

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

AMBASSADOR LEON J. WEIL

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is May 2, 1991. This is an interview with Ambassador Leon J. Weil concerning his time in Nepal and is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you would tell me a little bit about your background--where you were educated, where you came from?

WEIL: I always lived in New York City, but I never went to school in New York City. I was always off in New England somewhere. I went to Berkshire School in Sheffield, Massachusetts and from there I went to Princeton University. During that time, which was the end of World War II, I left the University for a brief stint in the U.S. Navy and then returned to Princeton and graduated in 1949.

Q: You were born when?

WEIL: I was born in June 15, 1927. When I graduated from Princeton I took a little time off and about six months later I entered the securities business in New York City. That basically has been my career throughout my entire life. I was always in the securities business, although I had many other interests. However up until the time President Reagan appointed me Ambassador to Nepal I had been in the securities business.

Q: Had you, either in college, prep school, or while in the securities business, gotten involved in or interested in foreign affairs?

WEIL: I never, of course, dealt with securities that were overseas, but I was always interested in history. As a matter of fact, I had majored in economics, but the best grades that I got in college were in history. I was always interested in political affairs and joined various political clubs at college, like Whig Clio and those kinds of organizations, and thought very seriously of going into the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs in Princeton. But then I got into major economics and made history and public affairs sort of an avocation rather than a vocation.

I became involved in political affairs when I graduated and came back to New York from my brief stint in California and I joined the New York Young Republican Club. Those were the days when guys like John Lindsey, Robert Price and a number of prominent people, whose names I can't recall right away, were involved. I met people there such as William Rusher [phonetic], Cliff White...names that may not be familiar to you, but they became involved in Republican Party politics as we got more mature. I really loved that and became very active and wound up on the Republican National Finance Committee.

Eventually, years later, of course, I was the Chairman of political committees that elected James Buckley to the U. S. Senate and I became fairly well-known.

Q: When you say you got involved in politics, how does one get involved in politics? What sort of work were you doing?

WEIL: Well, you know it is a long process. People become involved in politics in different ways. For me it was originally joining the New York Young Republicans Club. We used to have meetings on issues of interest. But, of course, little by little, people from the Club began to run for public office. Then you start getting involved in the political campaigns. Of course, the senior Party too relied on the Young Republicans Club, or did in those days (I don't think the Club is that active anymore), for workers. Therefore you

find yourself getting involved in somebody's campaign for mayor, for congressman... I remember Ted Kofferman [ph] was a congressman from my district here for many years. There were others. William Green is now the congressman from my district. But you get involved in these campaigns and if you like it, you continue to stay involved. And I did.

Q: I take it, as far as our interview is concerned, the operative period was the Ronald Reagan time, because you became Ambassador in 1984.

WEIL: That is right.

Q: Ronald Reagan first ran in 1980. How did that come about?

WEIL: Back in 1979, when he was seeking the Republican nomination, I was approached by some political friends who wanted to know if I would become involved in this effort. I said, "I would." Do you want me to name of these people?

Q: Sure, why not?

WEIL: These people were Maxwell Rabb, who later became Ambassador to Italy.

Q: Whom, by the way, I have interviewed.]

WEIL: Have you. A delightful man.

Q: Oh, yes.

WEIL: Then there was Helene Von Damm, who became Ambassador to Austria. I had known these people. We had been friends. Max called me, and said he thought this would be a good one to get involved in. I hadn't signed on to John Connally or George Bush.

Q: These were other candidates?

WEIL: These were the other candidates. Howard Baker, John Connally, George Bush and there may have been others--perhaps Dole, I don't remember. Those three were the main ones. Ronald Reagan was actually not too well known in New York and had very little support there. But I signed on to the Reagan effort in New York.

What happened was very interesting because Ronald Reagan decided or the campaign organization decided that New York City would be the location for his formal announcement of his candidacy for the Republican nomination. We all then started to work on a dinner where he would make that announcement. That was a major effort. We had the New York Hilton, I believe...I am not sure now. But anyway, we had a major hotel in New York. It was our job to sell tickets to the dinner to raise money.

Incidentally, we did something in that dinner which I will never forget and which is probably a good thing to put into this oral history. We had a rule that anyone who bought a ticket--in those days the ticket was only \$500, which by today's standards is cheap for a political dinner--could bring someone under 18 free. So the dinner took on the aura of a family affair. It was unlike any political dinner I have ever been to. People came with their children and it was exciting. The feeling of it was just wonderful. I don't think I have ever really attended a political dinner with that kind of atmosphere.

