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

AMBASSADOR RICHARD N. VIETS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is April 6, 1990. This is an interview with Ambassador Richard N. Viets on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. I wonder

if you could give me a little about your background--when your were born, where you come from, etc.?

VIETS: I was born and raised, Mr. Kennedy, outside a tiny village in northern Vermont, a place called Hyde Park.

Q: Is that in the Northeast Kingdom?

VIETS: It sits in the underbelly of the Northeast Kingdom. It is sort of midway in the northern part of the State of Vermont between Burlington and St. Johnsbury.

I was "educated" in one of those classic schools where there were three grades to a room. You had the benefit as a first grader of doing third grade work and as a fourth grader doing sixth grade work. I remember once writing a brief autobiography claiming that my principal education had taken place in a one room school house in Vermont, which was a slight elaboration on the truth. But it was a great way to...

Q: I know. My wife comes from Sheffield, Vermont.

VIETS: Well, things have changed since then, but that was the way I started. I subsequently had an appointment to West Point and was going to be a West Pointer. About a month before the plebe summer started I was involved in a bad accident and the Army, or at least, West Point wouldn't touch me. I went home to recuperate from this accident in Vermont. After a couple of months I enrolled as a special student in the University of Vermont...part time because I couldn't go to school full time at that point.

The Korean War broke out--this would have been September 1950--and I had been too young to participate in World War II. I was in the middle of what I characterize as my "Hemingway phase" in that period of my life and was certain that no man could understand life without having seen and participated in war. So I lied about my condition and situation and joined a reserve Army unit that had been called to active duty to go to Korea. I ended up not in Korea but in Germany.

When I finished the Army, a little less then two years later, and went back to school...I came down here to Georgetown, I went again to the University of Vermont, I was at Harvard for a while, I studied out on the West Coast and a little bit in Europe.

Q: You really bounced around.

VIETS: I was a little ahead of my time...academic trampism! I finally concluded enough was enough.

I had been out on the West Coast working for the Bank of America and later building custom kitchens for homes of movie stars, when I encountered a young lady whom I had known in Germany some years earlier and I followed her back to Washington.

I encountered on the street, Pennsylvania and 17th Street, an old college classmate who was just walking out of what was then USIA headquarters at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue. He had just taken an oral examination to enter the USIA junior officer training program. I was at loose ends. The young lady in question had come back here for treatment of cancer and had just died. I thought on the spur of the moment that USIA sounded like a good idea.

So I walked in and went through the necessary examinations and somewhat to my surprise received a letter several months later from USIA telling me that I had been accepted and was being assigned as a junior office trainee to Kabul, Afghanistan. This was in 1955. I was back in Vermont staying with my parents at that time having a great life as a ski bum. I can remember going to the Encyclopedia Britannica to look up Kabul to see just where it was. I didn't know.

I subsequently went to Kabul and spent a wonderful year there. In many respects, as so often happens with a young person on their first post, it was a fascinating period. From there I went to Tunis. In those times USIA had an interesting approach in training their junior officers. They felt that in order to test the mettle of their officer candidates, they ought to be thrust into two very different cultures and environments in the course of a two-year overseas assignment. And they were also concerned that junior officers work for at least two supervisors in their first assignment in order to mitigate any prejudice one way or another on the prospects and potential of each officer candidate.

Q: Were you being run out of USIA at that point?

VIETS: In Washington, yes. I arrived in Tunis, I think about a week after Tunis had become independent. I recall that when you got out into the countryside in Tunisia into some of those small desert towns, the French tricolor was still flying from the local mayor's office.

It was also a time, of course, when the Algerian revolution was gaining force and the FLN had their headquarters almost in my back yard. So it was the revolutionary phase, one of them, of my Foreign Service career.

I spent a little over a year in Tunis.

Q: Let me ask you a couple questions first about Kabul and then about Tunis. In Kabul...we are talking about the mid-fifties which is pretty isolated. The Afghans as has become very apparent to everybody, the British earlier on and the Russians much later, aren't very susceptible to anybody. What does a young, brand new USIA officer do there?

VIETS: I am sure that my USIA masters have probably long since departed from this world so I can be very truthful! I think the answer is, precious little in terms of advancing the interests at that time of USIA. I had the advantage of being the youngest person on

that Embassy staff and I was also a bachelor. So I was the clean up hitter of the staff and always the guy who was available to do what nobody else wanted to tend to.

Our Ambassador at that time was a remarkable character by the name of Angus Ward.

Q: I was going to ask. He is one of the remarkable people in the Foreign Service.

VIETS: A memorable person. Ambassador Ward was in the final phase of his own career. He disliked what he called the capital life...that is, staying in Kabul. He had two major obsessions in his life at that point, and indeed they were obsessions. One was to complete work on a Mongolian-English dictionary and the second was to complete the mapping of certain areas of the northern reaches of Afghanistan which the British had never gotten around to doing. He had brought to Afghanistan a custom-built International Harvester safari wagon. These things are rather common now days, but in those days it was quite a vehicle. It had extra gas tanks, and water tanks, etc. We would go out for weeks at a time...we being me as his sort of aide-de-camp, his driver and a bearer and cook, to put up the tent and make the meals.

It was a wonderful education for me because I can remember so many nights sitting around a campfire up in the Hindu Kush listening to this man relive his career, which as you will recall was essentially in China and in the Soviet Union, with one major break prior to coming to Afghanistan in Kenya where he often said he got very bored with the Mau Mau rebellion and wanted to come to Afghanistan where things were really happening.

I also spent a great deal of time traveling around Afghanistan with our military attaché who was probably the most intelligent person I ever knew in the armed services. Alas, several years later he blew his brains out. His reporting requirements out of Washington necessitated his spending a great deal of time moving around the country, and especially the northern areas. The Soviets at that point were just beginning their rocket testing program and one of their bases was not too far north of the border.

Q: Were you picking up concern about the Soviets trying to get into Afghanistan? If so, what were we doing about it?

VIETS: That is a good question. You may recall that in 1955, Khrushchev and Bulganin came to Afghanistan, to Kabul, and dropped the equivalent of a $100 million economic grant in the lap of the Afghans. That was the first, in my recollection, major Soviet foreign aid program outside of what we then called the Iron Curtain, that is Eastern Europe. In many respects, I think, the Soviet rule book on how to run an economic assistance program was written in Afghanistan.

Yes, we were extremely concerned at that point about Soviet influence in Afghanistan. In retrospect, one needed much more of an historical understanding of the region than it seemed to me we were demonstrating in those days. You recall it was the era of the

Baghdad Pact. I remember great efforts being made to sign up everybody along the so-called "northern periphery" to the Baghdad Pact. The Afghans would have nothing to do with it, of course.

But there were two central concerns. One was Afghanistan's strategic position as the throughway between the subcontinent and Western Europe and secondly, as I say, there were some major interest in what was going on on the other side of the border in the world of rockets.

Q: Ambassador Ward who had been in prison in Mukden and had served in the Soviet Union...here was probably as good a man as any to be in this place. Obviously he must have known the history of the area well and was not a Washington cold warrior. How did he view Soviet influence in Afghanistan?

VIETS: He, in fact, was in the final process of tuning out his career. I don't recall, I'm sure we must have had discussions on this, but his principal interests in those days didn't relate to the contemporary political, social, economic problems in Afghanistan. He was in an anecdotal phase of his life and I wish I had had the same tape recorder you have in front of me now. I would have had a hell of a book out of it. As I said he spent as little time as possible in Kabul. When he was there he spent a great deal of time in his house.

He was quite a skilled craftsman with wood. I remember ...he knew that he was retiring so he started a big program of building packing cases for what was a 40-50 year collection of things. He was married to a white Russian lady of formidable dimensions and pretensions. I don't remember, but it seems to me something like 350 packing cases were produced. All of them of cabinet craftsman quality.

I recall when he finally left...our Army attaché had two huge trucks that were used to haul food and other things needed by the Embassy from Peshawar, which was our depot for all of our sea pouches and food shipments, etc. In those days very little was available in the bazaar of Afghanistan, unlike today. These trucks were shuttled back and forth a couple of times a month. They were commandeered by the Ambassador to take his shipment of 300 odd packing cases down to Karachi to catch a ship back to Europe. He was retiring in southern Spain, where he intended to take his safari wagon into the Sahara and do mapping work there.

By then I had surely become the American equivalent of the ADC and was asked to accompany the two trucks to insure that nothing untoward happened. You can imagine that over the years he had amassed an extraordinary collection of artifacts. A great deal of stuff came out of China which obviously was valuable. We were to go down to Karachi with these trucks and then link up with the Ambassador and his wife and get them on board ship and away. This was about a week's journey overland. It was a long haul and the roads were such that you had to go pretty carefully. But I recall finally getting down there and linking up with the Ambassador.

The morning the ship was sailing...the MV Victoria, I still remember, one of the old Lloyd Triestino ships that sailed from Hong Kong to Singapore, to Bombay, Karachi, to Aden for refueling and then on to Italy...Naples. One would go to Naples and the other would go up to Venice and Trieste.

In any case we went down to the port in Karachi...the Ward family had a collection of three or four beautiful cats. I am sorry I don't recall whether they were Russian, Siamese or what. I am not a cat fancier. But they were gorgeous creatures. I recall that the pouch room at the Embassy had been raided by the Ambassador and he had taken away two large sea pouches and had cut air holes in them. Those bags had leather handles on them for easy carrying. Two cats were put into each bag. I was assigned the task as we got out of the cars at the port of carrying these bags on board.

The gangway was a rather rickety affair, I remember, and it swung back and forth. I was directly behind Mrs. Ward who was of a certain age and size as I suggested earlier and I recall hanging the two sea bags over the sides of the gangway and trying to use my elbows to steady poor Mrs. Ward who was having difficulty climbing the gangway.

The Ambassador was right behind me and about halfway up as we were swinging back and forth and the cats are meowing and Mrs. Ward was complaining, he roared at me, "God damn it, Viets, never mind my wife watch those cats!"

I could go on with many more anecdotes like this...

Q: Well, I like getting these stories because people like Ward die out unless we get something in writing. Well, going on to Tunis. What were you doing there?

VIETS: I used to talk about myself as deputy head of the USIA office in Tunis. In fact there were two of us there! As I said, this was just at the moment of Tunisian independence so the Tunisians were scrambling about looking for assistance in every single area of governmental and private activity you could think of. So our agency operation there was a very busy one. Lots and lots of people were coming from the United States.

Q: Tunisia had gained its independence fairly peacefully.

VIETS: That's right. Habib Bourguiba was the great figure at that point and for many years after.

Q: My understanding is that he had a very strong positive feeling towards the United States.

VIETS: He did. He was a tremendous admirer of President Eisenhower, who was in office at that point. Despite what one would have to say had been a spotty, if not questionable, record of American subservience to French colonial policy in North Africa for a considerable period leading up to Tunisian independence, Bourguiba was a great

admirer of many aspects of the United States and its institutions. In consequence, we had ready access to him and, I like to think, a certain amount of influence.

Our access to him was immeasurably enhanced by the fact that we had on our staff at that point, the USIA staff, an extraordinary woman who was a Polish, a displaced person, who Bourguiba had almost "adopted" as a daughter. There was a period, I recall, when he would not receive anyone who couldn't talk to him in French or Arabic, without her acting as an interpreter. This lady, I should add for the record, subsequently, became my wife. So I have a certain bias in my description of events. But she played a very, very interesting role during that period in our relationship not only with Bourguiba, but in a sense even more importantly with the FLN political leadership. But that is another story and one which I don't want to get into here.

Q: I would like whatever you can say. There was a tremendous debate within the American government over what we should do about Algeria because you had the European Bureau saying, "Look, we don't want to mess around with NATO, we have to keep the French happy." This led to our problems with Indonesia too. Yet at the same time the colonial situation, even in those days it was pretty obvious that this thing was not going to go on. Algeria was hopelessly divided with a very strong colonial element there. What were we doing?

VIETS: Your characterization is absolutely accurate. The Europeanists in the State Department were the dominant force until quite late in the day in North Africa, in our relationships with the incipient North African independent governments and institutions. The historians may quarrel with me, but it seems to me that this period marked the beginning of a structural change in the American government's pro-French orientation of "well, it is their backyard and we shouldn't mess in it since we have all these NATO obligations, etc." Also a lot of just plain Francophonism, if one can coin that word, I think drove a great deal of our North African policy. But a seminal event in my memory at that time was a speech on the floor of the Senate by a man named Jack Kennedy.

Q: Who was the Senator from Massachusetts.

VIETS: Who was the Senator from Massachusetts. I think that speech was in 1954. It rang alarm bells that the law of diminishing returns was beginning to set in by our almost blind support of a very myopic French colonial policy in Northern Africa. I don't think that is over-stating the situation.

Q: No, I don't either.

VIETS: In later years of my career, as you know, I spent a certain amount of time working in Israel and Jordan and I saw so many segments of Israeli society acting, behaving, thinking in much the same manner that many of the French "Colon" did during the 1950's.

In any case, in answer to your question, obviously we had to adhere to the policy lines laid down by our political masters in Washington. But I can recall vigorous dissent messages flowing back and forth for the first months of my time there. Our mission was still a consulate general. We had not been elevated to an embassy, even though the country was independent. Again, our Embassy in Paris, I remember, had a hand in insuring that this did not happen for many months.

Q: To get a little feel of the atmosphere, did you sort of look upon the Embassy in Paris as being overly sophisticated?

VIETS: We certainly looked upon it as being an extension of the policy interests of the Quai d'Orsay. One has always to understand that emotions in such circumstances can run very high. And they did! But you see these issues through rather small sets of political, social binoculars. And as I look back on it, I realize this was really my first introduction to the frustrations of disagreeing with policies handed down from on high. I don't want to put too fine a point on this or mislead anyone who reviews these records, but in our defiance of Washington and our embassy in Paris I think we sailed pretty close to the edge in Tunis during this period in finding creative ways to deal with the "outlaw" FLN leadership in Tunis through various emissaries, including Bourguiba. My late wife was very active in this regard...she wasn't a US citizen so she wasn't under the same constraints we were. But we did not spend a great deal of time informing Washington of those activities.

Q: This is the type of thing that I think is good for somebody to understand the record, that there is an awful lot going on out there that just won't get in the record. Most people are individuals and have their own agendas and see things. The Secretary of State may make his orders, but the written ones are rather meager out in the field.

How about with the Tunisians? Here you are with USIA talking about America. This must have been rather difficult. It is hard for us to get away from our independence as a former colony and then to sort of cool it when we talk about French colonialism.

VIETS: It was extremely difficult and again I was so often reminded in the last years of my career...working with the Israel-Arab conflict and the Palestinian problem...of exactly the same dilemma of having to work within the constraints of a policy laid down by the President and the Secretary of State and the Congress looking over your shoulder constantly and constantly interfering-- policies with which you found yourself sometimes in major disagreement. It creates plenty of creative tension in the profession! And on occasion when you felt yourself veering too far towards the edge you ask yourself, "Should I get out?" You are still a loyal soldier, but where do you draw the line?

Q: With the Tunisians was this coming up?

VIETS: Yes, constantly.

Q: Every time you saw a Tunisian, Algeria came up.

VIETS: Absolutely. As I say, you had to be creative while still attempting to be fundamentally loyal to policy. We were able and I think more so perhaps in those days than now because there weren't quite so many layers of people then between you and the senior policy level in the Department and the White House to make our arguments and then hope that those arguments were registering and getting through. And over a period of time the policy changes, of course. In the case of Tunisia how much of a policy correction was due to our efforts as opposed to broader considerations of policy, is somebody's doctoral thesis.

Q: You certainly were absorbing in these two years two quite different atmospheres.

VIETS: That's right.

Q: When did you leave Tunis?

VIETS: I left in July or August, 1957. I had become frustrated by the US Information Agency. It seemed to me that it was becoming very sclerotic in its management of itself. In those days there were still a great many hangers on from the old Office of War Information, in senior managerial positions of the Information Agency. These people were all approaching retirement but they were still running things. There were a lot of cold warriors. There were a lot of people who weren't, in my judgment, terribly competent. It seemed to me that it was an organization that had a dead hand. I became very impatient with it. I was young and impatient in any case. So I resigned. I had enjoyed a very rapid run with them. They were very liberal in their promotions and all that. But I decided I did not have the patience to wait for these people to move on into retirement.

I also had a very itchy foot and was still a bachelor. I had been exposed on several occasions over the last couple of years to a government program called the Office of International Trade Fairs. This organization operated in the most wonderful free-wheeling manner you can imagine. The GAO, General Auditing Office, would jump off the roof today if any office ran itself like the Trade Fairs office did in those days. I thought this would be great fun for a couple of years to just wheel and deal around the world putting up trade fairs. So I joined them and spent the next two years hurtling around the globe in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, doing this.

I ended up in India and in 1960 decided enough was enough...in late 1959 I married the remarkable Polish lady that I mentioned earlier and realized this was no life for her. So I resigned from the government, joined the Mobil International Oil Company and spent the next 18 months or so working with Mobil, ending up in Paris. But I increasingly realized that, to quote old Joe Kennedy's famous dictum, there is no fun in chasing the buck, or something like that...I found making money a very boring world in which to operate. However necessary money may be, unless you are awfully lucky, making it is not terribly interesting, and I had had an interesting life up until that point and it seemed to me to

spend my days talking with petroliers in France about the need to change the oil in their airplanes more frequently was not terribly exciting or intellectually stimulating.

My wife and I went on a holiday to Sardinia in the summer of 1961. I was one of the early scuba divers and a great devotee of Jacques Cousteau. I sat on the bottom of the Mediterranean off the coast of Sardinia for a week, coming up for air, of course, occasionally, just working out my future. I finally decided that what I wanted to do was to join the Foreign Service. I was thirty years old at that point and going on thirty-one. That was a period when thirty-one was the cutoff point. So I quickly took the exams and passed and got in just under the wire. Because of my "business" background, and some trade experience, it was a logical thing that my first assignment to Tokyo was as a commercial officer.

Q: I have you there from 1962-65.

VIETS: That is slightly misleading in that we departed just before Christmas 1962, arriving at the end of the year.

Q: Did you come in with a Foreign Service class?

VIETS: Yes.

Q: I wonder if you could just characterize just a bit the class you came in with?

VIETS: I am sorry, I am misinterpreting you, I came in as a lateral entrant. In those days one took what was the same oral examination that an FSO candidate would take, what they waived was the written exam. I vividly remember the day I took the exam. There was a wonderful French restaurant across the street from the building I was to be tested in on 17th street. Unhappily, it has long since disappeared. My exam was scheduled for 2:30 in the afternoon. I had a certain apprehension because I knew if I failed, that would mark the end of my Foreign Service aspirations because I would be thirty-one in a couple of months. So I invited to lunch a ravishing lady, a friend of my wife and I, and we sat across the street out on the terrace of this restaurant and consumed a couple of wonderful bottles of white wine.

I sort of lurched into the examination room feeling absolutely no pain. Fortunately in those days exams were held with the examiners sitting behind a long table on one side and you sat on the other. So I sat with my hand over my mouth hoping that nobody would pick up the vapors. I think I had had just enough to drink to be sufficiently articulate and I got through the ordeal all right.

Q: You then went to Tokyo. What was the commercial situation and what were you doing at that time?

VIETS: I was thinking about this the other day because I was at dinner with a distinguished American lawyer who had just come back from a couple of years in Tokyo and we were trading comments and reminiscences.

In those days Japan was still in its pre-pubescent period. The Japanese were still very busy copying things. They were already well into the radio and television business, but nobody wanted their cars. The Japanese didn't think much of their cars. I remember bringing an American Ford car there and crowds would gather around it out in the countryside. It was a cheap American Ford, but it was always greeted with great appreciation.

I have always thought that the threshold of Japan's transition to a mature industrial society really was marked by the Olympics in 1964. It seemed to me from that point onward, the Japanese suddenly demonstrated a self assurance in a societal sense that we hadn't earlier seen. They had labored night and day, seven days a week, in Tokyo for several years prior to the Olympics in changing the face of the city. Everything suddenly seemed to come together for the Japanese. They became increasingly important players in the international marketplace. They were becoming more assertive in their relationships with us. They grew up. It was for that reason an especially interesting period to be there.

It was made all the more exciting because we had as our Ambassador one of the more remarkable men I have ever worked for, Edwin O. Reischauer, the famous Japanese, Chinese scholar from Harvard. I think the United States was inordinately fortunate to have him as our principal representative to that country at that period because he was very much a father figure for the Japanese. They paid great heed to his advice and counsel. He was a very wise, exceedingly competent man. I think his contributions to the Japanese transition from a sort of occupation mentality into a more normal relationship with us have never fully been appreciated either by policy makers or by historians.

Q: What were your responsibilities and how did you see him as he related to the commercial side of things?

VIETS: Unlike almost any of the other politically appointed chiefs of mission that I either worked for or saw at close distance over the ensuing years, there was very little in the Embassy that didn't interest Ambassador Reischauer.

We had established as part of our Embassy operations at that point, indeed it was one of the reasons I was sent there, a trade center, where every six weeks we mounted a major exhibition. The center was a display case for American products. I remember that the Ambassador took a very keen interest in that operation. He was always there for openings and often came over to see how things were going, etc.

He was also very much personally involved in negotiations in the economic arena. He, of course, was essentially bilingual in Japanese-English, but he used a very clever device. If he were in a press conference, for example, with Japanese journalists, he used the

principal Embassy interpreter to do the English to Japanese portions of the affair. And, you could rest assured there would be several points in the course of this exceedingly proficient interpreter's rendition of what Reischauer had said when the Ambassador would interrupt him in Japanese and say, "Now that is not quite the right shade of meaning that you have given to this, rather it is etc. etc." Of course, the Japanese just loved this because it revealed his inner knowledge of the most refined elements of that very sophisticated language. A remarkable man in many respects.

Q: Working for Commerce at that time, what sort of instructions were you getting?

VIETS: The Commerce Department, I think, was essentially a reflection of the general American attitude toward Japan at that point. That is, Japan was an important potential market for American exports. We were beginning to worry about our trade deficit. My recollection is that in those years we had a shocking global trade deficit of something like $18-20 billion a year...we would be on our hands and knees if we could get it down to that today.

So Commerce's view of Japan was almost exclusively focused on exports. I must say it was rinky-dink stuff that Commerce was focusing on. I have no particular respect, looking back on that period, for the competence and vision and foresight of the people in the Department of Commerce or State, for that matter, on what was coming down the pike. I can remember those of us on the commercial staff...we had six or seven American officers, it was a large establishment...were principally devoted to kind of hand holding American businessmen who were visiting Japan for the first time. We were involved in explaining distribution systems and patent office problems and MITT, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, and arranging appointments, etc. There was no real understanding that the Japanese industrial juggernaut was gathering steam and would soon be rolling down the road over everything in front of it.

I do recall, however, working on a major study that Commerce never asked for but we decided we should do, on the fledgling Japanese automobile industry and the potential it had for becoming a major player in the global marketplace. I haven't, of course, read that despatch in many years, but I think we demonstrated surprising foresight in our predictions on what was going to happen. I can remember the study reaching Washington and eliciting guffaws...what were those young guys smoking?

So we had it all wrong. We didn't understand very well. And when I say "we" I am really speaking of the policy makers here. Those of us out there in Tokyo realized what was happening, although perhaps not with all the vision that there should have been.

Q: To move on, you then were assigned...you were going to spend quite a bit of time in India. First in Madras (1965-67) and New Delhi (1967-72). What were you doing in Madras?

VIETS: Again, I was assigned there as a commercial officer. It took me a little more than five minutes to realize that the potential for American exports in South India during that period was so limited as to perhaps occupy an American officer's activities about five or ten percent of the time. Fortunately, several months after my arrival, a State Department inspection team blew into town as part of their overall India inspection tour, and I was able to prevail on their good sense that this position should be abolished.

Our Consulate General in Madras covers a territory about the size of West Germany, four southern states of India, with, I think, a population of about 400 million people. That meant a great deal of travel. Again, I happened to be fortunate enough to be working with a group of people who didn't like to be away from their homes too frequently, so I spent a lot of time moving around south India, which is a fascinating part of the world. In consequence, I did a lot of both political and economic reporting.

Q: What were our interests in that area?

VIETS: Again, and this is always hard for anyone today to understand the passions which drove so much of American policy and preoccupied and dominated the activities of so many American posts abroad, one of the major preoccupations was our concern about Soviet influence in India. It was certainly a legitimate concern, but should never have become a dominant concern. We had a huge intelligence representation in India at that point. We spent an awful lot of time monitoring what the Soviets were doing, and they spent an awful lot of time monitoring what we were doing.

Q: Was India sort of going on despite it all like Old Man River?

VIETS: Yes. But you will recall this was also an important era of India's own political history. Nehru had just passed from the scene. Prime Minister Shastri had succeeded him. Shastri was a rather weak figure who, you may recall, died of a heart attack while on a trip to Tashkent. To many people's surprise, within the US establishment at least, a lady named Indira Gandhi succeeded him.

