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

MARK TAUBER

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INTERVIEW

Family origins: Eastern European Jews Who Got Out in Time

Q: Let's start at the beginning, when and where were you born?

TAUBER: I was born in Long Branch, New Jersey, just enough past midnight to arrive on Easter Sunday, March 29, 1959. According to family lore, it was still cold enough for a few snowflakes to fall. My parents had been in their house for 3 years when I came along. My younger sister was next, in 1961, and my brother in 1964.

Q: What do you know about the Tauber side?

TAUBER: My grandparents were the first generation of immigrants to this country, so I am a third generation American. My mother's parents came from what is now Belarus and my father's parents came from what is now Poland. Both have done their DNA checks. Mom is 100% Eastern European Jewish. Dad is 97% Eastern European Jewish and – get this – 3% Irish! That might account for his blue eyes and light brown hair. No one knows where the Irish connection came from.

Q: Ok, let's stick to your father's side to begin with. What were they doing? I assume the name Tauber, coming from Eastern Europe, they were Jewish?

TAUBER: Correct. Except that my paternal grandfather arrived at Ellis Island with the surname "Teiberer." The immigration officials changed it to Tauber, ostensibly to make it more pronounceable. No such luck. I've heard my last name pronounced as Tayber, Tober, Tawber, and Toober.

Q: So, what were they up to?

TAUBER: All my grandparents arrived between 1918 and 1923. My paternal grandfather was a house painter, my paternal grandmother worked in the apparel assembly industry – the rag trade. They lived first in Manhattan, and then, after the Depression hit, they moved to the Bronx where my father was born.

Q: Were there any tales that came out of the Cossacks coming in and all that sort of thing? It's one of the great American stories about the Jewish experience in middle Europe.

TAUBER: Certainly there were all kinds of official and unofficial anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe and Russia, but my grandparents did not relate any stories of getting caught up in pogroms. But they knew there was no future in Europe for them. They left Europe the very first moment they could, basically in search of better jobs and a better quality of life. They were young, in their late teens or early 20s. They had an anchor relative who filed appropriate papers and they all came, everybody on both sides of the family, with only one exception we know of. That was my father's maternal grandfather. After a great deal of genealogical research, we recently learned that he lived long enough to perish in the Holocaust.

Q: Where did they come from, my terms may be wrong, but a shtetl, or rather the big city or something like that?

TAUBER: They all came from cities. It is difficult to say exactly which city because even in their early life they moved around looking for work. I have a postcard that my paternal grandfather sent in 1912 from Vienna to his family in Bialystock, Poland. But it is safe to say that they all pretty much came from the old Pale of Settlement, meaning the border areas of Poland and Russia.

Q: So your grandfather was a house painter? Did he ever talk about being a house painter in New York City?

TAUBER: I never knew my paternal grandfather. He died relatively young, in his late forties, but from my father I learned that he didn't much like being what in Yiddish is called "a schmearer," or house painter. His advice to my father was to get an education. That would be a path to a better job.

Q: Let's continue with your father. What was your father doing?

TAUBER: From an early age my father loved mathematics and science and did very well in them. He attended DeWitt Clinton High School, which at that time was an all-boys school. A number of its graduates would go on to distinguished careers. My father was also fortunate in that he was a Boy Scout, which allowed him to go camping and take part in other activities that his family could not otherwise afford. After high school, he enlisted in the Navy. This was right after WWII, just in time for the benefits of the GI bill. So after his enlistment he attended Brooklyn Polytechnic, a college with a strong

science curriculum. It merged with NYU in 1975. My father continued his education there in chemistry and electrical engineering up to the PhD level.

Q: Did he have any stories to tell about the Navy experience?

TAUBER: Yes, in fact he has a lot of photos that date back to that time. He was a medic, and recalls giving vaccines and assisting with minor surgeries. Even though the war had ended, seamen still suffered all kinds of mishaps, so there was plenty of work for medics and doctors. In fact, my father wanted to become a doctor, but he could not fund the additional expense of medical school, and instead began work using his bachelor's degree in chemistry for the U.S. Army Electronics Command at Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey. This would be in the early 1950s.

Q: You say he had gotten a PhD?

TAUBER: Yes, the PhD came later, in 1972. Fort Monmouth encouraged him to complete the doctorate on a part-time basis since the additional degree would not only add to his credibility in the field, it would allow him to lead teams and take on more managerial responsibilities in the lab.

Q: But he continued to work at Fort Monmouth?

My Father at Ft. Monmouth: A First-hand Look at the McCarthy Era

TAUBER: For the Army Electronic Materiel Command, yes. Most of his work was classified, but he was allowed to tell me that it involved developing components for communication equipment – everything from ground radiography to satellites. Just a few months after my father entered on duty, Senator Joe McCarthy came through Fort Monmouth looking to root out communists and other "undesirables." A number of my father's colleagues had their security clearances suspended, which meant there was little they could do while investigations went on for a year or more to determine if McCarthy's allegations had any merit. Eventually, all those accused were restored to full employment and their security clearances were reinstated because McCarthy's informant recanted.

Q: I am a year older than your father and I say Joe McCarthy is not a person I would care to associate with, except to be at the other end of a firing squad.

TAUBER: But even as Joe McCarthy and Roy Cohn sought to root out "communists" at Ft. Monmouth, they totally overlooked the hive of ex-Nazi scientists ensconced there. Under "Operation Paper Clip," the U.S. secretly brought to America somewhere between

1,000 and 2,000 Nazi scientists to work for the U.S. government. The most famous of these was Werner Von Braun, who was a key player in U.S. rocket development. Far less famous were the former Nazi scientists farmed out to various Army research and development labs, including Ft. Monmouth. There were several physicists, chemists, and experts in other fields at Ft. Monmouth. My father's first boss was Horst Kedesdy, one of the "Paper Clips." In fact, Dad wrote a short paper with him that is still used in research today. You can find the paper at this website: (http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1151-2916.1956.tb15616.x/abstract Where else but in America could you find a Jew and a former Nazi as joint authors of a peer-reviewed paper? Dad said Kedesdy was very nice. Kedesdy's denazification file was auctioned off several years ago. Unfortunately, the images from the auction are no longer available.

Q: Alright, well let's come back to the family but on your mother's side. What do you know about her family and her experience?

Mom's Family: Surviving the Depression

TAUBER: Sure. We believe that my mother's mother was born in 1898, but she never had a birth certificate from Poland. All she ever said about her youth was that she was one of several children whose family lived on the outskirts of Bialystock, Poland. Her family could not support her, so she had to go out to work from an early age as a housemaid at the home of a Polish landowner. As long as I knew her, my grandmother never spoke about those years, so I have no other details other than that she married at around the age of 20 in Poland and had her first child, my Uncle Irving, there. Her husband, my grandfather, arrived in the U.S. in 1921. He was a tailor and it took him quite a while to become established, even in the Roaring 20s. He eventually set up a tailor shop in Manasquan, New Jersey, and later moved to Asbury Park. He still didn't have much money, but another family member, a cousin, helped out, and my grandmother and uncle arrived in the U.S. in 1923.

Subsequently, my maternal grandmother and grandfather had two daughters in the U.S., my aunt, and my mother, who was the youngest. My grandfather had become quite fat, smoked, and enjoyed his evening schnapps when he played poker with the boys. He died of a heart attack in 1933, leaving my grandmother to run the tailor shop in the Depression. Unfortunately, my grandmother never learned to speak or read English beyond a very rudimentary level. She had to rely on her children to help her throughout her life. Several years after my grandfather died she gave up the tailor shop and began working at a women's clothing factory in Asbury Park. The owner, a man by the name of Kasliner, was a wonderful employer known for helping out immigrants and minorities.

Mom Works for Ma Bell

My mother enjoyed high school and had several part-time jobs on the Asbury Park boardwalk as a teenager. Immediately after she graduated from high school, she went to work for Bell Telephone as an operator, in 1947. She loved that job because it was good pay and she and the other operators on her shifts became fast friends. Sometimes, on midnight shifts, they got up to hijinks by connecting people to the wrong number. She was with AT&T until 1961 when she had two children and there was strong peer pressure to be a stay-at-home mom. After my younger sister and brother were old enough to go to elementary school on their own, she returned to work as a part-time teaching assistant at the school. Later, she re-entered the workforce full-time, first at the county welfare board and finally at Ft. Monmouth as a clerk.

Q: Was Yiddish spoken at home? Did you pick up a significant vocabulary yourself of Yiddish words such as "Nebbish?"

TAUBER: Interesting choice. I prefer *shpilkas* as an example.

Q: Shpilkas?

Q: TAUBER: We'll get to that definition shortly. I did pick up some Yiddish expressions. Generally, these were the colorful curses like, "May you grow like an onion with your head in the ground and your feet in the air." I imagine these could also be found in other languages like German, Polish, and Russian, and were incorporated into Yiddish.

Q: How religious was your family?

TAUBER: My family belonged to a "Conservative" synagogue. For us, that meant attending religious services regularly, observing most of the Jewish holy days, and adhering to some of the kosher food requirements. My sister, brother, and I went to after-school lessons in Hebrew language, religion, and Jewish culture and history. We also attended Saturday morning services for young people. Altogether, this was about five hours of religious instruction per week. I was Bar Mitzvah in 1972.

Q: Where did the family fit politically?

TAUBER: Democrat. From start to finish they were always Democrats. But you have to remember that in the 1960s and 1970s there were many parts of the Party. There were right-of-center Dems like Scoop Jackson and Sam Nunn, and left-of-center ones like

George McGovern and Eugene McCarthy, and there were centrists. Some Democrats held some views now more associated with conservatives and others more associated with liberals at the same time. It was a bigger tent back then.

Q: Roosevelt Democrats?

TAUBER: Yes, exactly, because it was Roosevelt who forged the alliance of labor, northern liberals, and southern blue dogs that eventually led to social security and Medicare/Medicaid. Without these social programs, my grandmothers would have been indigent, with little savings and no ability to earn income after retirement.

Q: What sort of reading materials were around?

TAUBER: Lots. You could find the local *Asbury Park Press*, the Sunday *New York Times*, the Yiddish newspaper *The Daily Forward*, my father's scientific magazines – including National Geographic -- and a growing library of mysteries and thrillers that my mother read for pleasure. Most importantly, my mother insisted on biweekly trips to the library. She became friends with all the librarians and we were expected to read for pleasure. This was simply part of life that one never questioned.

A Feral Childhood

Q: What was your neighborhood like when you were a kid?

TAUBER: Long Branch borders the Atlantic Ocean. My part of town, called Elberon (a conflation of the name of the developer of the area, L. B. Brown) was just a half-mile from the beach. You could walk there. Long Branch grew in the post-World War II era, and my particular house was part of a development that had been a golf course. There was a small lake nearby and Monmouth College, a small liberal arts school, was also half-a-mile away. Monmouth College has since grown considerably. It is now a university whose public opinion polling is sometimes quoted during national elections like the one in 2016. I could walk to my elementary school. For high school, which was about a mile and a half away, I took the bus. I was a Cub Scout. Mom was an Assistant Den Mother for a while, and although Dad wasn't a scout master, he did participate in my Boy Scout meetings. Unfortunately, neighborhood interest in our scout troop waned quickly and I only reached Second Class Scout. I liked the Scouts since it required a variety of skills that I could master, not just team sports.

Q: The place must have been swarming with kids, when you say tract housing, I mean this was the post-World War II generation and they were a generator of children.

TAUBER: Absolutely. You could walk outside and every other house had kids with whom you could put together every kind of activity kids could want. Everybody had a bike. The only thing you ever concerned about was the sunset curfew. Generally parents would want their kids home by sundown. In the summer, that meant the kids were out till 9 pm. We had a great time.

Q: You are still part of the feral generation. The parents used to say "now get out of the house and be back by sundown". I mention this because it so different from today, where everything is so organized. I understand, I mean my grandson lives in a very nice neighborhood. But there are no kids and they are always off going somewhere and the parents have to drive them to one activity after another.

TAUBER: Very unprogrammed. I did go to a YMCA summer camp twice, but I preferred the footloose summer where you just rode around to friends' houses until you found one or two ready for that day's adventure. The only programming we had was Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and occasional PTA activities. Otherwise we made our own fun. We were all very happy doing that. We did not mind the absence of adult supervision.

Q: No, they just weren't around.

TAUBER: Yeah.

Q: I grew up in the same type of climate and I find it hard to see my grandchildren being brought up with helicopter parents now. Always hovering over them. Part of it is just because the parents no longer trust the neighborhood so kids aren't turned loose.

TAUBER: There are so many more fears now about crime and predatory sex offenders or traffickers and who knows what. It is a completely different scene.

Q: I think it is more perceived rather than actual.

TAUBER: I suspect you are right, but even one can do great damage. One great thing that I had as a kid was plenty of friends who went to various Christian churches. You could just go along with them to any church activity, nobody cared. So I would go with my Roman Catholic friend for Saturday afternoon movies in the basement of the church. The movies seldom kept our attention, but we didn't care. There was plenty of candy. And when we got bored there was ample opportunity for spitballing, rubber band shooting, ice cube fights, the usual naughtiness that kids get up to when they have lost interest in the program.

Long Branch: The Jersey Shore

Elberon did have a bit of history. From the late 1800s it was a vacation destination for wealthy New Yorkers and presidents such as Ulysses S. Grant. Even Oscar Wilde was hosted by New York moguls in their Victorian-style summer homes along Ocean Avenue. In 1881, President Garfield was brought to an Elberon cottage overlooking the Atlantic after he was shot. It was thought that the fresh sea air would help him recuperate. A piece of the railway spur built from the main line to his beach house still survives. Sadly for Garfield, although the germ theory of infection was known, and Robert Lister had lectured in U.S. medical centers in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia just a few years earlier, American doctors were slow to adopt antiseptic methods. The description of their "care" of Garfield from the time he was shot to his death is gruesome. Once the U.S. medical establishment did adopt antiseptic methods, there was a revolution in health care across the country. Antisepsis was a key contributor to the sudden increase in population and life expectancy that helped push the U.S. so quickly into world power status. But this advance was not soon enough for poor Garfield.

Q: Was the town all divided up into ethnicities?

TAUBER: There was a white/black division. There were a few black families who lived among the white families. But most of the African Americans lived in the northern part of town, closer to the main street. That was also true in the high school in the sense that, while we all went to the same high school, at lunch time, most of the black kids sat together and most of the white kids sat together. There were exceptions. High school sports teams sat together without regard to race, and the school band, numbering over 100 students, all sat together without regard to race. But by and large it was still divided.

Q: Was anti-Semitism ever a subject?

TAUBER: Seldom. There was one act of vandalism at my synagogue in my recollection. It was in the late 1960s. Apparently some kids got in and wrote anti-Semitic slurs on the ark and a few other places. Other than that, I never experienced anything I could call anti-Semitism while I was growing up. My parents told me stories of their experiences with anti-Semitism when they were kids -- Ku Klux Klan marches, families who followed Father Coughlin's rants, name-calling in school – but in our daily lives in Long Branch, New Jersey, there were few experiences of anti-Semitism.

The experiences of anti-Semitism my parents recounted seemed alien to me, from another era. I was too young to fully appreciate the experience of anti-Semitism and Jewish

identity as explored in the fiction of Jewish-American authors like Philip Roth, Herman Roth, and post-Holocaust writers like Elie Wiesel. Recently, Adam Kirsch, a professor at Columbia, summed up my experience this way, "In America, by contrast, Jews have assimilated so thoroughly -- and have benefited from the culture of pluralism -- that few believe there is a tension between the interests of Jews as Jews and the interests of Jews as Americans." (*The People and the Books,* pg. 44) I was bottle-fed American civic religion from birth and continued to imbibe it without critical reflection for many years. Now, of course, after the election of Donald Trump, there has been an upsurge in violent anti-Semitic crimes as well as in anti-Jewish conspiracy theories on the internet. All of this has created a new unease among American Jews. There is heightened security at synagogues and community centers. The journalist and author Jonathan Weisman, in his recent book <<*Semitism*>>, offers a thoughtful and ultimately grim analysis of his own run-in with viral antisemitism on the internet. When I read his book just a few months ago, I couldn't imagine that his fears would be reified by the mass killing of Jews in a Pittsburgh synagogue on October 27, 2018.

Q: At home was Israel a subject of conversation?

TAUBER: Periodically. When the news included something about Israel, and certainly during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, my parents followed events closely. Otherwise, it was not a major concern. Once again, my parents were very much dug into the local scene, the PTA, school, job, colleagues, local friends, that kind of thing.

Q: Was there an elite in the town? Wealthy bankers or something like that?

TAUBER: I would not call it a very wealthy town. The city had 30,000 people and only one high school. There were parts of the town where the houses were much larger and much nicer, maybe 10 percent of the population. But you didn't have a very strong feeling of rich and poor. The overwhelming majority of people lived in what you would think of as an average middle class house, some in apartments. There was definitely a poorer part of town. This was principally populated by minorities of color. I recall that a large number of kids from that part of town qualified for the free lunch program. As you might expect, some of these kids did not like the food choices offered at the school cafeteria. A small gray market in lunch tickets grew up. The street value of a lunch ticket was between 25 and 50 cents. Kids traded lunch tickets for candy, snacks, or used the change from sales to buy sodas. At that time, 50 cents could buy you a slice of pizza, so if you could wait till after school, you could get a slice in any of several sub shops nearby.

Q: Where was shopping?

TAUBER: From the early 1960s we had a mall that grew over time, and plenty of other shops. The nice thing about my county, when I was growing up, was that there were still truck farms. Not on the coast, but as you went further inland, toward the Battle of Monmouth Park, there were also farms where the racing horses for Monmouth Raceway were stabled. Much of that has now been turned into housing. But during my childhood, in 45 minutes, we could be in an orchard picking our own apples. There were also two apple trees in our backyard. Their fruit was generally small and sour, but Dad collected them to make apple pies. It was a skill he learned as a Boy Scout. My mother did not have the patience for baking pies, but she did do most of the other cooking, including chopped chicken liver from scratch. It is a delicacy I still enjoy.

Q: New Jersey is nicknamed the Garden State, and it was because of these fruit and vegetable farms.

TAUBER: Absolutely. Farmers grew peaches, apples, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, and further south there were blueberries and cranberries. There was an apple orchard nearby where we went as kids to get fruit and wonderful apple cider in the fall. I even remember eating wild raspberries and sassafras roots when I was out in the woods with the Boy Scouts. I don't know that New Jersey should still be called the Garden State. Today, when I visit my parents, all the small farms have been developed into upscale residential housing.

High School: Reading, Writing, and Math Block

Q: Turning to elementary school, what subjects were you good in?

TAUBER: I was always best in anything that had to do with language. Anything that had to do with numbers, much harder. My elementary school was probably like any other. But I do remember one special moment. When I was in third or fourth grade, we were all prepared for a special assembly. We had been introduced to the Underground Railroad and Harriet Tubman. The assembly was to watch a living history presentation by Tubman's great grandniece -- Mariline Northrup Wilkins, who was already well into her 50's during this time -- somewhere between 1967 and 1969. Wilkins quoted some of Tubman's own oral history stories, sang songs that Tubman used to sing, and answered questions from students. You could have heard a pin drop. It gives you an idea of how compelling the presentation was when you consider that I can still recall it some 50 years later.

Q: Indeed. But you mentioned you had trouble with math. Even though your father must have been very good in that subject?

TAUBER: Correct. I was an average student in math and struggled with it. Arithmetic wasn't that hard, but the more difficult aspects of math defeated me. I was not as interested or as good with higher math as I was in the humanities. I got through geometry and algebra, but never took calculus. Dad tried to help me understand the application of mathematical formulas to chemistry and physics, but I was a lost cause.

Q: What about reading?

TAUBER: I read for pleasure from as far back as I can remember. Over time, I grew to like reading more than television, but that only came later, as a junior and senior in high school. I read everything that caught my fancy from bird and reptile guidebooks to biographies and the paranormal. Lots of arcana. Useless but spellbinding.

Q: Did you have any books that really stick in your mind at a relatively early age? Anything formative?

TAUBER: Quite a lot. But that would come later, in junior high and high school.

Q: <u>The Hardy Boys?</u>.

TAUBER: By the late 1960s the Hardy Boys felt dated to me. I took on the Horatio Hornblower series. I also read everything by H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft's work was dismissed by literary critics as pulp fiction. But since the 1990s, Lovecraft has enjoyed a steadily growing cult following and a more serious look from critics, at least in the science fiction and horror genres. Now there are Lovecraft conventions and all kinds of spinoffs of his prose. He is also highly respected in Europe. I saw his work translated into Hungarian, Romanian, French, and several other languages. Ayn Rand became a favorite of mine later in high school.

Q: When you got to high school, you said you had one high school, were you in the band?

TAUBER: Oh yeah, from 8th grade to 12th grade I played alto saxophone. I eventually became the first chair in the section, but never had any talent for it. I stuck with it though, through every football game, every parade, every event. I played in the pit band for the drama club's yearly musical. Five years of all that. When I graduated from high school I put that saxophone in its case and I never opened it again.

Q: Did you have pick-up bands that played at your dances and that sort of thing?

TAUBER: No. They may have existed, but I never took part. It was just not my forte.

And Then I Found Out About the Foreign Service…

Q: How about by the time you got to high school, were you looking abroad at world developments and all of that?

TAUBER: I was an average teenager when it came to international affairs – getting most of my knowledge from TV news -- until my father told me about the State Department and the desk officers who work there. He knew about this because, by the mid-1970s, Fort Monmouth was hosting foreign scientists and engineers, mostly from NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) countries, but not exclusively. All of them needed visas and all of them had forms to fill out. Eventually, my father had to deal with the State Department on visa issues, and probably talked to a desk officer or two at some point in the organization of the visits. Once he learned about it, he thought I might be interested in it as a career and told me about it. It was like setting off a rocket.

I was completely seized with it. The idea of representing America abroad and fighting communism gripped me from 10th grade. From then on it was the only thing I ever wanted to do. It was both the public service aspect and working on behalf of democracy. It would also get me out the parochial world of Long Branch where I felt a gay man could never realize a full life.

I started reading everything international I could lay my hands on. I subscribed to *U.S. News & World Report, Foreign Affairs,* and *Foreign Policy* magazines. I can't say I understood everything I read. But it helped me realize the depth and complexity of international relations and what I would need to study to become proficient. So I started going regularly to the college library after school when I didn't have extra-curricular activities.

Q: Did any particular area of the world grab you?

TAUBER: Certainly Europe. With the Cold War still raging there was a lot of literature on NATO. America was still very Euro-centric in the '70s. I did look at other areas of the world, but not with the same interest and concern.

Q: Did anybody ever talk to you about international relations or U.S. government agencies engaged in that field while you were in high school?

TAUBER: No. There wasn't a soul in Long Branch, or anywhere nearby that I found through any connections who could talk to about the State Department. That was why, in great part, I was drawn to Georgetown. I figured you had to be able to find out more about the Foreign Service when there is an entire school dedicated to it.

Being a Gay Kid in the 1970s

Q: What were your dating habits in high school?

TAUBER: Well, I knew I was gay in 7th grade, so that created a certain, shall we say, reticence in the teenage dating scene for me. I avoided social events where I would be expected to date girls. Similarly, I avoided hanging out with guys. None of them seemed gay to me, and since I couldn't conform to their expectations of masculinity, I was often mocked. Avoidance was easier than trying to feign interest I didn't have.

I realized that being gay wasn't just a passing "phase" -- as the school guidebook on adolescent sexuality claimed – by the time I was 14, in 8th grade. I needed information that I couldn't get in my high school library, so I used to sneak into the Monmouth College library. Back then, it was relatively easy. You couldn't check books out, but the librarians didn't shoo you away when you folded yourself into an out-of-the-way alcove. I found the HQ section (homo queer was an easy mnemonic) and began a methodical march through every single book they had on homosexuality. It wasn't hard. There weren't more than a dozen or so.

First was Leo Rosten's *Religions in America*. By the mid-1970s, Rosten's latest editions included a question on homosexuality for all the denominations of Jews and Christians. The answers were uniformly negative. The only difference was the extent of hostility. You could get the fire and brimstone reply that placed homosexuality right up there at the top of Satan's plan for the destruction of the Earth and dominion over of human souls. Or you could get the more nuanced "contradictory to natural law" or "disordered and needing counselling" reply. Only the Quakers were hesitant to declare gay people unwelcome. But the Quaker reticence is due to the fact that Quaker meetings are wholly autonomous. It takes them a long time to reach consensus among all the meetings in the U.S. on any topic, so they couldn't make an absolute declaration positively or negatively on the issue. Buddhists and Hindus weren't included in the Rosten book, so I wrote to some of their associations. (That was back when people could still expect a reply to hand-written letters). They weren't any better. They replied that a same-sex orientation was unnatural but could be overcome with meditation, the eight-fold path, or chanting Hare Krishna. This turned me off to organized religion.

When I found *Homosexuality: An Annotated Bibliography* by Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg, I thought I had hit the jackpot: 1200 abstracts of books, articles, and studies from the 1950s and 60s. Today, these abstracts read like jokes in bad taste. Back then, they were truly frightening. Twenty years of "research" all started with the presumption that homosexuality was a disorder that needed treatment. Some felt psychoanalytic treatment was enough. Others added various medications. Some said it wasn't necessary to jail adult homosexuals. Others urged incarceration and forced treatment with drugs as a tough love regimen. One article assured that *physical* castration wasn't necessary because drug-induced castration was sufficient to eliminate the abnormal sex drive. Nearly all agreed that homosexuality was caused by environment. – a disordered family life or "recruitment" by predatory sex abusers. Along these lines, several doctors associated homosexuality with pedophilia. This accorded with a popular view that homosexuals *had* to prey on youth since they had no other means of reproduction. All the Freudian analysts agreed that "narcissistic object choice" resulted from unresolved Oedipal conflicts. They did not all agree on the exact nature of the arrested development and therefore on how to treat it. A few authors speculated that genetic mutation might be in play, but even if this were a causative factor, a blighted home environment was still necessary to derail normal heterosexual development. And so it went. 1200 references. None of them described me or my family.

More readings, more bad news. By now it's 1975. The ACLU guide book on gay rights was pretty bleak. It talked about entrapment under sodomy laws, arbitrary firing, public opinion polls that associated homosexuality with pedophilia and other sex crimes, the military's dishonorable discharges, and other officially tolerated prejudice. Other books detailed the lives of gay teens who had been turned out of their homes and ended up in criminal justice system. Aversion therapies of various kinds still had a serious audience. I thought of *Clockwork Orange* and shuddered.

But there were, even back in the 70s, studies that did not begin with the presupposition that homosexuality was an illness or a destructive force in society. Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg not only gathered old articles for a bibliography, they conducted their own study financed by the National Institute of Mental Health. They interviewed 1500 men and women who self-identified as homosexual. It was the largest known effort to document – without denigration – the views, habits, and psychological condition of these people. Their conclusions were published in 1978. The work was well known in its time and quoted frequently as opinions began to change. Similarly, C. A. Tripp's *Homosexual Matrix* marshalled arguments that homosexuality was either harmless to society, or beneficial in some ways.

I was also surprised to find that other works in the mid-1970s reflected a relatively tolerant approach to homosexuality. These started with the decision, taken by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973, to remove homosexuality from its list of pathological disorders. (Careful here. Just saying that something *isn't* pathological doesn't take you very far. It just means that a majority of psychiatrists agreed that using the medical term "pathological" was no longer a useful way to describe the phenomenon. Something can be non-pathological but still worthy of and susceptible to treatment. Nevertheless, one takes one's victories where one can.) Also, television shows were beginning to include periodic appearances by gay characters. The depictions were nearly all stereotyped, negative, or just plain ludicrous. Gay characters had to be self-hating, conflicted, unhappy, sick, or villainous. Even so, I think most gay kids like me were happy to see any depictions at all.

Q: Was this the reading that affected you the most?

TAUBER: Yes. I also started reading philosophy as an alternative to religion. Will and Ariel Durant's *History of Philosophy* remained a valuable resource throughout college. Seneca and Marcus Aurelius were easy enough in translation. By accident, I wandered into the Ayn Rand epics *Fountainhead, Atlas Shrugged*, and *Anthem.* She was virulently anti-communist, and rejected traditional religion, which suited me just fine. Through her books, Rand was working out her philosophy of Objectivism. For a while you might say I was an Ayn Rand devotee. I read copies of her old magazine *The Objectivist*, and, as a freshman in college, I found a few other Rand followers. We staged a theatre lab performance of her play, "Night of January 16." Denise Noe provides an excellent explanation as to why Ayn Rand can be catnip to gay male teenagers. In her article in the *Gay&Lesbian Review* of August 21, 2019, "What Ayn Rand Hoped You'd Miss," (https://glreview.org/article/what-ayn-rand-hoped-youd-miss/) she also notes that most teenage Rand acolytes abandon the "faith" once their critical reasoning skills get honed in college. Rand and I parted on amicable terms by the time I graduated college in 1981.

Looking back on this time in my life, I realize now that I was looking for a system of thought that included gay people as a normal part of the diversity of human life. This would integrate them into natural law and ethics. A good effort to develop just such a non-religious ethics can be found in Mark Johnson's *Morals for Humans.* He cites many earlier attempts and develops an approach that takes account of recent studies in brain science and game theory. Back in the 1970s I also wondered if there was anything that could explain the cause of homosexuality. There was little in the way of reliable research. For an incisive review of this subject over the last 30 years, see Martin Duberman's *Has the Gay Movement Failed? (pp. 150-159)* Even today, sexual orientation remains too complex a phenomenon to reduce to a single cause. In any case, I'm over it. I have hung

a big DO NOT DISTURB sign over the part of my brain that lights up when new findings come out "hinting" at the causes(s) of homosexual orientation. Wake me up when you've got something final.

Harassment

You mentioned mocking, did you experience gay bashing or bullying in high school?

I think anyone who was perceived as gender atypical in the 1970s probably got bashed. The African American boys in my high school just called me a faggot and roughed me up when they had a chance -- mostly in gym class. The white boys… hmmm… how to put this diplomatically… let's say they invited me with a sneer to engage in various sex acts and groped me in mock sexual assault. I wasn't much in the fisticuffs department, but call me a faggot, and I recommend you don your flame retardant gear and stand back. As Linda Goodman notes in *Sun Signs*, the Aries male is ruled by fire and I saw red. The Scorpio in me was a quick study in how to sting with belittling insults. This was a bad habit I would later unlearn with the help of college roommates.

I also learned coping strategies as well. Never go to the boys' bathroom during regular class intervals – that invited a bash. And I figured out alternate routes to classes to avoid crossing paths with the worst of the bullies. In any case, the most violent ones disappeared from school, one way or another, by the time I was a junior.

Gym class presented a problem. Gym teachers did not act against name-calling and seldom intervened when kids got roughed up. A fight would have to be full throttle to get their attention. The received wisdom at that time was that participation in team sports taught teamwork and fair play. What a crock! Team sports in my high school were about shaming, hazing, and dominance hierarchies. I would have loved a period during the school day to exercise the way I wanted to. But it was required that I take part in team sports, especially football. Supposedly it was touch football. Hah! The school nurse got more business from the outcomes of "touch" football than any other high school hazard. Then there were the indoor "sports." One was called Volleyball. I knew it as "Ace the Face." Dodgeball was a favorite of gym teachers. Everyone knows the vernacular for that one: "Smear the Queer." And basketball? That's where I learned the term "flagrant foul."

My first defense was avoidance. I'd sneak back to the empty locker room on some ruse. It didn't take long for the gym teachers to get wise to that. They started giving me low grades for failure to participate. So I tried other tricks and left high school with low grades in gym which reduced my overall grade point average. I thought it was unjust.

How can your performance in gym class be predictive of your success in college? Or life for that matter. I left high school with an aversion to team sports that has never abated.

(N.B. To my chagrin, not all gay men share my view of team sports. There are gay rugby teams, and – horrors – gay dodgeball! I'm seldom speechless, but gay dodgeball? Color me apoplectic.)

Q: This sounds like a pretty grim high school experience.

I don't want to paint high school as entirely negative. There were small havens as well. Kids in the public speaking club and school newspaper, where I excelled, were more accepting of non-conformity. My extra-curricular work with them gave me a reputation as someone who was all business about getting ahead. My helpful guidance counselor convinced the mayor of Long Branch to name me as his ex-officio representative to the public library's board of trustees. This was a real job even if the board only met quarterly. It gave me my first look at negotiation over scarce resources.

By senior year, the high school environment had improved considerably. I was voted "Most Likely to Succeed". We had a winning football season which put everyone in a good mood. Most of my cohort by then focused on college or work. Put-downs were seldom a part of seniors' daily discourse. Because my gym grades brought down my grade point average, I graduated 9th of 344 students with awards. But I did receive awards from the Kiwanis Club for community service and others for essays and debate.

Coming Out

Q: Were you open about your sexual orientation to friends or family in high school.

During high school, I came out to only two friends. One was a year older and had already left for college when I wrote to him asking about college life for gay people. He had converted to a strict evangelical branch of Christianity and was not sympathetic, so the friendship ended. However, another friend who lived on Long Island was wonderful. At first, she didn't understand what "being gay" meant. She confused it with gender dysphoria and wondered if I was going to seek gender reassignment surgery. But she was always very supportive as she learned more. At this point, in 1976-77, I would meet her in Manhattan for day trips several times a year. These trips were also opportunities to find gay-themed books, which were becoming both more plentiful and more positive about consolidating a healthy gay identity. *The Front Runner*, by Patricia Nell Warren, was a watershed in this regard. I think most gay men growing up in the 1970s read it, as well as

many other gay-themed books. Few of these books were great literature, but they were readily available and helped me understand more about the growing gay sub-culture.

Q: When did you tell your family?

TAUBER: I told them while I was home over the summer from college. They wanted me to discuss it with our family doctor. It was 1979 and Masters and Johnson among other less reputable "scientists," published articles claiming cures for homosexuality. Our family doctor, to his credit, gave me the lecture on safe sex without advising me to change my sexual orientation. The Masters and Johnson "cure" was later shown to be a hoax, but I imagine there are still mountebanks out there peddling "reparative therapy," or other gay-to-straight transformation programs. My parents and I were reconciled and we've had a perfectly good relationship since. This was important for my Foreign Service application since Diplomatic Security could not claim I was vulnerable to blackmail simply for being gay if everyone of any importance to me already knew.

What about work during high school? Any part time jobs?

Part-time work: My Libertarian Moment

Sure, New Jersey allows teenagers to work starting at age 16. So my first after-school job was working in the kitchen at an Arthur Treacher's Fish & Chips, a now-defunct fast-food chain. While training with the senior cook, I noticed that his arms, from wrist to elbow, were bone white. He explained that he had lost the pigment in his forearms from repeated hot oil burns. Oh, really? I didn't even last one pay period there. Cheery-bye, Arthur. The chain has since gone out of business.

Next I tried hot-walking thoroughbreds. Monmouth Park, a summertime horse racing stadium, was a few miles from my house. I arrived one June afternoon, got finger-printed, and started walking horses around the track. The horses weighed, on average, 1,000 pounds and stood nearly six feet tall from hoof to mane. I was 5'7" and weighed 145. I had no idea how to wrangle these high-strung fillies as they snorted distrust of their new groom. I was terrified they'd rear-up or gallop away, dragging me behind like the corpse of Hector. During my break, I walked off the track, never to return.

Then I had a stint with the soft ice cream vendor Carvel. Here I did much better. I lasted six weeks. Try as I might, I couldn't quite get the hang of dispensing the correct amount of ice cream per curl. For a long time I saved my pay envelopes from this establishment, astonished at how much of my hard-earned money was shaved off in taxes. With Ayn Rand's philosophy solidly behind me, I flirted with anti-tax libertarianism. Let's just say

there was alarm around my Democrat dinner table when I started voicing my support for the libertarian platform. That attachment didn't survive high school.

There was a summer of caddying at the local golf club. Successful caddies were large, muscled, and loved the sport. I was the opposite. Although wheeled golf bags were the new rage, it seemed a point of honor among the codgers at this club that labor-saving devices must be forsworn to enjoy an authentic golfing experience. So, yoked with a 50-pound bag of irons, woods, and putters, I followed those skinflints around the links for a $6 or $7 tip. I still hate golf.

Finally, I found two part-time jobs: one at a bookstore and one at the local movie theater. These became regular sources of income during summers and Christmas breaks while I was in college. I was much happier with the work and the coworkers. By the time I entered college, my total earnings from sub-minimum wage and minimum wage jobs was $3,000. Enough to pay for one 3-credit class at Georgetown University.

You graduated high school in what year?

TAUBER: 1977.

Q: I assume with your family pushing you to go to college.

TAUBER: Yes, college was a regular topic of conversation and my parents expected me to inform myself about which universities offered the best programs and the best statistics on post-graduate employment. Back then the go-to book was published by Lovejoy. It required as much dedicated study as any high class. I applied to a number of schools, but once Georgetown said yes I didn't look further. I was lucky in that all my reading in the college library paid off. We didn't have advanced placement courses at my high school, but my independent reading helped me get enough advanced placement credits to graduate a semester early.

Georgetown University School of Foreign Service: Glide Path to the State Department.

Q: You were at Georgetown from when to when?

TAUBER: '77 to '81 the first time, and then I worked on a masters from '82 to '84.

Q: Let's talk about when you arrived. What was Georgetown like?

TAUBER: It had much more green space than it does now. And Georgetown itself was at the end of the hippie era with head shops, used book stores, and modest storefronts. It was far from the gentrified boutiques that would replace brick and mortar bookstores. Roughly half the campus was not yet built up yet, so you could wander around to green areas and picnic, or find quiet spots to study outdoors.

I remember the first day I arrived. The president at that time was Father Timothy Healy, S.J. He hosted the students and parents out on the big lawn in front of the clock tower. As he spoke, if you closed your eyes, you could swear it was Orson Welles. I don't remember much of his welcome address, except for one quote from *The Tempest*, "Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises, sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not." Although Shakespeare puts this lovely sentiment in the mouth of Caliban, who meant no good to any of the isle's visitors, the quote was true of Georgetown. It was, in every way, an alma mater.

I lived in the Arts Hall. It was a small three-story dorm that used to be the nurses' quarters for the old G.U. hospital. There were 60 students in it, two floors of girls and one floor of boys. It had a large basement with practice rooms, a piano, and performance space. We put together entertainments of various kinds. It was great because if you had an acting bug, you could satisfy it without having to join the drama club. Or, if you wanted to put together a small dance or music recital, everyone was supportive.

Q: What was your major?

TAUBER: At the School of Foreign Service you had to follow a multidisciplinary major called "Foreign Service" and declare a concentration, not exactly a major. My concentration was in diplomatic history, European and American.

Q: Were girls as active in class as the boys, or did boys tend to dominate discussion?

TAUBER: In my experience girls spoke less often than boys, but there were always exceptions. Girls would speak more often in English classes. In nearly all the other classes I took – political science, economics, history, etc. they tended to speak less often than boys. Nevertheless, I knew plenty of girls who graduated Magna Cum Laude and who were quite active in class and study groups. Some also went on to very successful careers in the Foreign Service and elsewhere.

Q: What were the issues on the campus when you were there?

TAUBER: Very few. The university adhered to Catholic doctrine, so there were no sales of contraceptives or pornography on campus, and I believe cigarettes and alcohol were also not sold on campus. No worries. All those items were easily available nearby.

It was generally known that Georgetown had slaves well into the 1800s, and that the ports of Georgetown and Alexandria were entrepots for the slave trade. But since this was true of many colleges at the time Georgetown was founded, it was not a major issue. I don't think anyone really knew the extent of Georgetown's involvement in the slave trade during the time I was there. Looking back from today, I'm glad that Georgetown recognized its history with slavery, made a public apology, and undertook efforts to repair the harm done with scholarships for the heirs of the slaves, and by renaming buildings after slaves who served the university in the antebellum era.

The one other issue that became important to me was the recognition of the small gay student group that was founded when I was a sophomore. We may have had as many as 30 students who had some connection to the group, but generally you could only count on about a dozen to be active in any way. When I was a freshman, I imagine everyone knew I was gay, but I didn't publicly affirm it until the following year. I went to the meetings of the small gay student group. But I was also concerned not to be too visible. Looking back, this caution was silly. State Department background investigators looking into my suitability would certainly interview my dorm mates. They would have to answer honestly if asked about my sexual orientation.

But in answer to your question about political activism, I don't even think the issue of sexual orientation was important enough to most of the student body to be politically active about it. There were occasional instances of anti-gay articles or public remarks, but I think most students were more concerned with preparing for jobs after graduation than on-campus politicking on social issues.

Q: Did you get the sense, just watching the dynamics of the student body, that there were people like Bill Clinton or others with political aspirations. Were students beginning to test out skills traditionally useful for winning elective office.

TAUBER: There were campus Democrat and Republican groups. I think there were a few Libertarians and Green/Environmental party groups, but these groups were pretty small and I don't recall that they conducted many activities, except, perhaps around the period of the 1980 elections. I'm sure some students had political aspirations, but I didn't know any in my cohort.

Social Life in the Arts Hall and Washington DC

Q: What activities were you involved in?

TAUBER: Well, in the Arts Hall, you could work with students on any small project, so I acted in a few plays, wrote for *The Voice,* the school's artsy tabloid newspaper and eventually became a features editor. But these were modest commitments. Like most Georgetown students, I had my nose in books for the better part of my waking day.

Q: Well how about the District of Columbia and the whole area there, how did this pertain to you?

TAUBER: In my freshman year I stayed pretty close to Georgetown. This was in 1977-78, before Wisconsin and M streets went upscale. There were still used book stores, foreign language newspaper shops, head shops, all the remains of hippie culture. My friends and I went down to the Mall periodically, but we did little exploration that first year. Things changed dramatically when I came out the following year. Washington had several gay clubs of varying quality around Dupont Circle and in Southeast. For a while, the whole area around Dupont Circle took on the nickname "The Fruit Loop" for its explosion of gay friendly shops and burgeoning gay population.

Also that year, I started working as a messenger at Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen, and Hamilton, a DC law firm. I earned maybe $100 a week or so doing that. It was a great way to learn the city because you were always picking up newly published regulations at cabinet department buildings or delivering legal documents. We went by metro or taxi. This was just at the dawn of bicycle delivery services, when taking a taxi or metro was still a relatively fast means of getting from point A to point B.

Starting in my junior year, I worked as an intern at the Commerce Department's International Trade Administration, so I was down at the Mall area several times a week and got to know the downtown area better. That was when 14th Street was known for prostitutes and drug sellers and many downtown storefronts were boarded up. I saw all that change with the renovations inaugurated by the Pennsylvania Avenue Reconstruction Authority and the subsequent redevelopment of downtown.

Gay Students Win Equal Access to University Facilities

Q: What about civil rights and all that, how did that play there?

TAUBER: I don't recall that there were many civil rights demonstrations or large groups devoted to those issues. That doesn't mean they did not exist. There were Catholic

charitable organizations that recruited students to help low-income neighborhoods. I was part of a small gay student group that sought official status in order to get equal access to facilities that all other campus groups had. Georgetown's administration did not mind us using rooms for meetings on an ad hoc basis, but refused, for religious reasons, to formally recognize a gay student organization or grant use of office facilities. This led to a lawsuit brought by the gay student organization. The suit went through the courts for several years after I graduated. Ultimately, in 1987, the student group won – securing equal access to facilities – while the Georgetown administration could still withhold official recognition. It was a resolution that both sides were willing to live with. There's a good article on the issues and outcome of the suit in the *New York Times* at this link: http://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/22/us/gay-groups-win-equal-privileges-at-georgetown.html

Although I supported my friends who were named in the suit, I did not list my name in among the plaintiffs. This goes back to the excess of caution I mentioned before about being too open about sexual orientation. I can only say that I was not the only gay student concerned about being too open.

Coursework During the Cold War

Q: How about your courses? Which ones stand out?

TAUBER: I took several courses in philosophy and theology and maintained a 4.0 average in those fields. They really engaged my mind and forced me to think through complicated questions. Nietzsche has a wonderful aphorism: "To have the courage of one's convictions is nothing. To have the courage for an *attack* on one's convictions, now that's real courage." I also read the Cambridge Bible Commentary which opened my eyes to biblical criticism. I can't really account for why I could excel in philosophy and theology but just barely maintain a 3.5 average in my major – diplomatic history. I liked most of my courses, and made sure to sign up for the ones taught by anti-communist and anti-Nazi heroes like Jan Karski, André Marton, and Walter Laquer. Sadly, economics defeated me. No amount of effort could give me fluency with ISLM curves or the cause and effect relationships among interest rates, currency values, financial markets, monetary policy, and so on. I understood political economy, or the effects that economic decisions have on creating winners and losers, but the details of economic models were Greek to me.

Q: With diplomatic history, did you turn to the State Department for anything?

TAUBER: Not for academic purposes. Georgetown's library was quite sufficient. I did apply for State Department internships, but was never selected.

Q: What about your interest in the Cold War at the time? It was still rather hot.

TAUBER: Looking back, Georgetown's professors taught a pretty orthodox interpretation of the Cold War:

- It was caused by Stalinist/Soviet expansionism;
- The policy of containment should be understood as a rollback of communism and its eventual defeat; and
- This, in turn, has produced the U.S. national security state we have today, including the necessity for managing a nuclear deterrent and forward basing throughout the world.

Since I was disposed to this Cold War catechism anyway, I tended to scant revisionism. It wasn't that Georgetown professors took no notice of revisionists like Walter LaFeber. Nor did they gloss over the questionable episodes of U.S. intervention in places like Guatemala, Chile, Iran, and Vietnam. I also knew about the ethically questionable use of Nazi scientists after WWII and human rights violations against African Americans, native Americans, and others. But you weren't going to convince me that, in the epochal struggle of pluralistic democracy and open markets against totalitarianism and central planning, U.S. errors were in any way morally equivalent to communist oppression or that U.S. interventions provoked Soviet expansionism.

Basically, no one went to Georgetown at that time expecting to be taught a narrative that said U.S. foreign policy was run by a military-industrial oligarchy that created proxy wars to increase its market share in the world arms trade. Later, I learned to be more critical of U.S. government actions when we entered into wars of choice like Iraq and Afghanistan. But it was Georgetown that taught me those critical thinking skills, that let me examine the data below the headlines and make judgments for myself.

Q: Did you find that you were learning much more about Roman Catholicism than you wanted, or did that come up at all?

TAUBER: No, I never felt that religion at Georgetown was pushed uncomfortably. Every dorm had a Jesuit resident director, but they seldom involved themselves in student life unless there was a major dispute or problem. Quite to the contrary. Since they were also professors, students generally sought them out for discussions -- extra office hours. During my Georgetown years, 1977-81, the Jesuits made up about 10 percent of the

faculty. I had only one Jesuit professor in my four years there, and he taught South Asian history. Once in a while, I did go to mass with my Catholic friends, especially the ones organized by Dignity, the gay Catholic group. But there was no sense that Georgetown was a parochial campus or that it was unwelcoming to people of other religions.

My Dorm as Finishing School

Q: Was there anything else formative about your college experience?

TAUBER: I was part of the very last cohort of students who might have learned some Latin in high school and who were encouraged to read the ancient Greek and Roman writers. Familiarizing yourself with them at that time was still considered "improving" because they served as examples of how to debate and write effectively. Finally, professors reminded us that they were considered an essential part of the education of the framers of the Constitution. One of these ancient works is still taught, I believe: Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations.* Marcus begins his work by thanking every person who helped educate in the broadest sense. He is generous and humble in his praise. I'd like to follow his example, but I cannot name every single person at Georgetown who helped me emerge as an adult. Also, I'm not sure all of them would want to be named. So I'll summarize.

Coming from my high school experience, I was still defensive in an environment that was entirely welcoming. My friends, mostly the girls, pulled me aside periodically and suggested how I might improve my behavior. This is what the Foreign Service calls, "interpersonal relations." They spoke in a way meant to be helpful, not reproachful, which made it possible for me to reflect on what they said and try to improve. I was very lucky to have these friends. Their guidance stayed with me and gave me a model for how I could counsel my own staff in the Foreign Service. Also, starting my sophomore year, I had a gay roommate who was more active in the DC gay community than I was. He helped me navigate a new world of gay social activities and dating. He and I got up to all kinds of hijinks, the usual late night parties and week-end trips, only with lots of gay men in lots of gay interest groups. It was also through my roommate's contacts that I landed the internship at the Commerce Department's International Trade Administration (ITA) that I mentioned earlier.

Internships at International Trade Administration and CSIS, Graduate School

At ITA, just as the Foreign Commercial Service was being transferred from State to Commerce, I was drafting speeches for Lionel Olmer, then Under Secretary for International Trade, and Ray Waldman, then Assistant Secretary for International

Economic Policy. These were boilerplate paeans to open markets and free trade. No one else wanted to do them, and I was more than happy to feel like I was contributing something important. I also rewrote a couple of marketing surveys of European countries that we sent out to American Chambers of Commerce designed to help U.S. companies do business abroad. I learned a great deal about U.S. government corporate culture and started to drink coffee to stay awake for those boring periods when no one recalled I was waiting for some task to do that I could put on my resume. This experience helped me get a subsequent paid internship at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I worked under John Yokelson in the new office on trade policy.

Q: Did you get the feeling that all was not well with relations between the State Department and the Department of Commerce?

TAUBER: I did get a bit of that because during the Carter administration the Foreign Commercial Service moved from the State Department to Commerce. I think the State Department regretted the loss, but the people in the FCS were delighted. For one thing, this meant they could stay in rather nice foreign postings for a much longer time, five years or so, now that they were no longer subject to the State Department personnel system.

Q: Given your connections in the Commerce Department, were you still contemplating the State Department?

TAUBER: Absolutely. I took my first State Department written exam when I was 20 years old while I was still an undergraduate. I passed the written and oral exams, but with low marks. And since I wanted to get a graduate degree before entering the Service, I wasn't too disappointed. I hoped my scores would improve with more education.

Q: When you graduated from college, you went where? To graduate school at Georgetown?

TAUBER: Not immediately. I thought I might go to law school. That was a big mistake. I didn't do well on my law school tests and I really could not imagine myself as an attorney. So I lost a year between graduating from college and starting the Master's program at Georgetown. During that time I worked for a firm that abstracted USAID project reports. But I knew that I'd have to get a Master's degree before I could really raise my score on the Foreign Service exam. I took a summer course at SAIS that was part of its first year requirements, but barely managed a B. SAIS declined my application for graduate school in international relations, followed quickly by Fletcher, Columbia,

and other Ivies. In fact, the only graduate program that did accept me with my modest 3.4 grade point average and 680 GRE was Georgetown.

I did not excel in the graduate program at Georgetown in the first year. In addition, a couple of professors found me nettlesome. One, who also served in the school's administration, invited me to his office halfway through the first semester. He asked me to stop intervening in class. I wasn't on point and my questions distracted other students. I was not reading the cues and norms of this learning environment. I had to retune my wavelength.

Another example was more substantive. In my first semester I enrolled in the introductory class for the Landegger Program in International Business Diplomacy (IBD). It was an honors program. (I have to admit, I didn't really know what made it an "honors" program, but I did like the sound of "honors.")

Q: Surely you must have had a more substantive reason than that.

TAUBER: Well, yes. As much as I was single-mindedly pursuing the Foreign Service as a career, I thought I ought to acquire some salable skills just in case it didn't work out. The meat of IBD course work addressed how companies identified and exploited opportunities in foreign markets. It included elements of economics, business sector analysis, and international risk analysis. Back then, it was generally understood among my classmates that this honors program might help prepare you for international business or finance. Unfortunately, not very far into the program, I got into a kerfuffle with the lead professor.

As class reading assignments progressed, I tripped over something that wasn't on the syllabus. I started reading articles on deindustrialization. I assumed these articles were authored by leftist academics, so I was suspicious from the start. I wondered, were they using suspect methodology and stuffing data into precooked notions of how to interfere in the free market? I had no intention of succumbing to the woolly minded advocates of Dependencia Theory or crypto-communist ideology. Nevertheless, I did have a weakness for underdog arguments and minority reports. The cautions on deindustrialization originated from a group of thinkers called communitarians. They were alarmed by a couple of trends they identified with the growing openness of the U.S. economy to international trade:

- the rusting of the Rustbelt;
- worker migration to low-wage, non-union jobs in the Sunbelt;
- disintegration of social fabrics in northern, working class communities; and
- labor substitution of native-born tradesmen by low-cost illegal migrants.

Communitarian writers did not stop with simple hand-wringing over what they saw as the negative effects of unbridled free market forces. From the communitarian perspective, America's ill-considered march toward more openness to international market forces (subsequently called "globalization") was already causing measurable damage in the breakdown of communities. Anomie, they warned, was not an ivory tower concept. It was the polluted effluent of companies maximizing market share value at the cost of their employees' real purchasing power and health. The breakdown of social networks dissolved the meaning Americans drew from rootedness in region, family, and civic organizations. Communitarians scoffed at the definition of well-being advanced by free market capitalists: a rising tide lifts all ships, or, that growth in macroeconomic data meant improvement in living standards. Communitarians said no. Happiness was not properly measured that way. In any case, even the rising tide wasn't rising for everyone. They had already begun to see that the real buying power of workers' wages was decreasing even as the nominal value increased.

The ultimate problem, Communitarians insisted, was the underlying myth of free marketeers: the rational actor. Ayn Rand's heroic individual, who always acted based on reason and rational self-interest, was not the full measure of what it meant to be human. They insisted that social goods, such as: clean environment, health care, literacy, and local control of commons, needed to be part of any measure of well-being. In addition, by 2020, we have already seen that social grievance, or perceived loss of privilege or local control can lead people to make economically irrational decisions. Brexit is an example of this.

I didn't have sympathy for the communitarians. Go ahead, let the market shatter traditions. What do I care? Most traditions were hostile to gay people anyway. But I couldn't join this debate on any meaningful level. I didn't have the breadth of scholarship to engage. I just knew that smarter people than I were making a case for caution as the Reagan Administration and its supporters drove libertarian approaches to economics in a free market vehicle without a brake or a rear view mirror. When I put this problem before the professor he thought it was whack. He wasn't there to waste time on debates over theories of political economics. That was something you did as an undergraduate. He wasn't going to unbundle the givens of the international market as they existed in the 1980s. Prosperity was created by business decisions to maximize profit. It was up to social policy to determine whether and how to compensate those who lost out in global competition.

I did not take no for an answer. I plagued my professor with communitarian journal articles on the ills -- short-term and long-term -- of deindustrialization. He grew impatient

with me. I got a B on my midterm paper. For any normal student, that alone would have been enough to wilt any further interest in a digressive thought experiment. But I was born under the sign of the Ram, and you don't stop an Aries once his Mars blood is boiling. By November, the smart money said I'd be deselected from the Honors Program.

Q: So what happened? Because you did get into the program, yes?

TAUBER: I kept looking at that B on my midterm paper. It stung. I started to get *shpilkas*. (Yiddish for "butterflies in the stomach." But like all Yiddish words, it bundles more into one word than a one-word translation can render. To feel the full weight of *shpilkas*, combine: a parent's anxiety that the beloved child will sing off-key at her high school musical; a Bar Mitzvah's terror that he will misread the Hebrew in his Torah portion and get publicly corrected by the Rabbi; and the anticipation of getting a vaccine from a syringe clearly intended for horses.)

My final grade, and a big chunk of my *amour-propre*, were in the scales. Communitarians vs. Honors Program. The balance had been weighted toward the Communitarians. Time to rebalance. I put the communitarian journal articles into a box and took out the sheet of paper on which the eight potential final exam questions were listed. The professor said two from this group would be on the final exam. What was it the professor repeated when I posed all those communitarian digressions?

I had to go back to my notes. Back in the early 1980s, students took notes by hand in spiral-bound notebooks. Some students actually typed their handwritten notes after class, both to make them easier to annotate and to reify the lecture data. With all due modesty, I was a ferocious note taker. In fact, as good as I was at taking verbatim notes, I wish I had taken Gregg shorthand along with typing when it was offered in junior high. But at that time, shorthand was a skill for girls. Along with flute- or violin-playing, unless you wanted the boys to sort you into the nail polish and hair-frosting set, you stayed away from shorthand.

So I typed up my notes on my IBM Selectric typewriter. The Selectric was still the gold standard for student work in the early 1980s. There were two great things about the Selectric. The first was that you could easily change font by switching typing balls, and the second was that the eraser tape was built in. There were font balls with small type for quotes or footnotes, foreign language balls for bibliography entries, and a host of other typefaces as needed. Power typists owned cases of IBM Selectric balls for the most arcane of font needs. Word processors were just beginning to make their way into use. I started using one in 1981 at the USAID contractor office where I abstracted its project

reports. At Georgetown, word processors were cloistered in the library where you had to sign up for your ration of access.

I did not join IBD study groups for the finals. There was a limited number of places in the honors program and only the top X number of students could get in. I wasn't about to share my notes given the precarious situation I was in. I put all my chips on a pair of questions that I was pretty sure the professor addressed every time I tried his patience. I studied those. As I recall, I even wrote out sample answers to see how long it would take me to get all the ideas into the two-hour exam period. I entered the final exam room with the anticipation you feel as the croupier spins the wheel and the roulette ball starts its orbit. I turned over the exam questions and the timer started. Every once in a while the little ball lands on your bet.

"I had to look twice when I turned the examination booklet over and saw your name," the professor told me afterwards. "An A on the final gives you a B+ for the course. Congratulations. You're in the IBD program," he admitted, with a look of incredulity on his face.

Q: Did you get any opportunity in this time, or even back in high school, to travel overseas?

TAUBER: Only once during my graduate years. I went on a summer program in Dijon, France, to improve my French speaking skills. I lived with a French family during that time and that's where I really learned French. After 10 years of high school and college coursework, I learned more French at the family dinner table than I had in all the years prior. My French family was multigenerational. The husband and wife were in their mid-40s and their two children were teenagers. The grandmother lived in the apartment downstairs, but came up most nights for dinner. The wife was originally from Holland. She learned French on an exchange program in Dijon and met her future husband there. He was a native of Burgundy. I remember his Burgundian accent. Thick as stew. Either his wife or kids had to translate what he said into standard French for me to understand.

Eventually, I did begin to understand him. He had an ironic sense of humor. He told me once that the family was completely divided politically. Grandma was a communist. (I hoped he didn't see me flinch when he said that.) He was a devout Gaullist. His wife was socialist. His son, the older of the two teens, was liberal (in Europe, this meant left-leaning on social issues and right-leaning on economic issues). Finally, his daughter had yet to declare, but she was leaning Green. They all got along splendidly, he assured me.

At some point, I told the family about my ambition to join the U.S. Foreign Service. My French mother told me that she would invite to dinner two recently retired French diplomats. Maybe they would have career advice for me. And then she advised me, "*Ils sont pédés, Marc, mais charmants, très charmants*." They are queers, Mark, but nevertheless charming, very charming.

OK, I thought. How is it, that of all the French families I could be staying with, I happened to get the one that had two gay friends in the *Corps Diplomatique Français*? The appointed evening arrived and the wine flowed. It turned out that the two diplomats had plenty of humorous stories to share. They even had some acquaintances in the U.S. Foreign Service, but none that I might easily meet. I didn't let on about my situation, but I did get the uneasy feeling that everyone at the table had me pegged but were too polite to say so out loud.

