle of American society. I am reasonably certain the Secretary did not appreciate Kennedy's occasional irascibility, profanity, and vulgarity, but he admired his intelligence, courage, and political wizardry, and gave him what one might call "his full measure of devotion."

McGeorge Bundy and his growing National Security Council staff were also at the White House. Bundy always seemed to me respectful of the Secretary and his prerogatives, but he had much readier access to the President, was more attuned to the President's style, and unlike the Secretary was relatively free from protocolary and managerial responsibilities and could devote full time to policy. The relationship was nevertheless productive -- there were frequent phone calls between the two -- and little of the friction and antagonism which spoiled later Secretary-NSC Director relationships.

As for the Pentagon, despite the natural tendency for bureaucrats of State and Defense to approach problems from at times differing perspectives, I never sensed any serious conflicts between Rusk and McNamara. The latter developed a better rapport with Kennedy and was on more intimate terms with him than Rusk, but the Secretary was not a man at all give to envy or rancor. Also, he had a substantial background in military affairs that gave him respect for the role of the military as a backdrop to diplomacy. He had served with distinction as an Army officer from 1940 to 1945, and the public servant whom he admired most was a military man -- General George C. Marshall. I believe that he tried to model himself on Marshall. They were both men of uncommon integrity and reserve.

I should perhaps comment on the Under Secretaries of State. Chester Bowles, the first to serve with Rusk, had presumably wanted the top job himself and had been appointed as Under Secretary directly by the President, not by Rusk. There was thus the potential for rivalry and friction. But I never witnessed any. Bowles' problems were with the White House. He was too voluble and perhaps too liberal for Kennedy, and the policies with which he was identified drew White House criticism. Dean Rusk was in due course given the thankless task of telling Chester Bowles he must step down as Under Secretary. Rusk is tough-minded but also compassionate. He gave every sign of regarding that interview with Bowles as one of the most difficult of his career. George Ball, forceful, assured, cogent in argument, meshed much more effectively with the Secretary. Despite their grueling schedules they regularly arranged to meet at the end of the day in the Secretary's office for conversation over drinks (the Secretary invariably had scotch on the rocks). I suspect these meetings were of critical importance. They afforded each man the opportunity for informal exchanges and for reflection on the issues of the day and formulation of courses of action.

We on his immediate staff found the Secretary remarkably even-tempered, considerate, and kind. But he is a very private man, with natural reserve and reticence and no fondness for small talk. Since he had told me that, like George Marshall, he would never write his memoirs, I was surprised to learn from his son Richard in 1986 that he had obtained his father's consent to write a book about him. Richard was in high school when his father became Secretary and probably had little opportunity to be with him. One of his reasons for writing the book, Richard told me, was "to find out who my Dad is."

I suppose that historians in evaluating the Secretary's term in office are likely to focus heavily on Vietnam. That was a growing problem on the horizon during my years with him -- it had not yet become the consuming fire of later years. The Secretary had strong convictions based on his experiences. Thus he never forgot that the U.S. had been unprepared for World War II, and military readiness became an article of faith for him. The Korean War had happened "on his watch" during an earlier tour in State, and he never neglected to ponder the potential menace of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The Berlin Wall had been erected and the Cuban missile crisis had erupted "on his watch." So containment was another article of faith. He was also a student of the American political system, and one of his favorite postulates was that good

government is based "on the consent of the governed." The preciousness of freedom was a favorite theme. In a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Minneapolis in August 1962 he stated that "Our goal is a worldwide victory for freedom." I think he regretted the morass of Vietnam. In 1967, passing through Washington, I called on him and have remembered ever since the rueful comment he made. "Things are not going badly for us -- if only we did not have the burden of Vietnam." He wanted very much to look beyond it.

I took leave of the Secretary in August 1963 to enter the National War College. I asked him if he would autograph for me his book Winds of Freedom. He inscribed it thus: "With deepest appreciation for my friend, colleague and supervisor -- Coby Swank." This is an accolade I cherish -- so typical of Dean Rusk's generosity and wry humor.

Q: Let me return to the subject of Vietnam. Did the Secretary see it in terms of containment and subscribe to the view we had to become involved?

SWANK: At some point in the evolution of the crisis -- I cannot pinpoint the occasion -- I am sure he conceived our actions both as preserving freedom in South Vietnam and as containing the spread of communism. He was especially anxious to contain Communist China.

Q: He had of course had a lot of experience with the Chinese. Did he see Peking as an equal threat to Moscow?

SWANK: Not as an equal military threat. But he was impressed by what seemed to be the intractable hostility of Peking to the U.S.

Q: I never had any working relationship with Dean Rusk during his tenure. But after he had left office I asked him at a lunch I had joined whether he had seen all the memoranda we had sent forward from the office of Arab-Israeli affairs in the Near East Bureau in the aftermath of the 1967 War. I noted in a friendly way that we had advocated a number of positions that might have made things easier but got no reaction from his office. He replied with some dryness: "We saw all the papers." Can you comment?

SWANK: The Secretary frequently took no action on policy recommendations rather than rejecting them outright. But he recognized, of course, that failure to act was in itself a policy decision. Occasionally action paper would come to rest for a considerable time at the bottom of his in-box. As a staff aide it was my job to rescue it and bring it again to his attention. More often than not, he would put it back in the box with a smile: "Just leave it there."

Q: Could you say a word about Mr. Rusk's relationship with Adlai Stevenson and with CIA?

SWANK: Stevenson and he seemed to have great rapport. The Secretary admired Stevenson's eloquence, intellect, and diplomacy. Stevenson, I suspect, admired the

Secretary's honesty and fairness. John McCone and the Secretary were not, to my knowledge, close friends, but relationships with CIA presented no problems.

Q: What about his relationship with Vice President Lyndon Johnson at that time?

SWANK: Their contacts were to my knowledge rather limited in the Kennedy years.

Q: We come now to your service as Ambassador to Cambodia, September 1970 to September 1973. Please begin your reflections.