She was clearly the candidate of the political bosses in India at that point. They thought they were going to be able to dominate her and manipulate events as they desired. So we also devoted quite a lot of time trying to figure out whither India in political, economic and philosophical terms. We were still hoping that we could influence the Indians to embrace the so-called market economy, which we called private enterprise in those days. So a lot of time was spent working with American businessmen and Indian politicians who were favorably disposed to freeing up the economy from its layers and layers of British inspired bureaucracy and Indian refinements thereof.

There was also a major presence throughout India of USIA. We had library operations in those days in Trivandrum down in Kerala State...in each of the capitals of the four southern Indian states that our consular district embraced.

Q: You mention Kerala State. This was one of those red blotches on the map.

VIETS: Kerala had a "Communist" government. That was a period in which there had been a major split in the Communist Party between a faction of the party that supported Moscow and a faction which supported Beijing. So you had this wonderful CPI, Communist Party of India, divided into two groups. One was what we called "Right" and one was "Left," "Right" being Moscow. We wasted a lot of time on that.
Q: I'm sure there were other things we could have been doing, but in those days the word "communism" would suck us into paying too much attention to it at the expense of other issues.

VIETS: We did have some major American economic projects going on. I should have said at the outset that another big preoccupation, certainly mine, was our AID program, economic assistance program, in India which at that point was of a value of hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars. Much of it was in the form of food aid. In 1966-67, India went through a very severe famine and the United States came to India's rescue in a stupendously generous fashion. I can remember going down to the port in Madras and looking out and seeing 70, 80 American ships sitting at anchor filled with grain waiting to come into the port.

Q: How was the delivery system? Often getting grain to the right place is crucial.

VIETS: Compared to other parts of the world that I lived in I think it was relatively efficient. The Indians had, thanks to the British, an extremely good rail network which covered all of south India. And their road system also was still in relatively good shape. The grain losses in India were in the storage of it where rats and weevils get to it. Often, as you know, it would just be stored outside. There were inadequate covered storage facilities. But in terms of transporting and distributing those food grains to feed hungry people and their hungry live stock, I think one has to give very high marks to the Indians for the way they handled the crisis.

Q: When you were in Madras what was the attitude of the officers you worked with and your own attitude towards the Indians? Was it positive or sort of "Oh my God, these are difficult people"?

VIETS: I think both of the above. I had a life long love affair with India, less so with Indians, but certainly with the country. It is such a fascinating series of cultures and civilizations. The topography is magnificent, of course, from the Himalayas to the coast lines. All those wonderful hill stations, tea plantations, etc.

I think that no American who has served in India has not left considerably older because of the need to find secret reservoirs of patience and understanding which he might not have had when he came. But also I doubt if any American who really made the effort to get out and know something about India hasn't left much the richer for it. It is a remarkable civilization.

Q: Was there a difference between when you were in Madras and moving around attitude towards Americans and all than there was when you got up to New Delhi which is much more a capital which often reflects the central party, etc.?

VIETS: Yes. To begin with south Indians...there are major Christian communities in south India, especially in Kerala, so there exists a different ethic towards such things as private enterprise in south India than in north India. South Indians are a more sophisticated, in a sense more worldly group of people than the north Indians are. These are terrible generalizations but there is some validity to them, I think.

But you put your finger on, I think, the principal differences...in New Delhi you were in a capital with layers of bureaucrats and politicians many of whom were not very competent and were driven by the most confused and confusing economic and political philosophies. We were all, ourselves, under the spell of Chester Bowles.

Q: He was Ambassador there from 1963-69.

VIETS: Well, he was Ambassador there twice. I got him the second time around. He had amassed...it was a very large mission in those days in New Delhi...and he had amassed without question the most capable group of people I ever worked with anywhere during my Foreign Service career, which certainly includes the city of Washington! He had an eye for talent.

Q: How old were some of those people?

VIETS: Well, for example, the current head of National Public Radio was one of his people; the current head of AIPAC, Tom Dine was one of his people; the current head of the Foreign Service Institute [Brandon Grove] was one of his people; there must have been 30 or 40 future ambassadors who were on his staff; the Governor of Ohio, Dick Celeste, was one of his people. The Foreign Service today, at least my generation, is just studded with Bowles graduates.

Q: What was his method of operation and how did you view him in his relations with the Indians?

VIETS: It is a complicated question and a complicated answer and I will try to simplify it by saying that he was impassioned to imbue American principles and ideals into the Indian political consciousness and mainstream. He was a great democrat, as you know, both in terms of being a great member of the Democratic Party, and a democrat in the political philosophical sense of the word as well. A man of formidable intellect and energy and that combination always, of course, is nothing to trifle with. So he worked seven days a week, eighteen or twenty hours a day, coming up with idea, after idea, after idea, on how to knit US institutions with Indian institutions. He always said that he got much of his inspiration from his pattern of surrounding himself with fairly young,

energetic people. We were all in our 30s or early 40s at that point. Once or twice a week he would have eight or ten of us to his home for dinner and we would sit out there in that lovely back garden of his and argue far into the night with him. I had two wonderful years with him in that garden listening to argument, debate and dissent on everything under the sun that was going on, both in India and elsewhere. As a consequence, he missed very few tricks and we, as a consequence, were the beneficiaries of a lot of practical political wisdom on his part. He was one of the most open ambassadors I have ever known. If he had just come from spending a couple of hours with the Prime Minister, we would hear about the most privileged elements of that conversation. This was not always true in other embassies in which I served. But his influence led me to try to emulate him in many ways when I became an Ambassador.

Q: How do you think your work related to the Indians?

VIETS: They were devoted to him. Partly because they felt they had co-opted him, and certainly much of the bureaucracy in Washington was convinced of this fact, and it was probably true. It was a mutual co-option I would say. But India, for him, became an important center of the universe and he managed to divert huge amounts of American resource to that country. For example, at one point, we had a rupee account amounting to a couple of billion dollars stashed in the coffers of the Indian Central Bank.

Q: We are still living off them.

VIETS: Yes. Senator Moynihan, while he was Ambassador, finally had the good sense to negotiate a framework of agreements that led to this huge rupee debt owed to the US to be channeled into productive things that finally got rid of the bulk of it. But we were an enormously important player in India in those days.

Q: There is the saying that when the Democratic Party is in, India gets the tip, and when the Republicans are in, it seems to go to Pakistan. Did you have any feeling towards this?

VIETS: No, I think that is not a particularly thoughtful comment. There are many factors at play here. I think that various administrations, going back to the Nehru era and perhaps up to and including the present...although I am less certain of myself now because I keep an eye only occasionally on US-Indian relations, I am not intimately involved with it anymore...but I think that every administration had its frustrations in dealing with the Indians, who are, as I said earlier, inordinately frustrating human beings.

The Pakistanis, on the other hand, have a somewhat crisper approach to their relationship with the US. They know what they want and they are prepared to make the necessary accommodations to get it. In consequence, over years I think that the Pakistanis have done rather better in managing their relationships with the United States than the Indians have. But it is a hell of a complicated subject to open up on.

While I was in India, of course, we had two Indo-Pak wars. One in 1969 and one in 1971. During the second one there was a major American bias toward support of the Pakistanis. Henry Kissinger was, more than any other person, responsible for this. I can recall Kissinger, who at that time was National Security Adviser for Nixon, coming out to India. I was the control officer for his visit. At that time I was working in the Ambassador's office. I had stayed on in India because when Bowles left and a new Ambassador had arrived, Senator Kenneth B. Keating, he had pinned my arms behind my back and knocked me against the wall and said that I was going to stay and be his principal assistant. I agreed to do it for a year and ended up doing it for three. That is why I was in India for so long.

In the summer of 1971 Kissinger visited India on his way to China, via Pakistan. This was the famous secret first trip to China. As I said, I was appointed his control officer for the visit. We had come up with the idea that he meet with a group of Indians who had been his students at Harvard, in his celebrated Harvard seminar. So we pulled in 20, 25 Indians from around the country who had studied under him. We were very frustrated at that point because we had been sending message after message to Washington saying that the Indians and Pakistanis were on the way to war and Washington wasn't listening and didn't believe us. The Washington policy mandarins thought we were reflecting Indian attitudes and not our own best estimates.

In any case I remember vividly getting these guys for breakfast around a huge table in the Ashoka Hotel, and Kissinger showed up and remembered most of them. He sat down and went around the room in his professorial fashion asking each of them to make a forecast of what was going to happen in the next four months. Every single one of them came up with a four or five minute analysis of why war was inevitable.

Q: The war was over what issue?

VIETS: The war resulted in the fragmentation of East Pakistan into the new nation of Bangladesh. Its causes are complicated and some are still murky, but in sum the Indians were dabbling around in East Pakistani politics and the Pakistanis were dabbling around in Punjab things. A long story.

In any case I was sitting beside Kissinger and could palpably feel his anger rising because he didn't want to hear any of this. When we finally completed the circle he just preemptively stood up and said in so many words that he was ashamed that he had made so little impact in their capacity to analyze situations rationally and none of them knew what he was talking about. There wasn't going to be any war, and if there was, it was all India's fault, etc.

It was quite a performance by this man and he stalked out leaving these poor fellows all looking at one another and wondering...

Q: In interviews in general what I have absorbed is that Kissinger tends to make up his mind, and also there was a bigger plan as far as he was concerned. He was in Pakistan and this was going to screw things up.

VIETS: That is right. We, of course, were not aware of his maneuverings at that point.

Q: When he came was he asking you and others what was going to happen?

VIETS: Oh, sure. But as I said, there was hardly a day that a very thoughtful cable didn't go out of our mission forecasting what was going to happen. It didn't fit in with his scheme of things. I must say that I doubt very much if Henry Kissinger spent a hell of a lot of time learning the intricacies of South Asian politics. He did not have any particular love for the Indians to begin with. He had had various encounters with them and apparently felt they were a hopeless species.

In this type of interview I don't want to get too deeply into analyzing Mr Kissinger. I subsequently worked for him as the head of the so-called S/S-S, Executive Secretariat, in the Department when he came over from the White House to be Secretary of State. I spent a year there, so I had a ring side seat observing how he worked and operated. He certainly was one of the most fascinating figures in post-war American political history. He is a person of exceptional talent and knowledge, but also a man who was not nearly as wise, I think this is the word I want to use, as he managed to make the world believe. US policy, as a consequence, enjoyed both the benefits and the downside of that man's power.

Q: As the war clouds gathered how did you see the other side of the moon...our Embassy in Islamabad, and how were they reporting?

VIETS: Well, both Embassies made major efforts to keep our lines open without necessarily including Washington. We visited one another very frequently. We worked out some elements of our disagreements without spilling any blood on the floor. But there remained some basic policy differences which led to opposing policy analyses and recommendations from the two missions. I am not sure, as I look back on it...and I would need to refresh my memory by going back and reading some of the telegrams of the period from both missions...but I am not sure how good a job either of us really did in seeing these issues through the optic of our own national interests as opposed to perhaps doing a splendid job of articulating the views of the governments to which we were accredited. I would like to think that we did a reasonable job in interpreting these events and analyzing them and recommending courses of actions that served American interests. But we will leave that judgement to the diplomatic historians!

Q: Wasn't there also some emotion as to how the West Pakistanis were putting down their colleagues in what we now call Bangladesh?

VIETS: Yes, there was a lot of butchery going on.

Q: Including reports from our Consul General, Archer Blood and others. This was a pretty emotional thing.

VIETS: Indeed it was. Since we were bankers to both parties, we had some responsibility.

Q: Here was a Senator, Kenneth Keating, coming who was not a great intellect as others had been and didn't come from having a significant role in foreign policy formulation in the Senate. In fact, if I recall, he was a defeated senator, wasn't he?

VIETS: Yes, by Bobby Kennedy.

Q: This was his first ambassadorial assignment. How was he received and how did he operate and what was his role?

VIETS: To begin with, his appointment flowed from the fact that he and Richard Nixon had entered the House of Representatives together and were founding members of the Marching and Chowder Society and were very close friends. Keating, by the time he got to India, had clearly begun to have some major reservations about aspects of President Nixon's behavior, etc. However, he still remained a loyal and close friend. That was the genesis of his appointment.

The Indians, I think, were ambivalent about the appointment. In the first instance they always wanted to think they were getting an ambassador, as most countries do, who could pick up the phone and get the President on the other end. Keating certainly could do this, although he wisely, because of his political background, was aware of the fact that if you excessively used this entree those who guard the portals of power will insure your access over time is eroded, especially when you are 7 or 8 thousand miles away.

The quality of persons with whom he was dealing with, for example, the top echelon of the Foreign Ministry were all Oxford, Cambridge educated men, very intelligent, worldly, suave, urbane, sophisticated, experienced men in the world of politics and economics and it didn't take them very long to figure out that Keating was not an intellectual heavyweight. But he had some damn strong people standing behind him. So he was made to look much better, I think, than he was.

He was an enormously personable fellow, an Irish politician who really knew how to press the flesh very well. He loved the social side of his job.

He used his Senate method of operation by appointing a chief of staff who was responsible for everything. I had both the great fortune and the misfortune of being anointed by him to this position. Keating refused for a long, long time to adhere to the traditional patterns of managing an embassy, and I as a fairly young and junior officer found myself effectively running the place. The good Ambassador used to devote a couple of hours in the morning to the office, then retire to his swimming pool until late afternoon, followed by a siesta for a couple of hours. He would then start his social

rounds, the high point of his day. I am afraid he did not work very hard, which meant that the rest of us put in some mighty long hours. Fortunately, after several months of 20 hour days a very professional DCM, Galen Stone, arrived in New Delhi and picked up the reins as the traditional deputy Ambassador.

Q: Did he have any opinions of how things were going? Did he listen to others?

VIETS: He would listen very carefully. I am hearing my voice echo here and realize I am perhaps drawing a picture of something of a fool. He was not by any stretch of the imagination. He was shrewd. He had a lot of experience in the political world and in Washington. He had an enormous range of contacts in this country. In every part of our society Ken Keating knew people who counted. He was perfectly happy to use those contacts whenever they could be helpful.

To his credit he recognized that, as politicians who survive do, I think, he had some bright people working for him and he listened to them and took their advice. I respect him for that.

Q: How did he feel about this coming war? This is one of those times when there was a lot of emotion at home over India and Bangladesh.

VIETS: He had no trouble understanding what was coming down the pike and supported fully those officers on his staff who were writing the telegrams that made these forecasts and policy recommendations. He backed them to the hilt and was back in Washington very frequently to argue the case in his own fashion. But I fear that he was written down by the policy level people in Washington as being a little fey and growing old and a bit forgetful. People in this city were concerned because they knew he was a close friend of the President and thus he was accorded respect due to his position and his age, but I don't think he made any great impact in a personal sense either here or in India.

Q: Looking at policy situations, here you have a nice test case. You have two countries with which we have considerable interest in--Pakistan and India--and they are heading towards war. What can we do and all that. We have a National Security Adviser who has his eyes fixed on China and almost anything else is passed over. It is often said that you don't really need a powerful ambassador because other things happen, but really in the Washington sense, had this been somebody else who had not only political clout but who was at the peak of his or her powers, that could have made some difference.

VIETS: Well, I agree with you. As you were posing this I was quickly thinking of people I had worked with who could have made more of a difference. Sam Lewis, for example. I was his DCM in Tel Aviv for a couple of years. There is a man who had intellect, energy and the forcefulness of personality and the respect of his audience in Washington at the policy level who would have made a difference had he been in India. I am certain of it. I could name other people. You are right. I do not subscribe to the prevailing theory that ambassadors are an anachronism and are the personification of the irrelevancy of the

Foreign Service institution as it has developed. I agree that ambassadors are in some respects a useless institution, but there are certain moments when they really earn their keep and can make an enormous difference in the formation of policy and perhaps even more importantly to the implementation and conduct of that policy. But they have to have that combination of intellect and experience and the capacity to come back to this city and make people listen to them. Otherwise the bureaucracy in this city is so huge and so divisive and fractionated and self-important and arrogant that it will just get its own way. I have always thought that this was a capital waiting to be told what to do. Ambassadors, like certain generals and admirals, still have that potential to represent the difference between stupidity in policy and policy that is acute and germane to US national interests. Unfortunately, I am not sure there are too many people about these days who meet my criteria for this, but the potential role is there for the person with the right mix of qualifications.

Q: It does also point up a problem. There is nothing worse in Washington as far as clout goes than to have lost an election.

VIETS: Well, you get what you deserve. I think the myopia of the political wisdom of using defeated political candidates as an Ambassadorial resource was even more sharply drawn when Keating decided that he wanted to go to Israel. He had wanted to come out to India because he had served there as an officer in World War II and had enjoyed it very much. He knew it could be a great life and indeed for him it was. He had a huge staff in his residence, a beautiful residence and a couple of swimming pools, airplanes at his disposal, etc. After 3 years he decided he wanted to go to Israel, primarily I think because of the warm and fuzzy feelings he had generated with his New York Jewish constituency. He mistakenly calculated this popularity could be transferred and re-packaged in Israel. Alas for him, it couldn't be, and he died an unhappy and frustrated man.

Q: India must have been as viceregal as one could get.

VIETS: That is right, and he enjoyed it. But as I say he decided that he wanted to go to Israel and the President thought that was fine. Well, that killed him, quite literally. If you can think of any more stupid thing to do then send a man in failing health, elderly, unable to muster much energy and toss him into the vortex of the Middle East and make sure he is there during a major war, that is pretty smart.

Q: Was this the 1973 war?

VIETS: Yes.

Q: How did the Embassy react, particularly thinking of the political officers? This was the time we were going through the tilt towards Pakistan. Was there sort of a revolt of allegiance on the line or something of this nature?

VIETS: No, no, no. If you are asking about the Indo-Pak war, our energies over night refocused into trying to end the war. It was essentially US good offices that brought that conflict to a relatively rapid end. It is a shining hour in American diplomacy and I hope you don't ask me for too many details about how we did it because my memory is fading!

Q: Could you describe what you and others were doing?

VIETS: To begin with, we were the main communications link between Islamabad; Dacca, the provincial capital of East Pakistan and now the capital of Bangladesh; and New Delhi. We got right into the middle of it by trying to quickly defuse the situation. We arranged cease-fires, we were even the communicators of "don't bomb during this period because red cross people are going to be moving in and evacuating patients from hospitals," etc. We did everything you could dream of that a negotiator could do who had the best communication system of anybody in the world at that point...not what it is today, but still so much better than either one of the adversaries had.

I think we were essentially trusted by both sides. Better said, I think the people on the scene were trusted. I don't think Washington was particularly trusted by either capital, but the force of personality of the people we had in New Delhi and Islamabad and our bona fides had been amply demonstrated to our respective host governments. And personal trust as always, even in issues of war, become terribly, terribly important.

Q: The Soviets, I take it, played no real role in the war.

VIETS: No. There may have been some rumblings and threats, but I don't recall any major Soviet role.

Q: But you found dealing with the Indians that they didn't feel we were on the side of the Pakistanis because of this? How did our role in ceasing the hostilities play out?

VIETS: As in all wars, there comes a point when the advice of the military to their civilian political masters becomes the dominant element in decision making. Our Deputy Chief of Mission in New Delhi, Galen Stone, had established exceptional rapport with the military chiefs in India during that period. Also our CIA liaison with the Indians was of the highest order at that point. The combination of these two factors, I think played a critical role in ending the war. Galen could sit down with the military chiefs individually and go through things. Our Station chief could do that with his intelligence opposite numbers at the top and they in turn could go to their political masters. They wanted to end the war. They had no ambitions to become occupiers of East Pakistan. They were taking casualties and were concerned about a potential long term guerilla activity that could go on along the frontier. No soldier wants to continue a war. It is the politicians who were the...

Q: I know you have to quit at this point.

VIETS: I am getting ready to make a trip to Romania and promised to go over to the Department to meet with some people and had better do so.

Q: Well, then come on back.

Today is July 6, 1990 and this is a second interview with Ambassador Richard N. Viets. Picking up where we left off before, I wonder if you could tell me your impression at the time of how we treated India as regards to Vietnam? You were there at the time and India was sort of the burr under everybody's saddle, at least from our point of view. How did we look at it and how did we deal with this?

VIETS: We swallowed hard. I think that both the Washington foreign policy bureaucracy, as well as certainly our Embassy in New Delhi, accepted the fact that we could not in any foreseeable conditions modify Indian views regarding our role in Vietnam. But as in all conditions of this sort, there are always anomalies and aberrations. One that immediately comes to mind is the fact that the Indians made available to us, certainly during the seven years I was there and I left in 1972, facilities at their naval bases in Cochin and Bombay, for flotillas of US warships that had been on patrol off Vietnam and were on their way back to Europe or the US and they would put into Cochin or Bombay for several days of R&R, refueling, etc. We made no effort to hide the fact that these ships were coming from combat patrols in Vietnamese waters.

Q: I assume there was a general feeling of "let's cool it" as far as talking about this anywhere. If you were faced with criticism about doing more with India this was not something one would drag up to show Indian support in Congress or the press.

VIETS: Your point is well taken. The Indians were of some value to us in the ICC operation in Vientiane and certainly there were individual Indian diplomats who I think understood with greater clarity than perhaps their political masters did, what was going on and quietly were helpful to us. But over all, as I said a minute ago, I think we just gritted our teeth and muddled on.

Q: In a way this gives a certain feeling that there was some sophistication in what we were doing because there is the tendency, either the new people coming in or because of Congressional pressure, to go charging around and try to do what you can't do. But you felt things were well enough under control so that you didn't have to deal with people who wanted to convert the heathen?

VIETS: I think it was, to borrow the cliche, more of a damage control operation. What we were spending more time doing was insuring that the Indians didn't publicly take us on in various arenas around the world on Vietnam, as opposed to trying to proselytize and swing them around to our point of view.

Q: I would like to ask a couple of questions. You mentioned that you had this position where you were moved up and at your rank dealing at a much higher level. One of the

things I am interested in is how the Foreign Service operates. How did this sit with your fellow officers at the Embassy over a period of time?

VIETS: That is always a question better put to others, not the individual.

Q: How did you feel about it?

VIETS: It wasn't easy for anyone. I think in the circumstances, people in that mission...and as mentioned earlier it was a huge operation. My recollection is that there was something like 800 Americans throughout the whole country at that point. Certainly one of the biggest missions we had anywhere in the world. Many of those people, of course, were AID folks out in the countryside, but still the Embassy, itself, was enormous with 20 odd agencies represented there.

People, I think, in general...those who showed up for work every day...understood pretty well that what we were dealing with was (a) an ambassador who had no background at all for the task that confronted him, (b) was beginning to show signs of failing health and certainly did not have a great deal of energy and (c) like many political appointees was rather more interested in the ceremonial aspects of the job and the perquisites then he was in most of the substance. I don't want to completely diminish Ambassador Keating. He had, I think, the good sense, which I can't say for every political ambassador, to listen very carefully to sound advice that was given to him by his professional subordinates. Rarely would he override them. And he was prepared to stick his neck out on policy issues when one could have easily seen it would be better for him to remain quiet. In any case, people understood I think quite well the nature of his role and personality and knew that somebody had to be there to borrow Donald Regan's famous phrase, "to sweep up after him." Certainly that was one of my jobs.

He also had made very clear from his day of arrival that he wanted to run that mission as he had run his Senate office. He wanted to work through one person and what happened after that didn't bother him much as long as it was done. It was only after being there quite a few months that he became more sensitive to the fact that one person really had to be the DCM, and not this young personal assistant staff aide. But still behind closed doors more often than not he would use me as his transmission belt to the DCM on many, many issues.

I was very fortunate to be working with Galen Stone, under whom I had served a couple of years earlier in New Delhi when he had been political counselor and I was one of the political officers on his staff. We had developed a very close personal relationship in addition to a professional relationship. When Keating began to look for a new DCM, he was the person who I pushed hardest with Keating. Ultimately Keating hired him. So here were two men who both had some professional standards and who were also close personal friends. I think by in large it worked very well.

Q: It works sometimes when this sort of situation happens when a political appointee brings his own staff aide from outside. Then there is an immediate cutoff from the professional ranks.

VIETS: Well there I have to give Keating great credit. He could have done the same thing. He didn't. He knew he would be better served to use people within the system. And I think he was. His successor arrived with an outside fellow who took over the job I was doing and I think it was very, very hard for everybody for a long time.

Q: Well, then you came back to Washington in 1972 and would stay there until 1974. Having had this peculiar position in New Delhi, were you told that you now would be doing work equivalent to your rank?

VIETS: I came back and was assigned as one of the senior watch officers in the Operations Center. Not a job without responsibility. We often said that when the lights went out on the seventh floor and people went home, we effectively were the link between the outside world and the Secretary of the State. And, indeed, on occasion we dealt directly with the Secretary of State and certainly all the other principals every day of the week when you were on duty.