Not long after, I received a phone call from my parents. My mother said that a large manila envelope had arrived from the State Department for me and should she open it? Are you kidding? Open it very carefully. Don't tear the sheets inside. When my mother starting reading the State Department acceptance letter, my French family saw what a Snoopy Happy Dance looks like. They weren't sure the news was good. When I explained what had happened, they invited their neighbor, "Kojack," so named for his bald head, to come over with his sabre. Long ago, Kojack was a fencer, and he still had the bearing. He had a bottle of Piper Heidsieck with him for the sabre trick. He tossed the bottle in the air, lopped off the top with the sabre in one hand and caught the foaming magnum with the other. My French mother assured me, sotto voce, that it was safe to drink. All glass shards had rocketed out of the bottle by the force of the carbonation. It was the happiest day of my life. A long journey had finally reached its destination among the vineyards and mustard factories of Dijon.

Q: When was this?

TAUBER: Summer of 1983. One of my few regrets in life is that I did not find a way to stay longer. France. It was bigger than I expected when I arrived and grew larger in my imagination as time went by. I was convinced it held the power of transformation because, when I returned to Washington from Dijon, I was a changed man. All my grades, once so middling, and so painfully achieved, turned into straight As. MSFS administrators and faculty did not hide their astonishment. One told me that I should visit France more often. From your mouth to God's ears.

I graduated with honors in the International Business Diplomacy Program. Here, I must take a moment. Again, the ghost of Marcus Aurelius would haunt me if I failed to

acknowledge a vital source of assistance. My college roommate, at that time working as a researcher at a DC consulting firm, put his ample talents to work for me. Were it not for his tireless editing of my final papers, sometimes well into the night, and his access to publication equipment that bound them into professional-looking theses, I don't know that I'd have been able to stuff all my deathless prose over the transoms in the nick of time. A photo from my MSFS graduation shows me shaking hands with my roommate. I'm in cap and gown, grinning like I was six sheets to the wind. My roommate is a little less effusive. He had the rare ability of conveying a knowing expression in a single smile.

"Don't Ask Don't Tell" in the Foreign Service

Q: You mentioned talking to French diplomats, at this point, were you able to talk to U.S. diplomats to find out more about the life in the Foreign Service?

TAUBER: I did. Thanks to the help of my college roommate, I finally had social circles wide enough to get myself introduced to FSOs who had recently retired or were approaching retirement. They all encouraged me to pursue the career but cautioned me that it was still run by an old boy network. They advised me to find a mentor if I expected to rise in the Service. The few gay officers I spoke to also encouraged me. They said that the worst of the witch hunting days were over and a de facto "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was the unspoken rule. They were more or less correct. Diplomatic Security investigators never asked me or whether I was gay. They did ask if there was anything in my life that might bring disrepute or embarrassment to the U.S. government. I could honestly answer no.

(N.B. Actually, I would learn later that individual Diplomatic Security Officers were given wide latitude in investigations of gay Foreign Service Officers. Until the Clinton Administration, a typical approach would be for DS agents to confront the officer, tell him that they had proof he was gay, and give him a choice. He could quietly leave the Foreign Service or they would notify his parents that their son was a fairy. A few did resign. But as more gay men and lesbians came out, it became harder for DS to make a case for dismissal on the grounds that being a closet homosexual was a vulnerability to blackmail.)

My contacts in the Foreign Service told me that as long as I did not draw attention to myself in a way that might be embarrassing, I could have a full career. But they also warned me that establishing a romantic relationship with a foreigner – something that had to be reported to DS – would be a source of trouble. Based on this information, I decided that I would do whatever it took to get in to the Foreign Service and would work out the

gay part of my life at some vague future time when it might be easier. It is easy to make decisions like this when you're in your early 20s and the rest of your life is ahead.

Q: So, did you in fact improve your score on the Foreign Service Exam after graduate school?

TAUBER: Yes, I took the written and oral during my first year of graduate school and scored in the mid-90s. By September 1983, when I had just started my second year in graduate school, the Department called to offer me a job in the political cone. Since I really wanted to complete the Master's degree, I asked if I could enter in the following spring. The Personnel Office agreed. Comparing stories with other officers who were offered jobs at that time, it was unusual to be allowed a nine-month waiting period. Most were offered a position and had to decide immediately whether to accept or not. I didn't know it at the time, but it might have been better for me to forego the last year of my master's program and enter the Foreign Service in the fall of 1983. Had I entered then, I would have been under the older retirement system, which was more generous than the one that began in 1984.

Q: But do you think your Master's degree was the main reason for your improvement on the Foreign Service exam?

TAUBER: The first year of study, yes. The first year was very tough: statistics, political risk analysis methodology, and business diplomacy really challenged me. It was also in that year that I took a course on Food Policy with Carol Lancaster, who would later become Dean of the School of Foreign Service. This course gave me a template for thinking through all natural resource policies. It was especially good on how to get stakeholder buy-in, and how to prepare for the unexpected externalities that might ruin an otherwise carefully crafted policy. Overall, the second year of the program was mostly applying what I had learned.

To judge the value of a year of graduate study on my Foreign Service Exam scores, here they are, side-by-side:

1981 Written	**1982 Written**
English Expression - 75	English Expression - 73
Functional Background Average - 80	Functional Background Average - 85
Admin - 72	Admin - 70
Consular - 87	Consular - 68
Econ/Commercial - 85	Economic -87
Political - 81	Political - 86
Info/Cultural - 79	Info/Cultural - 71

1981 Oral Average = 58	**1982 Oral** Average = 91
Offered Employment in Consular Cone	Offered Employment in Political Cone

In 1984, upon entry into the Foreign Service, my Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) score was 61. This was considered an average score, predictive of success in learning Western European languages only. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) conducted a study in 1994 to determine the predictive value of the MLAT in language learning and how well the MLAT correlated with outcomes in personality and learning-style inventories. For the results of this interesting study, follow this link: http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED461260.pdf

Language Tests:

1984: French 3/2+
1986 French 3/3
1986 Spanish 3/3+
1999 Armenian 3/3
2002 Romanian 3/3
2009 Spanish 3+/3

The Fault is not in Ourselves, but in Our Stars.

Regarding personality inventory tests, I am a skeptic. I don't buy in to their predictive value. And I'm not alone in this. In a 2018 article on psychometrics, a Washington Post reporter began, "Personality type tests are hugely popular, though if you ask working psychologists, they'll tell you the results are little better than astrological signs." https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2018/09/17/scientists-identify-four-personality-types/?utm_term=.b68d015c8b24

Also, the on-line news service *Vox* has a good article debunking Myers-Briggs at this site: https://www.vox.com/2014/7/15/5881947/myers-briggs-personality-test-meaningless Nevertheless, for those interested:

> Myers-Briggs: **ENTJ** - Extraversion, Intuition, Thinking, Judgment
>
> Gallup's *StrengthFinder*. My strength is **"Context**." This means I always want to know how things have been done up till now before I start on a new project. Context people are few in number – occurring about as frequently as hardcopy newspaper readers occur today. You're going to run into a lot of Context in this oral history. Consider yourself warned.

Zodiac sign: **Aires**, Scorpio rising. It's not that I really believe in astrology. But Linda Goodman's *Sun Signs,* the seminal 20th century work on the Zodiac, has some spot-on predictions of my character traits and relationships in the Foreign Service. You'll see Linda's *apercus* peppered throughout this history. At the beginning of each of her chapters, Linda quotes from Lewis Carrol's *Alice in Wonderland.* Here is the one for Aires:

"They would not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them: such as that a red hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long: and that, if you cut your finger very deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds."

Foreign Service Orientation and Training: A-100 and ConGen Roslyn

Q: You came into the Foreign Service when?

TAUBER: June of 1984 right after I finished my master's degree.

Q: What was the situation when you came into the Foreign Service at that time?

TAUBER: It was evolving to eliminate the unfair aspects of the "old boy network." I regularly heard about personnel changes in recruitment and retention policies that allowed for entry into the Service without taking the Foreign Service exam. Also, the Department's medical office was slowly coming to terms with society's changing understanding of mental health/addiction issues. No organization is perfect, but it was clear that the Department was slowly modifying its policies to be more sympathetic to these needs. Of course equitable treatment of gay people and their spouses would take the better part of my 30-year career to achieve.

Q: What was the composition of the A-100 class? How did you feel in the crew?

TAUBER: This was the 22nd A-100 class. There were slightly more men than women, and about a quarter of the class was married. Among the married group, in only one case was the officer a female. There were a few people over 30, and the youngest person was literally right out of college. Everybody in the class got along. It was very congenial, and everyone was highly motivated.

Q: How about minorities?

TAUBER: We had two or three African Americans, and perhaps one person of Latino heritage. That's about it as far as I can recall in terms of minorities.

Q: Looking back on it, what were the particular things that you picked up in the A-100 course and ConGen Roslyn?

I had little experience with full-time work, so there was a lot of corporate culture I had to imbibe quickly. The A-100 off-site exercise, where you prepare for a VIP visit, was especially valuable. There was one woman in my group who had left the Foreign Service but was now returning. I worked with her to prepare the itinerary of our VIP and she guided me through everything. I had no idea how detailed a VIP itinerary had to be or how much care had to be taken at every step of the way: the management of media, backgrounders for the briefing book, and so on. I was lucky to have profited from her experience and felt much more prepared when I was in charge of congressional delegations -- Codels -- later on.

She also gave me some advice I never forgot: "Never abandon. Five o'clock may come, and you may think you're done, but if there's something urgent, don't leave a colleague to put out the fire alone." She also told me, "Departures are as important as arrivals. Leave a good feeling behind. You never know if you might serve at that post again." For me, this kind of practical advice was the most important thing I got out of A-100. ConGen was good preparation for consular work. I just wasn't very good at it

Q: Did you feel that you fit in? Too much education? Not enough? Social class?

TAUBER: That's a very interesting question because I felt very well prepared from a substantive knowledge point of view by Georgetown. I felt much less prepared for managing an in-box. And that would be a continuing problem. It would take me quite a while to understand and thrive in the Foreign Service corporate culture. Of course, at that point I did not discuss my sexual orientation with anyone other than friends or other people I knew were gay. Once again, the fine line between assuming people know and saying it out loud.

Q: You mentioned in-box. What does this mean?

TAUBER: In the Foreign Service exam at that time one of the tests was literally an inbox full of tasks to manage that ran the gamut from routine to urgent. Some required scheduling, others needed delegation of responsibility, etc. You had to judge when to ask for help with a problem and what solutions to suggest. It was a good test since the Foreign Service expects you to learn your job without foisting responsibilities on others. I didn't do as well on this test as I did in all others. I would need to work on decisiveness. This would dog me for quite some time.

Q: And as you did this, did you change your focus or what you wanted to do?

TAUBER: No, I firmly believed that political work was my vocation. Part of this was my background and training, and part of it was the desire to be part of a cadre in the Department that – true or not -- believed itself to be the most important of the specializations. I was ambitious to show that I had plenty of "masculine enterprise" and did not want to be caught in a specialty regarded as a weak sister to real diplomacy. This view would change over time, but I was 25 then, and had something to prove.

Q: Did you find that there are two levels of instruction or education? One at the official level and all and the other one was sitting around talking to people and how the system really works?

TAUBER: Absolutely. At that time, I think many entry-level officers saw the assignments process as a black box and welcomed any help they could get from more senior officers who were in the know. Some of my A-100 colleagues argued effectively to get a European posting on their first time out. I did not.

Q: Did you find anybody to mentor you?

TAUBER: Not particularly. As time went by, I did ask DCMs (Deputy Chief of Missions) about appropriate next steps for my career. I also asked more senior officers, section chiefs, and colleagues, but I couldn't say that I felt someone was guiding my career path. It did become clear to me that it was difficult to break into the European Bureau. But since I didn't have a Plan B, I kept plugging away.

Q: What was it about the European Bureau that attracted you as compared to some of the others?

TAUBER: It was still the cockpit of the Cold War, the front line against the communists. I was highly motivated to work toward the elimination of communism. Unfortunately, I did not have the language skills or experience that many others had. I entered the Foreign Service with a reasonable command French, but there were plenty of people who were much more fluent. In fact, my MLAT score was a discouraging 61. MLAT was the test that FSI used to predict language learning ability. A 61 is just average.

Q: While you were going through training were you seeing any vestiges of our losing the war in Vietnam?

TAUBER: No. I knew some Foreign Service Officers who had actually served in Saigon, but none of them really talked much about it.

1984-1986
Kingston, Jamaica, The Visa Mill

Q: Well, where did you go?

TAUBER: I told my personnel officer that I was ready to be flexible. I just wanted something in a warmer region of the world. I had psoriasis, and sunshine helped reduce the symptoms. My Career Development Officer had plenty of positions to fill in sunny climbs since these regions tended to have the highest demand for visa officers. So, after consular training, I went to Jamaica for my consular tour. All my friends in the U.S. figured I'd be going to work in flip flops and a Hawaiian shirt. In fact, Kingston had a 15% differential (extra pay) for violent crime. There were whole neighborhoods off-limits because criminal gangs ruled the streets. In a country of widespread poverty and few job opportunities, many Jamaicans sought undocumented work in the U.S. This created a huge demand for non-immigrant visas. The Kingston consular section processed as many as 500 applicants a day. It was a high-stress job. But on the other hand, I bonded with many of the other junior officers who worked in the consular section while I was there. I stayed in touch with them for many years.

Q: How were bilateral relations during the time you were there with Jamaica?

TAUBER: Relations were pretty good because transshipment of illegal drugs had not yet become a major problem. We were trying to help Jamaica become a more attractive place for private sector investment to create jobs and reduce the push for illegal immigration to the U.S. Part of that effort included assistance from USAID and Peace Corps.

Q: How did you deal with the fact that you are in a country with a high demand for tourist visas to get into the U.S.? In other words, you were coming from a background where lying and misrepresentation carried a high penalty and was seldom practiced and suddenly found yourself in a place where many used lies and deception to gain entry to the U.S. What was that like?

TAUBER: That was the hardest part of my job. Many Jamaicans thought of the visitor visa adjudication process as nothing more than a lottery. They didn't understand why they couldn't work in the U.S. when there were so many jobs available that Americans did not want to do. Consular Section explanations of the visa process rang hollow because everyone in a small nation like Jamaica knew someone who got a visa who

didn’t deserve one. All kinds of rumors and magical thinking surrounded the application process.

The Anatomy of a Visa

So there you are, a first-time visa officer, working with three or four other junior officers on their first tours, each trying to adjudicate some 70-100 visitor visa applications a day. The applicants waited hours in the hot sun for an interview. Our refusal rate was high -- about 75%. Given the high rate of fraud, and the thriving black market for U.S. visas in Jamaica, we took many precautions:

- First, every approved applicant went through the AVLOS, or Automated Visa Look-Out System. This was a local file kept at each post. It included information on Jamaicans who had known violations of law, either Jamaican or U.S. We added information to this file through a number of means: media reports of crime; consultation with police and security services; and sometimes through just the personal knowledge of officers or local employees. The file also contained classified derogatory information that only FSOs could review. AVLOS was far less than 100% reliable. It was part of a leaky pre-9/11 immigration monitoring system. AVLOS was eventually replaced by a better, computerized system.

- Assuming no problems from AVLOS, we went to the first two facing pages with no other stamps or visas. Across the binding of the two pages, we pasted a sticker called a "counterfoil," an adhesive strip whose complex designs were meant to prevent counterfeiting. This counterfoil covered a small portion of the visa stamp. Any attempt to remove the counterfoil would destroy both pages and the visa.

- Next, we signed the counterfoil with what we jokingly called our “secret decoder pens.” The ink was ultraviolet and indelible. It could only be read under black lights used by Immigration Officers at U.S. ports of entry.

- Then came Bangkoking. This was an anti-fraud process invented in the Consular Section in Bangkok that had proven very effective. Our local staff took all the visa-stamped passports to an ironing board and heat-glued the applicant's photo to the clean page facing the visa. In this way, if someone tried to photo-switch the passport, they would have to tear out the page with the photo, and this would be evident to fraud examiners in the U.S.

Every once in a while, an applicant would show up with a passport that had obviously been tampered with. Usually, it was an attempt to erase the stamp showing a previous

visa refusal. But sometimes it was an effort at photo switching. Since tampering with a passport was a crime in Jamaica, we would silently alert our Fraud Officer to call the Jamaican Constabulary. The arrest of an applicant on the visa line was high drama and generally caused quite a stir. But that was not the only drama I encountered. I also had a few applicants who put Obeah charms in their passports. Obeah is the Jamaican version of voodoo. Generally, I would just return the obeah charm to the applicant, but on one occasion, the applicant's passport had been doused in powder. I asked her to please shake the passport clean before passing it under the bullet-resistant glass window at my station. Instead of shaking the passport, my applicant's body started shaking. Her eyes rolled back in her head and she fainted.

That was quite a scene. Other applicants gathered around her, medical help arrived, and the woman was revived with water and sweets. While this was going on, the Consul General came running and asked me, in high dudgeon, what I had done to cause the woman to collapse. Fortunately, there were enough witnesses to absolve me, but the Consul General and I never got along.

Colin Powell's advice on decision making

Q: Did you eventually get the hang of visa interviewing?

My big problem in adjudicating visitors visas was decisiveness. I wanted perfect, unassailable visa decisions. This made me a slower interviewer and reduced the productivity of the whole section. Eventually, I did get up to speed – a respectable 70 interviews per day -- but it did not help having the Consul General periodically "checking my progress" by standing behind me at the interview window, questioning my applicants herself and countermanding my decisions. This was the same Consul General whose evaluation of my work contained the expression, "Mark possesses a great deal of arcane knowledge." This was true. After all, I was well acquainted with the Zodiac. But such a statement had nothing to do with consular work. A promotion board reading this expression in my evaluation would assume that my boss had nothing good to say and was damning with faint praise. However, over time, promotion boards got wise to this tactic. They banned it. The evaluation process became more precise, with required and documented counseling sessions so that promotion could clearly see whether employees overcame performance problems.

I did much better with immigrant visas (IVs). Adjudicating IVs meant verifying the information on the anchor relative in the U.S. and ensuring that the prospective immigrant would not become a public charge. Sometimes, because the family income in the U.S. was low, you could only let one of several siblings have the visa. The rest would

have to wait until family income increased. I always left good notes on my cases so that my colleagues could pick up and know immediately where to go next.

Q: Did you encounter pressure from higher-ups in the embassy to grant visas to their favored contacts?

TAUBER: I don't recall that, no. In general, visa adjudications were rarely overturned. When it did happen, officers grumbled. Some Jamaicans did get special treatment. What I did experience was another kind of pressure. At some point in your tour, every U.S. visa officer in Jamaica runs into someone who didn't get a visa as a result of your decision. After I was there a while, plenty of Jamaicans came up to me on the street, or in the market, or anywhere really, and gave me "the short end of their tongue" if I had denied them a visa. It was a strange and unwanted kind of celebrity.

Q: Jamaica, I would imagine, you had politically appointed ambassadors. Did you have any contact with the ambassadors?

TAUBER: Yes, that's true. Both of the ambassadors under whom I worked were appointees. I generally encountered them only at official functions. The post was small enough that an Ambassador's reception was an "all-hands-on-deck" affair. Every junior officer would have a role when the VIPs were there.

Q: Did you get involved in protection, welfare problems? I would think that the tourists would create one hell of a workload?

TAUBER: Most American tourists came for a very short time, so the possibilities for getting into mischief were few. We had only a small number of arrests. Deaths were mostly due to road accidents. Since the American Citizen Services Section had more time, it was also responsible for our anti-fraud cooperation with the Jamaican government. That generally took up more time than typical ACS work.

Q: Any other work activities to note?

I volunteered to draft a speech for the Consul General to deliver at a high school. I thought that my background in speech-writing in high school, at the Commerce Department, and elsewhere, would be enough for me to rely on. What I failed to do was consult the principal of the school before drafting. Looking back, I'm not sure I could have gotten the time off to scope out the high school even if I had asked. So I wrote the speech on what a consul general does in simple language, assuming she would need to be understood by the youngest students as well as the advanced ones.

The Consul General had a Jamaican secretary who had attended the school. She looked at my draft a day before the event and deemed the language too simple for the students. The CG would sound condescending. So, the Consul General called me off the interview line and accused me of deliberately dumbing down the language to embarrass the CG in a public forum. Linda warns about this reaction in *Sun Signs*. The Consul General was a Leo, and they are prone to roar about any perceived slight to their reputations. In such cases, "The lion is apt to point out your mistakes with very little discretion. Employees with ultra-sensitive natures would be happier working elsewhere." (*Linda Goodman's Sun Signs,* pg. 217) Since there was no longer any time for me to recast the speech, the CG would take care of it. After that experience, I insisted on meeting with representatives of any organization for which I was writing remarks. The few times I let down my guard and failed to do this, I came to grief.

Personal Security in Jamaica

Q: In Jamaica, what about violence?

TAUBER: Personal security was a constant concern. Starting from Jamaican independence in 1962, the two major parties became like two rival clans, doling out patronage and taking bribes from their supporters when in office. The left-of-center Peoples' National Party was headed by Michael Manley and the right-of-center Labour Party was run by Edward Seaga. When I was there, from 1984-86, recollections of the violence in the previous national elections of 1980, when 800 people were killed, were still fresh. I think both sides had been taken aback by that level of violence and worked to keep their supporters from subsequent reprisals. Separate from political violence, rampant poverty brought all the associated social pathologies, including theft and home invasions. FSOs were housed in gated communities with bars on the windows and house alarms. Within the first six months of my arrival, a vagrant made himself a home in my small backyard. Efforts to evict him failed. Finally, he tried to break in while I was away on vacation. The guard shot him in a fight over the gun and I was immediately moved to another, more secure apartment complex on the second floor.

Q: Did you get a taste of political, economic, or administrative work?

TAUBER: Happily, yes. Vice consuls were allowed two one-month rotations in their cone. I spent two months in the political section, researching the influence of the many protestant churches on the Jamaican political scene as well as a report on local labor movements. These were first efforts and didn't amount to much, but I found them very

satisfying and looked forward to more opportunities to do this kind of reporting and analysis.

Social Life in Jamaica

Q: What about dating?

I did go out with a few Jamaican men. They were remarkably beautiful and companionable. Although I would have welcomed a romantic relationship, I was scrupulous in avoiding one since I didn't want to come to the attention of Diplomatic Security. At around the same time, a gay Foreign Service officer who was serving in Yugoslavia, did come to the attention of DS. He reported, as required, a few contacts he had with gay men there. Thereafter, he faced a decade of security clearance revocation, grievances, and court battles. His case eventually went to the Supreme Court, which declined to hear it, so the lower court's judgement, which upheld the revocation of his security clearance, was final. Most courts defer to the executive branch on questions of security, and that is what happened in this case. But, there is a happy epilogue to the story. The officer reapplied, passed all the tests, and was rehired 10 years later. The decision on whether to grant him a new security clearance went all the way to Larry Eagleburger, the Secretary of State at the time. Eagleburger said, in effect, "Enough already," and the Officer was allowed to restart his career 10 years after the revocation of his clearance. Most gay men in the Foreign Service knew about this officer's experience and took it as a cautionary tale.

Many of my male colleagues in Kingston did date Jamaican women, and at least two married Jamaican women while I was at post. I socialized with other FSOs and a number of British expats. At the direction of our DCM, I also became active with the Jamaica-America Society. Its members were mostly wealthy Jamaicans who wanted to have good connections to the embassy and fund scholarships for talented students who could not afford the cost of a private school education. The J-A Society was a useful social outlet for a first tour junior officer and helped me understand the connections among elites in a small country.

I also attended local cultural events including the unforgettable Christmas pantomime. The roots of pantomime go back to Roman Saturnalia when nobles and lower classes switched places and all kinds of naughtiness went on. In Jamaica, pantomimes were staged satires that eviscerated political leaders and the pretensions of the nouveau riche. I'll never forget the scene when a working class man, who had suddenly become wealthy, explains how difficult his wife had become. With a wink at the audience, he calls to her. From off-stage we hear a shrill, irritated voice complaining that she had been awakened

her from beauty sleep. She arrives on stage in a frilly pink dressing gown, oversized fluffy pink slippers, and pink glue-on nails. Her hair is wrapped around pink curlers the size of PVC pipes, and her face is cemented into a grimace with mineral mud. When the slices of cucumber fell from her eyes there was a roar of laughter from the audience that shook the building. Jamaicans have a wonderfully mordant sense of humor. It made working with our local staff a pleasure. We always found something to laugh at.

Also, I visited with the tiny local Jewish community. I'm not sure that they even had enough people to maintain a congregation, but their small, historic synagogue was interesting because its floor was covered with sand.

Preparing for the next tour

When it approached the time to bid on my next job, I looked for a French tutor to help me improve my fluency so that I could make a case for going to France. I had entered the Service with 2+/3 French, and wanted to test again to get at least to 3/3. The local French Embassy offered me an instructor from their version of the Peace Corps. He was teaching French somewhere in Kingston and could make time for lessons after work. I remember him arriving for the first session on his Vespa, with his Jamaican girlfriend on the back, threading through the improvisational traffic of Kingston. In the end, I did get to 3/3. I think the FSI testers were a little surprised by my fluent description of the gangs or "posses" that controlled Kingston neighborhoods and where it was safe to walk and do business.

Lessons Learned:

1. **Drafting speeches for officials.** Always check with your audience before writing a public speaking presentation. You can even ask the intended audience what their group is interested in hearing. You're not obliged to actually give them what they ask for, but your supervisor or higher official will be better prepared and happier for knowing it.

2. **Management**. Read the distillation of Colin Powell's leadership advice at this website: http://govleaders.org/powell.htm It will give you everything you need to know as a first-tour officer. By the way, I would get to see Colin Powell's application of these principles in person when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But we'll save that story for later.

3. Relations with supervisors. Remember, if only one person can be happy in your authority relationships, it better be your supervisor.

1984-1986
Costa Rica: First Political Cone Job, Refugees

Q: Well then where did you go afterwards?

TAUBER: Jamaica had been a 15% hardship tour, which meant that my next tour would likely be at a nicer location. My Career Development Officer chose San Jose, Costa Rica. Really? I don't speak Spanish. I speak French, remember? I want to go to Paris. But the orders had already been written. I arrived at the Foreign Service Institute in May 1986 to begin Spanish language training. It astonished me that the FSI Spanish teachers could take me from 0 to 3+ Spanish in five months since I had never spoken a word of Spanish before. I surprised myself when I had to use the training as an interpreter for visiting VIPs. This was because the FSI language trainers not only taught you the language, but also how to manage a conversation so that you would not get caught in long, open-ended replies that are difficult to follow.

Iran-Contra Scandal Begins my Tour in Costa Rica

Within two months of my arrival in San Jose in September 1986, the Iran-Contra scandal broke. My chief of mission in San Jose, Lewis Tambs, was recalled after allegations surfaced that he had been part of the illegal transfers to the Nicaraguan Contras. Following Tambs, we had a number of charges d'affaires until Deane Hinton arrived as the new ambassador. Hinton was from the old school of U.S. diplomacy where officers were a bit more freewheeling in advancing U.S. objectives. He was charming, but also quite capable of being direct and tough when he needed to be. He was married to Patricia, a Salvadoran, considerably younger than he was. She was full of energy and great fun. She put the carbonation into what would otherwise have been flat diplomatic receptions. Once, when a salsa band was playing, I tried out a few of the dance moves I had learned in college during the disco era. Patricia saw this, and as soon as I let go of my partner, she took my arm and said, "C'mon, Mark, let's dance." I gamely tried to keep up; Patricia was quite a dancer.

Afterwards, as I caught my breath, the DCM quietly came by and asked me to take a look at another guy dancing a few yards away. He was Colombian, and must have been dancing since infancy given the flourishes and ballroom command he displayed. I figured the DCM pointed him out to show me what a real dancer could do. Instead, he stage whispered, "That guy is as queer as pink ink." He then went on about his hosting responsibilities. I was left to ponder the DCM's intentions. Was he warning me about acceptable comportment? I had a great of respect for him, but started to feel uneasy about how he viewed me from that moment on. I would meet this DCM again, back in

Washington after my tour in Costa Rica ended. We had lunch, ostensibly to catch up on what had happened in Costa Rica since I left. Instead, the DCM steered our conversation to the recent news that Congressman Barney Frank had used his influence to waive parking tickets for a male prostitute with whom he had a kind of relationship. I never really understood why the DCM took the trouble to call my attention to these things. It just left me puzzled.

Nicaraguan Refugee Work

Back to business. I was the refugee officer in the Political Section. Some 150,000 Nicaraguans had fled the Nicaraguan civil war into Costa Rica, a country with a population back then of about 4 million. The U.S. government had donated large sums to the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, the International Office on Migration, and other humanitarian organizations to care for these people. It was my job to ensure the money was spent effectively and to verify that conditions at refugee camps were humane. Only a minority of the refugees were in camps (some of these were family members of Contras). The majority of other Nicaraguan refugees lived among the local population, usually in outlying areas or in the poorer neighborhoods in cities.

I took many U.S. government visitors on tours of the camps, including Ambassador Hinton. My A-100 training in planning VIP visits came in handy here. The Ambassador relied on me for the entire trip from mapping the route to briefing materials. He asked penetrating questions on the way there and back and went over my reporting cables personally. I could usually answer his questions on the spot. If not, I could try to radio to my colleagues in the Political Section if we were still in range of the Embassy's transmitter. This was, of course, before the era of cellphones. Every trip had to be planned with the knowledge of when and where you would lose radio contact with the Embassy. Although Hinton had a reputation to be a force of nature that could easily destroy a career with a storm of disappointment in an officer's performance, while I was with him he put me at ease with many entertaining stories from his earlier adventures as a young officer.

Q: So when you were out of range for radios to the Embassy, and needed help, what did you do?

TAUBER: Costa Rica was not the Wild West. It has cultivated an image of friendliness and hospitality long before I got there. I found that to be the case. If we really needed something, we would stop at a roadside restaurant or a house with a telephone and ask to call the embassy. We were never refused. But this pre-internet, pre-cellphone era does bring back memories of the practicalities of reporting. When the ambassador's trip was

done, naturally I wrote the report. The draft first went through my boss, the Political Counselor. He was an excellent editor and tidied up my draft. Then it went through the DCM, who would call me up to his office to ensure that all the events and remarks happened as described. He did not want the ambassador to have to make any changes of fact. Once it was letter-perfect – since a single character out of alignment could cause the encryption transmitter to spit it back -- it went to the ambassador. Usually, the ambassador signed off without many changes, but sometimes he would add classified comments that required his secretary to retype it. You always looked at the comeback copy, the version that was transmitted, to see the ambassador's comments and whether they contained further action for you.

The Nicaraguan Civil War and Oscar Arias' Peace Process

Q: Can you give me any examples of Deane Hinton in operation?

TAUBER: I was too junior to be in the presidential meetings with Deane Hinton and President Oscar Arias, but it was easy to see when something changed quickly after Deane Hinton had gone in and spoken with top levels of the Costa Rican government. Arias was very independent of Washington. I don't know what leverage Hinton used to affect Arias' diplomatic activity. Hinton certainly couldn't threaten to withhold aid since congress had voted to maintain it at current levels. But I did get the impression that Washington liked Hinton's management of the situation. You can read more about Hinton's views on this posting in his memoir, *Economics and Diplomacy: A life in the Foreign Service of the United States.*

Let me provide a little context. Arias was shepherding his own peace process, begun in 1986, that included all five Central American countries – Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua under the Sandinista regime. The Reagan Administration objected to the participation of the Sandinistas, regarding them as an illegitimate communist government backed by Moscow and Cuba. But Arias barreled ahead, believing that he could get the Sandinistas to negotiate an end to the civil war and hold internationally supervised elections. For his efforts, Arias won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987. This added credibility to his approach in the U.S. Congress, while the 1986 Iran-Contra scandal reduced the credibility of the Reagan Administration.

By 1987, the Reagan Administration was left with few levers of influence to stop Oscar Arias' Esquipulas Peace Process. (Esquipulas is the Guatemalan town where the Arias peace process was initiated.) By 1988, the five Central American presidents signed a final Esquipulas Peace Accord in San Jose. Arias, as he insisted he would, got the Sandinistas to negotiate an end to the civil war and to allow the Nicaraguan Contra political leaders

back into the political process to contest the 1990 elections. Although Arias got the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts, we should remember that the pressure the U.S. exerted on the Sandinistas, both through the support of the Contras and undoubtedly through other clandestine support to anti-Sandinistas, was certainly helpful to Arias. In his diplomacy, he could certainly underline to the Sandinistas that failure to reach a peace accord could end up sapping their strength and leaving them open to continued military attack. In such a situation, the Sandinistas might well have concluded that an election was not as dangerous to them as trying to govern with active measures going on against them.

The First Free Elections in Nicaragua

The result of the elections? The anti-Sandinista coalition won. Violeta Chamorro, the widow of a famous Nicaraguan human rights advocate who was assassinated during the civil war, became the first legally elected president of Nicaragua. It wasn't an ideal outcome from the point of view of the Reagan Administration. The Sandinistas were still the largest single political party in the country. Even under Chamorro they retained the defense and police ministries. They also rigged a number of institutions to remain in their hands. But the victory of a non-Sandinista government was an acceptable outcome to the Reagan Administration given the situation at the time.

Q: So how then did you participate in events?

TAUBER: I was only a minor player as a second tour junior officer. At times, I carried messages back and forth between Costa Rican cabinet officials and the Embassy, but I was not involved in the top-level negotiations. The details of this period have been chronicled by many others who were party to the high-level meetings, or by historians who gained access to primary source material. This was a heady time for a junior officer in Costa Rica. I also helped by shepherding congressional delegations (CODELs) that visited on a nearly monthly basis for most of the time I was in Costa Rica. One of them, a single individual, was a congressman from Georgia's sixth district named Newt Gingrich. I have to say, unlike many other CODELs which descended us on like a rockstar roadshow, Gingrich was very low maintenance. In addition to the VIPs, we hosted U.S. citizen groups visiting Costa Rica as tourists or volunteers in development projects. The Political Section – which usually meant me – was expected to brief these groups on our policy and the overall situation. I was never entirely sure that the facts I quoted in support of the policy were 100% accurate. Some groups had done their homework and challenged my assertions, but I stuck to the talking points.

Smith-Mundt and the Propagandizing of the American People

This brings us to an interesting aspect of the changing nature of U.S. diplomacy. Attentive readers will recall that in the Gallup *Strength Finder* personality inventory my strength was Context. People with Context strength want to know how things were done up to now to take the right lessons from the past.

In 1948, as the Cold War began, the U.S. needed an official voice to explain and advocate its foreign policy to overseas audiences. The Smith-Mundt Act made the State Department, and later, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), the lead agency in creating media campaigns and running educational and cultural exchange programs to accomplish this goal. From the 1940s to the 1980s, USIA's cold war messaging seldom reached domestic U.S. audiences. This is important, because Smith-Mundt prohibited the U.S. government from using messaging intended for foreign audiences to influence U.S. citizens.

So there I am in San Jose. It's the mid-1980s, and Smith-Mundt restrictions still apply. Nevertheless I am presenting information on U.S. policy to visiting Americans that is full of material we designed for placement in local media to influence Costa Rican opinion. For example, our U.S. Information Agency office in San Jose contracted with CID, a Costa Rican franchise of the Gallup organization, to conduct public opinion polls in Central America. The results: CID found public opinion majorities in all Central American countries agreed with the Reagan Administration's view of the Sandinistas; namely, that they were an anti-democratic threat to the region. These results were put into talking points that I used to prove to American visitors to the Embassy that support for Reagan Administration policy in Central America was widespread. What I did not say was that these polling results came from a study paid for and vetted by the U.S. government. Strictly speaking, this information was meant for local dissemination, not for advocating Reagan Administration policy to visiting Americans. I think we all knew this, but I followed Foreign Service discipline and delivered the points as instructed.

Meanwhile, the results of the CID polls were indeed placed in local newspapers in Costa Rica, particularly *La Nación,* which is the journal of record. (Just by coincidence, the guy who owned CID also had a major ownership stake in *La Nación.*) This was a typical way of influencing foreign audiences and was completely legal under Smith-Mundt. But now we get to the shadier side of the street. These newspapers also found their way to U.S. members of congress friendly to the Reagan Administration. They quoted the opinion polls in interviews and congressional debates to gain support for providing military equipment to the Contras. None of the American legislators who quoted from the CID polls noted that they were the product of U.S. government purchase and vetting.

At this point, one could make an argument that the Reagan Administration was propagandizing the American people by: 1) purchasing a public opinion survey from a Costa Rican polling company; 2) constructing the questions in a way to get the desired replies; 3) printing the results of the poll in the most respected Costa Rican newspaper; and 4) quoting the results of the poll in Congress and in the U.S. press without indicating the link between the Administration and the polling company.

And that is where the U.S. newspaper *The Nation* (no relation to *La Nacion* in Costa Rica) comes in. *The Nation* claimed that the Costa Rican polling company CID had used faulty and manipulative questioning methods to achieve an outcome supportive of Reagan Administration policy. A good summary of *The Nation's* objections can be found at the following link: http://projectcensored.org/23-reagan-administration-used-secret-gallup-polls-for-propaganda/anda/ For those who find *The Nation* a little too left-wing for their taste, I recommend an article by professors James Coleman (University of Kentucky) and Lee Sigelman (University of Arizona) entitled "Poll Review: 1985 USIA Central America Surveys" (*Public Opinion Quarterly*, Issue 52, pp. 552-558; Fall, 1988). They found problems with the CID methodology as well.

But there is another reason to distrust the Reagan Administration's intentions here. See the review of Smith-Mundt violations cited in, "Apple Pie Propaganda? The Smith–Mundt Act Before and After the Repeal of the Domestic Dissemination Ban." (*Northwest University Law Review*, Vol. 109, No. 2. 2015. pp. 511-546.) at this link: http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1203&context=nulr The author cites a 1987 GAO study concluding that the Reagan Administration had violated Smith-Mundt. Here is the key passage from the GAO study:

> For example, in 1987, the State Department paid unaffiliated consultants to write op-eds in support of the government's policy on Central America who in turn submitted the op-eds to newspapers under their own names. The GAO found that the State Department violated the covert propaganda prohibition because the newspapers' readers incorrectly attributed the source of the op-eds to someone other than the government agency.

By 2013, it was widely acknowledged that something had to be done with the now outdated Smith-Mundt restrictions. Any American with internet access could read U.S. messaging intended for foreign audiences on U.S. embassy websites or in foreign journals. Consequently, in 2013 new congressional guidelines were passed to take account of this situation. You can find an excellent summary of this change in the Congressional Research Service Report at https://fas.org/sgp/crs/secrecy/R42754.pdf

The resolution of the Smith-Mundt problem raises another issue regarding the propagandizing of the American people. The U.S. military spends gigantic sums of money, not only in advertising for enlistment, but in cooperating with motion picture companies to create heroic images of soldiers. I have nothing against this, but you can't really call it anything but propaganda. Now, imagine if the State Department, USAID, and other foreign affairs agencies also had a budget to advertise its work to the American people. What if average Americans were flooded with the same amount of ad time about how much blood and treasure is saved by savvy negotiators and insightful reporters who send red flags to Washington about brewing conflicts well in advance? Instead, we must rely on the occasional remark by the rare legislator who takes it upon himself to counter the myth that U.S. diplomats luxuriate in sybaritic lifestyles at public expense in the fleshpots of sunny, louche foreign capitals. It is astonishing how old this myth is and how persistent. The earliest example I found goes back to WWII. Take a look at Congressman Stearns' remarks for the record preserved in the *Foreign Service Journal* of August, 1942 (pp. 417-420) at this link http://www.afsa.org/sites/default/files/fsj-1942-08-august_0.pdf

Max Tower: Ace of Spies

Q: Any last anecdotes before we move on to your next tour?

TAUBER: Let's end my tour in Costa Rica with a bit of dark humor. As the junior political officer, it was my responsibility to follow the local communist party. It was a traditional Soviet-funded tool with a Latin American commissar as its chairman. I negotiated an interview with him and arrived to find not just the chairman, but his entire "central committee" seated on a dais, staring with a heat that could defrost a steak straight through the freezer door. I asked about their views on the peace process, local labor issues, and other topics of general interest. In response, they blistered accusations of imperialism and the usual communist cant. Afterwards, I returned to the Embassy and duly wrote the cable. The following week, the banner headline in the communist party's weekly newspaper read, "U.S. Embassy Spy Visits Party Headquarters." Accompanying the story was a large-format copy of my business card. Not long after that, at a diplomatic reception, a local labor leader of my acquaintance, who never pronounced my name correctly, introduced me to his friends as, "Max Tower, the guy who was on the front page of the Communist Party newspaper." My FSO friends at post subsequently found plenty of opportunities to joke about my secret life as, "Max Tower: Ace of Spies."

Social Life and Networking

In Costa Rica, I did manage to get some exercise into my daily routine at a small fitness center at one of the hotels. Plenty of the guys there were regulars and there was a bit of a

gay vibe among several of them. In fact, several of my Costa Rican acquaintances who were closeted during my first tour in Costa Rica, were openly gay by my second tour (2009 – 2012). But that was a lifetime later in Foreign Service years. During this tour, as in Jamaica, I scrupulously avoided entangling romantic alliances that might lead to a hostile DS interview.

Much of my social life was spent with embassy contacts or other Americans who had retired to Costa Rica. I regretted not having a more developed social network among the local population, but this was still early in my career. Building friendships and networks in the Foreign Service was as important as building them in the local population. Often, these early work friendships continued throughout your career and helped you find job opportunities or gave you frank evaluations of life in other posts. There was hiking, the beach, a little theater company, and bridge with the defense attaché and his wife, or anyone else I could get to make four.

I had a lot of pent-up demand for access to an openly gay social life, so I looked forward to a tour back in the U.S. where this wouldn't be a concern. When it came time to bid, I put the State Department Operations Center at the top of my list. I figured it was a good place to learn how the Department worked and to find a track to a tour in France.

At the end of my tour in Costa Rica I was recommended for tenure but did not get it. It was a disappointment because I did get a commendation from the Refugee Bureau for my work with NGOs that provided humanitarian assistance to sudden inflows of Nicaraguan refugees into Costa Rica. But I did get a meritorious step increase, which meant I was close to selection for tenure, and would almost certainly get it a year later.

Lessons Learned

1. Ambassador readiness. When the Ambassador asks you a question, tell him what you know and promise the rest as quickly as possible. Don't invent.

2. Language Learning. Most people I knew who improved their language skills did so through daily contact with the local population, either professionally or horizontally. Although language study with local tutors, helps, there is nothing like immersion to reach fluency.

3. Don't collect breakables. You won't own them, they will own you.

1988-89
Watch Officer, Operations Center

Q: Do you want to describe the operations center when you were there?

TAUBER: I arrived as the Reagan Administration transitioned to the Bush Administration. The Ops Center is certainly an exciting place to work. As a Watch Officer I learned the building so that I could distribute hundreds of cables a day to all the appropriate bureaus. I used my Spanish to do quick translations of world events from Spanish-speaking media and most importantly, my Ops Center wrote situation reports on unfolding crises for the Secretary and his top-level assistants. It is important to recall that the Operations Center is a 24-hour office. Three teams staff the Center on the following rotation: three days on the 8 am to 4 pm shift, followed by three days on the 4 pm to midnight shift, followed by three days on the midnight to 8 am shift, then three days off. Operations Center staff receive extra pay for the unusual schedule and typically only remain one year. At the end of each shift, the departing staffers brief the oncoming group on any issues that require continued monitoring.

One of the major developments we monitored for many months was the "Ferdinand Marcos death watch." Marcos was the autocratic ruler of the Philippines from 1966-86. During the latter half of his rule, he imposed martial law and was guilty of widespread human rights abuses, corruption, and the assassination of his major political rival, Benigno Aquino in 1983. The assassination led to a growing popular uprising against Marcos. By 1986, even the Reagan Administration favored the resignation of Marcos in the face of the uprising and allowed him to stay in Hawaii given that he was also in declining health. By 1989, Marcos was reported to be suffering from multiple organ failure and it was only a matter of time. He lingered for 10 months, passing away in August, 1989. By then, free elections had taken place in the Philippines and Cory Aquino, the wife of slain opposition leader, Benigno Aquino, was President of the Philippines. There were concerns in the State Department over whether there might be unrest, or even coup attempts from Marcos die-hards. In the event, his death did not instigate significant problems in the Philippines. At least not immediately.

After nine months of 24-hour rotations, I nearly fell asleep at the wheel driving home one morning and knew it was time to pull the ripcord. (It turns out I had sleep apnea, which would eventually become severe, but it went undiagnosed until after I retired.) The Deputy Director of the Ops Center was happy to recommend me for an opening on the Honduras Desk. "Honduras," I thought. “One more tour in the Latin America Bureau and I will be Max Tower for life.” I was glad when an opportunity arose to move to the Secretary’s staff. Like so many of my decisions regarding onward assignments, I would have cause to wonder whether this was the right choice.

Lessons Learned:

1. Situational Awareness. Don't bring food or anything else with strong odors into the workplace. The Ops Center is one of many compact areas in the Department and any aroma will quickly be shared with everyone.

2. Use humor judiciously. Impiety and mordant humor have their place, but FSOs are supposed to exude a certain gravitas. If you are seen as not taking things seriously, this will undermine your reputation. I have a transgressive sense of humor and would too often forget to leave it at the door.

1989-90
Secretary Baker's Staff

Q. Secretary Baker ran the Department quite differently from Shultz, I understand.

TAUBER: Yes, the management style of the Secretary can make all the difference in how the Department is run. Secretary Shultz, in his memoir *Turmoil and Triumph*, notes,

> "I was warned that the Foreign Service officer corps was incorrigibly biased toward the liberal side of politics and that I could expect either to be captured or sabotaged by them. I doubted the latter was true; I was certain the former would not happen." (pg. 33)

Shultz relied heavily on mid-career officers in his personal office to manage his calendar, take part in drafting speeches, and control the flow of memos and other materials to him. Once Shultz took action on a memo, these same staffers alerted and distributed the results to the bureaus concerned. These staffers were reputed to be among the best in the Service and would typically go on to plum assignments in Europe, or other top locations. The staff job that I went into under Secretary Baker was not at all the one that Shultz had established. It was considerably diminished in responsibility and tasks.

James Baker's memoir as secretary of state is quite different from Shultz's. While Shultz's authorial voice is evident in his descriptions, Baker has a more careful, edited tone. This is not a criticism. Baker's is the only secretarial memoir in my 30 years of service that takes time to explain how "the building" actually works (see *The Politics of Diplomacy, pp. 27-36*). He also explains why he strictly limited his exposure to the career Foreign Service in order to do his job as shown in the following quotes:

> "I had approached the running of the State Department with some apprehension…" pg. 27
> "George Shultz … relied first and foremost on the Foreign Service to run the "building" and to guide policy. pg. 30
> "…I preferred to centralize policy authority in a small team of talented, loyal aides, and build outward from them." pg. 31
> "In hindsight, the strength of this organizational concept was that it allowed me to develop initiatives privately and coherently… My approach placed a tremendous burden on me and my closest aides, who simply couldn't always focus on every potential crisis." pg. 32

This is confirmed by the top human resources official at the time, George Vest, the Director General of the Foreign, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times,*

> "For America's senior diplomat [Vest], it was strictly *deja vu*. A new secretary of state--this time, James A. Baker III--was coming into office with his own set of top aides. And the advice of partisan supporters was ringing in their ears: "Don't let the Foreign Service take you over." As George Vest --a 41-year veteran of the service--lamented in a recent interview, the State Department's new management always takes the advice. Convinced that the career Foreign Service wants to pursue its own agenda regardless of the new President's foreign policy, the new bosses try to distance themselves from the diplomats who had served the previous Administration." (See http://articles.latimes.com/1989-02-20/news/mn-50_1_foreign-service)

Baker concludes that his organization served him and the Bush Administration well. It is certainly true that many of Baker's policy initiatives were successful. President Bush (41) and Baker had to manage the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the first Gulf War against Saddam Hussein, the denuclearization of Ukraine and Kazakhstan, and a sudden ramp up of U.S. assistance to the former Soviet states to help them with basic humanitarian services that had collapsed along with the rickety Soviet distribution system. It was also true that, as an institution among the national security departments, Baker's State Department still held weight. This would change for the worse over time. Finally, Baker would also contribute significant funds to the creation of the Museum of Diplomacy. But based on my experience, if a secretary of state does not make it his personal goal to improve the recruitment, retention, and training of Foreign Service Officers, the Service doesn't just drift, it falters.

What is the Foreign Service, anyway?

Few legislators, much less the general public, understand what the State Department does. Most legislators only become involved with the State Department when constituent services require their attention. Generally, this is due to a constituent's complaint against the Department over a visa case or a service they wanted from the embassy. What these constituents seldom understand is that there is little the U.S. government can do to protect them once they go abroad. Americans are subject to the laws of the country they visit. There are few places where an American embassy official can successfully intervene to get an American out of jail without going through that country's legal system. Nor can an embassy indemnify them against robbery or foul play. Americans take upon themselves the risks that go with travel. Members of Congress don't like having to pass on that bad news.

Many Republicans labor under the stereotype of Foreign Service Officers as left-wing elitists who undermine Republican foreign policy initiatives. During my time in the Foreign Service Jesse Helms was the paradigm of this view. More recently you might hear the expression "deep state" indicating that the Department harbors some kind of Masonic conspiracy with its own interests and power capable of sabotaging the policy of duly elected or appointed officials. So Republicans are afraid of too much activity on the part of the Service.

By contrast, Democrats believe that Foreign Service Officers do not innovate or exert themselves enough to successfully implement foreign policy initiatives; consequently, Democrats install loyalists ever further down into the State Department ranks. These Democrat appointees, not infrequently, "burrow in," at the end of a Democrat administration, or convert their political appointment into a permanent civil service job, thereby reducing slots for Foreign Service or civil service officers at the State Department.

The general public, to the extent it thinks about the Foreign Service at all, gets its information from TV and movies. In these media, Foreign Service Officers are portrayed as mealy-mouthed time-servers who do nothing but attend boozy parties and sell secrets. Baker's tenure did nothing to change these views or update training for the post-Cold War world. A comparison with Colin Powell's Diplomatic Readiness Initiative is instructive of what a Secretary can do to develop the skills of U.S. diplomats when he takes a mind to do it.

The other disadvantage for diplomacy and diplomats in the public eye is that diplomacy is slow, careful, and quiet. The media seldom covers small bore victories that, once added up, deliver greater security and prosperity for the U.S. Since diplomacy, by its nature does not lend itself to sound bites, it is at a disadvantage to those who think that we don't

need to maintain all those embassies and positions overseas, or the "dark state" that supports them from Washington..

Q. Can you describe a little of what it was like to work in Secretary Baker's inner office.

How a Memo Becomes a Secretarial Action

Let's take an example. Say a proposal from the Africa Bureau comes up to the Secretary asking him to meet with an African foreign minister. There may be a number of issues to discuss such as economic development, trade, democratization, regional security, etc. The memo would address all these items, cite current policy, and supply talking points. Once cleared, it would first go into the Executive Secretariat. This was the Secretary's outer office, where staffing begins. The Executive Secretariat gives the memo a tracking number, and then it proceeded to me. I was seated in the Secretary's inner office suite. I entered the memo into a tickler file and followed it through the secretary's inner office until final action was taken.

A memo's first stop in the inner office was the Office of Bob Zoellick, Counselor of the Department and the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. Zoellick was one of the smartest people I have ever observed in my 30 years in the Foreign Service. He knew what the Secretary would be most concerned about, understood both the international and domestic political dynamics, and could convey this to the Secretary in an economy of words.

To help him, Zoellick had a small but high-powered staff that included some political appointees as well as some talented career FSOs. For example, during my tour, Nick Burns worked for Zoellick. Burns would later go on to be Ambassador to Greece and NATO as well as Under Secretary for Political Affairs.

Once a memo reached Zoellick, he might change or add something. For example, Secretary Baker's inner staff knew that he was interested in the CITES agreement (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). Baker was particularly concerned about illegal trade in elephant ivory since this encouraged poaching and could lead to species extinction. Baker's staff would want to give the Secretary talking points that encouraged the African foreign minister to take action to end the poaching and illegal marketing of elephant ivory. (see: *The Politics of Diplomacy, pg. 218)*

Once I learned that the memo for the African foreign minister was undergoing change, I would alert the bureaus that had cleared it: African Affairs, International Organizations,

Oceans/Environment/Science, USAID, Legislative Affairs, and the Department's Office of Legal Affairs and Treaties. At the same time, a copy of the memo would go to Baker's scheduler to see where the meeting with the African foreign minister could fit in the Secretary's calendar. This required direct knowledge of the secretary's movements and his relative concern with the issues to be discussed. Once the changes in the memo were completed and scheduling issues resolved, the memo would be presented to the Secretary in a priority order that the inner staff knew, but I did not. My job was to try to figure out when the memo might get a final decision and keep the bureaus apprised. This gave me a wide set of contacts among the staff assistants throughout the Department. While these connections introduced me to fascinating and talented colleagues at my level, the connections were ephemeral. Most dissolved as soon as I left the Secretary's office.

Back to our African foreign minister memo. If approved, the memo would also go to Margaret Tutwiler, Spokesman of the Department. Her office would develop talking points on the meeting for her daily press briefing. Baker was renowned for his management of the media. Part of that adroitness came from Margaret Tutwiler's careful attention. Although I was not privy to her daily activities, I knew that she made available to key media contacts certain "top State Department officials" for background briefings. At times, that might even have included the Secretary himself. I also imagine that, once a memo like this one was approved, Tutwiler, or her staff, would contact key reporters who would want to hear about a meeting with an African foreign minister or those who were interested in the topics under discussion. These are small but important courtesies that journalists appreciate.

The final stage in a memo's life cycle was to return to the Executive Secretariat where it was prepared for archiving. Naturally, I would read it before turning it over to the outer office. I looked for any marginal notes or requests that the Secretary might have made that I could convey to the drafter of the memo. Without this heads up, the drafter might not see a copy of the original for a long time as it made its way down to the working level.

Xeroxer to the Stars

There were other responsibilities with this job. I put together the Secretary's "day book" or briefing materials he would need for the following day. In theory, the Secretary took the day book home overnight, but I don't think that actually happened. Certainly the Secretary saw some of the items since they would come back out with his signature or the occasional marginal note. But my guess is that his inner staff gave him a few elements based on their understanding of what he would really want or need.

I also drafted routine correspondence or got caught up in moving paper during an urgent policy issue. Lastly, I drafted the Night Note, the Secretary's one-pager to the President on the status of key issues. Once again, although that product went to the White House, I doubt the President read it. More likely, one or two items that the President's staff thought he needed to see actually reached the President in the NSC compendium. Otherwise, the Night Note was likely a product for low-level NSC staffers.

I have to admit that this job was not a great challenge. Moreover, I don't think my supervisors in the Executive Secretariat expected it to be. I came to understand that I was a benchwarmer, a placeholder for a time when the position would again be influential under a different Secretary. There were times when I had to look for things to do to fill my time. We joked that although we carried the title "Secretary's Staff" we were little more than "Xeroxers to the Stars." There was a fair amount of turnover in this outer office staff. For their departures, and not for general consumption, I sometimes wrote them song parodies. Here's one:

Don't Cry for Me Foggy Bottom (Sung to the tune of "Don't Cry for me Argentina.")

It isn't easy, you'll think it strange
When I try to explain what I do
In my windowless cage at the 7th Floor zoo
You won't believe me,
All you will see,
Is a trained chimpanzee
Although he's attired for State
Still just a lower primate.

I had to pull the ripcord
I couldn't bear
Being Xeroxer to the Stars
Logging memos you see
It just wasn't me
So I chose Rio
Chief FMO, keeping track of the dough
And ignore that the crime stats predict
I'll be mugged by some drugged derelict.

Don't cry for me Foggy Bottom
The truth is I forged curtailment

SECSTATE initials
Clearing my orders
Were clever copies
From xerox sorters

And as for fortune and as for fame,
They never invited me in.
No one wanted to know
A career FSO.
It was illusion, and to think
The solution was always in reach
One cable and life is a beach.

Don’t cry for me Foggy Bottom
The truth is I changed the memo,
A small refinement,
Brought reassignment,
Off to the lido,
In my new Speedo.

Have I said too much?
And there’s nothing more I can think of to say to you
Except that the code, for perfect copy mode, is 0142

Lessons Learned:

1. State Department Corporate Culture: Any success I had in the Secretary Staff position was due to the training I received from one of Shultz's career staff assistants who agreed to show me the ropes. She patiently and good-naturedly explained every kind of Department document and all the Secretary’s office procedures. In the course of instruction, I learned that she played bridge. So, to thank her when she departed, I invited her to an evening of bridge. AWKWARD. A pained silence followed the invitation. If a movie director ordered a close-up at that moment, we would see my high-level instructor grimace in ill-suppressed dread. This image of discomfort would tell the audience, "Mark, you are not the kind of A-list officer who would typically occupy this job. A-list officers like me certainly do not fraternize with the middling many like you. Nevertheless, sigh, *noblesse oblige*, I am forced to accept." Fortunately, another couple, both seventh floor staffers bound for ambassadorships, agreed to come as well and we made the best of it. I did not hear from my mentor again after this debt of social obligation was paid.

2. Again, gravitas: Area for Improvement in my Evaluation: "Mark needs to work up a more stately presence." Translation: No matter how effective you are, if you don't have the proper gravitas for the 7th Floor, its aureole of access and influence won't follow you into your next assignment.

Q: So what was your next assignment?

1990-1992
EUR/RPM: Office of NATO and CSCE
Desk Officer for Confidence- and Security-Building Measures

TAUBER: Around this time, a friend suggested that I keep a journal. I'm not very disciplined about that, but I did keep a detailed account during this period. I wrote countless resumés, interviewed for every available desk officer job in EUR, and pried loose recommendations from reluctant supervisors who had higher-value protégés to promote. I was never under serious consideration for any EUR desk job until a political-military slot opened up in EUR/RPM, the European Regional Political-Military Office. This office was in charge of NATO, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later, the OSCE), plus European conventional arms control issues. RPM had a reputation as a constant motion machine -- the gear that turned the European Bureau. It was a place from which many officers went on to high-level careers, so I jumped at the opportunity.

The job I pursued was responsible for writing instructions for U.S. arms control delegations that were negotiating military confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) in Europe. Before I get to the nitty-gritty of this job, it would be useful to provide a little, drum roll, Context.

In general, the State Department corporate culture encourages officers to gain a lot of substantive knowledge of the issues in their portfolio. But above all, the Department prizes the ability to "hit the ground running." You need to quickly judge which information you need to do your job and which to set aside for later study. Striking the right balance determines how well you manage your small piece of the policy pie. I set about acquiring a lot of knowledge right away, the drinking from a firehose approach. It would take me years to become more discriminating and confident in my choice of focus.

Q: Alright, what are confidence- and security-building measures?

Definition of CSBMs

TAUBER: CSBMs are military transparency measures. Most of them are requirements to provide advance notice of military activities and explanations as to why you are exercising. Generally, the answer is simple: readiness. Troops do not maintain their ability to maneuver, use weapons, and foresee obstacles without practice. But these exercises are often taken as signals of impending attack by neighboring countries. The idea of CSBMs is to reassure neighbors that exercises are not a prelude to war.