Q: They tend to be pretty stodgy affairs.

WEIL: Very stodgy with corporate tables and that kind of thing. But this particular dinner was a family affair and there was lots of enthusiasm. Ronald Reagan came to New York, and he made his formal announcement that he was a candidate. A lot of those people who worked on that dinner became members of his administration. There was John Shad [ph], who became Chairman of the SEC and later on Ambassador to the Netherlands; Raymond Donovan, who became Secretary of Labor; Charles Wick, who became Director of the U.S. Information Agency; William Casey, who later became Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. We all worked on the dinner.

After the election, many of my friends suggested that I join the Administration as many of them did do. But I didn't feel that the time was appropriate for me. I couldn't really leave my business. I wasn't financially comfortable in just dropping my business. So I stayed in private business. I was, however, invited to join the President's Council for Physical Fitness and Sports. I had always been very active in sports and similar activities. So I was appointed by the President to serve on the President's Council. This was a Presidential appointment, but it was a voluntary job. Our Chairman at the time was the coach, George Allen, who coached the Washington Redskins for many years.

I, however, had occasional discussions with the White House. I had been to Nepal on several occasions with an organization that I am still very active with--Outward Bound--and was quite interested in the country. The White House knew that I was interested in going to Nepal.

Q: When you say, "the White House knew," did you have any particular point of reference there?

WEIL: I had friends there who were in the White House personnel section. Earlier I mentioned Helene Von Damm, well prior to her becoming an ambassador, she served first as assistant director and then as director of the White House personnel section. She knew and it was in the file that I was potentially interested in Nepal. The post wasn't open at the time, and I wasn't ready anyway so we put it all on hold.

Several years later, towards the end of the President's first term, my situation changed. We had sold our business and I was more independent. I decided that this was the proper time for me to enter public service. I let them know in Washington, and by a lucky

coincidence, I was informed that the ambassador in Nepal, who I had actually known, Carleton Coon.

Q: Oh yes, I have interviewed him too.

WEIL: Have you? He was getting ready to come home, and the post was open. So the White House put me in for it and, I don't have to tell you the process which is very complicated, I was nominated for the position.

Q: What did you do for preparation for the post, both for the Senate hearing, which approved your nomination, and for getting ready to go to the post?

WEIL: Well, I was fortunate in that I had the time to devote to training for the post. I attended the Ambassadorial seminar which was given in the State Department by Shirley Temple Black, and David Newsom. That was very interesting. I took the two-week course in South Asian studies at the Foreign Service Institute. And I worked with the Nepal Desk which set up briefings for me with various people within the Department of State and in other Departments over a period that lasted from late May, 1984 through July. So I was lucky to have a rather long period of gathering information and preparing for the post. Part of the preparation was for the hearings. When my hearing actually took place, I went up to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee room. I knew there would be one other Ambassador appearing that day and it turned out to be Anthony Quainton, who was just leaving his post as Ambassador to Nicaragua and was about to appear before the Committee to be Ambassador to Kuwait.

When we got into the hearing room and sat down at the table in front of that horseshoe desk, Senator Rudy Boschwitz, the Chairman, asked who wants to go first. I knew that the Senators were very anxious to question Quainton on Nicaragua. They were more interested in where he had come from than where he was going. So I said I would go first. We had a very relaxed and pleasant hearing. I made a statement which I had worked on for quite some time with the help of the Department. I gave that, then answered a few questions from the Senators and then they turned their attention to Quainton, which was very interesting.

For the purpose of this history and for those who use this service, I think it will be interesting to know that when you appear before the Senate on a confirmation hearing, you have several audiences that you have to consider when you are testifying. One audience is the Senate, but the other audience is the country that you are about to go to. In the room were reporters from the newspapers back in Kathmandu. They were taking down everything I was saying. When Senator Pell asked me a rather sensitive question about a road that was built from Tibet down across the border into Nepal, and he made some reference to the fact that it was for the purposes of the Chinese coming down that road to perhaps invade India, I had to be very careful in how I would respond. I wanted to respond to the Senator, but I also had to remember that the people in Kathmandu were paying a lot of attention to the way I was answering some of these questions.

Q: We have had some ambassadors-designate that never made it to their post because they were perhaps a little frank and didn't pay attention to that other audience.

WEIL: Right. I remember with Maxwell Rabb's successor for instance. He made some remark that roused the people in Italy.

Q: When you went out to Nepal, did anybody in the Department or elsewhere sit down with you and say, "These are American interests in Nepal and this is what we need done," or something like that?