Ted Eliot at that time was the Executive Secretary and after perhaps three or four months, I don't recall the precise period of time, Eliot called me in and said that the officer, Nicholas Platt, who is now our Ambassador in the Philippines and then was the head of the S/S-S, the line, the Executive Secretariat, was moving over to the National Security Council, and Eliot asked me to take over his job.

This gave me more of the type of responsibility that I had in India. I must say on looking back it was certainly one of the more interesting periods in my Foreign Service career because in that job you are dealing 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with the principals of the Department of State.

Q: What did your job entail?

VIETS: Well in those days, and I don't know how much it has changed in the interim, there were about 10 or 12 young officers in their early 30s who had a couple of tours under their belt, who were by all odds the cream of the crop. Ray Seitz, for example, was one of the officers on my staff and is now Assistant Secretary for Europe. Bob Blackwill was one of the young officers and now is the President's senior adviser in European affairs. And I could just go through the list, they were all...Jerry Bremer, who is now President of Kissinger Associates...very talented fellows.

Each one was assigned several accounts...bureaus and offices in the Department...to act as sort of interface between the seventh floor principals and those particular offices. Every scrap of paper that the Department produced for any of the seventh floor principals went

through them. They sent it forward with appropriate comment and if it didn't meet the standards it went back down. Thus a lot of responsibility and a lot of power.

In my time we actually, I think, stretched our charter somewhat by getting quite frequently into policy aspects of what was being proposed. That was as much a function of the acute intelligence of these officers as it was management on my part.

It was also a very interesting period because about two or three months after I took over that job Secretary Rogers departed and a man named Henry Kissinger came over. We had the great experience of breaking him in, as it were.

There was a lot of travel involved. The Secretariat teams went everywhere with the Secretary and usually the Deputy Secretary and sometimes even some of the other principals, so one was in the air a lot.

Q: Kissinger had been running foreign policy pretty much from the National Security Council. When he came over to the State Department, all of a sudden he had this apparatus. Did you find he was using it, or was he more or less continuing as he had run the NSC?

VIETS: He started out with a very small group of trusted staff that he brought with him from the White House operation. But within a fairly short period of time he had sized up with considerable acuity the strengths and weaknesses of the State Department and the people that he could depend on. By the time he left, I think the Foreign Service had gone a considerable distance towards co-opting him, in the more positive sense of the word.

Q: Selling itself as an instrument that could be used as opposed to one that was dragging its heels.

VIETS: Right. And it was a period in which there was a lot of talent around. He knew how to use talent. He knew that talent would make him look good, and that was part of the name of his game. So I have to give him in that arena very high marks.

Q: Today there is talk that Baker is running for the Presidency and people may be doing things to make him look good. Were you in the Executive Secretariat ever pulling punches or trying to maneuver things so that you wouldn't pull the Secretary into doing something...maybe publicly making a hard decision or something, because often the Secretary of State is the person who just by his job brings bad news?

VIETS: I think one of the things that has happened to the institution of the seventh floor is that over the years there is an increasing sense that the domestic politics of foreign policy at the level of the Secretary of State are sometimes more important than foreign policy implications.

I remember actually just a couple of months ago having lunch with Paul Nitze and talking about this subject. Nitze was reminiscing when he had been asked by Acheson to revive a small policy planning cell. Acheson had sat him down in his office to have their first discussion and the first thing Acheson had said was, "I want to make one thing very clear, I want the best possible shot you can give me on any particular foreign policy issue that I have to deal with. I don't want you for one instant to crank into your best shot the domestic political implications of whatever it is you are advising me to do. That is my concern and the President's concern. The two of us will worry about that. Your job is to tell me what is best for this country, exclusively in foreign policy terms." Well, anybody who took that attitude today would be out on the street within two hours. I saw this so strongly in the latter years of my career.

Q: How about at this time? Was this a consideration? You say you were a filter and a filter always plays an important role in any bureaucracy.

VIETS: I am not sure I can give you an accurate answer to that question without sitting down in a dark corner and pouring over some recollections. I know that domestic political considerations, especially as the Nixon era came to a close, were certainly there, but I am contrasting my recollections of that period with what I saw over the last five or ten years in the Foreign Service and they were nothing in comparison to today. When I say today, I am not specifically talking about James Baker whom I never served under, but his predecessor.

Q: One other thing before we leave this. You say that sometimes these young officers were getting involved in policy matters. Can you give some examples?

VIETS: If papers were done by bureaus, for example, on disarmament negotiations and came up and were not well argued or the options that were offered were, for the most part, straw options, not realistic, one of these young guys would come in and we would sit down and go through it and discuss it and decide whether we would shoot it back down to the front office of that bureau. That often precipitated an angry Assistant Secretary calling me and telling me to keep my nose out of his business. I would respond that I was saving him from himself, it was a lousy paper and he should take a more careful look at it and here were some ways to strengthen it. It was a great way to make both friends and enemies!

To be more precise, we were not actually sitting down and designing policy. Rather, we were attempting to improve the quality of the arguments, proposals, etc. that were going to the Secretary. Sometimes this required totally redoing things and at other times perhaps simply dropping stuff and adding new stuff.

Q: As you were in this position I assume you were keeping your ties to the South Asian hands.

VIETS: There was really no time. It was a very, very stressful job. I actually worked at it six and a half to seven days a week because it never stopped. People burned out quite fast. There was always a lot of last minute juggling. There were very long hours...16, 17, 20 hour days sometimes. And, as I said, an awful lot of traveling, which consumes people as you well remember.

Q: So I take it in this period of time you didn't really have much time to contemplate policy direction and all this?

VIETS: I contemplated, if that is the action word...there was only time for a lot of fast thinking about things.

Q: Particularly towards the latter period of Kissinger as Secretary of State and the Watergate thing began to build up, did you have the feeling that the direction at the top was not as strong as it might have been?

VIETS: I think our overwhelming sense was that our allies were deeply concerned about the staying power of the administration, its capacity to make timely decisions. Kissinger, obviously, was aware of this fact and worked very hard to counterbalance it. But he had so many other liabilities in a personal sense, that I am not sure how successful he was in doing this. Remember, I left that job after only a year because I had been selected as Deputy Chief of Mission in Romania and was sent off to study Romanian for four months. So I only had a year's exposure to this.

Q: You took Romanian when?

VIETS: In 1974.

Q: And then what happened?

VIETS: At the conclusion of the four month course I went immediately to Bucharest.

Q: What was the situation in Bucharest? You were there from 1974-77. This is midstream Ceausescu.

VIETS: We had in place a most remarkable Ambassador, Harry Barnes, who had some three years earlier himself been the Deputy Chief of Mission there. He had come back to the Department for a couple of years and then had been nominated as our Ambassador and not long after he got there, I arrived. Harry knew the country as well or better than perhaps any American diplomat who ever served there. He was essentially bilingual in Romanian. A fantastic linguistic competence.

Even though Romania was a very carefully controlled...I started to stay a closed society, but they hadn't totally slammed the door at that point...it was still possible with a lot of work and care to develop relationships with private Romanian citizens. And Harry

succeeded in that better than anybody on his staff, or perhaps all the rest of his staff put together. He felt that Ceausescu was still redeemable in certain areas in the sense that if we were clever enough and worked hard enough at it we could maneuver Ceausescu into doing certain things that were in both Romania's interest, which was an element in Harry's approach to his job, as well as in US interests. His major effort was to weave as many strands of ties, economic, cultural, political, with the United States as he could.

We initiated all kinds of programs. We had an extremely active cultural exchange program...student exchange, professors, researchers, etc. We negotiated an MFN agreement with the Romanians. We negotiated a trade agreement with the Romanians. We worked terribly hard at family reunification cases. We did vastly more than the Israeli Embassy and the Israeli government to insure that Romanian Jews were permitted to leave Romania.

It was again a kind of a whirling dervish type of job working for Harry who had inexhaustible energies and a very fertile mind. He had all kinds of new ideas every morning. He would come in and reel them off.

Q: Well, Romania was really sort of the star in the Eastern European firmament as far as our foreign policy was concerned. It served in the way that in the fifties Yugoslavia served. This was sort of a friend in the other camp.

VIETS: I think one can overdo this. We were under no illusions that the Ceausescu regime in internal affairs was the most oppressive in Eastern Europe even in the mid-seventies when I was there. But externally, of course, Ceausescu had managed to carve out a fair amount of freedom to maneuver. It was in that arena that Kissinger and his successors dealt most effectively. Harry Barnes concerns went beyond the external side. He tried to loosen up some of the internal political dynamics and up to a point succeeded, I think.

Q: In this period, human rights was really not in the front of our priority list in foreign affairs. That came later during the Carter administration.

VIETS: I am happy to have you ask that question because as you know I have recently been back to Romania a couple of times in connection with the elections and I have had the mitigated pleasure of having to sit in a number of conversations with revisionist historians and others who were lecturing me about "how could you possibly have permitted the United States government to deal with this dreadful tyrant, Ceausescu? There were all these civil rights that were being abused and you people never did anything about it. You just gave them MFN, etc."

Well, I would take issue with you on one level. You are quite correct that under Henry Kissinger, human rights would never be writ large in the foreign policy charter of the United States government because that would get in the way of doing things that he thought were perhaps more important. But by golly for those of us who were there,

human rights were terribly important. As I said a moment ago, we spent hours and hours every week cajoling, arguing, prodding, pushing, probing for ways to get (a) Romanians who were divided from their families out of the country, and (b) making life easier for those who couldn't get out...rapping knuckles when people were thrown in jail, etc. They were important to us and we did a hell of a lot.

The difference is that we didn't have a human rights bureaucracy in this country, both in the non-governmental sector as well as in the bureaucracy itself. So there wasn't a great deal of publicity generated by this. It was just very quietly done.

Q: I want to add this as a historical note that your actions were following events almost a hundred years before when President Grant had sent an American Jew to Romania, Benjamin Behoto [ph], for strictly the purpose for trying to help the Jewish community. This was done at the behest of the Jewish-American community. He was paid actually from volunteer funds from various Jewish groups including some from the Rothschild family.

VIETS: I had no idea of that.

Q: In a way for somebody who is looking at the Foreign Service and all or the State Department apparatus, an awful lot is done in the field that is not part of an official telegram that goes out. If you see something that can be done it depends really on the ambassador in a way.

VIETS: Yes, you do it. There still are people in this profession who don't need to seek credit for things that they do and therefore never reported it, or only casually, informally would make reference to it. I think that is the difference between the professional and whatever.

Q: How did Harry tell the Romanians that they had to let more Jews go to Israel or other things that were not our immediate concern?

VIETS: Well, this was the carrot and stick. I mentioned a moment ago, for example, that we had negotiated an MFN treaty. We negotiated it in a fashion that required frequent reviews of performance in various areas including the numbers of family reunification, the numbers of Jews that were allowed out, etc. The Romanians were terribly anxious to get an trade agreement with us. Once again we tied to that understandings, some explicit, some implicit, but we knew and they knew what we were expecting.

Q: How did you deal with the Romanian government? Was everything under Ceausescu?

VIETS: By the definition of the apparatus which he set up you could do nothing without channeling it through him. By the same token, as with any other society you worked very hard at developing relationships with people who could help make things happen. You won their trust or made yourself needed by them and proceeded a pace.

Q: Were the British, French and Germans involved as much in what we would call the human rights field?

VIETS: No. The Germans were more than anybody else because of the large German community...roughly 300,000-400,000 Germans up in the Transylvania area. These people were trying to get to the Federal Republic as the Jews were trying to get to Israel. So they more than any other embassy were involved in similar efforts. But we were way out ahead of all other missions across the board in our interest in the human rights arena.

And I was saddened when I most recently was in Romania a month ago to discover that when a group of lawyers I was with wanted to discuss the human rights situation, everywhere we would turn we were told it was the Dutch Ambassador who was the man who was the most active and knew the most people, etc., not the American Embassy. So we went and had a session with the Dutch Ambassador and sure enough he turned out to be vastly better informed than our own Embassy did.

Q: It is personality...who is there and who wants to take on things. How did Harry Barnes use you as his deputy?

VIETS: Well, Harry started the relationship with the time honored assurances that I was to be his alter ego and I think perhaps more than anybody I ever worked with he stuck to that. There was nothing he did or nothing he knew that he didn't share. He was very good at delegating the daily operation of the Embassy. At the same time his shadow loomed over everything we did. He loved to travel and spent a lot of time out of Bucharest and in the countryside so that also left one ample opportunity to...and he was frequently in Washington pushing his agenda.

Q: Did we find Bucharest a good "listening post" compared with other places? It had strained relations with the Soviet Union and some of the other Warsaw Pact countries.
VIETS: I think the answer has to be yes. It was a particularly useful listening post for the rest of Eastern Europe and the third world because it was the anchorage for all kinds of revolutionary groups and individuals who used Romania as their training ground or safe harbor. There was a great deal going on in that country of interest to us.

Q: You mention revolutionary groups, were these terrorist organizations?

VIETS: Well, the PLO, for example, was very active there, as were other Palestinian organizations. Various African liberation groups were also there.

Q: What was your brief at the Embassy as far as contact was concerned?

VIETS: You mean my personal brief?

Q: Well, your brief and also the Embassy's.

VIETS: Obviously we had to live within whatever rules of the road that were laid down by the Department on dealing with groups such as the PLO, but if one was seated next to someone at a dinner table who was "black-listed" you found ways of being polite and also productive. But there were plenty of other people who were able to deal with these people and those clearly would become contacts of yours. You would carry on dialogues through them.

Q: What about relations with other Eastern European countries, particularly the bordering countries? Was there concern that an awful lot was being swept under the rug by the tight controls...nationality problems, etc.?

VIETS: I think the sense was there that in the future there were going to be immense problems because of the overlapping of nationalities. I think that none of us had the foresight to predict that Eastern Europe would crumble as rapidly as it did. There was no love lost between the Romanians and their fraternal brothers in Eastern Europe.

I remember particularly the Yugoslavs were terribly disdainful of the Romanians and they shared a long border and a lot of other common economic interests. Ceausescu was detested by other Eastern European leaders. I think they were embarrassed by his cult of personality, etc. So again another interesting way to get insights into those people were through discussions of what was going on in Romania.

One of my most fruitful contacts was my Yugoslav counterpart who had been in Romania for a number of years and was the best informed person in the country so far as I was concerned of what was happening behind the scenes.

Q: Was there a feeling that there was another life behind the Ceausescu facade?

VIETS: Well there surely was another life and that was a Sybaritic life of nothing but the best for Ceausescu and his family and immediate hangers-on. But I am not sure what you mean by the question.

Q: Well, were you able to sample what the Army was thinking, or the peasants were thinking, etc.?

VIETS: We tried but everybody was so scared the instant you began to raise subjects such as this. People would look at the ceiling or put their finger to their lips or roll their eyes, etc. It was very tough to do, but we were constantly traveling. As I said, the Ambassador spent an awful lot of his time out of town, but the rest of us also traveled a great deal. It was the most traveling Embassy I have ever served at, which was helpful. In consequence we were far and away the best informed foreign mission in Romanian.

Q: I traveled a lot when I was in Yugoslavia. I added it up once and discovered I had spent 42 nights in different places in Yugoslavia. This was very typical of the Embassy.

Before we leave Romania, were there any major problems or situations that you experienced?

VIETS: We had a Presidential visit. Mr. Ford came to see us. Kissinger came a couple of times. I think one of my most vivid memories in a very personal sense of a job that I doubt very many Foreign Service officers have had to shoulder was to take Ceausescu's most senior adviser aside at a music recital in the Ambassador's residence and warn him against the imminent assassination of somebody in the United States. I will always recall that particular evening and the aftermath of that conversation. That is the sort of message that one doesn't pass very often.

Q: Can I ask more about it?

VIETS: Well, I probably shouldn't go beyond that, but it was a very dicey period. I am happy to say that the individual who was the target, so far as I am aware, is still thriving. The assassination team was called off at the last moment but only after a lot of huffing and puffing.

Q: Did you get the impression that the Romanians thought they had a sort of special relation with the United States?

VIETS: Oh, very much so. And as is their cultural heritage, they pushed it to the limit and beyond. I think that by the late seventies and early eighties as Ceausescu's paranoia became more and more evident, that markedly changed. My good friend Roger Kirk, who was our Ambassador in Bucharest until about ten months ago, spent a very tough three years there. The relationship dribbled off into open antagonism and he had a tough time.

Q: You left Bucharest in 1977 and went from there to another hot spot, Tel Aviv, again as Deputy Chief of Mission. How did this assignment come about?

VIETS: That is an interesting story. I was back in Washington for a consultation three or four months before I was scheduled to finish my three year assignment and Carol Laise, who was then Director General, called me in for a meeting. She announced to me that she was very unhappy with the situation in our Embassy in India at that particular time and thought it needed a very different hand. I was her handpicked person to go out as political counselor. Happy as I would have been to return to India, I was not happy with the thought of returning as political counselor having been for three years a DCM in Romania. I thought it was a step backwards. Carol didn't see it that way. Her interest in India was supreme and anyone who had an opportunity to serve in India, regardless of the level, was obviously...

I was a good soldier and said, "Okay. I would rather have another DCMship, but if this is what you think must be done, I will do it." I returned to the India desk and there was a phone message for me from a man named Sam Lewis, who I had met once or twice before socially, but had never worked with him. Sam had just been nominated as our

Ambassador to Tel Aviv. The phone message asked me if I would have lunch with him that very day. I agreed and we had a terrible cafeteria lunch.

It became clear to me in the first 30 seconds of the conversation that Sam was taking a look at me as a potential DCM. At the end of it I was pretty certain that I was going to get the job, although he was shrewd enough not to say so. Indeed, a couple of days later he called me and formally offered it. So we had to go to Carol and untangle the India web.

Sam was very anxious to have me there immediately after his arrival. He was being held back in Washington until the day after the Israeli elections when Prime Minister Begin was elected. He flew out the next day and two weeks later I stepped on an airplane in Bucharest bound for Israel. Half an hour later I was sitting at my desk hard at work and never stopped.

Q: Let's compare and contrast how Harry Barnes used you as his DCM and Sam Lewis used you as DCM?

VIETS: Well, again, the same traditional ambassadorial words of, "I don't want anything to go on here that you are not aware of, etc." Sam was true to his word. Especially in Israel you had to be because it was such a hot spot. This was the period that led up to the Camp David negotiations and then the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. The US was right in the middle of all of that from day one, setting up everything and acting as intermediary for months and months between the Egyptians and Israelis who wouldn't speak directly to each other. We set up all kinds of secret contacts, etc. There were periods when more than half the time Sam was in Washington. So one really became almost a permanent Chargé and it was necessary that we worked very closely, and we did.

The only area that Sam reserved for himself, and he insisted that it was for protection purposes for me, was relationships with the American-Jewish organization leadership. He felt that that was the exclusive responsibility of the Ambassador to manage that and very rarely did I get involved in it. It would only be when I was Chargé and a group came in and I would have to meet with them.

Q: In the period you were there...you were there from 1977-1979...how did you and the Embassy view the Israeli political situation? Here was a real change in the political orientation domestically in Israel.

VIETS: There was very deep concern over the political changes that took place under Begin. We spent an enormous amount of energy and time trying to modify some of Begin's views and policies. A great deal of time during my first year was spent in trying to effectively contain Israeli attacks into the Lebanon. You had on the one hand, very, very active intelligence, Mossad, and Israeli Army and Air Force operations in Lebanon, and at the same time you were carrying on these very sensitive negotiations between the Israelis and the Egyptians, in which we were the exclusive conveyor belt. All messages went

through us...to Cairo and came back from Cairo to us. We were the principal interlocutors for a very long time.

I remember after months of this finally one day getting a call from Prime Minister Begin's Chef de Cabinet, asking me immediately to get on the line to Cairo to pass along a message which he dictated to me over the phone. I said, "For Christ's sake, Eli, why don't you pick up the phone and do it yourself." A week before a direct line had been established. He said, "Do you think they would answer the phone?" I said, "Why don't you try." He did and it worked. That is how we began to get out of the business.

Q: What was your impression of how the Begin government worked?

VIETS: Well, that is about a week of conversation. Begin was a most remarkable figure. An old world Polish Jew who had lost all of his family in the holocaust under dreadful, dreadful circumstances. Truly a great patriot in his own right. He was a lawyer to the tips of his toes, very legalistic in everything. A man with enormous innate politeness. Even in the most dreadful moments of antagonism, and disagreement, conversations would always have to start out with, "How is your wife and your daughters?" etc. All the niceties of civilized conduct were carried on and then once you got beyond that he was one tough cookie to deal with.

But there were other tough cookies who worked with him. Moshe Dayan was a brilliant man. The most fertile, creative mind of any of Begin's advisers. Ezer Weizman, who in those years was an unbridled hawk and has now become a great dove. He was quite a remarkable figure. There were some very tough chiefs of staff in the army that one had to deal with regularly. It is difficult to characterize and describe the nature and quality of our Embassy relationship in Israel during those days. Again, I think, it has changed substantially since then. We were simply in all their pockets as they were here.

Q: I have been interviewing Nicholas Veliotes who mentioned, this was in the early seventies, that they always had to work on Friday because the cabinet met. I asked why they had to schedule the Embassy meeting because of a foreign government's cabinet? Well, apparently the relationship is so close that one is moving in accordance with their political life.

VIETS: And you had this enormous community in Washington interested in everything that was going on. You had a huge press corps there that was spewing tens of thousands of words of reporting back here seven days a week. So you were in competition all the time with even the wire services in getting stuff back. We were just constantly, 24 hours a day running that relationship. It was, and remains, deeply complicated by the fact that our Chancery is in Tel Aviv and everything except the Ministry of Defense and Mossad Headquarters were in Jerusalem. So you were everyday winding up and down those Judean hills to Jerusalem to do your business and then dictating all the way back into a little portable recorder your cables and memcons.

As time went on and the negotiations leading up to Camp David became so critical, we often would move over from meetings with the Prime Minister or other cabinet ministers and dictate our reports at our consulate general in Jerusalem and send them from there, simply because of time purposes, or we would get on the secure phone in Jerusalem. There were days that one would make three round-trip trips to Jerusalem. The last one perhaps getting home at 3 o'clock in the morning.

Q: You were sort of an outsider to this. You had served in India and Romania. Did you sometimes stand back and say, "Why the hell are we getting so involved in this country and what really is our real interest here?"

VIETS: Well, I think that one of the reasons Sam took me as his DCM was that conversation over lunch in the State Department cafeteria in which I expressed considerable skepticism about the nature of the US-Israeli relationship, one that I did not know a great deal about but what I did know I was skeptical about it. I think that Sam may have felt that perhaps it was not a bad idea to have somebody at his side with this quality. Indeed, to his great credit a few weeks after I arrived, we brought out an extraordinarily talented older officer named Bill Brubeck, who had served as DCM in Amman some years earlier. He had become really a great authority on the Middle East and was an iconoclast of the first order. We brought him out because we wanted somebody sitting off, out of the line of daily operational fire, to nitpick, to push us, to examine and re-examine from every perspective what we were up to.

All of this in the light of what subsequently happened in the relationship may sound like pretty thin gruel, but I, at least, to the day I left, liked to think that I maintained my integrity in handling that relationship when things...I would call a spade a spade. I still have some marvelous notes from Jimmy Carter and Brzezinski and Cy Vance on things I did, especially when I was Chargé and brought the Israelis up short.

Q: There has been this accusation that you get in the Near Eastern Bureau that I am sure everyone is aware of, that somehow our Embassy in Israel becomes completely co-opted by the Jewish movement politically in the United States. Here is a small country of several million people putting us at odds with this huge Arab world out there and it is not in America's interest. Somehow the feeling gets focused on the Embassy. When I mention Sam Lewis to hands who have dealt in the Arab world steam begins to come out of their ears. I wonder, is this endemic or is there a problem of co-option?

VIETS: I believe in general terms there are problems of co-option in almost any society you can name for a diplomat operating in that environment if he gets deeply involved in it. But I think there is nothing that approaches the danger of co-option in Israel because here is a society that never lets up. It has enormous influence and impact in Washington and has no qualms about using it. For them the game is their security, their livelihood, their lives. That is their argument. It is very tough to buck it. I think that it is a major mistake to leave anybody in Israel for an extended period of time. And I include, needless to say, ambassadors in that.

Q: In dealing with upper level Israelis...let's say a directive comes out from Washington to press them hard on a point...they look at you and say, "Okay fellows, this is nice and you have made your point, but if you press it too hard we are going back to the Israeli lobby in the United States and they are going to wipe you out."