There are a few other types of CSBMs in the European area that are more restrictive. These include occasional inspections of military installations and troop deployments to check the information that is reported. There are also periodic meetings to discuss military doctrine and emerging threats like terrorism. These meetings give the U.S. a chance to advocate for civilian control of the military and adoption of a military code of conduct. The CSBM negotiations for which I wrote instructions were a descendant of agreements first reached in 1975 under the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

The History of the CSCE: The Condensed Version

As the Cold War shivered on through the 1960s, the U.S. confronted the Soviets in proxy wars and covert activities throughout the world, most famously in Vietnam. In the U.S., there were policy fault lines regarding how to handle the Soviet Union. Everyone agreed that the USSR had internal weaknesses that could be exploited: an inefficient economy that relied on oil exports for most of its hard currency; a one-party state with limited legitimacy; entrenched corruption; and power struggles among the elite (Kremlinology). American experts on Russia differed on how much money and military assets we should use to confront the Russians versus how much and what kind of inducements we should use as incentives for better behavior. Everyone who argued over this issue had to rely on calculations of Soviet economic strength, military structure, and foreign policy strategy that could not be reliably verified. So there were arguments over how strong the Soviets were and how much of a threat they posed, and most importantly, what their intentions were. This debate served as the backdrop for U.S. policy decisions on how hawkish to be.

Where it all started: The Helsinki Final Act of 1975

Richard Nixon earned his reputation for rabid anti-communism early in his career as a supporter of Joe McCarthy's witch hunts. This gave him the credibility, at least within the Republican Party, to determine how much the U.S. could do business with the Soviets. By 1972, Nixon, and his Secretary of State/National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, saw opportunities to end the Vietnam War and simultaneously improve the U.S.

geopolitical position by engaging with both China and Russia. Nixon's decision to move forward with a *détente*, or a greater willingness to engage in negotiations and exchanges with the Soviets did provoke opposition within Nixon's Republican Party, and among some of the more hawkish Democrats. But Nixon believed that his landslide victory against McGovern in 1972 gave him an unassailable mandate in foreign policy, and pursued both *détente* with Russia and a new opening to China to counterbalance the two communist giants of Eurasia.

One of the outcomes of *détente* with Russia was the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The Conference included not only all European countries, but the U.S. and Canada as well (This was a Soviet "concession". For a long time the Soviets wanted to exclude the North Americans, the better to exert their outsized influence to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its NATO partners.) Ultimately, they gave up this insistence and the CSCE took place in Finland, concluding with the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. The Final Act was an executive agreement, not a treaty, so it was signed by President Ford and did not require ratification by the Senate. The results of the Conference were gathered in four baskets as follows:

- **Basket One**: Political and Military Issues. This included the definition of post-WWII borders and introduced a peaceful settlement of disputes mechanism and a military confidence building measure requiring 21 days advance notice to all other members of the Conference before conducting military exercises involving more than 25,000 troops. This was the beginning of CSBMs.

- **Basket Two** focused on economic issues like trade and scientific cooperation. This was the period of the 1975 "handshake in space" when a U.S. Apollo rocket docked with a Soviet Soyuz counterpart and the two commanders shook hands, opening a period of scientific cooperation in space science between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

- **Basket Three** focused on human rights, including freedom of emigration and reunification of families, cultural exchanges and freedom of the press. This basket turned out to be more important than anyone expected. It was seized by human rights activists in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as the legal justification to set up human rights monitoring groups that drew attention to Warsaw Bloc human rights violations. Although harassed and periodically jailed, members of these Helsinki Committees helped break down the legitimacy of communist party rule over time.

- **Basket Four** Is also very important. It created CSCE follow-up meetings and implementation procedures. For example, the CSCE 1983 Madrid Review Conference defined the area for military CSBMs as the "Atlantic to the Urals (ATTU)." This leaves out the vast areas of the Soviet Union beyond the Ural mountains as well as the continental U.S. (CONUS). This "Madrid Mandate" would become the foundation of the CFE and CSBM negotiations.

For a more complete background on how we got to the Helsinki Final Act, the following link provides a trenchant analysis from the perspective of a CIA analyst at that time. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000498586.pdf

I also recommend *To Helsinki: Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1973-1975 (Duke Press Policy Studies)* by John Maresca, who was the Deputy Chief of Mission in the U.S. Delegation that negotiated the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. I would become very well acquainted with Maresca, as you will see shortly.

Congress Gets a Slot on the U.S. Delegation to the CSCE

There was one other important aspect of the Helsinki Final Act. For President Ford to get congressional support, he had to agree to the establishment of the U.S. Congressional Helsinki Commission, a bipartisan group that would review the follow-up actions mandated by the Helsinki Agreement. As part of this, it was agreed that the Congressional Helsinki Commission could place a staffer on the U.S. delegation to CSCE follow-up meetings. This staffer reported to the Commission, but also had access to State Department reporting. It was a rare concession from the executive branch that afforded the legislative branch an integral role in a foreign policy activity.

The Stockholm CSCE Review Conference: More CSBMs

Throughout the 1980s, the U.S. generally liked CSCE Review Conferences. Washington and its NATO allies could excoriate the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact for human rights abuses and fend off communist efforts to remove the U.S. military from Europe. Soviet efforts to make Europe a nuclear-free zone never prospered. A downside was that the Soviets were reluctant to accept any more CSBMs proposed by the U.S., not least because the U.S. always insisted on including some regime of on-site inspections. The Soviets were absolutely paranoid about having their military or bases inspected by foreigners, especially Americans.

Europeans Need Progress on Arms Control as U.S. Pershing Missiles Arrive

During this same period, the early 1980s, the Soviets installed new, more accurate intermediate range nuclear missiles in their European region, west of the Urals. These

missiles -- the SS-20s -- had not been limited under previous arms agreements. Moreover, SS20s were mobile and could hit anywhere in the territory of Europe, putting all NATO allies in peril. Negotiations between the U.S. and Soviet Union to limit or eliminate these weapons were unsuccessful as the 1986 Stockholm Review Conference approached. As a result, the U.S. began stationing its own intermediate range missiles in Europe (Pershing IIs) to counter this new Soviet threat. Although European governments saw the necessity for the U.S. missiles, large portions of their citizenry did not. Public demonstrations against the U.S. missiles mushroomed across Europe (there was an element of radical chic to them) and the U.S. was beginning to suffer from diminishing popularity among voters in NATO countries. European allies regularly suggested that the U.S. start other arms control initiatives to defuse the protests, but these initiatives were either strategically or tactically unacceptable to Washington.

In casting about for an alternative, the Reagan Administration settled on an expanded program of CSBMs that could be agreed at the 1986 Stockholm CSCE Review Conference. CSBMs could be sold as enhancing stability and predictability, reducing the chance for an unintended slide into war. The CSBMs that came out of Stockholm, known as the Stockholm Document, contained the list of CSBMs I would inherit. It is important to see the basics of the document -- in abridged form – to understand my work for the next seven years, from 1990 to 1997.

Here are the key elements of the Stockholm Document with my notes in ***Arial italics***:

The Stockholm Document 1986: Statement of Purpose

The participating States stress that these confidence- and security-building measures are designed to reduce the dangers of armed conflict and of misunderstanding or miscalculation of military activities and emphasize that their implementation will contribute to these objectives.

PRIOR NOTIFICATION OF CERTAIN MILITARY ACTIVITIES

Participating States will provide each other with written notification 42 days in advance of any military activity whenever it includes:

-- at least 13,000 troops,

-- at least 300 battle tanks, and/or

- 200 or more air force sorties, and/or

- amphibious or parachute landings involving 3,000 or more troops.

-Formats will be created to ensure uniformity in reporting of all relevant details of these activities.

These troop and equipment levels were chosen deliberately. They capture division-level training exercises or basing in European in the late 1980s. By 1986, NATO and the Warsaw Pact were moving away from corps- or army-size exercises (captured in the Helsinki Final Act at the 25,000-troop level). As the Cold War slowly faded, military exercises would get smaller. Subsequent CSBMs would reflect this with lower thresholds for notification. The reporting formats were initially relatively easy to fill out. The formats themselves would become a subject of negotiation later, as CSBMs became more numerous and complex.

OBSERVATION OF CERTAIN MILITARY ACTIVITIES

The participating States will invite observers from all other participating States to the following notifiable military activities:

- Whenever the number of troops engaged meets or exceeds 7,000 troops, or with an amphibious landing or a parachute assault by airborne forces in excess of 5,000 troops.

- The invitation is for two observers and will include all information on date, time, and place of inspection, languages to be used, what kind of equipment will be permitted, and how the visitors will be housed, fed, and protected from accidents or environmental hazards.

-The participating States need not invite observers to military activities which are carried out without advance notice to the troops involved unless these notifiable activities have a duration of more than 72 hours.

- Formats will be approved to provide the invitation and reply in a uniform way.

Unannounced, or "snap" military exercises are a key element of readiness training. They are too difficult to plan if you have to include provision for observers as well. Also, at this time, invitations to observe exercises were sent by diplomatic note to foreign ministries. By the early 1990s, paper

invitations were phased out, replaced by negotiated formats sent over the internet.

ANNUAL CALENDARS

- Each participating State will exchange, with all other participating States, an annual calendar of its military activities subject to prior notification forecast for the subsequent calendar year.

- It will include all activities noted above in chronological order and provide the type, purpose, types of troops, number of States involved, location, duration, and level of command.

CONSTRAINING PROVISIONS

- Each participating State will communicate, in writing, to all other participating States, by 15 November each year, information concerning military activities subject to prior notification involving more than 40,000 troops, which it plans to carry out in the second subsequent calendar year. Such communication will include preliminary information on each activity, as to its general purpose, timeframe and duration, area, size and States involved.

- Participating States will not carry out military activities subject to prior notification involving more than 75,000 troops, unless they have been the object of communication as defined above.

- Participating States will not carry out military activities subject to prior notification involving more than 40,000 troops unless they have been included in the annual calendar, not later than 15 November each year.

- If military activities subject to prior notification are carried out in addition to those contained in the annual calendar, they should be as few as possible.

These were relatively easy constraints for the U.S. military to live with. The era of very large NATO military exercises was coming to an end. The reason you notify in the second calendar year is that large-scale exercises required a two-year window for U.S. planners to prepare.

COMPLIANCE AND VERIFICATION

- The participating States recognize that national technical means can play a role in monitoring compliance with agreed confidence- and security-building measures.

"National Technical Means" is diplospeak for spy satellites.

- In accordance with the provisions contained in this document each participating State has the right to conduct inspections on the territory of any other participating State within the zone of application for CSBMs.

This is it! What the U.S. always wanted! A way to see Soviet military deployments, exercises, and bases on the ground in real time. It is a much weaker inspection regime than the one adopted under the INF and CFE Treaties, but it can be used by all countries, not just members of NATO and the former Warsaw Pact.

- Any participating State will be allowed to address a request for inspection to another participating State on whose territory, within the zone of application for CSBMs, compliance with the agreed confidence- and security-building measures is in doubt.

- No participating State will be obliged to accept on its territory within the zone of application for CSBMS, more than three inspections per calendar year.

- No participating State will be obliged to accept more than one inspection per calendar year from the same participating State.

- An inspection will not be counted if, due to force majeure, it cannot be carried out.

"Force majeure" means you can refuse an inspection if an unexpected act of nature makes it impossible for you to transport observers to the inspection area. While it is true that "force majeure" can be faked to avoid having to host an inspection, you won't be able to keep up the ruse forever. Participating States will line up and eventually get in. Also, note the first paragraph. This right to question another participating State would become more important because it can be done in the big negotiating forum with all other members present. It is one way to exert some peer pressure to prevent or end misbehavior. Finally, remember that the Madrid Mandate established the "zone of application" for CSBMs as the Atlantic to the Urals

(ATTU). No Soviet troops or equipment stationed beyond the Urals are involved.

- Any request for inspection as well as the reply thereto will be communicated to all participating States without delay.

- The participating State which has received an inspection request will reply in the affirmative to the request within 36 hours.

- Any possible dispute as to the validity of the reasons for a request will not prevent or delay the conduct of an inspection.

- The participating State which requests an inspection will be permitted to designate a "specified area" for inspection. In the specified area the representatives of the inspecting State may have access to all but sensitive points to which access is normally denied or restricted. The number and extent of the restricted areas should be as limited as possible.

- Inspection will be permitted on the ground, from the air, or both and will last no more than 48 hours from beginning to end. The inspection team will include no more than four inspectors. All of the equipment to be used on the inspection will be specified in this document. No other equipment will be permitted.

Inspections are usually the most contentious aspect of CSBM negotiations. The exact kind of equipment you can bring on an inspection, where you can inspect, what is off-limits, and a host of other details are negotiated in excruciating detail.

ANNEXES

Annexes are parts of the document. Usually, they are statements that record agreed definitions, but sometimes they record minority statements or understandings that a specific country has insisted on in order to join consensus on the accord. There are several annexes in the Stockholm Document, but the most important one is:

ANNEX IV
CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

It is understood that the participating States recall that they have the right to belong or not to belong to international organizations, to be or not to be a party to

bilateral or multilateral treaties including the right to be or not to be a party to treaties of alliance; they also have the right of neutrality. In this context, they will not take advantage of these memberships to circumvent the purposes of the system of inspection, and in particular the provision that no participating State will be obliged to accept more than three inspections per calendar year.

Translation: The Soviet Union (later Russia) knows that NATO would like to combine all of its quotas to conduct inspections in the Soviet Union. This statement basically says, "Nice try NATO, but the Soviet Union (later, Russia) will only accept 3 inspections per year from your members." After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia took over the responsibilities for this agreement.

1990: EUR/RPM and Negotiations on CSBMs

Q: My eyes are already glazed over. And you're saying the real document is more complicated than this?

TAUBER: Oh, much. But there's no way to tell the story without providing some level of detail since it is the details that get negotiated among the 50+ nations of the OSCE.

Now, back to EUR/RPM. My principal job was to draft instructions for our CSBM negotiators, first at NATO for coordination with allies, and then in Vienna where the negotiations actually took place. The recipe for concocting negotiating instructions is as follows:

1) I draft them based on what my negotiators want;

2) my office approves my draft;

3) the other State Department offices with an interest in CSBMs clear my instructions;

4) then all other agencies with an interest in CSBMs clear the cable; and finally

5) the National Security Council puts its seal of approval on the instructions; so that

6) I can then transmit the instructions to our negotiators.

Cleared instructions, also called negotiating guidance, move from Washington to our delegation in NATO. The U.S. rep there tries to get all the NATO allies to sign on to our

approach. If he is successful then that becomes the NATO position and goes to Vienna where all the allies support the position in negotiations with all the other countries. This was the ideal. In reality, common NATO positions were hard fought and not always achieved. France was generally an antagonist to common positions because it hoped to play a more leading role in European security as the Cold War was ending and a new security architecture for Europe was emerging. But France was not the only NATO outlier. Depending on the issue, others might have concerns as well. Sometimes, after discussion within NATO, we did alter our instructions. We always wanted to achieve consensus at NATO, but not at any price. In the end, whether we got consensus at NATO or not, the instructions would eventually move from NATO to Vienna where the U.S. Ambassador to the CSBM talks -- Jack Maresca -- would deploy them in the talks. Maresca was a perfect choice to head this delegation given his previous experience in negotiating the Helsinki Final Act.

My predecessor on the CSBM desk briefed me that Ambassador Maresca was a hard-charger -- very determined and very committed to completing a CSBM agreement. The Ambassador had earned the sobriquet, “Full Metal Jack” for his steely resolve. But my predecessor also warned me that the Pentagon, which was the organization most affected by CSBMs, took a dim view of their value. Since all my instructions had to be cleared by the Pentagon, I should expect opposition from the Pentagon. This meant that I would have to tell Ambassador Maresca to go slow and agree only to the fewest and least burdensome of proposals. My predecessor further warned me that Full Metal Jack did not like guidance that would straight-jacket him in the talks. He wanted flexibility, she told me, and he will want to *lead* negotiations, not simply be a nay-sayer. She recommended that I develop a thick skin right away for my own health and well-being. Then she took off for greener pastures and left me with the CSBM file cabinet and my mouth agape.

1990: EUR/RPM and Negotiations on CSBMs

Q: So you're saying that your predecessor did the equivalent of passing the flak jacket?

TAUBER: Precisely. Although the Pentagon accepted CSBMs in 1986, recognizing that this was the price of deploying the Pershing II missiles, by 1989, the Pentagon had soured on confidence-building measures. Perhaps DoD’s opposition was due to its experience with implementing the Stockholm Document CSBMs. From 1986-89 maybe the Pentagon found that troops in the field complained that CSBMs were more nuisance than value. Or, perhaps the Pentagon saw more arms reductions coming and hoped to avoid the burdensome addition of even more transparency requirements. In any case, by 1989, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell got nothing but negative

feedback from his branch chiefs and warnings against expanding the Stockholm Document CSBMs any further.

Ambassador Maresca did convince Powell to represent the U.S. at a military doctrine conference held as part of the CSBM talks in Vienna. Powell saw value in meeting his counterparts from the Warsaw Pact to discuss the future troop numbers and deployments in Europe on the strategic level. It also gave him a chance to emphasize the importance of reforming post-Soviet militaries to become wholly civilian led, professional, and subject to a code of conduct. But more CSBMs beyond this? Powell was skeptical. Maresca himself relates in his second book, *Helsinki Revisited: A Key U.S. Negotiator's Memoirs on the Development of the CSCE into the OSCE*, that Powell's staff had warned him not to agree to any package of CSBMs Maresca might try to sell. (*Helsinki Revisited*, pg. 119).

CSBMs versus the Conventional Forces Europe (CFE) Treaty

Here it may be helpful to take a wider view than just whether CSBMs were burdensome for the Pentagon. Let's take a look at the larger strategic context in the Vienna negotiations at that time.

While CSBMs were being negotiated among all the countries of Europe, a subset of this group -- NATO and the Warsaw Pact – were negotiating another separate agreement. It was the first serious effort in the 20th century at arms reductions. It was called "The Conventional Armed Forces Europe Treaty" or CFE for short. The Pentagon focused on CFE with the full weight its ample staff. The reason is that CFE's mandate touched upon the most critical aspects of their mission. The CFE mandate was designed to: 1) to reduce troops and military equipment; 2) restrict troop and equipment movements; and 3) to verify compliance using a rigorous on-site inspection regime. This inspection regime for troops and equipment was also a first. It meant that, finally, the U.S. military would gain access to Soviet bases. A new agency, originally created to carry out the INF inspections, would now become a major bureaucratic player in U.S. interagency negotiations. It was called the On-Site Inspection Agency – OSIA. Given that it would inherit the numerous and detailed responsibilities for inspection compliance under INF, CFE, CSBMs, and any other inspection regime that might come along later, it needed a flag level officer to lead it and a detailed training budget to ensure that its inspectors did not miss a scintilla of information when we had the chance to lift the lid on Soviet/Russian military activities.

So, while Ambassador Jack Maresca was negotiating CSBMs with all 50-some-odd European countries in the Austrian emperor's old ballroom, another U.S. ambassador, James Woolsey, was negotiating the CFE Treaty among a much smaller but overlapping

group in another, smaller space. CSBMs would result in an executive agreement that did not require approval by a two-thirds majority in the Senate. By contrast, CFE was always destined to be legally binding, so there were regular briefings for senators, especially those with jurisdiction over arms control and defense authorization and appropriations. Recognizing the importance of CFE, my office devoted several officers to the writing of CFE negotiating instructions. I was the sole backstop officer for the CSBM negotiations. It is telling that my supervisor, who was responsible for both CFE and CSBMs, discusses only the CFE Treaty work our office undertook in his oral history. He has not one word about CSBMs. If he did tell me to try to integrate my instructions with CFE, or to frame them as part of a larger strategy, I don't remember ever receiving such advice.

Although the Pentagon's influence in the interagency was weighty, it was not the only voice in the clearance process. There were other players in the U.S. government who did indeed value the information that would come from CSMBs. Their interests acted as a counterweight to the Pentagon at times. Also, recall that the post-WWII map of Europe was rapidly changing. From 1989 to 1991 the Berlin Wall came down and Germany was reunited. Communist governments left power in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Rumania, and the Soviet Union collapsed. Czechoslovakia splits and a long, bloody Yugoslavian civil war begins. CFE inspections had been designed only for NATO and the Warsaw Pact. All the other European countries had no means of verifying military information other than CSBMs. All of this played out against the Pentagon’s hope of avoiding the extra bureaucratic work required by CSBMs.

The Interagency Clearance Process: Getting to Yes, but More Often Getting to NO!

Q: You said you had to clear your negotiating instructions and put them through an interagency clearance process. How did that work?

TAUBER: First, the stakeholders.

--**The State Department**. Lead agency for negotiations. My office, European Regional Political-Military Affairs (EUR/RPM) drafted the negotiating instructions. We had to clear everything inside the Department first and then with the interagency. Sometimes, even my most balanced and well-reasoned instructions -- in my own humble opinion -- simply got slashed down to: No, No, and Hell No. But, a clever and intrepid desk officer can find chinks in agency positions that open just enough room to give State Department negotiators in Vienna room to improvise and bargain. Free range negotiators are happy negotiators. Successful instructions also win a small approbation from supervisors. Fewer problems to resolve at higher levels. Also, recall that this is the *European* Bureau. Once in a while we did have to consider the views of all those other European countries that

wanted CSBMs, especially those outside of NATO, even if the other parts of our own government did not.

--The Pentagon. The Pentagon was in fact two offices. First, there was the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), at that time headed by Colin Powell. Then there was the Office of the Secretary (OSD), the civilian side of the Pentagon, which was typically responsible for policy making and interactions with foreign defense ministries, NATO, and other alliances. Since CSBMs related to field operations, JCS typically spoke for the Pentagon while OSD held the megaphone. But sometimes JCS and OSD did not agree. Sometimes OSD saw that larger strategic interests would require JCS to accept additional bureaucratic burdens to get the overall security architecture we wanted at the time. Ultimately, we got a CSBM agreement called the Vienna Document that did include some additional bureaucratic burden on the military as the cost of a larger strategic policy outcome in Europe.

--Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Yes, ACDA was still alive and kicking. Jesse Helms had not yet folded it into the Department of State. Most of the ACDA officers were experts in arms control, and had been in the field since the 1960s. In addition, ACDA typically sided with Ambassador Maresca on CSBMs, so you might think I could rely on them as a natural ally. But their wordsmithing of my instruction cables drove me crazy. They were only ones who tried to correct my writing even when they didn't have a substantive point to make. Wow. If you want to butt heads with an Aries just try to correct texts he has been laboring over for weeks. Eventually, my office did grant me a dispensation: I did not have to accept non-substantive corrections.

--The Intelligence Community. Ever watchful. Seldom vocal. The IC was always interested in more information, but it usually deferred to JCS when it came to issues of excessive bureaucratic burden.

-- The Onsite Inspection Agency. Separate from the Pentagon, its interests were nevertheless generally represented by JCS since its staff were mostly detailees from the various branches of the U.S. military.

--The National Security Council.

The Black Box. After everyone had their say and put their chop on a set of instructions the instruction cable still had to go to the NSC for its approval. This procedure was called crosshatching. Even a set of instructions that I had cut and polished to a jeweled effulgence could still be recut and repurposed if the NSC so decided. The NSC director responsible for CSBMs at that time was in detail from the military, so she undoubtedly

had many contacts at the Pentagon. I mention this because even when I succeeded in getting JCS to drop some restrictive language, and give my negotiators room to maneuver, the NSC could reinstate the restrictive language. In that case, my email queue blaze with complaints from my negotiators about bait and switch. Why had I told them that they would be getting new, more broad-ranging authority to negotiate only to tighten it up at the last minute? This naturally made me look foolish, like I did not know my job and could not reliably advise my delegations on what to expect.

Interactions with the NSC also taught me that there is no such thing as an excess of caution in crosshatching. I remember one instance in which I thought I had received the NSC approval. The NSC director for CSBMs had left the office early, and I took that to mean she had no objections. When I heard nothing from the NSC by 7 pm, I took the cable, with its beautiful page of 20 clearances, up to the cable transmission window and handed it to the communicator who fed it into the encryption reader and it blinked into the ether guided by satellite to my negotiators in Brussels and Vienna.

The next morning I learned that the NSC director had returned at 8 pm to her office and changed the cable. The changed version was sitting on my desk when I arrived the next day. I was now required to send the most mortifying message a desk officer can transmit: the corrected copy. I had to tell my negotiators that I had mistakenly sent *my* final draft, not the *NSC-approved* final draft. Unfortunately it was too late. My negotiators, delighted with their roomy instructions, had already shared them. There really isn't any way to recuperate from this. Your only friend is time. Given the fluid nature of the negotiations, even mistakes like these eventually wash away in the oceanic gyres of debate.

Lobbying for my Negotiators in the Interagency Process

Q: What about your own lobbying. As you became more knowledgeable in the position, were you able to argue more effectively for what the Ambassador wanted?

TAUBER: Here's where my Georgetown education comes in. I started with no knowledge of this political-military specialty, but the analytical and negotiating skills I learned at Georgetown helped me master the situation. After reading previous cables and memos in the files, I tried to figure out the reasons behind JCS opposition to CSBMs. For example, under CFE requirements, the U.S. would have to report information on brigade/regiment units and accept on-site inspections from the Russians to verify the data. Would it be a burden to have a few more on-site visits as required under a CSBM regime? Since it was expected that U.S. troops and bases would be downsized, wouldn't this mean less to report on? Did CSBMs impinge on the Pentagon's post-Cold War

planning? If so, how? Or was it just the Pentagon's aversion to the cost of training staff and allocating time to fulfill the CSBM requirements?

In trying to find answers, I started by asking my office director if it would be possible to see the military equipment that CSBMs address at a nearby base or get a briefing on how U.S. military units would be affected by the CSBMs under negotiation. The answer was a flat no. I had the impression he took my request as frivolous, as if I were asking for a boondoggle of military tourism. This boss was a Cancer, and they tend to be stingy with time and resources. For example, after I returned from my first short visit to NATO, I returned late on Sunday, jet-lagged. I called in to work to say that I would be late and would be happy to spend annual leave catching up on sleep. My Boss called me at home and told me, "We don't do that. We return to work immediately." As Linda warns in *SunSigns* about the Cancer Boss, "By the way, watch those mental notes he makes. He has a memory like an elephant. Cancer bosses seldom forget a thing. That includes what time you arrive, what time you leave and how many times you visit the washroom while you're there." (pg. 176).

With no help from the boss, next I talked with State Department offices that cleared my instructions, including the staff of the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs, the Policy Planning Staff, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, and sometimes a European Bureau country desk officer. In fairness, even within the JCS there were some captains and majors -- desk officer equivalents -- who did try to answer some of my basic questions. But the information never seemed to be enough to help my negotiators lean forward in the talks. Whatever the reasons, I never had a conclusive explanation of why the Pentagon, or at least the Joint Chiefs, were so opposed to CSBMs.

Ambassador Maresca and members of his delegation also tried to convince the Pentagon. They argued that if the U.S. was going to be part of a CSBM regime, we should lead negotiations, not simply say no. Maresca ran into the same immovable object in the Pentagon that I did. I remember twice accompanying him as the notetaker in meetings with then-Chairman of the JCS Colin Powell. I was very impressed with Powell. Given all the other high-level issues on his plate, he couldn't have spent more than 30 minutes to prepare for this meeting. Ambassador Maresca made the case that the U.S. had to take the lead in developing CSBMs so that Russian proposals (and those of other adversaries) did not become the objects of discussion. Powell listened amiably. He agreed that we would need to find appropriate ways of dealing with the security desires of non-CFE countries, but made no specific commitments on CSBMs. Powell owed his loyalty to his staff and did not want any additional CSBMs if that could be managed. But he was cagey enough not to say never, even though Maresca always left these meetings empty-handed.

My office was no help; they seldom wasted political capital supporting something the JCS so implacably opposed. It also came back to me through the grapevine that Ambassador Maresca felt I was incompetent in pushing his agenda in the interagency and that he wanted a better backstopper. This was ironic because it fell to me to write the justification for his merit pay award after he successfully concluded the 1990 agreement on CSBMs.

The Beginning of Mediocre Evaluations

My first year evaluation was unenthusiastic. In it, my boss described my efforts to educate myself about CSBMs as too narrowly focused. Perhaps if I had engaged more in the CFE process, I might have understood the larger strategic picture in which CSBM negotiations took place. Eventually, Ambassador Maresca did send a commendation on my work, but it lacked examples of specific achievements. A promotion panel isn't impressed with flowery encomiums. My second year evaluation did mention that I secured interagency agreement on a modest package of updates for the 1992 CSBM document. But it was equally flat in tone. As I continued in pol-mil work for a total of seven years, I would accumulate modest evaluations and no promotion. This is a dangerously long time to remain in the same grade. Some officers who languish in the mid-ranks are recommended for selection out. I would learn just how close I came to being low-ranked for selection out several years later.

Looking back, I always had the suspicion that my real role was to invent crafty delaying tactics on CSBMs until all the CFE issues had been resolved. If those were my instructions, I would have understood and proceeded accordingly. Or, if EUR/RPM had held staff meetings where we reviewed the role of CFE and then set an agenda, however restricted, for CSBMs, I would have known the strategy and carried it out. I had no personal stake in promoting CSBMs. But in the absence of such clear instructions, I proceeded on the assumption that I was the flack for Full Metal Jack and gave it my all. Perhaps my supervisors thought they were giving me this guidance and I simply didn't get it. I still don't know.

Q: But let's be clear, a CSBM agreement finally resulted?

TAUBER: Yes, The 1990 Vienna Document on CSBMs. The first one was approved shortly after I arrived in EUR/RPM, in November 1990. The subsequent updates to the Vienna Document 1990, which took up the majority of my time in EUR/RPM, were approved in Vienna in 1992 and again in 1994. Updates to the Vienna Document would continue until 1999. An excellent review of the development of CSBMs during this

period can be found in this 2004 SIPRI report: *Confidence- and Security-Building Measures in the New Europe,* Zdzislaw Lachowski. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-829788-2. Although it's a bit dated, the report does reflect on the first 14 years of CSBM negotiation and implementation and the value of Vienna Document as an example for use in the Dayton Accords that ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Q: So as we approach the end of your two years in EUR/RPM, where were you thinking of going next?

TAUBER: I had the *idée fixe* that a tour in EUR/RPM qualified me for a tour in Paris. This was wrong. Looking back, it reflected an ignorance of process on my part. The basic thing I didn't understand was that, in the Foreign Service, you don't choose plum jobs, plum jobs choose you. I spent a long time waiting for a positive reply to my bid on a Paris political job that was never going to materialize. Linda Goodman, in *Sun Signs*, describes an Aries employee as someone who cannot imagine defeat, who just keeps butting his head against the same wall expecting it to collapse. In this case, I found myself at the end of the bidding season with no walls left. I was now subject to a directed assignment. That's when the Human Resources Bureau orders you to take a job whether you like it or not. In this case, absent any viable alternatives, I was assigned to the Nuclear Risk Reduction Center, or Nerk, for short.

Lessons Learned:

1. Situational Awareness: Obviously, my supervisor did not care about CSBMs. He did care considerably about CFE. An alert FSO can increase his chances of an outstanding evaluation in direct proportion to how well he helps his boss on the boss' concerns.

2. **Career planning and self-knowledge.** This tour should have taught me that my skills and approach are unsuited to pol-mil work. That I continued in a field that did not inspire me just to get a European posting would become an ever-more costly mistake.

3. **Don't just hear cues, listen to them.** If supervisors express doubts that you can manipulate the personnel system to get a posting to Paris, or anywhere else for that matter, believe them.

1992-93
Nuclear Risk Reduction Center (NRRC, or as it was commonly called: The Nerk)
Department of State

Q: So what was the Nerk?

TAUBER: The Nerk was originally created as part of earlier arms control treaties with the Soviets, such as the Intermediate Nuclear Forces agreement or INF. It was the 24-hour office that sent and received information required by those accords. In 1992, when I arrived there, the Nerk had just received new responsibilities under the CFE Treaty and the Vienna Document on CSBMs. It had to ramp up its personnel and software to deal with regular information exchanges among over 50 countries. Since I had experience with 24-hour shifts in the Ops Center, and since few people in the Department knew CSBMs as well as I did, I was perfect for the job. I did everything I could to worm my way out of this assignment. I fought the law and the law won.

Most of the work in the Nerk consisted of receiving the forms required by the agreements and disseminating them to the appropriate recipients. Honestly, I thought the job was beneath me, and had trouble hiding that fact. This attitude did not endear me to anyone in the office, and I was acquiring a poor corridor reputation the more I flapped my gums about it. A friend of mine in the Service, who listened patiently to my rants, replied with some wise advice. She knew I had read the Horatio Hornblower series. She recalled that, despite Hornblower's many admirable traits, he chose poorly when it came to marriage. Nevertheless, out of his strong sense of loyalty, Hornblower was always complimentary and solicitous of his wife in public. "That," my friend said, "should be your model of behavior with the Nerk." It was good advice that I did not take. The only good thing I ever had to say about the Nerk was that it came with added pay for the 24-hour shift work. The salary bonus helped me pay off my remaining student debts.

I was fortunate in that the Nerk position was only one year and I was assigned a new personnel officer sympathetic to my predicament. He helped place me in what seemed to be a good follow-on assignment. Actually, from a promotability point of view, it was not helpful. But I would only learn that several years later. At the time, I thought myself quite lucky to win a position on the U.S. Delegation to the CSBM Negotiations in Vienna starting in fall, 1993.

Lessons Learned: Corridor reputation. Complainers might as well give off a bad odor. They are quickly identified and avoided. This can have a chilling effect on finding willing mentors or recommenders.

Q: Aside from your assignment, in 1992 we are approaching the arrival of the Clinton Administration. Were attitudes changing toward gay people in the Foreign Service?

GLIFAA -- Gays and Lesbians in Foreign Affairs Agencies

TAUBER: Yes, slowly. In the summer of 1992, David Buss, a management officer (whose oral history is also located on this site) and a number of other gay FSOs decided to found the first professional association for gay people in the Foreign Service. After a few meetings, a charter was hammered out and the Gays and Lesbians in Foreign Affairs Agencies (with the unhandsome acronym "GLIFAA") was born. I attended a number of these organizational meetings. They attracted some 30 people, nearly all men. Some members were still hesitant to allow their names to be made public on any official GLIFAA list, so it was decided that the membership list would be shared only among members. At this point I figured, safety in numbers, and signed up.

Over time, GLIFAA would grow in size, but not dramatically. The important thing was that the Department recognized the organization. With this recognition, the leadership of GLIFAA could approach both the American Foreign Service Association and the Director General of the Foreign Service to request that gay people receive the same benefits that straight people received, especially with regard to committed partners, and later, with regard to married partners. This equalization of treatment did occur, but it took some 20 years and the decision of the Supreme Court legalizing gay marriage for the curtain to close on the final act.

Recall that GLIFAA was designed as a professional, not social, organization. For social outlets, gays fell back on that most American of habits -- creating voluntary organizations. Washington was now home to a wide variety of gay clubs and communities of interest. I took part in quite a number: adventuring, bridge, religious, others. These organizations were exciting social outlets. There was a general feeling that things were going to change for the better.

1993 LGBT March on Washington

Before packing out for Vienna, I took part in the 1993 March on Washington. It drew a remarkable number of people from all over the country. I was surprised that so many people would interrupt their lives, spend time and money, and take the chance of being seen as openly gay. According to DC police, between 800,000 and 1 million people descended on Washington over the weekend of May 11-12, 1993. Even if that number was off by half, it would still be the biggest organized event of gay people and their supporters I can remember. The platform of the march was titled, “A Simple Matter of Justice: 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation.” (The Program Guide." pg. 16) Following is the manifesto:

We Demand:

- Passage of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender civil rights bill and an end to discrimination by state and federal governments including the military; repeal of all sodomy laws and other laws that criminalize private sexual expression between consenting adults.
- A massive increase in funding for AIDS education, research, and patient care; universal access to health care including alternative therapies; and an end to sexism in medical research and health care.
- Legislation to prevent discrimination against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people in the areas of family diversity, custody, adoption and foster care and that the definition of family includes the full diversity of all family structures.
- Full and equal inclusion of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people in the educational system, and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender studies in multicultural curricula.
- The right to reproductive freedom and choice, to control our own bodies, and an end to sexist discrimination.
- An end to racial and ethnic discrimination in all forms.
- An end to discrimination and violent oppression based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, identification, race, religion, identity, sex and gender expression, disability, age, class, AIDS/HIV infection.

Of course, the only thing that happened in the wake of the March was the creation of the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy in the military. At the time, I thought that this was a ridiculous policy that would not survive a court challenge. I didn't understand how deferential courts are to executive orders, even those that enshrine a pretense.

And the Quakers

The march was the last major event of my five years in Washington from 1988-1993. But it is worth mentioning that, aside from a gay social life, I was also exploring religious life as well. I started attending the Friends Meeting of Washington (Quakers). I liked the Quakers not least because they welcomed gay people. They had very little in the way of organized worship, which suited me, although I chafed at having to reach consensus on every decision. I kept thinking, just vote and get on with it already. But this was not the Quaker way. For the first time in a long time I really felt as if I had found a place where I could explore the religious side of my life in a safe environment. I joined them for a yearly meeting in upstate New York, took part in their outreach to people with HIV and AIDS, and enjoyed the social connections the Meeting afforded.

1993-97
Pol-Mil Officer, U.S. Delegation to the OSCE

Vienna, Austria

Q: What was Vienna like when you arrived?

Vienna in the 1990s as Austria Moves Toward EU Membership

TAUBER: Vienna was a unique post for me because it was the only one where I spent four years. It almost felt like home. It is easy to get around the city and its immediate suburbs using only public transportation. Moreover, Vienna, at least in the 1990s, was a very safe city by any standard.

I lived in the center of town, in an apartment building right across the street from the palatial, neo-gothic city hall, the *Rathaus*. My building was constructed in the late 1800s. Sigmund Freud lived there briefly before moving to his apartment on Berggasse. While I was there (1993-97), the building was occupied exclusively by U.S. personnel.

I did not bring a car to post and got along fine with periodic rentals and taxis for the few places that public transit didn't easily reach. My apartment was within walking distance of the CSBM negotiation venue at the old imperial palace. Unfortunately, the U.S. Delegation offices were 45 minutes away by subway and trolley at the northern edge of the city. So, each day I commuted 45 minutes up to the Delegation offices, then 45 minutes back to the negotiating hall, then 45 minutes back to the offices to report on the negotiations, then 45 minutes back home. A great deal of time was wasted, and there were no plans to change the location of the U.S. Delegation offices while I was there.

Vienna's winters are gray and bleak. I suffered from them until I discovered saunas. Then I realized why northern Europeans are such sauna enthusiasts. There is something about dry roasting your body and then plunging it into an icy pool that flushes out a tide of endorphins in the brain. By the time I finished a few cycles of baking and gasping at the shock of icy water, I was so doped that I completely forgot what I was grumbling about on the way in.

By contrast, Vienna summers are sunny and full of well-tended flower beds. I walked everywhere at all hours and never felt that I was under threat from crime. It was a medium threat post for terrorism, but I don't recall any event serious enough to cause any special action. On the other hand, there is a real counterintelligence threat. Vienna lived up to its reputation as a hive of spies. One of the Russian KGB officers regularly sat in on the CSBM talks. Everyone knew who he was. Tall, and not at all ugly, he styled himself a late 1950s hipster in a patch-elbow blazer, dark turtle neck shirt, pleated slacks, and pipe.

I think his KGB dressers must have consulted an out-of-date style guide. He looked like he was on his way to a swanky party in a Doris Day/Rock Hudson movie.

Although the Department declined to teach me German -- since the OSCE offered simultaneous translation -- I tried learning it at night. That quickly melted away when my hours at the job, including the many mandatory receptions, left no time in the evening. You could get along relatively easily with English, but Vienna was not the polyglot, cosmopolitan hub you might have expected. Its 1.7 million population was actually smaller than it had been in 1940. The shopkeepers, tradesmen, and retail clerks that I dealt with on a daily basis seldom spoke English. Or at least they were unwilling to.

That began to change after Austria joined the EU in 1996. Immediately there were more ATMs, more English was spoken, and many of the smaller museums in the city reopened after renovations. The most visible example of this was the Albertina, a rampart of the old imperial palace; it held the Austrian graphic arts collection. The restoration of the Albertina truly sparkled. By the time I left in 1997, Vienna was an EU member and life started to take on a very un-Austrian bustle.

I had many visitors over the four years I was in Vienna. By the end of my tour, I don't think there was one historic or noteworthy place I hadn't visited, no matter how small or remote. But I should note that Vienna is an expensive place to live, even without a car or house payment. Nine years into the Foreign Service I was already starting to fall behind the average promotion rate from FS-3 to FS-2. Vienna on an FS-3 salary was a stretch and my credit card debt slowly crept up.

Q: Did Austria have glimmers of a reversion to the 1930s anti-Semitism and all. Did you notice any of that or were you monitoring that?

TAUBER: As *gemutlich* as Vienna felt, I never entirely embraced it. A country that cares deeply about maintaining its beautiful countryside and historic sites, not to mention its skiing and opera, doesn't seem like a place that could embrace Nazism. And yet… A friend of mine from the U.S. visited me about halfway through my tour. His parents had owned a shop in Vienna that was destroyed on Kristallnacht in 1938. They were among the lucky ones who had the means and connections to get to the U.S. We visited the location where the shop had been on a side street in the old city. There was no indication that it was once a shop. It had been entirely repurposed.

There were many echoes of the Nazi past in Vienna. Oddly, it was one of the smallest ones that I remember most. Karlsplatz is a busy transfer station on the Vienna subway. I regularly went through there. It has a circular hall where you can buy a snack and other

sundries as you go from one platform to another. One of the shops is a stamp and currency store. Its glass walls are plastered with every kind of collectible paper. In one of the panes, easily visible to the hurried commuter, is a set of paper currency with an inset of Moses in an oval. This was the fake currency the Nazis used in Theresienstadt – a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. Theresienstadt was the show camp. It was the one the Nazis used to demonstrate to the world that they were treating the Jews humanely. Among the many examples of its Potemkin normality, the Nazis liked to flaunt the currency. Miniature notes with an oval inset of Moses. The Karlsplatz philately shop was still trying to make a profit from Nazi concentration camp artifacts. Typically, shops like these showed just examples in the window. They usually had far more of the product available inside. So the Karlsplatz philatelist was likely to have a rich collection for true connoisseurs of concentration camp swag.

I thought about buying the Theresienstadt gelt just to donate it to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, but then I thought better of it. I didn't want anyone to profit from the sale of this stuff. The owner should have had the conscience to donate it himself. He never did. As far as I know, the Theresienstadt script is still there.

But I don't want to leave you thinking that this one example is dispositive of the Viennese attitude toward their Nazi past. Certainly, they were not going to put on hair shirts or practice other public mortifications. But they weren't entirely without compunction. In fact, Vienna's Jewish museum grew in size while I was there and the memorials to the Holocaust increased. It's a mixed picture.

Q: *So, down to business. What was your role on the Delegation?*

CSCE: The Labyrinth of Multilateral Diplomacy: From 35 Countries to 57

TAUBER: My three main areas of responsibility were: CSBMs, the implementation of the Open Skies Treaty, and miscellaneous other arms controls issues as they came up. But here, as before, it is necessary to understand that, as part of the changes taking place in Europe with the end of the Cold War, the CSCE itself was changing. This requires a moment of context.

Q: This won't be as long as the last moment of context, I hope?

The CSCE and NATO Envy

TAUBER: Well, remember, I spent a total of seven years in pol-mil work on CSBMs. I would be remiss if I did not try to make it understandable to someone outside of this policy niche.

From my arrival in EUR/RPM in 1990, the U.S. continued to support the CSCE as a useful part of the new security architecture of Europe. But as the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union collapsed, questions arose among some European countries (and even among some experts in the U.S.) as to whether we still needed NATO. Couldn't the CSCE take the place of NATO as the new pan-European security organization? The majority of the U.S. congress and the executive branch agreed that the answer to that question was NO. NATO had been the instrument through which the U.S. protected the development of democracies and market economies in Europe. It was also the largest contributor of troops and equipment which allowed it to exert significant influence in European security. The U.S. was not going to give up this valuable investment as part of the peace dividend. Instead, the U.S. led efforts to articulate a new strategic architecture for Europe, one in which the promotion of stability and the prevention of conflict were the key components. Within this architecture, NATO would have pride of place.

This quickly led to the debate over whether NATO should take in members of the former Warsaw Pact, and even among former Soviet republics. The debate was resolved in favor of NATO extension. The idea was that by offering the highly desirable NATO membership to former communist countries, the U.S. could achieve two key goals: 1) oversee a rapid modernization and democratization of formerly communist security structures; and 2) ensure that NATO candidate countries would refrain from creating security problems with their neighbors. New NATO members had to become, in the term of art of at the time, "exporters of stability." By and large this worked, except, of course, in the former Yugoslavia.

The American policy makers who engaged in NATO expansion had another reason for taking in former Soviet satellites. Everyone knew that Russia's incipient democratization could go south. Therefore, when the U.S. insisted on a "Europe whole and free" with no more zones of control, everyone knew it meant that Russia would no longer exert the malign influence it had formerly cast over its "near abroad."

This approach to NATO expansion did have opponents, even in the U.S. Some experts, like George Kennan thought it was ill-advised to move ahead with a wholesale expansion of NATO because sooner or later it would generate revanchism in a restrengthened Russia, and wasn't worth the blood and treasure to refight the post-WWII lines of influence. (See the floor statements of Senator Paul Wellstone, et al., in opposition to NATO expansion that quote from George Kennan's *New York Times* Op Ed "A Fateful Error" (Feb. 5, 1997) at this link: https://books.google.com/books?id=ku2KQGpJrXEC&pg=PA4159&lpg=PA4159&dq=Senator+Biden+op-ed+on+NATO+enlargement&source=bl&ots=mWBbbc9IlB&sig=cV8LTgoNsot53tCDrTn_IyNIhtA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjUqODvvazVAhVLbD4KHVFPDcQQ6AEIPDAG#v=onepage&q=Senator%20Biden%20o.)

Opponents of NATO expansion warned that the Russians would see such a move by NATO as establishing a Western zone of control up to their border when they were too weak and too absorbed by internal problems (e.g., Chechnya) to prevent it. But the NATO boosters won out. They successfully argued that it was better to risk Russian grievance than agree to resume the old "zones of influence" with an uncertain future for the zone nearest to Russia. For a short, excellent history of the rationale for NATO expansion, and some of the opposition to it, see the Senate testimony at this link https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-105shrg46832/html/CHRG-105shrg46832.htm In particular, see Annex 5 which is a memo prepared by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff and the Congressional Research Service.

I mention all this because our CSBM negotiation instructions, insignificant as CSBMs were in the great game, nevertheless always began with NATO expansion talking points. U.S. negotiators were adjured to be wary of any effort that might undermine NATO as an organization or restrict its ability to carry out missions under a new strategic concept that included out-of-area conflict prevention and resolution. This was important because the nightmare scenario of Pentagon planners was that the U.S. would agree to CSBMs that would restrict its freedom of action in carrying out the new NATO doctrine.

By-and-large, the U.S. was successful in preventing CSBMs from interfering with its freedom of movement in Europe, both unilaterally and through NATO. However, there was at least one occasion during NATO's involvement in Kosovo when the Vienna Document CSBMs did create some problems for U.S. freedom of maneuver. See the following U.S. Air Force Occasional Paper for a detailed explanation of these problems at file:///C:/Users/tauberms/Downloads/ADA435013%20(1).pdf

Stitching Together an OSCE

TAUBER: Despite U.S. efforts to prevent the CSCE from becoming an organization that might compete with NATO, the tide was turning toward organizational status. When I arrived in Vienna in 1993, the CSCE already had a permanent secretariat in Vienna and a few other small permanent offices. In addition, the CSCE now divided negotiations into two bodies with quasi-institutional status. The first was the Permanent Council, which negotiated everything but military and security issues. The second was the Forum for Security Cooperation, where CSBM negotiations took place, and where any of the CSCE's members could raise any issue of security concern.

(N.B. Separate from, but related to the FSC were two other implementation groups that met under the "auspices" of the CSCE. The first was the Joint Consultative Group, responsible for implementation of the CFE Treaty. The second was the Open Skies Consultative Council. Membership in these two groups did not include every state in the

CSCE, but everyone was more or less aware of how their activities dovetailed with negotiations in the FSC.) Finally, as with any multilateral organization, there were many temporary committees, working groups, and informal get-togethers. I had to keep an eye on these groups to be sure they were not incubators of proposals inimical to U.S. interests.

With all these proto-organizational limbs lying around, Europeans naturally groped for a body to attach them to. Certainly, the Russians wanted to replace NATO with a formal CSCE organization. But even they did not have a clear idea of how much authority to give such a new player on the European scene. The Russians were well aware that they did not have many friends left from their former "zone of control" inside or outside the former Soviet Union. In fact, as I recall, only Belarus could be counted on to rear up on its hind legs, flare its nostrils, and whinny when the Russian delegation needed a stalking horse. With the Chechnya uprisings going on at home, the Russians did not want to create a new security organization so powerful that it could shackle Russian internal military operations designed to quash the separatist uprisings. Moscow proceeded with caution.

France also had aspirations to reduce U.S. influence in Europe. Initially played out in the debates over the future of NATO. The U.S. declared that NATO had "to go out of area or out of business," meaning that NATO must now take on activities outside of its Cold War area of operations such as anti-terrorism operations or conflict resolution in the Balkans. The French declared that they loved NATO so much they wanted it to remain exactly as it was, with no role other than protecting its members, or providing troops and logistical support for missions under a CSCE or European authority. The two visions – U.S. and French -- eventually did reconcile in a way acceptable to all NATO members. The French developed a European-only brigade answerable to a joint European command within the Western European Union. (This remained something more on paper than reality.) The U.S. was satisfied with a rewriting of the NATO mission and manual that would allow out-of-area activities.

CSCE Budapest Summit 1994: From CSCE to OSCE

While the French plan to reduce NATO influence (read: U.S. influence) did not prosper, the pressure to create a permanent organization out of the CSCE was overwhelming. At some point in the 1992-94 period, Washington decided that its isolation on this issue was not so splendid after all. New instructions from Washington told us that we could now accept institutional status for the CSCE under strictly limited conditions. All of our negotiating instructions sternly directed the delegation that, while sewing together the flailing limbs of the CSCE onto a new body, we must never allow it to become a Frankenstein capable of lumbering into NATO mission areas. The British, in particular,

were helpful in this. Their instructions conveyed London's unease about the CSCE becoming a UN *manqué* with all the expense and duplication that entailed. They helped keep the resulting CSCE organization small in cost and ambition. And that is how, in very brief terms, the CSCE became the OSCE at the 1994 Budapest Summit. For an excellent brief history of how the CSCE became the OSCE, see P. Terrence Hopmann's chapter in, "The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe: Its Contribution to Conflict Prevention and Resolution," in *International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War* at https://www.nap.edu/read/9897/chapter/15

Q: And CSBMs lived happily ever after. Can we move on to your next assignment?

TAUBER: Not quite yet. The 1994 CSCE Summit took place in Budapest, so its concluding agreement was naturally called the Budapest Document. To ensure that the summit document came out right from the U.S. point of view, our ambassador decided that most of our delegation would decamp to Budapest for the six weeks leading up to the final event. He would later take a lot of flak for that decision in regard to the expense of housing so many people in Budapest hotels. For me, it was a taste of things to come. I didn't know it then, but I would be returning to Budapest in a subsequent tour. The next OSCE Summit was in 1996, in Lisbon. The ambassador was much more careful to limit the number of delegation members. Happily, I was deemed essential, so I got to go to help ensure any additional CSBMs were modest and did not trouble the Pentagon.

Back to the Budapest Summit Document. It had several outcomes. The new OSCE would now become involved in promoting economic and energy development but in a way that considered environmental impacts. OSCE human rights monitoring teams could now be sent to places where problems clearly existed if the participating country agreed. Peer pressure would generally force the state in question to accept the team, then stymie its efforts once it arrived. The Document included a separate Politico-Military Code of Conduct which largely drew on U.S. and NATO doctrine.

Another innovation in Budapest was that, for the first time, participating States agreed to consider how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be allowed to attend and speak at the summit. The U.S. was leery of this because there are plenty of anti-U.S. or just plain wacky NGOs out there. But, finally it was agreed that certain NGOs would have an opportunity to speak in a special session. One of the NGOs that applied to speak was the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). ILGA is an umbrella organization composed of many national chapters and partners. These individual groups work through ILGA to organize global action and report progress on or violations of LGBT human rights.

Unfortunately for ILGA, in 1994, the year of the Budapest Summit, Senator Jesse Helms, an unabashed homophobe, discovered that two of ILGA's constituent organizations promoted pedophilia. Although ILGA expelled those organizations immediately, the U.S. delegation did not support their request to speak at the Budapest Summit. In fact, our ambassador decided that there were far more urgent human rights concerns to address in public sessions than gay rights. I was disappointed because I had several friends in ILGA-Vienna who worked tirelessly as volunteers to promote protection of LGBT rights. They were looking forward to having their voices heard at this important forum. I also disagreed with the ambassador that the U.S. had to choose among a hierarchy of human rights to support. Any statement on human rights by the U.S., even if it has no follow-up action, is read, quoted, and used in human rights organizations around the world. Similarly, U.S. silence is noticed as well. ILGA did eventually get to speak at the OSCE follow-up conference in Vienna in 1995, but this is a far less visible event than a summit.

Q: Any other issues of note?

Open Skies Redux or Reflux?

TAUBER: Throughout this period, CSBM improvements were still under discussion in the Forum for Security Cooperation. I reported on all the debates, working groups, NATO caucus meetings, etc. Another revision to the Vienna Document came out in 1994. Additional revisions to the Vienna Document would follow until the early years of the Vladimir Putin regime in Russia.

But the other half of my job was to report on a separate confidence-building agreement -- the Open Skies Treaty. Under its provisions, any treaty member could request a reconnaissance overflight of any other member. You could use photography and other sensors to supplement on-site inspections under CFE and CSBMs. The yearly number of overflights each country could conduct was set in the treaty based essentially on size of territory and military. So the U.S. and Russia each got the largest number, with nations like Germany, France, the U.K. getting the next largest number, and so on down the line. The unique aspect of this treaty was that it applied to the whole territory of the Russian Federation and the whole territory of the U.S., not just the European regional deployments. So the U.S. could peek beyond the Urals at things going on in, say, Chechnya, and the Russians could fly the friendly skies from Boston to Honolulu and photograph areas that even U.S. citizens were not allowed to see. The kicker was that the aircraft and its suite of photographic or sensor equipment had to be old technology. Very old. The information you could get using this equipment would in no way equal what you could get from state-of-the-art satellite technology. Still, since the treaty required that

information gathered by any country had to be shared with all treaty members, it became an attractive additional CSBM for smaller countries without access to satellite telemetry.

Q: This goes back to an old idea in the first Eisenhower Administration. Why did they dust it off now?

TAUBER: Well, in part it was a George H. W. Bush initiative. He certainly lived through the Eisenhower effort and thought that this kind of transparency measure lent itself to the post-Cold War era of new regional security. Colin Powell as CJCS, also saw the Open Skies Treaty as offering modest gains in reconnaissance in exchange for a relatively low price in implementation costs. With the Bush 41 Administration fully behind it, the Open Skies Treaty was an easy sell to the U.S. Senate for ratification in 1993. Even so, the treaty still needed some technical elaboration. To accomplish this, the Treaty created the Open Skies Consultative Commission (OSCC), a technical group of air force experts from treaty members who met under the auspices of the OSCE in Vienna. Although most treaty members empowered air force officers to be their representatives, in the U.S., the State Department had to be the lead agency, and once again my boss was the negotiator. But State struck a deal with the U.S. On-Site Inspection Agency, a military organization created to conduct CFE and CSBM inspections. A flag level Air Force officer from OSIA would share the negotiating responsibilities since his knowledge of both the aircraft and its sensor array was essential in the implementation talks.

In the mid-1990s, when I was in Vienna, it was believed that Russia (and its semi-autonomous oblast, Belarus) would shortly ratify the treaty so that it could enter into force. But that's not what happened. The Russians would drag their feet for nearly 10 years. It wasn't so much the technical issues themselves. These could be quickly resolved by experts. The problem was that the Russian military believed that the treaty had been concluded on terms prejudicial to Russia. This view was not entirely incorrect. When negotiations began in 1990, the Soviet Union could count on using the overflight quotas of all of its Eastern European satellites just as the U.S. could count on caucusing with NATO allies on which ones would overfly high value targets over the Soviet Union.

Imagine Russia's chagrin when it found that, by the time the U.S. deposited its instrument of ratification in 1993, the majority of all overflight quotas had flipped to Team U.S.A. For example, you could be sure that former Warsaw Pact countries, seeking NATO membership, would now work with the U.S. to direct their quota of reconnaissance flights over sites in Russia. Even some of the former Soviet republics like the Baltics and Georgia, would certainly want to use their quotas over Russia as well. By contrast, the quota of flights Russian could use against the U.S. and NATO countries did not increase. The only Open Skies Treaty members that Russia might count on to share overflight

quotas were Belarus, Armenia, and perhaps a few of the former Central Asian republics. No wonder the Russians used every trick in the book at the OSCC to find technical reasons to delay their ratification.

Q: So what did you do in the interim?

TAUBER: Even though the Open Skies Treaty was not formally in force from 1993-2002, there were plenty of Open Skies "practice" flights and other technical issues to address. In fact, as reporting officer for the deliberations at the OSCC, I even received an invitation to go on an Open Skies practice flight over Germany. Finally! An actual field demonstration of equipment about which I was writing cables. I remember that as I stepped on board the very bare military aircraft, the pilot asked me about the fiber content of my suit. I assured him it was top quality worsted wool. "Oh, that's good," the captain replied. "Just in case there is a fire on board, wool doesn't flame as quickly as polyester. Polyester will melt on your skin and leave you with third degree burns." The colonel who commanded the mission told me to put my feet up on the side panel because this aircraft was not heated for commercial use and the floor would get so cold that I could get chilblains. Good to know. And there was no toilet. They did have a bucket in case of urgent need. This was one of those moments when you realize you're not in Kansas anymore.

The flight itself was short. Little more than an hour. Toward the end, the pilot asked me if this was the first time I had flown on a military aircraft. I guess it was pretty obvious. He invited me into the cockpit to see how they engage the photo and sensor arrays and offered me a chance to look out the window at the vista the pilots saw. It really was an unforgettable experience. I also saw that a cockpit crew's work is complex and requires constant focus and skill, even on autopilot. Their skill really impressed me.

The OSCC generated plenty of work for me. For example, we needed to elaborate forms for every activity and datum of information required under the treaty. This also meant plenty of additional work for my former colleagues at the Nerk. In addition to all the CSMB and CFE notifications to tabulate and distribute, the Nerk would now have to add to its portfolio the ones required for Open Skies. And there were many other details of the treaty that required joint statements or memoranda of understanding.

For more on how the Open Skies Treaty was refined in the age of digital photography, see Ambassador Greg Delawie's excellent discussion in his oral history located on this site.

How to Become Unpromotable

Q: This does seem to require quite a detailed understanding of a recondite matter. How did you demonstrate the political officer skills and abilities of an 02 officer to get promoted?