WEIL: You probably are aware that each post has something in their files called, "Goals and Objectives." Each year the Ambassador has to write such a document--"Goals and Objectives." It is done with the Department, with his staff and what he, himself, feels. So I was able to review several of the "Goals and Objectives" of my predecessors and from doing that you get a pretty good idea of what the position of your government is in terms of its relationship with the host government.

Q: Did you go out with one or two bees in your bonnet that you felt you wanted to focus on? Were there any problems?

WEIL: I had been to Nepal on two previous occasions and by coincidence I had actually had lunch with Carleton Coon in his residence back in 1981 never dreaming at the time that I would be his successor and that his home would in three years be my home. I kind of knew where I was going, but in terms of a fixed agenda, I did go out with a pretty open mind. I knew our overall goals and objectives, which don't change very much in a country like Nepal. But I wanted to emphasize private sector development. I happened to have the opinion that countries develop through the efforts of their own people and that their own people are more effective when they are working in their own self interest, rather than working for some state organization. And I think the events of the last few years has proven that these state-run economies have generally failed.

Q: For historical context, in the last couple of years the Soviet Socialist model throughout the world has gone through an absolute collapse.

WEIL: Correct. Of course, my going out there was prior to that. Nevertheless this was what I was very sensitive to. I wanted to go out there and kind of be the instigator of private sector development and as a result of that I became involved in the development of the Kathmandu Stock Exchange. If one could say that one had a monument to his tour, I suppose you could say that the Kathmandu Stock Exchange turned out to be my monument.

Q: Rather than wait and come back, why don't we talk about it now? What was the situation there, stock exchange-wise when you came?

WEIL: Fortunately, at the time I arrived, the government of Nepal had just passed a law which permitted the creation of public stock companies. There had been an institution in the country...it had a different name, but had to do with the marketing of government bonds to private investors in Nepal. This, of course, was very small. This new piece of legislation which was passed just at the time that I was arriving created an opportunity for public shares and therefore the institution changed its name from its previous name, which I can't remember...something like Kathmandu Securities Marketing Board...to the Kathmandu Stock Exchange. Just a few weeks after I arrived, I saw a notice in the English-language newspaper, Rising Nepal, that there would be a formal ceremony commemorating the establishment of this new institution called the Kathmandu Stock Exchange, which actually was simply a change of name from the previous organization. So I had my secretary call up and tell them that the American Ambassador would be coming. Their reaction was one of great elation. They never dreamed that anybody from the diplomatic corps would be coming to an almost mundane kind of event. But when I got there, there was a seat of honor for me. They were delighted because they had heard that I had spent my entire career in the securities industry. When I came to this occasion and met the officials I told them that I would be delighted to help them and work with them and be of special assistance to them. And I did. I arranged for the director of the Exchange to come to the United States under a USIA tour. He spent a month here going to the New York Stock Exchange, the SEC, the Boston Stock Exchange and learning how our country did it. I also sent him off to Bangladesh because I traveled to Bangladesh once and had visited their stock exchange and wanted the Nepalese counterpart to go there. That was helpful to him.

Then I received a number of prominent visitors while I was in Nepal. Among whom were John Shad, the Chairman of the Securities Exchange Commission; and John Whitehead who had been a senior partner of Goldman, Sachs and also Deputy Secretary of State. These individuals had learned of my work with the Stock Exchange and they wanted very much to come to the Stock Exchange, so they visited the Exchange and, of course, this made the people there feel like they were very important and therefore it was a wonderful boost to their morale.

Another fortunate thing that happened was that while I was there Steve Weisman, who was the New York Times Bureau Chief in Delhi came up to Nepal to go on a trek. I was with him on this trek as was Carrie, my daughter who is sitting next to me. Steve Weisman and I were walking along the trail one day when he said, "While I am up here, I would like to do a story about Nepal. Do you have any ideas what would be an interesting story?" So I started to tell him about the Stock Exchange. He thought that would be interesting. I said, "Okay, when we walk back to Kathmandu we will go over there, and you can see for yourself."

So I took him over and he wound up with an article about the Kathmandu Stock Exchange which received enormous publicity. It was in the International Herald Tribune as well as The New York Times. Many friends of mine in the securities business saw it-- John Shad saw it, John Whitehead saw it. Therefore I became somewhat famous for

assisting this development of a stock exchange in one of the world's least developed countries.

Q: How has the Stock Exchange been doing? Has it been an element within the changing of the economy and development of Nepal or not?