VIETS: I don't remember anybody being quite that blunt. They didn't have to be. There is language within language in this arena. But I can assure you that we all had our hours at bat when we were brutal in our directness. I certainly include Sam in this. Whatever Sam's reputation is, and remember I was only there for a little over two years with him, and he stayed on for seven or eight years, and clearly as time went on his views were modified and shaped by the pressures that were on him so I won't speak to that. But during the period I was there the United States was very lucky to have a guy as smart and tough as he was. When the chips were down there was never any question in my mind as to what he was representing in those days. It perhaps changed.

Q: Well, you were there at a time when there was really a very crucial shift going on, when Israel was becoming more and more dependent on the United States. Was there disquiet on the side of the Israelis who were looking on this thing and knowing the underside of American politics, etc.?

VIETS: I think there were very few thoughtful Israelis who worried a great deal about the liabilities of becoming so dependent on the United States. In part because I think no one in those years understood how dependent Israel ultimately was going to become. And secondly, because I think there is an inbred, perhaps arrogance is too strong a term, but I will use it, that at the end of the day they knew what they were doing and could manage the relationship in a fashion that would always keep their interests protected.

On the American side there certainly were many people who were concerned about the changing nature of the relationship, but the domestic politics of the relationship became so paramount in policy decisions with the Congress pressing the administration unmercifully to give more and more aid, military assistance, economic assistance, trade advantages, intelligence exchanges, etc. You had people like Jimmy Carter who suddenly found himself running for his life. In his re-election campaign he turned 180 degrees concerning his views on how to handle the Israelis.

Q: But initially you were there when Carter was first coming in. So the period you were there you felt that there was really a certain amount of firm control?

VIETS: No, I wouldn't say that. I think the moment of major change, the fault line, took place during the Johnson administration. Up to that time, I think the relationship had been one that was best characterized by the figure of speech...the Israelis were kept on a quite short leash. Johnson, for purely domestic political reasons, changed that policy. He suddenly opened up a cornucopia of arms to Israel. We became the principal military suppliers and remain so to this day. Economic assistance began markedly to increase

under Johnson. By the time Carter arrived in office it was already in the billions. I can remember arguing until blue in the face on maintaining lower levels and ultimately we found ourselves faced with a relationship that had gone out of control in many important respects.

But lets be fair, I am sitting here running on about a relationship that is so complicated and so nuanced that one risks doing a great injustice to it with the kinds of superficial responses that time constraints dictate in responding to your questions.

Q: The idea is to at least pick up some of the feeling here. What were your impression of our congressman coming to Israel? Was this sort of a political situation that they would come to? Were they completely the creatures of the Jewish lobby in the United States?

VIETS: I think with rare exception one would have to characterize them as being craven in their deportment and behavior, each trying to out do the other in their public utterances, in their fealty and loyalty to the State of Israel and its people. They had very little time for any conversation that contained criticism or analysis of what was going on. These were PR visits for use in fund-raising and election winning. One very often was physically disgusted by it.

Let me add out of fairness to the Israelis, I think in the dark of the night they were equally disgusted.

Q: Well, it is almost impossible not to be by this peculiar relationship that has developed. What about our consul general in Jerusalem? This has always been a fascinating post. I have written a history of the consular service and at one point the consul general in Jerusalem, in the 1970s up through World War I, served as a protectorate of the Jews. This was unofficially, but interceded often with the Ottomans, etc. But then the role almost switch. It was the same role but the Ottoman Empire no longer posed a threat, the Israelis were the occupying power. How did you view their operation, what were they doing there?

VIETS: I think Sam and I agreed that we would not fall into the trap that some of our predecessors had in viewing the consulate general as the enemy. As you know I think it remains the only consulate anywhere in the world whose reporting goes directly to Washington.

Q: I think Hong Kong is another one.

VIETS: Oh, yes. So both of us worked very hard in insuring that our personal relationships with the Consul General and staff...

Q: Who was the Consul General?

VIETS: Well, Mike Newlin was there for all of the period that I was there. Mike felt the same way. I, in particular, spent a lot of time insuring that Mike was kept fully apprized of all but a tiny fraction of sensitive elements of our negotiations leading up to the Camp David and the peace treaty, etc. Although a lot of the traffic was so highly compartmentalized we couldn't send it to Jerusalem, he would come down one day a week and lock himself in my office and I would show it to him. So he knew what was happening.

For his part, he insured that all of his reporting was repeated to Tel Aviv. Our staffs would meet regularly and compare notes. Occasionally there would be an eruption of differences, but on the whole it was very well managed and productively managed on both sides. The one major problem area I recall was at the staff level. A vice consul became very, very incensed over her perception of some human rights abuses on the part of the Israelis.

Q: I think that she was really one of the first eruptions of this. It got on the front pages...

VIETS: She documented a number of cases of maltreatment and abuse of Arab prisoners in jails, etc. She was very concerned that the Embassy was undercutting her and went public at one point on this. In the end, I think she was relatively satisfied. She had her day in court and her information in no way shape or form was censored.

Q: This is an area on both sides of the track. Some of the same people ended up in the Executive Secretariat where the action is. You can turn a young officer loose and they are going out doing some reporting. This is Jimmy Carter and human rights time. There is a very controversial relationship, at least in the Foreign Service, with Israel. Were there things coming out of the West Bank where Israeli occupation authorities were that were embarrassing to the Israelis and which they didn't want reported?

VIETS: Absolutely.

Q: How did you deal with these?

VIETS: They were reported. I am sad to observe that the censorship of these reports took place in Washington, not in the field.

Q: Let's talk a little about Washington. My only time in the Middle East was a short time as a vice consul in Saudi Arabia. I had nothing to do with any of this and am not a Middle East hand, but I have watched this with a certain amount of fascinated disinterest. It has always seemed that in Washington our relationship with Israel is so political that you really can't report as you would from another post. It would immediately leak into the press, one's career could be jeopardized, etc. How did you feel about this? You were new to it too.

VIETS: My career, I guess, is marked by a reputation of being excessively outspoken and I never really worried about it. It seemed to me that one calls a spade a spade as accurately as one can. That is on reporting. When it comes to policy formulation, obviously one has to be careful to insure that you are embracing the spectrum of agreement and disagreement. So it is two quite different issues that one is talking about.

I felt, as Sam did, that careers could be badly bruised, if not destroyed, out there, so one made very sure that one took responsibility for those messages that we knew would cause heartburn in Washington. But one encouraged the younger officers on the staff to dig and dig hard and there was no...I think it would be an interesting case study to go around to officers in that mission who have left and ask them if they felt any kind of constraints being put on them. I doubt very much during that period you would find...My concern today, if we can move this interview to 1990...by virtue of one of the things I am doing in retirement is political advisor to King Hussein, so I stayed very actively engaged in US-Israeli relationships and US-Arab relationships, such as they are. I am deeply concerned that almost all of the Foreign Service officers that I now see and deal with, I feel have become politicized by this issue and all too often are pulling their punches in their reporting, their analysis, their recommendations to their superiors. It is something that I could quite easily document. It is very sad to see what is happening. They are scared of their careers on this particular issue.

Q: Probably Central America was another one.

VIETS: I think it probably was. I think this is much less true in our...

Q: Were you getting instructions from Washington saying to knock off this talk about what the police are doing within Israel, itself?

VIETS: No.

Q: Were there times when you would give a candid report and the next thing you knew it was in Evans and Novak?

VIETS: Yes.

Q: Where was this coming from? You must have thought about who was leaking this material? Was it political opportunists; were they Jewish-Americans who felt so strongly for the cause of Israel that they would do this; or was it somebody who was wanting to make a name for themselves?

VIETS: All of the above.

Q: Would you sometimes lash out and say, "Who the hell leaked that?" Or would you just sort of shrug and get on with your business?

VIETS: There would be a lot of discussion over telephones, I don't recall cables discussing it. We had a very active secure line between Tel Aviv and Washington.

Q: If somebody was to look at the official record today... just by the fact that there were leaks if you put something down on paper you always had to look at that and ask how it would look in the editorial op-ed section of the Washington Post.

VIETS: Point well taken. More than in any post I had served in you were aware of the fact that what you were sending back in one form or another, bits and pieces of it could appear in the public domain. We had some very special category arrangements on distribution for that stuff so few people saw that and I don't recall any difficulties there. But once you got below that, it was fair game to the Xerox machine.

Q: So the telephone was often...
VIETS: Alas, the historians are going to be up the creek because so much of this was done by secure line, even though I think both Sam and I were perhaps more aware than many that it was important to keep a historical record. Files were full of memcons, telephone memcons, etc. But in the pace of events you just never got them all down.

I am going to have to break off.

Q: This is fine. We will take it up another day.

Today is October 21, 1992 and this continues an interview with Ambassador Richard N. Viets. Dick, the last time we covered a lot of the relationships between the Embassy and Washington. What was your view and the Embassy's view of the Arabs within Israel itself at that time?

VIETS: I must say in retrospect I am not at all certain that this Embassy nor I as the Deputy Chief of Mission put as much focus on the issues of the Arabs within the so-called green line, Israel proper, as we should have. I believe in an earlier interview, we may have got into the tensions that existed between the Embassy and our Consul General in Jerusalem, which, of course, is responsible directly to Washington for reporting what was going on in the occupied territories. The Arabs within the green line were by definition the responsibility of the Embassy.

During that period, as a community, my recollection is that they were a quiescent lot. I don't recall, frankly, with enough vivid detail, what at the time I felt was the reason for this quiescence. Whether it was that they simply had been beaten down by the general weight of the Israeli state, or whether they had simply made their peace with themselves and with the Israelis and were going about their lives. There was very little, as I recall, formal contact between the two Arab Palestinian communities...those within the green line with those in the occupied territories. This wasn't terribly easy to accomplish because of the security apparatus and the military apparatus which was omnipresent. I think any green line Arab seen spending a lot of time on the West Bank would immediately have

come to the attention of the Israeli authorities and probably would have to shortly respond to somebody to what he was doing there. So it was not a period when a great deal of contact was taking place.

We had in the Embassy a political officer who, along with a number of other things, added it to his portfolio and did sporadic reporting on it. We certainly kept in touch with the Arab delegation in the Knesset and members of the parliament. But I don't know in retrospect whether perhaps we should have put more emphasis on that community than we did.

Q: It sounds like at the time they knew their place and the Israeli apparatus was keeping them knowing their place.

VIETS: That is certainly my recollection.

Q: Coming to the events...you were there probably at the most dramatic time one can imagine, other then just a war going on which is dramatic, but not necessarily moving ahead. What was our view of Sadat before he came? Were you getting from Egypt a feeling that something was happening?

VIETS: Yes, quite a lot. To begin with, we knew, although it took us some weeks to extract the full facts out of the Israelis, we knew that there had been contact between Dayan, the then Foreign Minister, and an Egyptian in the President's office. I recall vividly Dayan's anecdote about this gentleman, who he had met on one or more occasions secretly in Morocco. I recall Dayan telling the story that at one of their meetings this man suddenly went very silent and wouldn't respond or anything. When his silence was finally broken he announced that he was very fond of clocks, he collected clocks and he apparently at that moment heard a lot of clocks ringing in his brain and he had to listen to them and he couldn't talk to anybody. There was some very strong feeling on Dayan's part and I think on others who knew this gentleman, that he was slightly “tetched.”

In any case, Dayan eventually succumbed to Sam Lewis' beguiling efforts and gave us the details of those meetings of which we had had bits and pieces of through various intelligence means, but we didn't know everything.

From that point onward our Embassy in Tel Aviv became the conduit for all of the messages going back and forth between Cairo and Jerusalem. The bulk of that became my responsibility. Clearly this was a very sensitive, highly classified operation. I can recall spending a great deal of my time in the weeks leading up to the Sadat announcement of his impending visit handling these contacts. There were, I think a few direct Israeli-Egyptian contacts outside the area, but basically the two sides used the Americans to pass messages and views back and forth.

I do recall a very secret visit that we arranged shortly before the Sadat visit for Ezer Weizman, who at that time was the Minister of Defense in Israel. We flew into Tel Aviv

in the dark of the night a US Air Force aircraft from Germany and I can remember picking up Ezer before dawn in an Embassy carryall and hiding him under blankets and driving out to the far end of the Tel Aviv airport runway and Ezer appearing from beneath these blankets and being hustled on board before any of his own people could see him. I remember even the pilot and crew on the plane had no idea who the passenger was or where they were going until he was on board and they were in the air. He went to Cairo and met with Sadat and his counterpart. Ezer, I am sure, is still dining out on that story and elaborating on it. And it was rather amusing...

Q: While this was going on, were you concerned that there were elements within the Jewish political system who would love to torpedo this sort of thing?

VIETS: No. I think that is a fair question, but I think the Israelis at that point were desperate to get talks going with any Arab state. After all, remember no offers had been laid out by anybody on what the price of a peace agreement with the Israelis was going to be. That all came later.

The Israelis could read the handwriting on the wall, I suppose, but remember that the Israeli public didn't know that this was going on. That, in it self, is a remarkable moment in the history of the State of Israel. If we think of Washington as a big piece of Swiss cheese where no secrets can be kept, I must say Tel Aviv puts Washington in most respects to shame. There are a few core secrets in Israel, for example, issues relating to their nuclear capability, on which indeed their lips are sealed, but almost everything else within minutes, hours or days of the event or conversation taking place gets into the most active media world I have ever served in.

Q: Well you and obviously our Embassy in Egypt, Hermann Eilts was Ambassador, knew what was going on since you were acting as communicators. Were you also acting as advisers in suggesting the next move?

VIETS: Yes, we did both. I think both Embassies were very, very conscious of the need to insure that neither party was getting a skewed view of what the other side was trying to say. We didn't shade messages, but we might interpret them. We might say, "If you responded in this fashion this is probably the response you will get." That kind of role.

Q: That is quite a different thing.

VIETS: We passed the stuff back and forth without putting any input...

Q: What about the role of Washington? Here is something that is going on and the policy makers in Washington must have been itching to get heavily involved in this type of thing. Did you have a feeling that this was being tightly controlled?

VIETS: Obviously Washington by its very nature wants to be the mother hen on everything that is both unimportant and important. We, I think, were punctilious and

professional in keeping Washington informed about what was going on. We were repeating, where there was cable traffic, all of the cable traffic. I would several times a day have conversations over secure voice telephone with people in Washington about what was going on. And certainly Sam would have very lengthy conversations, sometimes daily.

No, I feel confident that they were kept apprized of everything that was important. There were, by definition, all kinds of telephone calls back and forth between our Embassy in Tel Aviv and our Embassy in Cairo, that Washington wasn't monitoring. It was up to both Embassies to insure in the cause of the day that they reported to their respective Desk what had gone on.

I should add that the point was reached in which I felt that the moment had arrived for the Egyptians and the Israelis to begin to deal with some of these issues directly. I vividly recall one day getting a telephone call from Prime Minister Begin's office, a man named Ben Eliezar who at that time was his principal chief of staff. He asked me to pass what was a very anodyne administrative type message to the Egyptians through our Embassy. I think I must have been up all night the night before or something was wrong because I was quite testy with him. I remember saying, "For God sake Eli, I think it is time that you guys just pick up the phone and contact the guy who is going to be receiving this on the other end and say this to them directly. This is ridiculous for us to be acting in this role. We will be happy to continue doing whatever we can to facilitate things, but this is getting silly." I remember him saying, "I agree. Do you think the Egyptians will answer the phone?" I said, "Well, here is the phone number, try it." And he did. From that point onward, the Israelis and the Egyptians both started their direct bilateral contacts. I am sure that somebody in American intelligence has never forgiven me, but there were other ways of keeping track of this.

Q: Did you find as you were watching these messages going back and forth that there was a difference in approach between the Egyptians and Israelis?

VIETS: Absolutely. I should preface this by saying that this was a period of intense high pressure on all of us at the Embassy. Looking back on it it has just become a jet speed kaleidoscope of events and I wish that my memory were better so that I could answer these questions with greater acuity. But we were all totally exhausted. I was probably getting on average about 3-4 hours of sleep a night for weeks on end. In those circumstances, that part of your brain that stores things sometimes doesn't do very well. But my general response to your question is yes. I think you could see always in at least the more important substantive messages the omnipresent Israeli toughness. The Israeli view on negotiations, understandably, and perhaps quite rightly, is to reach way beyond the possible, assuming that by the end of the negotiation you may be back about where you want to be. On the other hand, I think the Egyptians generally took the attitude that you should start out with a fairly sensible proposition and take it from there. It took them quite a while to realize the Israelis would always whittle away at it, shape and form it to their requirements.

That is not to suggest that the Egyptians were always sensible. They weren't. They can be excruciatingly exasperating when they want to be. And they can be as bureaucratic as the best of them and certainly they can be as fuzzy if not more fuzzy than anybody I ever worked with when they wanted to be.

But as time went on both sides, I think, pretty much got the measure of each other and began to calibrate their messages, responses and reactions.

Q: We are talking about this heavy load of work. I take it for a good part of the time...this was before Sadat made the announcement...that the heavy load was going on in that period too. Is that correct?

VIETS: That is correct.

Q: Obviously your wife was noticing, but everybody else must have been noticing the Ambassador, the DCM and a few other people...I mean, here it is a bright sunny day outside and they are walking around looking harassed and there is nothing on the horizon that looks particularly menacing or something like that.

VIETS: Well, by definition Tel Aviv is a screwy Embassy to work in and I don't think it took long for anybody who was there to figure out that there was a good bit that went on in the US-Israeli relationship that was handled by the Ambassador exclusively or by the Ambassador and the DCM. Occasionally bits and pieces of this floated down to other senior officers. But it wasn't one of those wide open missions where everybody knows exactly what the Ambassador and the DCM have done all day long because they would tell everybody about it in the next day's staff meeting.

People were accustomed to seeing a lot of closed doors and a lot of cars coming back in the dark of the night. The poor communicators were accustomed to knowing that at 2 or 3 in the morning they were going to be asked to send a NIACT IMMEDIATE or FLASH message on what was going on. It was just the nature of that installation at that particular period. It may still be the same, but I doubt it.

Q: This whole thing was opened up when Sadat made the announcement. Was this agreed upon, because certainly it would make it much stronger if Sadat made the statement rather than a joint declaration?

VIETS: No, my recollection is that this was a unilateral decision on his part and "bang" there it was. We may have had a little bit of advance notice, but I don't think very much.

Q: Did it hit the Israelis the same way?

VIETS: Oh, yes. It blew that country right off the map.

Q: What was the Embassy's and Washington's reaction? How did we see the Israeli's response and how did we play with that?

VIETS: Well, it would have been better to tape this at the moment because you surely would have received a more accurate answer to that question. I don't think that either Sam or I were at all surprised. You could see this symphony being created, if that is the right metaphor, and one knew ultimately that either there was going to be bilateral talks or the thing would blow up, one or the other. It came very close to blowing up any number of times. Here's where I think Hermann Eilts and Sam Lewis and perhaps one or two of the rest of us made the difference. We kept it going in those moments when it started veering off.

Q: This is where we are talking about not shading the answers but working on the formulation of the answers.

VIETS: That is correct. Or simply sitting down with people and saying, "God damn it, don't pay any attention to that, this is what you ought to have your eye on, and this is what ought to be your goal. Here are some ideas of how to go after it." Sam, for example, spent many, many hours almost every day with people like Moshe Dayan, either during the day or late at night. Dayan lived outside of Tel Aviv, not in Jerusalem, so it was easy to spend evenings with him. And Sam certainly spent hours and hours with Begin. And when he wasn't in Tel Aviv I was doing the same routine.

So, as I said, I don't think either one of us was at all surprised, but because this had been so carefully controlled by Begin and Sadat, it did come as a bomb shell in Israel. My recollection is that there was literally dancing in the streets and all the rest. It was a nation that suddenly after all those years of having been a pariah, somebody recognized that you existed and spoke to you. In the ensuing emotional outburst it unleashed a great deal of unrealistic hope on the part of the Israelis that this meant perhaps the beginning of the end of Israel's isolation throughout the Arab world. After all, the Egyptians were the center of the Arab world and if the Egyptians did this it would be so much easier for everybody else, etc.

I think in a sense those unrealistic views have for some Israelis perhaps existed to this day. I haven't ever quite understood how the Egyptians could do this and why it didn't open the way for others.

I recall after the visit itself there was a great rash of naming children, twins, Begin and Sadat. One little personal anecdote, I remember a dinner that Moshe Dayan and Ezer Weizman gave at the Jerusalem Hilton for Secretary of State Vance, who was there for a visit trying to keep the game alive. Students of this era will remember that after the initial euphoria of Sadat's visit, both the Egyptians and Israelis began to tighten their positions and things slowed down in a hurry for a while. Again, that is where, I think the Americans won their equivalent of the diplomatic Nobel Peace Prize by really being basically responsible for keeping it going.

In any case, I recall at this dinner, half way through, Vance, who was sitting with Mr. Begin, crooked a finger at me. I left my table and went over. He wanted me to deliver a message to somebody in Washington. While I was standing behind his chair talking to him, Begin reached over and in his usual punctilious fashion, greeted me warmly and asked, as he always did, after my wife and children. I always tried to have a semi-jocular relationship with Begin and I said, "Mr. Prime Minister, I have something to report to you in this post-Sadat era of naming children after you and Mr. Sadat. My middle daughter Kasha, has bought two fish. One is named Begin and one is named Sadat." He smiled and laughed and said, "This is going on all over, isn't it." I said, "Well, I am reluctant to tell you, but one of them the night before last killed the other one." He immediately in his quick witted fashion said, "Did Begin kill Sadat or Sadat Begin?"

In a sense that little story is a metaphor of what was going on at that very moment. Tensions were rising. Begin was beginning his very hard line approach in reaction to Sadat's demands for a total pull out in Sinai, resolution of Palestinian issue, etc., and he was beginning very carefully to lay out his markers about what Israel would and would not accept. Sadat, I think, was perhaps somewhat confused and frustrated over the fact that he had made, in his eyes, and I think most Israelis would agree, a great personal gamble and taken a very courageous step, and it wasn't being accepted in the same fashion and manner in which he had made it. It had immediately become kind of a bizarre negotiation. And that caused some bitterness, to put it mildly, within the Egyptian policy community and Sadat's entourage. This is where Hermann Eilts earned his keep and Sam Lewis earned his.

Q: Were we trying to let the Israelis know that Sadat had done something that was really very dangerous politically and physically for him? People in the Arab world would be out gunning for him and not to waste this moment because he might not be around.

VIETS: Certainly we were taking a line similar to that. But the Israelis in their own fashion had their own reactions. I think that, again I don't want to turn into a psychiatrist, but it does seem to me that when you have a society that has been a pariah, and that really is the right word for many, many years...a whole generation of Israelis had grown up in an environment in which essentially nobody in the region in which they lived had recognized them, spoken to them, indeed at various times tried to do them in...it is perhaps too much to expect that society overnight to trust what the first person to come down the pipe offers is a peace initiative. This is asking a great deal of any society.

Again, this is 1992 and we are still seeing those delayed reactions. Remember, this is a society that has been shaped and formed by an adversarial relationship and has not known any relationship in which one is treated as an equal or one is treated as something other than an enemy.

Q: Just to get a little personal thing on this, how did you see anything you did that might be worth mentioning during the Sadat visit in 1977?

VIETS: I am probably the last person to ask that question of because literally on the day of the visit we had essentially all of our Embassy out on the street in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and God knows where else, in order to pull together the appropriate reporting messages. Dick Viets played the role of DCM by staying home and minding the fires. So I watched it on a television set in my office. But I had no role, whatsoever, that day. I only heard all the wonderful stories from my wife and my colleagues who were there. I wasn't present.

Q: After the Sadat visit it moved into a period of joint negotiations. Were our Embassies in Cairo and Tel Aviv still playing somewhat the same role, or had the play moved more to being directed from Washington?

VIETS: I think at that point Washington certainly became the senior partner in all of this and we were subsidiary, because at that point you were talking about policies that required very top echelons in this government to make decisions on. I think one of the professional thrills of that period was knowing that whatever you were drafting was being read by the President personally, by the National Security Adviser and the Secretary of State. I still have somewhere in my personal archives in the Department a variety of copies of telegrams that I had done as Chargé with writings on the margin from the President, Brzezinski and Secretary Vance, etc. There aren't too many times in any Foreign Service officer's career when you know you are talking directly to the boss. That in itself is a sufficient inducement to survive on four hours less sleep a night than normal.

Q: At that point was your main purpose to interpret how the Israelis were reacting?

VIETS: Again, I have trouble remembering the details of that period precisely. It really is a blur to me. The fact that Camp David was held, I think in itself is part of an answer to your question. A few weeks later things really were not going very well and the I think the feeling on the part of the President and his senior advisers was that the moment had arrived for the United States simply to lock people up in a room and hammer out an agreement; that it was drifting and it was always a risk that one or the other would simply say, "Enough of this."