TAUBER: For my first 18 months in Vienna, I went to all the negotiations on CSBMs and Open Skies. Initially, I wrote very long reporting cables that captured every country's interventions and positions. I added comments I could gather from informal chats with other reps between negotiating sessions. I tried to add moments of drama to spice up my reporting. I loved it when the Swiss delegate picked up his newspaper and noisily crunched and unfurled the pages. It was his stagey way of expressing boredom when one of the post-communist bloviators unburdened himself of interminable and impenetrable interventions. Even the simultaneous interpreters were defeated by the obscurantist cant of the thatched eyebrow set. Sometimes, though, there were real theatrics. I always awoke from somnolent head bobbing when Turkey shook its table tent and demanded a point of order whenever Greece attempted to delegitimize the Republic of Northern Cyprus. Greece would explode if Macedonia tried to refer to itself as Macedonia and not its proper name - the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." Moldova objected to anything related to Transnistria. Azerbaijan would reply to any intervention by Armenia, whether in fact it had anything substantive to say or not. Georgia and Russia got into spats over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And so it went.

In spite of their length, my reporting cables were cleared much more quickly because:

1) simply reporting on what happened produced little disagreement;

2) in the new world of classified email, all the other agency reps had reported back to their home offices through their own channels before my report got there; and

3) Ambassador Maresca moved on to another assignment. With the Vienna Document on CSBMs well established, it was now just a question of refinements in light of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. In such a situation, the Department reasoned we no longer needed an Ambassador to do the negotiating. Instead, my supervisor, an FS-01 officer, sat in the chair for the U.S. He was much more willing than Maresca to accommodate the hesitations of JCS.

By 1994, with a little more than a year on the job, I was not distinguishing myself. My long cables on the give and take in the negotiations might have been useful for the historic record, but email made them less and less actionable, and therefore less valuable. In counseling sessions with my boss, he'd pick up his big metal scissors and start snapping them shut. I needed to trim down my writing and comment only on the most

important issues, he advised. But even with shorter reports, I was still covering a conventional arms issue that very few people cared about.

My boss knew this and was not unsympathetic. When the Hungarian Delegation asked to borrow a U.S. officer for a few months to help them draft the summit documents for the 1994 Budapest Summit, I got the nod. I was certainly capable of drafting, but it became clear that what they really needed was someone who had quick access to Washington and could advise with some level of certainty on Washington desiderata. Most of the issues of importance were the ones addressed in the Permanent Council – OSCE architecture, future tasks in human rights, economics, environment, elections and development of civic society institutions. Although I was acquainted with these topics, they were not my area of expertise. I had immersed myself in the conventional arms control side of things and the Hungarians quickly discovered I was not adding value. I was soon replaced with a more knowledgeable officer from EUR/RPM in Washington.

Another idea was to expand my portfolio to add coverage of post-Soviet conflicts; e.g., Moldova's conflict with the break-away region of Transnistria, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia's conflict with its breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and other cats and dogs. This did help broaden my work, but not my promotability. Only one thing could do that: taking the chair as U.S. negotiator.

At last, the Negotiator in Full

In my last year I had a change of supervisor. My new supervisor was a Capricorn, an earth sign. Typically, Aries, the fireball, wants an air sign to complement him. But I urge you to read Linda's delightful description of her own interactions with two Capricorns. Linda herself was an Aries with Aries rising. You don't get more Aries than that. The Capricorns she describes were her editor and a bookseller (*Sun Signs*, pp 409-410) Here's a bit of her recollection, "As an Aries, I hate to take direction. No Aries writer can stand to have anyone edit their work." But she took pains to describe how the patient, reflective Capricorns eventually persuaded her they were right. Linda also credits Capricorns with being careful, determined climbers in any organization. They plan their course and stay on it. So when my new boss told me, "Mark, we're going to get you promoted," I had every reason to believe he could do it.

To make good on his pledge, he had me take the seat for the U.S. Delegation in the Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) when it was negotiating CSBMs. Eleven years after entering the Foreign Service I was finally a negotiator for the U.S. It was a big honor, and a big responsibility. I was a bit intimidated at first. But, after the stage fright

passed, I found it wasn’t terribly hard to deliver instructions. My problem was the peanut gallery sitting behind me. This was composed of representatives from JCS, OSD, ACDA, and various others. They all wanted me to pipe up any time another country mentioned something they didn't like. Their yellow sticky notes flew, or rather, pasted themselves on my three feet of table space with alarming frequency. Every sticky note invoked the Apocalypse. If I did not smother monstrous initiatives like small arms registries, naval CSBMs, and prohibitions on anti-personnel mines, the U.S. would be reduced to a second-rate power. Some of the yellow sticky demands were easy to accommodate: U.S. policy was clearly opposed to naval CSBMs and small arms registries. These are not even to be discussed. Land mines were more difficult. We were happy to eliminate most of them, but we could not demine on the Korean peninsula while the Kims kept millions of soldiers on alert to invade the south. So we could not agree on a global ban. There were other doomsday stickies I never understood.

The worst part of negotiating for me was saying no. (For Myers-Briggs enthusiasts, I got a big fat zero in the "firm, tough-minded" part of the Thinking/Feeling inventory.) And that was the heart of my job. Washington viewed my role at the FSC as a damage control operation. We opposed most of the proposals that came up, not only in Vienna, but in other fora around the world. I had to constantly confront, oppose, and block. It wears on you. It was obvious that pol-mil work was not my métier.

Q: But were you finally promoted as a result of your advancement to negotiator?

TAUBER: As promised, my new supervisor worked very hard to describe my contributions as worthy of promotion. I am indebted to him for the effort. I even got a recommendation letter from the ambassador. But it wasn’t enough. The promotion board recommended me for promotion. There were 34 promotion slots available. I was ranked 35. I got a Meritorious Step Increase instead. I was now in my seventh year as an 03 political officer. I did begin to worry that I would be left moldering at the 03 level and eventually forced out of the Service in a culling of the mediocre.

Q: What did you do next? With the clock ticking on your time in grade as FS-03 officer, did you look for a more challenging assignment that might showcase your talents in a more visible way?

TAUBER: No. That would have been the smart thing to do. I'll get to the onward assignment in a moment. But first, there is one more episode worth recounting before we leave Vienna.

Fearless Leader’s Mancave in Azerbaijan

TAUBER: In 1996, Lynn Davis, the Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Affairs, visited Vienna to represent the U.S. at the first plenary meeting of the Wassenaar Agreement. Wassenaar was a new military transparency arrangement requiring twice-yearly reports on the export of arms or equipment that could be used in weapon-making. You had to report exports so that the organization could work against rogue regimes receiving weapons, or to keep track of arms that went to places where they might be stolen by terrorists. Members of Wassenaar basically agreed that there are places where arms exports are a bad idea and tried to coordinate on what to do about it. At that time, key countries of concern were Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Libya and North Korea. But there were also near abroad areas that worried the West like Transnistria and Abkhazia. For a complete description of how Wassenaar worked at that time, go to this link:
http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/arms/arms_briefing/960123arms_briefing.html

The Wassenaar Secretariat was in Vienna, and Davis needed a control officer. I got the duty. At that point, I was read-in on all the post-Soviet conflicts, and I familiarized myself with Wassenaar. I gave the Under Secretary impromptu briefings on all the Russia "near abroad" areas that were locations of concern for illegal weapons transfers. Apparently, the Under Secretary liked my work because I was invited to accompany her, several months later, on a visit to the Caucasus countries.

On that trip, I met her Learjet in Frankfurt. It was considerably nicer than the Open Skies aircraft. You could put your feet on the floor and there was a private bathroom. When I boarded, the passenger compartment was already filled with State Department staffers. There was great commotion among them. They were arguing over how to nuance the talking points for each stop: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. In Georgia, the first stop, the commotion accidentally resulted in Davis getting the talking points prepared for Armenia. For once, when a screw-up happened, I had clean hands. But the Georgians were good sports, and any awkwardness was quickly washed away in the brandies, vodka, and whiskey that accompanies the Caucasus tradition of grandiloquent toasts. The stop in Armenia went off perfectly. The unforgettable part of this trip was the stop in Azerbaijan.

In 1996, Heydar Aliyev, the once-communist and now post-communist leader of Azerbaijan was clearly aging. He had only three major items on his bucket list: 1) ensure his son's succession to power; 2) rake off the profits from Azerbaijan’s oil industry to enrich himself and his cronies; and 3) secure the return of Azerbaijani territory lost to Armenia in the 1992-94 war over Nagorno-Karabakh.

During the Under Secretary's visit, Aliyev invited the entire U.S. delegation to dinner at the presidential palace. I went as note-taker. Seated at the far end of the table, as protocol requires, it was sometimes hard for me to hear the give and take among the principals, but I got most of it. At one point Aliyev made a joke about the old Cold War habit of spies wining and dining each other. "Perhaps," he said, "There are even a few spies at this table." In response, one of the Under Secretary's senior staffers replied, "Make no mistake, Mr. President, that young man down there," pointing to me as I spooned some tomato bisque, "is a killer." I froze in mid-bisque to general laughter. Even Aliyev, who was a dead ringer for Bela Lugosi, managed to part his lips in a vampiric grin.

As the dinner ended, we were led down a circular marble staircase that looked like something purloined from the backlot of Universal Studios. Ahead, at the bottom of the stairs was "the Grotto," President Aliyev's mancave. Under Secretary Davis was saved the walk. She was escorted by Aliyev to the president's glass elevator. We watched with disquiet as the doors closed on the two of them and the car began its grinding descent.

Aliyev's grotto had won a small fame among those Foreign Service officers honored to be a guest there. You enter it (unless you go by presidential elevator) through a yawning concrete maw of molded cement. You continue through a passage of bulbous concrete outcroppings designed to resemble a pathway through a cavern. To me it looked more like the images that came back from my colonoscopy. You exit this membranous tunnel into the main chamber whose ceiling canopied some 20 feet above. The chamber was furnished with wagon-wheel tables and barrel chairs hobnailed in red leather. An oaken door led into the humidor and its equal and opposite twin to the wine cellar. At this point, I was separated from the Davis group. They continued with Aliyev into the recesses of the Grotto. I was left to wonder, as I sunk into my barrel, what affairs of state were being decided under the stalactites in the cavern ahead. As I waited, a segmented filter circled the ceiling lights, casting shades of azure, absinthe, canary, and vermillion on the floor.

Q: So as you sipped your single malt whiskey, what were you thinking about as an onward assignment for 1997?

TAUBER: Actually, I ordered an espresso because I didn't want to nod off. But you are right, I was already afflicted with the four-year itch. Not long after this trip, in the fall of 1996 I submitted my bid list.

Q: Any significant social life developments before we move on?

TAUBER: A fair amount. Aside from the official cocktail parties that were meant to extract useful info, I did get to know a dozen or so Viennese Jews who were also gay.

They had a small organization for which I hosted events like Hanukkah and other celebrations. That was the moment when I tried baking and cooking for my friends. My pecan pie, lovingly prepared from crust to sugar-glazed pecans, refused to bake properly. What I removed from the oven could anchor a cruise ship at port. I needed a hacksaw to slice it. My potato *latkes* (pancakes), traditional Hanukkah treats, went the other way. From the time I pureed them in the Cuisinart, they withheld liquid out of sheer spite. I compressed them through colanders, squeezed them through sieves, and mummified them in cheesecloth. They came out victorious, an aqueous goo. I added egg and flour, slavishly following the magazine recipe. I even bought *latke* bucklers -- steel forms insinuated into the bubbling oil so that each cake would brown with perfect structural integrity. I waited for them to solidify well beyond the admonition of the recipe. But as soon as I freed them from their steel corsets, they sluiced to a single gelatinous blob. I raised the white flag and rushed out to buy Viennese potato pancakes -- not exactly the same thing as latkes -- but serviceable when guests are due in an hour.

My gay Viennese friends also belonged to ILGA and marched in the yearly gay pride parade. Although I wasn't an official member, I walked alongside and took the photos. I supported them as much as I could given my diplomatic status. They were all friendly and welcoming and I socialized with their network of friends. I also visited the local gay watering holes. As a rule, Austrians don't warm up to strangers very readily. In fact, the city of Vienna, recognizing this, printed postcards to fill out to invite a neighbor to chat so that you wouldn't actually have to ask in person. I'm not sure how effective those little cards were. I did not use them in gay bars. My tourist German did not serve me well in these environments.

Otherwise, I often went out for weekends with other State Department colleagues who had cars. There were plenty of picturesque Austrian towns with one-star attractions to enjoy, and the countryside is beautiful no matter where you go. I even went to see the Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage path that the Dalai Lama had constructed in the small town of Hüttenberg.

Q: What was a Tibetan pilgrimage path doing in a small town in Austria?

TAUBER: Glad you asked. When I was in high school, and enamored of Tibetan Buddhism, I read a lot of memoirs of Western encounters with the Mahayana practiced there. One of them, *Seven Years in Tibet*, recounted the story of an Austrian mountaineer, Heinrich Harrer, who made his way to Lhasa after escaping a British internment camp. In 1946, the Dalai Lama was a teenager, fascinated by Western culture. Harrer managed to stay in Lhasa through the war and become a bit of a mentor to the Dalai Lama. Harrer returned to Austria and published his account of the last moments of traditional Tibetan

culture in the mid-1950s. Many years later, as a sign of his gratitude, the Dalai Lama had monks oversee the construction of a Tibetan study center in Harrer's hometown. It was unlikely that I would ever get to Tibet, so Hüttenberg was the next best thing. The study center included a pilgrimage path carved into a bluff on the side of the Carinthian Alps. It snaked past images of Buddhist saints, prayer wheels, and other objects whose touch brings merit. A föhn flapped the giant thangka of Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of compassion. I hoped he was looking out for me on the little footbridge. Hugging the face of the hill face, it nevertheless bucked and heaved like a thrill ride. Were someone to fall, the arrowhead tops of the fir trees below wouldn't do much to slow the descent. I don't know if I accrued any good karma, but it was an impressive walk.

Lessons Learned: Location vs. Vocation

1. Vienna is indeed a nice place to live, but nicer still if you speak fluent German.

2. Think twice, then think again if you are taking a job that you're not interested in just to live in Europe. Four years of conventional arms control and no promotion? I swore I would never get near political-military issues again. It was an oath I would break. But I didn't know it then.

1997-98
Pearson Fellowship:
Minority (Democrat) Staff Assistant, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Q: You mentioned you had submitted your bidlist for future posts. Which ones were at the top?

TAUBER: The Pearson Fellowship – a one-year detail assignment to Capitol Hill – topped the list. Once I submitted the bid, it didn't take long to receive an offer. I got a call from Mike Haltzell. He was the chief foreign policy aide to Senator Joe Biden who was at that time the Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Chairman of the SFRC – the most feared man in the Senate – was Jesse Helms from North Carolina. Biden's staff, and Mike Haltzell specifically, had hired Foreign Service Officers to work on the SFRC before, and valued the help. So when he offered me a position that would focus on the NATO expansion hearings, I said yes without a moment's hesitation. Mike was a great guy to work for. He was bright and capable of navigating the many foreign policy activities that Biden was engaged in.

Q: The Pearson Fellowship is still considered a plum job, isn't it?

TAUBER: As prestigious as a stint on the SFRC might look from the outside, it was generally known that a year on Capitol Hill was promotion poison. Nevertheless, with the disregard for advancement that had characterized my career thus far, I leapt again into a rewarding but promotion-killing position.

Q: Did it turn out to be as rewarding as you hoped?

TAUBER: Yes. The Pearson program is run by the American Political Science Association. It begins with study, lectures, and seminars, followed by placement in a Capitol Hill office by November. As soon as I arrived at the SFRC Minority Staff office, I was drafting floor statements for Biden. I also met with legislative delegations from Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland, all of whom wanted to know what they needed to do to ensure Senate support for their admission to NATO. I gave them the agreed list of talking points, but I also recommended that it wouldn't hurt for them to be seen in their constituencies, listening to the concerns of voters as they explained the benefits of NATO membership. I remember the look of incredulity that greeted this recommendation. Visit constituencies? Either I didn't understand what a bad idea this would be (attracting anti-NATO crowds) or I hadn't read their job descriptions. Parliamentarians didn't have time for constituency visits.

In the end, the vote did go their way, and I was allowed to witness the roll call (80-19) from the Senate floor in the area reserved for pages and other Senate administrative staff. It was quite an honor for such a historic moment.

Q: Did you take part in any other issues related to foreign relations while you were on the committee?

TAUBER: Working in a Capitol Hill office is definitely exciting. When the Senate is in session you stay as long as it takes for your issues to be resolved for the day. If there is a lot of debate, or a filibuster, you could be at your desk well into the wee hours of the morning. But I was fortunate in that there was a great deal of bipartisan support for NATO expansion, so we did work closely with Helms' staffers on the hearings and consultations related to that. On the other hand, when the Senate was out of session, working hours were very humane and you had time to explore the issues you were most interested in with the help of the Library of Congress and the Congressional Research Service.

My side of the SFRC had much less agreement with the Helms' side when it came to Foreign Service personnel issues. Jesse was well-known to penalize individual Foreign Service nominees, whether career or political, by holding up their nominations or

promotions. More importantly, this was the moment when Helms was negotiating with the Clinton Administration on the elimination of USIA, USAID, and ACDA as the price for his support on the Chemical Weapons Treaty, and for paying U.S. arrears to the UN. Although I wasn't involved in either of these negotiations, I did get to see some of the fireworks they generated as the two staffs and the executive branch reps held meetings on a variety of subjects that touched on these topics.

As much as the Democrats and the Republicans on the SFRC were wary of each other, if you want to feel real tension in the room, you need to sit in on a few of their joint meetings with the executive branch. That's when the executive clearly recalls James Madison's famous warning (Federalist 48), "The legislative department is everywhere extending the sphere of its activity, and drawing all power into its impetuous vortex." These meetings were an education in civics you can't get from a textbook or lecture.

Executive branch negotiators arrived for these meetings with coaches who carried their brawny briefing books. The coaches were also sparring partners who got their executive branch principals into fighting shape for the bouts with Capitol Hill staffers. By comparison, Senate staff briefing books were 98-pound weaklings, with the exception of the NATO "battle book" that I worked on. That was a compendium of research and draft talking points for Senator Biden to refer to during hearings. At executive-legislative negotiating sessions, the lead executive branch negotiator always came out punching with his talking points exactly as written. That was so that his aides could honestly report that he deployed his instructions. After the rehearsed lines were spoken, meetings became more free-wheeling. Strap hangers (like me) were often dismissed so that the principals could speak more freely in a smaller negotiating group. The best description of the entire NATO expansion process from the U.S. point of view is Ron Asmus' *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era*. The only problem I found with this otherwise meticulously researched work is that it fails to mention me in the index. Must have been an editorial oversight.

Q: So how would you sum up your time on Capitol Hill?

TAUBER: At the end of my time on Capitol Hill, even though my actual face time with Biden was very limited, I was grateful for the opportunity. It also reinforced the certainty that my vocation was with the Foreign Service. The SFRC taught me that legislative staffers are very hardworking, and believe every bit as much in their mission as I believe in mine. But the feeling I was left with was that staffers fight like siblings for the attention and approbation of their members. Although they are colleagues, they are also maneuvering to be seen as the most helpful or the most capable of making the Senator look good. Turf battles can be fierce. I don't thrive in that kind of environment.

Lessons Learned: Plan, Schmooze, Network

1. **Plan** what you want to accomplish on Capitol Hill**.** The State Department personnel system thinks you are on vacation. You need to prove them wrong.

2. **Schmooze** with your Committee staff members. If they go out for drinks after work, and invite you, go. I went to adult education classes that were personally rewarding but useless for long-term connections.

3. **Network.** You get to meet a whole 'nother set of players. Even if it is researchers at the Library of Congress or Congressional Research Service, they can be enormously helpful in subsequent tours when you need info fast.

1999-2001
Armenian Language Training
Chief of the Political/Economic Section
U.S. Embassy Yerevan, Armenia

Q: I don't suppose you were promoted after this assignment?

TAUBER: No. Although my promotion was within sight, I did not know that when I completed the Pearson. So I was in a pickle. I explained this to my Career Development Officer. Since CDOs get merit badges when they place people in hard-to-fill positions, he was only too happy to help me demonstrate my excellence in a difficult environment. I volunteered for stretch assignments -- positions one grade above mine -- in Bishkek, Minsk, Port-au-Prince, and Yerevan. Despite volunteering for these jobs, I still had trouble acquiring one. Perhaps my corridor reputation had suffered irreparably in the Nerk. Perhaps my lack of heavy artillery in the form of high-level recommendations left me at the bottom of the list. And, perhaps my long time as an 03 political officer with no awards and little to show for my 12 years in the Foreign Service also served me poorly. Eventually, I did land a stretch position as the Political/Economic Section Chief in Yerevan, Armenia. This would come with nine months of Armenian language training and a brush-up economics course. So I entered training in the summer of 1998 and would arrive in Yerevan in summer of 1999. The post differential was 25% extra pay. This was partially due to remoteness, meaning it was difficult to find basic consumable items on the local market, and poor sanitary/health conditions. Believe me, you earn every penny of your differential in Yerevan.

Q: *How did you do with language training?*

TAUBER: As you recall, I had a modest score on the MLAT -- 61 -- which predicted success only in the easier Western European languages. Armenian is a fascinating language with roots in ancient Phrygian and borrow words from the cultures around it. Although it is an Indo-European language, and although it has only four cases, its structure and alphabet are quite different from any other Indo-European language I had encountered. Also, there are many dialects. Eastern Armenian is spoken in the former Soviet Republic of Armenia, Iran, and among Armenians in Russia. Western Armenian is spoken in Turkey, the Levant, and in the rest of the diaspora. They are mutually intelligible to native speakers, but a challenge to new learners like me. I struggled with Armenian. There are even more dialects within Armenia itself as you move from valley to valley. I still have the 100-page glossary of words and expressions I accumulated over nine months. I also hired two different tutors outside of class to work with me. I really gave it my all. I did finally get a 3/3, but it was likely a gift. By the time I was done, I could pretty well understand what a newsreader was saying on TV, but I couldn't follow fast-moving conversation using vocabularies outside of my subject areas.

Woven into language training were area studies. This was a very helpful way to learn about Armenia and the Caucasus area. It gave us additional material to talk about in class. There are a few histories of Armenia written in modern times, but as I looked through them, I got the impression that they were selective in emphasis, biased in approach, and not entirely reliable. In writing Armenian history, a major problem is how much space you devote to diaspora versus homeland communities, especially since the homeland's internal struggles for power among princes or clan leaders become dizzying in their complexity. One thing I did learn while studying Armenian history was how much it mirrored Jewish history. Curiously, the few times I pointed this out to Armenians, they did not seem pleased with the comparison.

Similarities	Armenians	Jews
Ancient language with non-roman alphabet	√	√
Liturgical language separate from modern vernacular	√	√
Huge diaspora going back over 1,500 years. Many work in professions and commerce rather than	√	√

agriculture and manufactures		
Difficult geopolitical position: often threatened/occupied by large empires	√	√
Violent internal struggles for power when free of foreign occupation	√	√
High value placed on male literacy. Subsequently women too.	√	√
20th Century genocide	√	√
Small homeland with few natural resources	√	√
Homeland controls territories won through war	√	√
Top political leader assassinated when he appeared ready to negotiate an end to occupation.	√	√

Promotion to 02 at Last

I arrived in Armenia in August 1999. You'll remember that I had grown concerned about my languishing as an 03 officer far longer than average. Although I have to own that my performance was not stellar, there was another issue at play in the 1990s that tended to delay promotions across the board. In the 1990s, the Foreign Service had become top-heavy. Promotion numbers were therefore reduced to wait out retirements so that lower ranks could again move forward. The Department began implementing an employee buyout program to incentivize retirement. Foreign Service personnel at or above the rank of FSO-2 could receive up to $25,000. Qualified Foreign Service personnel had to be over 50 with at least 20 years of service.

Finally, in September 1999 I received word that I had been promoted. No one typically gets promoted out of a Pearson or even out of hard language training. How did this happen? I learned much later, from someone in the know, that the promotion panel was leaning toward selecting me out, but were ultimately convinced that I had done exactly what the Department wanted from a political officer: I increased my knowledge of arms control, negotiated on behalf of the U.S., I went to Capitol Hill to use the knowledge I had gained at the OSCE to help the Department achieve a major foreign policy goal -- expansion of NATO. I had been recommended for promotion, and now I was taking on a hardship post with a hardship language. Having been saved from early retirement, I was

strictly admonished to stay out of pol-mil in the future. My promotion had been a hard sell. For the first time in my Foreign Service career I followed good advice and was happy I did so. But my choice of hardship tours, while keeping me in the European Bureau, led to the end of my specialization in political affairs.

1999-2001
U.S. Embassy, Yerevan Armenia
Chief of Political/Economic Section

Q: What led you to give up political work?

TAUBER: I'll get to that, but first I need to set the scene in Armenia. Remember that my job was both political *and* economic. In addition to Armenian language, I also got economic training at FSI before I left for Yerevan. So I was always trying to see the nexus between political and economic developments. In particular, I wanted to know who the official and unofficial power brokers were? What did they control? Were there disruptors in either the political or economic realms? I didn't seek this information for its intrinsic interest; I was looking at events from the point of view of U.S. national security and the particular goals we had for bilateral relations with Armenia.

But let's return to the basic political scene in Armenia while I was there. From a political point of view, I would describe Armenia as a mafiocracy. Political and economic power overlapped among the elites. Political violence and assassination were relatively rare. This is not to say that blood feuds did not take place, rather, I think it would be fair to say that all players had a common interest in avoiding a failed state scenario, so there was no serious reason to believe that a civil war or total breakdown of authority would take place. This hypothesis was proven true after the assassinations of top officials in 1999. An excellent treatment of political developments in Armenia during my tour can be found in Stephen Astourian's paper entitled, "From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia." University of California, Berkeley, at the following link: https://escholarship.org/content/qt0c2794v4/qt0c2794v4.pdf

My own travels around Armenia and discussions with local experts in Yerevan led me to the conclusion that average citizens, except for the small gratinée at the top, struggled to maintain life above the poverty line. I was keenly interested in finding out when and how this situation might improve. Were there signs that the citizenry could effectively demand a more accountable, representative government? Were there indications of progress toward better protection of basic freedoms and human rights, government transparency, a reduction in corruption, and free market economic growth? A significant portion of my understanding of this problem came from the periodic evaluations of USAID projects

designed to develop free market and democratic institutions. This was because information from local Armenian sources was always colored by personal and political interest. I took it on board, but seldom gave credence to anything I couldn't verify with USAID officers. The USAID mission director did not like it that I quoted from their reports or from their contractors. She took her complaint to the ambassador. I should stay in my lane. Whatever the ambassador said seemed to calm the waters. My reliance on USAID as a source of fact-checking continued.

I say this as context so that you will understand why I believe the best single document to consult for the condition of average citizens while I was in Armenia is the *USAID/Armenia Strategic Plan: 1999-2003* at (https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/joe+ryan/FMfcgxmVxqktrlhPzpFCrkFbkqxhXDPB?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1

Below, I paraphrase from that document the basic political, social, and economic markers you need to know for the Context in which I worked from 1999-2001.

- Armenia is roughly the size of Maryland with a population of about 3 million. It is difficult to know the exact population because hundreds of thousands of citizens work abroad, sometimes returning home, sometimes not. Their overseas remittances – at least while I was there -- accounted for some 20 percent of Armenia's GDP. I reckoned that international donor assistance, plus donations from private diaspora sources, accounted for roughly another 20%.

- The Armenian economy began to collapse in 1988 when a 6.8 Richter scale earthquake levelled a northwestern city. The quake killed some 25,000 people, destroyed 40% of production capacity, and left hundreds of thousands homeless. When I arrived in 1999 – 11 years later -- donors were still funding permanent housing projects for victims of this earthquake who were still in temporary shelters.

- The earthquake also caused the closure of Metsamor, the country's sole nuclear power plant. This left much of the country without heat for several years. Winters are ferociously cold in Armenia. The city of Yerevan was completely denuded of trees and anything else that could be used as fuel for wood-burning stoves in the 1990s. Metsamor was back on line when I arrived, but there were continued concerns about its safety.

- Unemployment and underemployment affected some 50-70% of the workforce. Over half the population is estimated to live below the poverty line. The social

safety net is weak. The education and health systems have deteriorated considerably as state support has diminished.

Although plenty of aid money was coming into the country from many sources, I did not see conditions improve for average Armenians while I was there. It angered me that a lot of money went into beautifying Yerevan while health, education, and social safety net coverage for the majority of people did not increase from 1999-2001. It wouldn't have taken much for the wealthy to share a little with the many less fortunate.

Everyday Life at a 25% Differential Post

Q: What was life like for you? Housing, everyday needs, etc.

First of all, Yerevan is a 9-hour time difference from EST, so staying in touch with friends and family meant mostly email exchanges. My quarters weren't ready when I arrived. The house that belonged to the previous Pol/Econ chief was no longer available. The reason for this was that, one night, my predecessor got a knock at his door and was greeted by a guy brandishing two jagged-edged knives. Although this political officer avoided harm, the Embassy Housing Committee decided to drop his house from its pool. The search for appropriate quarters for me was still underway when I arrived. I spent about two months waiting for permanent housing in the Hotel Armenia on the central square in downtown Yerevan.

Q: Sounds posh.

TAUBER: Not exactly. If someone wanted to create a Soviet theme park in Yerevan, the Hotel Armenia would be its hospitality center. It was more of a tourist detention facility than a Michelin Guide accommodation. It was run by Marriott. But near as I could tell, the management contract did not include any promises of renovation. Each floor still had its stolid babushka, guarding the keys to all the rooms. Some people might have called these ladies "concierges," I think that would be aspirational. They were more in the mold of jailors, who, if properly bribed, would allow you some comforts in your cell. For example, I arrived at the height of summer and the hotel had no air conditioning. Sleeping on the horsehair mattress was disagreeable to begin with; the heat made it worse. For a small fee, my babushka arranged for a fan. The fan was lame. Every time I turned it on, sparks flew from the old electrical socket. I hoped that, if the wiring did go blooey, it would at least kill off some of the mice in the walls. Their nocturnal peregrinations were a constant source of insomnia.

Since I could not prepare food in my room, I had to take breakfast and most dinners in the hotel cafe. This was not bad. Even though there were few menu choices, the food was fresh and never gave me food poisoning. Given the overall unhealthful situation, including the potential for intestinal distress from spoiled food, I was permitted to import 1800 pounds of non-perishable consumables. My mountains of canned, vacuum-sealed, and dried goods would eventually fill a room-size pantry. Tap water was off-limits too, more due to heavy metals than parasites, so even shower water had to be filtered.

There were plenty of fruit and vegetable markets to get reasonably fresh produce. You did have to pare off the skin and soak all vegetables in a mild chlorine or iodine solution. Sometimes I cheated and just washed everything with filtered water. My food poisoning episodes never came from food I prepared, only from food eaten in restaurants. Looking back at my diary from that time, I am astonished at how many grocery lists I had with little notes on where and when to buy fresh. It seems to have been a constant concern.

Q: This is typical for an unhealthful tour. What kind of housing did you finally get?

TAUBER: After about six weeks I was moved to a four-story house once inhabited by a Soviet apparatchik. It was on a nice street that overlooked Hrazdan Gorge, a deep stream bed that runs through Yerevan. The house had a small front yard and a terraced backyard with fruit trees. To maintain the house I hired a gardener and a housekeeper, a husband-wife team. They were among the many Armenians whose modest jobs and savings were wiped out in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even with everything ship shape, I seldom went to the patio that looked out over the gorge. The backyard was filled with bees, wasps, hornets, and scorpions. No snakes, though.

The house itself was a simple four-sided square. Armenian houses tend to be built for privacy, so outward facing windows are few and small. This tends to make the interiors dark even during the height of summer. You entered my house through a small vestibule. That led into an atrium. On the ground floor were the living room/dining room and kitchen. The bedrooms were on the second floor along a corridor that overlooked the open area below. On the top floor was an indoor barbeque, but no bathroom. Also, the flue on the barbeque chimney was broken, so I could never use it. The basement was for storage. It held the mini-sub and the UFO. I swear, my water tank looked like something James Bond would use to infiltrate a SPECTRE hideout. It held all my potable water. Next to it sat the compressor that pushed the water up into the bathrooms. The compressor looked like a spaceship evacuation pod. Once, while I was at work, the mini-sub sprang a leak. By the time it was discovered, a squad of GSO workers had to be called in to patch it and pump out the bilge. Although my house had the square footage

for representational events, its castle keep design made it impossible to manage more than a small number of people at a time.

It took several months for my consumables and household shipment to arrive. I camped out in the house with no car for a few more months. That wasn't too much of a hardship during the week. I could walk to Yerevan's deep bore subway to get to work. But it was a nuisance on weekends when I would have liked to get out of Yerevan. My predecessor wrote a guidebook based on his own explorations entitled *Rediscovering Armenia.* It is an outstanding guide to the off-the-beaten-path historic sites. I should mention that when my shipment did arrive, my neighbors lined up outside my door to get the discarded plywood containers and cast-off cardboard boxes to use for fuel in the winter. I was astonished to learn later that stuff like this typically sold by the square meter for a tidy sum.

U.S. Embassy – The Special Embassy Program

Q: And how about the Embassy itself. Was it a new model?

TAUBER: No. When I arrived in 1999, it was still an embassy without marines. It was part of the Special Embassy Program (SEP). When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1992, Washington wanted to quickly recognize the newly independent republics. One important step was the rapid establishment of embassies. These new embassy buildings, inadequate in many ways, were understood to be stand-ins until a real chancery could be built to code and properly secured. I was in one of these "lock and leave" posts so named because you had to pass through several locked, crash doors to get to the confidential part of the building where you worked. At one point I counted about 10 locks, mostly with combinations, that I had to crack, to get to my office. Also, given the smaller staff at SEP posts, you were on "minimize," meaning, you were not flooded with the Department's routine cable messages, or those of nearby posts. Someone sending a cable had to actually think about whether you really needed to see it in order to include you as an addressee. (One might wish that this were the normal practice today.) By the time I left in 2001, we did have a Marine Security Guard contingent, so we graduated from the SEP program to a regular small embassy. Also while I was there, our ambassador broke ground on the new embassy building several miles away outside the center of town.

The SEP building we inhabited did have some advantages. It was the former Armenian Komsomol headquarters -- the communist youth league -- and it was pretty solid. It housed both the U.S. embassy and the USAID mission. Its location could not have been better. We were practically across the street from the parliament. A few blocks further stood the president's office. At that time there wasn't much vehicular traffic, so I could pay calls on political leaders very easily either on foot or by car.

Q: What was the atmosphere like in the Embassy? Did you integrate well into the community?

Chief of the Political/Economic Section

TAUBER: As the head of the Political-Economic section, two FSOs reported to me. One was a very talented Entry Level Officer (ELO) who ran the Econ/Commercial Unit. I nominated him for the Commercial Officer of the Year Award. Although he did not win, I hoped that the nomination would give him a leg-up for promotion. The promotion panel that reviewed his evaluation sent me a letter of commendation for how well I had written his evaluation.

The other FSO in my section was a mid-level political officer who served as my deputy section chief. Try as I might, I could not get him to become interested in the country's regional political scene. Periodically, he shared with me a few research papers he was writing for his own interest such as a history of Christian heretical groups. I did what I could to encourage him to provide more contributions to the section's work.

We also had five local-hire Armenians, all of them knowledgeable and well-connected in Armenian society. They were a joy to work with. One of them wrote a monthly "column" to Washington about humorous events in the local political scene. These were usually examples of self-important windbags hoisting themselves on their own petard. As the incoming Pol/Econ chief, I had her stop these "frivolous feature stories" so that she could focus her ample talent on more serious reporting. What a mistake. Serious reporting had many limitations in Armenia. I should have allowed her to continue something she really enjoyed and that helped provide Washington with some atmospherics of life in Yerevan.

Another unfortunate loss was our economist. He decided to take his education and work experience and immigrate to Canada. Driving his decision in no small part was a desire to avoid the draft. The Armenian army, like its Russian counterpart, is an organization to be avoided if at all possible. Hazing and other human rights violations in the Armenian military were a standard part of our human rights report for Armenia. His departure was also emblematic of the brain drain from the Republic of Armenia to places where Armenian talent could thrive and earn a decent living. This was a major problem for Armenia. Although many of those who left Armenia sent back remittances, it is also typical that remittances diminish over time. For my small Econ/Commercial Unit, the economist's departure meant that we could not devote as much time to macroeconomic reporting and to my goal of determining who controlled which sector of Armenia's crony

capitalist economy. The list of cronies and their sectoral controls was completed and became public under my successor.

My biggest challenge was not section management, or even the living conditions. Rather, I came in as Pol/Econ Section Chief following a real star. My predecessor in the position spoke fluent Russian, which was still the second language of Armenia. This gave him the ability to hold detailed conversations with all the post-Soviet political and economic elites. Every political leader I spoke to remembered my predecessor as a thoughtful and skilled interlocutor. His reporting covered a tumultuous political period in post-communist Armenian history. It included an important national election, major demonstrations that were mediated by the U.S. ambassador, and a palace coup that ousted Armenia's first president. My predecessor subsequently wrote a book that included a chapter on his tour in Armenia entitled, "Chilly Lessons from an Armenian Election." (see: *Diplomacy Lessons: Realism for an Unloved Superpower,* pp. 167-177.)

Quotidian Disappointments and Daily Abrasions

I also contracted a host of viral illnesses like strep, but mostly of a gastrointestinal nature. These were separate from an additional three episodes of food poisoning. These illnesses caused me to absent myself from meetings, sometimes urgently. The most notable illness occurred during the day of memorial events for the assassinated prime minister. The opera house, where his body lay in state, was packed with notables including our own Washington VIP representative. I suddenly felt dizzy, nauseated, and feverish. I thought it might be food poisoning, so I walked the short distance back to the Embassy to lie down. Then I blacked out. The next thing I knew, my Econ officer was escorting me to a car where the Embassy doctor was waiting to take me to an examination. I didn't quite reach the car without vomiting and feeling my legs buckle under me.

Looking back, it must have been Norovirus based on the symptoms and the fact that I couldn't get out of bed for a week. The following week I still felt out of sorts, and probably went home early. After this, a regional medical officer was called in to determine whether I should be curtailed for medical reasons. The medical examiner started by telling me that she knew I had been medically evacuated before. This was false. I had never been med-evaced. I had never even requested a medevac. And I told her so. She blithered that she would have to review my file. After that, the issue of health as a reason for curtailment went away.

Q: Did you want to curtail?

There were certainly plenty of daily abrasions to convince me to leave. The ambassador's secretary was a piece of work. She always gave me taskings or cable corrections at the end of the day so that I had to scramble and stay late to keep up. Eventually, the iron rule of the Foreign Service took care of her as well. After one year, her tour was up and her successor was much easier to work with. Then I learned from a contractor that I would be the last to receive computer wiring for my home even though my seniority would typically place me higher on the list. This meant I had to use the computers at the embassy for any personal correspondence after hours. In fact I never got the wiring throughout my tour.

Then there were the DCM's remarks that betrayed a certain animus toward me. For example, one day, I was delivering a cable for clearance to the DCM. As I entered the office I heard the DCM declaim to my deputy, in the plummy tones of finishing school elocution, that once I was gone *he* would get new furniture and other emoluments of office. A disconcerted quiet fell upon their conversation as I entered the room. When I applied for new office furnishings I had been told that there was no budget money available. My relations with the DCM became correct, but guarded.

These were nuisances in comparison to the biggest source of dismay. We all know that unhappy spouses can be a real problem for morale in a small, remote, hardship post. In Yerevan, the wife of one of the embassy officers had a reputation for dishing dirt on embassy employees. This earned her the sobriquet "Harpie." From friends in the USAID mission I learned that Harpie was claiming that I had confessed to her a sexual relationship with a local Armenian man. Since I barely knew Harpie, and had never socialized with her beyond mandatory receptions, it astonished me that she could concoct such a patently false claim. In Armenia, as in all other posts, I was meticulously honest with the Diplomatic Security officer about the nature of all my relationships with locals. Was it rational to believe that I would choose a scandalmonger like Harpie as my confidante for a relationship that I did not disclose to the Security Officer? A rumor of a gay sexual relationship in Armenia was bad for me, but far more dangerous for the Armenian named in the calumny. Worst case, if I failed to report a romantic relationship I could lose my security clearance and possibly be fired. An Armenian perceived as being gay is deep in the hurt locker. Prejudice against gay people goes deep in Armenian society, as I'll explain shortly. Fortunately, as far as I know, Harpie's rumor was never taken seriously by DS.

And yet. I did wonder about my status with one of our Regional Security Officers (RSO). During the period when Harpie's rumor was circulating, the embassy had an acting RSO. When he arrived at my office for his courtesy call, I introduced him to the section and its basic activities. Then I suggested that, for a more detailed discussion of the political

scene and possible sources of concern for an RSO, to host him for a welcome dinner at a local restaurant that was reliably sanitary. This was, I explained, a courtesy I extended to all newly arriving officers. The look on his face when I suggested that we have dinner was unforgettable. His eyelids peeled back, he squared his shoulders against the back of the chair, and solemnly informed me that he was Married. Now, there might be any number of reasons why a temporary RSO, who had only been at post a few days, and had not yet had a conversation with me, might want me to know that he's Married. But the only reason I could see was that someone had already warned him that I might, how to put this diplomatically, put the moves on him? Lure him into my den of sin?

The human mind is an amazing thing. In just a few seconds, so many potential replies lined up for launch. They went in the general direction of:

"Oh, of course you have to alert me to your marital status since, in your domination hierarchy only women show that they are bonded in matrimony. Men are assumed to be above reproach.

Dude, do you really think, after 14 years in the Foreign Service, I would be so stupid as to hit on the Regional Security Officer? The guy who investigates sexual harassment cases? And if I were so injudiciously disposed, take a look in the mirror. You are a balding, Pillsbury Doughboy with hyperhidrosis. How can you imagine I'd be attracted to you?"

But instead I soothed and we did end up dining together. Once. My God, the sweat that rolled off that joker as his eyes followed my hands. His startle response was in top condition as I passed the bread basket or made any other motion in his direction. Fortunately, his temporary duty ended and I had a perfectly good relationship with his successor.

Including LGBT Human Rights in the Annual Report

Regardless of this climate of rumor about me, I insisted that, for the first time, we include a section on abuses based on sexual orientation or identity.

Q: What did you find out?

The few gay men willing to talk to us described shunning by family and friends, denial of jobs, arbitrary firing, termination of leases without notice, arrests on trumped-up charges, and sometimes forced psychiatric "treatment" including injections of unknown drugs. Looking back at the Armenia Human Rights Report of 2000, I was surprised to see how

few of these complaints got in the final document. I can't account for it now, my memory of it is too vague. But as the years went by, these testimonies finally did find their way into the formal reporting. Here are a few examples from the 2018 Report:

> **Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**
> Antidiscrimination laws do not extend protections to LGBTI persons on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. There were no hate crime laws or other criminal judicial mechanisms to aid in the prosecution of crimes against members of the LGBTI community. Societal discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity negatively affected all aspects of life, including employment, housing, family relations, and access to education and health care. Transgender persons were especially vulnerable to physical and psychological abuse and harassment. (pg. 37)
>
> According to the PMG [Prison Monitoring Group] and other human rights organizations, LGBTI individuals experienced the worst prison conditions. They were frequent targets of discrimination, violence, psychological and sexual abuse and were forced by other inmates to perform degrading labor. Prison administrators reinforced and condoned such treatment and held LGBTI individuals in segregated cells in significantly worse conditions. The PMG noted that homosexual males or those assumed to be homosexual, those associating with them, and inmates convicted of crimes such as rape, as well as those who refused to live by the "unwritten criminal prison rules" were segregated from other inmates and forced to perform humiliating jobs such as cleaning the toilets, picking up trash for other prisoners, and providing sexual services. The PMG reported a case in the Nubarashen Penitentiary in May when prison staff revealed an LGBTI inmate's sexual identity to his parents, after which he became depressed and self-mutilated. Despite deteriorating health, he was not provided medical assistance for weeks, and was transferred to the prison hospital penitentiary only after the involvement of the PMG. (pg. 9)

To give you an idea of how profound the homophobia is within the Armenian community, even gay Armenian-Americans, who belong to a small affinity group in Washington, did not allow their membership list to be public. I met with them during my home leave in Washington, DC, and they asked me not to reveal their names. They told me that they feared estrangement from family and church – even in the U.S. -- if their orientation became public knowledge.

Q: Now can we turn to the assassination and its aftermath?

TAUBER: Absolutely. You may recall that while I was in Vienna, in order to give me a break from CSBMs, my boss had me follow the post-Soviet ethnic conflicts at the OSCE. One of these was the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute over the small enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K). So I was well read-in on the conflict by the time I got to Armenia.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

In brief, When the Red Army annexed Armenia and Azerbaijan into the Soviet Union in 1921, the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) was given to Azerbaijan, not incorporated into Armenia. Skating over a great deal of history, the Armenian community in N-K never accepted this, nor did the Armenians in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. As the Soviet Union was collapsing, and the independent republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan were emerging from the ruins, the 150,000 Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh -- the majority -- declared independence from Azerbaijan. They sought to unite with Armenia. For its part, Armenia welcomed N-K's declaration. Azerbaijan did not. It regarded N-K as part of its sovereign territory. This led to war from 1990 to 1994. The war officially pitted the self-declared Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh against Azerbaijan. But without help from Armenia, N-K could never maintain its independence. By 1994, Armenian and N-K forces had occupied N-K plus a buffer zone around it amounting to some 20% of Azerbaijani territory. Although the two sides agreed to an armistice, Azerbaijan never recognized N-K's independence. Today, N-K is a de facto part of Armenia, even while officially claiming independence. Armenia also continues to hold the 20% of Azerbaijani territory as a buffer zone.

The Assassination of Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan: A Tragedy in Five Acts

The Cast:

Levon Ter-Petrossian. First president of independent Armenia. Although some of his cabinet officers were reputed to have committed political assassinations, Ter-Petrossian remained popular until he stole his reelection in 1996. Thereafter, his political star waned and he resigned under pressure in 1998.

Vazgen Sargsyan: A high school gym teacher by trade, he fought in the war for Nagorno-Karabakh's independence (1990-1994) and became a national hero. With a huge political following, Vazgen later became defense minister, then prime minister before he was assassinated in 1999.

Robert Kocharian: A native of Nagorno-Karabakh, he was also a Karabakhi freedom fighter. A comrade of Vazgen's, Robert Kocharian eventually became prime minister under Ter-Petrossian, and would later become president after Ter-Petrossian's fall.

Serzh Sarkissian: Another Karabakhi nationalist, and a close ally of Robert Kocharian. He also distinguished himself as a freedom fighter. President Ter-Petrossian made him Interior Minister. Later, Serzh would also become President of Armenia.

Karen Demirjan: A former Armenian Communist Party boss, he continued to have a large following in parliament. He would forge a political coalition with Vazgen and become Speaker of Parliament. He was also killed in the assassination of Vazgen.

The Gunmen: A group of unlikely assassins.

ACT I: Vazgen's Climb to Power

By 1994, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh had defeated the numerically superior but poorly trained forces of Azerbaijan. To recap, not only did the combined Armenian forces take over Nagorno-Karabakh, they also acquired a significant buffer zone around N-K amounting to some 20% of Azerbaijani territory. The war caused Armenians to flee from Azerbaijan as refugees and Azerbaijanis to flee from the areas that Armenia held as a buffer zone. These latter became an internally displaced population living in poor accommodations away from the war zone, totally reliant on the Azerbaijani government for the essentials of life. Their miserable conditions became the grievance that Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev used whenever he wanted to whip up nationalistic hatred of Armenia to distract attention from his kleptocracy. In sympathy with Azerbaijan, a fellow Turkic republic – Turkey closed its border to Armenia. This severely reduced Armenia's ability to engage in international trade.

Meanwhile, Vazgen Sargsyan, the former gym teacher, used his hero status to build a party of war veterans. President Ter-Petrossian recognized Vazgen's political strength and named him defense minister. From this base, Vazgen began to acquire cash-producing connections to industries and build his patronage network. The political story gets murky, as alliances shift in the late 1990s. Vazgen, on his way up, had supported Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrossian. But Ter-Petrossian had two weaknesses from Vazgen's point of view. First, Ter-Petrossian's reelection in 1996 was generally seen as stolen, and Ter-Petrossian began hemorrhaging popular support from then on. Second, Ter-Petrossian appeared open to negotiating a peace treaty with Azerbaijan on a step-by-step basis which assumed good faith on the part of the Azerbaijanis. Both Vazgen and the Nagorno-Karabakh leaders Robert Kocharian and Serzh Sarkissian feared that

this would be too accommodating. They were much more hardline. For a detailed description of this difference of approach among the top political players, see Michael Croisant's *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* pp. 120-130.

The Nagorno-Karabakh leaders -- Robert Kocharian and Serzh Sarkissian -- who had also won fame in wresting control of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan -- were now part of the Armenian political scene. Ter-Petrossian had recognized their hero status by appointing Robert Kocharian as prime minister and Serzh Sarkissian as interior minister. Neither of these two had a following as large or as well-funded as that of Vazgen, but they were players, especially when they worked together. Most importantly, they were hawks regarding peace talks with Azerbaijan, a view that Vazgen shared. So, when Ter-Petrossian finally ran out of legitimacy in 1998, Vazgen saw his moment for political advantage. He withdrew his support from the President. This led to Ter-Petrossian's resignation and Robert Kocharian moved from prime minister to president. For an excellent account of the rearrangement of power after Ter-Petrossian's fall. See "From Ter-Petrosian To Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia."
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0c2794v4

Although Vazgen was content with Robert Kocharian as the new president, he still wanted to be top dog. To achieve this, Vazgen merged his ample following of veterans with that of another force on the political scene, the former Armenian Communist Party Boss, Karen Demirchan. Together, they created a party that swept parliamentary elections in May 1999. With this resounding victory, Vazgen became prime minister and Karen Demirchan became speaker of parliament. With both a parliamentary majority and a big political machine, Vazgen was the de facto leader of Armenia. Nothing of significance happened without his approval.

I arrived in Armenia in August 1999, at the height of Vazgen's power, just a curious thing happened. There were indications that Vazgen might be open to a peace deal with Azerbaijan after all. Preparatory talks on peace negotiations were underway. Some of the preparations were conducted by OSCE mediators called the Minsk Group. The group was so named because the Belarussian capital would host the signing of the peace treaty. It's hard to imagine Belarus hosting anything more serious than a Russian money laundering conference, but it volunteered and no one could think of a good reason to say no. The Minsk Group included mediators from many countries: Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, and the U.S. While each of these countries officially worked to end the conflict, each one also had its own geopolitical agenda at play.

ACT II: Vazgen As Peacemaker?

Instead of relying exclusively on the Minsk Group, the U.S. State Department brought in Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott, an expert in Russian and post-Soviet affairs, as a closer. It appears that Vazgen had matured as a leader during the years he consolidated his power. Although I was not privy to the precise details of the peace framework under discussion, the pace of discussions certainly led me to believe that an agreed basis for serious negotiations was close at hand. The typical ingredients in such an accord would include return of territory to Azerbaijan, an exchange of land corridors that would link Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia and would link Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan's exclave) to Azerbaijan. There would be demilitarized zones and confidence-building measures. Once a real peace treaty was signed, borders would open and diplomatic recognition would be exchanged -- including between Turkey and Armenia -- a valuable element since this would increase Armenia's commerce and economic growth.

Why was Vazgen ready to cut such a deal? Well, only Nixon could go to China. I think we have to assume that Vazgen came to see what Ter-Petrossian understood: the long-term value to Armenia of open borders. Peace could bring benefits to Armenia that included a pipeline from Azerbaijan's Caspian oil fields through Armenia to Turkey. Turkish businessmen might even invest in some job-creating businesses in Armenia. In essence, Armenia would be less dependent on assistance and acquire a modest increase in its ability to act on the international stage.

ACT III: The Assassination

So, when Deputy Secretary Talbott arrived in Yerevan on the morning of October 27, 1999 to hold talks with Vazgen and other top Armenian leaders, there appeared to be guarded optimism. Again, I was not privy to the high-level talks, but to the extent I could read the tea leaves, the augurs looked good. Then, that very afternoon, men with automatic machine guns and grenades entered the parliament while Speaker Karen Demirchan presided over Vazgen's question time. The gunmen killed Vazgen and Demirchan as well as another cabinet minister and five members of parliament. I forget how we at the embassy first learned of the killings, but it didn't take long to see the movement of police, military, media, and on-lookers to the fence that surrounded parliament. Within 48 hours the gunmen surrendered and President Robert Kocharian was on his way to appropriating the key levers of power.

The embassy initiated its emergency action plan and established a regular link to the State Department's Operations Center in Washington. A task force was set up in Washington to monitor the crisis. We reported on a daily basis for a while. But as our worst fear -- that there would be violent disturbances or even civil war -- never materialized, reporting became less frequent. Over the longer term, lots of questions remained about the

assassination. As Pol/Econ Section Chief, finding the answers was part of my job. We wondered: Were the gunmen working alone, or for some puppeteer, foreign or domestic? Would Kocharian be pushed aside by another don of the Armenian oligarchy, or was his position secure? And did the remaining leaders of Armenia have the chops to reach an agreement with Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh that would have popular support? Nothing seemed clear in the first few months after the assassination as Armenia adjusted to the new political reality and the embassy stood down from emergency. But I did seek the counsel of many local pundits. Here's what I gathered about the assassination.

ACT IV: Whodunnit?

The gunmen publicly claimed that Vazgen and his power elite were corrupt nabobs who were bleeding Armenia dry. Once these tyrants were eliminated, they claimed, the Armenian people would rise up and demand a more just political order. As Political Section Chief I consulted the many people who passed for political experts at that time to get their view of the assassination. Following is the short version.

The Assassination Theories (Abridged Version):

1. <u>The Gunmen Acted Alone</u>. According to Ockham's Razor, the simplest hypothesis is the best. It was not altogether crazy for the gunmen to believe that the elimination of a key leader like Vazgen might be enough to ignite a popular revolt. There had been major civil unrest following the 1996 national elections when Ter-Petrossian clearly resorted to fraud to gain a second term. Yet, it surpasses understanding how the gunmen could believe that assassinating a national hero would make them popular among the citizenry. As the investigation of the crime got underway, there were questions as to the mental health of the gunmen and whether they had been taking drugs during the operation. Had someone promised them military support once the deed was done? The plots and subplots I recorded from local political commentators could fill an encyclopedia of conspiracy. For my simple mind, there are only two other possibilities.

<u>2. President Robert Kocharyan and Interior Minister Serzh Sarkissian Did It</u>

Both Robert and Serzh were from Nagorno-Karabakh. They wanted an ironclad security guarantee in any peace treaty before they gave up the buffer territory that currently protected N-K from immediate attack. What if they believed that Vazgen was on the verge of an agreement similar to Ter-Petrossian's – too accommodating to Azerbaijan? And what if their protestations were being ignored? How could they, with only modest political capital, overrule Vazgen? Well, they couldn't. Not without removing Vazgen.

At the time Vazgen was assassinated, Serzh controlled the police, and other elements of the domestic security establishment separate from the military. So, did Rober Kocharian and Serzh Sarkissian conspire to take control from Vazgen, scuttle the peace talks, and make a deal on presidential succession? Sure sounds like a good deal for two guys who started life in a tiny province with no political following or economic base. All Serzh had to do was make sure that, on October 27, parliamentary security could be easily bypassed by a bunch of self-appointed saviors with guns and grenades.

After Vazgen's assassination there was a big investigation. The public prosecutor did put two of President Kocharian's aides in temporary custody. But charges were never brought against anyone in the government, and Kocharian's aides were eventually released. If the gunmen had been hired by Robert and/or Serzh, once they were arrested why didn't they sing? The typical answer to this question I got was: Don't be naïve. Once you are held in an Armenian jail, actuarial tables on your life change dramatically for the worse. You suddenly acquire many more risk factors for longevity than you had before. Get the picture? Here are a few examples of the fate of those involved in the investigation (Source: *A1+ News*, downloaded from:)

> In 2000, Norayr Yeghiazaryan, who sold weapons to the gunmen, died under mysterious circumstances in an isolated cell. (I recall something about him trying to use an electrical appliance in his cell and getting electrocuted. Hmm.)
>
> In 2002, Tigran Naghdalyan, 36, Chairman of the Board of the Armenian Public Television and a key witness of the case, was shot dead at the doorstep of his apartment. (Vazgen's younger brother, Armen, was later arrested and convicted of conspiring in this crime as a murder-for-hire. But did he actually do it? What motive would he have for killing an eye witness to his brother's murder?)
>
> In 2004, National Assembly deputy Mushegh Movsisyan, 47, another key witness in the case, died in a car accident.
>
> In 2004, Hasmik Abrahamyan, 45, an employee of the Parliament Protocol Department, who was also on the witness list, was found hanged in the Parliament building.
>
> In 2004, Vram Galstyan (uncle of the lead gunman, and part of the assassination team) hanged himself with a bed-sheet in prison.
>
> In 2010, Hamlet Stepanyan, the gunman who received the lightest sentence – 14 years – was found dead in his cell, supposedly of a heart attack.

Regarding succession after Vazgen's death, President Robert Kocharian did emerge as the new power broker in the months that followed the assassination. Although he named one of Vazgen's brothers, Aram, as prime minister, there was a sense that this was merely an homage to the family of the fallen hero. Aram only lasted a few months in office and resigned.

Did Kocharian do it with Serzh's help? I don't think so. The two of them would have had to collude with a lot of people to make this plot work. There was a strong possibility that someone in that chain of backstabbing would have ratted them out to Vazgen. No, I think Kocharian just took advantage of the opportunity fate offered him. For those more suspicious of Kocharian, or who want a more detailed look at the clan structure underlying the triumvirate of Vazgen, Kocharian, and Serzh, see this article:

http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CAD-17-8-12.pdf

3. Mother Russia: The Mother of All Conspiracies

If Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed on a final peace treaty under Vazgen's leadership, there would be little likelihood that the Caucasus region would remain a powder keg. Without the N-K conflict to serve as dynamite, Moscow wouldn't be able to use Armenian-Azerbaijani frictions to keep its former Caucasus republics in thrall. Also, a peace accord might lead to oil pipelines that Russia did not control. The KGB must have regretted Vazgen's moves toward peace. He had been so reliably rejectionist in the past. What gives? In this conspiracy theory, the Russians were dismayed at the possibility of being sidelined. What to do? What to do? "I've got it!" someone shouts in the bowels of the KGB. "Take Vazgen off the board and hope for the worst!" For this theory to have credibility, Russia would have had to convince a band of useful fools to do the wet work. Well… the lead gunman of the assassins, Nairi Hunanyan, did spend three years in Crimea – 1994-97. Although Crimea was officially part of Ukraine at that time, we all know that Russians were still around. Perhaps KGB operatives found Nairi an easy shil to train and kept him in reserve for possible use when needed. This theory is a long shot, but far from mission impossible for the spymasters of the Kremlin.

4. Or maybe it was a mix of the above. I never found out for sure.

Act V: Peace Negotiations in Key West

After Vazgen's death, the work of the Minsk Group continued. As Pol/Econ Chief, I worked with my local staff to prepare Minsk Group visits. These were periodic shuttles between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and consultations in various Minsk Group capitals. Kocharian did not have the hero status, charisma, or domestic base that Vazgen did. But he did not reject peace plans out of hand. I was note-taker in several meetings he held with the Ambassador. Kocharian was laconic, grave, and extremely careful. But it did appear that he possessed just enough political capital to conclude a peace agreement – if he wanted to. Similarly, although Azerbaijan President Heydar Aliyev was aging and concerned mainly with succession issues, he was certainly in charge of his country and could cut a deal if he so desired. Finally, with the change of U.S. administrations and the arrival of Colin Powell as Secretary of State in 2001, U.S. negotiators sensed an opportunity.