SWANK: I'll furnish a few comments on the origin of the appointment, Henry. I was named Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs in May 1969. I had an excellent boss in Assistant Secretary Martin Hillenbrand, and my responsibility was to oversee Soviet and Eastern European relations. This position, short of an assignment as Ambassador to Moscow, is probably the job most sought after by Soviet specialists. In April 1970 I decided to visit my constituency and made a trip to Belgrade, Zagreb, Warsaw, Poznan, Krakow, Sofia, and Budapest. It was in Budapest, in the office of Ambassador Alfred Puhan, that I read the text carried in the USIA wireless bulletin of President Nixon's speech of April 30, 1970, announcing that U.S. and South Vietnamese forces had entered Cambodia. Having served in Laos, I had more than a routine interest in this development. The President, I have always believed, misjudged in giving this decision the momentous quality it acquired through this nationwide address on television. It was a reasonably straightforward, if unexpected, military action against enemy sanctuaries. His speech was defensive and somewhat emotional. Shortly thereafter I returned to Washington unsuspecting of what lay ahead.

Deputy Assistant Secretary positions are often regarded as stepping stones to Ambassadorships. I had worked closely in recent months with Joseph Sisco, Assistant Secretary for Near East and South Asian Affairs, who was spearheading Secretary William Rogers' efforts to induce the Soviet Union to play a constructive role in Arab-Israeli affairs. One day Joe asked me to consider whether he might nominate me for the Embassy in Jordan. After reflecting a day or so, I declined the nomination, explaining that I was unfamiliar with and had rather hazy notions about the area and believed there were better qualified candidates. (Dean Brown subsequently served as Ambassador to Jordan.)

In late May, a few weeks later, I received a telephone call from Bill [William H.] Sullivan, a good friend who was Deputy for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Bill informed me that my name had been submitted to the White House as State's leading nominee for the reestablished position of Ambassador in Phnom Penh. I remember telling Bill at the outset of this conversation that Phnom Penh did not need an Ambassador but a worker of miracles. My misgivings stemmed not only from a suspicion of the sorts of difficulties that might lie ahead in Phnom Penh but also from my ambivalence about the U.S. role in Indochina. The issue has troubled me for some time, beginning in 1963-64 at the National War College where my class had been unable to reach a consensus on whether Indochina was a "vital" U.S. interest. This ambivalence had grown in Laos, where I served as DCM

from 1964 to 1967. The government we were supporting in Vientiane with economic aid and covert military support against the North Vietnamese and their Lao allies was barely surviving. I feared we were in a "no-win" situation in Laos. The best we could hope for was that our friends would hold on pending some overall settlement with North Vietnam. It was because of this ambivalence that I had sought a second tour in Moscow.

But other considerations tended to override these misgivings. How many opportunities to become an Ambassador can a career officer reject? Unlike the Near East, I could not claim ignorance of Southeast Asia. Also, Cambodia's situation challenged me -- career officers are not likely to decline assignments because of their intrinsic difficulties. Finally, as a practical matter, did I have any option? My name had already been submitted to the White House. The die was cast.

An interview at the White House was necessary. The President felt no need to be a major player in the screening process, and so I met with Henry Kissinger, Director of the National Security Council. U. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs, prepped me for the meeting. "Be confident and dynamic," he advised. "Give him the impression you can handle the situation." The meeting with Dr. Kissinger was unremarkable and not very probing and lasted possibly fifteen or twenty minutes. We talked about Cambodia and Vietnam and East-West tensions. I guess I displayed sufficient assurance and knowledge to pass muster: my appointment was announced on July 14, 1970.

Even before the announcement, my briefings got under way. Cambodia was a controversial issue -- a circumstance that affected not only my tour in Phnom Penh but my briefings for it. State had argued against the invasion of Cambodia. The White House never forgot this apostasy. To further complicate matters, relations between Secretary Rogers and Dr. Kissinger were not only cool but almost nonexistent. As a consequence, the White House, distrusting not only Rogers but also State's Asian Bureau, headed by Assistant Secretary Marshall Green, took Cambodia under its protective wing. My most important briefings were with Thomas Pickering, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Political and Military Affairs in State, and with the Pentagon and CIA. Significant communications concerning Cambodia were in a special channel classified NODIS KHMER (no distribution Khmer). Many of these dealt with arms deliveries being made to General (later Marshal) Lon Nol in response to his April appeal for military aid against encroaching Vietnamese forces. So sensitive had the White House become about leaks that few in State had access to this information. As a matter of fact, policy towards Cambodia was already being made and was henceforth to be made essentially by the White House. Kissinger's Deputy in the National Security Council, Colonel (later General) Alexander Haig, had made his first trip to Phnom Penh in May 1970. I never saw a written report of his meeting with Lon Nol, but as a result of it military supplies had begun to move from storehouses of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) to Phnom Penh.

Q: May I interpose a question? What was the position of our Embassy in Phnom Penh on arms deliveries and other support?

SWANK: Lloyd (Mike) Rives was Chargé d'affaires, a.i., at the time of Haig's visit and of a later visit by Vice President Agnew. Rives was dubious, I believe, about Lon Nol's credibility as a leader, but he was excluded from Haig's meeting with Lon Nol -- the meeting that activated a policy of military support for Phnom Penh that was to continue until its fall in April 1975.

Q: Were there American troops fighting in Cambodia?

SWANK: Ground forces were withdrawn in June 1970. Bombers and fighter and reconnaissance aircraft flew missions in Cambodia until August 1973.

White House differences with State over Cambodia were paralleled by differences with Congress. On August 11, 1970, along with several other Ambassadorial nominees, I appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The confirmation hearing was conducted by Chairman J. William Fulbright. Given his record of dissent on Vietnam, he was relatively mild in his questioning. He asked me if the U.S. Government were contemplating a treaty of alliance with Lon Nol. I replied that we had not undertaken any formal commitments to Cambodia.

The overriding authority on Cambodian affairs was neither Agnew, Kissinger, nor Haig, but Richard Nixon. My meeting with the President -- my only meeting with him while I was Ambassador -- took place at the Western White House in San Clemente on September 4, 1970. Dean Brown, off to Jordan, flew with me to Los Angeles and we motored together in a rental car to San Clemente. The meeting lasted a full hour and was largely a monologue by the President. He spoke cogently and in detail, without notes, about the opportunities the recent political change in Cambodia offered us and stressed Cambodia's importance in buying time for "Vietnamization." Kissinger, who was present, said little. Secretary Rogers, although present in San Clemente, had not been invited. The President discussed the prospects for economic and military aid and stressed his determination to do all he could to support Lon Nol. He was insistent -- the matter came up twice -- that Mike Rives be replaced as DCM (the President did not so inform me but the Vice President had strongly recommended this action). At the end of the meeting, the President, Dr. Kissinger and I walked out to the garden overlooking the ocean and had numerous photographs taken as we gazed west across the Pacific.