As I am talking I am constantly comparing in my mind the environment then with the environment today in peace talks that are starting up again this very morning that we are talking. I remember the frustrations that began to develop in the region when nothing seemed to be happening as a result of this wonderful Sadat visit when emotions and hopes ran so high. It just seemed to tail off into endless volleys of diplomatic exchanges and sharp off-the-record comments, leaks, etc., by both sides. The constituency always needed in any prolonged negotiation of this nature, began to erode. There was no tangible evidence, either for the Israelis or the Egyptians, that the game was necessarily worth the price. The same thing is true today, I think. But fortunately wisdom prevailed. There was a political and policy leadership in this city who saw this as a moment in history that should be grasped irrespective of the dangers that it would blow up in your face. And they grasped it and forced it through.

Q: Were you getting from your Israeli contacts as the negotiations seemed to be drifting that the United States should come in get the thing back on track?
VIETS: There were people like Ezer Weizman who were saying precisely that, who were growing frustrated over the actions of their own government. Ezer was one who was extremely critical of elements of his own government's policies. I can't speak for what was going on in Cairo. The Israelis had then, and still have, thank God, a very free press which meant that the media was full of analysis and as always advice to the government over what to do. So it wasn't a depressed public debate at all, it was a very lively one. But frustration was there.

Q: Was it a sense of relief from your point of view when President Carter called the Camp David meeting?

VIETS: Oh yes, very much. You may remember during Camp David, itself, the press was miles away and it was a very tightly controlled negotiation. I really didn't know many of the details of what was going on because there were no daily reporting cables coming out of Thurmont, Maryland. I didn't learn many of the details until Sam flew back to Tel Aviv. I can remember the morning after he arrived going to his residence, sitting down by the swimming pool in the hot Mediterranean sun, while he went through several hours of notes that he had taken. He knew what he was doing during Camp David and took very extensive notes, which unfortunately have never seen a book, but someday may.

Q: I will tell you in a way what is happening to those notes, he has been doing a series of Oral Histories with us which has been going on for a few years. Peter Jessup is doing the interviewing. I think he was Station Chief or something like that. Anyway, Peter is a professional oral historian and Sam has been basically dictating his memoirs.

VIETS: Just to continue this parenthesis, when he retired he started work on a book which was really to be a political memoir of that period couched in the greater context of the US-Israeli relationship. He worked on it for several months, maybe a little longer, and I think got half way through or so and decided there were other ways he wanted to spend his time.

Q: You left shortly after the Camp David thing?

VIETS: I left there in August, 1979. There is one anecdote that has come to mind. Again I can't place precisely when it took place, but you will recall that the negotiations on a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel began to flounder very badly. President Carter who was in the midst of gearing up for his re-election campaign clearly saw not only the historical importance of getting a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt accomplished, but also that this would be a major accomplishment of his administration. He also realized that things had probably reached the point where he, the President, would have to reinsert himself between Begin and Sadat. So he flew to the area.

I remember clearly the first meeting that took place after his arrival in the cabinet room of the Israeli Prime Minister's office. The room was full of people around this very long cabinet table, as well as in the row of chairs along the wall...both Israelis and Americans. Obviously everybody wanted to be there. The Israelis are exactly like the Americans, the second and third echelon people wanted to be seen as part of this. Carter took a look around the table and said, "Prime Minister Begin, I really feel that we aren't going to be able to conduct the kind of conversations I want with all these people here. So I am asking everybody in my delegation to politely depart this room. The only people I want to stay behind are Secretary Vance, Sam Lewis, Ham Jordan, Jody Powell and Brzezinski [I think that was it.]." So we all started to get up. Begin quickly said, "Well, I agree." And he asked his people to depart. As I walked by Begin's chair, he turned to me and said, "Dick, you are not leaving, you can't leave." To have a Prime Minister of a country to which you are accredited say something like that obviously raises certain questions as to where you come from. He turned to the President and said words to the effect, "Mr. Viets has played a very important role in all of this and really deserves to stay and I would like to have him stay." So the President said, "Well, Dick, you are staying."

So I had the pleasure of sitting in that meeting which went on and on and on. It reached just a dreadful deadlock. The President finally said, "Prime Minister, I suggest that we take a break and consult with our colleagues because we are going nowhere and we really need to break this off for a bit and take a rest." So Begin and his team got up and left the cabinet room. I will always remember this moment. The President of the United States took his shoes off and put his stocking feet on the cabinet table and put his head in his hands and began to rock back and forth, almost like a child in pain. And then a very strange thing happened. Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell walked up and sat down on either side of the President and began to speak to him in some of the crudest language I have ever heard any man address to a superior. The essence of their words was, "For God's sake, Mr. President, put something up your derriere and get on with it. Stop whimpering and feeling sorry for yourself. You can crack this nut, you can win this, etc., etc. You can win this but you have to get with it." The language was very earthy, Southern lingo.

Q: They were both Georgia loyalists who had been with the President right from the beginning.

VIETS: That is right and you could see they were probably the only people in the world who could talk to the President of the United States in this fashion. I found it most fascinating and terribly embarrassing to be present at a moment when the President of the United States was being addressed in this fashion by two, albeit old, friends, but who were nevertheless subordinates. And in front of a group of people who shouldn't have been there!

In any case, the President responded positively to this dressing down by his two old friends and took charge of things. We very quickly decided what we were going to do when the Israelis came back. The President made it very clear he would leave if the

renewed session again devolved into endless bickering. He asked me to go outside and telephone somebody on the staff and tell them to get the aircrew of Air Force One ready, that the session might bust up at any moment and he would want to get out of Israel in a big hurry.

So Begin and company came back into the room. Against all rules of the game I wrote a note to Ezer Weizman, who was one of the few Israelis that Begin trusted...

Q: He was Minister of Defense?

VIETS: He was still Minister of Defense at that time.

I said in the note, "Ezer, you should know that the President has ordered Air Force One ready to take off. This thing is just going over the cliff unless you guys get your act together." I passed it across the table to Weizman. He read it; looked at me; got up and showed the note to the Foreign Minister, Moshe Dayan. Dayan read it and looked across the table at me and I nodded. Dayan, who was sitting next to Begin, showed the note to him and there was a kind of silence among the Israelis. Dayan then said, "You know I have perhaps an idea that might work us out of this box we are in," and proceeded to develop his idea. Carter chimed in that he thought the proposal was great and he could work with it. Within 15 minutes things were on the way to being resolved and it was agreed that the President and Begin would meet again that evening and settle it.

So again one never knows in life what the results of even the smallest actions are. That meeting may well have ended in great success in any case, but this certainly gave some impetus to resolution of the immediate crisis.

Q: Sort of nailing down the obvious, sometimes there is the idea that everything can be done from Washington and a foreign capital and you don't need people on the ground, but there are times that it is absolutely essential that you have built up trust. In the first place somebody from Washington couldn't have passed that note because they wouldn't have known that person or cared. If nothing else, this is one of those instances that shows what embassies do. They build up trust, confidence so that in times of crisis they know somebody is talking straight.

VIETS: Well, it is also I think that you know every day of this life people serving Presidents and Prime Ministers and others are constantly doing this sort of thing and very little of this ever gets into anybody's memoirs. But that is what history is made of. It has always intrigued me, these little tiny episodes that take on such historical significance.

Q: Well, this is, of course, as we develop this oral history what we are trying to do. It is not to highlight but to show that there are a bunch of people running around carrying spears, etc. who keep the machinery going. Before we leave Israeli, what was your view of Sharon at the time you left in 1977, because he before and particularly later led Israel

down a disastrous road into invading Lebanon in which he pretty much controlled things and did it without any real direction?

VIETS: Sharon during that period was under a much tighter leash then he subsequently was. He was Minister of Agriculture and while there was no doubt in anybody's mind what his political views were...he never tried to mask it. On the contrary I can remember going any number of times to see him at his office in Jerusalem and he would lay out on a big table his maps of the West Bank and show me the roads he was planning to build or were already being constructed. For every Congressional delegation that came he would have military helicopters and fly them up to some of the higher points in the West Bank and show them the famous narrow salient. So he was very open and aggressive in a more controlled fashion then he subsequently became over espousing his views.

My recollection is that he became Minister of Defense about the time I was leaving because I do remember a ship visit where the visiting admiral gave a dinner on board the fantail of his cruiser and I recall going up with Sharon for that dinner with our wives. But the bulk of my time he was Minister of Agriculture and was, therefore, essentially cut out of all the diplomatic toing and froing that took place between Israel and Egypt and Washington. He really wasn't that much of a factor. Begin was supreme during that period. Nobody could take him on politically and survive. Even Moshe Dayan was very careful in the way in which he handled Mr. Begin.

Q: Therefore an American President could go in and deal with an Israeli Prime Minister at that point, when other times that an American President might go, a Prime Minister of almost any country might have to have almost the whole cabinet there because of shared power.

VIETS: That's right. It was a combination of factors. Begin had a very powerful personality. He was a very shrewd, tough politician who knew how to run a cabinet. While I don't think he will ever go down in the history of Israel as one of the great prime ministers in terms of the type of government he gave Israel, he is certainly firmly ensconced in the history books for what he did on the Egyptian peace treaty. And that was clearly his major goal. He had a great sense of history and he damn well wanted to insure that he had a place in history, and he did.

Q: One last question on the Israeli thing, looking at our Embassy, how did you view Israeli specialists? It is always very difficult to recruit people because it is somewhat limited to one country and makes them a little bit suspect in the Arab countries. How useful were they and how did you feel about them?

VIETS: This is unfortunately a very sensitive subject and I am going to address it frontally because it is a subject that is generally avoided. People prefer to sidestep it. During the period I served in Israel, 1977-79, we were blessed with a group of a half dozen or so FSOs of Jewish origin who were bilingual in Hebrew, who were exceedingly talented young officers whose contribution to the United States Government's

understanding, and most particularly to Sam Lewis' and Dick Viets' understanding of what was going on in Israel, is hard to overstate.

That said, everyone serving in Embassy Tel Aviv was on the receiving end of unremitting pressure by Israelis in and out of government [or an intensity I never experienced anywhere else in the world] to be sympathetic to Israeli policies and points of view. All of us at one time or another found it very tough to handle these pressures. Our Jewish colleagues were special targets, of course. Without going into any personal details, there were moments when some of them did not handle these pressures very well. The emotional weight laid on them simply was too great.

I have always felt, and nothing has happened in my life since then to moderate my views one iota, that there are times and situations when special heed must be given to ethnic and religious roots in making personnel assignments. Not to do so risks potentially difficult problems for both the individual and the Foreign Service. However imprudent this view may be in our outrageously (at times) politically correct society, I feel it must be said.

Q: We have this including Irish-American, Serbian-Americans, Chinese-Americans, the whole thing.

VIETS: I know some people reading this transcript will immediately feel that what they are reading is a closely disguised anti-Semitic smite by Dick Viets. Quite the contrary. I think anyone who knows my record in Israel would not find that to be true. But I am now speaking as someone who has had some responsibility in the Foreign Service for managing people in such situations. I am appalled when I read, for example, that we are sending to country X an officer I worked with for several years, who was born and raised in that country and is now going back as ambassador. I think he is being put in a most difficult personal and professional position. No matter how hard he works to maintain his balance, the moment will surely come when his emotions will overcome his professional self-discipline. In this instance because he will be the Chief of Mission there will be no one above him to save him from himself. I truly feel sorry for my friend. The Republic has done neither him nor itself a favor in making this assignment.

Q: It has been sort of traditional that we do it to the immigrant who makes significant political contributions. But now a lot of new countries are opening up and sort of reaching out for one thing or another. Particularly what was part of the Soviet Union. We have been sending some people who come from those areas.

VIETS: This is the area of the world that I was just referring to.

Q: I think this is something we are all aware of.

VIETS: Well, not, apparently, some of the people who make these personnel decisions. The defense offered always is that these are fine Americans. And they are fine Americans. But I had been seduced over the years in any number of societies I have worked in and I

have no roots in those societies whatsoever. I can only imagine how much faster I would have been seduced if I were Irish and in Ireland, or Jewish and in Israel or Chinese and in China. This is human nature and has nothing to do with one's Americanism or patriotism, or professionalism. It is human nature.

Q: We will cut it off here and the next time around we will go to Tanzania. How is that?

VIETS: Let's do it the year after next!

Q: Today is January 14, 1993 and this is continuing the interview with Dick Viets. After Israel you get your first ambassadorial assignment. Could you tell me how this came about?

VIETS: Well, one never, of course, knows the full story behind any decision of this nature. But during my posting in Israel I think over forty percent of the time my Ambassador, Sam Lewis, was traveling to or from Washington. And he had a certain amount of regional travel to boot. As we have discussed earlier, this was an intensely active diplomatic period leading up to the Camp David agreement and, following that, all the negotiations related to the Egyptian-Israel peace treaty. This required Sam's physical presence in Washington for a great number of meetings, consultations, etc. So I was left minding the store for long periods of time and very frequently. Because life did not stop while Sam was away, there were still lots of things going on in Israel and there were high level meetings almost every day of the week with the Prime Minister, the Defense Minister, etc. We had terrible problems up on the Lebanese border at that point with Israeli incursions into Lebanon...sound familiar?...to which President Carter was adamantly opposed. So we were constantly hammering the Israelis to stay on their side of the border.

In consequence I suppose I developed a higher than usual profile for a Chargé in Washington. I can remember indeed getting phone calls from the Department saying that the President has called the Secretary on your meeting with Begin and wants to congratulate you, etc. It was all very heady stuff for a guy who still didn't have a totally white head of hair. I also, of course, during this period got to know Secretary Vance fairly well because he was coming through regularly and I, myself, was going occasionally back to Washington.

The sum of all this being that one's name got to be known fairly well. In 1979 you will recall that we were in the final phase of our negotiation with the British, with the Rhodesians and with the soon-to-be Zimbabwean independent state.

The US was extremely active in this negotiation. In fact, in retrospect, I am not sure that historians have yet really given the credit I think due to the Carter administration, particularly Secretary Vance and his immediate subordinates...people like Chet Crocker and Steve Low, etc...for the extraordinary efforts they made that culminated in this

peaceful transfer of power from whites to blacks in what was seen to be one of the more insolvable of the world's standoffs between whites and blacks.

At that time in mid-1979, the so-called front line states in Southern Africa, I think there were five of them ...the organization was chaired by Julius Nyerere, the President of Tanzania, a very remarkable gentleman. Nyerere really towered over the other four heads of state and this organization in many respects was a one man operation. Because of his long association with the independence movements in East Africa and throughout Southern Africa he was highly respected. Nyerere is an intellectual of very considerable dimensions, an extraordinarily articulate person. So the leadership of this group was essentially his without any challenge. He was offering almost daily advise to the Zimbabwean leadership on tactics, strategy, etc. in their negotiations with the British and the Americans and the others involved.

We had a very competent Ambassador named Jim Spain in Tanzania at that time who had been there for about five years. Jim had played a remarkable role in counseling, advising, pressing, pulling Nyerere in an attempt to shape his views, not always successfully. There was a strong view in Washington and I think the Secretary, himself, felt strongly about it, that Nyerere needed a good bit of handling and Jim's time had come to an end. So I was the designated hitter. I think, as far as I know, it was Secretary Vance who decided this. I knew Carter fairly well at that point and he went along with it. So off I went.

Q: Were there any problems with confirmation?

VIETS: None. This was almost a pro forma hearing.

Q: You obviously had not been in the area. What were you getting from the Desk, the African Bureau and maybe in the corridors, about Tanzania? Being in the Foreign Service and not in the area, to me the word was out that here is this guy Nyerere who is brilliant, a great speaker, but ruining his country. That he had got caught up in the British left wing social thing and was a disaster. This was the impression I heard. What impression did you go out with?

VIETS: Well, I went out with a lot of impressions of that nature. I should say that from the moment I was first alerted that I was selected as Ambassador, while I was still in Israel, I made arrangements with the Department to receive all of the important cable traffic between Washington and Dar es Salaam as well as some of the regional cable traffic relating to the negotiation. I did that to try to get a running start while I was still in Tel Aviv.

There was a second reason for this. Sam Lewis would not let me go from Israel and had a commitment from the Secretary that I would not be released until after a successor had been designated who Sam approved of. There is a rather amusing anecdote behind all that. My first candidate was someone whom Sam Lewis had never met. A gentleman by the name of William Brown with whom I had served in India back in the early sixties.

Bill was a Chinese language specialist, a hydra headed monster. He was both a Chinese language specialist and Russian area specialist...a very rare bird, and an exceptionally capable officer. It seemed to me that Bill had a great many of the qualities that would serve Lewis very well and more importantly the United States government and the Embassy in Israel well. Bill at that point was in Taiwan running that curious organization, whose name I don't even remember, which was in fact...

Q: A liaison office.

VIETS: Well, we didn't even call it a liaison office. It was a fancier name. But in effect it was our Embassy. I called Bill on the transpacific telephone from Tel Aviv, tracked him down, and after the pleasantries I told him in three or four sentences why I was calling him. And there was a long pause and then a kind of giggle over the phone and he said, "Dick, do you know where I am taking this phone call?" I said, "No, I don't." He said, "Well, I am lying on a chaise lounge beside one of the most beautiful swimming pools in the world. I am waiting for my Chinese butler to bring me one of the best Chinese meals you will find anywhere in the world, cooked by one of the best Chinese cooks anywhere in the world. I probably will put in at least an hour of work today and the rest of the day I am going to spend reading and perhaps play a little tennis, have a couple of swims. This is the best assignment and the best kept secret assignment in the world. And if you think I am going to trade this to go to Israel and work my butt off, you are absolutely crazy, so get off the line and let me get back to my snooze." I said, "Well, Bill, we all have moments when we have to do things that we don't like and you are going to come to Israel." "Well, the hell I am. It is nice talking to you Dick and just forget it. There is no way I am going to be moved from this place."

I had by then sold Lewis on the fact that Brown was the man. And Sam Lewis, who is one of the world's greater behind the scenes operators, without Bill Brown knowing what had happened, arranged to have Bill brought back to Washington on consultation at a time when Sam, himself, would be in Washington on consultation. He backed Bill Brown up against the wall and said, "You are coming to Israel." Well, in fact, Bill came to Israel. And, indeed, to finish off the story, Bill served out two or three years as Deputy Chief of Mission, went on to Thailand as Ambassador and a couple of years later returned to Tel Aviv as the US Ambassador to Israel. So I always felt that I made a fairly good choice.

Sam, having got all of this finally lined up, let me depart in September, 1979. I still remember that series of farewells in Tel Aviv. It is probably the only country in the world, of substance, where you can just turn out the entire government to see you off. A lot of that was testimony to my very remarkable wife who had made a great hit in Israel.

In any case, off we went. I do not frankly recall at this point when I got to Dar. It seems that there was a delay in Congressional hearings due to recess or something, but we got there in the Fall.

Q: Before you went out you were going to focus on the area. How did you manage that?

VIETS: I realized in my preparation for the assignment that the major focus in preparation should really be in learning everything I could about Julius Nyerere. The historical side of the preparation was fairly easy to do. Tanzanian history is not that complex. I decided that one of the ways to do this was to go around and see every American Ambassador who had ever served in Dar es Salaam.

I did this because I realized firstly, as I just said, that Nyerere was the key to my success, or lack of success, in that assignment and secondly, because as I read Jim Spain's reporting cables back to Washington it became increasingly clear to me that he had developed a remarkably close personal relationship with Nyerere. They had become very, very good friends. As a consequence I think Jim had had a great deal of influence on Nyerere. Nyerere had been trained by the Jesuits as a young man and so had Jim. They were both strong, practicing Catholics. That was an immediate bond.

And they had developed a wonderful game. Every call on Mr. Nyerere, which usually was at Nyerere's seaside house and not at his office...he preferred to do business out on the porch of his house...one or the other would open the conversation with a quotation of some renowned Catholic philosopher or a Biblical quotation and before the end of the conversation the other person was supposed to complete the quotation and identify its genesis.

Well, this had gone on for five years. The bond between these two men was very strong. Obviously I had studied a lot of school boy Latin, but I was not Catholic and I was not steeped in Church history and my memory of biblical quotations, to say nothing of Latin quotations, is pretty thin. I realized if I wasn't going to be able to do that, I had better have some alternative intellectual horsepower that could compensate for it. And that was the reason why I decided I needed to know more about Julius Nyerere than anybody else on the face of the earth.

And, as I was saying to you earlier, it was the first and last assignment I ever had in the Foreign Service that I did start with a sense of confidence that after a period of settling in I could get on top of the job relatively well. I strongly believe that no Foreign Service officer is worth his salt if, irrespective of his lack of regional knowledge of an area, he can't operate well after an initial start-up period. But for the first time because of Jim's intense and close relationship with Nyerere, who was effectively the key to our influence in East Africa, and more importantly, the key to influencing the Zimbabwean leadership it was important I be able to develop quickly a strong personal relationship with Nyerere.

The last American Ambassador to Tanzania that I saw before departing for Dar was a gentleman who is no longer living, but I think should go nameless because of the nature of the story I am going to tell you. I remember he was posted in Washington at that time in a sort of nonsense job. He was getting ready to retire. I recall walking into his office...he was a great tall, imposing man. He got out of his chair and came around his desk. I introduced myself, we had never met, and sat down. I candidly told him that for

the first time in my life I was starting an assignment with some lack of confidence. I knew that he had also enjoyed a strong relationship with Nyerere and had served there during a very tough period...there had been a kidnapping of some Americans and he was involved in negotiating their release. But I said that the man who had clearly set the standard was Jim Spain and I went into the Latin quotation business, etc. This gentleman sat there with a grin growing on his face as I went on explaining why I felt so ill prepared to go down and deal with this great fellow. I finished and he looked at me and he said, "Dick, let me tell you something. Jim Spain and I and all our other predecessors, all developed the world's greatest relationship with Nyerere. Why? Because it was Nyerere who developed the relationships. He is a very shrewd man and knows that he is going to need to develop a very close relationship with any American who is sent down as chief of mission in that country. You don't need to worry. Nyerere will make sure that a different game is found. You are going to find that you are going to do just as well if not better than any of your predecessors. This is a lot of bull shit that Jim Spain has handled it better than I did or anybody else. So don't think that it won't go well."

And, indeed, I have to say that when I left Dar es Salaam I was absolutely convinced that I had a better relationship with Julius Nyerere than any American Ambassador who had ever set foot in that country!

But, going back to your original question on Nyerere, he was, he is, because he is still living, a most remarkable figure in contemporary African political history. I always said, and others who knew him well I think shared this view, that if Nyerere had been born in Western Europe or the Far East or even in North America, he would have been an exceptional figure in public life. He was a superb politician. He had an acute brain, the memory of an elephant, intellectual horsepower that was second to none. He was cunning. He could be warm-hearted one moment and cut you off at the legs at the next if it met his political or personal needs. He had, of course, been the principal political figure behind the Tanzanian independence movement in the 1950s.

He had been the great hope, I think, of the British when they were departing East Africa. Here was the man exceptionally well prepared to take over political power in a country that was endowed with extraordinary resources ...physical resources, a beautiful country...very rich in natural resources. It had an agricultural base at the time of independence that was second to none in East Africa. A wonderful deep water port, etc. And a stable political environment.

Alas, for a variety of reasons, Nyerere, while he continued to maintain a stable political society...there was none of the Mau Mau type of operation that ever developed in Tanzania...went in the same direction that many other African political leaders did at that point, namely, that government always knew best and everything should be operated by the government, everything should be nationalized, and the people simply weren't ready to conduct their own affairs and the government would always know best. In consequence the economy went into a tailspin and even to this day, 1993, the Tanzanian economy is a vastly poorer economy then it was on the day of independence about 30 years ago.

Part of Nyerere's economic developmental philosophy surely was shaped by the Fabian socialists. Various LSE professors (London School of Economics) used to float in and out of Dar es Salaam offering advice to him. Also, I think he was genuinely convinced that given time his particular formula for the development of Tanzania would turn out to be right. He believed what he first had to do was to educate the population because at the time of independence it was essentially an illiterate society. As I recall, other than three or four doctors there wasn't a Ph.D. in the country. There was still a big British and other expatriate population that ran everything from the water works to the railroad, etc.

Nyerere simply concluded early on that his first moves toward bringing Tanzania into the second half of the 20th century must be (a) to establish a national educational program, which he did; (b) to break up the big estates which had been by foreigners and to divide the land among the peasantry, which he did, and (c) to nationalize all the limited industry in the country so that the profits derived from these organizations would go into the national treasury and not turn up as dividends being repatriated to the tea or coffee market in London or the gold market in Zurich. This he also did.

Alas, as I say, all of these moves turned into an economic disaster primarily because he did not have the trained cadres to run any of these things. Pretty soon the Tanzanian economy developed into a basket case. The international organizations such as the World Bank, IMF, etc. came to Tanzania's rescue. There was one point when Tanzania was getting more international donor assistance per capita then any country in the world, billions of dollars.

Q: By the time you got there in 1979 the structure had shown where it was going. There was no doubt about it. What was the reading you were getting from the people you talked to why Nyerere didn't say, "Gee, maybe this isn't working"? Was he an ideologue or was it a matter of political control? What was our reading for his stubbornness in driving his country to economic disaster?