All sides agreed on Key West as an ideal locale for peace talks. It was pleasant and easily secured from threat and excessive media attention. The U.S. could manage the accommodations of the relatively small delegations. Looking back on these talks, perhaps our confidence in a successful conclusion came from the memory of the successful Dayton Accords where the parties to the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict were locked up until they agreed on a peace treaty. Perhaps we had received clear signals from both Kocharian and Aliyev that they would do business with Colin Powell and a new Republican administration. At any rate, they all gathered at Truman's refurbished Winter White House in Key West in early 2001. Where once Truman and his cronies played games of chance, the U.S. hoped its high-stakes gamble would pay-off.

We had to fold. I was not present at the talks, nor did I see the classified reports of the positions and the outcome. There is plenty of open-source reporting and more detailed analysis as to why the talks failed for those who wish to find out more. Undoubtedly more will be written since Nagorno-Karabakh remains one of the world's frozen conflicts where neither war nor peace has resolved the underlying disagreement. The only positive thing to come out of the Key West talks was a promise to continue negotiating, so I continued to prepare Minsk Group meetings with top Armenian officials until my departure in fall 2001.

Other Issues in Armenia: Dual-Use Exports to Iran

Q: Back in Armenia, as you conducted regular political work, what were the other key issues you followed?

TAUBER: There was the unusual case of Armen Sargsyan. The younger brother of slain prime minister Vazgen Sargsyan, Armen had no public profile I was aware of. But during

my tour, I learned that he had an ownership stake in a company that was selling a product to Iran. It was a product known to be used in the production of weapons of mass destruction. This would put Armen in a difficult position vis-à-vis U.S. law, which sanctions companies and people who sell such products to Iran. It was my unenviable task to alert him to his legal jeopardy and counsel him to discontinue sales.

At first, Armen would not respond to my calls for a meeting. But eventually, with the help of some local officials, Armen was 'convinced' by higher authority to pay a call. Although I did have the Armenian vocabulary to describe illegal arms sales and weapons of mass destruction, I did not trust my fluency enough to engage in a detailed discussion about it. The defense attaché kindly pitched in as interpreter in Russian. Armen arrived dressed in a black motorcycle jacket stitched with silver hobnails. A black shirt, black pants, and black boots completed the ensemble. His dark brown eyes sparkled with the stabbing klieg light of homicide. He declined the coffee and sweets I had set out. Refusing hospitality is a serious snub in Armenia. We were clearly off to a bad start.

Nevertheless, I coolly explained the situation to Armen -- the dual-use materials in question, the weapons of mass destruction at issue, and the potential for sanctions which, of course, we would not want to be forced to impose. We hoped he understood. He took it all in with a carnivorous rictus that some might mistake as a smile. He repeatedly denied he was involved in any activity that could be harmful to the U.S. The meeting ended unsatisfactorily. There was no signal, either in text or subtext, that he would comply. I duly reported the exchange to Washington. As he left the office, I was never so glad of my protected status as a U.S. diplomat. I wouldn't want to run into him in a dark alley.

By the following year, 2002, Armen was indeed sanctioned by the U.S. for having a stake in a company selling materials that could assist the Islamic Republic of Iran with its WMD program. (See the following reports on the sanctioning) http://asbarez.com/46896/armenian-customs-chief-denies-sensitive-equipment-sales-to-iran/ and http://asbarez.com/46879/armenia-says-sanctions-will-not-worsen-ties-with-us/ and https://www.ecoi.net/local_link/63315/467690_de.html

Not long after this sanction, Armen was convicted of being the ringleader in a murder-for-hire conspiracy. The target: the Director of the Armenian National Television company, Tigran Naghdalyan. The latter was gunned-down at his apartment in a mafia-style hit. For Armen, to go from a privileged perch atop the nation's hierarchy to Armenia's *Chateau D'If* is a long, long way to fall.

But most Armenians are the opposite of my experience with Armen -- very hospitable and polite. There is a saying that Armenia is the only place where you can spend half-an-

hour saying good night to your host and then come back in for another cup of coffee. Armenian dinner parties have plenty of alcohol for the Caucasus tradition of toasting, but I never attended one where people drank themselves under the table. Armenians tend to be modest and serious.

This is not to say that Armenians are humorless. They have plenty of comedy on television and satirical theater productions. And then there is Vardavar. Once a year, an old pagan festival taken over by Christianity allows children to take out their buckets, fill them with ice water, and douse unsuspecting victims. I learned about Vardavar the hard way. I was waiting at a stop light when a girl opened my driver's side door, threw in a bucket of ice-cold water, and then politely closed the door as the light changed. When I arrived at the embassy, soaked to the skin, there was quite a buzz.

But the country is also very poor. While I was there, public servants, especially teachers, went months without pay. The state-run Armenian Airways could barely pay landing and refueling costs and finally went bankrupt. The majority of the inhabitants made a significant portion of their living in the informal economy, avoiding taxes, but paying bribes. They could afford only the basic necessities of life. Adding to the economic woes, Armenians with salable skills often emigrated to more remunerative jobs in the diaspora. The subsequent brain drain meant that the relative size of the needy population -- children, seniors, the under-educated, and persons with disabilities or illnesses – grew disproportionately. Some among this group received remittances from their family members working abroad. A smaller number gained some livelihood from U.S. and other donor programs. Many just scraped along, seldom able to visit doctors or dentists or afford vital medicines.

For example, the family that maintained my house and garden had lost their government jobs and modest savings and made do with odd jobs and the remittances their daughter could send from Russia. Social safety net payments, never generous even during the Soviet Union, were now vanishingly small. When I left post, I left them my furniture, appliances, and car so that the husband could try running a taxi service. They had a second, younger daughter. She was fortunate to meet some of my Foreign Service colleagues and eventually get a job with a Foreign Service couple as an *au pair*. She went off to Paris to work with them, ended up marrying a French citizen, getting a real education, a good job, and could send more remittances to her family in Armenia. Later, when the family's small house outside of Yerevan essentially collapsed, I helped out with a down payment on an apartment in Yerevan. This gives you an idea of how precarious life was in Armenia for many average people who had no patronage network to rely on.

Metsamor – Armenia's Chernobyl?

Another major issue was Metsamor, the Chernobyl-era nuclear reactor. It had been taken off-line for a while after the 1988 earthquake because experts feared that, with no primary containment, it was too fragile to operate in an earthquake zone. While I was in Armenia, representatives from the U.S. and other countries helped the Armenians put in as many safeguards as possible. Still, it was a common worry that another earthquake close to Metsamor could turn a large swath of Armenia into a Chernobyl disaster. In such an event, hapless U.S. diplomats like *moi* who lived only 25 miles away, would die a lingering death from radiation poisoning.

If you are interested in how Metsamor is still *shlepping* along today, see this BBC article http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20190527-the-city-in-the-shadow-of-an-ageing-nuclear-reactor

Q: What part, if any, does Georgia play in Armenia's current foreign policy?

TAUBER: The northern border with Georgia was open and it was one of the principle routes for Armenian goods to reach market, basically through trucking. Unfortunately, Armenia's most important export was people, educated, talented people. The largest Armenian diaspora locations were Russia, with about 1.5 million Armenians, and then the U.S. and Canada, with 2 million Armenians, and then lots of smaller Armenian communities in lots of other countries around the world. Those diaspora communities were essential for the homeland because remittances and philanthropy accounted for a huge portion of the economy. I did travel to southern Georgia where a small Armenian community lives just over the border. It is a very poor area, and at that time, Georgia was not maintaining roads and other key infrastructure, making cross border travel difficult. Also, in the late 1990s, central authority in Georgia had become very weak and there were stories of violent car-jacking by Georgian criminal gangs. It was best, at that time, if you were going to Georgia, to fly into Tbilisi rather than drive.

Q: What about corruption?

Corruption

TAUBER: This short quote from the *USAID/Armenia Strategic Plan for FY1999-FY2003* tells the story quite succinctly:

> A major constraint on Armenia's democratic, economic, and social transition has been the pervasive embrace of corrupt practices at all levels of government… Despite severe penalties, bribery is widespread and the most common form of

> corruption. In addition, collusion between officials at various levels and private sector actors has hindered competition and fostered the emergence of powerful "clans." (pg. 6)

Corruption was endemic. You would be stopped by police officers who wanted a bribe. You know the drill. They would say something like: you can give us a $50 bribe or we'll give you a $100 ticket. And it went all the way up. At the airport you can pay the $1,000 tariff or you can give the customs inspector $200 to look the other way. The further up the chain, the more expensive the baksheesh became. You could buy your way out of being conscripted into the army with a significant bribe, maybe $10,000, and that happened quite a bit among those with means. But what steamed me the most was that the corrupt clans prevented innovation, prevented market entry of small business, and thus prevented wealth creation of any kind outside of their control. That's why so many Armenians took their skills and left.

Q: Anything else of note before we move on to the next tour.

Armenia's Historic Sites

One of the most wonderful things about Armenia is its historical ruins. They are relatively small in scope -- mostly consisting of old fortress churches that were destroyed more often by earthquakes than foreign attack. In addition, in the far south of the country there is a Cappadocia-like labyrinth of caves carved into limestone bluffs. Human habitation in Armenia goes back many thousands of years to the late Paleolithic Era. Archeologists are still finding obsidian arrowheads, knives, and other tools of early human civilization. I also had the chance to see the ongoing excavation of a small Jewish community dating back to the medieval times. This community mostly served as a way station for Jewish travelers and traders. On another trip to the provinces I saw a sign for a local museum that claimed to have artifacts dating back to Alexander the Great's march through Armenia. I pulled off the road and my translator and I eventually roused the curator. He was kind enough to place a glass beaker in my hands. He said that it had been dated to Alexander's time, or at least to the Greeks who had stayed behind to hold the territory. Someone had painstakingly glued the beaker back together from many small pieces. It would not be typical for a curator to take a fragile and precious artifact out of its case for some random American to fondle. For this reason, I strongly recommend that antiquarians wandering off the beaten path in Armenia carry a few bottles of whiskey and a few boxes of cigarettes. Tips of cash are certainly welcome, but Johnny Walker and Marlboro Golds weigh more heavily as a curator or docent ponders whether to let you into the storage room where remarkable finds remain safely under lock and key.

Why Leave the Political Cone?

Q: What were your considerations as you looked for an onward assignment?

Having completed a hard language and hardship tour, I had some thinking to do. First of all, I realized that writing political analysis cables that no one read was a dead end. It provided no professional satisfaction whatsoever. It also did nothing for my evaluations. For example, my first boss in Armenia wrote of my reports, "Mr. Tauber's writing style combines syntactical and lexical brilliance with a sharp, Rabelaisian wit… He takes the time and pains necessary to produce polished work of literary quality. His refined, witty, diamond-hard prose is simply a joy to read." (Linda remarks on the Aries employee, "One thing Aries cannot stand is to turn in work which is less perfect than he knows he can do." *Sunsigns*, pg. 45)

Very nice, but take a look at the area for improvement written by the same boss, "I admire Mr. Tauber's attention to the art of drafting and the finely honed prose he produces. That said, at times operational requirements must take precedence over the desire to find the perfect turn of phrase… Mr. Tauber should train himself to draft more quickly under pressure, especially when short reports to the Department are required on an urgent basis." Of course I could write short pieces. I had two years of that in the Ops Center and the Secretary's office. I *chose* to add context so that anyone in Washington would understand why an event was happening. Isn't that what a political officer is supposed to do?

Another example was my job as notetaker. With Robert Kocharian now president, we met with him as often as possible to understand where the country was going. At Georgetown, I learned how to take near verbatim notes in a legible handwriting. Consequently, my notes could be typed as is and go directly to the Ambassador to refine into the cable he wanted. But if that were the case, I would be adding no value. I would be nothing more than an executive secretary taking dictation. As Political Section Chief, I would not be doing my job. I was supposed to save the Ambassador time by organizing the data and adding prescient analysis. But no one wanted to wait for that.

Moreover, as Political-Economic Section Chief, I thought it was important to get the dope on the dons of the Armenian mafiacracy. Who owned which sectors of the economy and what was the cost to economic growth of corruption and extortion? These efforts were generally dismissed by my front office as "insider baseball," of no actionable value. I was getting the distinct feeling that I no longer belonged in the political cone.

Q: Did you receive an award for your work?

One thing a Section Chief can do for his employees – both American and locally hired – is nominate them for awards. I mentioned that I nominated my first tour Econ/Commercial officer for Commercial Officer of the Year. I also nominated everyone in my section for something. This might be a good moment to mention the hierarchy of awards in the State Department. You can find a well-defined list in Wikipedia at this link: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awards_of_the_United_States_Department_of_State

The most important ones are typically awarded at the end of a tour. Usually, your boss nominates you, since he or she knows best the nature of your outstanding performance. But even your subordinates can recommend you. The recommendations go to an embassy committee which passes judgment to the ambassador for final action. The only important ones are the ones with the word "honor" in their title. Those are recorded in your personnel file and may be taken into account for promotion. The others are in the "nice to have" category. Here are the basic ones granted by embassies:

Superior Honor Award

This is the highest embassy-generated award. It is granted to those whose contributions have had a substantial, long-term impact on the accomplishment of the mission's goals. Alternatively, it is also awarded if you show exceptional service well above the expectations of your job. The award consists of a certificate signed by an assistant secretary or ambassador. For a time it included a silver medal set, but that has been abandoned.

Meritorious Honor Award

This is awarded for outstanding service in any of the following categories: support of a one-time event (e.g., support for a major conference or summit meeting); innovation and creativity in short-term tasks or projects; or increasing productivity and efficiency. The award consists of a certificate signed by an assistant secretary or ambassador. For a time it included a bronze medal set, but that has been abandoned. I got two of these. One in Romania and one in Hungary.

Benjamin Franklin Award

The Franklin Award consists of a certificate, typically signed by the Chief of Mission or Office Director. It may also include a cash award from $200 to $750. The problem is that a Franklin Award is not included in a Foreign Service employee's official personnel file and so is not considered for promotion. It's like getting a piece of fruit on Hallowe'en instead of candy.

Extra Mile Award

The Extra Mile Award gives supervisors a mechanism to immediately recognize employees whose work merits recognition, but which may fall below the threshold for a Franklin Award or one of the honor awards. It is a certificate with a cash award ranging from $25 to $200 in increments of $25. (Translation: I like what you're doing, keep it up.)

Certificate Of Appreciation

The Certificate of Appreciation recognizes general contributions that further the objectives of the Department. All employees, regardless of pay plan or rank, members of other agencies and the armed services, and private citizens and foreign officials are eligible for the Certificate of Appreciation. (Translation: The equivalent of honorable mention in a high school essay contest.)

The End of Political Work

At the end of my tour, as an awards ceremony was being planned, it was realized that everyone was getting an award but me. The DCM turned to my Econ/Commercial officer to write up a justification for a Certificate of Appreciation. Seriously? They gave Certificates of Appreciation to the char force. Do you know how an Aries male accepts a Certificate of Appreciation under these conditions? Read through Linda's chapter on the Aries employee, it's only 5 pages (*Sun Signs*, pp 43-48). You can't get through a paragraph without being reminded that nothing motivates a ram like an award. Recognize his creative contributions and he's happy to go without a raise. But when he sees others awarded while he is scanted, it is not necessary to fire him. He'll quit. I wanted to put that certificate of appreciation into the document shredder, catch the macerated pieces in a burn bag, and set it ablaze. But instead I chilled. I realized it was valuable as a judgment of my work, a watershed in my career.

Back when I was a 25 year-old freshly minted FSO, I absolutely believed that the only job worth having in this man's Foreign Service was in the political cone. That belief turned to dust on the deforested piedmont of the South Caucasus.

At the same time, I saw what the Public Affairs Officer got to do. He had his own car and driver and sped out every day to some interesting locale. He checked on English language training programs, recruited exchange students, hobnobbed with Fulbright scholars, and got to see the illuminated manuscripts in the Manuscript Museum that are not exhibited. He prepared cultural events and met with a host of artists, writers, and dissidents. In

short, he was eating my lunch. That's what I wanted to do. But to get a job in the public affairs cone meant undergoing the painful process of conal rectification. To move from the political to the public affairs cone I first had to land a public affairs assignment, and then, at the end of that assignment, apply to become a public affairs officer with the support of all my supervisors up to the ambassador.

Finding a mid-level public affairs job in the fall of 2000 was not an easy task. The reason: Jesse Helms. The Most Feared Man in the Senate had just made the great bargain with the Clinton Administration: eliminate USIA and ACDA and rationalize their assets – human and financial -- into the State Department. In exchange, you get Senate approval of the Chemical Weapons Treaty and payment of the U.S. arrears to the UN. The immediate impact of this deal did two things. First, it drove many public affairs officers who did not want to go through the downsizing into retirement. And second, it also eliminated many public affairs jobs that were formerly controlled by USIA.

So, with that genius for timing that had marked my career up to this point, I entered a field that was about to be reduced in size and importance. Moreover, I was competing against veteran public affairs officers for a smaller pool of positions. Even undesirable public affairs jobs, the ones bobbing like rusting scows at the end of the dock, were jealously guarded by the public diplomacy human resource officers just in case one of their veterans unexpectedly needed a captaincy. Getting me a berth, even on one of these barnacled rust buckets, meant that my assignments officer had to bring up the heavy cannon. After the fusillade cleared, he had won the day. My post of assignment was once known as the "Paris of Eastern Europe." By 2002, when I would arrive there, it was much more like Pyongyang-on-the-Danube. The city was now a toxic bowl of coal dust, heavy metals, and decaying infrastructure. Nevertheless, it was with no small hope of a brighter future that I arrived back in the U.S. on September 10, 2001 to start Romanian language training for my tour as cultural attaché in Embassy Bucharest the following year.

Lessons Learned: How to Excel

1. Find your joy. Trite but true. Find the things you do best and excel at them in difficult environments. I enjoyed speaking Spanish and French and really should have concentrated on improving these, even if it meant going to hardship tours in Haiti or Honduras, the two poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. In places like those, fluency helps you find something to do of lasting impact. Trying to learn small, difficult languages like Armenian and Hungarian are best left for language-learning geniuses who can get into the culture with greater ease.

2001-2005:

FSI Language Training and Romania Desk at the State Department

Q: Where were you on 9/11?

I was actually beginning home leave. I had planned to start in Atlanta and drive up the Smokey Mountain Trail to Virginia. I had a day of canoeing in North Carolina when I saw the collapse of the Twin Towers on a general store TV. I drove straight back to Washington.

Of course, the atmosphere in the State Department was more frenetic than usual. There was continued concern about potential threats to the State Department building. But I was assigned to FSI for Romanian language training, not to Main State. The atmosphere at the Arlington campus was grave but not white-knuckled.

Q: How was Romanian Language training?

Romanian Language Training

I started out confident. I thought that after learning French and Spanish, Romanian would be a breeze. Not a breeze. More like a category 3 hurricane. The reason is that Romanian is not the romance language it pretends to be. It retains the old street Latin case endings that the legionaries used as the Roman Empire collapsed. But the waves of Slavic tribes moving in on their territory eventually had an effect on the language. All said and done, Romanian is about 20% Slavic in structure, but that is the 20% used in everyday speech. Listening to spoken Romanian today, you can still detect a romance language prosody. It sounds like Italians speaking a Slavic language. But this 20% also makes Romanian uniquely difficult even for a speaker of romance languages. I did finally get a 3/3, but only after I hired a tutor to work with me after class. When I arrived in Romania I was just barely fluent and again needed help from my local Romanian staff whenever I had to conduct business. The regional studies portion of the training gave me time to read about Romania. The best book on Romania for the casual reader is Lucian Boia's *Romania*. It was a new book back in 2002, but I think its approach and insights are still valid today.

Language training ended in January 2002, but I had six more months before I could transfer, so HR temporarily parked me in the new public diplomacy office of the European Bureau. I became the public diplomacy desk officer for Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. I did learn a bit about the embassy while I was there. The political appointee ambassador, James Rosapepe, was just finishing his tour and the post was preparing for a new chief of mission. Rosapepe was not well-liked at post and morale had suffered. Indeed, a State Department Inspector General Report on Rosapepe's tenure placed him

rock bottom among all ambassadors over the previous 10 years. I couldn't locate the entire IG report, but key conclusions can be found at: http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1999-12-22/news/9912220008_1_rosapepe-romanian-department-staff

Q: What were your first impressions of Bucharest

Arrival in Bucharest

Relatively positive. My quarters were ready when I arrived. It was a nice apartment at the top of a 6-story apartment building. In the 1960s it might have been described as a swanky bachelor pad. There was one large, windowed living room/dining room and two small bedrooms. It was near the subway, so my commute to work was quite reasonable. There was only one problem. Another building was under construction right next door. The noise, dust, and general upset became unendurable for my building's residents (mostly other Foreign Service Officers). So, within about 3 months of arrival, and just as I had unpacked everything, I packed out again to go to a new apartment much further from the Embassy. It made the commute about 45 minutes, but the new apartment was comfortable and the electricity worked most of the time.

My new neighborhood might have been called "transitional." There were other buildings going up nearby, and the street was relatively well maintained. But next door was a single-family house that was shingled with a few corrugated tin panels where water infiltration had begun to rot the wood. A henhouse took up most of their yard. The rooster felt it his duty to set my alarm at 5:30 am.

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of Ceausescu (1989), Romania went through tough economic times. Citizens had to adapt to global markets and prices overnight. Many families could no longer afford to keep their dogs and simply put them out. Since these pets were not neutered, they created generations of feral, often vicious dog packs. One night, on my way home from work, I was bitten on the back of the leg by a feral dog and I had to go through the anti-rabies shots. The feral dog problem slowly diminished while I was there. The general understanding was that some authority was rounding them up and euthanizing them. After I was bitten, I carried a small can of mace that I only had to use once, not in Bucharest, but in a provincial town. A ferocious mongrel chased me even after I sprayed him. He finally left off when I was far away from his territory.

The city of Bucharest itself is a bit eccentric in its layout. Ceausescu successfully razed most of the charming old parts of the city, and arguments over ownership and restitution kept the remaining historical sections in a mostly ramshackle condition. Ceausescu built

oversized blocks of unremittingly ugly structures reminiscent of North Korean megaliths. Well, I guess size matters when you're promoting a cult of personality. Public art, to the extent it existed, was appallingly ugly. I thought that the best thing to do with all the sculptural eyesores was to move them out to a distant, abandoned factory and set them up as an installation representing the demise of communism. With a little imagination, the site could actually become a ghoulish tourist attraction. But the real ugliness in Bucharest was the negative effect of Ceausescu's choke hold on Romanian society. He created a culture of bribery and abuse of power that continued well into the post-communist period. It is a miracle I met so many Romanian patriots stepping forward to remake their country into a place that values human development.

To give you an idea of just how shady the Ceausescu's were, there was an apocryphal story going around at that time. In the late 1970s Nikolai and his wife went on tour in Western Europe to collect plaudits for his "independence from Soviet foreign policy." In France, he stayed at the official guest house, the Hôtel de Marigny. After he left for his next stop, the UK, the French discovered that a few museum pieces in Marigny were missing from the Ceausescu's' room. Mr. and Mrs. Ceausescu took them as souvenirs of their stay. Notified of the theft, President Giscard D'Estaing quickly telephoned Queen Elizabeth to warn her of the Ceausescu's' sticky fingers. The British had just enough time to substitute copies of the state antiques that had been in their official guest quarters, and even these were bolted in place to prevent their removal.

The U.S. Embassy and the Public Affairs Section

Q: How was the Embassy set up?

The chancery inhabited the mansion of an old Romanian family, so its design was unique. The Public Diplomacy Section was housed in a smaller mansion about two blocks away. The PD Section also had the former stables which were converted into an auditorium and an Information Resource Center, the new term for a USIS library. I had a spacious, high-ceilinged office with plenty of wall space that I plastered with eraser boards showing six-months of advance planning. These boards allowed me to post project goal milestones, VIP visits, staff absences – a host of planning issues so I could quickly see how well we could adapt to sudden changes or needs. Although I obsessively planned my projects, and held my staff's time as my most precious resource, I was terrible at keeping my own personal schedule. I developed a habit of arriving late and flustered at meetings. It became a subject for periodic admonishment.

The Cultural Officer's Work Requirements

Q: And what were your specific responsibilities?

As cultural officer I had several basic duties:

- Represent PD on the Democracy Grant Committee. This interagency group had about $500,000 per year to give out in grants to Romanian NGOs whose goals helped the country meet U.S. foreign policy objectives like promotion of a free press, educating school kids to avoid drugs and human trafficking, restoring polluted areas, and other worthy community-level activities.

- Promote Mission Goals with Grants to NGOs. There were many new Romanian organizations geared to develop their civil society. The challenge was to find the ones with good business models for sustainability, not just fly-by-nights with a good idea but no notion of how to implement it.

- Promote Good Will with the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Restoration. This fund was provided to Ambassadors in certain countries in which we had special interest. Since we wanted to help Romania meet the requirements for NATO membership, the U.S. ambassador was given access to State Department funds based on yearly applications. The best projects – both in terms of impact and sustainability – would be funded.

- Use Education Exchanges to Benefit Both Countries. I represented the embassy on the local Fulbright Commission that selected local scholars for one-year study programs in the U.S. We also helped American Fulbrighters during their one-year residency in Romania with orientation and enrichment programs, and helped them get through the local bureaucracy when they hit roadblocks. I also managed the embassy's deliberations on short-term visitor programs to the U.S. A short-term program was usually a 2-3 week whirlwind tour related to an embassy goal like: training in how to detect and prosecute financial crimes – especially transnational money laundering; fighting terrorism and organized crime; and promoting transparency in government operations; etc.

- Grow American Corners. This was an innovation that began in the former Soviet Union. U.S. embassies and consulates received funds to work with local libraries to increase their holdings of U.S. books and print materials as well as web access to U.S.-based search engines. American Corners would grow to become mini-cultural centers that we used for programming events and as stops for the ambassador to meet with local officials and citizens in areas that were not previously included on a VIP travel schedule.

- Widen Outreach to Youth and Minorities. Invent your own ways of reaching out to all sectors of Romanian society with positive and accurate information about the U.S. This was great fun because it also gave our locally employed staff the time and material support to develop local contacts and leverage their venues and access for U.S. events and visitors. There are few better ways of keeping your staff happy than giving them room to innovate and run their own programs.

Q: How about the Public Diplomacy Section itself, how big was it, how did you get along with the team?

The new Public Affairs Officer arrived around the same time I did. The Information/Press Officer had already been there one year. So three Americans and about a dozen local hires.

Linda Goodman's *Sun Signs* would warn me that my new boss, a Cancer, would be a bad fit as a supervisor for an Aries male. Cancer is a water sign governed by the Moon while Aries is a fire sign governed by Mars. A more opposite pair of signs you cannot find in the whole Zodiac. Yet my Cancer boss was one of the best supervisors I had in the Foreign Service. Here is how Linda Goodman accounts for that in her chapter on the *Cancer Boss*:

> It's good to work for a Cancer executive. You'll learn more in one month from him than you will in a year from other bosses. The most important thing you'll learn is consideration. A Cancer boss drives a hard bargain, but he's fair while he's being shrewd. Playing a game of win or lose with the big guys who hold the blue chips is one thing. Taking advantage of the innocent is another. He is essentially a kind and decent man, who's moved to deep pity by both cruelty and misfortune. Courtesy and compassion aren't old-fashioned words to him. They are part of his gentleman's code. If your intentions are sincere and your heart is honest he'll back you through mistaken opinions and personal troubles. (pg. 178)

And he did.

As this was my first public affairs tour, he took pains to make sure I didn't get ahead of my skis. He was able to give me candid, straightforward correctives that I could use because they didn't feel reproachful or snarky coming from him. I think we made a good team. And the stars may have had something to do with it after all. Although Aries is a fire sign, not given to the intuitive or feeling side of things. But. I did have Scorpio rising

in my natal chart. Scorpio is a water sign. Perhaps that influence helped in establishing a good working relationship with my Cancer boss.

Changes, New Staff in the Cultural Office

During my first year in Bucharest a few of our locally employed staff retired. This was good for them and for us. There comes a point when local staff is too wedded to older methods and objectives to change with the times. The new staff I hired to fill these vacant positions were all outstanding. I was amazed at how much they contributed and how quickly they developed a network of support we could draw upon for our programs.

In addition to supervising five local staff, I was also responsible for the English Language Fellows who were on one- or two-year contracts with the State Department. You could only get these special contractors if you had a cooperating Romanian partner institution that would employ them. The partner institution also had to provide a package of support, including housing. We were able to maintain two such positions while I was there. Again, I was amazed at the outstanding work these American English teachers did. I always kept money aside for them in my budget to buy supplies and pay travel expenses. Whenever I could, I went to their schools to observe and demonstrate embassy support for their efforts. Their lives were not easy. In some ways they were like Peace Corps Volunteers, living on the local economy and dealing with the Romanian bureaucracies without the protection of a diplomatic passport. Nevertheless, they thrived and helped introduce American teaching methods – sorely needed in Romania – to institutions like vocational schools and adult education facilities that never had such assistance before. I also supervised one, sometimes two summer interns and various temporary assistants.

Q: What were the major projects you worked on?

Legacy Programs: Journalism, Civics Textbooks, Dispute Resolution Training

First there were legacy projects begun under the former PAO. Most of these were in their last year of implementation when I arrived. One was a relatively small training program in investigative journalism. That grant was easy to complete and close. But the giant of the group was the social studies textbook modernization program. That grant selected 12 senior teachers committed to removing the communist gloss on civics that had so long misinformed students. Each teacher came from a different province to ensure geographic diversity. This core group spent a period of time in the U.S. learning about how textbooks and curriculum aids are developed then returned to implement their study in Romania. Chapter by chapter, they rewrote the basic social studies text for upper level high school students. They also began student newspapers and government, and then served as the

advisors to other teachers and schools who wanted to institute the same changes. It was an enormously successful program. One of my most pleasant duties in my first year was to periodically visit the pilot schools, the proud teachers, and the excited students to measure the progress.

There was a final legacy project that had only just begun when I arrived. In the early 2000s, Romanian county-level courts (the lowest level) were overwhelmed with minor disputes. Most of these were small claim litigations, divorce, and property disputes that could be dealt with by an alternative dispute mechanism (ADR) if both parties agreed. The problem was that Romania had no history or examples to create its own ADR system. The previous PAO had found a willing partner in the Romanian Bar Association of Craiova, one of the provinces west of Bucharest. About a dozen young attorneys and academics took part in the training program conducted by visiting American experts. The goal was to clear the county dockets of small cases so that judges could address more serious crimes of corruption and abuse of office.

It should be noted for clarity's sake that alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and arbitration are two different things. Arbitration generally addresses business-related issues such as labor-management disputes. Often, arbitration is mandatory because it is part of a contract. ADR is much more flexible. For example, let's say two neighbors can't agree on their property line. A judge might suggest that rather than wait for their case to be heard, they could try ADR and see if that might resolve the problem. Both parties would still have to agree on the outcome, or else the case would go back to court. But ADR could deal with these small cases and generally promote good will between the parties to the dispute.

By the time I left Romania in 2005, the first group of ADR facilitators was fully trained. A few went on to become instructors. They trained more attorneys in other provinces. Soon dozens of ADR specialists were ready to take on cases across the country. The success of this program helped to demonstrate to both the ambassador and the USAID mission director that we could conduct programs similar to those USAID was managing in civil society building. This would result in the transfer of $1 million USAID funds to the PD office to take on more small projects in this field.

Visitor Programs: The Fulbright Exchange

The flagship of U.S. people-to-people exchanges is the Fulbright Program, named for the U.S. Senator who pushed its creation in the 1960s. The program provides significant U.S. government funding for American students at the Masters and Ph.D. level to spend a year teaching and researching in foreign countries. Foreign countries that agree to take part in

the exchange also have to contribute funds to support the exchange. The exact amount of funding and in-kind contributions from each side differs from country to country. What is the same throughout the world is the governing body. A non-profit Fulbright Commission is formally incorporated in each participating country to advertise the number of exchange slots, accept applications, choose the list of funded participants, and work to increase the budget with private contributions, or with increases in host government funding.

Officially, the U.S. ambassador is the Chairman of the Commission, but typically the ambassador delegates this task to the Public Affairs Officer. In Romania, my boss, the PAO, represented the ambassador when the Commission had to take important decisions. At regular working-level meetings I substituted for the PAO. The Executive Director of the Commission, the person who runs it on a day-to-day basis, is a paid, full-time manager. It is held by someone with considerable background in education, either a host country national or an American citizen resident. The other members of the Commission included representatives from the host country's ministry of education and volunteers from the local academic community and business community who receive small stipends for their time.

When I arrived in 2002 we were approaching the end of the current Executive Director's tenure. There had been significant friction between him and other members of the Commission and a decision was taken not to renew his contract. So one of my first duties was to help the Commission advertise for a new Chairman and organize the 100-some applications in rank order. Each application was about 20 pages long, and each one had to be reviewed carefully. I worked through the summer of 2003 with an American college intern in my section to get this herculean task done. The intern, a political science major, developed a spreadsheet with the all the candidates and criteria for hiring. We assigned a score to each criterion and then tried weighting various criteria to see if the same candidates were more or less at the top.

Finally, we tallied the scores and managed to winnow down the applicants to about a dozen, of which only half were strongly recommended. The intern explained our methodology to the Commission members so that he could get university credit for his work. The Commission members were duly impressed. The final candidate also interviewed with the ambassador to be sure he had no reservations. The winner was a U.S. citizen currently resident in Bucharest who had significant experience in higher education in the U.S. She turned out to be a great choice. She restored morale and was a pleasure to work with as we tried to increase the Commission's budget and select applicants whose areas of expertise were useful to the development of democratic and market-based economic institutions in Romania. To get an idea of how valuable the

Fulbright experience was for those selected to take part, go to these sites for Romanian Fulbright testimonials:

http://www.fulbright.ro/alumni/left-main-right/romanian-alumni

http://www2.comunicare.ro/profesori/cv/pricopie_remus/Fulbright_Ripple_Effect.pdf.

The overall yearly cost for a Romanian to go to the U.S. under a Fulbright grant was in the vicinity of $50,000. We tried to get private sector or individual donor contributions, but didn't find any willing donors. If there was any Romanian philanthropy going on in the 2002 – 2005 period it wasn't going to educational exchange programs. However, my successor did manage to get some contributions with the help of the next ambassador.

Although we could not convince private, wealthy Romanians of the value of investing in their scholars, we did choose high quality, highly motivated Romanians who invariably impressed their American host institutions. This helped get them invitations to stay a second year funded by their American university hosts. This, in turn, won my Fulbright team a good reputation in the Department's office of Fulbright exchanges. Our reputation was so good, in fact, that when slots for additional scholars suddenly opened up in the region we could quickly fill them with Romanian candidates from our alternate list. During my three years in Romania, I reckon we sent about 60 Romanians to the U.S. under the Fulbright program. It was one of my most exciting jobs and contributed to making Romanian one of my best professional experiences.

There was one crisis that had an effect on the selection of Romanian candidates. During my tour, the U.S. Marine gunnery sergeant responsible for the embassy's Marine guard contingent was in a car accident. He was driving the Marine van and it crashed into a taxi at an intersection. As a result of the collision, a popular Romanian singer named Teofil Peter was killed. For a brief description of the incident, see this report in *Stars and Stripes* *https://www.stripes.com/news/marine-involved-in-crash-that-killed-romanian-rock-star-is-back-in-u-s-1.27110*

In addition to the human tragedy, the Embassy came in for criticism from both the Romanian government and public for refusing to allow the Marine sergeant to be tried in Romania. To help demonstrate our sympathy with Teofil's family and fans, we received permission to permanently name one of our Fulbright Exchange positions after the singer and promised to fill it with a Romanian musician or a music-related candidate. You can never perfectly repair the damage to bilateral relations after an event like this, but the dedication of a scholarship did help blunt the criticism.

Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation

The AFCP is a State Department program that allows ambassadors to build good will by restoring well-known cultural sites, collections, or objects. Each year, qualified embassies submit detailed proposals for funding. Sometimes the ambassador originates the project, sometimes he asks the cultural section to do some sleuthing and offer him some options. While I was in Romania, we had some of both. In fact, Embassy Bucharest's proposals had gained a reputation for leveraging its funds to exceed initial plan goals. The one year we failed to submit a project, the Department's AFCP office called to urge me to come in with a proposal because they didn't have enough worthwhile applications. Following are the projects we completed during my tenure.

2002: St. Nicholas Church in Densus. The year I arrived, I monitored the completion of a $15,000 AFCP grant to preserve this church's interior frescos. The St. Nicholas Church is generally believed to be the oldest continuously active church in Romania – believed to have been built in the 1300s. The frescos date from the 14th century and are remarkably vivid given their age. But the entire church was under intermittent restoration for a variety of problems. During my tour the church building was buttressed inside and out with scaffolding. It was far from clear that our restoration would be the last one.

2003: Stavropoleos Monastery Courtyard in Bucharest. Stavropoleos Monastery was – and still is – a boutique monastery. It has a small, cloister, and a caravansary, or visitor hostel, built in the center of Bucharest in the 18th century. The floor of its cloistered courtyard had begun to crack and water damage was threatening the foundations. This small complex of buildings was unique in that it combined elements of Ottoman, Byzantine and Romanian architectural motifs. Moreover, Stavropoleos is one of the few historic buildings that escaped Ceausescu's bulldozers. It is used by the local populace for worship and for art and architecture classes. For tourists, it is a simple refuge of calm and beauty from the megalithic monstrosities Ceausescu erected as monuments to himself.

When we first considered the Stavropoleos restoration project for the AFCP I was a little hesitant. It was another religious building right after the St. Nicholas project. Also, the Romanian Orthodox Church was hostile to gay people. I could easily scant this option and choose other, more secular projects that were equally needy. Yet, when I talked to the priest and his small group of nuns about the possibilities of restoration, you could see the hope in their eyes and how devoted they were to this little gem of a churchyard that they had saved from the communist wrecking ball.

After such an appeal, I'd have been churlish to say no. The ambassador approved, and work got underway quickly. The priest surprised us all with his entrepreneurial skill in leveraging our $20,000. He found matching grants or in-kind contributions that not only repaired the water damage, but the entire courtyard, the bell tower, and introduced climate control throughout the buildings. This permitted him to showcase antique religious manuscripts and music sheets that were previously in storage. The ambassador spoke at the ribbon-cutting and the embassy enjoyed feature broadcasts on the evening news as well as big spreads in the local press. It was heartwarming. There is a coffee table book on the Stavropoleos Church that shows what it looks like after the restoration. Unfortunately, it is only available in Romanian under the title: *Stavropoleos : Ctitorie, Oameni, Fapte* (Hardcover)

2004: <u>Documentary Film on Romanian Artisan Craft Traditions</u> – (Grant amount: $30,000) This movie presents segments on folk art traditions in Romania that are dying out. It includes New Year's mask making (a tradition going back to pagan times), iron smithing and tin smithing (skills mastered by both Romanian and Roma minority craftsmen), and wool makers. It also shows how ethnic minorities have influenced Romanian traditions. We intended that target audiences include high school students in rural areas where these skills still had a few practitioners. We hoped to demonstrate that you could still make a living by remaining in rural areas and mastering the old artesian skills rather than leaving, as most do, for the cities.

2005: <u>The Village Museum's Library of Ethnographic Photos.</u> Bucharest's Village Museum is a must-see. It preserves houses and farm buildings made of wood, brick, mud, and every other "peasant" building material over hundreds of years. The representative houses were moved or reconstructed on the grounds of the museum to represent village life from all over Romania. In a single day you can wander through this open-air museum and see hundreds of years of Romanian material culture, including an impressive wooden chapel carved in the syncretistic Romanian style that incorporates Slavic, Byzantine, and Ottoman influences. This museum also has a library of old glass and silver plate negatives showing village life in the 1920s and 30s. The photographer, a Romanian anthropologist named Dmitri Gusti, was prescient. He captured the material culture of rural Romania just before WWII, and its aftermath, destroyed much of it.

One of our Romanian staff learned that the glass and silver plate negatives of these photos were decomposing because their storage site had no climate control

or modern archival protections. This was an ideal candidate for preservation. The ambassador agreed and we convinced the Department to grant us $21,000 for construction of proper archival storage.

Hosting Major Regional Conferences

Our cooperation with the Village Museum was so successful that they agreed to let us use their convention facilities for a regional seminar we hosted on managing museums without state support. In the post-communist era, many formerly state-subsidized museums lost their funding. To help them cope with a market economy, we brought in experts from the U.S. museum community to explain how to create endowments, rent museum space for events, and build a support base among the public. Why bother? Eventually, the treasures of newly democratic countries that had been hidden from view will provide American scholars with fantastic new material and the American people with a deeper understanding of countries once dismissed as a monolithic Eastern Bloc. Since they would soon be members of NATO, building ties at all levels was one of our key goals.

This seminar on how to successfully privatize museums was a gigantic effort that my cultural staff organized. With help from cultural officers in nearby embassies, we attracted a total of 100 delegates from all over Southeastern Europe. The Romanian Ministry of Culture was impressed enough to pay for the follow-up conference the following year. I made sure my hard-working staff received awards for their remarkable achievement.

We also funded English-language conferences conducted in provincial cities to help establish more direct links between Romanian and U.S. universities. I loved attending these events because I connected with education sector leaders not only from Romania, but from bordering nations as well. Promoting the teaching and use of English has been a State Department goal for generations. However, resources to support it have waxed and waned. During my career in the Foreign Service, the Department periodically put modest amounts of money and personnel into traditional classroom English training. We also began experimenting with the use of computer-based programs like Rosetta Stone. None of our efforts ever made us a major presence in the English teaching sector in these countries. Private and public universities, as well as private sector companies like Berlitz drew many more students than our programs.

Holocaust Education and Remembrance

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, information about the location of Jewish assets confiscated by the Nazis came to light more frequently than before. Pressure built to return these assets to survivors or their heirs grew. These assets included life insurance policies, bank accounts, art, and sometimes real property. To assist in both documenting the Holocaust and restitution of assets, the State Department created a Special Representative who reported directly to the Secretary. In addition, the U.S. joined a task force of countries dedicated to memorializing the Holocaust through monuments, school curriculum, and other means. Romania belonged to this task force, and it fell to the public diplomacy section to fund programs that supported education about the Holocaust, particularly in Romania. While I was in Bucharest I had two opportunities to contribute to this effort.

Reprinting *Night* by Elie Wiesel

The first came by way of a Peace Corps Volunteer teaching English. The PCV wanted to use Elie Wiesel's *Night*, a short memoir of his survival in the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau. (I would later tutor two immigrants to the U.S., one from Iran and one from China, in reading this same work for their high school English classes.) The PCV was astonished to learn that, in Elie Wiesel's native country, his memoir was out of print. (Wiesel was born and raised in Sighet, now called Sighetul Marmaţiei, a town on the Romania-Ukraine border.) Somehow, I secured copyright permission for a 1,000-book print run, the smallest publication contract you could make. Then I wrote to Wiesel's literary agent, notifying him that we were reprinting the book, and asked if Wiesel would write a preface for this edition. And he did! The books went to many more schools and colleges than our PCV imagined. I notified the Peace Corps country director that this remarkable feat was set in motion due to the request of one determined volunteer.

A New Documentary on the Roma Holocaust in Romania

The second project was even more extraordinary. Well into my tour I met a U.S. postgraduate student who was working on a project under the auspices of a Fulbright grant. She was connecting with a number of Roma communities to document their stories of Holocaust survival. Her goal was two-fold: to educate a new generation of Romanians largely unaware of this WWII atrocity and to help the Roma apply for reparation funds under a German government program that makes payments to Holocaust survivors. It took many months of careful and respectful work by the Fulbrighter to win the trust of the Roma survivors. They were still suspicious of the motives of any authority, afraid that if they came forward with their stories – which included descriptions of how some Romanians colluded with Nazis to eliminate the gypsies – they would be targeted for

harassment or worse. Eventually several Roma did apply for reparations with the help of the film maker. The documentary relates their stories and their eventual victories in receiving small survivor funds – no more than $1,000 each. But the victory also gave them and their families a reason to believe that there is genuine interest on the part of Romanians in helping Roma integrate into post-communist Romanian society while respecting their culture.

My job in the cultural section, once I acquainted myself with this work, was to get money from our embassy's democracy fund to help the filmmaker take her documentary to schools and movie theaters around the country. This was an easy sell because of the obvious quality of the documentary and the expertise of the Fulbright grantee. I can't remember how many cities she toured with her documentary, but we worked with many Romanian universities, municipal authorities, and art house managers to plan openings for the film. They all included a talk and Q&A with our Fulbrighter. You can see the film, entitled, "Hidden Sorrows" on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQNhSQemCzo&app=desktop&has_verified=1

An Almost Visit by Francis Ford Coppola

One day I was in my office, minding my own business, when I got one of those telephone calls. It had been routed around the embassy a few times like the time bomb game at a child's birthday party. The wind-up bomb ticks ticks ticks as the kids pass it back and forth until Boom. One kid is out. I guess that kind of game is no longer politically correct, but it was great fun when I used to go to birthday parties. The bomb survivor got a gift – usually a bag of candy. Oh, for days when I could eat a bag candy without guilt.

Anyway, the person on the other end of this telephone call claimed she represented Francis Ford Coppola. Mr. Coppola needed help getting visas for a Romanian movie crew that was helping him film his new project in the U.S. Mmm-hmm. So I began the tedious game of debunking the delusional caller who had somehow managed to put the right number of digits in the right order to connect with the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest. But as her story continued, it sounded too expert to be a psychotic delusion. There were lots of details that a typical delusional caller wouldn't be able to string together. So I made a date. Bring the guys over and I'll talk to them. If they check out I'll let the Consular Section know.

Imagine my surprise when, several days later, I was summoned to the gate of our offices to vouch for a team of guys all dressed in black. Sporting long hair, some with facial hair waxed into topiaries, they looked like a bunch of central casting jewel thieves. But the equipment they carried had all the earmarks of state-of-the-art cinematic engineering. Just

the negotiations with our embassy guards on how to store the delicate equipment must have taken half an hour. Once in my office they pulled out storyboards and a production schedule – enough for a course in film making. If this was a hoax, somebody connected to the movie industry had gone to great trouble. To make a long story short, I was convinced and the film team was legit and they got their visas. Turns out that Mr. Coppola – the mastermind behind the Oscar-winning *Godfather* movies -- was indeed working on a movie with Romanian connections. It was a film version of the novel *Youth Without Youth*. This was a work by the renowned Romanian novelist Mircea Eliade. What's more, Coppola was coming to Romania for some of the later filming and post-production work. I asked the team if Mr. Coppola was grateful enough for the help with the visas to consider doing something for us; namely, giving a master class to Romanian film students at the university? I could promise him that there would be fantastic media coverage, which he could use to plug his upcoming film.

Despite my entreaties, Coppola's agent could not find time in The Auteur's busy schedule on this trip. But the agent did leave me with a raincheck. Man, I had that thing laminated. I made sure my successor knew that Coppola owed us a master class and she cashed the raincheck. Sadly, Coppola's film *Youth Without Youth* was a commercial and critical flop. It tried to take a book that was a highly interior narrative and tell it in a medium that is highly visual. Oil and water. But I had another connection to Francis Ford Coppola, wholly separate from the movies, and that story is ahead. First, American Corners.

American Corners: From 0 to 9 in Three Years

With the integration of USIA into the State Department beginning in 2000, management decided that the large U.S. cultural centers and libraries that had defined American cultural presence abroad for some 50 years were no longer needed. Instead, a smaller version of American cultural presence was established in most countries where we have an embassy. This presence became known as American Corners. Here is the brief description of the Corners today:

> [American Corners offer] … authoritative and up-to-date information about the U.S. via print and electronic resources, the American Corners organize cultural, educational, and English language learning interactive programs. The American Corners offer a welcoming and inspiring environment, trained staff, and modern technologies necessary to connect with Romanians, in person and virtually, in support of the U.S. Government policies and for a better understanding of the U.S. history and cultural values. (from the U.S. Embassy Bucharest website)

The concept originated in post-communist Russia. The idea was to find existing Russian libraries or cultural centers and make a deal with them: We give you U.S. books and materials, desktop computers, and free access to U.S. search engines; you give us a part-time librarian to manage the resources and access to your venue for our traveling performers. The value to our partners was that the material and equipment we provided created a new demand among students and the general public – increasing the library's support base. As the Corners grew in popularity, we attracted larger crowds and more media to our events, even in far-flung provincial cities. In essence, we reestablished the large cultural centers on an as-needed basis. We could program everything from American jazz ensembles to town hall meetings with the ambassador. The key was finding agreeable partner institutions.

The search for Romanian partners for our American Corners was largely a job for my local staff. They knew the country and could best assess how well a venue could offer consistent support. We were lucky in that our search took place in a welcoming environment. During my tour -- 2002-2005 -- Romania was still preparing for NATO and EU membership. This was a golden hour for a cultural affairs officer because many in the Romanian education and cultural communities were prepared to come forward and cooperate with us in the expectation that such agreements would help lock Romania into Western alliances and help their own careers with access to friendly officers at the U.S. embassy. By the time I left in 2005, we had established nine American Corners in the following cities: Bacau, Baia Mare, Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Craiova, Iasi, Timisoara, and Targu Mures. Nearly all were in provincial libraries that had large auditoriums we could use for free. We pushed out every U.S. expert speaker could find to fill those performance halls as well as consular officers who conducted town halls on visa services. Among the cultural activities we sent were modern dance and movement classes for high school and university students and an array of art instructors. The modern dance classes were particularly popular as Romanian youth were eager to learn break dancing and every kind of acrobatic and athletic body movement style. Until then their instructors had limited them to traditional ballet.

Ultimately, we had so many American Corners that my local staff started to get jealous of the one Romanian I had hired and put in charge of the whole program. Since significant travel was involved in the care and feeding of American Corners, to have one under your authority came to be considered a desirable perk. Everyone wanted a piece of the action. Fortunately, that issue did not come to a head until my successor arrived. I extended our battle lines well beyond headquarters. It fell to my successor to increase the logistic support.

American Corners, even today, in 2019, are a major embassy tool for extending the U.S. presence throughout the country. But their usefulness requires regular innovation since many people can now access the information we offer on their smartphones. The question of how to repurpose these low-cost, high-value investments would become one of my responsibilities in my final year in the Foreign Service.

Ambassador Initiatives: Archeology and Fortress Church Preservation

Aside from the money available to ambassadors through the Fund for Cultural Preservation, chiefs of mission also call on their PD Sections to spend their modest operating funds on ambassadorial initiatives. I was involved in three of these.

The first one related to archeology. The ambassador used to travel around Romania on the weekends on his own. After returning from a number of these trips, he remarked at how many archeological sites were fascinating but virtually unknown outside Romania. He was also impressed by the fortress churches built from the early renaissance to the baroque periods by waves of German settlers to Transylvania. A little bit of historical context would help here.

From 400 C.E., when the Roman Empire fell, the territories that comprise modern-day Romania began to take shape. The first is the Danube river basin, an area in southern Romania that became known as Wallachia. The second portion, Moldavia, is the eastern part of the country that runs from the mouth of the Danube north along the Prut River to Ukraine. The third part is the large central region known as Transylvania. There are other bits and pieces, but these are the three main areas.

All three regions have potential archeological sites that go all the way back to the Mesolithic Era (c. 7000 BCE). There have been rich finds related to Greek, Roman, and Byzantine civilizations . In Transylvania, it is more a question of preserving than excavating. For hundreds of years, the princes of Romania invited Germans to settle and tame the Transylvanian wilderness. Over time, the Germans built fortress churches of storybook splendor. Everything you could want from a castle -- crenelated walls, ramparts, moats, portcullises, towers -- all huddled on top of natural rises in the landscape.. These castles are now falling into decay because most of the ethnic German communities that used to live there departed for the reunited Germany. This is all the more regrettable because Roma/gypsy communities often grew up on the outskirts of these historic sites and have become ever more impoverished as the population left and tourism fell away.

Exploring Historic Romania: Ancient, Renaissance, Baroque

While I was in Romania, I took three car trips to examine the three regions myself. One trip went Northwest through Transylvania, exploring the old fortress churches, and ending in the border town where Elie Wiesel grew up. The second went Northeast to the region near the current nation of Moldova. There, Romanian Orthodox churches are richly painted with external and internal iconography. These churches also possess museum-quality collections of liturgical art going back to the 1400s. The religious authorities in the painted churches were willing to show me – a cultural attaché from the U.S. Embassy – some of their holdings. But when I suggested that they make their collections known to the wider public through digital photos on the internet, they demurred. They were afraid that wide-spread knowledge of their collections would lead to theft.

I arranged my third trip through a Romanian travel agency specializing in historical tourism. We examined some newly opened sites in the Wallachia/Moldavia regions. Most of these were small-scale excavations like an early Byzantine tomb with frescos showing the Apostle Paul with several women believed to be supporters of Christian evangelism. Roman law was still in force in the early Christian era and it allowed women to inherit family wealth when male heirs were scarce. Some of these women converted to Christianity and provided financial support for Christian evangelists. Their philanthropy won them permanent memorials in the early Romanian church as it did when they were previously patrons of pagan city projects.

Promoting Archeology, Mapping Historic Romania, and Marketing U.S. Wine

At the ambassador's request, I did some research to find U.S. universities and foundations most likely to be interested in archeology in Romania. He wrote to them describing his discoveries, urging the dispatch of even a small, exploratory archeological team that could be the first to document exciting new sites. He ran up against the basic fact that archeological funds are limited and U.S. funders look for the headline-grabbing sites. Romania's ancient heritage was not quite on their radar screen and none expressed interest.

Separately, to draw attention to the need to preserve the decaying fortress churches, the ambassador asked me to find a local cartographer who could develop maps with tourist routes through the Transylvania castle area. The goal was to increase tourism and bring some economic development back to these relatively remote and underserved areas of the country. By luck, at an embassy reception, I ran into a descendant of the German community who held a seat in the Romanian legislature. He also owned a printing

business with access to mapping software. I described the ambassador's project to him and he was enthused. No one had come up with this idea before and it was worth a shot.

Over the next few weeks I collaborated with him to put the ambassador's vision into print. Ultimately, the fortress castle tourist guide was published in Romanian, German, Hungarian (since Transylvania has a large Hungarian-speaking minority) and English. The end product was, if I do say so myself, a beautiful job. The photo and history of each church covered one side of the map while large-scale silhouettes of each site appeared on the road map on the opposite side. The public diplomacy section used its funds for a first printing and gave the copyright to our cartographer. He, in turn, promised to keep it in print, at least for a while.

The ambassador had another idea for supporting the fortress churches. He wanted to host an American wine show whose proceeds would go to a non-profit dedicated to preserving the fortress churches. The U.S. wine show would also be an opportunity for American vintners to break into the developing market for wine in Romania, a country whose per capita income was likely to grow in the future, and with it a taste for upmarket consumables. Get in on the ground floor before the Europeans drink up market share.

This project was a bit more of a caprice than you might imagine. I had no wealthy oenophile friends whose expertise I might consult. In fact, I had no wealthy friends at all. I did not know how the U.S. wine industry worked, or how to pique the interest of American vintners in a wine show at the ambassador's residence in Bucharest. Our embassy Foreign Commercial Service was not interested in being helpful. So I began cold calling U.S. wineries in California. Calls had to be placed after working hours in Bucharest because of the 10-hour time difference between Romania and the Napa Valley. In the process, I learned something not terribly surprising about wine-sellers. Their public telephone numbers go directly to their marketing departments. You could not get an owner on the line. My pleas to the sales departments went unanswered. Francis Ford Coppola, who also owned a winery, might have considered a donation given my earlier work on his behalf. But nooo. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "How sharper than the serpent's tooth doth sting the ingratitude of a filmmaker." The ambassador was not pleased with my lack of progress.

Were it not for the help of the U.S. Foreign Agriculture Service rep at the embassy, I think the whole enterprise would have failed. Through his Department of Agriculture connections he was able to get the tightfisted American wine producers to cough up a few cases for sampling. Even the Coppola vineyard did send a nice case of cabernet (I know because I bought two bottles myself.) The ambassador cast his net wider. He reasoned that a charity event to renovate Germanic fortress churches might interest the German

ambassador to Romania. He was right. The German embassy scared up some cases of Rhine wine to help fill out the event.

Now to the gala itself. I conscripted my local Romanian staff and any interns or family members I could find to move the crates of wine from the customs authority to the ambassador's residence. Since the residence had no wine cellar we distributed the bottles throughout downstairs rooms as best we could and hoped that the infiltration of summer heat would not boil their contents into vinegar. Next, the gears of the ambassador's invitation machine were oiled and cranked into action. Who would the ambassador like to invite? Who were the deep-pocketed donors we could put the touch on? My staff and I looked at each other in dismay. Romania did not have a glitterati ready to drop fat stacks on good causes. To the extent that there was a monied class in Romania at all, it was composed of former communist apparatchiks who had held on to remunerative state assets. Add a few *nouveau riche* and you have the entire social grantinée of the country. None had yet developed a taste for philanthropy. The logical choices for invitees were local food, beverage, and hospitality managers, as well as others in high places to whom the odor of corruption did not yet strongly adhere.

We did get good media coverage, but the attendance was disappointing. By the end of the night, the haul did not quite reach five figures. Worse still, we were left several dozen bottles of unsold product. The Foreign Commercial Service office wanted no part in marketing the remaining donation. Once again my local staff leapt into action. I don't know how, but they sold the remaining bottles and raked in just enough dough to get the final donation amount up to some $10,000. Less than what the ambassador had hoped for, but certainly a respectable amount.

Preserving the Historic Core of Bucharest

With the success of the fortress churches map, the ambassador thought that a second tourist map of Bucharest's historic Lipscani quarter would be helpful in the same way. Bucharest was once a typical East European city. It had old, elegant sections, and more modern, fashionable quarters. But, it did not have a Baron Haussmann or Frederick Law Olmstead to give it a unique urban vision. In many places, handsome 19th century mansions and public buildings sat cheek-by-jowl with decaying hovels. That changed considerably during the dictatorship of Nicolai Ceausescu (1965-89). He decided that the North Koreans had the right idea: create a cult of personality and build huge structures to celebrate yourself and your centrally planned state. Ceausescu had whole sections of Bucharest razed for his vanity projects. His flagship of ugly monumentality was the Great Hall of the Legislature. It was conceived as a gigantic Soviet wedding cake in stone. Ceausescu called upon "volunteers" to erect his Megalotorium. Thus, the word

"volunteer" lost its gloss of civic pride and became associated with a *corvée* that was resented and avoided whenever possible. Stone masons shaped granite and marble into ashlars and columns. Nuns wove tapestries and rugs for stadium-sized chambers. And workers… well… they shoveled and pumped and shouldered the loads for years to raise Ceausescu's monstrolith. Romanians claim that it is the second-largest building in the world after the Pentagon. Maybe it is. But one thing's for sure – it's impossible to use. Many of the rooms are not designed on a human scale. Maintaining the building and using it for legislative purposes is more expensive than simply having Cristo heave a colossal drop cloth over it and call it art. Despite offers, Romania has resisted efforts to monetize the pharaonic colossus by converting it into a Las Vegas-style casino and video arcade. I suppose I get it. That would dishonor the labor of so many Romanians who spent their productive years enslaved to its completion. Thus it stands, a eulogy in stone to the long-suffering Romanian people who survived so much capricious adversity.

