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

PHILIP C. WILCOX, JR.

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is April 27, 1998, and this is an interview with Philip C. Wilcox, Jr. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

I wonder if we could just start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

WILCOX: I was born in Denver, Colorado, on February 21, 1937. My father was a businessman, an employee of the Bell System, the telephone company, born in Denver and worked there. During my early years we moved to New York where my dad worked for the AT&T in New York. Then we returned back to Denver where I attended high school. My mother was born in El Paso, Texas, so our family had a strong western background. When I finished high school in Denver, I went to college at Williams College in Massachusetts, and then I went to the Stanford Law School.

Q: All right, well let's go back. We'll start in Colorado. You went to grammar school there, or was that in New York?

WILCOX: I went to grammar school in Colorado, but then we moved to Maplewood, New Jersey, and I finished grammar school and went to junior high school there. We then moved back to Denver where I attended public high school.

Q: Well, before you hit high school, what were your main interests?

WILCOX: I was an ordinary kid who was interested in sports, and I liked to read. My parents encouraged me to read and as a very young child I remember a map of the world in our breakfast room. I had some sense of geography and of other countries at a fairly early age. My mother was from El Paso; she spoke Spanish, so there was a little bit of a

Mexican dimension to our family.

Q: You were a little young to be caught up in the news of WWII, weren't you?

WILCOX: I remember listening to the radio and hearing the announcement of Pearl Harbor when I was four years old. I also vividly remember many years thereafter the Korean War. We were swept up in that. With the help and encouragement of my parents and teachers, I was somewhat aware of what was going on in the rest of the world, even as a child.

Q: You did your high school in Colorado. Where in Colorado?

WILCOX: I went to East Denver High School. Denver, although it is deep in the west, has always had kind of a cosmopolitan character and an interest in the rest of the world. As a high school student, I attended World Affairs Council meetings. I heard diplomats, including State Department officials, who visited Denver and began to be more oriented toward foreign affairs.

Q: When you were in high school, what were your subjects of greatest interest?

WILCOX: I read a lot, and I liked cars and skiing.

Q: What sort of things did you read?

WILCOX: Oh, I liked adventure stories and historical novels, including those set in exotic foreign countries. I maintain that interest today.

Q: Were you still looking at the map?

WILCOX: Yes, we always had a map somewhere in our house and an atlas on our coffee table. My parents were interested and involved. We often had visitors at our home from foreign countries, including visitors who came under the U.S. Information Agency's program. A Turkish student lived with us for a year in Denver.

Q: Well, then you went to Williams. You were there from when to when?

WILCOX: I was there from 1954 to '58.

Q: What got you to western Massachusetts?

WILCOX: When I lived in New Jersey, I got to know the East Coast well, and I discovered Williams. I decided, as a Denver boy, that it would be broadening to leave Denver and go to college somewhere else, so I went to Williams. That opened up the world for me, intellectually. I studied history and political science, and got a good grounding in the history of Western Europe, the Soviet Union. There were no courses at that time on Asia, Africa, or the rest of the world.

Q: Did you have Richard Newhall?

WILCOX: He was my professor of philosophy. Fred Schuman was my political science professor. He had been exiled from the University of Chicago, and was a marvelous teacher and a great scholar and articulator of power politics.

Q: I was class of '50 at Williams and a history major, so these are people I know. I think a wonderful grounding. What was your impression of Williams at that time?

WILCOX: It was a terrific college because of the caliber of the teachers and the students. There was an intimate relationship among students and faculty. That indeed, was the vocation of the college, to teach. The college is physically remote, in the mountains of Berkshire County, but it was not intellectually isolated. People came from Washington and around the world – George Kennan, John Foster Dulles, and Henry Cabot Lodge, for example. There were a good many foreign students. The mission of the college was to provide a broad liberal education. You absorbed a lot by osmosis, by being there.

Q: When I was there, the faculty was relatively liberal and the student body was relatively conservative. I don't know if that still applied.