VIETS: You put your finger on the principal reason. He was an enormously stubborn man and he did not want to admit that he had been wrong. But having said that I do remember the last several months of my posting there...I was only there for a year and a half because suddenly the telephone rang and I was told that our masters wanted me to go as Ambassador to Jordan...I do remember the last several months of my posting there...by then I had developed a pretty solid relationship with Nyerere and used to frequently go out to his home and sit on his back porch facing a beautiful Indian Ocean lagoon and swat the mosquitoes away as he sat there in his Gucci loafers and safari suit and talked about the world and Tanzania.

As his confidence and trust grew in this foreign ambassador he would open up more and more about his own views of the way things were going. I began to pick up threads of tacit or implicit admission that he had taken some very bad turns over the years and that things had to be put right. And, indeed, a couple of years after I departed he left office

voluntarily. That was already written on the wall. I remember sending cables forecasting he was going to retire. He resigned first from the office of the Presidency, but very shrewdly kept control of the political party apparatus and he kept himself on as chairman of the party.

Perhaps the most influential person around Nyerere was a very interesting, extremely intelligent English lady name Joan Wickham who had gone out to Dar es Salaam as a young woman shortly after independence, or just at the time of independence, and had moved into the YWCA and had volunteered to help in the launching of this new East African state. She was a gifted writer and Nyerere, who himself remains as far as I know the principal translator of Shakespeare from English into Swahili and one of the most gifted orators I have ever heard in English, and himself a marvelous drafter of the English language, spotted her right away and took her into his inner circle. She remained with him all those years as an inside, very private and confidential advisor. Joan was a born socialist, not an economist but very well read in economy and she held some very strong views on developmental economics, etc. I think, on looking back, that she had helped, if not shaped his views. Certainly she buttressed many of his own views.

Q: During your time there when the economy was obviously in a shambles were they blaming anybody for it? Was it a capitalist plot?

VIETS: By the time I left one clearly had developed enough relationships, not simply with Nyerere, but with others so you could hold very candid conversations in private. It wasn't difficult to get a conversation going in which people were very open in saying that this was a mistake and that was a mistake, there was corruption, etc. Overall I think there was the universal view that for whatever reason, the international markets were rigged against the interests of the third world. Nyerere constantly hammered at this theme. I can remember listening to him rail hour after hour against the IMF and the prescriptions the IMF was demanding of Tanzania that he argued would send it further into poverty, etc. He would cite how many pounds of tea in 1953 it took to buy a truck and how many tons of tea it took in 1979 to buy a truck. So there was certainly a sense of while Tanzania had made mistakes, and most people were perfectly prepared to admit that...Nyerere not publicly, but privately...there was also a strong feeling that the first world, Western Europe, Japan and the United States, had very carefully rigged the game so that so-called third world economies would never become competitive, that they would always be at the end of a leash that would be controlled by these major primary commodity markets, at that point raw commodities were all that Tanzania had in terms of exports.

I can't say there was a bitterness about this. It was, as you find so often in societies of that nature, an almost quiescent, benign acceptance of this as fate...we were born in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Q: Trying to get Rhodesia in a situation where the blacks could take over was one of your assignments, but other than that did you feel that you as the ambassador was under any

obligation to put the Tanzanians on the right course as we saw it or was it any of our business?

VIETS: No, it wasn't all Rhodesian independence. There were three or four principal issues that I got involved in. One was the Rhodesian independence issue and that was my primary focus in the early months.

The second issue was the estranged relationship between Tanzania and Kenya. For economic reasons this was an extremely difficult period for Tanzania because the borders were closed and no commerce was flowing back and forth. Thirdly, we had next door in Uganda the famous Idi Amin. You will recall at one point the Tanzanians sent half the Tanzanian army to get rid of Idi Amin. Julius showed in that venture a little bit of the imperialist in him. He wanted to play the kingmaker in Uganda and poured a lot of Tanzanian treasure into his efforts to dominate the political process and formation of the new political leadership in Uganda.

One of the side benefits to this was the impact on his army which became very accustomed to living very well as armies of occupation always do and they came back to Tanzania to a much poorer economy. One of the immediate repercussions was a sudden spurt in vicious crime, of lawlessness and the society was buffeted seriously. I think to this day the domestic security situation of Tanzania is more dangerous than it was prior to the incursion into Uganda.

Lastly, there were serious political problems in Mozambique, the country to the south of Tanzania. Nyerere was not physically involved in the sense of having an army down there, but politically he was deeply involved in trying to resolve the conflict between Michel, the then leader of Mozambique, and the forces that were financed by South African interests who were trying to destabilize and overthrow Michel.

There was also the Namibia problem in which Nyerere was involved in as president of the front line states. That became increasingly a problem on my plate.

Angola, yes we became involved in that but more peripherally. And always looming over the horizon was South Africa. Nyerere had black South African revolutionary groups training in southern Tanzania and there was financial assistance to them, etc. So in that part of the world there was a fair amount going on.

In addition to all these external problems that the American Ambassador by virtue of being the American Ambassador constantly became involved in the role of advisor, hand holder, message deliver, and idea generator, we also had a major involvement in the dreadful Tanzanian economy. There was a substantial AID mission in Tanzania. We also had restarted a Peace Corps operation there. It was my lot to wind down the major part of the AID effort primarily because I felt we were simply wasting our money. I told Nyerere so, and told his Finance Minister so, etc. So that did not make me a very popular figure.

Q: Let's deal with various parts of this. How about the Zimbabwe thing? Was there much of a role to play or was it pretty much on course at that time?

VIETS: There were just a lot of bumps on the road, but there was no driving over the cliff. In the final months of the negotiations, Nyerere became increasingly helpful and less skeptical of the long term objectives of the Americans and the British. Therefore he was more amenable to influencing his Zimbabwean brothers to take more moderate positions on various aspects of the negotiations. I think by the end we all gave Nyerere pretty solid marks for the role he had played. It was a positive role. It was a beneficial role on the whole. In the earlier part of the negotiations, I think Jim Spain had many more problems to deal with than I did on Rhodesia.

Q: What you haven't mentioned is the role of the British. Had the British sort of blotted their copy book? What was the role of the British Ambassador as opposed to the American Ambassador?

VIETS: The British were the senior partner in this negotiation, there is no question of that. But because of that, there were aspects of the negotiations and moments in the negotiations when the Americans were a much more acceptable intermediary than were the British. More trusted, I think. We had no axe to grind.

Q: No constituent pressure.

VIETS: We had relatively minor investments there to protect. But we had no population there that we had to worry about.

It is interesting that the current British Ambassador in Washington was the principal Foreign Office staffer in the negotiation. The British Ambassador in Dar es Salaam, or High Commissioner as he was called because Tanzania was in the Commonwealth at that point, and I worked very closely on this issue. We traded information and very often harmonized our demarches to Nyerere and reported to one another on our conversations and reactions. I would not wish to characterize which of us was the more effective with him. You can go talk to Julius about that.

Q: What about the problems with Kenya, Uganda, and Mozambique? Did we have any particular involvement in these?

VIETS: Well, the Kenya thing I really took on as a personal project. I very often got well out ahead of Washington which wasn't very interested in this problem. For the record I don't want to suggest that I was violating any policy, but I sure as hell was making policy in Dar es Salaam and not espousing made-in-Washington policy in my discussions with the Kenyans and occasionally their neighbors over how to resolve all this. I also was working very closely with the World Bank representatives at that point trying to figure out ways to alleviate tensions between the Kenyans and the Tanzanians. And we made quite a lot of progress. By the time I left the major breakthrough hadn't occurred, but

things were pretty well set so that my successor was able to finish it off. Of course, let's not forget that the Kenyans and Tanzanians themselves finally settled things, but they were helped a lot by the Americans.

Q: For somebody in the future looking at this, our role was one of facilitation, sort of an honest broker, because of a lack of major commitment there, but we had a moral commitment there.

VIETS: Surely the diplomatic history of the United States, especially in the last 15 years, I think will play that very theme over and over around the world. This is possible because (1) we are what we are...a huge powerful giant of a country with all kinds of resources at our command and (2) I think with some notable exceptions, the quality of the chiefs of mission we had representing us were people who had the intellectual capacity and experience to play this type of role. We were not High Commissioners or Field Marshals. We worked by in large very quietly behind the scenes. Often few people knew what we were up to, sometimes not even people on our own staffs. Most of us, I think, were able to develop, again not because of our scintillating personalities, but because we represented what we did, most of us were able to develop very close relationships with the head of state and principal advisors and play very influential behind the scenes roles in the countries to which we were accredited.

Unfortunately, the official diplomatic history of the United States probably will not cover all this in the terms I am describing it because many times I know we didn't report all that we were up to.

Q: This, of course, is one of the fun things about being in a place such as Africa. What about the African Bureau? What was your impression? This was not your bailiwick.

VIETS: With exception of the Rhodesian negotiations, which was very high on Vance's list of priorities...during the last part of my tenure in Dar, Chester Crocker had come on board as Assistant Secretary. By all odds he was one of the most capable men I ever worked with. So superb leadership came out of the Bureau. In general, our missions in Africa were staffed by very young, relatively inexperienced diplomats. It was a training ground. I don't know whether it still is, but it certainly was in those days. There were very few, it seemed to me, at least in East Africa, trained, regional specialists. The physical stress and strain on employees and their families was such that people would do a tour in Africa and then usually rotate out into something less damaging to livers and blood streams. There certainly were devoted Africanists, but they couldn't be compared for the most part with the specialists you would find in Asia or Eastern Europe, etc.

I also felt that the competence level was not as high as what I had encountered in other parts of the world. I had the impression the personnel people used Africa as a dumping ground for people who were in the B and C+ category. I don't wish to suggest that all our embassies were filled with B and C+ people. But the average embassy in Africa that I saw, and I saw only a fraction of the total number, never seemed to me to be up to what I

had been accustomed to elsewhere in the world. It was my first assignment in Africa below the Sahara Desert. I had been in North Africa early on where we had a highly skilled staff, or so I thought.

Q: Did you find that you were comfortable doing things such as trying to promote connections between Tanzania and Kenya, etc., without over informing the Department? You didn't feel that anybody in Washington would get their nose out of joint?

VIETS: Well, the truth of the matter is that I got bored towards the end. When I arrived, as I have said, there was this one burning, diplomatic negotiation going on. So one had quite a lot to do. Secondly, there had been a long hiatus of Chargéship. Spain had left many months before for another assignment. Frankly, the Embassy I inherited was a very sleepy and inefficiently run operation, I thought. Remember I had just come from this big time Israeli experience. I probably piled into the poor staff in Dar es Salaam with a little more horsepower than needed. But by the time I left I thought we had a pretty sparkling Embassy and I think the Department did too. But I always called that assignment to Tanzania as my sabbatical. I had a couple of times been headed for the War College and Senior Seminar and each time had been diverted off to something else, so this was my year and a half away from the front lines.

Q: Now to the AID business. Obviously the country doesn't like you to yank AID out, but also even more important from an American Ambassador's point of view, AID hates to go out. You are breaking a very large rice bowl in one of the nicer countries to serve in.

VIETS: I don't want to get into the details of this even for the historical record, but AID was rather poorly served in Dar es Salaam during the latter part of my tour there, which was when I began to wind things down. So we had two problems. We had very poor leadership, which ultimately ended up in legal difficulty. Secondly, we had a Tanzanian government which was simply wasting American taxpayers' money, in my judgment. We were involved in a great number of peripheral programs that had grown up over the years and nobody had paid much attention to them and we just kept pouring money and people into them. There were various university contracts that had gone on well beyond the time when they should have been terminated.

It was I think the classic scene in the third world of time to pull things up by the roots and either throw them over the fence and move on to other things or close down. I might add that there were also some legal difficulties that arose between the government of Tanzania and the United States government, namely that the Tanzanians were frequently missing their debt payments and under public law after a certain period disbursement of AID funds has to be frozen. So we had that to contend with as well.

My successor in Dar es Salaam was a political appointee, a young businessman who had been working for an American multinational corporation in Nigeria. He had a lot of business experience and I think he finished off what I started. I understand today,

however, we are back giving various types of assistance to Tanzania. But I don't think it is of the magnitude that it was in the sixties and seventies.

Q: I have this very strong impression that so many of these AID projects were matters of bright ideas with very little follow through or else they were not suited for the society but beneficial for the Ambassador, the AID Administrator for living in the country. But the overall effects were either nil or almost pernicious. Did you have this feeling?

VIETS: A final point on this. As I earlier stated, the magnetism of Nyerere's personality ...and he was an internationally known figure, he wasn't simply a political figurehead in East Africa...he was highly respected outside of Dar es Salaam, especially in Western Europe and particularly in Northern Europe in the Scandinavian countries. He had a lot of supporters in the World Bank, less so in IMF. But he managed over his career to bring into Dar es Salaam several billion dollars in economic assistance. The United States government bilateral contribution was a fraction of all that. So we, in fact, were quite small time players, at least during my period as Ambassador there, in comparison to the Swedes, the Danes, the Germans, etc.

Q: He had Socialist connections.

VIETS: Indeed he did. The point that I want to make was that I will go to my grave gnashing my teeth over a mental picture I have of Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, German aid employees spending every afternoon at the Dar es Salaam Yacht Club sailing their yachts, scuba diving in those beautiful reefs, living lives of considerable wealth and position, lives most of them I doubt could undertake at home. They were paid enormous salaries, paid much better than their American counterparts, and doing fairly well nothing in my judgment to earn their salaries. It was just a dreadful picture of the worse of the excesses of the donor world.

I think the single most effective aid program that I ever encountered anywhere was in Tanzania and that was conducted by the Dutch. The Dutch knew exactly what they were doing and then got their money's worth. They were very generous in terms of the size and scale of their economy, but then kept a very tight hold on expenditures.

On the other hand, it was a running sore of mismanagement, corruption, incompetence, sloth, indolence on the part, I think, of most other aid representatives. The Chinese learned their lesson faster than any of the rest of us when they built the famous Tanzam railway in the 1950s between Zambia and Dar es Salaam. They spent hundreds of millions of dollars on this project and before it was finished it was already rusting and deteriorating with bridges washing away, etc. The Chinese became very disillusioned with the capacity of the Africans to absorb their hard earned assistance in an effective manner.

Q: This was at a time of great tension with the Soviet Union. The Soviets had moved into Afghanistan to prop up a Communist government. The Carter administration had done a

tremendous flip flop because they had been betrayed; the Brezhnev Doctrine was in full force, not allowing any Communist country to change its form of government. Africa was considered by many cold warriors to be probably the one open battle field... What was your impression of this during the 1979-81 period?

VIETS: The Russians were minor players in Tanzania at least during my period there. They had learned their lesson earlier on, that this was a kind of open ended hole into which you tossed money and got really very little back in return for your investment. They were, of course, supporting a number of revolutionary groups operating on the periphery of Tanzania. They were active in Mozambique and surely were supporting with arms and funds some of the South African groups...SWAPO was one of their favorite beneficiaries. But Julius Nyerere had by then I think pretty well concluded that the Soviets were not the best game in town and while he maintained cordial enough relations with them, he didn't spend a great deal of time worrying about enlarging his relationship with the Soviets. The other Eastern European representatives who were in Dar, and they were all there...remember this is a time when they were essentially taking orders from Moscow...all had small aid programs and all were active. But you had to ask yourself whether their governments realized these were peripheral role operations at best. They probably would have done better to go elsewhere.

The one burning issue which isn't related to the Russians that we haven't mentioned occurred when our hostages were being held in Tehran. I can remember demarche, after demarche, after demarche that I had to make either to Nyerere or to the Foreign Minister for assistance with the Iranians on releasing these hostages. I remember the last major demarche I made. Nyerere was off in Zanzibar on a political tour and I was instructed to deliver this damn demarche within two hours. I had to hire a plane and fly over there and insist on seeing Nyerere. I interrupted some important discussion he was having with island political leadership to deliver it. I remember he sort of quizzically looked at me and I recall thinking "Oh God, Washington has once again kind of lost its perspective on the importance of all this." But he was helpful to a degree. He didn't have any influence with Tehran to speak of, but he did maintain relations with Iran and did send messages once or twice.

Q: At one point when we were issuing our human rights reports and all, Nyerere was called a hypocrite. Human rights were big during the Carter time and you were there during most of that time.

VIETS: I do recall some strain on this issue. In particular there was some discriminatory imprisonment and even torture, I think, of some of the Indian-Pakistani community. As I remember there were several instances when some of Nyerere's own political opposition found themselves in jail and there was some question about mal- treatment, etc. But on the whole I think the Nyerere regime's record is...in the human rights arena when one is talking about imprisonment and torture, or loaded legal shenanigans against opposition, I

think his record is remarkably good. If human rights includes the right to a job, an education, hospitalization, etc., then you have to give him pretty good marks.

Q: How about UN votes? Did you have to trot in and ask for their vote in the UN?

VIETS: I did quite a bit of that. In the final months of my tour the Foreign Minister of Tanzania was a gentleman named Salam Salam, who nearly became the Secretary General of the United Nations. I think he would have had it not been for George Bush. Bush remembered Salam Salam as the Tanzanian delegate who came and danced in front of his chair in the General Assembly the day the Chinese were admitted to the United Nations. And Bush never forgot Mr. Salam Salam. I found Salam Salam, who I think is now Secretary General of the OAU, to be a very, very bright, interesting man whose revolutionary zeal had long since cooled.

But the Tanzanians were always a part of the third world nonaligned group. This was a period when they didn't break ranks. One could bring all the rational arguments you wanted to in making a demarche, but I don't ever remember turning more than one or two votes.

Q: What about Zanzibar? What I understand is that it was really an Arab trading place. Do we still have our station there?

VIETS: No. We had closed it down.

Q: At one time we had a satellite station there for our space effort and all.

VIETS: We totally closed down there. I think Jim Spain had closed it down. After I left one of my successors was Jock Shirley. He was a senior USIA career officer who had a great interest in USIA activities. He reopened the USIA installation in Zanzibar. During my time we had no one there. I used to go over, of course, from time to time to meet with the leadership of the island and press the flesh as it were. It is a fascinating island to visit, but a very sad scene. The clove export market was still a major source of foreign exchange for the Tanzanian government, but the Zanzibar government saw very little of it. It all disappeared on the mainland.

There I think Nyerere has to be judged by history. He treated the Zanzibareans as second class citizens in the Tanzanian Commonwealth, as it were. There was a lot of strain and tension between the two entities and I think it exists to this day.

Q: You are talking about people who have really international trading instincts in the blood.

VIETS: Yes, they are very different genes.

Q: Next time we will move on to your next assignment which was Jordan.

Today is February 24, 1993 and this a continuing interview with Ambassador Viets. Dick, could you tell me how you got your next assignment after Tanzania?

VIETS: I think it fair to surmise that I had established some minor reputation while I had been DCM in Israel with the seventh floor and the White House, and also with Nick Veliotes who had been named as the new Assistant Secretary for NEA. Nick and I had shared a very curious career pattern. I had succeeded him in three or four jobs over the course of my Foreign Service career. I succeeded him as political officer in India; I partially succeeded him in my only Departmental assignment; I succeeded him as deputy chief of mission in Tel Aviv and succeeded him as ambassador in Amman. This was sort of a diplomatic Siamese twin act. I think Nick probably provided the final impetus to the decision to send me to Jordan.

Q: This is the beginning of the Reagan administration isn't it?

VIETS: The very outset of the Reagan administration.

Q: Could you give us a little feel about it? In interviewing people who served in Latin American affairs it was bloody when they came in. But I don't think the same hostility was there in the Near Eastern Bureau.

VIETS: No, I don't recall that there was any particular sense of that. NEA was still felt by many to be the premier Bureau in the Department. There were a lot of extremely talented, very experienced people in the Bureau at that time. It subsequently, alas, has declined considerably. But at that time I certainly don't recall slipping on anybody's blood.

I am reminded of an amusing anecdote in connection with this transfer. You may recall from other interviews that Ronald Reagan decided at the outset of his administration that he personally would telephone every one of his ambassadorial appointees. That was probably as close as he got to the substantive side of foreign policy. One was always alerted that you could expect a call from the President within the next 48 hours or whatever, and to make sure somebody always knew how to reach you.

Well, I got the usual call from Washington saying that everything was set and that the President was going to be calling me in the next couple of days offering this appointment to me. At that particular point, it was in the spring of 1981, my wife was in a hospital in England. She had been at some kind of charity fete down on the beach in Dar es Salaam and one of those tremendous cyclones had blown up out of nowhere. She had been under a huge tent which collapsed with the tent pole narrowly missing her head and pulverizing her leg. So she had been evacuated to an Air Force hospital in England and I was alone in my residence except for the presence of a very personable, interesting Anglo-Indian lady who had been on my personal payroll for a number of years taking care of my youngest daughter.

Mary, as I say, was an Anglo-Indian who had seen a good bit of the world before I ever knew her. She subsequently served in many posts with us. She often took over the general management of whatever residence we were in, superseding the government employees and was really almost part of the family. She was very protective of all of us and particularly of me, She was especially effective in handling importuning phone calls that always manage to get through to an ambassador's residence.

On this particular early evening I was taking a shower preparatory to going out to dinner. I had been advised early that morning that the President would be calling within the next couple of days. I failed to mention this to any staff in the house. Unbeknownst to me while I was in the shower the telephone rang. Mary picked up the telephone and an operator said, "This is the White House calling. Is Ambassador Viets there?" "Yes, he is." "Well, the President would like to speak to him if you will put him on." She apparently said, "Yes, she would get me" and meanwhile for some reason the President, himself, came on the line and said, "This is President Reagan speaking, am I speaking to Ambassador Viets?" Mary roared back at him, "You bloody trickster, you joker, we don't take calls like this here. Play your games with somebody else." and slammed the telephone down thinking this was just some local joker who was playing games with the American Ambassador's phone number.

About that time I emerged from the shower and Mary was standing in the hallway. She said, "Some joker just telephoned claiming he was the President of the United States and I hung up on him." I said, "Oh Jesus, Mary." Well, the phone rang again and this very patient operator said, "Do we have the right number?" And all went well. I subsequently told the President this story when I saw him next in Washington and, of course, he got a great charge out of it. He said he vividly remembered being told off by this woman.

Q: Can you give us a feel about when you came back, how you prepared for the post, what you saw were the major problems and were there any problems with Congress?

VIETS: The confirmation procedure was very easy when it finally took place. I recall it was a fairly long wait. Congress was on one of their summer holidays, etc. I didn't get out to Amman until August, having come back to Washington in late May.

I knew, having gone through the process once and having assisted any number of other ambassadors to go through a confirmation procedure, I knew pretty much how I wanted to handle my own preparations. These included taking sort of a vacuum cleaner approach to the city of Washington and calling on almost anybody who had anything to do with Jordan, whether it was the Congress, the key agencies, Defense, Commerce, etc. I made a number of trips around the country talking to business executives who either had interests in Jordan or...

Q: In the American community, Jordan seems like a very poor country, who would have an interest in the place?

VIETS: Petroleum companies have long been interested in Jordan and several, indeed, have sunk significant amounts of money into exploration in Jordan. There are a variety of lesser manufacturing joint ventures in Jordan...light industry. For example, there were a number of projects relating to the exploitation of the resources of the Dead Sea. It is very curious that as I talk to you this morning I just got off the phone from a call to Jordan regarding a major joint venture involving an American firm that I have been working on for the last months and it looks as if it may finally come to fruition.

Q: What is there in the Dead Sea that excites exploitation?

VIETS: Well, the brine of the Dead Sea has more minerals and chemicals in it than any other body of water anywhere in the world. The particular project that I just referred to is one relating to Bromine. Bromine additives are chemicals that are used in fire retardant clothing and equipment. It is a very big, big field and there are only three companies in the world who produce it in any quantity. Two of them are American and the other is Israeli. Now, maybe we will have a fourth.

Q: Speaking of Israeli. Did the Israeli lobby get in touch with you before you went out? Jordan seems to be the one maneuvering ground.

VIETS: My recollection is that it worked both ways. A lot of these people I had known for a number of years and worked with and I called on them. Others contacted me. I think there was a strong sense that because I had recently spent two years plus in Israel, separated only by what I call my sabbatical of a year and a half, I was still fairly fresh off the griddle and knew a good many Israelis and knew a great many members of the leadership of the "American-Jewish Community." So it was a natural thing to do.

Q: As you go out to Jordan, you are looking at it with an experienced but fresh eye. What did you see as American interests in Jordan and what did you see as your check list of things you would like to do?

VIETS: There was only one overwhelming objective that I had. That was to do whatever I could to relieve some of the pressures of the Arab-Israeli confrontation and ultimately, of course, to help move the parties into negotiations. I do recall getting ready for this assignment. We had a new Secretary of State, General Haig, and I remember that Al Haig did not have time to meet his new ambassador to Jordan. This is perhaps understandable, although I took it as not a particularly good omen.