Q: But you were talking about the map of the historic center of Bucharest… Lipscani?

TAUBER: Quite right. Lipscani is the only historic part of Bucharest that survived somewhat intact. It could be much shinier and jollier if it were turned into a gentrified pedestrian area. But anyone trying to renovate the area runs into problems. There are ownership issues, there are engineering issues, and there are Opinions on exactly how it should be restored. Walking the streets of Lispscani I saw ramshackle storefronts desperately needing an architectural makeover squeezed between trendy pubs and boutiques. I always had to watch my step. Feral dogs left behind prodigious amounts of stinky shoe glue. Broken sidewalks, open manholes, and poor drainage made the area a hazard to inattentive walkers. Lipscani was a textbook example of post-communist urban mismanagement. So why bother publishing a walking tour map? Well, sometimes you have to envision it before you can deliver it.

This time we found a partner in a local non-profit, the Pro Patria Fund. Its mission was to preserve old Bucharest. We gave them a grant because they had access to both the information on Lipscani and the technical ability to realize an eye-catching map. Once again, the final product was a beautiful publication that tourists, students, and even Romanians could use with ease.

Flag Day and Friday Night at the Movies: Engaging Youth

One of the embassy's top goals was to increase outreach to young people. After all, very soon, some among them will be important contacts. We conducted many programs, but two were particularly successful, sustainable, and cheap.

U.S. Flag Day Event at the Ambassador's Residence

June 14 commemorates the adoption of the Stars and Stripes as the U.S. national flag. It is also just a few weeks away from the biggest reception of the U.S. diplomatic year – July 4th. By early June, embassies all over the world are in overdrive to prepare the reception for the hundreds of guests who will get a coveted Wonka Golden Ticket to The Social Event of the Year. Invitees to this august occasion are generally government and private sector VIPs -- the most important embassy contacts. Notable by their absence are young people. How can we make them feel part of this celebration?

One day I was rooting through the backroom of our small auditorium and found a couple of boxes with the flags of all 50 states. It struck me that we could use these as teaching tools for high school students to explain federalism. From there the idea grew into an event at the ambassador's residence. Students would set up small presentations next to a state flag and the ambassador would choose the winners. This modest event would not interfere with preparations for July 4th and give the ambassador a dress rehearsal for his speech to be delivered a few weeks later.

My staff and I fanned out to Bucharest high schools. Our offer was $200 to each school to field students who agreed to select a state and show how it runs its own budgets, legal system, and electoral offices. The reaction was positive, but not huge. About a dozen schools agreed, yielding a total of about 50 students. But once the students got started, and word spread, we had to add more schools and the number of participants doubled. Excitement was in the air.

Come June 14th my staff and I waited at the ambassador's gate as busloads of costumed high schoolers arrived with all kinds of U.S. state swag. I don't know how they did it on just $200, but there were farmers in overalls, 49ers with gold pans, honey bees (Utah), native Americans, a couple of chorus line dancers, and, of course, cowboys. The kids way over-performed. It was a mardi gras of federalism. How do you choose winners with this kind of participation? Fortunately, we planned that no one would walk away a loser. Everyone received certificates of participation signed by the ambassador and a pizza and ice cream lunch with a movie on the lawn of the residence. It was absolutely heartwarming to see these Romanian high school students so jazzed about getting into the ambassador's residence and demonstrating their knowledge of U.S. states. In subsequent years the numbers of participants for Flag Day grew to include some schools from outside of Bucharest. Embassy family members volunteered to help the kids represent their state. The event took on the look and feel of a folk festival. As far as I know, it is still celebrated as a public diplomacy event to this day.

The Way to a Teen's Heart: Popcorn and Ice Cream

Our older Romanian staff regretted that we had not attracted teenagers to our (aging) auditorium. In previous years it had been a major destination for teen activities. We had access to several Hollywood films, although copyright restrictions allowed only older movies, limited our advertising, and permitted no more than about 90 people to attend the screening. We strategized on how to get kids back into our venue when they could see many of these films on TV, or in pirated editions on a now antique piece of technology called a video cassette player. I asked my staff, "What if we provide free snacks? Would that help?" In no time we had purchased a real popcorn machine and an ice cream freezer. Somehow, with a tiny budget for food and drink, we managed to fill these teen magnets with kettle corn and popsicles once a month. That did it. Once high schoolers knew they could get free popcorn and ice cream, our creaky old seats were filled with adolescents happily talking through every old chestnut we could lay our hands – the Poseidon Adventure, the Towering Inferno, even Kramer vs. Kramer.

The three years 2002-05 were among the busiest and most productive of my career. I loved the opportunity to innovate. I loved my staff – they could do anything. And we won the confidence of both the embassy and Washington in our ability to produce cultural and educational programs on short notice and within budget. As a reward, we received an extra $1 million from USAID to conduct small-scale civic development programs because we could quickly sign grants below USAID's minimum and still accomplish their goals. Some of these projects included training high school students in investigative journalism or how to spot and evade human traffickers. Others trained community developers in how to promote volunteerism in a country where the expression "volunteer" had long meant forced work. Similarly, when Washington had an unexpected cultural or educational program that needed additional stops in Eastern Europe, we could always accommodate them. In one case, we had six weeks to stage a tour of Romania for two NCAA basketball players. In spite of the fact that this program was in the summer, when school was out, we organized crowds and media to cover basketball clinics in several cities. With all my staff otherwise engaged or on holiday, I sent our Cultural Section intern to escort the players. She reported back from each stop. The tour was a roaring success, and not only for the embassy. The intern who led the tour later dated and married one of the players.

The Blooper Reel

Q: Is this the moment to tie a bow on this assignment? Move on to the next tour?

TAUBER: Well, not everything was peaches and cream. I gave a small grant to a local modern dance company to develop a live performance. They were working with a visiting U.S. artist – that was the U.S. link that allowed the grant. He was teaching them new choreographies that would help attract audiences to the underfunded dance space they occupied. I went to the final dress rehearsal of their production and everything seemed fine. My colleague, the press officer, made sure the media would be at the premier. On opening night, I sat in the front row with the art critics and various VIPs. The performance went without a hitch, until about half-way through the performance. Then the dancers got naked. Yup. The Full Monty. I guessed they thought this would be the *coup de theatre* that would fill seats for the rest of the run.

At that time I used to carry a small satchel with me. It held my Franklin Planner, a flashlight, and a few other necessities for emergencies. One thing I didn't pack was a disguise. Until that point in my life I did not know how quickly the human body could sweat through a wool suit. The answer: very fast. I also received a number of other anatomy lessons as I sat pinioned to my seat with press representatives on either side. For example, did you know that even in low light, a facial blush of mortification photographs perfectly? Also, the percussive throbbing of one's own heartbeat can actually drown out the pounding of kettle drums in a live pit band. I will be forever grateful to my dancers for this free lesson in the human autonomic response system. All I could think of, as the dancers waggled, was that some congressman would get a VCR tape of their bouncing buns and play it on a monitor on the floor of the House. He would demand to know why some gay diplomat invested taxpayer money in a pornographic prance. I don't know how, but at least in this case, what happened in Bucharest stayed in Bucharest. A career-ending denouement was averted.

There were other poor choices. An American installation artist planted a series of black lights the size of Olympic javelins on a Romanian beach. It drew some curious on-lookers but otherwise went quietly into obscurity. It made me wonder if all the work I did to help the artist get his ultraviolet spears through Romanian customs was worth it. Then there was my brief attempt at creating a protégé. A Romanian photographer returned from New York with interesting photos of skyscrapers. They were not direct shots. Instead, he captured their reflections in the mirrored windows of neighboring buildings. Such originality! It was a visual meditation on how our constructed environment is never fully seen, that we "reflect" on a building's value and beauty depending on our vantage point. Oh, brother. There must have been some potent poppy seeds in the pastry I ate while the photographer pitched me his show at the cafe. Let's just say that my protégé's exhibition, despite ample advertisement, was under-attended.

Q: I've neglected to ask about social life. Anything interesting on that front?

TAUBER: No. Not for want of looking. But there was little in the way of organized LGBT life in Romania and it remained rather backward in that way for some time.

Q: What next, then?

In spite of mistakes, and a memorable public rebuke from the ambassador for delaying his search for American archeologists, my tour ended with a Meritorious Honor Award. I had found a way to excel. Just as importantly, I had the backing of my boss – a veteran public diplomacy officer, and my DCM in bidding on my next post. I was now confident that I had found my calling. For the first time I felt that I could actually move up to a larger and more complex assignment. But that's not how it turned out.

Q: What happened?

TAUBER: When you change specializations or "cones," you are a newbie even if you already have 15 years of experience in the Foreign Service. No one owes you any favors and you have few recommenders outside of your immediate post. To get attention fast, you need to bid on a press job in a high visibility post. This was 2005 and the war in Iraq was THE issue. You needed to go somewhere where you were in the thick of defending the administration's policies on counter-terrorism and nation-building in Iraq if you wanted to get noticed in the public diplomacy field. For me this posed two problems.

First, I didn't want another hardship post. You may think that Bucharest is the Paris of Eastern Europe, but it had hardships that were more nuisances. Feral dogs wandered the streets and I did get bit, occasioning a series of rabies injections. The water is undrinkable water due to heavy metal infiltration. Coal dust comes in even through closed windows. I came down with fungal infections whose size and bodily locations I will forebear from describing. The medical system was inadequate for all but the most rudimentary service, and there was a prevalence of sprained/broken ankles from slipping on broken sidewalks, especially when ice-covered in winter. I wanted a break.

Second, I couldn't see myself in AIP (Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan) as a press officer. The work of a press officer requires the pugnacity of a boxer. In addition to mixing it up verbally with unfriendly media on a daily basis, you literally have to be ready to throw yourself at a press gaggle to prevent them from discountenancing your VIPs. I was not made for such a mixed media fight club. But it was precisely this skill that the Department was looking for when it considered whether you had the chops for higher responsibility in public diplomacy. And, by 2005, the administration's management of Iraq was going south in a big way. In December of that year, President Bush admitted

that U.S. military operations were based on faulty intelligence. You would need to be ready to fight negative press on the U.S. presence in Iraq pretty much every day. I just couldn't see it.

So I bid on quiet press jobs and large cultural jobs. None panned out. I was again at the end of the bidding cycle wondering why, after what I thought was a successful tour, I could not find another challenging job.

Q: You seem to find yourself in this situation more often than not.

TAUBER: Oh, dear. You *have* been paying attention. Eventually, an unexpected opening presented itself in another Danubian capital. With nowhere left to go, I found myself literally up the river as cultural officer in Budapest, a smaller job in every way compared to Bucharest.

Lessons Learned in Bucharest

1. Don't be tardy to meetings. It conveys to others that you are not a good manager of your time and that you don't care about theirs.

2. Be sure you know the Ambassador's deadline even if he doesn't mention one. It is better to submit something in a timely manner, even if it doesn't offer a perfect outcome. Explain why it is imperfect and ask if you should continue to pursue the matter.

3. Try not to stay until 7:30 most nights. By the end of the Romania tour, I had acquired the bad habit of working until exhaustion. This had a lot of bad effects on my body that would take years to reverse.

2005-2008
U.S. Embassy Budapest, Hungary: Cultural Affairs Officer

Q: When did you arrive in Budapest?

The Most Beautiful City on the Danube

It was September 2005. This was right after I went back to Washington for the shake-and-bake course in Hungarian language. My job was not language designated, so I got about 6 weeks of basic Hungarian. We did have a few lectures on Central Europe and Hungary. I never found a single book on Hungary like Lucian Boia's *Romania* that

insightfully captured the national myth and character of Hungary, so I made do with what I could find. There were some generalities on which all scholars of the region seemed to agree. First, Central Europe's often gloomy climate contributes to the pessimistic attitude of its inhabitants. This was especially true in Hungary. On top of that, Hungary's sad history of foreign invasion and suzerainty made Hungarians prone to expect worst case scenarios. There was a perception, repeated throughout modern Hungarian history, that Hungarians were more prone to suicide than any other European people. Whether or not this is literally true, there is no doubt that Hungarians do have an outsized problem with suicide. One recent article in *The Annals of General Psychiatry* entitled, "Suicide in Hungary-Epidemiological and Clinical Perspectives," notes that suicide rates in Hungary were "unexpectedly high" in the 20th century. Although the suicide rate in Hungary has come down a bit, it was still higher than the worldwide average when I was there. (Zoltan Rihmer, Xenia Gonda, corresponding author, Balazs Kapitany, and Peter Dome, 2013 Jun 26. doi: 10.1186/1744-859X-12-21. Downloaded April 8, 2019 at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3698008/)

On the other hand, for someone preparing to go out to Budapest for three years as a cultural officer, there is plenty of good news. Hungarians are lovers of music and poetry. They are also voracious readers: just take a ride on public transit anywhere and you'll see nearly everyone rapt in a newspaper story, magazine article, or book. I even saw H.P. Lovecraft in translation in a bookshop in Budapest. Another generalization I learned was: ask Hungarians what they do for a living. They will tell you, "I am a musician/poet/ author/artist. My day job just supports my real vocation." This turned out to be true often enough to be noticeable. Finally, Hungarians have a devotion to education. A nation of only 10 million people, Hungary has produced 13 Nobel Prize winners who have made world-historic contributions in math, sciences, and arts.

When I arrived in Budapest I noticed right away that, in terms of infrastructure, it was a generation ahead of Bucharest. I went immediately to my permanent quarters -- a nice, two-story house in the Buda suburbs. The only problem was distance. It was far from the embassy – one hour door-to-door. The house was big enough to host modest representational events for our Fulbright scholars and their local contacts in the Hungarian academic community, but none of my other contacts would want to venture out to the leafy suburbs for a reception chez moi.

Q: How about the embassy size and public affairs office?

TAUBER: I'd put it at about a mid-sized embassy. By the mid-2000s Hungary was a member of NATO and EU. As a result, the U.S. was downsizing its commitment there. The Peace Corps had left, USAID was down to one small office that supported regional

projects, and there was no U.S. military presence to speak of. The embassy building stood on the flat side of the city, the Pest side. It was part of a quadrangle of buildings with 19th century facades that surrounded a green space about the size of a football field. The public diplomacy section was in a separate high-rise building a few blocks away from the embassy.

The public diplomacy office consisted of three Americans: a public affairs officer, a press/media officer, and me. I liked everyone, and we made a good team. I supervised a secretary and four local hires: one covered short-term visitor programs, one covered cultural programs, and one covered Fulbright and everything else. The fourth was a shared office assistant who took care of office equipment, driving, and other tasks.

Within two years of my arrival we replaced two of my local hires due to retirement. Both of these retirements had to be encouraged. It was difficult. Both of them had been highly respected specialists – one was a Holocaust survivor. They had seen the apogee of their contributions to the section in the years immediately following the fall of communism in Hungary (1989-2000). But, 16 years later they were simply not capable of doing anything more than routine tasks. At first they did not want to leave, and took my suggestions as personal insults. Ultimately, the section chief had to help convince them. That was stressful.

After the retirements, my cultural unit in the public diplomacy section was composed of three women and one man. All spoke excellent English. In fact, my Fulbright assistant was a language genius. He spoke English without an accent and served as ambassador's interpreter from time to time. This is a remarkable accomplishment when you consider that he had never been to the U.S. They all worked hard and were perfectly reliable. They were particularly adept in navigating the many shoals of Hungarian bureaucracy through which we had to navigate to bring our programs safely to port.

Q: What were the embassy goals you supported with your programs?

There were three major goals while I was there: 1) get Hungary into the visa waiver system; 2) get Hungary to host a military airfield capable of receiving C-130's, the U.S. military's large transport planes; and 3): address the Hungarian government's request to return a property known as Tancsics Prison. Located in Buda -- the hilly side of the city – the complex of buildings known as Tancsics Prison housed the Embassy Marine Guard force. An excellent description of the building's history can be found at this U.S. Embassy website https://hu.usembassy.gov/embassy/budapest/embassy-history/historic-complex-tancsics-mihaly-street/.

Of these three goals, I was only really active on the Tancsics property return. The Tancsics complex once served as a prison for some of Hungary's most famous 19th century poets and freedom fighters. Every school child knew its name. The Hungarian government had plans to turn it into a major tourist site. During the visit of President George W. Bush to Hungary in 2006, the Hungarians organized a press conference where their prime minister announced that the two sides had agreed to begin negotiations on the return of Tancsics prison. Apparently, President Bush did not have the same understanding, but he didn't want to contradict the prime minister on such an important historical symbol. Negotiations began.

The basic deal would be to exchange Tancsics for two buildings adjoining the current U.S. chancery. This would double the size of the embassy, allowing both the Marines and the public affairs section to move into the expanded chancery. We would lose in overall square footage, but we would gain in convenience by centralizing our operations in a strategically located and historic square in central Budapest. Before we turned over the Tancsics property, we wanted to demonstrate our interest in Hungarian culture using the space. My staff was acquainted with a deputy curator at the National Museum. After a few visits, we got their agreement to host an exhibit of lithographs and other works on paper that generally stay in National Museum storage because of their fragility to light and mishandling. The museum agreed, I should say, as long as the deputy curator was present when the exhibit was open to the public.

Remember that this was the Marine Security Guard barracks. It turns out that the best room for the exhibit was their exercise room. It was long, had little exterior light, and a controlled entry/exit. So we agreed with the Marines that, for a small contribution to their Marine Corps Ball fund, they would make the barbells scarce for a week, and we could use the space. Our curator from the national gallery arranged the show with a rope cord around the pictures as proximity protection. And then the school kids arrived.

Everything was going swimmingly. The Prime Minister's wife came with her little daughter. Next, a 6th grade class marched around the exhibit. The teacher sternly instructed her charges not to touch the *objets*. What the teachers failed to order was the removal of bags, umbrellas, and backpacks. A sixth-grader, with a backpack as big as the Ritz, turned a corner and knocked over one of the glass-covered pictures.. Down it went, its easel folding in behind. The easel tore right through the lithograph, shattering the glass cover like a karate chop through a drywall. I saw my life, or at least that part of my life devoted to this project, flash before my eyes. My painstaking persuasion that convinced the National Gallery to loan us the lithographs… my work to turn a Marine exercise room into an exhibit space… the precautions taken to prevent touching or joggling of the easels… Everything ruined by one inattentive 6th grader.

The calamity-maker convulsed into hiccoughing tears. Her adult escorts closed around her -- matriarch elephants protecting a calf. They all stared at me like I was a predator ready to strike. Are you kidding? That little brat's giggling pirouette destroyed a work of art, ruined my reputation with the National Gallery, and could, quite possibly, result in a lawsuit against me for damages, and I'm the dangerous one? What did these adult minders think I would do to a 6th grader who had wrought such a catastrophe? Crank down one of the old horse bridle hooks and hang her up by the back of her leotard? The idea did occur to me. I saw her flailing over a sign that read:

Ecoliére á Wedgie
First Prize
Performance Art Category
Budapest Youth Art Competition

But I suppressed that geste of poetic justice. In the mayhem, the National Gallery curator ran forward to grab the lacerated lithograph and spirit it to safety. What happened next? Honestly, I can't remember. All I can say is that I did not have to call my personal liability insurance company. Somehow, I was spared civil action.

Q: Let's move on to the more specific goals of the public affairs section?

TAUBER: Yes, my first boss had only a year left in his tour and was planning to retire afterwards. He was a Virgo, an earth sign, not typically the best match for a fire sign like Aires. Linda describes Virgos as fastidious, perfectionist, and careful planners. One of my boss' proudest achievements, he often recalled to me, was erecting a new U.S. public diplomacy building in a previous tour in Poland. He put on a hardhat and went down to the building site every day to be sure everything was going according to plan. In Budapest, he kept a clean desk, an exact schedule, and faultless grooming. It was when he turned his improving eye to me that things got sticky.

The Advent of Blackberrys and the 24/7 Connection

One more thing about Virgos. They share Mercury as their ruling planet with Gemini. This makes the otherwise cautious Virgo vulnerable to "shiny object syndrome," a readiness to adopt the latest thing. As soon as I arrived, my boss gifted me with a

personal digital assistant. I can't remember the exact brand, but he was proud of his exhaustive research into the PDA market and wanted the public diplomacy section to be the embassy's first adopters of this technology. In theory, I could telephone, email, and draft documents on the same handheld device. In point of fact, it was impossible to use without frequent resort to the technical assistance line. It fit no pocket found in human business suits, and needed to nap in its cradle like a cranky baby whenever not in use. Its instruction manual, from which I was expected to teach myself all of its capabilities, was the size of an anatomy textbook.

(N.B.: Dear reader, never give an Aries male a how-to manual and expect him to read it. He would rather misassemble DIY furniture three times before admitting, with ill-grace, that he had to read the instructions.)

Fortunately, Blackberrys made their debut throughout the embassy shortly afterward. My PDA was consigned to the junk drawer. The Blackberry was pocket-sized and, at first, only sent and received emails and telephone calls. Later, you could access unclassified cables and draft short documents, but this was as much a nuisance as a help. Try drafting a document on a 2"x 2" screen with correction keys hidden under the tilde or umlaut. And woe betide if you accidentally deleted something. There was no "go back" key until several generations later. Everyone suffered with the Blackberry's limitations and the spotty cellular coverage in Hungary at that time. Regardless of how difficult it was to maintain a connection, the Blackberry is a historical inflection point. It signaled the beginning of 24/7 accessibility. Now, you were always a phone call away.

After this, my Virgo boss turned to perfecting my management skills. He was an ardent believer that ISO is the royal road to management mastery. He signed me up for the one-week course in Nicosia. Well, I did learn that Cyprus is a nice place to visit in early spring. To this day I have no idea what I was supposed to learn from ISO training.

Q: With all this training, did you become a better public diplomacy officer?

"Murdering your reputation is a form of suicide."

TAUBER: Ultimately, yes. But it was a rutted road to success. My introductory event with the ambassador was a flop. I had been at post only a few days when my boss selected me to accompany him to a Rotary meeting. Sounded easy enough. I'd been to Rotary meetings before. My boss gave me no further instructions. This was odd until you realize that the trip would take place during a day when my boss was preparing a major private party at his residence. All of his meticulousness was getting used up on the event. So I asked my staff if it was typical to prepare remarks since I had no tasking and no one

instructed me on what the Ambassador wanted to talk about. Everyone said no, the ambassador could speak off-the-cuff. The careful reader will recall a lesson I learned in my first assignment as a consular officer: Always contact the organization where the ambassador will be speaking. Find out what they expect and prepare the ambassador accordingly. But instead of following this rule, I listened to my staff.

On the long ride to the Rotary meeting, in the ambassador's car, where the ambassador and I were the only passengers, I had ample opportunity to learn of the ambassador's disappointment at my lack of preparation. Fortunately, the ambassador was a Rotarian of long standing and could wing it with this audience. This was a Friday, so I had all weekend to inhale the bad odor my reputation for reliability now gave off as far as the ambassador was concerned. Although invited to my boss' party that night, I did not have the wherewithal to put on my glad rags and affix my game face. I gave it a miss. As a result of this infraction, I was stricken from the guest list for all future parties at his home. Virgos review attendance. Fastidiously.

Then there was the Ambassador's Education Summit. The ambassador sat on the board of a prestigious Midwest university that had acquired an enviable endowment from the private sector. He now wanted to bring that university's president to Budapest to instruct Hungarian counterparts on how to do the same thing now that their state funding was starting to wither.

The ambassador gave me the task of rounding up the Hungarian university leadership and staging the event. The problem was that I could not sell what looked like a winning offer. I personally called on many rectors or other officials and explained the ambassador's offer. They simply would not bite.

Q: Why not?

TAUBER: Because they were rabid anti-capitalists. Academe in Hungary was one of the last bastions of *ancien regime* socialists. They did not want to change the way they did business or revise curricula to address the needs of a post-communist labor market. Many of the university officials and professors spoke no English and could not access the growing world of globalized information. When I reported this to the ambassador, and urged that we abandon a project that would not attract its target audience, I found that the ambassador simply went around me. He wanted his summit and called in my colleague, the press officer, to make it happen. I was obviously not equal to the task. A remark from Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* is useful here, "To murder one's reputation is a form of suicide." In Hungary, a nation known for pessimism, perhaps I had fallen under a spell of defeatism. When the press officer returned from the ambassador's office with her tasking,

her face pinched in consternation, I realized I had become that worst of all Foreign Service Officers – the Foister. These self-promoting careerists give lip service to team spirit while unloading their most difficult assignments on their colleagues. To be thought of as a member of this disreputable club brought the hairs on the back of my neck to attention. A choking regret balled up in my throat. I took the tasking back.

Resurrecting Your Reputation

At first I thought of hiring a group of actors to play the roles of rectors, provosts, and deans. I had made the acquaintance of an impresario who directed a large, modern theater capable of supporting plays, dance, and concerts. I had no doubt he could supply the personnel. But as I followed this train of thought I realized it would certainly go off the rails. An actor wouldn't be able to improvise about the Bologna Process or describe the labyrinthian process whereby state money made its way to university coffers.

Instead, I appealed to Huba Brookner, the Executive Director of the local Fulbright Commission. Everyone loved Huba. He had been the Exec forever when I arrived and would remain so for many years to come. His connections in the Hungarian academic community were broad and deep and grew with each passing year. Together, we contrived a plan. First, Huba secured the use of a famous military reception hall for the event. It was a beautiful old building that few ever got to see. At midday there would be a catered, sit-down lunch with a keynote speaker. Coffee with pastries buoyed the guests as the late afternoon restoratives. After a cocktail that featured vintages of the beloved local wine, Tokaj. ("The Wine of Kings and the King of Wines" goes the old Hungarian saying.) There was also a buffet dinner featuring the heaviest of Hungarian gastronomic delicacies. A student quartet played baroque favorites and smoking was allowed in the large reception hall.

Huba knew his men. The hand-delivered engraved invitations advertised all the festivities. This helped many a university official change his RSVP from regret to accept. In the diplomacy biz, this is known as, "communicating cross-culturally to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals." It is one of the precepts on which Foreign Service Officers are evaluated.

Writing Evaluations That Get Promotions

Speaking of which, this might be a good moment to take a look inside the yearly evaluation that determines whether an FSO will be promoted. It is composed of three sections. In the first section, the FSO writes a page on his outstanding accomplishments. On the second page, his boss writes an evaluation on how well he fulfilled all his

responsibilities. The third page is a short review of both by the next level of supervision – either the Deputy Chief of Mission or the Ambassador. The key to promotion is the second page. You need to get your boss to rhapsodize about your achievements. If your boss' praise does not sing like a diva, if his metrics do not pop the eyes of the promotion panel like Halloween googly peepers, if his dismount – urging promotion – does not get a 10 from the Russian judge, then you might as well trim your evaluation into rectangular sheets and place them in the restroom as hand wipes.

I never quite got the hang of self-promotion. This helps explain why my career never prospered above the middling sort. Below, Description #1 is the verbatim statement I used to convince the promotion panel of my promotability. It refers to the Ambassador's Education Summit. Following that, Description #2 is how I *should* have written it.

> #1) The Ambassador's Education Summit in late June was a milestone (Hackneyed. Every officer's accomplishment is a "milestone.") in demonstrating American methods of building university endowments. Thirty rectors of Hungary's largest state-funded universities attended. I drafted the Ambassador's opening speech and prepped our two keynote speakers to amplify the Ambassador's theme of partnering with the private sector to improve university infrastructure and curricula. (Big deal, everyone writes speeches.) In particular, they urged listeners to conduct joint research and marketing with private sector firms and create curriculum advisory boards so that local businesses could offer internships targeted to higher-value jobs. Local corporate executives from Alcoa, General Electric, and Coca-Cola, among others, suggested how to replicate American successes in Hungary. At the reception that followed, paid for by the companies at my request, agreements were reached between some of the university administrators and local company executives to explore potential cooperative ventures. (Passive voice. Hosting a cost-free reception? That's a baseline. That's what we *trained* you to do.) This marked a successful first step for the Ambassador's goal of convincing Hungarian university administrators to begin cooperative ventures with U.S. institutions of higher learning. It also broadened our contacts among university rectors. (Big deal. What did those rectors do for you? Amplify a policy statement? Host a U.S. official? Contribute to the Fulbright Commission?)
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> Now this would be the moment, if I had a mentor, that he or she would rewrite this paragraph as follows:
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> #2) The Ambassador's Education Summit (June 2006) gave Hungarian university leaders the guidebook on how to attract private sector funds to

build their endowments as state support diminishes. The Ambassador and his expert guests from Washington University urged Hungarian rectors to: 1) modernize university infrastructure; 2) learn how to market the products of corporate-university research; and 3) recalibrate curriculum and establish internships to prepare students for openings in a new labor market. I ensured that 30 top Hungarian university officials spent the day building connections with U.S. universities. This opened doors to sales of American education products and services. Afterwards, I followed-up with the local American Chamber of Commerce to initiate internships for Hungarian students. The results: the first Hungarian MBA interns at the local Coca Cola distributor won a company award for their marketing project -- an expansion of vending machines on campuses and in transit hubs. The Education Summit helped me gain credibility with top Hungarian university officials – social capital useful in securing their assistance with other mission goals, including the provision of free meeting space for Fulbright Alumni organizations.

Reality: the attendance at the Education Summit was thin. Yes, thirty university reps came and most of them had "rector" somewhere in their titles. The rest of the seats were filled with our Fulbright Commission staff and other ringers. I did make some valuable university contacts and learned more about the byzantine world of post-communist colleges in Hungary than I probably needed to know. Generally, younger Hungarian university officials were ready and eager for change while their elders feared obsolescence and dismissal. Like the Children of Israel in the Sinai, these older Hungarian educators would have to leave the scene before a new generation could enter into covenants with the private sector and international partners. I did see the beginnings of new American connections in a number of provincial universities. The University of Pecs stands out in this regard. They were developing STEM programs and a medical curriculum in English to attract tuition-paying foreign students. They were working toward U.S. accreditation and the lucrative exchange programs that would follow.

Q: Did this restore the ambassador's confidence in you?

TAUBER: Somewhat. I did get one more success that pleased him before the stars realigned and everything changed.

Save the Males

In 1995, Hungarian male life expectancy stood at 67 years. It was among the lowest in Europe. Moreover, according to a 2009 Hungarian journal article, the mortality rate for

Hungarian men ages 40 to 69 had risen from 12.2 to 16.2 per thousand (33%) since the fall of communism. By comparison, mortality among 40 to 69-year-old Hungarian women decreased from 9.6 to 7.8 per thousand. ("Why do Hungarian Men Die Early?" Koop, M, Skrabski, A. *Neuropsychopharmacol Hungary*. 2009. September; 11(3): pp. 141-9. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20128393 May 9, 2019.)

Q: Was suicide a key factor?

TAUBER: Yes, but the greatest risk factors for Hungarian men were related to diet, smoking, and alcohol consumption. According to the WHO European Health Report 2018, some 60% of Hungarian men are overweight and 25% are obese. Fatal car crashes for men are 10/100,000 and suicides are 35/100,000. In all cases, Hungary was among the highest third in male mortality rates in Europe. In essence, Hungarian men needed to change their habits if they wanted to live longer. (Retrieved from http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/288645/European-health-report-2015-full-book-en.pdf May 9,2019)

The ambassador asked me to use the cultural and educational tools at my disposal to assist Hungary's Men's Health Week. It was a Ministry of Health initiative that outfitted a couple of buses with basic health measurement tools, vaccines, and plenty of recommendations on how to reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke, respiratory cancers, colorectal cancer, and cirrhosis of the liver. The buses drove around the country getting local media coverage at each stop. I don't remember exactly what I did to help the ministry, but I do remember those buses. They gave me an idea. The ambassador left shortly after this event. My Virgo boss retired even before the event took place. My new supervisor was a Taurus. As keen as my first boss was in perfecting me with training, my second boss was skeptical. His introduction to my work was the Education Summit. That trip-up, regardless of how well the final event went, colored his view of me until nearly the end of my tour. Here is Linda on the other characteristics of a Taurus boss:

- Speaking of obstinacy, there's no telling a Taurean he (or she) is obstinate. In the bull's mind he's not stubborn at all. He's patient. It's a matter of semantics.

- The truth is that Taurus is as stubborn as a human can be and not actually turn to stone.

- It will be frustrating when he refuses to budge an inch for your most exciting concepts, and when he won't let you try out your new system…

The Fulbright Alumni Roadshow

By 2005, PBS's "Antiques Roadshow" had become famous in the U.S. and there was some knowledge of it in Europe as well. It wasn't quite a household name in Hungary, but that was about to change if I had anything to say about it.

To put this in context, the State Department found that the foreign scholars it supported in our education exchanges, especially Fulbrighters, returned to their home countries and disappeared from the embassy's database. This meant we lost the connection with up-and-coming leaders in fields we ourselves had identified as important to bilateral relations. To correct this, the Department opened a new Office of Alumni Affairs that offered incentives to embassies to build and engage their education exchange alumni base.

I wanted grant money from this new office to run a Fulbright Alumni Roadshow. We would rent a bus, festoon it with Fulbright advertising, and travel to major university cities to found new Fulbright alumni organizations that would work with the embassy on our public diplomacy goals. The road show would begin in Budapest with our Fulbright Commission staff and as many alumni as we could coral, and then add more as we went along. My colleague, the press/media officer would arrange media coverage. I imagined it as an innovative model that could be adapted for other foreign service posts. I would get an award, my picture would be on the cover of *State Magazine*… Wake up, Mr. Mitty.

Shortly after I proposed this exciting new idea to my Taurus boss, he called me in for a "wavelength" meeting. Did I understand we were working for a new ambassador? An ambassador who is possessed of a suspicion of the Foreign Service as powerful as that of Jesse Helms? The new ambassador reads every cable, including grant requests to the Department for alumni activities. Did I realize she would think I was going on a boondoggle with my friends from the Fulbright Commission? I would have to sell this thing to her. I was admonished to make it cheap, policy relevant, and free of any possibility for criticism of George W. Bush. "You have to understand," my Taurus boss told me, "that I meet with the ambassador every day and have to defend what you are doing. I need you on the team, not off the reservation." If there is anything that cuts an Aries to the heart it is an appeal to loyalty. Back to the drawing board.

Convincing the ambassador was difficult. She found out that some of our Fulbrighters had gone off on a U.S. government stipend to study fine points of literary theory, the provenance of a particular baroque painting, Ottoman Empire foreign policy, and other arcane topics. We needed to show that we were using our public diplomacy funds to amplify administration messaging or at least choose Fulbright scholars whose topics were

useful for bilateral relations. In fairness to me, I had not chosen these earlier topics. They were legacy selections made before I arrived. But they left a trail of breadcrumbs to the cultural office, and thus to me.

To overcome the reasonable doubt, I sat down with Huba again. He had identified Fulbright alumni who had studied applications of hard sciences, use of English in university curriculum, research in epidemiology, and other topics more likely to result in measurable outcomes that might create demand for American education products. We also found a few motivated Fulbrighters who could found regional alumni clubs. Huba used his contacts to make the Fulbright Alumni Roadshow an undertaking that could live within a small budget. The Department's Office of Alumni Affairs approved my limited request for $9,000, and this persuaded my boss. He, in turn, persuaded the ambassador that she did not need to accompany us. We took off for three university cities that had seldom, if ever, seen much attention from the embassy. The university rectors, on whom we depended for free space and accommodations, were in equal parts charmed and suspicious. Alumni at two of the three universities signed up to be in our database and at the third we cut the ribbon on a new alumni organization of secondary school teachers. Ultimately, we signed up some 100 Fulbright alumni to start our list of boosters. Best of all, we got media coverage. Enough media for the Department's Office of Alumni Affairs to take note. They posted our project on their website as a best practice. *State Department Magazine* did indeed feature us with a photo, though not on the cover. And I did get a few calls from nearby embassy cultural officers to ask how they could mount a similar project.

My memory of USG visitor programs is nearly all about Fulbright. This is because American Fulbrighters spend a year in their foreign university and I got to know many of the ones who came to Hungary. I also spent many overtime hours reading and ranking the Fulbright applications of Hungarians interested in going to the U.S. This tends to leave more lasting impressions than a march of short-term visitors.

The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP)

But that is not to say that the short-term visitors get short shrift. Alongside the Fulbright program, the State Department also funds many two- to three-week training programs with specific goals. These fall under the International Visitor Leadership Program. They are supposed to give embassies the opportunity to identify up-and-coming leaders at mid-career in fields of interest to the U.S. Those selected for an IVLP go on an all-expenses-paid tours in the U.S. that connect them with experts in their field for practicums and a little introduction to U.S. politics and culture. Each tour group comprises about 20 people from across a given region. In my case, the region was Central and Eastern Europe.

Each embassy is granted a limited number of IVLP slots based on the size of its country and its strategic interest to the U.S. The embassy then fills the slots for that year. Although IVLP topics vary based on foreign policy goals, many IVLPs are evergreens:

- Preventing transborder crimes like money laundering, human and drug trafficking, smuggling weapons of mass destruction, and terrorist recruitment.
- Empowering Women: how to open small businesses and improve health care, especially during pregnancy and early childhood.
- Building civil society: journalism training; computerizing court and police records; strengthening community organizations.
- Leadership training for mayors, chiefs of police; university rectors and NGOs, etc.

All embassy offices recommended their own contacts for the coveted IVLP slots. As culture/education officer, it was my job to organize them using criteria like diversity, strategic value, and likelihood of continued connection to the embassy. Finally, at one meeting, where all the nominators sat around a table, everything was decided. The meeting wasn't quite as wild as an hour on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, but it also wasn't quite as hushed as a corporate boardroom either. I wish I could say I could remember a single winner out of this process, but once the white smoke curled out of the chimney, our local staff took over the entire process from visas to debriefing upon return.

Except. Now that I think about it. There was one IVLP winner who does stick in my mind. As a working title, let's call him...

The Trash Whisperer

Periodically, the Department notifies posts of a sudden opening for a one-person International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). These are plum opportunities because they are tailored to a single individual. In Hungary, when notifications like these arrived, the ambassador had first dibs. Often that meant someone at the top of the political order who typically did not speak English. Not to worry, individual IVLP trips can include an interpreter, as long as the nominator pays for it. That meant the public diplomacy operating funds, controlled by my boss. He only allowed this when the ambassador was the recommender. We worker bees had to be sure our candidates spoke English because the section chief wouldn't pay for interpretation for any of our contacts.

Interpretation is difficult not simply because it is costly. Conveying complicated U.S. foreign policy issues often involves using highly specific jargon or describing complex

scenarios with a lot of variables. Interpreters need some background to understand these nuances. Poor interpretation leads to frustration among American interlocutors, which in turn leads to bad reviews of your candidate's ability to take part in a high-level discussion. We were always concerned that we might nominate a highly educated Hungarian, but without English, he might not get much from a three-week trip hobnobbing with legislators, governors, CEOs and media moguls.

In early September of 2007, at the end of the fiscal year, we received an offer for an individual IVLP, but none of the ambassador's key contacts could travel. So, the IVLP began its journey down river from the front office through the cataracts of the political, economic, and consular sections. In each case, the IVLP coursed right past. Finally, it berthed safely in the public diplomacy office where it was immediately greeted with great excitement. Following the dictum that fortune favors a ready list of talent, my local staff began dialing for alternates. But then a surprise candidate presented himself.

I don't remember exactly how, but the director of a Hungarian waste disposal center found his way to my office just as the individual IVLP came into my hands. My secretary ushered him into my office. I was surprised by how much charm and enthusiasm he brought to a field of work not typically associated with, well, glee. I asked him what he was proposing. A mellifluous baritone described how he was given free rein to contract with the towns in his region to collect, separate, and dispose of solid waste. Was there a way, he asked, that he could learn how these procedures are done in the U.S.? "Everyone knows that the most important innovations in waste management come from America," he declared with certainty. I had no idea if he was right, but, but I started to like the possibility. Apparently, my face gave away my interest because my staff assistant gazed heavenward, and not prayerfully. She was not buying it. I would later dub him "The Trash Whisperer" for his ability to turn even a discussion of hazmat into an enchantment. He hadn't yet begun collecting biomass or compost, but discussions were already underway in his region. Were there new ways of reusing these in the U.S., he wondered?

When the Trash Whisperer finished, my assistant ushered him out and returned with eyes bright as train hazards. Don't be taken in, she warned, by this self-promoter. His IVLP tour would indeed be trash.. He could hardly speak English and we would get negative evaluations from our American tour leaders. Think of our reputation in the Department, she warned.

*Q: I'm recalling Professor Higgins in "*My Fair Lady" *describing another Hungarian whose attentions were unwanted. "Oozing charm from every pore he oiled his way across the floor." Did you accept his application?*

TAUBER: Not so fast. One of the requirements for recommending an IVLP candidate is that you already know him. I didn't know the Trash Whisperer yet, but I would fix that. Before he left, I got an invitation to visit him at his waste disposal center for a demonstration. This way I could gain knowledge of his accomplishments and make a well-founded recommendation. When I got to his site I was surprised. I had never seen such a tidy, well-run dump.

Q: Not to be argumentative, but have you really visited enough waste disposal facilities to be a discerning judge of this one?

TAUBER: Well, when I was a kid, my family used to drive into New York City for a day. On our way we passed the New Jersey Meadowlands. At that time, they were hills of rotting, befouled filth. Everything from used diapers to dead car batteries and the remains of mafia hits were stacked there for carrion birds and skittering ground vermin to devour. We used to hold our noses as we passed. A few years ago, I understand, the last of the Meadowland dumps was finally ordered to be bulldozed and restored to greenfield.

Q: That wasn't exactly what I had in mind, but carry on.

TAUBER: How well I remember the Prince's site. Sheds held thousands of sheets of newspapers, magazines, and cardboard compacted into house-sized cubes that were set on palettes and addressed to recycling centers in Germany. Rail containers were filled to the brim with compacted plastics on their way to China to be pelletized and reused. He showed me a jar of plastic pellets that looked like beebees. This was the end product that Chinese companies would resell to plastic container manufacturers. In the trash separation center, conveyor belts carried glass, metal, and other recyclables for uniformed workers to collect into baskets. These were regularly emptied for final disposition. Many of the workers were Roma and Sinti, so the Whisperer was also providing jobs for marginalized minorities. I wondered what American waste disposal centers could possibly teach him. His operation did not look like it could not be improved. Still, he was certain that consultations in the U.S. would tighten efficiency and give him ideas on how to improve his service.

There was no question: the Whisperer was young and hungry for advancement. We scaled the back staircase to the crow's nest that oversaw the operation. As he climbed, he shot sidelong glances back at me, enthusing about the sequestration of methane in pig farms to fuel heaters during winter. I huffed my way up behind him. From the vantage point of the crow's nest, it was easy to see the big picture. We had a common goal. He wanted to be a young leader and I wanted a unique IVLP in a field important to

environmental protection but seldom addressed. Convinced, I returned to my office and began moving the gears.

Q: How did you square it with your boss?

TAUBER: I used a number of arguments. First, I noted that Hungarians are seldom so forward in promoting their own candidacy. That, I glossed, was an example of his initiative and enterprise, both desirable traits for young leaders. Second, I pointed out that no Hungarian, in all the long memory of all my local staff, had been considered for an IVLP from such a forgotten and disdained profession. (You'll remember that Linda assigns to Aries the predisposition to side with underdogs.) The waste disposal profession gave the Whisperer points for novelty. Third, I did not ask for money for an interpreter. The careful reader will hear alarm bells at this admission. Throughout my first interview with him, the Trash Whisperer did indeed rely on my staff assistant for phrases that were difficult, technical, or outside his area of expertise. But I barreled ahead, convinced that his ample expertise would carry him through.

In fairness, I imagine there were people on the U.S. side of the IVLP chain who were not as excited about his candidacy as I was. But look at it this way. When the U.S. calls on Hungary for help with nation-building in Iraq, Afghanistan, or some other post-conflict zone, and the Hungarians don't want to send troops, won't the enhanced expertise of a waste disposal manager be a valuable alternative? After all, there is nothing but rubble and trash after a conflict. Figuring out what to do with it all takes a real pro. In the Whisperer we will have a U.S.-trained expert to call upon for some time to come.

Q: Do you know what happened after?

TAUBER: The after-action report was not as friendly to the Trash Whisperer as I was. Some of the American evaluators felt he couldn't fully take part due to language limitations. But the garbage sites loved him. OK. OK. So I won't send another language-limited candidate without an interpreter. But I still think we got our money's worth. The Whisperer was definitely inspired to think about how to manage the mountains of non-biodegradable garbage we produce in larger quantities every year. Surely that counts for something.

Q: Alright, on to the major events.

The 50th Anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Uprising

TAUBER: This was the biggest project of my tour. Six months in the making, it was a conference composed of panel discussions on the uprising in the light of additional information that had been declassified over the years. (For a trove of primary source documents on this, see GWU's National Security Archive at https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/)The funders and organizers were eight countries with embassies in Budapest, and four international organizations that had assisted Hungarian refugees fleeing the Soviet invasion that followed the 1956 uprising. (The U.S. took the single largest number of Hungarian refugees – over 20,000.) At this conference we wanted to focus on this assistance aspect of the event and emphasize the many contributions that these refugees had made to our countries.

I negotiated the agenda (to ensure our ambassador was the first to deliver a keynote address) and developed the published materials for the information packets. I recruited six American speakers for the discussion panels, including one eyewitness to the events, and four documentarians who screened their works with a Q&A after. We also made DVDs of the proceedings for schools and for our three American Corners in Hungary. There was a lot of TV and radio coverage and we reckoned about 3,000 people attended the three-day event. For my efforts I got a Franklin Award. (see list of awards in the section on Armenia for the definition of Department awards.) Later I would also get a Franklin Award for organizing our July 4th cultural events while simultaneously serving as the control officer for an inspection by the Office of Inspector General and as a control officer for the visit of President George W. Bush. It was a let-down. Working three major events simultaneously, I thought, would surely produce a Meritorious Honor Award. It didn't.

Nevertheless, these were solid successes that showed I could manage ambassadorial events on my own. I eventually worked directly with the ambassador on her monthly trips to the provinces, and several other cultural/educational events we conducted. For example, Karen Hughes, then Under Secretary for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy, visited to take part in a March for the Cure organized by the Susan G. Komen Foundation. The ambassador wanted me to draft an introduction for her that would warm up the audience for Hughes' remarks. Once again, I was drafting a speech for a Leo official. This time I was careful to check with every possible source and gave the ambassador talking points that followed administration policy to the last scintilla. But the ambassador wasn't happy. She kept saying that my draft didn't warm up the audience. Now, you might think that, being born under a fire sign like Aries, I'd get what "warming-up" meant. Finally, on maybe the third iteration, the ambassador looked me in eyes, somewhat exasperated, and repeated her desire to warm-up the audience. Then something clicked. I remember it so vividly. She didn't want Department talking points. She wanted to connect on an emotional level with the audience. I hurried back to my

office and found the words. Thereafter, I understood the ambassador perfectly which came as a great relief to my boss as well.

More than that, I got along well with the ambassador's secretary and her executive assistant too. After each trip, I sat with them and reviewed how we would personalize the thank-you notes and task instructions the ambassador had for future contacts. It felt good, at last, to be successfully integrated. There are a few other projects that also delivered a lot of psychic income.

Holocaust Remembrance: Training Teachers

Hungary, like Romania, belonged to the International Holocaust Remembrance Taskforce. It has a rotating, yearly chairmanship and I believe, while I was there, Hungary held the chair. I worked with a wonderful, committed official from the Hungarian Ministry of Education on two important projects.

The first was a visit from a U.S. citizen Holocaust survivor who had retired from his job to dedicate himself to Holocaust remembrance activities. His name was Irving Roth, and he was already well-known in the U.S. for Holocaust education. He had written a book on his survival and the heartbreaking loss of his younger brother called, *Bondi's Brother, a Story of Love, Loss, Betrayal, and Liberation.* (see this link to the book on Amazon https://www.amazon.com/Bondis-Brother-Story-Betrayal-Liberation-ebook/dp/B00DFMQOQ4). Based on the book, he had also created age-appropriate teaching materials. We invited him to come to Hungary to instruct teachers on how to use them. Roth was in his late 70s when he arrived, but he was still vigorous and spritely. His presentations brought tears to the eyes of listeners. He explained to us that he starts from the assumption that no story is intrinsically interesting, not even Holocaust survival. You have to convey the experience to your audience in a way that they can understand and empathize with. Roth had coached a number of Holocaust survivors in the U.S. on how to present their experience. Now he was bringing the same coaching skills to Hungary. His first visit was so successful that the Hungarian Ministry of Education found funds to have him back for a second visit.

Holocaust Remembrance: Memorial to Carl Lutz

The second Holocaust remembrance project took some doing. Everyone sort of knew that during WWII the U.S. had withdrawn its ambassador, and left the embassy building under the care of the Swiss government. But few recalled the Swiss vice consul who was assigned to occupy the premises. His name was Carl Lutz. Here, from a U.S. embassy website, is his story in brief:

> Carl Lutz was the Swiss Vice-Consul in Budapest from 1942 until the end of World War II in 1945. Together with diplomats of neutral countries, such as the Swedish Raoul Wallenberg, the Apostolic Nuncio Angelo Rotta, the Italian Giorgio Perlasca, and others, Lutz worked relentlessly in his office set up in the U.S. Legation building for many months to prevent the planned death of innocent people. He created safe houses by declaring them annexes of the Swiss legation and eventually extended diplomatic immunity to 72 buildings in Budapest, saving as a result of it more than 62,000 Hungarian Jews. In 1963 a street was named after Lutz in Haifa, Israel, and since 1991 a memorial at the entrance to the old Budapest ghetto remembers him. A memorial room was opened in 2005 in the Glass House in Vadász utca 29, Budapest V. He was also awarded the title of "Righteous Among the Nations." [The latter is an honor bestowed on heroes of the Holocaust by the State of Israel]

In order to erect a memorial to Carl Lutz directly in front of the embassy, my staff had to get permits from the city, the national government, and an untold number of other bureaucrats. Then we needed to find someone who could carve a stone marker in the shape of an open book on a podium. After about a year, all the necessaries were completed and the ambassador dedicated the memorial on December 13, 2006. The inscription on the memorial reads:

> "In the building at Szabadság tér 12, Swiss Vice Consul Carl Lutz honorably represented the interests of the United States of America and other countries between 1942 and 1945. He courageously saved the lives of tens of thousands of Hungarian citizens persecuted as Jews."

It would be fair to wonder, where does a mere Swiss vice consul get the chutzpah to do what Lutz in war time? He knew the risk. It was entirely possible that he could have been "disappeared" like Raoul Wallenberg, thrown out of the country, or simply recalled to Bern for exceeding his authority. It turns out that Carl Lutz did not conform to the stereotype of diplomats who spend their days writing forgettable dispatches and their evenings at cocktail parties.

> "The son of a Swiss tradesman, Lutz displayed an early interest in a diplomatic career. With remarkable initiative, he immigrated to the U.S.—alone, at age 18—to earn money for college. He worked for the Swiss Legation in Washington, D.C. and graduated from George Washington University (GWU) in 1924."
> (retrieved from https://washingtonjewishweek.com/45665/book-brings-rescuer-carl-lutz-to-light/arts/arts_features/books/ May 28, 2019)

Q: You mentioned that this job in Hungary was smaller in every way. Was your budget for events and projects smaller too? How did you cope with that?

What can you accomplish with practically no budget?

TAUBER: Except for highly strategic countries, the Department had taken the view that it was not effective to give embassy public diplomacy sections a lot of discretionary income. They would just waste it on non-strategic objectives. Better to have them compete for grants on specific, administration-selected topics, than allow them room to squander funds.

I tried to get money from the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. Nope. Hungary was sufficiently preserved, thank you very much. There was no USAID around to transfer a million bucks to us to conduct civic-society building projects. I did get a little money to open a new American Corner, bringing our total to three. And there were youth gatherings we stocked with various travelling groups. We even published a two-language booklet on the anniversary of U.S.-Hungarian diplomatic relations. But basically, we looked for rich uncles to bestow upon us venues, audiences, and media.

The Rich Uncles

Thank you Central European University! This international school was founded by U.S. billionaire George Soros. Soros was born in Hungary, survived the Holocaust, and eventually made his fortune in the world of finance. The important thing for us was that the university welcomed our speakers, which meant we received free space as well as free hors d'oeuvres – a very important draw for students who had to sit through our guest speaker's presentation to get the free eats. It is sad that the current Orban government eventually closed this highly regarded scholarly center as too "liberal" in orientation and too cosmopolitan in its character. ("Cosmopolitan." Humph. Dog whistle for 'Jew' among anti-semites.)

Thank you *Jövö Háza*! (Young People's House) This is a renovated industrial site on the Buda side of the city. It has a small, hands-on museum for children and a lot of exhibition space. We contracted with them for a number of exhibits. The two most memorable were photography shows. The first was called "Revealing Chicago" – selections from Terry Evans' aerial photographs of the Windy City. The second was Edward S. Curtis' portraits of Native Americans from the turn of the 20th century. The Jövö Háza staff were wonderful to work with. They helped us attract visitors with their newsletter and website that reached thousands of Budapesters.

Thank you Mark Tauber! Well, I might take a little credit for one or two ideas that helped produce attendance at public diplomacy events. The Ambassador was looking for more opportunities to bring culture and education leaders to her residence for receptions. The problem was that her residence was quite distant from the center of town. Even the appeal of a U.S. ambassador's invitation was not always quite enough to get crowds. I suggested we might attract more "name" cultural and educational figures if we could honor them with an award. Thus was born **The Ambassador's Award.** No one needed to know that it was invented out of whole cloth, or in this case, whole parchment paper. It came out of our printer, was suitably framed, and slipped into the ambassador's podium shelf so that she could present it to the awardee with a suitable token of her esteem such as the coffee table book from "Revealing Chicago" or the Edward S. Curtis American Indian portraits. The presentation took place in an easily photographed area of the Ambassador's residence..

Boy, did we give out a lot of Ambassador Awards. So many, in fact, that at my going-away party, my staff cooked one up for me. It was humorous in its grandiloquence.

My other brainstorm was for my boss. You'll recall he is a Taurus. Linda once again gave me good advice. "Taurus people are home folks. There's scarcely a bull who doesn't love to luxuriate under his own roof and stretch out amid comfortable, familiar surroundings." (*Sun Signs*, pg. 56) Moreover, with Venus as his ruling planet, "...music stirs the heart and touches the lives of all Taureans." He had a baby grand piano in his residence. But his house was in the same neighborhood as the ambassador's. How to get people to come all the way out to his representational events? Mini-concerts! Hungary is full of musicians with repertoires ranging from Baroque to jazz. We found many ways to get these musicians out to the end of the tram line. By inviting guests to a concert of about 20 minutes, with an encore or two thrown in, the planets aligned and the people came.

Q: So you got small beer and scaled it up to a brewery.

TAUBER: Well said.

Q: Any other accomplishments before we move on?

TAUBER: Just one. My boss had to take temporary leave from October to December 2007. During that time, I was the Acting Public Affairs Officer. At last, I thought, I could get my hands on all those operating funds that had been so carefully sequestered beyond my reach. I could do some programming all my own. October is the beginning of the

federal fiscal year. You might think that the public affairs money flows right into our account and, with an appropriate bugle call, I can declare: let the spending begin!

It doesn't work that way. Money in the State Department moves like a ship through a canal. It has to go through several locks before it hits open water and can get under steam. Often, you don't get your full appropriation until April –six months after the beginning of the fiscal year. For public affairs sections this means a ponderously slow progress toward the wide sea of spending. Until then, you are exploring the shallows of fiscal constraint. This often leads to a rush at the end of the fiscal year in August/September to jettison every dollar just to get out of the doldrums and keep your ship moving towards its project goals. If you do not unload all your fiscal cargo by September 30, it will be assumed that you don't need it, and your provisions will be trimmed accordingly in the next fiscal year.

Wise public affairs officers not only off-load every penny appropriated for them, but are ready to seize the wealth of others. We lie in wait, the jolly roger furled, just over the horizon. When the moment comes, we hoist the skull and bones, point our bows to the slower moving public affairs galleons, and seize the treasure, matey. In my case, the European bureau always put out a request for proposals on what you might do with these unspent funds. If you could fire off the most powerful cannonade of proposals, and my crew always did, you would get the spoils. Then, all you had to do was sign the grant and start spending even a penny of the booty before the trade winds fell to whisper at the end of September.

Since this was October, all I had were funds for the pre-contracted grants. Even these funds were locked into specific disbursement calendars, the fiscal equivalent of autopilot. The unearmarked money, with no strings attached, arrived much later. All I could do was captain the ship until my boss got back. But I did distinguish myself enough at running the section that someone in the hierarchy nominated me for a real award. A Meritorious Honor Award. And you know what? This one came with a medal! No kidding. For one brief moment in State Department history someone thought it would be a nice idea to include a medal with an award certificate . It was the only time I got one.

The Blooper Reel

You Lost the Under Secretary?!

It seems I never escape a post without a few brushes with mortification. In Hungary, the first one came during the Walk for the Cure, when Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Karen Hughes, came to add visibility to our support for prevention

and treatment of breast cancer. I was Hughes' control officer. I have to say that there were few VIPs more down-to-earth or pleasant to work with. After the event, she had some time free and told me that she didn't need an escort. She could handle herself in the well-tended streets of downtown Budapest. It was tempting. On the one hand my training told me never leave your VIP alone, on the other, my judgment told me that Hughes was a world traveler and knew whether she needed a minder or not. Just as I let her out of my sight, my colleague, the press officer, called me on the Blackberry. "And how is the Under Secretary?" he asked. I explained. His reply was a tuba blast, "YOU LOST THE UNDER SECRETARY?!" That was the cry heard round the office.

The speaker on a Blackberry cell phone is pretty small. But at that moment it sounded like a bullhorn announcing the handover of Karen Hughes to Al Qaida. "I didn't lose her," I said. "She *asked* me to stop following her." But before I could say goulash, Blackberrys throughout the embassy were abuzz. My colleague came back on. "The RSO says you better find her again, and pronto." Sigh. After running through several stores I found the Under Secretary having a restorative at an outdoor café a few blocks away. Nevertheless this moment would be immortalized as the time I lost the Under Secretary.

Spring Forward

The Ambassador intended to hold a farewell brunch for departing Fulbrighters on a Sunday in spring. But something happened and she had to cascade the responsibility onto the DCM. He had wanted to be away that weekend, but of course changed his plans to accommodate. I promised him that I would be there to introduce the Fulbrighters and act as emcee. Only this was the Sunday when you had to spring forward and I did not know that. I arrived exactly on time, one hour late. The last of the Fulbrighters was describing his nanotube research at the University of Pècs and the brunch plates had been cleared away. The DCM, trooper that he was, had made my apologies and called on Huba to do the necessaries. I might make other mistakes in my career, but I wouldn't make that one again.