In his memoirs, Nixon wrote about his special preoccupation with Cambodia and his decision to invade. He was apprehensive that the North Vietnamese would topple Lon Nol and turn all of Cambodia into a sanctuary. It was therefore essential to bring Lon Nol into the war on our side. This decision has remained controversial, but after reviewing the materials that bore on it during my briefings, I concurred in it. If our overarching strategy was Vietnamization of the war so that U.S. forces could be withdrawn, the invasion could promote that strategy. Also, the Cambodians in Phnom Penh, for their own reasons, were

eager to add their weight to the forces opposing North Vietnam. What no one could foresee then was the phenomenal growth of the Cambodian insurgents into a disciplined, motivated force with Sihanouk as its figurehead. No one foresaw that Cambodia was going down a path to debilitating, destructive civil war.

Q: Was there an active Khmer Rouge rebellion under way at that time?

SWANK: In this early phase the insurgents could not have numbered more than 5,000 men. The rebellion had existed for about ten years without much success and was periodically engaged in skirmishes with Sihanouk's troops, under the command of Lon Nol. In 1970 the insurgency posed no immediate threat. All of us, including Lon Nol, perceived the real enemy to be the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.

I arrived in Phnom Penh on September 12, 1970, via Hawaii and Saigon. In Honolulu Admiral John F. McCain, Commander in Chief Pacific (CINCPAC), briefed me on the military situation. In Saigon I met briefly with Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams. Both men were helpful and promised their support, but their attention was heavily focused on the main theater of operations -- South Vietnam.

In Phnom Penh I was warmly greeted by Mike Rives and his staff. The Embassy already numbered about 50, and a new chancery was ready for occupancy. The city still had an aura of tranquility and charm that contrasted with the bustle and squalor of Saigon. I have preserved an article by Peter Jay, Washington Post correspondent, written on October 9, 1970, the date of the official proclamation of the Khmer Republic.

There is an aura of genuine friendliness, bravery, and good cheer. There is a notable sense of aroused nationhood and a new republicanism.

In my first interview with the press on September 22, I told James Foster, a Scripps Howard writer, that I was impressed by the patriotism of the Cambodians. I set for him the parameters of our involvement in Cambodia, as I understood them:

This is a Cambodian affair. We are simply helping the Cambodians defend themselves. Since we're furnishing military assistance, there need to be experts to manage it. But I think President Nixon has made it clear there will be no U.S. ground forces or military advisors.

I faced immediate challenges -- military, economic, and political.

Let me begin with the military. The question was this: What should be the size and location of the logistics team delivering military supplies and equipment to Cambodia? Arrangements up to that time had been informal with MACV sending supplies to the Politico-Military Section of the Embassy. This unit was headed by Jonathan (Fred) Ladd, a retired Army colonel and friend and appointee of Al Haig. Ladd's title was Political-Military Counselor. It was obvious that these informal arrangements would not be

adequate for long since our military assistance would be rapidly increasing. (It grew from $8.9 million in FY 1970 to $185 million in FY 1971, $200 million in FY 1972 and $225 million in FY 1973.) A more orderly channel of supply under military direction was required. Fred Ladd had misgivings about the military bureaucracy taking over and the diminution of his authority and support role. But it seemed to me a necessary and reasonable step to take. Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I agreed in January 1971 to establish a Military Equipment Delivery Team (MEDT) modeled on an organization the U.S. had devised some years before to deliver military aid to Burma. The initial complement of MEDT was 113 men, 23 of them resident in Phnom Penh, the remainder in Saigon. Later, additional personnel were brought to Phnom Penh, but the grand total of personnel at the Embassy, civilian and military from all agencies, never exceeded 200. The officer heading MEDT as based in Phnom Penh. The first incumbent was Brigadier General Theodore Metaxis, the second Brigadier General John Cleland.

The staffing dilemma we faced was of Washington's making. Congress was intent that the U.S. not convert Cambodia into a Vietnam and placed unprecedented restrictions on the executive branch to enforce this policy. Its vehicle was the "Supplemental Foreign Aid Authorization Act of December 1970," on which we depended for funding for Cambodia programs. The Act provided that no funds were to be used to introduce ground combat troops into Cambodia or to provide U.S. advisors to Cambodian military forces in Cambodia. Nor should the provision of military aid be construed as a U.S. commitment to Cambodia for its defense. Subsequent legislation went so far as to limit to 200 the total of all U.S. personnel based in Cambodia.

I concluded that we had to observe these restrictions scrupulously to assure a continuing flow of appropriations. But their impact was never far from my mind. Addressing an MEDT conference in May 1971, I noted the modesty of our efforts in Cambodia as compared to Vietnam and the dilemma we faced of making the military aid program effective without advisors. Nonetheless, we were providing critical assistance to people who wished to defend themselves against aggression. We had limited influence over the course of events, I noted, but were the source of their supply of arms and thus a vital part of their effort.

These restrictions on our input into the war, together with weaknesses of the Khmer government and armed forces that soon became apparent, made it clear to me that as in Laos we were engaged in a "holding action." When I arrived in 1970 the North Vietnamese and the insurgents already controlled about half the land area of Cambodia, although most of the people were still under friendly rule. At another MEDT conference held in Bangkok in May 1972 -- twenty months after my arrival -- I pointed out that we could be proud of what we had accomplished with the limited means at hand. The Khmer Republic had survived. The enemy had been denied use of the port of Kompong Som (Sihanoukville). More importantly, the Cambodian armed forces were deflecting between 10,000 and 15,000 Vietnamese troops from operations in South Vietnam, thus buying time for Vietnamization." Yet it was evident to all of us at the conference that the

Cambodian armed forces could not reestablish their authority over enemy-held areas and would do well to hold on to the provincial centers they then controlled. Although President Nixon as late as November 16, 1971, had called Cambodia "the Nixon Doctrine in its purest form," Cambodia was in fact a "no-win" situation.