Haig already brought to his new role a pronounced bias favoring the state of Israel. I remember within NEA there was growing apprehension as the weeks went by and he was seen to be staffing his office with a number of people who were very pro-Israeli. He would see every key Israeli who would flow into town, but he did not make the same effort with the Arabs. So I remember worrying at the time that this was going to be a problem of getting through to the Secretary. I had been rather spoiled when I was in Israel

because, of course, almost everything you sent got on the Secretary's desk and the National Security Advisor's desk and ultimately to the President's desk. And there were lots of phone calls and visits. So you got to know these people personally very well. Suddenly one found himself back to addressing the same issues, but from "across the river" and yet unable to get to see the gentleman in charge. This didn't bode well.

Q: Was there a feeling in NEA at that time that we had just come from Secretary Vance and Secretary Muskie and moving to Secretary Haig, that there was a difference in the way these Secretaries did this? Was the perception that Haig was more inclined to listen to the Israeli side more than either Vance or Muskie?

VIETS: That was the perception. How fair it was I am in no position to say. Nick Veliotes would be in a much better position than I am to make that judgment because he had to deal with Haig day in and day out.

I finally did get to see Haig because I had gone up to some eighth floor reception with Nick and there was Haig talking to a group of people. Nick, in his best tradition, just grabbed me by the shoulder and propelled me forward and pushed right through the crowd around Haig and said, "Mr. Secretary, we have been trying to get to see you for days and here is Dick Viets who will be leaving in three days for Amman and you damn well ought to talk to him." Haig, who I knew, but not well, said, "Oh, Dick, nobody told me." We walked over to a corner and talked for about five or six minutes. So I did have my brief moment with the great man.

I recall the night the news was flashed to Amman, and I guess I was listening to the BBC 11 o'clock newscast and was all alone in my residence, my family were away on a trip, and I heard that Secretary Haig had resigned or been fired. I distinctly recall going out to the kitchen, pulling out a bottle of champagne and uncorking it and consuming the entire bottle. I was greatly relieved.

Q: I heard from someone else that when the news came out in the State Department that Veliotes ran down the hall saying, "Don't anyone dare cheer. Keep at work." It sounds like tremendous disloyalty, but it is not. Attitude and the perception of attitude is important. It is very disheartening to be in a post where you feel you are not going to get a fair hearing.

Now, what was the situation in Jordan when you arrived?

VIETS: My timing couldn't have been worse because I arrived there two or three days, I can't remember precisely, after the Israelis had bombed the famous Iraqi nuclear reactor. The Middle East, as usual, was full of conspiracy theories, all of which sooner or later connected the United States to the Israelis attack. I arrived to find the Embassy in a state of siege, psychological siege. Nobody was moving out to see anybody, talk to anybody. People were just hovering in their offices feeling sorry for themselves. I remember realizing my first task was to get this Embassy to get on it's bicycle and get on down to

the bazaar and to ministries, etc., and to begin to do its job. I think all of this was exacerbated by the fact there had been a Chargé for about ten months. A long, long haul for a Chargé. He had taken the view that the Chargé's job is essentially to maintain the status quo so far as the internal operation in the Embassy is concerned. And that is a perfectly defensible thing to do. Perhaps he would have taken a different view had he realized he was going to be running things for ten months. But he didn't know that. He felt that the new Ambassador ought to be able to change things as he wished. So I had the sense the first day or so that I was in Amman that I was in kind of a haunted house or a summer house that had been closed up all winter. But there was a group of very, very good people at the Embassy who responded with alacrity to a little leadership and we soon had the place humming with activity. I had great fun working with this wonderful staff.

Q: What was the reaction to this Israeli bombing? I find myself most of the time personally sort of annoyed or angry at what the Israelis do, but this one I can't fault because subsequent events certainly proved you had a real nasty person, Saddam Hussein, who might have used a nuclear bomb.

VIETS: You have just reflected, of course, 20/20 hindsight. I think at the time, not only in the Middle East but even here in Washington, even Al Haig, was very concerned about the precedent that had been set where a national air force crosses two sets of borders and bombs a strategic objective which it is concerned about and returns home and expects the rest of the world to applaud. The fact that it was a nuclear reactor didn't appreciably change the concern that this was setting one hell of a bad precedent that needed to be responded to in an appropriate fashion in the Security Council, which we did.

Of course, in hindsight, as you just said, the history of the Middle East was changed more than we realized at the time by that mission. The Arabs and I think the Jordanians in particular were deeply concerned because they all felt, "Oh my god, if they can do it to the Iraqis, they can do it to us."

Going back to my time in Israel, every three weeks or so the Israelis would fly reconnaissance missions deep into Jordan and Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. They were doing this essentially at will. Partly I think for psychological purposes and partly to monitor air defenses, tracking capabilities, etc. in order to draw a profile of the type of reaction you would get if you ever had to attack that country. We would regularly go into the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Israel and warning against this practice.

My first meeting with the King was the day after I arrived in Jordan when I presented my credentials. That was, I think, a sign of the importance the King placed on the Jordan-US relationship...within twenty-four hours of arrival you present your credentials to the chief of state. It was probably also a reflection of the tension of the moment. It was a good thing to get an American Ambassador in place because people were damn well heated up over this incursion.

In my first conversation with the King he confided that in fact he personally had spotted the Israeli aircraft on their way into Iraq. He had been up in an aircraft of his own in southern Jordan, down near the Gulf of Aqaba, and had spotted some miles away part of the squadron of Israeli F-16s on the way in. He had a copilot with him and had said to him, "My God, I think they are on a mission into Iraq." He may have even said "after a reactor" because there had been some concern this might happen.

In any event he radioed the ground control staff to advise the air control center in Amman that he had spotted X number of Israeli fighters at very low level, which was part of the signal that this wasn't a reconnaissance mission. And he instructed them to inform immediately the Iraqi Minister of Defense of the sighting. Somehow there was confusion and the message never got to Amman air control and thus was never passed to the Iraqis. So that is one of those little ironic footnotes of history.

Q: Did King Hussein ever imply to you or say to you that he thought the United States was implicated in this, or was he savvy enough to understand what this relationship between the United States and Israel was, which was not a client/patron relationship by any means?

VIETS: He was much too sophisticated to make that allegation. He knew very well Israeli concerns regarding Iraqi nuclear ambitions and he also knew Iraqi concerns about Israeli nuclear capacity. But the street, the bazaar, I think, saw it quite differently, and believed there had to have been collusion. And I think to this day there are many people who believe that the US knowingly provided the Israelis with satellite photos, etc, of this Iraqi target. My recollection is that Mr. Pollard, the famous Israeli spy, did indeed provide them with quite a bit of information relating to that Iraqi enterprise, but I don't know the details of that.

Q: Well, you said your arrival couldn't have been more inopportune for opening up a dialogue. This mess must have set you back some in attempts to sew a few seeds.

VIETS: In the Middle East one can almost use the metaphor for the sea...the tide comes in, the tide goes out. You simply know that every X number of weeks or months or days or hours there is going to be a crisis. You just move from one crisis to another. And you know these things heat up and become very passionate and tense and then subside to be replaced by something new. So I understood that this was today's crisis and one had to keep it in check...

Q: Based on your time in Tel Aviv, your time before you went out and arriving and talking to people in the Embassy, what was your mind set of King Hussein?

VIETS: One must start by observing that the Israelis felt they knew Hussein much better than any other Arab leader. They certainly had ample time to get to know him over the

years. They had a number of psychiatrists and psychologists and strategists who were constantly updating profiles on him and on his immediate advisors.

But to answer your question, I felt quite confident that because of my time in Israel I had a leg up, as it were, over almost anybody else in the area because I had lived cheek by jaw with the Israelis and personally knew very well all of the political leadership. Remember, Begin was still in power in 1981 and I knew him and all of his principal cabinet people very well. I also knew the Israeli military leadership very well. So I had this great advantage of being able to sit down with the King, and often it was a daily meeting, sometimes twice a day, and discuss with him in detail the personalities who were responsible for whatever was going on that particular day. And believe me there are events that transpired every day between the two countries that just don't get into the newspapers for one reason or another. Each requires sitting back and taking a deep breath and deciding what you are going to do about them, if anything.

So throughout my period in Jordan I found it enormously beneficial to be able to say, "Well, I think, your Majesty, this is being said or done for the following reasons. Here is my analysis." Our present ambassador in Jordan, Ambassador Roger Harrison, two or three years before going to Jordan had served in Israel as well as the political counselor, and I remember his saying to me that his Israeli experience was extremely helpful for him. Of course, my immediate predecessor, Nick Veliotes, had also been the DCM in Israel.

So the three of us had this Israeli experience. I suppose if I were drawing up a list of qualifications for ambassador to any of the so-called confrontation countries with Israel, I would probably say that I think an assignment in Israel was not only advantageous but perhaps even imperative. I felt the same way about serving in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. You had to have been there to understand the Cold War.

Q: What was your assessment of what was driving the King? Where did he want to come out?

VIETS: One must first note that Jordan is blessed by having on its western border a juggernaut of military and economic power, the superpower in the area. Remember, Jordan has the longest border with Israel of any of its neighbors. This border also has been the one most carefully policed and the one in which the fewest incidents have taken place, since the end of the 1948 War.

Then on the other eastern border are the Syrians, neighbors some would find not the most pleasing of societies to have sitting at your back.

On another border are the Iraqis, a colossus of a country with a tremendous population, highly educated, the most industrialized country in the Middle East, second greatest oil reserves of any country in the world, with a tremendous military establishment.

And then there are the Saudis on the southern front. And here you had tensions between the royal families dating back to...

Q: Hashemites versus the Saudis.

VIETS: Yes, that is right. And on the far side, across the Gulf of Aqaba, are the Egyptians. And there sits this tiny little Kingdom of Jordan with a small population, almost no natural resources, that survives by its wits. Jordan has a well-educated upper class. Many people in our aid agencies and in international aid agencies think that Jordan stands among the first two or three countries in the world over the years in its sensible use of foreign assistance. It was a model for many, many years. A place where you got things done with minor infusions of capital.

Sitting astride all this is a man who became King while still a teenager. He has lived through several wars and lost half of the territory that the kingdom claimed, called the West Bank, after the 1967 War. He also lost direct Arab access to Jerusalem, the third most holy place in the Islamic world. As a descendant of the Prophet this probably has caused him greater pain than anything else in his life.

Over the years the King replaced Jordan's ties with the British, which, of course, in the beginning were imposed ties, to a new focus on the United States. For many years Jordan has viewed the United States as its principal protector and benefactor and best friend. The King has dealt with every President since Eisenhower. He may now be the longest reigning monarch in the world, if not, he must be number two. So he has seen it all and dealt with everybody. The de Gaulles, the Macmillans, the Khrushchevs, etc.

I think he accepted long ago the reality of the state of Israel, that it wasn't going to be blown away or pushed into the sea. He was always way ahead of all of his compatriots and fellow leaders in the area. Shortly after the 1967 War he initiated personal contact with Israeli political leaders. This is not the time or the place to go into the details of this, but I will simply say that hundreds of hours of conversation have taken place over the last 20 odd years.

I think starting with the Johnson administration, the King became increasingly concerned that for a variety of domestic political reasons as well as perhaps for foreign policy reasons, the United States increasingly began to favor Israel in its overall Middle Eastern political relationships. He was wise enough to know there wasn't really very much that he could do about that, but it certainly didn't preclude him from being deeply concerned by it. He also to this day accepts the view that the United States continues, as it has from the beginning, to hold the key to a final resolution of the confrontation between the Arab world and the state of Israel. And I think one can fairly say the principal policies that he has articulated over the years have been directed toward the sole objective of encouraging a continued American involvement as the main intermediary, or mediator, in the confrontation. He has not permitted his unhappy perception of an increasing Washington bias in favor of Israel to cloud the reality that Jordan and the other Arab nations need U.S.

involvement as the principal diplomatic catalyst in the search for a solution to the confrontation.

Q: This brings up something. I have talked to other people who have served in Jordan. You were saying that you would often see the King once or twice a day. Obviously he had been through a number of ambassadors and knew how to use them. He had his own staff so how was he using you?

VIETS: We now get into very personal and sensitive areas and I think the only way I want to answer this is that kings are no different than anybody else. They need one or more people with whom they can sit alone and discuss issues openly without fear of seeing it appear in the newspaper or being used by their enemies. They need listening posts. They need people to use as sounding boards for ideas. They need to share confidences. When they are down they need someone to hold their hand and they need someone to share their exaltation when something has gone right. Kings, I think, by the nature of the institution, are often more isolated than presidents are. It is very difficult for a monarch to know who his friend is and who is simply there to gain whatever advantage he can from the relationship. In a democracy there are institutions and compensatory balances, etc. in a system that winnow out much of that, but in a monarchy there isn't.

Q: It is the only game in town. Whereas in a democracy you can opt for party A or party B or perhaps something else.

VIETS: As I say, this really does touch on personal relations and I don't think, for purposes of this it is...all I can say is that one spent hundreds of hours with this man discussing not just simply foreign policy differences and problems, but the state of the world, the state of his own country, his neighbors, family, etc.

Q: Now let me toss a question and let you figure out how to answer it. Here you are the paid representative of the United States. You get into this and know that back in Washington anything dealing with Israel leaks like hell. How did you feel on your reporting? You must have decided what you would and would not report based on where it was going, etc. Can you talk a little about this?

VIETS: Well, you said it better than I can. I think that any ambassador who is worth his salt must be able to develop a relationship with a head of government or his cabinet ministers, in which there are conversations relating to the most sensitive aspects of that person's personal life, private life or public life. You have to make a decision about which part of this is important to policy makers in your own government to know about, and which part of it simply goes to the grave with you. I am sure that every ambassador who has developed those sorts of relationships every night when he goes to bed has this on his mind.

Of course there is highly selective reporting always going on. I don't think you have that relationship very long if the reporting isn't selective because, as you said, there are plenty of people who always find reasons to leak it.

I have to say in defense of the institution of the State Department and the White House, that there are very, very few instances of sensitive reporting I sent home in which there was ever any blow back--or at least traceable blow back. We had in those days, and I am sure it continues, some highly compartmented reporting categories in which distribution was very, very limited, very few people saw it. I have no complaints to make that people didn't honor their commitments to this sensitivity.

Q: Along with the King, who were some of the other players?

VIETS: In the period that I was there, 1981-84, there were really three principal players whom I saw very frequently...the King; the Crown Prince, his younger brother; and the head of the military forces, a man by the name of Zaid bin Shakir. He is now the Prime Minister. I had very little to do with Jordanian prime ministers during this period. The King preferred that the channel of communication be directly between him and me and the business that normally would be done with the prime minister was accomplished with one of those three men whom I just listed.

Our present ambassador sees much more of the prime minister than he does the King. So things change depending on who is the prime minister. And as democracy has matured in Jordan, the prime minister takes on more and more power and there is more and more need for the American Ambassador to deal with him. He also deals much more with the parliament than I did. The parliament in my day was not much more than a rubber stamp group. It was not an important segment of my job.

Q: In your conversations with these people, I am sure they were asking your evaluation of Begin, and in particular, Sharon. How did you feel about them at this time? We had gone through this security zone business which the Israelis had grabbed...by the way I had an interview with Sam Hart who talks very highly about you being the one person around who was willing to raise his voice in saying that this was a land grab at the time that the Israelis moved into the security zone. What were you imparting to the Jordanians about this? It turned out to be a rather lethal combination of Sharon or a weakening Begin or something.

VIETS: Yes, there was a weakening of Begin's position at that time and Sharon was certainly on the ascendancy. I felt, even while I was in Israel, that Sharon was frankly a very dangerous figure. Dangerous for Israel and dangerous for his neighbors, and perhaps even dangerous for the world. I felt even stronger as time went on in Jordan and I watched Sharon's maneuvering as Defense Minister and as I received intelligence information of what he was up too, I became very, very concerned. I certainly imparted that sense of concern without imparting the gory details to the King and to his immediate colleagues.

Q: Sam Lewis was still in Tel Aviv. Did you feel you understood what the action was in Israel, or because Alexander Haig was in Washington and Sam Lewis had much more a direct line and you had this affinity towards Israeli...?

VIETS: Well, remember Haig was gone within the year.

Q: But the year was a very important year.

VIETS: Yeah. I am afraid my memory is a little dim on the specifics of what we were going through at that time. My memory becomes sharper at the time George Shultz picks up his role as Secretary and then ultimately launches the famous Reagan plan in September, 1982. I will go to my grave thinking it is one of the greater diplomatic triumphs of the post war era of American diplomacy. Unfortunately, it foundered, but it was a triumph because it got through a very biased bureaucracy and the President got behind it. We simply didn't follow through on it as well as we might have for reasons we can discuss as we go along. But it was a tremendously well-constructed diplomatic effort which had great promise.

Q: My dates are getting hazy here. The really major event, of course, was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. That took place on Haig's watch. In fact allegedly there was a wink or a nod when Sharon...When did that happen?
VIETS: That was in the early summer of 1982 because the peace initiative came in September.

Q: Were you...?

VIETS: I was absolutely devastated by that invasion.

Q: We were having an Israel which was saying that if anybody does anything they will take threats. In other words it looked like this was something, in hindsight, that was obviously a trumped up event...an attempted assassination in London of the ambassador started this thing. There was no cause and effect.

VIETS: Sharon decided it was time.

Q: Had our Embassy in Tel Aviv, in your analyses and everybody else's who were looking at this thing, felt, "Oh my God, here is a gun that is loaded and cocked and is going to go off?"

VIETS: I think there was no great secret that Sharon had been promoting the idea, the concept, for quite some time. That sooner or later, preferably sooner from his point of view, the Israelis had to go into Lebanon and once and for all take care of the problem of the PLO operating inside Lebanon. And along the way to remind the Syrians that the Israelis remained the boss of that part of the world. I don't recall that there were any major

intelligence indicators that the invasion was going to take place up until immediately after the assassination attempt, and then you began to see reports. The Israel military is as good or better than anybody else at having contingency plans filed away in the safes of their headquarters, and I am sure the Sharon plan in various incarnations had been developed over the years and was ready and waiting. Sharon decided and persuaded the Prime Minister and the cabinet that this was the excuse (the abortive assassination) they needed.

In fact, you may recall the principal argument for launching it was that Israel had to neutralize the border; that the PLO would continue to threaten Israeli border settlements with rocket attacks and the odd infiltration effort by guerrillas. Over the years this had resulted in the deaths of innocent people and children.

In fact, Phil Habib had negotiated a year earlier, in Lebanon, a cease-fire along that border and my recollection is that it had held to the letter. So Sharon's "excuse" for launching the invasion because it was necessary to purge that border of all these dangerous people who were throwing bombs over the wire fences is pure baloney. The record simply doesn't sustain it.

And secondly, as we now know, Sharon sold the Prime Minister and the cabinet on the fact that this would be a very limited operation. He insisted he had no intention of coming in contact with the Syrians and certainly had no intention of going all the way to Beirut. In fact, he did. They did precisely that.

I think for those of us who were out there it was a very, very bad moment of our lives. God knows it was much worse for the people in Lebanon who were the victims.

Q: Could you talk about how you felt when you got this news?

VIETS: The first recollection that I have is a midnight phone call from the Queen of Jordan, daughter of Najeeb Halaby, a distinguished American citizen. She just stripped my skin off..."How can I serve a government which is doing anything to stop this carnage and this terrible war?" I remember giving it right back to her. Firstly, I thought she had no right personally to castigate me in this form. And secondly, she was speaking from total ignorance about what I was doing in trying to stop it.

The King called me the next morning and asked that I come up to see him. He closed the door and started laughing. He said he had been listening in on an extension phone and had heard the whole conversation. I guess I should not go into what he said about it. But it was not an easy time. There were demonstrations against our Embassy and threats against our people.

Q: It was sort of salami tactics in that...I have just finished a long series of interviews with Bob Dillon where he notes that Sharon and the Israelis were saying they were going up to such and such a line and stop and actually we saw them 20 miles beyond that line.

This went on and on. Did this unfold gradually or did you immediately realize they were going the whole way?

VIETS: My recollection is that it was happening so fast that one was stunned by the blatancy of the whole thing. It was as if there were no constraints, no restrictions whatsoever, placed on that army. I can still recall those terrible moments when the Israeli artillery units sat up on the hills overlooking Beirut and 24 hours a day just lobbed shells and rockets into that city of totally unprotected people.

I think from a personal perspective it was even worse for me because I realized what we were seeing at that point was in fact the first time that the most modern technology of war, those horrible weapons of war that were not available to the third world, were being used against defenseless populations. I was just horrified by what I saw on television. It seemed to me that as these terrible weapons became available to more and more armies and irresponsible governments the world would be witness to carnage and devastation of heretofore unknown dimension.

This is a slight aside, but at this time I got into terrible difficulties on Capitol Hill. I came home shortly after the end of the war. I was going back and forth between Amman and Washington with considerable frequency in those days, and whenever I did I always made a point, as many ambassadors do, of spending a certain amount of time on Capitol Hill going around seeing key senators and representatives and staffers, to brief them on what was going on, offer my own views, etc.

One of the people who I often went to see was Senator Rudy Boschwitz, now defeated Senator from Minnesota, a Jewish member of the Senate who had a very strong interest in the Middle East. While he was very pro-Israeli, he also understood there certain aspects of our interests in the Middle East that even transcended our/his affections of the state of Israel. I remember sitting in his office, this was right at the end of the war, and saying to him that I thought it was going to be a long, long time before those of us who had been witness to all of this could forget the inhumanity of the Israeli army's attack on the city of Beirut itself, which had absolutely no military significance whatsoever. I remember Rudy Boschwitz rising out of his seat and putting his finger under my nose saying, "You get out of this office. And you never cross the threshold of this office again. I will never tolerate hearing any American Ambassador or any representative of the United States government ever using the world "inhumane" in connection with the state of Israel. Get out of here."

Well, I sat there and gave him back exactly what he had given me with a little chapter and verse on the number of innocent casualties, men, women, children, grandparents, etc., who had been killed and maimed, and then got up and left. I have not seen him again to this day, but I know from others on the Hill that he went around really doing a job on me concerning my perceived lack of loyalty to Israel.

Q: During this time was there any thought of the Jordanians jumping in or anything like that?

VIETS: No. The last time the Jordanians jumped in (1967) was also the final time. This war was an insane military operation and thank God everybody saw it for what it was and did what they could to contain it.

Q: How about the Syrians?

VIETS: There was always the potential of this exploding into a regional war and the potential had various scenarios inherent to it. You could have had an uprising in Israel in the occupied territories in which large numbers of settlers, for example, might have been killed and maimed. You could have had the lost of American life and damage to American interests and installations in countries on the periphery. We certainly were concerned about such an event in Jordan, and so was the Jordanian government. I remember we had very heavy security around our Embassy and staff housing units, provided by the Jordanian government. That was true throughout the area.

Q: The two camps of Palestinians, Shatila and Sabra, men and women were left and with the collusion of the Israelis, Christian militia were allowed to go in there and it turned into a massacre. How did that play in Jordan and what was our Embassy's reaction in Israel to this?

VIETS: The press reports led to a feeling of abhorrence that this could happen and led to all kinds of contrasts with Nazi atrocities during World War II, etc. I'm being a little hesitant as I am responding to your question because my recollection is that all we really had in the first days after this were press reports. We really didn't have any inside information on exactly what had happened. We knew something terrible had happened and while there might not have been any doubt in the minds of people "in the streets" in the Arab world that this was a direct result of Israeli collusion with Christian elements in Beirut, I think most of us were a little reluctant to jump to that conclusion without further evidence to support the fact. We simply didn't have it at that point.

My own view is that the total story of what went wrong has not yet been made public to this day. I was told shortly thereafter that we had intercepted some communications between Israeli units and the Phalange, which we deep-sixed because we felt it would make the Israelis even more culpable than the Israelis' own investigation suggested. But I have never heard the tapes and have never seen them.

Q: Just to get a feel for the times, was this whole war on daily TV in Jordan?

VIETS: Yes. It was the first war to use modern weaponry and to be covered with such intense press interest. You remember, for its size the city of Jerusalem has more journalists from all over the world than any other city in the world. Wars attract journalists like flies. So there was tremendous coverage of that war and nothing has seen its equivalent since.

Q: Today is March 11, 1993 and this is a continuing interview with Ambassador Richard N. Viets. Dick let's talk a little about the Shultz plan.

VIETS: I first became aware of what we call the Reagan Initiative in August of 1982. In fact, George Shultz was its principal architect, and I will always believe this effort was one of George Shultz' finest hours, if not his finest hour. Despite the fact that the plan never went anywhere, it had all the elements that seemed to me at the time, and still does, to provide a fair and durable end to the confrontation between the Arab world and the state of Israel.