Counterfeiting for My Country

There was a famous Hungarian jazz musician who toured in America in 1956, right before the anti-Soviet uprising. Over the years, he remained dedicated to jazz, even when it was banned under the communist regime. He was as beloved a figure in Hungary as Lawrence Welk or Guy Lombardo were in the U.S.. I wish I could remember his name, but it escapes me now. Anyway, in 2006, when we were celebrating all kinds of anniversaries, it seemed appropriate to celebrate this musician's contribution to jazz. We chose April because it is Jazz Appreciation Month. My Hungarian jazzman suggested

that we present him with a letter from President Bush that congratulated him on the preservation of an American music genre even under adversity. Hmm. Why say no? We could pass the request to the White House and they could return the nugatory.

Turns out that someone in the White House staff liked the idea. They told us that the President would send the letter. I conveyed the happy news to my jazzman. On the strength of this, he recruited a TV station to do his 50th anniversary show. The station agreed because they were going to get the U.S. Ambassador to do the honors. She would present the letter with all condign plenipotentiary flourish. The date was set and we regularly reminded the White House.

And the days went by with no letter. Finally, after much flapping, squawking, and stamping, we received a cable with the text of the President's congratulatory letter. It concluded, "Signed Original to Follow."

Signed original TO FOLLOW!?

When Washington promises that an original will "follow," that means it will meander its way to you via diplomatic pouch, the slowest mail delivery system in history. Ancient Persian letter carriers were faster. You think I'm kidding? Ask Herodotus. We were a few days from a nationally televised event with my Ambassador and she was relying on me to provide the letter and all the necessary palaver to go with it. I had just established trust with her and now you expect me to go to her office and say we have to call the whole thing off? I had to have a Plan B.

Plan B was fueled by high octane adrenalin, after hours. First, I found a copy of a presidential signing statement with George W. Bush's signature on it. Then I got a sheet of embassy demarche paper and sliced off the embossed U.S. Embassy seal. Next I typed the text of the president's congratulatory statement from the cable and ran several parchment copies until the statement, the purloined presidential seal, and the stolen signature lined up just right. Finally, I turned the letter over and placed it on a blotter. At last, that awful PDA that my Virgo boss gave me had some use. I fished it out of my junk drawer and drew out the stylus. Using its blunt end, I carefully pushed the paper up behind the presidential seal to give it the appearance of embossment. The final fraud looked surprisingly authentic.

I took the counterfeit letter to the Ambassador's executive assistant just under deadline. The Exec looked it over, saw no problem, and immediately brought it into the Front Office. Tick tick tick. Would the ambassador discover the fraud? If she did, she never said a word. The following evening, we drove over to the studio and I waited offstage

when the time came for the Ambassador's cameo appearance. She strode confidently across the stage. Camera booms dove in for the close-up. I was watching on a backstage monitor as the Jazzman held up his trophy. No toner smudges. No xerox shadow. The Jazzman smiled and took a victory lap around the stage as each of his musicians nodded in appreciation. Synchronous waves of applause flooded the studio as the audience thumped a percussive joy. (N.B. The synchrony of Hungarian applause is the subject of considerable scholarly study. Whatever the reasons for it, to be in an audience of Hungarians once they get started with synchronous applause is an experience not to be missed. There is something awe-inspiring about it.)

Oh. My. God. It played. The counterfeit letter played.

Ten days later, I got a sealed envelope from the White House. Yup. It was the original signed letter on presidential stationery. Now what? I toyed with the idea of dropping it in the shredder and taking a vow of silence. But I was worried that White House staffers would continue to pulse me until they got a confirmation of delivery. And it wouldn't take long for White House staffers to move up the embassy chain to the ambassador if they didn't get a reply. So I took the original and went to the jazzman's club. He had already framed the fake. It held a place of honor in the center of other memorabilia.

After an exchange of pleasantries, I told him that it was White House policy to provide two copies of congratulatory letters -- one suitable for framing, the other as a keepsake that might go in an album or scrapbook. He looked at me with some suspicion, but accepted the proffer. Once again, it played. The original played.

Oh, Perfidious Terpsichore

In the course of three years in a culturally switched-on country like Hungary, you're bound to make some acquaintances in the field of dance. My contacts in Budapest were nothing like those in Romania, where I had enough operating funds to regularly support and attend all kinds of dance instruction and performance. But a few of the Budapest choreographers and artistic directors around town were acquainted with me, and they sometimes sent me complimentary tickets to new works. When I couldn't go, I gave my tickets to a young embassy couple. This was their first tour, and when they told me they were keen on modern dance. I figured, great! I can keep a U.S. embassy presence going, maintain contacts, and have a few evenings off. Well, one night, we all went together to a revival of a performance I had seen before they arrived. I loved it and thought they would too.

The seats were up front and the performance featured the troupe's top three male dancers. Having spoken to the dancers backstage after their first performance, I knew they were athletic and could execute gymnastic moves that won the famous synchronous applause from the audience. But wouldn't you just know it. This time, when the gasps came, it was because the artistic director departed in only one detail from his earlier choreography. The guys got naked.

Q: This nudity thing seems to pursue you.

TAUBER: You think? It would have been OK with me. You could not miss a single muscle in the entire male anatomy on these guys. Or any other part of their anatomy either. This would have enhanced the work for me, were it not for one little thing. My theater guests were evangelical Christians who were not at all cool with the full monty on stage. I was certain they believed I had deliberately enticed them into attending just to *épater la evangeloisie.* In my embarrassment, this time I did not sweat through my clothes. Instead, at the periphery of my vision I saw the rolling aura that foretells the arrival of a migraine. The clamminess, the throbbing temples, the nausea, the sudden sensitivity to light all fell in behind. Fortunately, I always kept a migraine pill in my pocket for just such an emergency. I had to chew it up, though. My mouth had gone as dry as a lint trap.

At the end of the performance we were escorted backstage to meet the dancers. My guests bolted. They never asked for another complimentary ticket again. I did meet the male leads, now back in their costumes, still panting from the exertion. They were grinning as if they had just won a gold medal. It was a perfectly executed choreography that had challenged all their skills. I congratulated them but did not stay for the press photo shoot.

Q: Anything more to note about Hungary before we move on?

TAUBER: I tried to create memorable events and projects that would have sustainability for my successor. That makes everyone's job a little easier. But you really can't do more with less. My fondest hope was that all the work we did to bring greater visibility to the Fulbright Commission would draw more private sector donations. Huba was an indefatigable advocate. I hope I left him more to work with.

A cultural attaché seizes every opportunity to create events. The ambassador, bless her heart, said yes to almost every opportunity. She visited with the U.S. Women's Olympic Fencing Team and the Men's Water Polo Team, both of which played exhibition games with their Hungarian counterparts. I had no idea that the women fencers shout. Loudly, in

fact. Apparently it helps press more kinetic energy into stronger parries and jabs. Also I had never seen a live water polo match before. Those guys wear no padding even though this is very much a contact sport both above and below the waterline. I wonder if there is a toenail length regulation. There was an awful lot of blood in the water and I imagined that razorsharp foot talons might be a sly way of putting opponents off their game. By coincidence, this game took place right around the time the movie "Blood in the Water" came out. This was a Hungarian feature film depicting the victory of the Hungarian Men's Water Polo Team over the Soviets at the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. The Hungarians went on to win the gold medal that year. Immediately after the award ceremony, half the Hungarian team defected. They had learned of the Soviet suppression of the 1956 uprising and so no future for themselves under an even harder-line regime than the one that sent them to Australia.

There was nothing I could do with or for the Hungarian LGBT community. Gay life in Hungary is quiet and closeted. I was also sad to learn that my own staff – at least the men – made insulting remarks about me as a gay man. They could take the liberty because they knew I couldn't understand Hungarian. This was reported to me by another local hire who understood their remarks very well. The best I could do in a situation like this was to remind everyone at our staff meeting that the State Department workplace had to be free from all forms of prejudice and harassment, including verbal abuse against women, minorities, persons with disabilities, and the LGBT community. I can't recall whether they got the message, but I did not receive any more reports of negative remarks.

Lessons Learned

Work/Life Balance. Find a way to put daily exercise into your life. It is easy to let it go with the excuse that there is no time. From this point on I would suffer the effects of a sedentary lifestyle that took years to correct after I retired.

Q: How did you decide on your next assignment?

TAUBER: I wondered seriously if I should do a tour in AIP – Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan. There were incentives. The best one was a linked assignment. You agree to go to an AIP tour and you get a desirable tour at the end of your one-year commitment. Paris, here I come. But I hesitated. I didn't know how expeditionary I was any more. And a linked tour wasn't going to take me to Paris. At this point I understood that much. What I decided to do instead was try a one-year detail at the National War College. A number of FSOs used these detail assignments to service academies as their jumping off point for a follow-on in AIP, or as a political advisor to a combatant command. It made sense. The State Department worked so closely with DoD in these theaters of operation that

spending a year learning how the military worked – logistics, resourcing, planning, etc. -- could be a good way to decide if I wanted to deploy to a danger zone.

Q: But didn't you kind of sour on pol-mil work after your long encounter with it in Washington and at the OSCE in Vienna?

TAUBER: Yes. But that was all pre-AIP. Maybe I would react differently now. Anyway my application for the National Defense University was accepted, but not to the War College. To the other college at NDU. The mouthful that no one had ever heard of. It was then called the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. DoD eventually twigged to the fact that ICAF sounded more like a coffee cartel than an institution of higher learning. They changed the name to the Eisenhower School several years after I left.

August 2008-June 2009
Industrial College of the Armed Forces, Washington, DC

I arrived in August 2008 and leased an apartment in, of all places, Silver Spring. You could scarcely get further away from the campus of NDU, located at Fr. McNair in the Southwest corner of Washington, DC. Well… I needed an apartment right away, and for only one year. That limited options to very pricey properties along the Orange Line, or more moderate ones in less geographically convenient places. There was a bus that left the Silver Spring station and went almost the whole way to the entrance of Ft. McNair. The commute was long -- about an hour and 15 minutes door to door. But that was the best choice at the time. Arriving on time at ICAF – 8 am – was not an aspirational goal. It was the law. None of this flextime for the military. That meant leaving my apartment no later than 6:20 am. This was torture. You could say that I am not a morning person. You could say that the undiagnosed sleep apnea created difficulties in waking. But once again, the fault is in our stars, not ourselves. Here's Linda on the Aires employee,

> "The Arien is constitutionally unable to keep to a tight and uniform schedule, regardless of standard office procedure. His great, creative energy comes on him at all hours, and it can't be adjusted to fit someone's idea of a proper working day… After a short period you'll notice that, although he may appear as late as ten or eleven in the morning, or take two hours for lunch, he'll also be the very last one to leave at night, especially if there is extra work to get out." (*Sun Signs*, pp. 44-45)

Apparently, the leadership at ICAF was unacquainted with Linda's work. They cautioned me that tardiness could negatively affect my grade point average. And it did.

It's important to note that I went into ICAF with an expectation that it would be like Georgetown in its approach to learning. There would be lectures and readings and seminars where we exchange views. There would be tests, and papers, and grades would be based on this. The ICAF approach was different. Yes, there were readings, but each one had specific learning goals. Don't bother with the context, background, possible flaws in argument, just get the learning goals. Yes, there was class participation, but I needed to read the cues better. You only speak to address the learning goal. Answer questions, don't ask them. This wasn't my learning style and my Aries head butted up against the brick wall of ICAF pedagogy for some time.

The First Semester at ICAF:

1. Military Strategy and Logistics: Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, and readings in recent U.S. deployments. The goal was to acquaint us with the considerations to take into account when trying (and not always succeeding) to define and achieve victory conditions. It can get very complicated as it did in Iraq and Afghanistan. We also examined the costs of deployment in financial and human terms, and in opportunity cost versus diplomatic and economic pressure. B+ for the course. Meh.

2. Strategic Leadership: My class was composed of about a dozen military officers and three civilians. I remember there being only three women, one military, and two civilians. All the military officers were colonels, or soon to be. They were selected because they were expected to make flag rank and would need to have some leadership training and some ability to work with civilian agencies. Our class used Harvard MBA case studies since they often illuminated how company leaders managed success or failure, including how to build morale and buy-in for changes in working habits or conditions. B+

3. National Security Studies: How does our national security apparatus work today, some 60 years after the Truman Administration set out its structure in the National Security Act of 1948? I wrote my short paper on the growth of the National Security Council and its acquisition of State Department turf over the years. I tried to come up with a wiring diagram that would return some of the power to the State Department. I got an A- for my effort. I have to admit that I could not achieve what I set out to do in the paper. Basically, there was nothing in the scholarly literature to support a return of power to the State Department. I was arguing against history. The NSCs control over foreign policy making continues to grow in a zero-sum game with the State Department. Nevertheless, the professor was impressed enough with my chutzpah in proposing ways to restrict NSC poaching that he gave me an A- for the course. I could have rewritten the paper to improve my grade, but it wasn't in me. The military students did. Impressive effort.

4. Macroeconomics: Hopeless. I was just as much at sea as I was at Georgetown. My nightmares were filled with scenes of opening the final exam composition booklet to find that the questions were written in mathematical formulas. The professor took pity on me and found a way to place a B+ on my transcript.

5. Post-Conflict Stabilization and Reconstruction. This class used as its basic text *The Beginners' Guide to Nation Building.* (RAND, 2007). It provided an excellent framework for evaluating efforts to rebuild war-ravaged societies. It compared UN and U.S. efforts and frankly stated where errors had been made both in planning and execution. In my end-of-term paper I used this framework to review the peace- and nation-building efforts in El Salvador in the early 1990s. Since they involved both the UN and U.S., I thought I would ace the course. I guess I didn't quite get what the professor wanted since he gave me a B+. However, he did take the sting out of the mediocre grade with lavish compliments on my class participation. That was a first.

6. The News Media: My end of term paper got an A, but, because it was turned in late, the grade was reduced to an A-. Tardiness tax.

Team Sport Requirement. Are you Kidding?

I tried throughout the whole first semester, but I just couldn't generate Tiger Spirit. The tiger was the ICAF mascot. If you did not take part in intramural sports under the flag of the tiger, you were expected to at least be on the field with a megaphone cheering on the team.

Oh, dear God. I went out for one game of softball and was so pathetic that one of the guys came to the plate each time I was at bat. He arranged my grip and instructed me on how to swing the bat in a way that increased my chances of actually hitting the ball. After a few of these performances I hid in the library when it was time to go out to the field. Once again I raged against not only the instance, but the policy. Why are we making middle-aged guys, who have been on multiple deployments to war zones, and have taken injuries in every part of their body, go out on the field and risk more injuries just to maintain "team spirit"? They are colonels in the U.S. military for Chrissakes. They HAVE team spirit. They don't need anymore. Can't you just require a physical fitness test and let them decide how to meet the goals? As for myself, I would rather risk a bad grade than go through that mortification again. Clearly, I did not understand military culture.

Myers-Briggs Again: Are You Kidding?

As part of the leadership class we all took the Myers-Briggs tests and were put into teams of three for presentations based on our personality inventory. Linda's *Sun Signs* was not part of the personality tests. Once again, in case anyone still needs reminding, I am a Myers-Briggs skeptic. Aries doesn't work well in cooperative learning. We are competitors through and through. Just read Linda Goodman's chapter on the Aries employee (*Sun Signs pp. 43-48).* You can't go one paragraph without her warning that, if you want the most out of Aries, either let him lead or leave him alone. He'll never submit to ideas he doesn't agree with. I had nothing against the other two guys in my group. They were perfectly good officers and students. In fact, one was promoted to colonel while at ICAF. But they didn't agree with my conclusions on the topic we were given to analyze. The result was that I went my own way in the summation, which one doesn't do in the military. But honestly, after 26 years in the Foreign Service, if I can't analyze challenges to mission goals and suggest how to address them, then what am I doing here? And that was exactly the question I posed, hands balled into fists, to my State Department Academic Advisor.

My Academic Advisor was on loan from the State Department to teach development economics at NDU. He was really switched on. He had read the Inspector General reports on Iraq and Afghanistan and knew in detail what was going on there below the official cheer of the Bush Administration. He was also sympathetic to my request to end my connection with NDU. He undertook to look into the possibility without ratting me out. The answer was hell no. State had already paid for my seat and I darn well better put in a creditable performance.

Gee, Maybe this Guy Isn't All Hot Air

So it's the end of the first term. Let's recap. I'm one of three civilians in a class with a dozen military officers. I take part in discussion too often, and not always on point. So now the class is preparing for its final activity -- a presentation for the Board of Visitors. The Visitors were distinguished retired ambassadors and military officers who volunteered to question us on the topic, "Does our participation in the UN support our National Security?" The class elected a studious senior civilian from DoD, who had mastered the ICAF research technique, to deliver our opening remarks. After her intro, the questions began. Few replies. The class instructor was starting to look alarmed. I busted a move.

"In addressing this issue," I began, "we need to avoid confusing UN Headquarters in New York with the UN Organization. Debates in New York are often punctilious and obscure. In spite of our best efforts, many countries do not vote with us on things we care about. This causes our government – both executive and legislative – to doubt the value

of the UN as a national security asset. The question is: do we get our money's worth for the dues we pay to the UN's operating expenses, peacekeeping, and other specialized agency activities? To get a full answer, we need to consider each cost center. For example, the UN High Commissioner on Refugees saves us the higher cost of sending U.S. officers to care for millions of people displaced by war and natural disaster. These sudden waves of migration often stretch the carrying capacity of allies like Jordan, Kenya, and Turkey, threatening them with instability. We need to keep refugees healthy and capable of returning to their native countries for our own strategic interests. The alternative is unregulated tent cities that breed epidemic disease and the despair that terrorists prey on for recruits. Consider another UN subsidiary: UNICEF. With child immunization, nutritional interventions, and women's reproductive health care, UNICEF measurably improves child survival rates, which helps poor nations develop a multigenerational workforce capable of raising standards of living. UN peacekeepers free the American military to address more urgent national security threats. Peacekeeping also provides well-paid jobs for young males who face structural unemployment at home, leading to many social ills that foment revolutions, or militant violence. UN negotiators have sometimes been successful in ending conflicts when the U.S. could not be the mediator. Examples include the El Salvadoran civil war, East Timor, and ceasefires in a number of African civil conflicts. In conclusion, while we can all agree that the UN is sometimes a talk shop of minor value to our interests, if the U.S. focuses its diplomatic assets on cooperating with effective UN Organizations we have seen a reasonable return on our investment."

Stunned silence.

The framework I had just set out helped my colleagues demonstrate they had done their homework too. Afterwards, the course leader pulled me aside. She was clearly surprised. My classroom comportment apparently did not foretell a performance like this. "What happened?" she asked me. I told her that class was class but business is business. I might go off on a tangent in class, but I would never leave my fellows in the breach when it really mattered. I left the event thinking that I hadn't really done very much. Any graduate of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service would be able to deliver the same analysis.

ICAF: Second Semester Courses

1. Defense Department Acquisitions. How does DoD acquire new weapons systems and equipment? What are the funding and political issues that accompany the process? Class started with a 25-page instruction manual on terms and basic processes. An instruction manual? A looooong instruction manual. Careful readers will recall that it is unwise to

give an Aries an instruction manual and expect him to read it (see the section on Hungary and the personal digital assistant). The manual served as a decryption device for the terminology used in lectures. But it was no use. The instructor might as well have been speaking Klingon. I got a B in this course. In military graduate school that is equivalent of a D in the civilian world.

2. Environment and Security: I learned a lot. The three most important takeaways were:

- We can slow climate change, but we can't stop it. Therefore, we should be investing now in ways to mitigate its effects.
- Climate change is one of the biggest threats to the readiness and sustainability of our military deterrent. Examples include degradation of equipment from flood, excessive heat, hurricanes, and tornados. In human terms, it becomes ever more costly to deploy troops to literal "hot spots" and other areas subject to extreme weather.
- My paper on whaling led me to a fascinating history of the harvesting of a natural resource. In the 19th century, the U.S. was the largest whaling nation by far. We used whale blubber for fuel oil, candles, cosmetics, and whale bone in grooming and fashion products (N.B. *Moby Dick*, published in 1851, was the high water mark of this industry. By the end of the 19th century, all those whale goods were replaced by petroleum, rubber, and not too long after, plastics.) The U.S. whaling industry vanished by the beginning of the 20th century. By then, the U.S. was advocating an end to whaling over fears of species extinction. Yes, I was surprised to learn that myself. In the early 1900s we were already advocating a moratorium on the harvesting of whales. My A- for the course would have been an A, but once again, I paid the Tardiness Tax.

3. Microeconomics: Nothing to see here. Move along. B+

4. The Iraq War: I took this course to learn what I didn't know from my readings of the books and articles that had already come out on the failures of Iraq planning. I was surprised to find that *all* the problems following the end of major military operations had been foreseen in executive branch planning groups. The Bush Administration simply ignored the findings.

If you are interested in a short, remarkably prescient work on what would happen in Iraq once Saddam and the Ba'athists were gone, see: *Reconstructing Iraq: Insights, Challenges, and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario.* Conrad C. Crane and W. Andrew Terrill. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute. February 2003 at https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/1492.pdf

Here is a part of the cautionary note written in the foreword to this work. The author is the Director of the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute.

> "In recent decades, U.S. civilian and military leadership have shied away from nation-building. However, the current war against terrorism has highlighted the danger posed by failed and struggling states. If this nation and its coalition partners decide to undertake the mission to remove Saddam Hussein, they will also have to be prepared to dedicate considerable time, manpower, and money to the effort to reconstruct Iraq after the fighting is over. Otherwise, the success of military operations will be ephemeral, and the problems they were designed to eliminate could return or be replaced by new and more virulent difficulties."

I worked my butt off to write a compelling paper on how all the best advice was ignored in our engagement in Iraq. My view was that the administration wanted a war that was quick and cheap. To get it, they had to ignore history, ignore expert testimony, and when events quickly got out of hand, cobble together a reconstruction effort riddled with poor management and inefficiencies. Rather than use the State Department and USAID, the administration hired a parallel bureaucracy to carry out the reconstruction and nation-building. Many had no experience in diplomacy or development work at all, not to speak of conducting a nation-building experiment under post-conflict conditions. But one thing they *did* have was Republican party loyalty. I don't have the paper I wrote for this course any more, but the end-of-term grade was A-. Given the effort I put into it, I was hoping for a solid A.

5. Industry Study. There were about a dozen choices for specialized industry study including "Blowing Stuff Up" – the Arms Industry. The great thing about this course, and what made me seriously consider it, was the promise that you would go out to a military practice range, buckle on body armor, and use the latest weaponry to prevail on the battlefield. The smorgasbord of destructive power made the Aries in me want to drink my mead from my enemy's skull. There was enough kaboom in this course to keep my ears ringing for the whole semester. Only one problem: having no previous experience in arms, I would undoubtedly dislocate some part of my body from an unexpected recoil and explode nothing but my eardrums from an off-target detonation.

I settled on the likelier choice for a public diplomacy officer: The News Media Industry.

I learned a great deal about both the craft and business of journalism. For the craft, a classic resource is *The Elements of Journalism* by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstein. They describe what journalists might aspire to accomplish in reporting and what reasonable people could expect from news media, i.e., balance. We can't expect

objectivity. Throughout the long history of reporting, there was never true objectivity. Every reporter has some bent or lens through which they edit reality. The answer is to own it and work to bring in all responsible voices on a given issue.

We moved on to analyze the industry. The news for the hardcopy media wasn't good. By 2008 it was rapidly becoming obsolete. News was changing into entertainment, be it satire like the *Daily Show*, or red-meat outrage for the right or left. Also, news no longer needed television or radio – many news consumers were now getting their feeds through on-line aggregators right to their cellphones. Good old investigative journalism was under threat because few news organizations could still afford to put reporters on a long-term project. Fact-checking, then in its infancy, needed lots of money to cover just the major elements of the federal government. Journalists had to become their own videographers to enhance their print stories. Editors had to accept crowd-sourcing as the first iteration of breaking events. The New York Times needed a bailout from a Mexican billionaire. Shortly thereafter, Amazon tycoon Jeff Bezos bought the Washington Post. Most importantly for me, I learned I needed to grow a big social media footprint at my next post to be minimally effective in reaching our target audiences.

The News Media Industry Study had several great field trips. First, we went to the Newseum for a roundtable on the future of news reporting. It reinforced the expectation that Twitter and crowd-sourcing would become ever more important. Experts concluded that journalists will have to serialize reporting in real time, meaning an increased use of multiple reporters sharing a by-line. The downside here is that if speed becomes the top priority, less attention will go to editing, context, background, or long-term impact. Next, at the *New York Times* headquarters, they showed us how they were coping with the transition away from print and toward on-line reporting. We saw a number of innovative tools they were developing to deliver news that might become lucrative proprietary tools like Bloomberg desk top trading devices. The debate over whether to put the on-line edition behind a paywall ended in yes.

Our overseas field trips took us first to London to talk to *The Economist, The Guardian,* and one of the Murdoch publications to see how editorial teams decide what the news will be for that day, and perhaps that week. Then we went on to Istanbul. I didn't really understand the value of talking to news organizations there. In any event, current reporting of any kind in today's Turkey is so censored or self-censored that the real question is how many journalists can survive harassment, arrest, or worse and still report anything of value. We ended in Abu Dhabi for a discussion with *Al Jazeera.* My class participation and paper earned me an A- for the course. I had hoped for an A since I did turn the paper in on time.

6. Regional Security Studies: I chose Latin America as my region. One of our classmates, who worked for DEA, managed to get us a visit to SOUTHCOM headquarters in Miami and the Coast Guard station in Key West. An unforgettable part of this trip was a voyage out of harbor on a Coast Guard fast patrol boat. Designed for search and rescue as well as drug interdiction, it was a marvel of engineering. Its motor could switch from forward to reverse and from side to side, or, as I was instructed, from port to starboard, from bow to stern. This course got me the only A on my transcript. It relied on a term paper analyzing the Mexican education system and suggesting how to improve access and quality of education.

Q: Any other reflections on the year at ICAF.

A New U.S. Visa for Same-Sex Partners

TAUBER: I had great admiration for the military officers at ICAF. I listened carefully when they recounted deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan and understood that they were risking their lives in a frequently hostile environment. My regard for them did not diminish even though quite a number expressed disapproval of Secretary Clinton's newly announced policy on same-sex spouses of Foreign Service Officers.

Q: What was that?

In 2008, we were still years away from legalizing gay marriage. While the State Department had made modest accommodations for same-sex couples overseas, if an American officer had a foreign same-sex partner, there were few legal ways for the partner to live in the U.S. The foreign partner usually had to get a visitor's visa and leave the country at the end of the allotted 3-6 months. After Secretary Clinton arrived, she wanted to know if there was a way, within existing regulations, to allow these foreign partners to accompany Foreign Service Officers to the U.S. for an extended period of time.

The answer was a new kind of student visa. All the foreign spouse had to do was register for one course at a U.S. school. This would put him in student status, and allow him to work part-time. It wasn't perfect, but it was a godsend for a number of same-sex couples who otherwise had few alternatives to continue their relationship while the American worked at the State Department.

There was a fair amount of grumbling among the military officers at ICAF when they heard about this. I didn't hear any cheers. The civilians at ICAF, some of them my FSO colleagues, were surprised to learn that something like this hadn't existed long ago.

ICAF Graduation and Next Assignment

Before our June graduation, many military officers received their onward assignments. Not all were happy with them. In taking a year at ICAF versus a field deployment, they made a career advancement decision.. All of them worked hard to acquire the highest grade point average they could. It was a quantitative measurement vital for their evaluations. By contrast, I eked out a 3.5 GPA and was relieved it wasn't lower. My work evaluation was not grade-based. Instead, it identified the contributions I made and the skills I acquired that would be useful in my next assignment. For example, I played the role of ambassador in a real-time scenario testing our ability to act as a team in an overseas crisis. I can't discuss the details – all classified – but I can say that the scenario was extraordinarily prescient in its choice of location and the nature of the emergency. I surprised my military colleagues by how well I responded to the worsening conditions as the scenario compressed days into hours. If only they had consulted Linda. She would have told them, "There's little that's graceful about the ram, unless it's his smooth way of handling a crisis (which never fails to surprise people who underestimate him.)" *Sun Signs*, pg. 6

2009-2012
Public Affairs Officer
U.S. Embassy San Jose, Costa Rica

Q: Sounds like you're ready to make an orderly retreat from ICAF and redeploy to your next assignment.

TAUBER: Yes, June came soon enough and with it my master's degree. But, even framed with a big matte around it, the paucity of honor awards, or any other distinguishing additions to my personnel file, was starting to sting. Moreover, my promotion clock was again ticking. Where could I go (besides Iraq) to demonstrate my excellence in difficult conditions? Honduras, yes. Nicaragua, yes. Colombia, certainly. But the decision on my next assignment once again came down to my last choice: San Jose, Costa Rica. Now I don't mean to denigrate Costa Rica or the job of PAO there. But the Department did downgrade the position halfway through my tour, clearly indicating that it didn't think someone with my years of experience was really needed. If I was hoping to get promoted in my next tour, and cross the threshold into the Senior Foreign Service, Costa Rica was **not** the straightest route.

Q: When did you arrive in Costa Rica?

TAUBER: In September 2009, after about 2 months of brush-up Spanish. Everything was ready. I had a beautiful apartment within walking distance of the Embassy. Good morale at post. Well… really. It's Costa Rica. If you don't have good morale in a country where 80% of the local population has a positive view of the U.S., you won't have it anywhere. Check-in procedures were quick. I had my security briefing with the Regional Security Officer. We sat down at a table together and he went through the documents I had to sign to transfer my clearance, confess any romantic liaisons with locals, etc. He neatly collected the papers and cautioned, "Now don't get fresh." We were seated next to each other. What? Did he think that I'd try to cop a feel? "Joking," he added before I could respond. What I wanted to say was, "Dude, get your pus-pimple face, your chewed-off nails, and your buttcrack suit back behind your desk before my proximity alarm goes off and we have a very *un*happy day." But the telephone rang and he was saved from getting, what Jamaicans call, "The short end of mi tongue."

Brief Discursus: In general, I have found that more and more people say outrageous or malicious things, and then, after a few media wash cycles, quietly forgive themselves on another platform with fewer subscribers. The intent is clear. They want to throw their red meat and eat it too. A sad state of affairs.

Background: New Strategies, New Tools, Retraining for Staff

Q: What were the goals given to you when you arrived?

TAUBER: A little context before the specifics. The new Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, chose Judith McHale as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. That office was what became of the former U.S. Information Agency (USIA). McHale's orders were to remake America's soft power into smart power – a public diplomacy for the 21st century. McHale, in her public statements, including testimony before congress, enunciated five goals. Number five is the one that directly affected me:

> Finally, we are taking steps to ensure a strategic allocation of resources in support of today's foreign policy priorities. We are strengthening the policy, planning, and resource function within my office and we are reestablishing multi-year public diplomacy plans for all posts. These plans will set forth our public diplomacy mission in host countries, analyze target audiences, inventory continuing and innovative tactics to achieve our goals, identify the resources necessary for success, and integrate realistic measurements of effectiveness.

(Downloaded August 22, 2019 from https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-111shrg63020/html/CHRG-111shrg63020.htm)

At the same time, the scholarly community had long been publishing studies on why U.S. public diplomacy had not achieved the high expectations set out for it. Many in the scholarly community were former ambassadors with experience in public diplomacy. I have read several of these studies. Here is my summary of their conclusions.

- The U.S. public and its elected officials believe that success in public diplomacy is measured by how well we get foreign publics to like us and convince foreign governments to do what we want.
- U.S. elected officials incorrectly believe that public diplomacy should use the tools of political campaigns. If it got me elected, it should work just as well on foreign audiences. The motto: Yell, don't tell.
- State Department public diplomacy fails because:
    - It doesn't have enough fluent speakers in critical languages like Russian, Chinese, Arabic, and Persian. You can't convince them if you can't speak the language. Leave fluent officers in these strategic areas for longer periods of time.
    - Its communication tools are obsolete and its information management is not organized for rapid response. Improving this may require change in laws and reorganization in the Department.
    - Officers are restricted by a bunker-like embassy far from the publics they need to influence.
    - It is chronically underfunded. It cannot quickly move human and communication assets to mission-critical areas. This contrasts with military strategic communication officers who can be ordered to go anywhere and can be counted to carry out orders without dissent.

In my humble opinion, the expectation that public diplomacy alone can "move the needle" from dislike to like, or from unpersuaded to "on the reservation" is fatally flawed. A foreign government's readiness to work with the U.S. is frequently at odds with the opinion of its public. Sometimes foreign governments work closely with us in spite of public opinion; e.g., the UK's support for the Iraq War when popular opinion in the UK was opposed. Sometimes a foreign government regards the U.S. as anathema, but its population has a favorable view; e.g., Iran and Cuba. Favorability measurements from public opinion polls also vary depending on how questions are framed and whether the sample size is large enough to yield a reasonably accurate snapshot.

Moreover, foreign public opinion toward the U.S. is colored by many factors. It may be based on our military presence in a country, our alliance with a tyrant, or, contrarily, our help in overthrowing a tyrant. Many foreigners form their view of the U.S. based on whether they get a visa. Others judge America by the way our tourists conduct themselves abroad. Still others like us if we invest in factories that provide jobs, then hate us if those factories create toxic waste or harsh working conditions. On the positive side are the countless people-to-people connections among communities of interest: educational institutions, commercial and investment ties, on-line videos and chats, etc. These links generally create a more positive disposition toward the U.S. However, it is difficult to quantify a "positive disposition" in any actionable way.

As far as I'm concerned, no amount of U.S. government public diplomacy is going to act like a tidal wave of Valium, blissing out a nation's grievances against the U.S. We should not expect it to. My view is the one espoused by Karen Hughes – the former Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The one who I nearly "lost" during her visit to Hungary. Here is the key part of her 2010 testimony to congress about public diplomacy:

> People often talk about public diplomacy in the context of opinion polls and, while we all want to be liked, I believe to view public diplomacy only in the context of an international popularity contest is a fundamental misunderstanding. America's engagement with foreign publics is actually a vital foreign policy and national security priority that seeks to promote our national ideals and interests, to undermine those of our enemies, and to foster understanding by engaging in dialogue and listening with respect to the views and opinions of others. (Downloaded August 22, 2019 from https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-111shrg63020/html/CHRG-111shrg63020.htm)

One last thing. By insisting on measuring how well we "move the needle" we overlook the fact that we can use public diplomacy in changing minds on particular issues. For example, during my tour in Romania, the ambassador spent a lot of time and effort speaking out against corruption. It annoyed the ruling party because, obviously, those who are in power are the ones who can most readily benefit from corrupt practices. During the national elections, the ruling party was turned out of office. Many commentators said that the U.S. ambassador's emphasis on ending corruption played a role in the voters' decision to throw out that set of blighters. It is possible to have public diplomacy victories, but you have to choose your objectives carefully.

Another push factor driving Under Secretary McHale's remodeling of public diplomacy was a 2010 General Accounting Office survey of public diplomacy tools. It looked at all the activities and platforms we had for connecting with foreign audiences. It urged more strategic planning with specific objectives and measurement of results. For real public diplomacy devotees, you can find the full GAO report at https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10767.pdf

What was the practical outcome of all McHale's efforts? U.S. public diplomacy sections around the world would now have two new forms to complete: one addressed strategic planning and the other measured each activity by resources put in and results that came out. Let's start with the strategic planning form, the MSRP.

Q: Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price?

TAUBER: No, Mission Strategic and Resource Plan. But you know, now that you mention retail sales, that does offer a rich vein of analogies. We could compare my retail advocacy of U.S. foreign policy to other kinds of boutique marketing.

Q: I would recommend that we resist adding any more analogies. It would likely take us into more acronyms and jargon. At this point, if we add any more, we might as well append a glossary.

TAUBER: OK. OK. The MSRP contained our list of public diplomacy objectives to accomplish in a given year and the resources we intended to devote to these efforts. Now to the retail level. To measure how well you conducted each *individual* public diplomacy activity, the Department rolled out another new form. This was the Mission Activity Tracker (MAT). There had always been forms to record individual public diplomacy activities. But the MAT was new in that it left little room for lengthy descriptions. There were many detailed radio buttons to fill and prose was strictly limited. This would allow the Department to aggregate data from all embassies and Washington offices. Every public diplomacy practitioner throughout the world from Washington to Ouagadougou, would post results of every action, no matter how small, into the MAT database. The Under Secretary would have a massive cumulus of public diplomacy data stored in the cloud. At last, the fusty old Department of State would speak the language of the bottom-line. Using excel, powerpoint, and prezi, we could shape encyclopedic data to dazzle auditors and Inspectors General. Oh, and by the way, all you public diplomacy officers out there, you've got access to this data too. Embassy by embassy, section by section, you will be able to see how other public affairs officers are eating your lunch. However ephemeral the data, however modest the activity, public diplomacy officers would now

have the ability to read the results of everyone else's work and compete for top rank. My, how my Aries blood ran hot when competition offered the way to funds and awards.

Or at least that was the ambition of the MAT. Like any on-line format, the roll-out of the MAT was a glitch-ridden agony. Many of my locally hired staff (LES) weren't sure how to describe results. They didn't like having to fill out MAT forms when *their* work evaluations were based on numbers of accomplishments, not completion of forms. Getting their buy-in to this system was a constant slog. To make things easier, I had my LES pre-populate their MATs before an activity took place so that only a few entries were needed at the end. Even with this practice, my email queue of MATs-ready-to-edit was never empty. I often had to re-edit a MAT as more examples of its success slouched in. We had dozens of activities going on all the time. Eventually, even the ambassador began to price in the time it took to complete MAT forms when she envisioned major new public diplomacy projects.

Q: So those were the planning and measurement tools. What were the specific goals in Costa Rica?

TAUBER**:** There are very few irritants in U.S.-Costa Rican relations. Like anywhere else, denial of visas can create negative publicity, as we saw with the Venerable Vituperator. But by and large, Costa Rica was a welcoming environment for most U.S. public affairs initiatives. Our embassy goals were to:

- Support Ambassador Initiatives
- Increase Outreach to Youth
- Create an Alumni Organization of Returnees from U.S. Visitor Programs
- Grow Social Media to Amplify and Promote U.S. Foreign Policy Goals
- Support VIP visits (Secretary Clinton)
- Support All Other Embassy Offices

Q: How about the section itself. How many, what specializations and so on?

TAUBER: The best single description of my section comes from another source. One day, in spring 2012, the ambassador called a special expanded country team meeting. The Ambassador's conference room, a large space by any measure, was at overflow capacity so I gave up my seat to someone else and leaned against the credenza. Next to me stood the RSO. He turned and warned me, "Now don't get fresh with me." The Scorpio in me filled with venom.

Q: Can we just stipulate that you had some scourging philippics ready and proceed with the narrative?

TAUBER: Yes.

Q: Yes!?

TAUBER: The ambassador gaveled the meeting to order before I could deliver the sting. That left a fire in my belly that had to find a way out. Once she had everyone's attention, the ambassador announced that the State Department Inspector General (IG) would be coming in May. "I knew I felt a disturbance in the Force," I intoned in my best Darth Vader imitation. The meeting dissolved into laughter. (Note to aspiring diplomats: ambassadors don't generally welcome comic relief when announcing the visit of an Inspector General.)

Here, briefly is what happens on an Inspector General visit:

1. The Front Office distributed the 25-page questionnaire to all embassy sections. Everyone, even local employees replied to the appropriate sections. The IG kept all replies confidential and shredded them after the inspection.
2. The DCM set up embassy committees to tidy up for the visit. We checked files, procedures, records, receipts… anything that might have the slightest whiff of irregularity was straightened out.
3. The IG team arrived. They conducted interviews to review the replies in the questionnaire. They randomly checked files, examined processes. It took weeks.
4. The IG team concluded its deliberations and shared its report with the Front Office and individual section chiefs. A brief period for comment was permitted.
5. The final report was reviewed at a staff meeting with the front office and all section chiefs. The Ambassador was ready. She had an outstanding legal mind and her arguments went to line-by-line corrections. My fellow section chiefs and I exchanged cringes. This was the moment for large concerns, for how misunderstandings in the final report might affect Washington's view of the post. At this point, the IG was a force of nature and I fear that the ambassador had not gotten the small craft warning. Ultimately, the meeting moved on to the plans for improvements.

IGs require improvements in two ways. There are **formal** recommendations. These are recorded in Washington and must be fulfilled. The second are **informal** recommendations. These are recorded at post and considered part of the section chief's work requirements. My section had **no formal** recommendations, just informal ones.

Q: That's good, right?

TAUBER: Oh, very good. The IG's review of my public affairs section was quite positive. And I did begin implementing his informal recommendations even in my last few months there. Because the IG's report on my section is so comprehensive, I'm going to reproduce it below with some comments.

The IG's report on the Public Diplomacy Section follows in black. My notes are in red.

Public Diplomacy

An experienced public affairs officer, (that would be me) assisted by a first-time information officer and an entry-level cultural affairs officer, supervise a wide range of public diplomacy activities conducted by 13 Local Employee (LE) staff members. Public affairs concerns are woven into all of the MSRP goals and shape the structure and content of embassy activities. The section has excellent relations and works closely with all sections and agencies resident in San José.

Much of the embassy's outreach is done through or markedly enhanced by creative and thorough use of social media. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and a bilingual website are all extensively promoted. For example, the audience for a recent presentation by an American astronaut discussing sustainable growth and alternate energy themes was tripled, and expanded to interested viewers in Central America and South America via live streaming on the Internet combined with virtual chat room interaction.

The embassy Facebook community includes some prominent legislators, opinion leaders, and academics, and at 41,000 followers is larger than the daily circulation of many of San José's newspapers and magazines. The embassy's Facebook penetration statistics and interaction rates are the third best in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs.

The embassy Twitter feeds cross-promote with Facebook, linking Bureau of International Information and Programming-generated content, which is then sometimes used by traditional media journalists. Almost all embassy external activity, from ambassadorial speeches to seminars, training events, and cultural performances, is heavily promoted on social media.

(This has stuck in my craw. All of these actions and accomplishments were urged on us by the Department. Both the geographic bureau -- Western Hemisphere Affairs -- and the Under Secretary's office wanted to see a much larger social media footprint from

every embassy, not least because Washington controlled one-third of every embassy's website feed. A later Inspector General's report of my next post -- the Bureau of International Information Programs -- would criticize the Department for emphasizing the growth of social media followers without a clear strategy of policy goals to promote.)

While the public diplomacy section analysis recognizes that the traditional media is still the paramount vehicle for getting the embassy's themes and messages across to Costa Rican audiences, the heavy demand on staff to develop social media products can leave insufficient time for more traditional media placement and meaningful, consistent interaction with key opinion leaders. Occasionally social media products are less substantive and have more of an entertainment character. Three LE staff members (or one-quarter of public diplomacy local staff) work on social media exclusively. The information officer spends close to 40 percent of his time on social media and the public affairs officer a lesser but significant amount. Interaction of both officers with the traditional media occurs most often at press events and mostly with mid-level journalists. (Again, we were following Department taskings in the decisions on resourcing the growth of a large social media footprint.)

One-on-one contact work with the editors of major newspapers, and the news directors and managers of television and radio stations is infrequent and of a lower priority. Many of these critical opinion multipliers are infrequent social media users. The public affairs officer developed an excellent influence analysis survey of Costa Rican media influencers but has not taken steps to consistently work with the key individuals identified. (We assumed that influencers are, in this day and age, people who have large social media followings. The IG may in fact be behind the times in insisting that we spend a lot of time on the directors and managers who are not the ones with the thousands of social media followers. Their news, opinion, and celebrity talent are the ones people follow.)

Informal Recommendation 7: Embassy San José should carefully analyze and monitor both social media activity and more traditional approaches to reaching key opinion leaders so that the embassy effectively and consistently reaches critical audiences.

(The IG is correct, although I think that traditional media in Costa Rica are not far behind those in the U.S. -- i.e., on a fast path to change or extinction. Also, I usually deferred to the ambassador to take meetings with heads of media organizations. I was timorous about engaging with anyone who might report my words because the ambassador

wanted to be the one to enunciate all policy matters herself. The IG also noticed this. He diplomatically suggested a change to that management style. See below.)

The Ambassador values public diplomacy outreach as a critical embassy activity and is in fact at the heart of much of the section's programming effort. The Ambassador is in demand to make presentations at all major events in Costa Rica. Her presence ensures a high-level audience and adds seriousness to the discussions. There are few speaking opportunities for other senior embassy officers, including the DCM, which can lead at times to overtaxing the Ambassador's schedule or deferring speaking opportunities that she cannot accept.

(This is gentle chiding. Many embassy officers undoubtedly told the IG that their work time was too often consumed with preparing large briefing books for the ambassador. She seldom needed the info. She was a fast learner and was never at a loss for words at public events. We could have done far less to prepare her. This reputation for excessive preparation got as far as the Department, so it could hardly have been expected that the IG would overlook it.)

The public diplomacy section has made good use of limited speaker offerings from the Bureau of International Information Programs and some visiting U.S. Government officials. Many embassies have American speakers programs that give embassy officers the opportunity to speak at host country high schools and universities to help counteract popular culture misrepresentations of the United States and its society. More senior officers often fill in for the Ambassador when appropriate. (More chiding.)

Informal Recommendation 8: Embassy San José should develop an American speakers program to give embassy officials, including entry-level officers, an opportunity to speak at appropriate venues across Costa Rica.

Overall, the public affairs officer manages the section well. He oversees a diverse set of activities, including English teaching programs, journalist training, arts and literature events, and seminar discussions. His management style includes frequent individual meetings with both the American officers and with selected Locally Employed (LE) staff. There are occasional cultural or information section meetings and ad hoc policy discussions that sometimes include LE staff. There are no regularly scheduled meetings for the entire staff with the public affairs officer. The LE staff includes many highly trained, motivated, and dedicated employees. Regular meetings in the section could

improve communication about goals and priorities, as well as give the LE staff a better sense of inclusion.

Informal Recommendation 9: Embassy San José should convene regularly scheduled staff meetings, including all locally employed staff, in its public diplomacy section.

(I liked my staff and enjoyed talking with them. I managed by walking around, resolving problems as I found them. This practice also helped me identify opportunities to cross-train staff in different specialties to keep their work interesting and upgrade skills in photoshop and desktop publishing. Nevertheless, as chief of section, I did need to hold more effective staff meetings. I made a start.)

Exchange Programs

The cultural affairs officer manages a large cultural and exchange program budget of $3.8 million in Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs-supported activities, including 20 International Visitor Leadership Program grants, Fulbright and Humphrey programs, and modest
cultural and speaker activities. The exchange program is the embassy's primary vehicle to build enduring Costa Rican support for the United States.
The International Visitor Leadership Program is closely tied to the MSRP goals and objectives. The DCM chairs the selection committee, and all mission sections and agencies participate in the nominating and selection process. Judicious use and timing of grantee travel and Washington incentive programs have enabled the embassy to receive several additional no cost grants in each of the past 2 years.

(My cultural affairs officer worked her way up in the Foreign Service starting as a secretary. She was simply fantastic. I was often amazed at how well she managed multiple programs and a complex, penny-pinched budget.)

Costa Rica does not have a Fulbright Commission. Instead the cultural affairs officer manages Fulbright grants, whose current recipients are both Costa Rican and U.S. senior scholars and graduate students. Three Fulbright U.S. English teaching assistants are also assigned to regional university campuses.

The cultural affairs section manages a number of non-Fulbright educational exchange programs for Costa Ricans, including a community college initiative, a global undergraduate exchange program, a summer institute on U.S. history and government participation, and a high school youth ambassadors program.

The public diplomacy section has a locally employed staff who serves as alumni coordinator. She maintains close contact with former grantees from the Fulbright and Humphrey programs, the International Visitor Leadership Program, and other exchange programs. Ex-grantees are frequent attendees of embassy programs.

(We hired our Alumni Coordinator as a temporary employee with a grant from the Department's Office of Alumni Affairs. Once we described her success, the Department made her position permanent. By the time I left, we had held an alumni networking event with over 300 participants. This had, quite simply, never been done before at any post in Latin America.)

Grants Management

An administrative assistant, who has completed the requisite grants training, maintains the public diplomacy grants files.

(Giving grants to local nonprofits to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals is one of the largest components of the public diplomacy officer's job. You find responsible partners and you dole out the money in tranches as milestones are met. Many grants are going on at the same time, so the grants officer must have an eagle-eyed assistant who can bird-dog the process. I was lucky to have an outstanding assistant who could ride herd on our recipients and git those doggies to the final round-up.) The public affairs officer holds current valid grants authority and has undergone grants training. The public affairs officer departs post this summer. Neither the cultural affairs officer nor the information officer holds current valid grants authority. In FY 2011, Embassy San José issued 35 grants totaling $428,044. (At most other U.S. government cabinet departments this sum would be known as pocket change. Does that sound bitter? It should.)

Informal Recommendation 10: Embassy San José should arrange for at least one additional public diplomacy officer to complete the required grants training and obtain valid grants authority before the current public affairs officer departs post. (This was an easy fix.)

The files for FYs 2010 and 2011 are in excellent order with all required documentation present or in the case of a few late, last quarter FY 2011 grants, pending only a final report. The grants officer's representative is in the process of obtaining those missing reports.

The embassy's Information Resource Center is located just inside the entrance of the embassy and is under the overall direction of the public affairs officer. It is not open to the public, although the center's conference room is used by the embassy for occasional video conferences and press interviews and by various embassy officers for meetings with their
contacts. The staff includes a director, who is a trained research librarian , and the exchange program alumni coordinator. The center director does extensive electronic outreach to a wide range of key embassy audiences providing article alert services and detailed research on topics tied to the MSRP. Her efforts are both proactive and responsive to growing requests from Costa Rican audiences. For example, recently the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly's head librarian asked for information on U.S. law and regulation affecting automobile drivers under the age of 18 because the
Assembly was considering legislation to lower the legal driving age and wanted to know how the United States handles this issue. In-house, the Center provides article alert services to embassy employees, does speech writing background material research, and offers similar services upon
request for embassy officers' key contacts. The Mexico City-based regional information resource officer regularly visits the Information Resource Center and considers its programs among the best in her region. At the regional information resource officer's request, the director of San
José's Information Resource Center hosts and trains directors from other embassy resource centers in Central America. (Take a moment to digest that. My staffer was so good she trained everybody else. And she wasn't the only on the team specially requested for training either.)

The Center director also coordinates the activities of the American and Science Corners and liaises with the San José Binational Center. The American Corner, located in the municipal library of the eastern port city of Limon, has 1,500 active members and hosts 20-25 embassy programs a year. The more modest Science Corner, located in the expanding northern city of Liberia on the campus of Earth University, operates 6-8 months a year and has a small but growing audience of university students and professors. Embassy support to both corners is modest and appropriate.

The embassy has long been a partner of the Binational Center in San José, one of the country's premier English teaching institutes and the embassy's principal programming platform in Costa Rica. The public affairs officer is a member of the center's board of directors. The center has an extensive collection of U.S.-oriented materials in its lending library, which also

houses an educational counseling office. The embassy directs all educational advising enquiries to this office. In FY 2011, the center received $228,000 in grants from the embassy and the Department to conduct cultural programming and educational counseling, buy books, and make
infrastructure improvements.

(The American Corner relied on a single African-Costa Rican librarian in Limon, the capital of Costa Rica's Caribbean province. She was a hero who worked tirelessly to leverage that small investment into a big asset for the community. The region is significantly poorer and under-resourced than the rest of the country. To maintain our American Corner we fought for funding to get air conditioning to protect the book collection and computer workstations. Hardware for American Corners was typically not funded. It took a lot of convincing to move funds into maintenance. But the result was better than expected. An air-conditioned library drew many new users to our materials.)

End IG's Report.

2009-10: The Regency

Q: That was pretty comprehensive. Is there anything you want to add?

TAUBER: Well, yes, a bit more. An IG's report is a pretty dry thing. I want to give you an idea of what it was like to actually run a mid-sized public affairs section.

Let's divide my tour into two parts; the pre-ambassador period, or the Regency, and the Ambassadorial period. For many months after my arrival we had no ambassador. Obama had just won the presidency and his administration was taking its time in filling all the political appointee ambassador slots. In the interim, we had a chargé d'affaires. He was an excellent Spanish speaker and had been a USIA officer in Costa Rica many years earlier. But his memory of public diplomacy (PD) in Costa Rica went back to the era when PD had been a separate agency -- the U.S. Information Agency. Separate agency meant a separate budget for the USIA Director in each embassy. USIA also had a separate building and the country director had a residence large enough for official entertaining. The USIA country director was an eminence on the local scene whose contacts were CEOs of news organizations, university rectors, ministers of education, and so on. He was a respected figure not least because everyone knew he had money.

But that was not the situation I enjoyed. Don't get me wrong, I had a nice apartment. It just was not suitable for entertaining. I tried holding a rehearsal reception to see how well

the rooftop entertainment area could host guests. On New Year's Eve I hosted about 30 people and found the space wanting in many regards. The stuccoed walls with the crown molding lacked sufficient electrical outlets to keep the *hors d'oeuvres* warm. There weren't enough chairs. My invitees began to get sore legs from standing on uncarpeted terrazzo tiles, I had to rush down to my apartment to bring up my dining room chairs and bridge set. Worst of all, the rooftop did not have any wind block. The gusts on the 12th floor were enough to blow my *amuse-bouches* into the *décolletage* of my guests. Subsequently, I did all my official entertaining at restaurants where I could engage a proper catering staff.

When I arrived, my first responsibility was acting as press spokesman. Fortunately, there were few sources of antagonistic reporting to deal with. This was not the 1980s, when Costa Rican media vied to be the most anti-Reagan. By 2009, only one of these contrarians still survived from the Era of Ill Will. He wrote a weekly on-line journal that reported local events. It was widely read by English-speakers in Costa Rica; even State Department desk officers could read the Grumpy Old Journal in real time. So when Mr. Cranky started attacking the consular section's visa denials, especially a few cases in which medical need was involved, the chargé ordered me to staunch the flow of venom.

It was a perfectly legitimate tasking. We were getting a public relations black eye and I needed to step up. But the last thing I wanted to do was start an elder-care relationship with a refractory grouch. Managing him would detract from my time to innovate, to sell positive messaging, to develop friendly contacts who would help with public events. This is the very soul of Aries' motivation and skill, as Linda tells us, "The fields of advertising and public relations attract him, since they give him a chance to promote, and he takes to selling like a duck takes to water." (*Sun Signs*, pg. 48)

I believed that my chargé was laboring under the memory of the earlier era when a single visit from the USIA country director to a difficult journalist was the equivalent of a hand-bagging from Margaret Thatcher. Now, with USIA integrated into the State Department, the official view was that we are public diplomacy officers. Speaking to the public should be part of everyone's work evaluation.

Well. following this logic, I had every right to find someone with a title and expertise better suited to dealing with visa complaints. And who better than the Consul General? He was above me both in rank and experience. He was the perfect Trojan to whom I could regift this Greek horse.

But how to get him to do it? This would take some convincing. I opened my grimoire of persuasive talking points and confabulated a set that flattered his expertise, blandished his

objections, and reassured his trepidations. It would be a one and done. Once the muckraker got a full dose of public diplomacy from the top U.S. consular official, he would surely relent, run a delete key over his vitriol, and stop scribbling disparagement against the embassy.

And you know what? That's exactly what happened. At least for a little while. Unfortunately, in resolving the matter, the CG broke The Law of Unintended Consequences. Without realizing it, the CG had created a fiend. I mean a friend. Subsequently, whenever The Grouch found new consular outrages to magnify into abominations, all eyes turned to the CG to soothe the savage beast.

Q: But didn't this action place you among the Foisters?

TAUBER: Certainly not! This was a delegation of responsibility. I would never foist a disagreeable assignment on a colleague. Moreover, I rewarded the CG. I loaned him my award-winning videographer to film an instructional video on how to fill out a U.S. visa application and request an interview. As more of my staff learned how to record video, we started filling YouTube with our public events. The likes and subscriptions to our videos started rolling in.

Before the pre-ambassador period closed, my staff also spent many hours migrating our substantial website data to its 2.0 successor. In addition, we created from scratch our embassy twitter account, set up English Language training programs for underserved youth, and opened a new Science/Technology/Engineering/Mathematics -- STEM -- American Corner to help students become more science literate. All this was in place for the ambassador when she arrived.

As the ambassador's arrival approached, the embassy also conducted the last pre-ambassadorial awards ceremony. A line of award-seekers formed outside the chargé's office. It was their last chance to be honored by a reliable source. You can be sure the mission's top officers cashed in. I continued to believe that if I were deserving, I'd be nominated. No award was forthcoming for me.

Part 2: The Ambassadorial Period

How to Manage a Visit from Secretary Clinton. Or Not.

The arrival of the ambassador changed the focus of work. She was a high-energy chief of mission with many initiatives to promote. It took her awhile to understand that, while we *wanted* to do everything she told us to do, we simply did not have the staff or time to do

it all. It became known as the "bandwidth" problem. Once again, not long after the ambassador's arrival, I was able to reduce her estimation of my work in the course of a visit from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This occurred early in the ambassador's tenure, in March of 2010.

Secretary Clinton had created a program that she wanted to highlight during this trip. It was called "Pathways to Prosperity." Very nice. But what exactly *was* Pathways to Prosperity (PtP)? I had no instruction cable. No scene-setter. Only a 25-page manual on how the public affairs officer should prepare for media management during the visit. I frantically emailed my desk officer in Washington. Nothing. I turned to the Economic Officer. Wasn't prosperity his forte? He made inquiries. Replies were vaporous. For all the clarity he got, we might as well have consulted the Delphic Oracle.

As the Secretary's visit drew closer, clues began to surface. The PtP had different objectives in the different countries on the Secretary's Latin America trip. In Costa Rica, the Secretary's surrogates made it known that she wanted to highlight corporate social responsibility, environmental protection, and women's empowerment, especially since Costa Rica had just elected its first woman president, Laura Chinchilla. For the Secretary's own description of PtP, go to this still-extant website and read her Costa Rica PtP ministerial speech. https://still4hill.com/2010/03/04/secretary-clinton-at-pathways-to-prosperity-ministerial-in-costa-rica/

(N.B. The new Costa Rican president, Laura Chinchilla, although a historic figure in women's empowerment, faced severe challenges as a chief of state. During the nearly two years I overlapped with her four-year mandate, the legislature raised Costa Rica's debt-to-GDP ratio by refusing to increase revenues to cover increased salary costs. Despite her best efforts, Chinchilla could not stop an increase in drug cartel activity in Costa Rica. Not surprising, since Costa Rica has no army and the small police force at that time was outgunned.)

Although the election had taken place, Chinchilla's inauguration was still months away when Secretary Clinton arrived. Oscar Arias was still taking his victory lap. Yes, *that* Oscar Arias. The one who was president during my first tour in Costa Rica when I was a young political officer riding around the country on refugee business.

But it wasn't exactly the 1980s version of Don Oscar. The thorn in the side of the Reagan Administration, the leftist/internationalist who won the Nobel Prize, was a new man. Now he was all about bespoke suits, free markets, and international trade, especially if that openness brought carbon-neutral investment to eco-friendly Costa Rica. Arias 2.0. also withdrew Costa Rica's recognition of Taiwan and transferred its embassy to Beijing.

I'm sure the announcement of China's agreement to build Costa Rica a new sports stadium had nothing to do with Arias' decision. And what a stadium it was! I know all about it because my apartment was only a few blocks from the construction site in San Jose's central park. For the better part of two years, sequestered Chinese laborers worked to raise a multi-purpose arena with the alacrity of reeducation camp inmates promised their freedom upon completion.