I want to make a few comments about our economic support to the Republic. A group of U.S. experts had arrived in July 1970 to discuss the country's economic requirements. These received further study in November 1970 during a visit by Roderic O'Connor, Assistant Director, AID. We produced a program of assistance that would provide essential imports for the economy and monetary stability. (Developmental assistance, what little could be used by a country at war, would be provided by the United Nations Development Program.) The first delivery of aid, symbolized at a welcoming ceremony by a sack of wheat flour, occurred on June 21, 1971. By mid-1972 assistance valued at $40 million had been delivered and $90 million was under procurement. An Exchange Stabilization Fund, modeled on that in Laos, was also in operation, with Japan, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, and the U.S. as contributors. The economic assistance program was effective and served the purposes for which it had been established. It was also well administered by Miles Wedeman, Economic Counselor.

Q: Did you take the President's counsel and replace your DCM?

SWANK: I saw no alternative, given the strong personal directive from the President and my need to retain his confidence. Mike's career was probably damaged by this episode, but I am glad to say he continued to serve in responsible posts for a number of years.

We now come to the political challenges of Phnom Penh, the most daunting of which was Lon Nol. He had been Prince Norodom Sihanouk's Minister of Defense and had personally led some campaigns against the insurgents over the years. Yet, along with Sihanouk and other top officials, he had been paid off by the Chinese for allowing war material for the North Vietnamese to be clandestinely unloaded at the port of Sihanoukville and transported to the Cambodian sanctuaries.

Q: Was Washington aware of that payoff?

SWANK: I think CIA obtained documentary proof of these shipments after I had arrived in Phnom Penh and certainly after the White House had committed itself to Lon Nol.

Lon Nol had been a ringleader, along with Sirik Matak, a princely rival of Sihanouk, of the bloodless coup which deposed Sihanouk in March 1970. There has been speculation about U.S. involvement in this coup. I am quite convinced there was no U.S. involvement. Top officials in the White House, State, and CIA were equally astounded by it.

Q: What were the reasons for the coup? Was it simply a grab for power?

SWANK: Yes, but in response to growing popular dissatisfaction with the encroachments and assertiveness of North Vietnam. Sihanouk was aware of his precarious situation and was on a trip to Paris, Moscow, and Peking to solicit protection from the Vietnamese.

Once committed to support of Lon Nol, Washington regularly sent "stroking" missions to reassure him of it. There were repeated visits by Haig, a second visit by Agnew, a visit by Treasury Secretary John Connally, visits by Admirals Moorer and McCain, a visit by Henry Kissinger, and a visit by Under Secretary of State John Irwin and Assistant Secretary Marshall Green. The President was in regular correspondence with Lon Nol through Embassy channels, sending him messages of encouragement and occasional policy suggestions.

I suppose I should record my impressions of Lon Nol. He had good qualities. He was a genuine nationalist and patriot and his anti-communism was deeply felt. He was generous and loyal to friends. He had boundless -- almost child-like -- confidence in the U.S. and in President Nixon. He was a shrewd manipulator of men, controlling his army officers through a network of appointments, friendships, and patronage. Yet he also had qualities that made him difficult to work with and an indifferent leader of his country. I found him divorced from reality a good deal of the time and had problems getting him to focus concretely on mutual problems. He was a devout Buddhist, perhaps even a mystic, but was also hostage to astrologers and all sorts of superstitions. He was over trusting of his family, giving far too much authority to his half-brother, Lon Non, who had no significant official position. He had delusions of grandeur and faulty military judgment. In December 1971, against the advice of some of his counselors, he launched a military campaign (Chen La II) to reopen communications with a northern provincial center, Kompong Thom. His troops got there but were then cut off by the enemy from resupply, panicked, and incurred disastrous losses in men and equipment.

But perhaps Lon Nol's major weakness was his failure to provide leadership. He could not articulate objectives -- did he even see them clearly? -- or motivate his people. He isolated himself from the public and distrusted his peers, seeing in them potential rivals. To aggravate the problem, his health failed. He was incapacitated by a stroke in February 1971 and relinquished power for six months, spending part of that time at U.S. hospitals in Hawaii. When he returned, he seemed less in touch with reality than before. He launched Chen La II, autocratically reasserted his authority (losing the friendship of Sirik Matak in the process), and seemed unable to work harmoniously with Cheng Heng, the nominal chief of state, or In Tam, a parliamentarian with considerable popular support.

By December 1971 we at the mission had arrived at a bleak assessment of the regime, and I sent a highly classified message to Washington incorporating our misgivings. The report was filched by a Navy yeoman in White House communications and was leaked by him to columnist Jack Anderson, who made it the subject of his syndicated column. My deputy, Tom [Thomas O.] Enders, alerted me by phone at a hotel in Pattiya, Thailand, where my wife and I were taking a brief vacation. I pondered with mounting chagrin the impact the leak could have on my relations with Lon Nol. On my return I sent him a

personal note, written in longhand in French, attributing the Anderson column to political maneuverings against President Nixon. Fortunately, the episode did not seem to reduce his confidence in me -- I have never known whether his staff translated the column for him. Ambassador to Chile Nathaniel Davis suffered from a similar leak to Jack Anderson about the same time, the particulars of which he recounts in his book The Last Two Years of Salvador Allende. Assured privacy of communications is of course vital to diplomacy.

Q: You mentioned that Lon Nol had received payments for allowing shipments to go to the Vietnamese. Would you consider him a corrupt individual?

SWANK: He tolerated much corruption in his government and in the armed forces. But corruption is endemic in Cambodia, in Southeast Asia, and in many parts of the world. Loyalty to the extended family takes precedence over other values, and providing for its welfare ranks above honesty.

As the months went by, we privately discussed at the Embassy whether a more effective leader than Lon Nol could be identified. The political vacuum that had existed in South Vietnam following the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem gave us pause. There was also the difficult question of who was qualified to succeed Lon Nol. Few Cambodians had ever had a chance to display leadership under Sihanouk, who had brooked no competitors. Strong personalities ended up in exile or in the insurgency. The Cambodian elite were also prone to factionalism and petty grievances. The country was in desperate straits, but no one seemed to comprehend the overriding importance of national survival. Who could replace Lon Nol in the armed forces? They might well disintegrate under a civilian alternative to Lon Nol. And so we never recommended that Lon Nol be replaced, and I am confident the issue was never remotely considered in the White House, however disillusioned they became with his performance. Lon Nol left for Hawaii on April 1, 1975, only weeks before the final collapse, and he later moved to California where he died at age 72 from heart disease in November 1985.