WEIL: Well, it's had some concrete economic benefit, but in the beginning I felt that it had more of a symbolic benefit in that it became symbolic of the government's commitment to free enterprise. Later on as things developed, there were a number of companies that actually raised capital through the Stock Exchange. There were two joint venture banks, one was Hindu Suez, which had a joint venture to establish a Hindu Suez Bank in Nepal. They raised money through selling shares. And Grindley's Bank also raised money through selling shares. There was some activity. They started out with eight companies that were listed. The secondary trading was virtually nonexistent. Companies agreed to be listed because the law encouraged listing by granting a slight tax reduction. So it paid you to be a listed company because you got a tax reduction even though there were no shares actually traded. For instance, there was a hotel that was listed. The hotel had maybe 12 shareholders. They were not buying or selling. They did qualify technically as a listed company and received whatever benefits listed companies got. There were a few other companies like that. And then there were a few companies that had maybe a 100 or so shareholders where occasionally there would be a transaction. But there were no independent brokers in Nepal; no telephone communications really in the beginning, so it didn't have all that much effect.

In the second year of this, however, when they started to do some underwritings, they started to develop a list of shareholders. Each bank underwriting created about 5,000 new shareholders. So when I left Nepal the number of listings had gotten up to about 23; the number of shareholders was somewhere over 15,000, which is a tremendous thing when you think of the economic poverty in Nepal. There was a little bit of trading.

Now, I have been back to Nepal twice. I am leaving in three days to go back on my third visit since I retired as Ambassador. I was back last November and had lunch with the staff of the Stock Exchange. They told me that the number of listed companies has now grown to over 40 and the number of shareholders has increased to about 30,000, which again is remarkable. So it is starting to have some effect. But when I was there it was very slow.

Q: Now back to when you arrived, what was your attitude toward the Department of State, the Foreign Service and all?

WEIL: Coming from the political side and having so many friends on the political side, some of whom were serving as Ambassadors, I became aware of the conversations about the conflicts between the career and non-career Foreign Service officers. Some of my friends had some unfortunate experiences and tried to warn me about one thing and another. I went out with a completely open mind. I can't really tell you the reason, but I think perhaps it was the people who I found at the post who happened to be very, very

nice and we got along beautifully together. I never encountered the slightest bit of career vs non-career feeling in any of my dealings at any time during my tour of duty with the Department.

My predecessor, who was a career Foreign Service officer, and who as I said I had met, I had lunch with him so he knew me and I met him again when he came back to the States for a visit in 1983. Again, this was long before I even thought I would be nominated. He wrote and told me that in his opinion I should keep his Deputy Chief of Mission, who was Jim Cheek. Jim had been a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. He was actually overqualified to be a DCM.

Q: I think I sat on his promotion panel around that time.

WEIL: Well, Jim turned out to be a wonderful guy and accepted me completely. We got along beautifully together. He was a very experienced guy. I relied on him. He showed me the ropes. He had the perfect attitude and I was very, very comfortable with him. He was only with me for the first nine months, but that was enough to get me started. Then I returned to the United States to interview candidates to succeed him. I selected Lewis McFarland. He came out, and was with me for the next three years, because I served over three years. Lew was with me right through to the end of my tour and actually stayed on for the first few months of my successor's tour. He and I got along famously together, and we were still friends. I talk to him quite often. He is retired now.

So anyway, I never became involved in any of this controversy you often hear about between career and non-career people. I can't explain the reason for it, but...

Q: I think it is an attitude on both sides and whether or not diplomacy has been used at some of our embassies, both by non-career ambassadors and career Foreign Service people. Diplomacy is not always indulged in in the house and it should be.

WEIL: That is true. And some of the non-career people probably go out with a chip on their shoulder. And maybe they have run into certain situations which cause them to have this chip. For whatever reason, it didn't happen to me.

Q: A question on the side because it has become sort of important now. When you were given a list of candidates to be a new Deputy Chief of Mission, there has been even a court case saying that the State Department was not putting enough women into the pot to choose from. Did you find this your experience or not?

WEIL: Well, in thinking back to the list of candidates for DCM, I don't recall seeing a name of a woman on the list. They gave me a list of about five or six candidates. I interviewed them all. But I was the eighth U.S. Ambassador to Nepal and of the eight ambassadors, including me, two of them had already been women.

Q: Among them Carol Laise.

WEIL: Carol Laise and Marquita Maytag. Since I left there have been two ambassadors and the one currently serving is a woman. So out of ten you have had three who are women.