I first heard of it when I was on holiday in England with my family. I had taken a house for a month in the Cotswolds. We no sooner got settled in and had taken our first amble through the Cotswold hills when I was informed by our governess Mary Luke that our Embassy in London was trying urgently to reach me. I called in and was told to come into London immediately because there was a secure line call I had to make to Assistant Secretary Veliotes. Well, I sensed immediately that that was the end of my holiday.

I drove to the train station and went into London and got Nick on the phone. He said, "I am going to make a very secret visit to Amman this weekend. I will be arriving in London Saturday morning and the King is sending a special airplane to pick me up and I want you to go with me. I will explain it all when I see you. No one is to know we are in Amman except the King and the Prime Minister. So do not advise your Embassy of this. We will not be staying at your residence, etc., etc."

Q: This was when?

VIETS: This would have been in August, 1983. I think the plan was announced in September.

At the appointed hour I showed up at Heathrow. I remember taking a taxi to Terminal 3 where we were to meet. I got out of the taxi and, my God, who was the first person I should bump into but the administrative counselor of our Embassy in Amman. He saw me with baggage and wanted to know right away whether I was going back to Amman. I said, "No, no, I am going on a hot weekend to the south of France." I could just see the look on his face..."This son of a gun Viets has some tootsie he is secretly meeting." And, sure enough, he went back to Amman with a big story that he had seen the Ambassador on his way to a weekend in the south of France. So, it took some time to live that down.

In any case, Nick and I joined forces at Heathrow and were flown out on a very plush private jet belonging to His Majesty, and over champagne and smoked salmon Nick first briefed me on the plan. That literally was the first I had heard of it. I knew something had been going on that required certain people in NEA to work very long hours, but I really did not know what was afoot.

Nick's job, as Assistant Secretary, and as ex-Ambassador to Jordan, led the Secretary to ask him to personally brief the King on the plan and to attempt to secure the King's support of the plan. We had several sessions with the King...we had a couple of days in Amman. On the whole the King subscribed to the plan with alacrity. There were one or two questions he had.

Q: In essence, what was the initial plan proposing?

VIETS: In essence it involved the US calling a conference of the confrontation states with Israel based on the famous UN Resolutions 242 and 338 requiring Israel to withdraw from the bulk of the occupied territories. It involved a series of telescoped time steps leading to Israeli withdrawal and to elections, etc. The final status of the territory that the Israelis withdrew from was to be decided in negotiations to be concluded within 5 years. In the interim the Palestinians were to establish and implement a self-governing authority.

We took the stand that while the United States was against an independent state, it would support whatever the parties themselves agreed to. In recent years we have backed away from that second part. Now we are solidly against an independent state--period. We no longer say that we will support whatever others agree to. This is only one of many erosions of the Shultz policy that has taken place in the last two administrations.

In any case, Nick flew back to Washington and I flew back to England to pick up my family and take them back to Amman. Obviously I had to be in Amman to follow up those initial consultations with the King. The plan was announced and our Ambassador in Israel, Sam Lewis, forecast very accurately when he learned of it, that it would go nowhere with the Israelis because they had not been apprized beforehand of it. They were not informed until just before the announcement of the plan. They had no hand in developing the plan. For the Israelis this was the first time in some years that they had not received notice over everybody else of a U.S. policy initiative in the region. They had almost always managed, as a result of having advance notice, to shape, to form and modify whatever the policy the moment was to accommodate their own needs--or perceived needs.

Begin immediately said no way to the Reagan initiative. He could see the handwriting on the wall. This would mean ultimately getting out of most of his beloved Judea and Samaria, and he wanted nothing to do with it. The Israelis put up a tremendous public relations campaign against the initiative. They pulled out all the stops in Israel and with their friends here in the halls of Congress and with the American Jewish community. I think it is fair to say they plain buffaloed the Reagan administration. The Administration got scared and in consequence walked away from its own plan--a plan many of us considered to be by all odds the fairest and most comprehensive, most balanced, most creative diplomatic framework thus far conceived to resolve this long festering confrontation. Those of us out in the field were left pretending that we still backed it, but in fact there was no muscle put behind it. It just died almost stillborn. It lived for a very short period of time.

I believe in retrospect that this failure was a great shame. Look at what has happened in the interim in the region in terms of the costs to human life in Israel and amongst the Palestinians. The toll has been terrible, to say nothing of the instability that continues to exist in the region because of the absence of a settlement.

Before we go any further, Stuart, I want to get on the record one of those bizarre instances that rarely become a matter of public record, but in fact have a very important bearing on relationships. In this instance I want to talk a little about the personal relationship between Secretary of State Shultz and King Hussein.

About two or three months before Secretary Haig resigned and George Shultz was appointed Secretary of State, George Shultz came to Amman with his wife on a brief visit. He was at that time head of Bechtel. I remember he came with one of the senior Bechtel vice presidents. He had known King Hussein in the past, I think through Bechtel, which had done some work in Jordan over the years, perhaps he had also known him in one of his earlier government positions. He considered the King a friend.

As I mentioned in one of our earlier taping sessions, George Shultz was number one on my personal list of potential Secretaries of State. I recall he was allegedly very disappointed when he wasn't named in the first Reagan cabinet in place of General Haig. I had never met Mr. Shultz. When I heard he was in town I immediately called him at his hotel and arranged to go over and to pay my respects on him and to invite him to lunch. I spent quite a lot of time with him and his wife. Of course the first thing I did was to inquire if there was anything I could do to expedite his meeting with the King. He let me know politely but firmly that he didn't need any help from me or anybody else. The King knew he was in town and he was sure the phone was going to ring. His office had sent advance word to the Palace of his impending visit.

A couple of days went by and I was wining and dining the Shultzes and still no word. I think he stayed in town three days and the phone never rang. He left Amman in a major huff. He never heard from the King or from the royal palace. On two or three occasions I said, "I am certain the King doesn't know you are here because he is an enormously polite man and if he knew you were here I am sure you would hear from him. Let me just call and find out." Well, he didn't want me to make any calls.

As soon as he left I happened to see the King, who had been down during this entire period at his palace in Aqaba for a long weekend with his family. I said to him, "I think somebody has made a bad mistake. George Shultz was here and spent three or four days waiting for word from the palace to call on you and he never got any word. He left in a hell of a huff and his nose was really out of joint. What happened?" He said, "George Shultz was here? Why in the hell didn't anybody tell me?" Well, once again it was one of those dreadful instances when staffs decide that the lord and master shouldn't be bothered with some businessman.

I always felt that this perceived slight negatively affected George Shultz' future relationship with King Hussein. I honestly am trying to remember as I am talking whether I ever told Shultz later when he became Secretary of State that the King had never been told he was there. I must have, but I can't recall the conversation. I do know that the relationship never was very warm. Shultz is a man of great personal pride and dignity and ego and does not like to be slighted, even by a king.

I don't want to use this particular tape to cite chapter and verse as to why I feel as strongly as I do on this, but it affected their relationship, that I am convinced of. And that in turn affected some policy decisions with respect to Jordan. As I said at the outset, this is one of those rinky dink things that forms little pieces of history.

Q: It is an interesting thing, you said this about Shultz. I don't know the man and have never dealt with him and there hasn't been a great deal of psychoanalysis of Shultz ...Alexander Haig gets all the psychoanalysis of that period, but I have never heard this strong sense of self with Shultz.

VIETS: Very, very much so. In my view, and I am probably almost alone in this, George Shultz in the first years as his time as Secretary State harbored, I believe, ...and again I do not want to cite why, because it is and enormously personal insight which affects somebody else...I think he harbored the hope that somehow he might find himself as a presidential nominee at the end of the Reagan administration. I believe he strongly felt there was no one else in the government at that time who had the vast experience at cabinet level that he had. And, of course, he was absolutely right. Treasury, Labor, OMB, Chairman of a huge international contracting firm...he had done it all. A man of considerable gifts. But a very substantial ego would be required, I guess, to survive in the fast lane and do as well as he did. He also was a man of considerable temper. You wanted to be very careful when you saw the color begin to rise in his neck. He knew how to sound off.

Q: Back to the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. When would this be?

VIETS: The date would be summer of 1983.

Q: And it was essentially over in the fall of 1983?

VIETS: Yes, I think so. I should have brushed up on the chronology of this.

Q: Well, the exact chronology is not all that important. It had happened, the Israelis were withdrawing, the Palestinians were getting out...

VIETS: Well, you remember they didn't get out for a long time and this was part of the problem. As time went on the Israelis began to suffer increasing casualties from truck bombs, car bombs, assassinations, etc. and life became intolerable for the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) in Lebanon. They finally decided they had had enough and got out. Of course

it was about that time George Shultz got on his horse and decided that he would negotiate the famous Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty.

I have one major recollection of that period. The Secretary flew out to Cairo immediately prior to launching his shuttle diplomacy between Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Beirut to negotiate the treaty. Immediately prior to that he went to Cairo where he summoned seven or eight of his ambassadors in the region, and I was one of them. The reason for summons was he wanted our collective judgment on what was needed in the treaty--and what was possible to attain. With the exception of Sam Lewis, who was still our ambassador in Israel, the rest of us to a greater or lesser extent told the Secretary--either very bluntly or very diplomatically--that he was embarking on a useless and dangerous venture. We all already knew essentially the dimensions of what he wanted in the treaty. His primary goal was to normalize relationships between Lebanon and Israel. Most of us believed it would be a big, big mistake to abandon what had been US policy for many, many years, of seeking a comprehensive agreement. To negotiate treaties piecemeal with Israel would surely guarantee an imbalance in the final result--or so we thought. As we went around the table with these warnings, as I say, one ambassador in particular, our ambassador to Syria, spoke to the Secretary about as bluntly as anyone I have ever heard.

Q: This was Bob Paganelli.

VIETS: Yes, Bob Paganelli, who if he has not been interviewed, should be.

Q: Yes, I want to get a hold of him.

VIETS: Bob almost was fired on the spot, I think. But in any case I could see the color rising in the Secretary's neck and face as more of us spoke our pieces. He didn't like it at all. At the end he just stood up and slapped his papers together and abruptly observed that he guessed he had heard all he wanted from us and stalked out of the room. I was subsequently told by a very close friend who was working on the Secretary's staff that later that day Mr. Shultz had told him he should have fired us all on the spot. In his view, all of us had been bought out by the Arabs or we couldn't see the forest for the trees.

Alas, the treaty that he ultimately negotiated was an appalling invasion of Lebanese sovereignty. It included permitting the Israelis to build and maintain monitoring stations on Mt. Hermon and to conduct over flights of Lebanon--and many other kinds of fundamental infringements of Lebanese sovereignty. The Lebanese ran for cover--the Syrians provided a good deal of that cover--and the treaty blew up in George Shultz' face. Although none of us ever had the effrontery to remind him, I think he got some pretty sound advise on that famous day in Cairo.

Q: Dealing with your staff in Jordan. Here you are watching what is happening every day on TV. From a practical point of view what the Israelis were doing was pretty outrageous. They were bombing essentially an open city. Lots of people were getting killed. It was not a justified invasion. But at the same time Israel has a special close

relationship with us and you had served there. Did you find that you had to kind of damp down the feelings and reporting?

VIETS: Yes. I had two problems as ambassador in that particular domain. One was personal feelings. At various points during the three years I was there my staff would get very excited, emotionally involved over various Israeli incursions into Lebanon or over flights over Jordan, etc. I have to say that I think as in any environment...I remember when I was posted in India I was there for two wars with the Pakistanis. One picked up the Indian cudgels in no small measure, particularly if one had no responsibility in the hierarchy of the Embassy it is easy to become excessively involved in emotional terms. Certainly a number of the younger staff people at the Embassy got pretty exercised over what they perceived as immoral acts by the Israelis, if that is the right characterization. But they became even more exercised over their own country's policies on these matters, which they were certain were highly prejudiced in favor of Israel. So one had constantly to attempt to control, tap down, that feeling within the Embassy. And it pervaded the entire mission. It wasn't simply the substantive officers who were involved.

The other problem that went hand in hand with that was that a great deal of what I was doing particularly with the King, was being reported in very restricted cable channels. There was a paranoia in the Secretary's office that much of what we were doing simply should not be shared with anybody. So I, as ambassador, had another problem of trying to keep my Embassy generally informed about what was going on and at the same time not revealing some of the more sensitive aspects of it.

I found this more difficult to deal with than I did the emotional side of things because temperamentally I am one who takes the view that while I accept that there is nothing wrong with embracing the concept of "need to know," I tend to give a broader interpretation of this than many of my colleagues did. I believe you get more out of people and better performance out of people the more you confide in them. You simply have to make a determination as to the degree of trust that you can put in people and then let it go at that. I recall there were many times in meetings with substantive officers when I told them things that George Shultz and company would have been unhappy that I was revealing. But nobody ever leaked it. These people were mature, disciplined officers and I felt they should be treated as such.

Q: Well, there is also the problem too, that somebody might speak out of turn if they don't know what is going on. Well, when did you leave Jordan?

VIETS: I left Jordan in August, 1984.

Q: Were there any developments of the aftermath that we haven't covered?

VIETS: No, I don't think so. We just kept drilling away at trying to find ways to keep the diplomacy of the hour from being torpedoed by some foolish action by one party or the other. You had, of course, during that period the Iran-Iraq war which became an

increasingly important part of my dialogue with the King. The Jordanian role during the early eighties with the Iraqis was a very critical one.

Q: In what way?

VIETS: Aqaba was the principal access port for everything going into and out of Iraq. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to a much lesser degree. Aqaba was the principal port available to the Iraqis. During those years the Jordanian economy became very closely tied to Iraq. And the King became a very close confidant of Saddam Hussein. The King felt strongly that the war must not result in an Iranian victory because of various geopolitical upheavals implicit in an Iranian triumph. Islamic fundamentalism is not a creature of the nineties. It has been around for some time and this was the King's principal nightmare. The King, more than any other foreign leader, I think, was responsible for the reopening of a dialogue during this period between the United States and Iraq. You remember after the 1973 war Iraq broke diplomatic relations with the U.S. Kissinger finally managed to get an interests office opened up.

Q: But there was never very much contact.

VIETS: No, but through the King's good offices we were able to build up quite a substantial presence in Baghdad. I think the King was very persuasive in the issue of opening up an intelligence relationship with the Iraqis which became very, very important in the prosecution of the war.

Q: Satellite photography and that type of thing.

VIETS: Yes.

Q: We were giving that information to the Iraqis to help them.

VIETS: That is right. So that part of my job became very interesting and quite important. Also in that period we worked very hard at trying to develop a Jordanian rapid deployment force which could be used on a moment's notice anywhere in the region. During that period the Jordanians had the best trained special forces in the whole region, exclusive of the Israelis. We worked very closely with them in training exercises, etc. and tried to get through the Congress in the so-called black budget funding to establish a quick reaction force.

Q: This is the budget that does not appear or is covered in other areas...a sort of hidden budget.

VIETS: ...funding for this force. Alas, the Israelis decided that it was a bad idea and through their surrogates in the Congress, killed it. Again, if that force had in fact been funded, I think there is a good possibility we would not have had the famous Desert Storm.

Q: When you were talking about doing a special force, what sort of eventualities were you looking at?

VIETS: Everything from coup efforts to border incursions to mob scenes that local government couldn't handle to outbreaks of regional strife. Remember, the Cold War was going on at this point and there were plenty of people who felt the Russians were manipulating forces in the area and looking for ways to destabilize regimes, etc. How much of this in retrospect was real and how much of this was a figment of our imagination...

Q: But it was certainly how we were operating, particularly in the Middle East because there it was very volatile. Talking about the Iraq-Iran problem, although it had already happened by the time you had arrived, did King Hussein ever question Saddam Hussein getting involved in that mess?

VIETS: He may have, I simply don't remember it. By the time I got there the war was in full swing. Saddam was taking a hell of a pounding from the Iranians. There were tens of thousands of people being killed on both sides. It was a carnage and the King simply wanted to get it over with. But he also wanted to ensure Baghdad had won the war or at a minimum had left the battlefield with Iran so severely mauled that it would not pose a future threat to the stability of the area.

Q: You left when?

VIETS: In 1984.

Q: What were you planning when you left?

VIETS: I came back and was told that I would be getting another embassy but it would be at least a year before that happened. I was offered a range of things to do. There were two things that I wanted to do: (1) I had not had an hour of French language training and I wanted to improve my French, so I spent eight or ten weeks working on my French fluency; (2) I wanted to do a stint on the Board of Examiners which examines new candidates coming into the Service. I had felt for many years that this was an obligation on the part of all senior officers of any merit to go over to BEX for 3-4 months and to examine new entrants. From personal experience I did not believe the quality of people serving on the Board was very high.

Q: It was a parking place. I speak as someone who served there for a year as chairman of the consular cone.

VIETS: Well, I did it and persuaded two or three other people to do it of my vintage and class.

Then I was offered our Embassy in Morocco. Just before that was to be announced the immediate deputy of the then chief of protocol, Mrs. Walter Annenberg, got her to go to Ronald Reagan and persuade him that he was the better candidate. So he went to Morocco and I stayed home.

I then worked for several months with a brilliant Foreign Service officer named Charles Bray, who also was back and between assignments, and with two or three other people on a major cost cutting program for the Department. At that point we had been told that the Department's budget was going to be very severely reduced in the coming year. So we did a vacuum cleaner type analysis of the Department's budget, both domestic and foreign, and made a series of recommendations to the Secretary.

In the course of that, Mr. Shultz called me in one day and said he wanted me to go to South Africa as our next Ambassador. There was a political appointee in South Africa at the time who was doing everything to hang on as long as possible, but the Administration had finally decided to get rid of him. I had ten months to get ready. So I spent one of the more enjoyable ten months of my career preparing for that assignment. Reading everything that I could, traveling everywhere, seeing everyone I could. I got on the speaker circuit for the State Department...this was 1986 when the Congress was giving the administration a very tough time on its sanctions policy in South Africa. So I made a long series of swings around the United States going as far as Alaska, speaking on behalf of the Administration's South African policy.

The day before my nomination was to go to the Hill at a meeting in the White House on the sanctions bill (it was pending in the Senate and was to be voted on in the next several days and the administration looked as if it were going to lose), Don Regan, who was then the President's Chief of Staff, decided on the spur of the moment that one way to defang opposition in the Senate would be to send up the name of a black American to be our Ambassador to South Africa. He thought this would take the wind out of the sails of the opposition. So I was called in and informed literally the day before my name was to go into nomination, that I wasn't going.

But at the same moment the Secretary told me that I had been such a good soldier (he was aware of the earlier Morocco fiasco), that he had talked to the President about sending me to Lisbon. The President apparently had a personal friend he intended to send to Portugal but the Secretary said the President agreed that because of what I had been done for the Administration that I should get first crack at the job. He said he had to have an answer in 24 hours.

I decided even while he was offering the job that I should get out. It seemed to me there was some message from on high here. I had really wanted to go to South Africa and had poured a lot into it. I was personally very disappointed that this had not come about. I felt I should get out while I was still young enough to do a number of other things with my life. I was 56 at that point. But I said I would discuss it with my wife and let him know the next day. I didn't tell him what my personal inclination was.

I took my wife to dinner that evening and told her and said that I thought I should get out. She made it abundantly clear to me that I was not leaving, that I would do this assignment, that I had spent most of my life preparing for senior positions in the Foreign Service, that by my own admission the Service had lost an awful lot of good people over the last several years and those of us who were still around should stay around. I knew from the tone and tenor of her remarks that I would be making a great mistake not to follow her advise!

Q: Your wife was a very powerful lady.

VIETS: In retrospect I wish I had followed my own advice because...I will not go into it on this tape. But I said yes the next day to the Secretary and my name was soon thereafter sent up in nomination. I started studying Portuguese and getting ready. And then Senator Jesse Helms entered my life. For one solid year he put a hold on my nomination. I think I am in the Guinness Book of Records. I was voted out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to the floor three separate times by huge margins. Each time my name got to the floor Senator Helms put a hold on it.

On the next to the last day of the Congressional session just before Christmas in 1987, George Shultz got into his car and went up to Capitol Hill and went in to see the Senate majority leader, Senator Byrd, and said, "This is an outrage. This is one of the best men we have. Etc., etc., etc. And we need him in Portugal. I want him voted out before the Congress goes home and the session ends." Senator Byrd said, so I was subsequently told, "Mr. Secretary, all you have to do is walk down that hall to office number such and such. Over the door is the name Jesse Helms. All you need to do is to go in and say this to Jesse and get him to lift that hold and I will have Mr. Viets name before the Senate five minutes later." The Secretary decided he would not see Mr. Helms and came back to the Department. I was informed of this and it took me one second to respond, "That's it, I am out."

I was asked to stay on. They thought something could be done in the next session, but I said, No." So I resigned/retired and that was the end of my career.

Q: Can you go at all into Helms' motivation, etc.?

VIETS: Well, I am really reluctant to get very deeply into this for a number of reasons, not the least being a very personal one that I have really locked the door on that period of my life. He brought a huge number of charges against me. Every single one of them was proven to be falsely based. But it brought terrible pressure on my family. If, as one now reads in medical literature, stress is related to cancer, then I have to say that I can thank Jesse Helms for the fact that my wife within a month or so of my retirement was diagnosed as having cancer and she died eight months later.

The essence of the Helms position, I think...firstly he was really manipulated by a member of his staff who had been in the Foreign Service and who either was selected out or got out one step ahead of the sheriff. I have never known. I did not know him in the Foreign Service. But this man had only one mission in life and that was to do whatever he could to skewer the Foreign Service whether it was in appropriation bills, or hearings on ambassadorial nominees, or what have you. I think I represented for this staffer a great many things that he did not like about the Foreign Service. Everything from the way I spoke, to the school I went to, to the fact that I had been very, very lucky and risen very rapidly in the ranks, etc. He developed for Helms' use a most extraordinary series of charges which were based in every instance on issues that, fortunately, I was able to disprove. But in the process an awful lot of dirty linen got washed around town. There was a lot of unpleasantness and humiliation and it is a chapter of my life that I have closed forever.

I should add for the record because I think it answers better than anything I can say about how the system works, towards the end of the year of being "held" by Helms, I went to the White House to see Frank Carlucci, who at that time was the President's National Security Advisor. Frank was an old friend and colleague. He had been in Lisbon and spent a lot of time briefing me on the Portuguese and he had introduced me to a lot of his Portuguese friends. He was very anxious that I get to Portugal. He let me know that he would like to talk to me about trying to break the Helms hold, so I went over to see him in his corner office there in the White House. After our talk he walked over and picked up his telephone and called Helms. He told him that I was sitting there in his office and we had had a good talk and he really felt that enough was enough and Helms should lift his hold, and he gave him some reasons why. Helms just very curtly said, "I am not going to," and hung up. Frank turned to me and told me what Helms had said and said, "I guess that is it. We, unfortunately, need Helms more than we need you."

It was said in a very nice way and I didn't blink at all. I understood it very clearly. At this level in this world and in this type of game there are those who are expendable and I clearly was one who was. Helms surely had a price and Frank knew that. George Shultz knew that. The President knew that. But nobody was prepared to pay his price. I understand that the most celebrated diplomat on active duty in the Foreign Service, who is about to be nominated for perhaps the most important post we have in the world today, has what is now known in the State Department as a "Dick Viets problem" with Senator Helms and Helms has sworn this man is not going anywhere.

Q: Well, Dick this sort of concludes this. Could you quickly explain what you have been doing since?

VIETS: I decided when I left that I had had enough of large organizations for a while and that I wanted to take that barge trip in France when the new wines came in, and I wanted to climb in the Himalayas, and I wanted to spend a lot of time on my horses down in the country, and I wanted to do a lot of reading. I also wanted to engage myself in what I call pro bono activities, Things I had never been able to do in the Foreign Service because

only two years of my entire career were spent in Washington working--and one of those with Henry Kissinger!

I knew that I wanted to stay involved in foreign affairs and I knew that our tax laws are fundamentally written by and for American businessmen, so the first thing I did when I retired was to set up a company. This has turned out to be one of the smarter things I have ever done. In the interim I have remained very active in Middle Eastern issues as a consultant to my old friend King Hussein. There had been four or five years passage between my time as Ambassador and the time I started doing this, so this arrangement met all the requirements of the ethics laws. I continue to do consulting for some major multinational corporations. I have joined the Boards of several groups and one or two companies. I have become very active in the human rights field and am on the Board of a major human rights lawyers group here in Washington...maybe the best one in the country. I do quite a lot of traveling for them. I have also done some election monitoring for both the National Democratic Institute and National Republic Institute. I ride my horses and read books and stay very active in a variety of things. I treasure those wonderful years in the Foreign Service. It was a great ride! But to be free of a deadly bureaucracy and of the vanities and incompetence of our political leadership, and to be able to do what one wants when one wants to do it, to speak one's mind freely--this is the freedom that I truly treasure.

Q: Well, let's stop at that point. Thank you.

End of interview