Q: In considering whether it might have served our interests to replace Lon Nol, did you ever consider whether we could accomplish it?

SWANK: We never got that far in our speculations.

I should make some remarks about Phnom Penh in wartime. The serenity of the early days soon vanished as rocket attacks on the city, indiscriminately launched against civilian as well as military targets, and harassment of the Embassy increased. Phnom Penh grew from 500,000 to over a million. Its facilities were overwhelmed by refugees from the countryside, and it took on the urban sprawl, litter, and confusion of Saigon.

Harassment of the Embassy began shortly after I arrived. A bomb exploded in the uncompleted wing of the new chancery at 7 a.m. on December 1, 1970. The timing of the explosion was odd -- at that hour the adjoining wing was unoccupied except for a guard, who was unhurt. But the message got through: We had enemies in Phnom Penh. The

enemy's first rocket attack on the city was spectacular, destroying on January 23, 1971, almost all of the T-28 fighter aircraft we had supplied the fledgling Khmer air force. Then in April and June bombs were tossed at MEDT vehicles, the occupants escaping injury. An attempt to assassinate me occurred on September 7, 1971. It failed because the charge of plastique hidden away in a bike pushed into the path of my limousine was improperly wired.

Q: Was the perpetrator ever identified?

SWANK: No. But while he failed in his mission, he achieved nationwide publicity in the U.S. for the notion that we were not welcome in Cambodia -- the attempt was front-paged in most newspapers. That same month a more serious incident occurred. Two U.S. mission staff members were killed and ten Americans and two Cambodians wounded by grenades hurled by terrorists at softball players using a vacant lot near the residence. This was a shock to us all, and we accelerated efforts to take precautions. Yet a year later Tom Enders, his chauffeur, and his bodyguard (Tom was Chargé d'affaires, I being absent in Washington), despite these precautions, were subjected to a bomb attack on the way to the chancery. The specially armored limousine in which they were riding was no longer usable itself but saved their lives. A Khmer motorcycle escort was killed.

As the war progressed and highways were interdicted, Phnom Penh became an island reached only by air or by river convoys moving upstream from Saigon with supplies of rice, other essentials, and military equipment. I spent frequent lunch hours on our terrace roof looking down the Mekong for these convoys. They were the city's and our lifeline. Phnom Penh ultimately fell to the insurgents because they acquired a capability to mine the river in the spring of 1975.

Q: Did the enemy control all the countryside around Phnom Penh?

SWANK: Only toward the very end. I cannot speak, by the way, for mission morale at that time, but in my years it was high in spite of dangers and hardships. Shared difficulties seem to reinforce loyalties.

Q: Were dependents at the post at this time?

SWANK: Most dependents were evacuated in the spring of 1973, some returning to the States, others staying in Bangkok and returning in periods when the threat temporarily lessened.

I come now to the stage of my tour of duty I call "Peace in Vietnam - War in Cambodia."

Q: Before moving to that, Coby, did you take special measures to keep morale up? Was morale a major preoccupation?

SWANK: It was not a major preoccupation. We all worked hard and then had social activities in the evening up to the hour of curfew. There was entertaining by diplomats, the still large community of foreign residents, and Cambodian officials, who were friendly and hospitable.

The Vietnam peace treaty signed in Paris in January 1973 between the U.S. and North Vietnam did not commit either side to actions to establish peace in Cambodia. Le Duc Tho, chief negotiator for Vietnam, had resisted Dr. Kissinger's efforts to include Cambodia in the treaty, claiming Hanoi could not speak for the Cambodian insurgents. We were skeptical about that assertion. In retrospect, it appears to have been an accurate statement. Nonetheless, I saw a glimmer of hope. We persuaded Lon Nol to declare a unilateral cease-fire on January 27, 1973. He insisted on addressing the appeal for compliance to the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, although we knew from special communications intelligence that the insurgents had then become the principal enemy. But it was at least an overture for peace. Simultaneously with Lon Nol's declaration, General John Vogt, Commanding Officer of the U.S. Seventh Air Force based in Thailand as the "United States Support Activities Group" (USSAG), stood down all tactical air and B-52 operations.

The response of the insurgents was to launch a major offensive against Lon Nol's forces. Takeo, a southern provincial capital, was seriously threatened. And so on February 8, 1973, Lon Nol and USSAG resumed military operations. Some years later a document came to light confirming that the insurgents were bent on total victory and feared the collapse of their revolution had they accepted a cease-fire (Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 348).

USSAG operations continued until August 1973 when halted by Congressional fiat. They have been the subject of controversy, generated in particular by the William Shawcross book Sideshow, subtitled Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia (1979). The Embassy's role in these operations, essentially that of liaison between USSAG and Lon Nol's General Staff, is described in detail in a memorandum which Tom Enders and I jointly filed with the Department of State's Historian in 1979. (Tom Enders served as DCM from January 1971 until my departure and as Chargé d'affaires from September 1973 until April 1974, when John Gunther Dean, the last U.S. Ambassador to the Khmer Republic, arrived in Phnom Penh.) The document we filed with the historian is also included as an appendix in Years of Upheaval.

I concurred in the resumption of the bombing. We judged it essential to the survival of Lon Nol's armed forces and to the success of negotiations that might be under way between Washington and Hanoi, or Washington and Peking, to terminate the war in Cambodia.

This might be as good a time as any to comment on those negotiations and on Prince Sihanouk.