In choosing a DCM, especially for a non-career ambassador, the discrimination doesn't really occur for women, but where it does occur is in candidates who are serving overseas in posts where you can't interview them. Now the career people have maybe served with these people and they know them. Maybe they ran across them at previous assignments, so they had some familiarity with them. But, if I was given a candidate who was a political officer in Pakistan or in Europe or Africa somewhere, if I couldn't interview the candidate personally, I would be very uncomfortable with that. So there is where you get discrimination. So all of my candidates were people who were in the Department. I had a few corridor walkers who were...

Q: Corridor walkers were people who have not yet been placed, sometimes because they were difficult to place and sometimes by chance.

WEIL: But I was fortunate there were a number of good candidates and I selected Lewis McFarland who turned out to be a real joy for me.

Q: What was the political situation in Nepal when you got there?

WEIL: In 1980 there had been some disturbances and as a result there was a referendum on whether or not Nepal should continue under the party-less Panchayat system with reforms or switch to a multi-party type of government, which they had experimented with 20 or so years before. The referendum turned out to be about 55 percent to retain the present system with reforms and 45 percent to go with a multi-party system.

The principal reform was that the people could now elect directly the members of the National Assembly. The Assembly would then select the prime minister. There was an election in 1981 under this system and a prime minister was selected. Now this was before my time. In 1983, for the first time in the history of Nepal there was a vote of no confidence in the parliament and the prime minister was dismissed and a new prime minister was installed.

But the system, this party-less Panchayat was in effect and these changes came about as a result of reforms that the king had put in.

There was a certain amount of unhappiness because Nepal was a very poor country. You didn't hear too much about the opposition. Political parties were banned. While they could meet without too much interference, they had to identify themselves as banned parties. The strongest was the Nepali Congress Party. As long as you said, "I am a member of the banned Nepali Congress Party," you were okay.

So things looked all right in Nepal. There were the usual grumblings. You couldn't tell what the opposition was. On the 19th of June, 1985, I was sitting in my office and I heard what sounded like a loud thud and within 20-30 minutes we got the news that five bombs had gone off in Kathmandu. Two of them were outside the Palace. They were very small and didn't do too much damage, although one of them did scatter bricks all over the business end of the Palace. Another bomb went off in the Anapurna [ph] Hotel and killed three hotel employees. Another one went off in the doorway of the Parliament building, killing one person and injuring another. Then there were several other bombs that went off in towns outside of Kathmandu. This was the first inkling as to the extent of the opposition movement. It turned out that this particular group that set off the bombs was a real extremist group. They really didn't have too much political clout. The political clout from the opposition came much later.

As a matter of fact, came after I had left. The revolution that brought about the subsequent changes and a new constitution for Nepal occurred about two years after I had left. So while I was there there really was not too much evidence...in 1986 during my tour there was a parliamentary election because there was one every five years. They elected a new parliament and interestingly enough, now that I think about it, there was quite a lot of turnover among the people elected. A lot of the prominent people were defeated; leftist groups did gain about 13 seats and people were quite surprised; and nobody really realized the extent of the Communist Party activities throughout Nepal. It was all illegal and it was done underground so that it was very difficult to get a handle on it. But they were starting to work and it all came to a head in 1989.

Q: When you were there, there were a considerable number of people put in jail weren't there?

WEIL: I wouldn't say a considerable number of people. There were some political prisoners, but I don't think that there was a large number in jail. The father of the Nepali Congress Party spent about 16 years in jail, and was not in jail during my tour. As a matter of fact I went to his house to attend a wedding reception for his daughter, so he couldn't have been in jail at that time.

Q: Were you under any instructions or if not instructions were their any media pressure from the United States to have the American Ambassador try to put the Nepalese on a course more in line with the way we saw things? Was this a problem for you?

WEIL: Well, one of our objectives in Nepal was, in typical State Department language, to encourage the king to continue the democratization process and urge him to make additional reforms. That was the way we put it. We wanted to encourage him. We wanted to say to him, "Look you are moving in the right direction. We want you to continue to move in that direction as fast as you think you can go."

Q: Sounds rather presumptuous. What did it mean in actual fact? How did you and your staff interpret this?