As the Secretary's visit drew closer still, I received an email asking me if I had ever directed a public affairs section during a secretarial visit? If not, the email instructed me, read the attached 25-page instruction manual and get in touch with the advance team on the double.

The careful reader will recall that Aries chafes against instruction manuals. This manual looked like blocking diagrams for a Broadway musical. Page after page of how to set up events and segue to the next one. I had no control over that. This was Costa Rica's ministerial meeting. All I could do was second guess and try to micromanage. The key chapter of the manual, the one that needed the most attention from public affairs officers, was how to handle the Secretary's accompanying press gaggle. I had worked on presidential visits in both Romania and Hungary. How much harder could it be to manage a secretarial visit that wouldn't even last 24 hours?

The ferocity of Secretary Clinton's press corps matched anything Jurassic Park could gestate in its Mesozoic petri dish. Each journalist was a carnivore ready to pick off unprotected VIPs if their embassy minders looked away. The gaggle had to be fed and leashed, lest their instinctual craving for red meat stake-outs got in the way of smooth transitions. Cameramen and TV reporters needed very particular habitats. They only thrived when lines-of-sight for the Secretary's video feed captured her in the most flattering and consequential way. To ensure this, the public affairs officer needed to have embassy wranglers at every site capable of acting as human shields between the Secretary and press predators.

I was over-confident and did not believe that video set-ups could be so difficult to defend or that media availabilities could be so kinetic. When it came to the rapidly changing blocking for press availabilities I was utterly flummoxed by Arias' media aide. She wasn't paid to care about the Secretary, or the ambassador for that matter. Their images on worldwide TV could go to blazes.

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But, since President Arias would certainly want to be seen with both of these officials for his own reasons, I did have a bit of a common interest I could leverage. Whatever

fulcrum I may have had, it was not enough. Here are the three strikes that put me out of the good graces of the Clinton travel team, and therefore, the ambassador.

- I needed to be in the Pathways to Prosperity ministerial meeting room by 5:30 am, spread-eagled across a duct-taped territory on the video riser so that no other camera crew, and certainly not the Costa Rican president's photographers, could annex it. Readers with strong memories will recall from my year at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces that Aries is not a sign known for early risers. I arrived at 7:30 am. The Arias contingent had already stolen a march on me. They got the cherry spot. The Secretary's video crew got the sour cherry spot. They were perfectly happy with it, but the sheer size of their equipment, and their need for elbow room, meant that a clash with their Costa Rican counterparts was inevitable. The two parties did get into a border skirmish that had to be resolved by Arias' media aide. A DMZ was established and both parties thenceforth observed the armistice. Once this was done, the Clinton coverage at the big ministerial meeting certainly looked good from the outside monitor I watched. But make no mistake. Someone ratted me out for failing to protect the American photo pool's buffer zone. This was strike one.

- After the ministerial meeting, the Secretary needed to be at the center of the press conference table in the adjoining room. That was also where the host, President Arias, expected to park. Arias was not a loud or elbowing kind of guy. He was used to being the most important person in the room and did not imagine he would need to give up a spot to the visiting American Secretary. He ambled in, took the throne, and I could not find words to tell the Costa Rican president he was in the wrong seat. I was also insufficiently demanding with Arias' media aide. The Secretary's travel team processed in and their fingers began skittering over their smartphones. I realized, with the sudden clarity you get when a white dorsal fin surfaces near your surfboard, that they were not exchanging selfies. The team had measured the photo angle for the Secretary and found it woefully off azimuth. This was declared Highly Inauspicious. Once again, although the television and photo crews appeared to have the Secretary covered perfectly, this lapse was registered as strike two.

- Then, after the press availability, the Secretary moved to a side room. My staff had set it up with women entrepreneurs and their wares. Remember Pathways to Prosperity? Each of these empowered women had founded a company relying on a micro loan from a socially responsible bank or venture capital fund. The Secretary was to stroll around, congratulating the women, and perhaps sampling the wares. But just beyond the tables of knitted, baked, and printed goods, the

> press snarled, reared up, and roared questions with outstretched mikes. What held them back? It wasn't the rope lines. Soft barriers were chum to these sharks. It was only the Secretary's travel team, linking arms in a human chain, that kept the predators at bay and the lines-of-sight clear. I did not join the human chain. I thought I had to be ready at any moment to run ahead to prepare for the next request. And, truth be told, I was stunned that it took such a physically aggressive act to keep the carnivore journalists at bay. Strike three.

Thereafter, the summit dissolved into bilateral meetings and negotiations on how the Secretary would meet the current head-of-state and the president-elect. As important as this was, I had an ambassador writing my performance evaluation. Every Secretarial meeting had to have the ambassador in it, and I had to get *my* photo/video staff to record it for posterity. How do I get my people into the photosprays and b-roll recordings? I can't remember. By the time all this took place it was around 7:30 pm and I was starving. My advice to public affairs officers in similar situations: bring along a lot of energy bars. There won't be any time for lunch or dinner.

Wanna see how it all turned out? Visit this Clinton blog site. I think the outcomes look fine. But you be the judge. https://still4hill.com/2010/03/04/secretary-clinton-at-pathways-to-prosperity-ministerial-in-costa-rica/

The whole visit was over 20 hours after the Secretary arrived. The following day I returned to work and the ambassador asked to see me. I can remember only one sentence from that encounter. "If you were in the private sector, you'd be fired by now." Surprisingly, I didn't flinch. This was still relatively early in the ambassador's tenure. Maybe she didn't know that a statement like that, no matter how it's intended, actually means, "Pack your bags, you're outta here." It's the kind of thing an ambassador doesn't usually say directly to the person being curtailed. Usually, the ambassador tells her deputy chief of mission (DCM) to deliver the bad news. The DCM then informs the unfortunate that he has lost the confidence of the ambassador and can pick up his one-way ticket to Washington in the travel office. So I waited to hear from the DCM.

He never called. Whether the ambassador was just blowing off steam or whether someone convinced her that a few noses out of joint among the Secretary's travel team was not the kind of infraction that merited curtailment, I don't know. In any case, I did not get a one-way ticket back to Washington. But. You can be sure that, at the next awards assembly, there was no Wonka Golden Ticket in my chocolate bar.

2011-2012: A Giant Social Media Footprint

As I mentioned earlier, the Department notified us shortly after I arrived that my position would henceforth be filled by an officer one grade below mine. That is unusual. Typically, a job that requires supervision of two Americans and 13 local staff would be given to someone at my grade -- 01 -- the last step before the Senior Foreign Service. It's the equivalent of a colonel in the U.S. Army. The Department's decision to downgrade the position may not have been any reflection on me. It may have been a reaction to a bulge in mid-grade officers. In the triage to find more positions for them, my job was sacrificed for the greater good. We fought the decision, but one seldom wins a fight against the Director General of the Foreign Service. Readers with long memories will recall that I once tried to fight a Director General's decision. The result: an assignment to the Nerk. That was a lost year.

Regarding promotion. I knew that I was coming to the end of my time in the 01 grade. The Foreign Service follows an up-or-out personnel system like the military. I had to "cross the senior threshold," i.e., win promotion into the Senior Foreign Service, or I would have to retire. I needed to wow a promotion board with stellar accomplishments in the six areas of performance: Substantive Knowledge, Intellectual Skills, Interpersonal Relations, Management, Leadership, and Foreign Language/Communication skills. I threw myself into everything. First it was the PtP Initiatives.

Ambassador Initiatives Under Pathways to Prosperity

For this active chief of mission there would be no "ambassador awards" to ensure an audience. She wanted to travel the country and promote Pathways to Prosperity. She wanted to advance socially and environmentally responsible development. And, taking a page from the SecState visit, each activity would have a large staff and awesome media coverage. That was the ideal. The reality was that the Costa Rican media followed the issues their readers/listeners/viewers found most compelling. My local staff had plenty of journalist contacts. We even took some along on ambassador trips. But we couldn't always convene them at a snap of the fingers. That is why we turned more and more to social media -- go around the influencers if you can't get their attention in a timely way.

From a practical point of view what did this mean? I got my staff the equipment to live stream and got them trained. We learned how to record video in real time, even from remote locations. My staff could do a light edit of the video and get it up on YouTube within 24 hours. Over time, more Costa Ricans watched the Ambassador's progress because they realized they could even suggest where the Ambassador should go next. I learned in my media course at the National Defense University that crowdsourcing isn't the wave of the future, it's the Now. In the Age of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) people

want to feel a connection to what influencers are doing. This made flexibility and agility on the fly an essential part of our support.

At first, I thought that the ambassador should husband her political capital. I urged her to make her public appearances meaningful, memorable, and few. But I quickly discovered that, it was not just better for a U.S. official to become a YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter star, but absolutely necessary. Even in a developing country like Costa Rica, cell phone penetration was widespread, and people could respond immediately if they could see the ambassador's activities in real time.

Twitter was the next step. We had two accounts. The Embassy account posted routine messaging. The Ambassador's account was new and went from 0 followers to 5,000 by the time I left. Eventually, she had at least one, and sometimes two or three tweets per day. Top Costa Rica officials followed her along with media influencers. We made sure other sections of the Embassy sent us a tweet when they backstopped an ambassador event. We would still control the final posting to be sure it was consistent with the ambassador's messaging and spoke in Twitterese, but this way we did not have to guess the outcome. I thought that these innovations in Embassy outreach were quite an accomplishment. No award though.

The ambassador also had frequent public speaking opportunities and liked to alter her speeches up to the last moment. I had stacks of speech rewrites that only *I* could retype because, apparently, only *I* had the Rosetta Stone to her demotic. The goal is to upload the speech as close to delivery as possible to attract social media attention. Changing the text up to delivery meant we had to wait for her to deliver the remarks because they were always different from the final draft. Then we had to get our hands on that final marked-up draft. This was not as easy as it sounds. Often, the final mark-up was in the ambassador's day book, which she kept until the end of the day. Or tomorrow. Sometimes we could get the text from the ambassador's secretary, who sympathized with our plight. At other times we resorted to all kinds of sticky-fingered shenanigans to distract the ambassador and nick the "as delivered" version from her book. Finally, at some events, we despaired of ever seeing the annotated copy and uploaded the final pre-delivery draft. Eventually, this habit became known in Washington and the IG put one of his gentle reproaches in his final report after he saw the stacks of rewrites in my book case. But, on the positive side, posting even penultimate drafts did confirm the ambassador as a weighty personage on social media -- something that both Costa Rican and the Departmental audiences could see with just a few clicks of internet navigation.

As time went by, to fulfill the ambassador's ambitious public agenda, I scored another delegation of duty. All public appearances began to be staffed by the responsible office.

So, if the ambassador was addressing the press corps, my staff and I sweated the briefing book and the murder board. But if it was an economic issue, a commercial promotion, a bilateral security exchange, or a political group, then the appropriate section dealt with the entire program except the live streaming, video recording, and happy snaps. Those remained in the hands of my staff. But eventually even that monopoly got busted up. Toward the end of my tour, as the ambassador felt ever more confident in public events, she did more. We regularly had to cover two events in one day. It was then we fully breathed life into that old Department bromide: we are all public diplomacy officers now.

My staff trained other sections in how to operate our video recording equipment and we lent out the cameras for them to use. My staff was uneasy about this plan. They were afraid that other sections would break the expensive equipment and they would be held responsible. So I spent another of my carefully rationed personal visits to the General Services Officer to get advice on how to write an equipment loan agreement that, no joke, committed the borrower to replace broken equipment. You break it, you own it. They signed, or *they* took the heat for disappointing the ambassador. In point of fact, the GSO told me that it was probably impossible to charge another section for broken public diplomacy equipment. Replacement would most likely come out of my hide. But, he was happy to keep that fact between the two of us and create a scary looking contract that did the trick.

By the end of the ambassador's first year, the Public Diplomacy Section was humming, and the ambassador noticed. She caught me at the end of a strategy meeting. Looking pleasantly surprised, she allowed, "Mark, you know you are a pretty resilient officer." I wanted to say, "Well, I guess, starting from, 'You'd be fired in the private sector,' this was high praise.

Q: So you won the ambassador's confidence back?

TAUBER: I wouldn't go that far. Still no award. And regarding my evaluations, looking back at this period, I am disappointed. I helped lots of other officers write their evaluations with action verbs and quantifiable results. Theirs had snap, crackle, and pop. My own evaluations now read to me as wooden, dense, and uninspired. My supervisor's remarks were measured and moderate. Measured and moderate won't get you into the Senior Foreign Service. Well, never mind. I had one more evaluation coming. A few big wins could still vault me into the medal round.

Strength-finding and the New Discourse of Private Enterprise

By the end of 2010, the language of on-line marketing and company values began to permeate everything in the State Department. It was no longer enough to have taken the oath to protect and defend the Constitution, or to rely on the president's appointment which states, "Reposing special trust and confidence in your Integrity, Prudence and Ability, I have nominated and, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, do appoint you a Foreign Service Officer…" Now we had to have a credo, an ethos, a mission statement, a set of values to adhere to. Blech. Euphemism and cant. I hated it. Had I spent 28 years in the Foreign Service only to be told *now* what my ethical responsibilities were and how to comport myself to reflect merit on my Service and my country?

The ambassador and her DCM were equally infected by this corporate vector. There would be no argument. An off-site for top officers and top local employees was convoked to produce our mission and values statements through a series of team-building exercises. Imagine 30 top embassy officers in one room with the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission. We are told to be open and candid about what works and what needs to be improved. Are? You? Serious?

It was here that I encountered the Gallup Organization's little book, *Strengthsfinder,* and discovered my own corporate strength. We all took the Gallup test and, without a drumroll, but with no small anticipation, the DCM read out all the strengths and we sorted ourselves into different sides of the room. I was Context.

Context: People especially talented in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.

I was the only Context guy in the group. I don't think it was a good look for me. My interest has always been to take the *right* lessons from history, to avoid reinventing the wheel. Instead of this proactive definition, Gallup reduced me to an archivist. That is about the last thing an embassy needs.

Among the other joys of this off-site was the group drafting exercises. You know, by now, how well Aries likes working in groups. The Economic Officer hammered out the winning mission statement. The mission values list, to me, just a murky set of affirmations, would be forgotten even before they became Embassy wallpaper. The ambassador did not fail to notice my lack of enthusiasm. She remarked to me that it was… disappointing... that the Public Affairs Officer would fail to be the author of the statement encapsulating the professional aspirations of the embassy. She thought I had problems with buy-in.

(Dear Reader, a moment of your time. You need to know that my mind, by now, had undergone complete operant conditioning by the terminology of the State Department evaluation system. My reptile brain lit up on that one word: Failed. If a performance evaluation board saw the word "failed" in your evaluation, you might as well send it to the Trash Whisperer for final disposition. You're in the don't-promote pile. Back to our story.)

"Failure" never did appear in my evaluation, and I can't fault the ambassador's reading of my lack of commitment to the off-site products. Nevertheless, it was up to me to publish pretty versions of them all over the mission. One of my staff designed the custom lettering. It had a 1960s ***LOVE*** vibe.

Cutting Edge Programming

1. The TEDx Talk: Students Love STEM

By now, I had two lackluster performance evaluations in the bank. To get my last evaluation to pop I took on the most outtathebox projects I had ever done. I hoped these would impress a promotion panel. My Time in Class (TIC) -- the number of years I could remain at the O1 level -- was fast expiring. Tic tic tic. If it expired without a promotion I had to retire.

The first effort was organizing a TED talk. TED originally stood for **T**echnology, **E**ntertainment, and **D**esign. The talks had to be 18 minutes or less and had to address new ways of combining TED ingredients to improve quality of life. Over time, these talks expanded to include every area of human endeavor. Video recordings of TED talks went viral on YouTube. They became a sensation, hot property, phenom, or Thing, depending on whether you were a Boomer, Gen X'er, Gen Z'er, or Millennial. My TED talk was the first one organized in the Western Hemisphere Bureau. Innovation, baby. Gonna get my picture on the cover of the State Department Magazine.

Q: Did you come up with the idea, like the Fulbright Alumni Road Show?

TAUBER: Not exactly. Here's how it went down. One night, I arrived a few minutes late at the ambassador's reception. It wasn't one of the events I was managing, so I figured I could be a little sloppy, avoid the greeting line, and enter through the ambassador's garden door. Nope. She was right there and I was stone cold busted. The only thing that saved me was that I immediately divined she needed extrication. A young enthusiast was pitching her a grant proposal. I knew from her Madame Tussaud smile that I had to escort the voluble vendor to a distant corner, the better to hear his proposal, of course.

It turned out he was the Executive Director of a new think tank. The board wanted to focus on improving secondary and tertiary education in Costa Rica, believing that an educated labor force would attract more carbon neutral investment. He was clever. He knew Secretary Clinton's Pathways to Prosperity talking points. Costa Ricans are good that way. Specifically, he wanted our help with a TEDx talk -- an event that uses the format of TED for high school and college students. It would have a STEM theme -- how to make STEM exciting for young people. He name-dropped some heavies of the Costa Rican science and technology scene to help him punch above his weight in fundraising. Could I chip in some venture capital? I don't know if he was aware that the ambassador had herself set a goal of visiting all 12 science and technology high schools in Costa Rica to promote STEM education. So when she heard about this idea, she was all in. In fact, she wanted to open the event.

OK. Where to get venture capital for a public diplomacy event of this size? Not from my teeny weeny budget. Better call Ripper.

The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs had taken over all public diplomacy activities after the merger between USIA and the State Department in 2000. Sometime afterward, the Under Secretary created an office devoted to ripping through humdrum grant proposals to find the cheapest and coolest outreach to youth audiences. It was called the Office of Research, Policy, Planning, and Resources. Reduced to its office symbol: RPPR. And with the merciless logic of State Department bureaucratese, it quickly became known as RIPPER. If you wanted to pitch Uncle Sam a public diplomacy activity, suit-up for Ripper.

It took months, but Ripper finally came through with a check for $25,000. You can't run a TEDx talk on 25K. But you *can* use the funds to leverage more. My Costa Rican think tanker started leveraging. A U.S. Embassy imprimatur still counted for something in the small moneyed community of Costa Rica. And nothing signals the confidence of the U.S. embassy more than a Treasury check for five figures. My thinktanker romanced an equivalent amount of money and secured in-kind contributions of TV coverage and a free venue. For my part, I sold the idea of live streaming the event to the Education Ministry which had a feed to smart boards in schools around the country. We were wired. Now to the speakers.

Q: That is good work. But remind me, why were we doing this?

TAUBER: I don't know if you've noticed, but Central America is not one of the world's engines of economic growth.. Poverty, unemployment, gangs, drugs, earthquakes, and

lack of investment have left all Central American countries -- other than Costa Rica -- in a bad way. Our goal was to help Costa Rica remain on a path of democratic, market-oriented development as a beacon for its neighbors. Moreover, as my thinktanker pointed out, encouraging job growth in STEM areas accorded with Secretary Clinton's Pathways to Prosperity. That was the theme of our TEDx talk: the exciting future of STEM studies. Our target demographics were high school and college students.

Q: Were there enough riveting speakers in Costa Rica, or did you have to import some?

TAUBER: We always planned for some foreign speakers, and we vetted the choices our partner made. In addition to the ambassador, I added myself. In 2012, a U.S. teenager had earned a small fame by becoming the youngest person to discover a supernova with her backyard telescope. She had toured a few U.S. high schools, so we knew she could do a TEDx talk. We negotiated with her stagedoor parents to tour a number of the Costa Rican Science High Schools before exploding onto the TED stage as her final act. (Note to other public affairs officers: Don't schedule your star performer at the end of a tour of science high schools. My seventeen-year-old star-gazer was exhausted. Worse, so were her parents.)

Nevertheless, the TEDx talk rocked. We filled the live venue with 300 students and they were stoked. (Lots of food and drink in the hospitality suite helped put them in a good mood.) My livestream staff impressed the professional TV video team. Our best guess was that we reached an audience of 5,000 within Costa Rica, with several thousand more tuning in from other U.S. embassies and American corners. The ambassador was very happy and Ripper sent kudos. I received calls from my counterparts in embassies as far away as Western Europe for guidance on how to mount their own TEDx talk. The MAT from this event sizzled.

2. The Embassy PR Packet

Another major public diplomacy creation was our embassy PR packet. I worked with my creative desktop publisher to produce a half-size folder that had pull-outs on all the embassy major activities. And my *piece de resistance* was the bilingual 8-page newspaper insert celebrating the 50th anniversary of USAID's activities in Costa Rica.

The insert took one year to complete. It was an adventure that started with the ambassador wondering why, when USAID had created so many sustainable development projects in Costa Rica, no one seemed to know what they were. I found a writer who had worked for USAID from its arrival in Costa Rica back in the 1960s. He unearthed the archival data in boxes buried in the basement of the U.S.-Costa Rica Binational Center.

The Binational Center was one of the last surviving in the world, it was a huge multi-use performance venue where we conducted most of our public activities. I funded the writer with a grant and we consulted throughout the year of writing. His final product was closer in size to a book, so we distilled the key information into a newspaper insert. We found a few local newspapers to run it. Once published, we also distributed it in our embassy PR packet and put it on our website. The ambassador took it with her to regional conferences and Washington consultations.

Again, I received phone calls from colleagues in other embassies asking how I did it and could I send them copies? But the best outcome came later. My desktop publisher told me she handed the packets out to President Obama's press gaggle during his visit the year after I left. The media wrote stories quoting large portions from the insert. Imagine the MAT that was written after that. I've even interviewed U.S. ambassadors years later who remember instructing their public diplomacy sections to create similar packets based on my example.

3. Maximum Exposure: The Ambassadorial Activities

Media Coverage: There was no problem scheduling the ambassador for public appearances at any serious institution. The problem was how to ensure media coverage when there were many other stories to capture the eye and bait the click. My strategic choice was to befriend the working journalists, the ones who could convince their editors that the story of the ambassador's trip to the hinterland held the promise of multiple platform audiences. We found willing journalists as long as we did everything but write the stories for them. They came along in the staff van, lunched with us, ran our photos, and held exclusives with the ambassador.

Universities: The ambassador wanted to visit every university, including the University for Peace. The UFP was nestled in an Henri Rousseau landscape of tropical tranquility. The campus was a ranch owned by a former Costa Rican president who donated it to promote conflict prevention and resolution. Funds were found to build classrooms and dorms, and the UN provided an advisory council, but no money. It was up to the UFP president to be its fundraiser-in-chief as well.

When I went over to see the president to pitch an ambassadorial event, who should I find in the beflowered office but Full Metal Jack, the ambassador I worked for way back in the early 1990s when I was on the NATO Desk in EUR/RPM. At that time I had tried to get broad-ranging authority for Ambassador Maresca to negotiate as he saw fit. I regularly failed in the interagency melee. I passed him my card as we began our meeting and waited for a sign of recognition. Nothing came. I did secure a date for the

ambassador's address and a brochure asking for the Embassy to help finance the University.

Q: He didn't remember you.

TAUBER: Apparently not. I also had to warn the ambassador that the University for Peace had plenty of students from countries with which we were not on speaking terms: North Korea, Iran, Sudan… But the Department approved and the event went off without a hitch. No money for poor Ambassador Maresca, though. I failed him again.

Youth audiences: The secret was food and swag. For example, we filled a botanical garden amphitheater with high school students who got a lesson in the importance of biodiversity from the ambassador and the garden's tour guides. The students attention to the ambassador's speech was a prerequisite for the tee-shirts and lunch that followed. At our Science Corner, on the opposite of the country, we filled the venue with high school students eager to sample the cuisine of the carbon-neutral organic farm on which the learning center was located. All they had to do was sit through a power point by the ambassador on sustainable agriculture. Finally, there was my last July 4th celebration. That was the one staged in a former penitentiary, now a museum. The goal: announce a new scholarship to the U.S. for Costa Rican science students.

The High School STEM Scholarship Program: The ambassador had an idea. What if we used the contributions from U.S. corporations for the July 4th celebration to instead create a scholarship for Costa Rican high school students. You'll notice there is no question mark with that sentence. It was a tasking disguised in the form of a question. The only possible answer is yes. This time there would be no Ripper to call. RPPR only funded one-time activities, not on-going commitments. So the search began.

If Costa Rica had been a country of strategic interest to the U.S., there would have been a myriad of money pots from which I could draw for STEM scholarships But as a stable democracy with modest economic growth, Costa Rica couldn't even score a few bucks from the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. What now?

I learned that some intrepid State Department thinkers found a way to allow public diplomacy officers to solicit funds from private sources for a joint activity. Sure, we had to pass through a legal obstacle course worthy of marine boot camp. And even if your proposal survived legal scrutiny, it still took a lot of dough to sustain a scholarship beyond one year. You need an endowment. The interest from the nest egg then pays into for future scholarship winners. With the help of the Costa Rican office of the American Field Service, our private sector partner in this venture, we found enough money to

finance the first year of a scholarship program. Yay. Now comes the real problem. Finding one suitable boy and one suitable girl to fill the first two openings.

At first, we limited ourselves to applicants only from the 12 science high schools so that we weren't flooded with applications. Actually, there was no need to worry about a tsunami of applicants. One of the lovely things about Costa Ricans is that they *like* to spend time with their relatives. Unlike American teens, many of whom would welcome a year away from Mom and Dad, Costa Rican teens did not relish the idea of flying solo for a year out of the nest. I remember the unease my staff and I felt as July 4th approached and we were still without any serious applicants.

Fortunately, the director of the science high school program in Costa Rica was a seasoned educator who recognized the value of a year of study in the U.S. He went to work on students and parents. Eventually, he did find two excellent candidates -- but they would have to begin their school year in 2013, the year after I left post. On the bright side, they did get one additional benefit I couldn't provide -- a photo op with Barack Obama, who visited Costa Rica shortly before they left for their school year.

Now, let's return to our July 4th celebration in the penitentiary. We got the crowd into the large exercise area at the center of the cell blocks. Instead of introducing the lucky scholarship winners, the ambassador promised that she would reveal their identities at a future date during a special ceremony at the embassy. Then she pulled the cord to release the balloons. And pulled again. I stage-whispered to our Diplomatic Security chief, "You wouldn't happen to have a Bat-a-Rang handy?" But his utility belt held only embassy keys. Finally, the net was pierced and the balloons fell. Even Leonardo Da Vinci, who managed stage shows for the Medicis, would have been impressed.

The Costa Rican Gay Pride Parade: Wait, What?

With all this attention on July 4th, the Costa Rican Gay Pride Parade crept up on me unawares.

Q: Wait. Isn't Gay Pride celebrated in June? Are we going back in time?

TAUBER: Yes, we've been bending the space/time continuum throughout the Costa Rica tour. I think there's a theory about this somewhere… or maybe a Star Trek episode? Anyway, for the first time in Costa Rican history, the gay pride parade was actually going to be a largish affair. And the ambassador wanted to march. Ay yi yi.

Q: But you of all people should have been delighted that your ambassador wanted to put the heft of the U.S. embassy behind the biggest sexual minority event of the year.

TAUBER: Yes I should have been. But I wasn't. I couldn't believe that the small gay community in Costa Rica could mount a real parade. And I couldn't find anyone in the embassy, myself included, who knew all the leaders or participants. Remember ILGA's problem at the OSCE? One of its constituent organizations promoted sex with under-age youth. It was entirely possible that some of the participants in the parade might have statements of incorporation or manifestos that were in some way at odds with U.S. policy. So I argued that instead of marching, the ambassador could host the leadership of the organizations after the parade for a nice chat about their goals and objectives. There would be plenty of opportunities for photo ops to show her support. Then, the following year, the ambassador could march, confident in the knowledge that there wouldn't be any organizations of questionable pedigree lying in wait to photo bomb her.

I recall the look of the ambassador when I made this argument. She was not entirely convinced. Was I trying, for some obscure reason, to keep her from scoring some good PR? Many other ambassadors were marching in gay pride parades; e.g., in countries like the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, etc. Yes, but those countries had long-established parades. It was still untested in Costa Rica. Ultimately, my argument prevailed and we held a nice brunch to make the gay groups feel welcome and respected.

Tighter Security and Rehearsing Disaster

Q: During your tour, were there any emergencies or evacuations you had to deal with?

TAUBER: Good question. The answer is no, but it does remind me of something important to mention. A number of historic tragedies for the Foreign Service changed the shape of and access to U.S. embassies. The most important were:

- 1979: The occupation of the U.S. embassy in Teheran and the hostage crisis.
- 1983: The bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut and attacks on the U.S. embassy. Over 200 service men and embassy staff died.
- 1998: The bombing of the U.S. embassies in Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi in which 12 Americans and 212 citizens of Tanzania and Kenya died.
- 2001: The 9/11 attacks that killed a total of 2,996 people.

In response, the State Department dramatically expanded security at all its overseas facilities. The Department instructed embassies to acquire property for new embassies far from the center of the capital to allow for setback, walls, and reinforced concrete. When embassies couldn't be moved out of downtown locations, we negotiated with the host

government to close streets and allow us to put up walls and cement bollards to protect against car and truck bombs. Diplomatic Security introduced a lengthy screening process for admittance of visitors to the embassy. These changes made it inconvenient and rare for visitors to come to the embassy for a meeting. It also became difficult for embassy officers to meet contacts in the city because this required advanced planning for use of embassy vehicles. We all chafed at the security restrictions.

Within embassies, and on their grounds, U.S. Marines serve as a protection force. They have their security protocols too. One of these is preventing an invasion of the embassy. Foolish is the Foreign Service Officer who stays a little too late in his office when Marines conduct a drill. More than once, armed Marines, painted for battle, stormed my office, mistaking me for an intruder. Well, I assume it was a mistake. I can't imagine that U.S. Marines would have a little fun at my expense. Sudden visits like these elicit two reactions. First, terror. You really don't want to be on the business end of an automatic weapon with a U.S. Marine fingering the trigger. After the terror abates, the second reaction is… well … um… er. I am a gay man, after all. 😁

Back during my first tour in Costa Rica, the embassy was in the center of town. It was an ugly, two-story building that sat right on the street. No setback. No bollards. And it was within an easy walk of the redlight district. And in answer to your question: no. I did not avail myself of its delights. But for all its drawbacks, we still liked the old embassy because of its central location. We could literally walk to most of our appointments. The new embassy was on the outskirts of the city. It adhered to all the new security requirements and looked more like a supermax prison than the penitentiary we used for the July 4th event. We had lots of fire and bomb drills, and one day, an instruction arrived telling us to devote a day to a realistic emergency exercise.

Everyone had a role, and everyone was expected to give that role their full attention. Make it real. The emergency would be an earthquake. It affected a large area of the country, including the capital. We created an emergency action team with phone banks, site managers, EMTs, and lots of personnel in various forms of distress. My role was to be a worried American citizen who was stranded somewhere in the capital and seeking help from the embassy. I thought back on all the years I had been a duty officer during emergencies, or took calls from distraught Americans about their relatives, or made arrangements to repatriate Americans who were off their meds and needed rescue from the outer space aliens who were holding them hostage. From this experience was born Father Kravchenko, a Ukrainian priest who had been travelling to Costa Rica each year with members of his congregation to take part in church repair. Father Kravchenko was now in his 80s, but still quite sharp. Sometimes he was a little difficult to understand

because of his accent. He had been separated from his flock and was inconsolable, worried that they were all dead.

He called the embassy emergency task force often. He had many names to check on that were coming in one-by-one. He was also moved to share, in detail, the purpose of his visit -- building a preschool for a church in the coffee-growing region. As the emergency exercise wore on, good news trickled in for the good Father. He learned that his parishioners were safe and sound. They just happened to be caught in an area where the main road had collapsed. They would need extra time to find their way to San Jose. Could the embassy send vehicles? Father Kravchenko had many helpful suggestions, which he shared at length.

When it was all over I complimented the phone bank team for maintaining excellent customer service skills for difficult Americans. They all got Extra Mile Awards. I know. I sat on the embassy awards committee.

But there was one facet to this disaster rehearsal. At least during the Obama Administration, the U.S. was starting to develop more detailed cooperation protocols in predicting extreme weather events and providing assistance in their wake. This is a valuable new aspect of diplomacy that is very important. When a foreign country suffers a major natural disaster, it can affect average Americans in many ways. First, we may have citizens living there who have relatives who want to go and assist them. This is nearly always a bad idea since access to natural disaster areas is already difficult. Putting more Americans in harm's way only complicates a bad situation. Second, trade with that country is disrupted -- this can cost business and jobs in the U.S. And then many secondary effects can make the situation worse -- pandemic disease, loss of control of borders, opportunistic terrorist groups taking advantage of the chaos, etc. We need to practice how we and the host country react so that we get the most effective response in the shortest possible time.

Moving on to the Office of American Spaces

Q: But I'm also wondering, we must be approaching the end of your tour. At some point you must have been thinking about your next post?

TAUBER: Yes. The disaster theme segues quite neatly to my quest for the next tour. Once again I was having trouble finding any office that would offer me a handshake. I went to Washington for a few days of annual leave to knock on doors and hand out resumes. I really wanted work in the Bureau of Examiners (B/EX). These are the people who oversee the recruitment and testing process for the Foreign Service. I had so much

success in hiring outstanding employees, I thought I'd make a good recruiter. You remember all my hiring successes.
Q: Yes, but you could refresh my memory.

TAUBER: Well, there was the search committee I managed for a new Fulbright Commission Chair in Romania. And then I hired lots of new local employees at four of my posts -- Yerevan, Bucharest, Budapest, and San Jose. And I managed the talent search for the exchange candidates at every post, like the famous Prince of Trash.

Q: Ah, yes. That one was unforgettable.

TAUBER: So I'm in the State Department basement. It has a nice little coffee bar dubbed 'Foggy Bottom.' I'm sipping my espresso and waiting for my interview with the hiring official from the Bureau of Examinations. He arrived 20 minutes late after I texted him a reminder. I rolled out my arguments to join his merry band just like the career coach at the Office of Career Management told me to do -- lots of action verbs and quantifiable examples. But Mr. B/EX was giving off a perfunctory valence. If eyes are the windows of the soul, I was looking into an office where the phone had me on permanent hold. I didn't get that job. Curiously enough though, I would get a job as an interviewer, but that was still several years away.

Once again, I found myself in the Slough of Despond, at the end of the bidding cycle without a job prospect. But then, arriving on April Fool's Day, the updated openings cable showed a newly created position -- office director in the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP). I tracked down the senior staffer who was doing the hiring. In the telephone interview she didn't evince much interest in my public diplomacy credentials. What she wanted to know was whether I had experience in supervising non-Foreign Service Officers. The State Department has many types of employees who are not FSOs. Some are civil servants, specialists, contractors... I'm probably forgetting a few others. In fact, I had worked closely with civil servants in the Operations Center, the Nerk, and the Secretary's Office, I assured her. The Secretary's Office? At last, the distant glow of a Seventh floor experience seemed to get her attention.

She explained that the new office director job in IIP was the result of a reorganization. It came with 25 employees to supervise and a budget of $19 million dollars. This was a fantastic opportunity. Yet something in her tone made me wait for the but. It was not long behind. Usually, when a bureau creates a new position, it has a candidate in mind. Advertising the position is just a formality. In this case, the person everyone expected to get the job was an Information Resource Officer (IRO), a specialist who ran cultural and educational programs through our embassies overseas. The IRO was not a Foreign

Service Officer and would not, my interviewer assured, get the job. The powers that be wanted the broader experience of a seasoned FSO in the position. Would I, the recruiter asked, be OK in a workplace where there may be some resentment?

Of cooourse, I oozed. I was long used to working with difficult people. I had attended many team-building exercises where this topic was addressed… "Alright," she said. "Consider this the handshake." I received my orders the next day. Few things arrive with such alacrity in the Foreign Service. It gave me shpilkas.

That's when I took advantage of the IG's visit to have a little chat. The IG team member for public diplomacy is the one who gave me the good review in the final report. He had been working for the State Department for 35 years and had accumulated a lot of wisdom. So I asked him what he thought of the job situation. He answered a different question.

"You do know that Costa Rica is a retirement tour." There it was again. The rhetorical question that has only an affirmative answer. The IG reminded me that this was my last year for promotion. Tic tic tic. He peered out over his reading glasses, eyes obscured by brow thatch. He continued in a tone redolent of crystal ball gazers, "If your evaluation doesn't get you over the Senior Threshold this time, your next assignment will be the retirement course."

Maybe this *was* his answer. I wouldn't need to worry about a job I'd never report for. I refused to believe him. In any case, I still had one trump card left to play that related to my tour in Armenia.

Q: I sense there is a consequential fact here you did not mention when you left Yerevan.

TAUBER: Well, it didn't matter back then. It turns out, when you take a hard language, like Armenian, your time in the Foreign Service is extended by one year. This is done to incentivize the study of hard languages. Since I had struggled through Hayeren (the name Armenians give their language), I won a jubilee year. Whatever else happened, my shelf life would not expire in 2012.

But my time in Costa Rica did. All that was left was my public farewell, always conducted by the ambassador. Having attended many of these events, I can tell you that the size of the audience measures the esteem in which you are held. The attendance at mine was rather thin. Imagine the embassy lobby, the only large space left inside the building. My staff and various others file their desultory way in. The ambassador arrives. Applause. "We're going to have to make this short, folks" she began with a strained

smile of apology. “My son is at the dentist and I need to be there with him.” She concluded her talking points. Photos. Fin.

As I was packing up my office, a large manila envelope arrived on my desk. It was an award. At last, at last. I opened the folder. An Extra Mile Award for my outstanding work as Father Kravchenko, the tormenter of the Emergency Action Task Force. Strange. To this day I don’t seem to be able to locate it. Can’t imagine where it ended up. Anyway, my staff gave me a going-away lunch with a lovely keepsake from my tour. It was a digital slideshow from my three years of public diplomacy activities. A visual MAT.

Q: OK, you’re back in Washington, it’s fall of 2012. What happens next?

2012-2013
Director, Office of American Spaces
Bureau of International Information Programs, Department of State

TAUBER: First, I had to find a house. It’s the first time I had actually bought a home. I discovered that the DC area is a real estate seller’s market. There never seems to be enough affordable housing. It took me a solid three months to find an affordable house in Springfield, Virginia. It came with a one-hour commute to the Department.

The Department was now such a hive of cubiclized offices that most of the public diplomacy staff had been relocated to an annex across the street. There was an advantage to this. Real offices. With windows. In embassies, consistent with security regulations, windows are small and placed high, near the ceiling. But in the annex I had eye-level windows on both sides of a corner office! I sat down in the ergonomic chair and sorted through my in-box. I found an org-chart of the IIP bureau so I could see where I fit in. Hmm. The wiring diagram looked a bit non-Euclidean. Lots of cross-cutting dotted lines. Unclear authority relationships. Tsk, tsk. Very un-State Department. I learned in A-100 that one of the quickest ways to a bad evaluation is failure to understand authority relationships. To understand why the orgchart was screwed up, we need a moment of context.

The Bureau of International Information Policy

Back in 2000, when the State Department absorbed USIA, everything went to the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The remains of the agency were divided into three sister bureaus.

The first one is Public Affairs, run by the Spokesman of the Department. He or she is an Assistant Secretary with a large staff that follows breaking news and prepares talking points for public briefings in Washington and sometimes for ambassadors if they are getting a lot of media attention.

The second bureau, Educational and Cultural Affairs, also had an Assistant Secretary. It's responsibility extended over all U.S. exchange programs in education and culture, plus a few other bits of bureaucratic flotsam that drifted up on its turf.

By the time we got my bureau, International Information Policy (IIP), the State Department had run out of Assistant Secretary positions. So IIP got a Coordinator. Although officially the Coordinator is equivalent to an Assistant Secretary, there was a sense among the worker bees in IIP of second-class status. This Bureau had 160 Civil Service employees, 26 Foreign Service Officers, 23 Information Resource Officers, and 142 contract workers. About mid-sized as State Department bureaus go.

IIP is responsible for the outward-facing explanation of U.S. foreign policy to the world. To do so, it prepares many kinds of materials for embassies to deploy: books, magazines, posters, videos, and an expert-on-loan program. The latter pays for American experts to spend several weeks assisting a foreign government with a special project like digitizing court and police records so that clerks can keep track of cases in a judicial database. Or learning how to prevent money laundering in the financial sector. Anything that advances bilateral relations and U.S. policy goals. Beyond, this brief description I can't get into the weeds of everything IIP does because a lot of its time is devoted to figuring out how to maximize value from social media platforms. New ones seem to grow like weeds every year. In an effort to keep up with the changing media platforms and markets, IIP has been reorganized so many times that everyone was suffering from reorg fatigue when I arrived in 2012. And remember, were it not for the 2011 reorg, my job as office director would not exist.

Q: Wait a minute. You are saying that after all this time and after so much previous context there will be no more expostulation on this labyrinthian bureaucratic entity?

TAUBER: Correct. No joy for you there.

Q: Note to self. Buy a lottery ticket. This must be my lucky day.

TAUBER: But I will give you some detail on the Office of American Spaces. No matter how many reorganizations there are, someone will always need to provide for the care and feeding of these public diplomacy platforms.

Q: I think you'll want to define "American Spaces."

What Exactly are American Spaces?

TAUBER: Right. American spaces are all the overseas venues, owned or leased by the U.S. for the purpose of public diplomacy. When I arrived in IIP in 2012 we still had a handful of American libraries overseas that survived the ax. They were now multi-purpose venues with few books and most space devoted to internet and small group activities. But the overwhelming number of American Spaces, at that time over 850 in some 150 countries, were American Corners. These were rooms in host country libraries or community centers. We signed agreements with their directors to fill the room with U.S. study materials and computer workstations and office equipment and sometimes we paid for internet connections in difficult circumstances. Our hosts supplied a part-time manager and gave us use of their auditoriums for our traveling shows and VIPs.

IIP senior staff created my office to evaluate how well the American Corners were fulfilling their role and to provide them with funding accordingly. Having created and programmed many American Corners in all my overseas posts, I felt qualified to be the office director.

When I arrived, my office was putting the finishing touches on the standards for evaluating American Spaces and the compliance reports we would use to determine how much money to give each Corner. Henceforth, uniformity of programming was to be the watchword. All American Corners requesting funds would have to demonstrate successful programming in five areas:

- Timely and accurate information about the U.S.;
- English Language study or study tools;
- Advice on how to apply to U.S. universities;
- U.S. exchange alumni activities; and
- Organizing audiences and media coverage for U.S. VIPs, cultural figures, and educational programs.

Now, I said "my office" was writing the specs. Not the whole office. My office was cobbled together with a number of individuals who ran small programs that fed American Spaces with content. Some of it was English language study materials. Some of it was tablet book readers with a contract for free material. And there were others who worked with search engines... or who selected and catalogued on-line materials for overseas posts… I have to admit I never really understood *what* they were doing.

But the ones most involved in our day-to-day connection to American Corners were the Information Resource Officers (IROs). IROs are Foreign Service specialists, not Foreign Service Officers. They have advanced degrees in library science and experience in managing information resource programs and facilities. At an embassy, IROs may be resident in the capital city but support all American Spaces across a large country like Russia or cover facilities in several neighboring countries like West Africa. As I mentioned earlier, there are a total of 26 IROs for the entire world. Four were located in my office to backstop the others who were in the field. These were the four who did not want to have a Foreign Service Officer as their boss.

Initial relations with them were testy. They were unwilling to do anything more than their IRO support tasks, claiming that they were already overworked. On top of that, as taskings fell from the Front Office, I had trouble understanding what they wanted. All this happened during the month of September 2012. Before I could figure out how to proceed, October 1st arrived and with it the promotion list. No matter how many times I looked at that list, I could not will my name to appear on it.

The Lame Duck Period

Q: So now is when you pull out the extra year, yes?

TAUBER: Yes, but no. I checked with my HR officer. She explained that I could indeed continue to work for one more calendar year, but my evaluations had expired. There would be no additional review of my work and no promotion to the Senior Foreign Service. "But look on the bright side," she chirped, "Many officers in your position are walking the halls looking for a one-year billet. You're in an office director position with 25 employees and a $19 million budget. That certainly looks good on a resume." I returned to my office and explained the situation to my supervisor. She, in turn, broke the news to the Front Office. It was decided that I would continue until a suitable alternative could be found. In any case, it was now so late in the assignments process that they wouldn't find anyone immediately available. At the next meeting with my staff, I informed them that I was committed to leading the office to the last day. They weren't terribly interested. If it walks like a lame duck and quacks like a lame duck… Problems multiplied.

First, there was a health issue. I had an ungovernable desire to sleep in the afternoon. It wasn't like the postprandial drowsiness one gets after lunch. It was like my Blackberry signing off when its charge had expired. In Costa Rica, I began pasting yellow stickies on my office door, "Back in 30," and sleeping on a yoga mat under my desk. This did not

fool my staff. At some point they gave me a little vitrine box with a small hammer attached. Inside were packets of instant coffee. The sign above it read: In Event of Caffeine Emergency, Break Glass.

At first my naps were infrequent. But by the time I arrived in Washington in 2020, it was nearly every day. At the same time I was also sleeping poorly at night and waking up tired. My GP, who had known me for some 15 years, said I should get tested for sleep apnea. I told him I was too busy, too many challenges now. (I would get the test after I retired, and it would show severe sleep apnea.) I tried to power through with a lot of joe, and started eying the Red Bull in the supermarket.

Second, relations with my Information Resource Officers worsened. They saw my impending retirement as a license to go around me to higher authority for approval of work products. There are few things in the Foreign Service that can get you in more trouble with your supervisor than failing to understand authority relationships. I was astonished since I would still have to write their work evaluations before I left. You might think they'd want to maintain a veneer of politeness. This was the last straw. I had never sought a curtailment from any post. This was my last year in the Foreign Service. Who would ask for a 6-month curtailment and reassignment?

I went back to my HR officer in December 2012 to find out if there were any short-term personnel openings I might fill anywhere but IIP. These do occur: special projects, summits that need extra staff, an unexpected staffing gap, etc. A week went by. No reply. In my many years of dealing with HR, I had learned that, if you are in Washington, it is best to plant yourself in their office suite and wait. Eventually, you get seen. My HR officer honestly seemed surprised to see me. After gargling a few ejaculatory syllables of consternation, she confirmed that nothing was available. Back to IIP, where I learned that the Front Office had found a replacement for me. We agreed that my last day would be April 15, the deadline for completing work evaluations. In this way, the new director could take over at the beginning of a new work cycle.

It was at this moment, once again, that the stars wheeled in their courses and a new alignment lit the sky. Awakened from its majestic slumber, the Office of the Inspector General descended on the Bureau of Information and International Programs in January 2013. IIP would never recover.

An Inspector Calls

The full Inspector General report is available via this hyperlink:
https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/211193.pdf

I'll reproduce some of the IG's key findings that most affected my work below. The report was published on April 5, 2013, ten days before the end of my tenure as Director of the Office of American Spaces. As before, I'll put my comments in red.

Key Judgments

- Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) leadership failed to convey its strategic vision to staff members, despite formalized communications. As I mentioned, I spent an awful lot of time figuring out what exactly the Front Office wanted. Apparently, I was not the only one.

- Leadership created an atmosphere of secrecy, suspicion, and uncertainty.

- A 2011 reorganization of the bureau did not resolve structural problems and caused new organizational difficulties. Morale is low.

- With effective use of technology, IIP has made a significant contribution to the Department of State's (Department) digital diplomacy outreach effort, increased the reach of its publications, and expanded the use of video in public diplomacy (PD) work.

- Regularizing support for American Spaces overseas has strengthened these platforms for engagement with foreign publics, a cornerstone of the Department's 21st century PD effort. A high point in an otherwise appallingly bad report. American Spaces are one of the few truly successful public diplomacy adaptations the State Department has carried out. That was why I wanted to work there in the first place.

- The Executive Office does not provide effective service. Response times to requests are slow, and customer service is inadequate. I spent the entire time I was in the office trying to get one position out of the Executive Office -- a budget officer who could do the required accounting for the money we granted to American Spaces from our $19 million. One positive effect of the IG's report was the arrival of this full-time position. See below.

- The bureau uses many contractors (43 percent of employees) but does not manage its contracts well. This deficiency constitutes a potential vulnerability for the Department. IIP's digital outreach should focus more on PD goals rather than raw numbers of social media fans. I certainly focused on increasing social media fans

in Costa Rica, believing that the Department wanted this above all as a metric of successful outreach.

From the Section on Executive Direction

...As a consequence of the reorganization, and the manner in which the Coordinator handled it, the already low morale in IIP has plummeted. A widespread perception exists that those who question changes are marginalized or forced out of the bureau. Some employees have retired. A Civil Service deputy coordinator position was eliminated. A year and a half after the reorganization, the front office had yet to distribute an accurate organization chart. When the OIG team asked for one, the front office provided a chart that was different from the one it provided the Bureau of Human Resources (DGHR). (pg. 5)

...Sixty-six percent of IIP's workforce responded to an OIG questionnaire asking them to rate bureau managers on 13 leadership characteristics. The coordinator's scores were the lowest in every category compared with those received by any of the previous 14 assistant secretaries or equivalents whose bureaus OIG inspected. Many staff members described the bureau atmosphere as toxic and leadership's tolerance of dissenting views as nonexistent…(pg. 5)

... Employees report that, on occasion, the coordinator shouts and uses profanity at meetings. Such behavior is belittling and demeaning to staff and has a devastating effect on morale. (pg. 6)

...During the inspection the coordinator announced to bureau staff that she had submitted her resignation.(pg. 6) (Shortly thereafter the Under Secretary for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy also submitted her resignation. I can't remember any IG report with such a disastrous outcome for top management.)

...Several factors have adversely affected the clarity of IIP's mission, and the Department's understanding of its mission. These factors include repeated reorganization and imperfect integration into the Department. There is also some functional overlap with the Bureau of Public Affairs (PA), the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), the Office of eDiplomacy, and the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication. (These overlaps, and the Trump Administration's desire to reduce the size of the Department, would lead to the elimination of IIP as a separate bureau in 2018.) In addition, the Department has not implemented a comprehensive PD strategy. A strategic framework established concepts and terms, but the Department has not translated the framework into a plan that links resources to priorities. (pg. 6)

From the Section on Regional Coordination and American Spaces

The 2011 reorganization created the Regional Coordination and American Spaces group, overseen by a deputy coordinator, to create a single point of contact for embassies and Department bureaus and to support the expanded mandate of 850 American Spaces worldwide. The 2011 reorganization added a Foreign Service FS-01 director (that would be me) and an FS-02 strategic planning officer to the Office of American Spaces (she developed new materials for American Spaces). These positions overlay an existing structure that had an IRO supervising and supporting other IROs in the field. The rationale for adding two generalists was to bring a Foreign Service generalist perspective to IRO work. IROs are Foreign Service specialists with advanced degrees in library science and experience in managing information resource programs and facilities. At an embassy, IROs may be resident in the capital city but support all American Spaces in a large country or cover facilities in several neighboring countries. The current IRO corps has taken on the expanded responsibility that came with a sizable budget increase, but a commensurate increase in personnel has not followed. Hiring barely keeps up with attrition, with several experienced IROs eligible for retirement in the next few years. (pg. 17) (The rationale may have made sense to the Front Office, but the IROs were not happy to be told, in essence, we need Foreign Service Officers to keep an eye on this function. They did not like working for me and made sure I knew it. Nevertheless, I did my best to give them good evaluations because I had worked with several other IROs in the field and had great respect for the work they did in promoting public diplomacy.)

There is much more to the IG report, but these are the important outcomes from the point of view of my office.

April rolled around, I wrote my evaluations, and now the question arose: what to do with me since my successor had now moved into the corner office. The verdict was exile. I was sent to a windowless room, formerly a secure conference facility, guarded by a vault door with a combination lock. There, for the remaining three months before retirement, I would write a history of American Spaces. But before we leave IIP altogether, it is worth noting a retirement ceremony. No, not mine.

The State Department can't allow an Assistant Secretary-equivalent to depart without some official send off. It violates good order. So a day and time were appointed, a room was found, and hors d'oeuvres were laid out. I left this in the passive voice because, given the IG's judgments on the use of IIP funds, I'm not sure where the money came from for the champagne and salt sticks. The event had a cringey vibe. Everyone there had seen the IG report and knew what was going down. A top Department official finally arrived to

give the eulogy, but what would he say? He could hardly gild the lily when the IG found only *fleurs du mal*. “This event is like an Irish wake,” he began in a lighthearted tone. “The body of the deceased is in the next room and we’re all celebrating her departure to a better place.” The words continued, but once I heard this I had to wonder what was going through the Coordinator’s mind as she stood there next to him, frozen in simile, frozen in smile.

I completed my history of American Spaces and learned quite a bit about the changes in U.S. public diplomacy since the Woodrow Wilson Administration first began organized outreach to foreign publics. What happened to the report I do not know. Area 51? I went on to the Retirement Course in August and September 2013, and turned over my badge to a duly sworn DS agent on September 30, 2013. Well, on the bright side, at least I wouldn’t get it caught in the shredder anymore. I was 54 and convinced that I still had plenty of good years left in me. But efforts to find post-retirement employment in the Department proved fruitless.

In Retirement

I was a bit at sea. My whole life up to this point had been nothing but preparing for the Foreign Service and then working in it. What now? Well, I did get my sleep apnea durable medical supplies, put myself on a diet, and began exercising regularly. I highly recommend that. Then I volunteered for several months with the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia. I was paired with an Afghan student who wanted to learn English more than she wanted to work at it. One day, she failed to show up and never answered my calls, so I took that as a cue to look elsewhere. Finally, I decided. I had a lot of knowledge going to waste. Why not teach high school?

In 2014, I enrolled in Virginia’s Career Switcher Program. If successfully completed -- and we did have a few washouts -- you get a provisional teaching certificate in about six months. Thereafter, it’s up to you to take that certification and find a job. The program is quite serious. There is a lot of reading and writing and peer review. I learned a great deal about the whole education sector, not just in Virginia, but across the country. My certificates entitled me to teach English, Spanish, and Social Studies. But Virginia didn’t really need any more teachers in those subjects, unless you wanted to teach in the Appalachians. What Virginia needed was STEM teachers. Oh. And one more thing. Teachers of English as a Second Language. That required another Career Switcher course, which I also took.

Along with the coursework, you had to apprentice yourself to a teacher in a nearby high school for several weeks. My first apprenticeship was in a Fairfax County high school

whose student body was majority minority. About 30% of the student body was Asian, another 30% were Spanish-speaking from all over Central America and the Caribbean, and about 40% were a mix of white, African American, and other. I worked for the Chair of the Spanish Language Department and shadowed a number of other teachers.

Just a few weeks of apprenticeship made me seriously doubt whether I was cut out for this kind of work.

- My lesson plans were too difficult even for the AP Spanish students. I was told I should think about college level teaching.
- The Spanish II students I proctored were trying to translate a simple newspaper story. The top student said she understood the article but just needed help with one word, so I went over to her desk. I had to wait until she was done slapping a boy with ADHD who kept pestering her. Finally, she asked me, who is this guy they keep talking about in the article. Al Qaida?
- I sat in with the English as a Second Language Teacher. She was fresh out of university with a master's degree. She had a class full of young men approaching 20 years old from all over the world. The one thing they had in common was a dearth of formal education in their country of birth. Now they were trying to read English at the 7th grade level. They were bored and they spent their time flirting with the girls and letting the teacher know how attractive she was. She did not renew her contract for the following year.
- A few sessions with the art teacher impressed me. She was able to teach to every level of student, including kids with documented learning disabilities. After class, a skinny red-haired kid with a tattoo showed up for a chat. He eyed me with undisguised suspicion but still took the time to report on the opening of his basement tattoo salon, and to thank her for helping to train him. After he left, through the ground floor window to avoid detection, the art teacher explained that he was a truant and was worried that I was there to bust him. He was bored in school, couldn't fit in, and his parents took little interest in his performance. There were plenty of others like him. Hopefully, he'll mature a little and come back.

In my second school, a majority white high school, I worked with the English as a Second Language Teacher. Teaching was only half the job. The other half was social work. Most of the students in this class were girls. Most had part time jobs to help pay the rent, and most were too distracted by family issues to be able to bring much attention to their studies. It was not clear how well the teachers were succeeding at sixth grade-level math and reading. The teachers still had to fill out daily progress sheets and enter outcomes into a share point spreadsheet that the principal could use at a moment's notice to show how well his school was hitting its Standards of Learning. It was then that I

realized that teaching high school was not going to be my second career. For a while I tried tutoring, but that too was awful. The only ones who wanted tutors were the parents. The kids were passive time servers.

Then, in late 2014, I got a lead on a job. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training advertised for an oral history interviewer. They were a small non-profit located on the Foreign Service Institute campus that conducted interviews of retired Foreign Service Officers and anyone else associated with the U.S. foreign affairs community. I started with them in 2015 and found my niche. I've been with them ever since.

Epilogue

Well, dear reader, if you have read this far, then *you* deserve an award. You've seen U.S. diplomacy change from fighting the Cold War to managing nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan and forging alliances against terrorism. You've seen the tools of diplomacy change from hand-written reports to text messaging, and the Foreign Service change from a mainly white male organization to one that better reflects the diversity of America. Sadly, over this time there is no question that the State Department, as an actor in the U.S. national security interagency community, has lost influence to the National Security Council and the U.S. military. Moreover, the Foreign Service, as a body of dedicated professionals, has suffered as well. First, the number of ambassadorships given to political appointees is far too many. Talented career diplomats go into retirement too soon for the Service to get the full value of their experience. Second, inattention to training, including through temporary assignments to other parts of the government and private sector, robs the Service of the vitality of upgraded skills suited to a rapidly changing world. Third, continuity of management is inadequate. We can't play the long game well. Everyone knows that you invest your money for the long-term, but somehow, when it comes to running the State Department and Foreign Service, management is wedded to short-term goals. Cuts in funding and reorganizations for "efficiency" or "productivity" are the go-to actions that look good on an evaluation. But this kind of management results in institutional amnesia and the reinvention of the wheel in too many key areas of resourcing. The failure to create worldwide IT platforms robs employees of easy, secure access to information sharing. All of this could be overcome with longer tenure for management officers in key positions with the proper career incentives.

I'd be remiss if I did not mention that the position of gay people in the Service has improved significantly since I entered in 1984. In part this reflects changes in U.S. societal norms, but it also reflects the willingness of State Department management to be a little more creative in finding ways to grant same-sex couples some benefits enjoyed by straights, and to address complaints of prejudicial treatment based on sexual orientation.

Of course, the Supreme Court's decisions on gay marriage and workplace protections against sex discrimination changed everything for the better, recent Court appointments demonstrate that such protections may yet be overturned. I can't say that I ever suffered prejudice based on my status as a gay person. But I was too often reminded by the actions of individuals that they knew I was gay and that I should watch my step.

In conclusion, nothing in the foregoing should leave you with the idea that I regret my decision to devote my working life to the Foreign Service. I always felt honored to represent America, even when I wasn't particularly excited about the particular kind of work I was doing. It was always exhilarating to work with highly motivated American colleagues and locally employed staff. Also, the foreigners who stepped forward to work with us to promote democratic governance and free market economies in their countries inspired me with their commitment and rectitude. Of course there are irritants in bilateral relations, but the reason we have diplomats abroad, ultimately, is to maintain dialogue even when we disagree. The good connections and networks created and maintained by Foreign Service officers with foreign governments and peoples often result in unsung benefits to U.S. security and prosperity. The increasing speed of change in global geopolitics makes the value of diplomacy all the more essential. My career with the Foreign Service was a great run and I'm glad that I can still contribute by helping to preserve its legacy through the oral histories of its members.

End of interview