None of us at the mission was privy to Kissinger's secret discussions looking toward a settlement and later described in Years of Upheaval. Kissinger correctly states that at the last meeting I was to have with him as Ambassador, in Bangkok on February 8, 1973, I stressed Lon Nol's objections to dealing with Sihanouk, then in Peking (p. 16). Distrust of Sihanouk was still widespread in Phnom Penh in 1973. He had forfeited good will be aligning himself unconditionally in 1970 with the insurgents and the Vietnamese, his former enemies. No Phnom Penh politician could have stomached his return to power in 1973 in a role of national reconciliation. My remarks to Kissinger did not come from any personal animus against Sihanouk -- I had never met him -- but from my reading of politics in Phnom Penh. In retrospect, neither we at the Embassy nor Lon Nol and his peers comprehended the degree to which Sihanouk had become a figurehead in the insurgent power structure. This lack of comprehension was not surprising since Sihanouk was to make a highly publicized visit to the so-called "liberated areas" of Cambodia in March 1973, the month following my meeting with Kissinger. Two years later, after the insurgents took power in April 1975, Sihanouk's fall from grace had become fully apparent. He returned to Phnom Penh only to find himself a prisoner in his own capital -- powerless, isolated, and unheeded. Several of his children lost their lives in the carnage Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot launched against his people. It is because of this subsequent suffering of Sihanouk at the hands of the Khmer Rouge that he has regained some measure of respect from his noncommunist countrymen and a sufficiently neutral posture to permit him to be seen, in 1988, as a possible figure of national reconciliation.

Q: So you never met Sihanouk.

SWANK: Yet I feel I know him quite well, having heard so many stories about him in Phnom Penh and having read his numerous interviews and books and seen his films.

My concluding months in Phnom Penh -- March to September 1973 -- were full of professional and personal frustrations.

Let me begin with the professional concerns. As the weeks passed with no sign of progress towards a negotiated settlement and no advance of Lon Nol's military fortunes, we could point to only one accomplishment: the survival of the capital from convoy to convoy. It is true that we managed to induce Lon Nol to accept, in the interest of political unity, Sirik Matak, Cheng Heng, and In Tam in a High Political Council which he chaired. But as early as June it had become clear the Council remained largely on paper and that In Tam, who had been named Prime Minister in May, would not be able to function effectively. Factionalism remained too strong. I pinned a hope or two on Kissinger's meeting with Le Duc Tho in Paris in mid-May 1973. But a private message to me from Kissinger in June indicated no progress had been made on Cambodia. We then persuaded Lon Nol to take another initiative for a cease-fire, but this July 6 declaration elicited no response from the insurgents. Meanwhile, refugees were streaming into Phnom Penh from the provinces. We reviewed our evacuation plans in April, based on helicopter rescue of U.S. personnel and friendly Cambodians and diplomats to safe

havens outside the country. The actual evacuation two years later closely followed these concepts.

In April I also decided to evacuate wives and children. My wife Meg was among them. The letters from me she preserved convey something of the anxieties we were experiencing.

June 29, 1973. I hope I can look back at this post at some future point without bitterness. But the past two years have been the most trying I can recall -- an accumulation of frustrations and failures. . . . Fortunately, there is harmony, by and large, within the mission that contrasts with the intractable divisions which mar the fading Khmer Republic.

July 6, 1973. If only by some miracle these people could sense their danger as much as we do. Simple, cheerful, uncomprehending, they are not equipped to summon the resolution and discipline they need.

July 25, 1973. I have sent a notice to non-official Americans recommending they leave. I am reminded so often of those last grim days in China in 1949. Lon Nol has no Taiwan. We gave the High Political Council a pep-talk yesterday and a program for survival if they can and will follow it. It is pretty much up to the Khmer now. I think the outcome is unpredictable, ranging from early evacuation to muddling along for months.

The sense of imminent danger in the last entry was due to the termination of U.S. air support scheduled for August. There was a widespread impression in the U.S. that the bombing was excessive and provided no long-term solution to the problems of the Khmer Republic. To us in Phnom Penh, it was insurance for survival.

My personal frustrations were also mounting. Earlier in the spring I took advantage of a visit by Bill Hall, Director General of the Foreign Service, to ask whether I could be replaced as Chief of Mission during 1973. I noted I would complete three years in Phnom Penh in September and told him a new Ambassador might bring more vigor and conviction to the job than I could now muster. There was a further consideration I did not share with Bill Hall. Friends privy to Washington currents told me Kissinger was unhappy with me -- too "low profile." Years later, in 1986, I came across a quotation in Barry Rubin's book Secrets of State attributed to Brent Scowcroft, an aide to Kissinger on the National Security Council staff in 1973, that substantiated this:

We felt Swank's attitudes were not healthy. He was pessimistic and therefore a bad influence on the government. He had a negative attitude towards what we were doing -- didn't put his heart into it.

Early in August 1973 I left Phnom Penh for a week for the relative tranquility of Burma, visiting Ed Martin (the American Ambassador) in Rangoon and making a trip up country to the temple ruins of Pagan and the city of Mandalay. One evening at Pagan, alone in my

hotel room overlooking the Irrawaddy River, I decided to write Dr. Kissinger a confidential letter that I later dispatched from Bangkok by classified pouch. The salient paragraphs were these:

Your criticism hurts because I have given a great deal in time and energy to realize the mission the President and you gave me at San Clemente in September 1970. Your minimum objective, as I understood it, was to preserve a friendly regime in Phnom Penh pending the success of the program of Vietnamization in South Vietnam and the negotiated end of the war we hoped would follow. Against considerable odds, some of them unforeseeable, including the invalidism of Lon Nol and the general ineffectualness of the Khmer military and political leaders after a period of initial elan, this minimum objective was in fact realized and contributed to the disengagement of U.S. forces from Vietnam. It was admittedly an uphill battle all along the way, at best a holding action which at the time many predicted would fail in six months. Yet we held the line through the 1973 [U.S.] elections and the January settlement. . . .

Our task would have been easier, as you know, without the restrictions on staff and prohibition on military advisors, both legislated by Congress. Indeed, the lack of combat advisors with Khmer battalions has probably proved to be our severest handicap. But within those restrictions, we have for the last two years been operating at full strength seven days a week -- a maximum effort which belies the description "low profile."

Naturally no one is fully satisfied with his effort. In retrospect, I think I placed too much confidence in the early enthusiasm of the Khmer for the war as well as their capability to wage it with a minimum of outside support. Only in time did I learn . . . that the competence of the Khmer in these things is modest. . . . Only after time did we perceive that our own supporting effort, basically modest in input and conception, would be just barely adequate to our purpose. A modest input, it should be recalled, did not prove adequate for Vietnamization in Vietnam. And so I am not apologetic about what we have accomplished with the means at hand. . . .