WEIL: I don't agree with you that it sounded presumptuous. I think it would have been more presumptuous if we were to say to the king, "Now look, this is the way we think you should run your country." We didn't do that. We wanted to encourage him to continue what we felt he was trying to do. Now, as it turned out he didn't do it fast enough. He got behind the curve and never caught up. But that is another story. Our official policy was to encourage further reforms and move the country towards democracy. We basically wanted to insure Nepal's sovereignty and stability. We, of course, have a great deal of interest in Nepal's welfare, just because they are such nice people. We have a humanitarian interest in Nepal. But aside from that our interest in Nepal was to preserve its sovereignty and stability because it is an important buffer between two giant neighbors--China and India. These two neighbors have fought several wars and Nepal occupies a 500 mile border between the two countries, so basically we wanted Nepal to exist and we thought we would help them by: 1) assisting in their economic development and 2) encouraging them to develop their political system and encourage democracy.

Q: Well, how does one encourage democracy?

WEIL: Well, it is very difficult when you have to maintain your relations with a government. But then there are lots of ways you can encourage them to become more democratic. You do this through your contacts, and through any way you want. I, for instance, had public contact with the Nepali Congress Party which was officially banned as were all parties in Nepal. I invited them to the residence for lunch. I attended the leader's reception. As a matter of fact we had a little meeting...the State Department didn't instruct me to do any of these things, it was just my own way of carrying out the goals and objectives. There is certainly a lot of leeway in letting you do what you want to do. We had a meeting of the Ambassadors from the UK and Germany and myself to discuss whether or not we would attend this very public wedding reception for the daughter of the leader of the Nepali Congress Party who had been in jail. The present king's father put him in jail. King Birendra may have had him in jail, too, in the late 1970s, I don't recall. We decided that we would attend the reception and along with the Ambassador from India, we were the only members of the diplomatic corps to attend the reception and it was so noted in the press.

Q: In the first place how did you deal with Nepalese officials to get the normal government things done and were they taking due note of what you were doing?

WEIL: As far as the Nepalese officials were concerned you have to understand that there were two parallel governments in Nepal. There was the elected government and then there was the Palace. I used to joke that the system of government in Nepal was a absolute monarchy operating the government through an elected bureaucracy, which in effect was what it was. Now the government, which I considered to be the prime minister, the foreign minister and the various secretaries who ran the government, who were my contacts on a day-to-day basis, they were not the ones to talk to as far as democratization was concerned. The ones to talk to on that subject was the Palace because the king in

those days created the constitution. He gave it to his people. He could take it away. He could amend it. That is not true today under the new constitution. But that was the way it was during my tour. So it was useless to talk to the so-called government about democratization, but I did in talking to the king in my private audiences encourage him. You can't tell a king what to do, obviously, and that would be presumptuous anyway. But you certainly went out of your way to pat him on the back whenever he did anything that could be interpreted as encouraging democratization.

Q: You mention that the German, British and American Ambassadors--I would imagine that if you add the Chinese and the India Ambassadors, these would be the countries that probably had the greatest role, you might say, of interest. Was the fact that Nepal has always had very close relations to the British, was he sort of the first...?

WEIL: No, the British had an important role, but the most important ambassador as far as the Nepalese are concerned is the Indian Ambassador, because this is the country with whom they have the trade. This is the country with which they have a 500 mile open border and the majority of the economic activity was between the two countries. That has to be Nepal's primary diplomatic relationship. A funny thing is that when the ambassadors used to have meetings...for instance if there was a crisis like a famine or an earthquake or various things that would come up where the government would want all of the ambassadors to get together because they were going to make an appeal to us, the Indian Ambassador rarely showed up, because the Indian Ambassador never liked to become one of many in its relationship with its neighbors. This was true in many other areas of relationships with countries in South Asia. India always liked to deal one on one with their neighbors. So the Indian Ambassador rarely showed up at these meetings.

But the most important ambassadors were the Chinese, because it was an important neighbor; then the US and the German and the British for different reasons were important to Nepal. After that came their other neighbors in South Asia, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka. Then the others were much less important like Thailand, Egypt, Israel, Italy and the countries like that. In my tour there there were 19 resident ambassadors. Most of the ambassadors were actually domiciled in New Delhi and were ambassador to India from their respective countries and also accredited to Nepal.

Q: Obviously you had your political section, CIA, Defense attachés...were you getting the feeling that either the Indians, the Soviets or the Chinese were meddling in Nepalese affairs? You mentioned the Nepalese Communist Party, was this internally driven or externally?

WEIL: The communist situation in Nepal is a little mixed up because you have the Chinese and their affiliated communist parties; you have the Soviets and their affiliated communist parties; and you had the West Bengal and their affiliated communist parties. So actually you had a lot of communist organizations and even today, now that they are all legal and some of them are quite strong, there is quite a diversity of them. They have controversies among themselves. The Chinese supported communists and the Soviet

supported communists and I do know the Chinese and the Soviets did give active support to their respective communists. It was always a source of great concern of the Palace. They were definitely anti-communist. As a matter of fact the worse thing you could call somebody in Nepal in the days I were there, was a communist. Today the communists are a major force in the political life.