I would of course have preferred to discuss this issue with you personally and directly since it is not one easily addressed in a letter. Although I have had numerous useful meetings with Al Haig, I have met with the President only once, and with you only twice since San Clemente, both times in haste on your way to Peking. I doubtless would have benefitted from more frequent and direct counsel from you since most Presidential emissaries who came to Phnom Penh were inevitably confidence-building missions for Lon Nol, focusing on the crisis of the moment. None gave me a hint of serious unhappiness with the mission's or my effort, and all seemed to accept we were doing our best in a fragile and intractable situation.

I was encouraged to receive rather quickly from Kissinger his reply through private channels.

From: Henry A. Kissinger. Eyes Only for Ambassador Swank.

I am replying to your letter of August 8 by this means in order not to have to wait for a pouch to convey my response.

It is certainly true that I feel our policy of "low profile" in Cambodia was wrong. It is equally true, however, that I was in a better position to have that policy changed than you.

It is clearly unjust to charge the executors of a policy with the consequences of that policy. I made that point very strongly at the time the Foreign Relations Committee failed to confirm Mac Godley. It most certainly is equally applicable in this case.

I want you to know that I have great respect for your professionalism and your dedication. The country owes you a great debt for your tireless efforts in a most difficult post at a most difficult time. The toughest days are now upon you but I know that you will "hang in there" and give it everything you have -- as you have never failed to do. You have the very best wishes of all of us. Warm regards.

I have quoted these letters in detail because neither, to my knowledge, has previously been published.

I was heartened not only by this letter but also by State's recognition of my service in Cambodia in granting me a Superior Honor Award. Also, I received an extravagantly phrased letter from President Nixon, with his signature, dated August 28, 1973, which spoke of my "great dedication and purpose" and of the Phnom Penh assignment as having added "new luster to an already distinguished career."

Yet in subsequent years (1973-75) friends in State acquainted with the personnel process, including Deputy Director of Personnel Hugh Appling, told me that although my name was frequently submitted for top level assignments, the prospect of my receiving one seemed negligible. I chose retirement in 1975, at age 53. I left with a feeling of depression I overcame only over a period of time as I immersed myself in the challenges and rewards of a second career.

Q: You mention having had two meetings with Kissinger after San Clemente. How did you find him on those occasions? Friendly? Well informed?

SWANK: The meetings were hasty -- he was obviously under great pressure and preoccupied with other problems. His tone was sometimes peremptory. Perhaps he did not have as accurate a picture as he might of our situation in Phnom Penh and perhaps I failed to convey this reality to him in our meetings. However, one would have expected Haig to brief him.

Q: What were your impressions of Haig?

SWANK: He was friendly, open, and talkative. I had numerous private talks with him, to and from the airport and official calls, in my office and at home. He projected an agreeable, relaxed personality quite different from that he later projected as Secretary of State.

Q: Did he fully understand the difficulties you faced?

SWANK: I don't know. He should have, since his trips were frequent and his contacts numerous.

Q: What about the Department of State?

SWANK: Our reporting was candid and realistic. State officials knew, I believe, what we were up against. But the White House formulated policy on Cambodia.

Q: What would Kissinger have had you do differently?

SWANK: I never knew precisely, and his message to me did not clarify that important point. Maybe he didn't like my style. But I have always suspected my reporting irritated him. It was increasingly reflecting my conviction we were facing a "no-win" situation, possibly even a losing one.

My sense of discouragement as I left Phnom Penh on September 5, 1973, was profound. I had met infrequently with the press for the past 18 months but had a farewell session with journalists on September 4. I told them I saw no prospect for a negotiated settlement or an end to the fighting. Thinking principally of the U.S., whose forces had by then disengaged, I said that the war seemed to have less and less meaning. What I failed to articulate was that for Cambodians the war had changed its meaning -- it was a bitter civil war. Did Lon Nol, Sirik Matak, or their associates comprehend this changed character of the war? Or did they continue to blame North Vietnam for their misfortunes? Sirik Matak and others who remained in Phnom Penh in 1975 must have thought some compromise with the insurgents was possible. They lost their lives as a consequence.

Before my departure, Lon Nol received me at Chamcar Mon palace to award me the Order of the Grand Cross Sahametrei (Friendship). It was the saddest encounter of my life. I had developed affection and respect for this genuine if flawed patriot, but I could not bring myself to tell him honestly that I was convinced the Republic was doomed. Diplomacy, personal courtesy, and concern for U.S. interests kept me silent. Besides, what would honesty have accomplished?

Since 1973 Cambodia has known continuing tragedy: war, revolution, genocide, foreign invasion, perplexing and unending factionalism.

But Willie [William] Shawcross is wrong and simplistic to assign blame for the tragedy up to 1975 to Nixon and Kissinger as he does in Sideshow. Shawcross interviewed me for

8 or 10 hours at my home in Cocoa Beach in 1976, and he later sent me for comment an early draft of "Cambodia: The Blame," an article published in the Sunday Times Weekly Review on December 12, 1976, which advanced the thesis more fully developed in Sideshow. In my reply I noted that Nixon and Kissinger bore indeed some responsibility for the widened war in Cambodia but that responsibility for the tragedy that ensued was rather widely spread. The North Vietnamese aggression against South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia was a root cause of the tragedy. The unwillingness of the Cambodian insurgents to negotiate a settlement was another. And our own Cambodian friends were not blameless. They were naive about their prospects in Cambodia, unrealistic in their assessments, and provided weak leadership. But Shawcross, although a talented and personable journalist, was carried away in his own emotional tide of sympathy for Cambodia and antipathy for U.S. policies.

There are probably many lessons to be learned from the Cambodian experience as far as U.S. policy makers are concerned: match resources to policies, or else change the policies; undertake military operations of any duration only when there is a broad national consensus favoring them; avoid interventions in third-world situations unless the objective is precise and appears feasible. We ventured into many unknowns in Cambodia.

Q: When we look back at our experience in Southeast Asia, my immediate impression is that we vastly overstated our interest in that region. What an expenditure of men and materiel we made and how little it all seems to count now! Do you share that judgment?

SWANK: Yes. There is a pervasive "Can Do" philosophy among Americans. It was that philosophy operating among policy makers in a series of decisions over a number of years that deepened our involvement in Vietnam -- so-called "incrementalism."

Q: Was it ever possible during that period to say to President Nixon or Dr. Kissinger -- Whoa! Aren't we overreaching ourselves? Or weren't they receptive?

SWANK: Alternative courses of action had to be examined much earlier -- in the Kennedy years.

Q: How closely did you work with Embassy Saigon and the various military headquarters?

SWANK: Very closely. Saigon was the logistics base for our Cambodian programs. We also worked together to ease tensions between the South Vietnamese and Lon Nol forces. Coordinated operations of the two armies were eventually feasible.

Q: It must have been difficult for you, given the variety of tasks the mission was performing, to keep your finger on operations. How did you manage that?

SWANK: On my arrival I established a Coordinating Committee comprising the principal officers of the Embassy -- a streamlined Country Team. Ten or twelve of us met at 8 a.m.

each morning except Sunday to review the intelligence picture and discuss courses of action. The meetings generally lasted an hour and were indispensable.

Q: Coby, your last assignment was as Political Advisor to the Commander in Chief Atlantic (CINCLANT), who is also the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT), from October 1973 to December 1975. Do you wish to comment on that assignment?

SWANK: I came to refer to it, Henry, as a "decompression chamber." The Norfolk assignment offered limited operational challenges but enabled me to learn a great deal about the U.S. defense posture and to become acquainted with Iceland, Portugal, and the Caribbean countries. I worked for two excellent commanders in chief -- Admiral Ralph Cousins, a low-key, reflective naval aviator, and his successor, Admiral Isaac (Ike) Kidd, a dynamic, extroverted surface commander. Both were exceptional men of broad experience and keen intellect, and I was highly impressed with most of the other naval officers I met. They were a dedicated professional elite.

I have a couple of observations about NATO deriving from my experience in the SACLANT headquarters and some six visits to Brussels for Defense Minister and Foreign Minister meetings. The first is that military planners seem doomed to fight the last war. SACLANT spent considerable time discussing and debating the resupply of Europe in event of hostilities with the Soviet bloc. Because of the new Soviet "blue-water" Navy and its expanded submarine fleets, the USSR can probably successfully interdict allied surface shipping. At the end of six weeks' fighting, NATO forces would have used up stockpiles, and resupply by airlift would prove inadequate. But is a war in Europe going to last more than six weeks? Many doubt it. I believe SACLANT planners could have spent their time more profitably on other problems. The second observation is about NATO itself. It is quite an institution. Not only is it the most durable and central alliance in which we participate, but also the degree of cooperation at the civilian and military levels is remarkable. It is a fully credible alliance and has helped keep the peace in Europe.

During my assignment to Norfolk I was invited to spend a week in the spring of 1975 as a diplomat in residence at Franklin and Marshall College, my alma mater, and to deliver an address on U.S. foreign policy during the last quarter of the century. I took as my theme the transition of the U.S. from post-war dominance to uneasy preeminence in the world -- a thesis that has received much attention in 1988 with the publication of several scholarly books on U.S. decline. I cited Soviet attainment of strategic parity with the U.S., the emergence of new centers of power in addition to the super-powers (European Community, Japan, China, India), and our diminished political authority, reflected in disillusionment with U.S. leadership as a result of the Vietnam and Watergate experiences and the loss of U.S. authority in such bodies as the United Nations. I foresaw that the process of adjustment to our changed status would prove difficult and complex for "Can Do" Americans since it would require much greater collaboration with Europe and Japan in economic and military affairs than we had been accustomed to, efforts to reduce tensions with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and produce a more survivable

and less terrifying balance of power, and development of a bipartisan consensus at home on what our overseas commitments should be. My experience in Cambodia, which fell to the insurgents the very week of this address, probably caused me to emphasize the injury and policy paralysis associated with executive-legislative confrontation. "No parliamentary democracy," I said, "has generated controversy over foreign policy issues of the intensity and frequency our presidential system has experienced." In the years since 1975 it is evident that we have succeeded, slowly and painfully at times, in shaping policies that give more weight to Europe and Japan and -- very recently -- that hold some promise of a lasting diminution in East-West tensions. But a consensus on foreign policy has eluded us. The fault may lie in our constitutional system, which we will probably not be prepared to change.

Q: My questions may seem irrelevant after that strong statement. Your career, Coby, seems to parallel the "rise and fall" of the Foreign Service as competing government agencies have chipped away at State's dominance of foreign policy. Do you have any comments on this?

SWANK: The fate of the Foreign Service is closely dependent on that of the Secretary of State. A strong Secretary who is trusted by the President can muster the enormous body of talent that resides in State and utilize the Foreign Service in grand causes.

Q: What about our foreign affairs management as compared to other countries?

SWANK: That is a large question. Power in foreign relations is much more diffused here than elsewhere. We are the only nation that has so many different players in foreign affairs that we have to organize them abroad in so-called Country Teams. The competition for the President's ear is fierce. I am proud of our Foreign Service, although like many of my peers I am ambivalent about some of the changes of recent years such as affirmative action. Terrorism is also reducing the interaction with other societies so important to the Foreign Service as a profession. The enhanced assignment of political appointees to top positions is a dangerous trend. For all these reasons, I am not as enthusiastic about the Foreign Service as a career now as I was when I entered it.

Q: Would you like to comment further about the impact of Congress on foreign relations?

SWANK: Congressional oversight is always troubling to members of the executive branch. I suppose that for a considerable part of my career I was anti-Congress. But the Constitution is reasonably clear on the point that neither the executive nor the Congress can prevail in foreign policy, and as a result of Vietnam, Watergate, and Irangate I am no longer persuaded that the executive should have a free hand. Abuse of power, especially in the White House, has been flagrant. So we are doomed to checks and balances and considerable inefficiency in foreign relations.

Q: What about the quality of American journalism abroad? How well are Americans being informed by the media?

SWANK: There's great variation in talent. Journalists whom I knew in Moscow were superb reporters, and some have produced excellent books on Soviet society. Reporting from Laos and particularly Cambodia was uneven and inevitably reflected the strong bias against the war which many journalists developed. There was little attempt at nuance, and they tended to view anyone in federal employ as hostile.

Q: This concludes the oral history, Coby. Many thanks for your participation.

End of interview