Q: How about Nepal's role in the world--the UN and things? Were you running to them all the time asking them to vote this way and that way?

WEIL: That was a very important part of my job. We were constantly getting requests from the Department to go over to the Ministry with a demarche on one issue or another. We would always receive a visit from USUN--one of our ambassadors to the UN would come out on a tour to South Asian countries and call on the Prime Minister and review the issues that would be coming up in the General Assembly and the Security Council. It was one of the more important parts of my job to inform the Nepalese government of the various issues and hope that they would see things our way. Fortunately, they did. Nepal had parallel views to ours on many important issues in the UN. We were always very proud of that. They had a much higher voting record as far as we were concerned than India, which had one of the worst.

Q: While you were in Nepal, did you ever feel that China was a menace or did the Chinese think Tibet was enough and weren't really looking toward expansion?

WEIL: No, China never appeared as a menace to Nepal. As a matter of fact, they always appeared as a great help to Nepal in helping Nepal resisting the pressures they would be getting from India. So they were there to insure Nepal's independence rather than to threaten it.

Q: Was there a tendency on the part of India to look towards Nepal as territory to absorb?

WEIL: India's record as far as Sikkim was concerned which once was an independent country and their sending troops into Sri Lanka, made Nepal very nervous. When you really sit down and talk to a Nepalese historian, he will remind you that Nehru once made the remark that India's northern defensive frontier were the Himalayas and if you look at a map, the Himalayas are on the wrong border. This is something the Nepalese always remember.

Q: So they want to have good relations with the major powers like the United States so that if push came to shove, they wouldn't have lost their credibility...

WEIL: Or identity. Nepal was always anxious to demonstrate their independence and sovereignty. They did it in a number of ways. One of them was to be an active member of the United Nations. They served on the Security Council, they contributed troops to the United Nations Forces in Lebanon. They participated in all national forums. They were

members of the non-align movement. They went out of their way to try to show the world that they were a country and independent and sovereign.

Q: Not a hermit kingdom that nobody cared what happened to.

WEIL: Right. The hermit kingdom episode lasted mostly from 1850 to 1950. After 1950 it opened up to the world.

Q: What about our AID program there? What were we doing and looking at it from some distance, how effective was it do you think?

WEIL: Our AID program averaged around \$15 million a year. At the time the program started at that level, Nepal had about 15 million people. So it was a per capita of \$1, which is a little on the low side. Nepal is really not a country that has any great strategic importance. It is a very useful country as far as we are concern, but it is not one of the front line states on the edge of the battlefield, so to speak, like Pakistan or Israel. So our aid was primarily humanitarian. Of course it has been some time since I was there and I have forgotten a lot of the details of our AID program, but in the beginning our first AID programs built a few roads, eradicated malaria in the southern part of Nepal, helped to open it up to agriculture.

During the time I was there we were not getting involved in capital intensive projects because we didn't have the money. We would do training programs, contribute to teacher training. We had a program where teachers out in Nepal would be trained over the air by Radio Nepal. We had special lectures and things that teachers would listen to so they could upgrade their skills. We also operated several integrated rural areas where we would try to do everything--irrigation, agriculture, forestry, fish farming, etc. We had money going into an oral rehydration program which we operated in connection with money that was going into family planning. We would approach family planning both from the conceptive side and from the health side to try to get the Nepalese to realize that if they did certain things they wouldn't lose so many children and wouldn't have to have so many children.

How effective was all of that? You know, you don't know because you don't know what it would be like if it hadn't occurred. I would hate to see nothing happen, but the record is not a good one. I really would like you to tell me what underdeveloped country in the world has really been helped by so-called economic aid?

Q: I think a couple. I served in Korea and there I think that did something. And there may have been one or two others. But most of them are on the margin.

WEIL: I had a discussion with someone the other day and they pointed out to me that in South America, for instance, which I don't know much about, the country that is growing the fastest and has the best economy is a country where we canceled our AID program and have refused to give them any foreign aid, and that is Chile. For political reasons we

canceled everything and yet now their country is the one that is doing the best. Now, whether it is a cause and effect, I don't know, but it makes one wonder.

Q: Talking about effect, what about American youth and the hashish trail? That really goes back to the 60s and 70s, was there any residue of this as being a problem for you as the Ambassador?

WEIL: By the time I got there in 1984 the hippie generation had started to age and disappear. There were a few of them left in Nepal, but they were getting bald and getting older. They were starting to go into the commercial life--opening up little restaurants, etc. So the whole scene on freak street has pretty well disappeared.

There was, however, a re-emergence of a drug problem which didn't involve foreigners or Americans, but started to involve the local Nepalese because Nepal was right in the center between the golden triangle of Burma, Thailand, Laos and the golden crescent, which was Pakistan and Afghanistan. The airport at Kathmandu was one of the places from which some of these hard drugs would be exported to Western Europe and elsewhere. One of our constant programs was to encourage the Nepalese and help them tighten up on the airport.

But as far as that hippie generation that you mentioned, it has pretty much died out. Maybe Carrie, sitting next to me, knows more. She visited me on several occasions. But there certainly wasn't much evidence of it when you walked around.

Q: Where there any other problems that I may not have touched on?

WEIL: I thought you might ask me something like that. So I gave some thought to it and there are two main problems that I would like to talk about.

One of the main overall problems which entered into many, many areas of our relationship, was the very fact that I was representing the world's richest country in one of the world's poorest. The Nepalese could never understand why the United States could not be more helpful to them. They reminded me, and they were right, that they had been a friendly country, they had contributed troops in World Wars I and II, they had parallel views on many important issues, they were the only country in South Asia to recognize the State of Israel, and they were a moderate member of the nonaligned movement, they tend to tone down some of the radical states that were in the non-aligned movement. In light of all this, they could never understand why we really didn't help them more. They could not understand our own budgetary constraints, and they viewed us as being so rich and they were so poor. That was something that sort of permeated everything in our relationship that sort of created a bit of a problem.

One of the problems that I had, and this started during my consultations prior to my going and it was a problem to the day I left: It was a problem that I never realized existed and that is the conflict between the evangelists who wanted to proselytize and the Nepalese

Hindu State that outlawed conversion. When I signed on I never knew that it even existed, but I was made painfully aware of it during my initial consultations. I called on members of our congress who represented the Bible belt, so to speak, and I was shocked by the intensity of this particular controversy. There are people in this country who believe that it is their religious right to go and convert...you used to hear in the old days about converting the heathen, you don't hear that term anymore, but nevertheless they do the same thing. They go out to convert people to Christianity. They feel that it is their religious right to do so. When you interfere with their ability to proselytize, you are actually interfering with their right to practice their religion.

Now this runs into conflict with a State that bars conversion by constitution. In the Hindu religion you can not convert to it any way. You can't get in and you can't get out. So this was a terrible problem as you can probably gather. There is no solution to it. It was a constant source of irritation and controversy...

Q: What would happen?

WEIL: Well, people would come out from the United States and do things illegally and wind up in jail. Then, also, there were people knowing of the situation thought that it was in their best interests to create a situation where they would be put in jail to illustrate what they felt was the injustice. So you had to deal with people who were extremists on this subject, who were moderate on this subject, and on the other side people who were also extremists and moderates. The Nepalese were embarrassed by the issue and tended to not keep any of our people in jail over it, but to get them out of the country as expeditiously as possible. That was the way they handled it.

It was always a contentious issue and there are people in our congress who serve on organizations who support proselytization. If you can figure out a solution to all of this, I am sure you would go down in history.

Q: I have seen correspondence in our files dealing with Greece where it is prohibited there too, going back to the 1860s on the same subject. There is no answer.

WEIL: No. I think that is a pretty good one to end on. There are a lot of others--we had the drug problem, we had people who would get arrested, but these were the normal day-to-day problems that you have. But the religious problem was such a difficult one because there was no way to get it resolved. I am the kind of person who likes to bring the two parties together and make some sort of agreement and get the thing settled. But there was no way to settle this.

Q: You left in 1987.

WEIL: Yes, I left November 11, 1987.

Q: What did you think about Nepal when you left?

WEIL: Well, I thought that Nepal was making uncomfortably slow progress, doing things that they had proclaimed they were doing. I thought that the privatization program was going too slowly. That there was more rhetoric than action. I was very uncomfortable about that and made a speech on that subject about two months before I left. Some of the radicals in the parliament got up and said that I should be PNGed for making such a speech and criticizing the government, but 97 percent of the people thought I had said the right thing by pointing out that while the rhetoric was there, the performance wasn't and that no efforts had been made to privatize some of the trading companies, the national airline, the cement company...the major industries in Nepal were state owned. I didn't feel that the country would make real economic progress unless the private sector was given a chance.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much.

End of interview