WILCOX: That was true in my era too. It was during the Eisenhower years when American students were not engaged politically, and it was a more inward looking time in our history I think. The students, as I recall, were mostly Republicans if they had given any thought to politics, and many of them hadn't.

Q: While you were at Williams, you were taking history and political science. Did you have any career in mind?

WILCOX: I had vague thoughts about the Foreign Service even then, but I had no career plans. I was not oriented. I visited Europe during one of my summers in college, and I also spent a summer in Venezuela working in an oil field. My uncle got me the job. He had moved to Caracas when he finished Dartmouth College and Harvard Law School, to go into business with his classmate at Dartmouth, Nelson Rockefeller. That adventure stimulated my interest in the rest of the world.

Q: Was there any effort at recruiting while you were at Williams for the foreign Service, particularly CIA, because CIA at that time, Williams was sort of a prime hunting grounds I think, particularly in my class.

WILCOX: I don't remember any. I had two classmates who joined one or another branch of the Foreign Service. Warren Clark joined the State Department and Jack Platt joined the CIA.

Q: When you got out, what were you doing?

WILCOX: In my senior year in 1958 I was at loose ends. So, like a lot of undergraduates even then, I decided to go to law school which seemed a reasonable option to prepare me to be a lawyer or something else. I went to the Stanford Law School. I chose over Columbia because I thought it would be broadening to live in California.

Q: That would be '58-'61. How did you find the law school?

WILCOX: Stanford was pleasant, with a beautiful campus. The curriculum and the professors were rigorous. In some ways it was a trade school which required the digestion of masses of law, but some courses put the law in a broader context. I was not excited by the law, and began to think more about politics and foreign affairs. That was a time of great ferment in the United States as we became more deeply involved in Indochina, and of course, Kennedy was elected. In my third year at Stanford, I felt I wasn't ready to go to work as a lawyer; I wanted an adventure. One day I heard the Reverend William Sloan Coffin whom I had known slightly at Williams

Q: From Yale.

WILCOX: He came to Williams after Yale as chaplain for a year. He was an energetic critic of the fraternity system, which was ultimately abolished at Williams. When he spoke at Stanford, he was promoting teaching opportunities in Africa with the African-American Institute. He had spent a summer building a schoolhouse in Guinea and was enthusiastic about Africa. At about that time, I heard President Kennedy give a speech on television at the Cow Palace in San Francisco announcing the establishment of the Peace Corps. I was inspired and excited by this. I was inspired and I applied for a teaching job in Sierra Leone and was accepted. I was grateful that my parents, who had paid my tuition for law school, encouraged me to do what I wanted to do. So, I went to Sierra Leone for three years.

Q: You were in Sierra Leone from '61...

WILCOX: '61-'63. I spent much of '63 wandering through East Africa after I left my job in Sierra Leone.

Q: How was the training for going to Sierra Leone?

WILCOX: The training was minimal. The program was designed to place American volunteers in teaching positions left vacant by African teachers who had quickly joined the civil service after the departure of the British in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Ghana. There was a week of indoctrination in Washington, including a briefing at the State Department by Under Secretary Chester Bowles. The school system in British West Africa in those days was a proper English style system with an organized curriculum. My students had a decent elementary school education. The medium was English, and it was possible to begin teaching and do it adequately. But we had no training in pedagogy, and this was a shortcoming. We were enthusiastic amateurs.

Q: You were not in the Peace Corps; you were part of this...

WILCOX: I was part of the African-American Institute program. I worked for the government of Sierra Leone at the St. Andrews Secondary School in the provincial town of Bo, which was run by American Wesleyan Methodists. In my second year, I lived with newly arrived Peace Corps volunteers. There were ultimately scores of them in Sierra Leone.

Q: Could you describe how you saw Sierra Leone when you arrived there, the country and the government and how things worked?

WILCOX: I had read a book by Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter that was set in Freetown during WWII. I stayed at the City Hotel, where Greene's protagonist, Scobey, hung out, and noticed the same mosquito nets and cockroaches I had read about. It appeared that the departing British had done a good job in Sierra Leone. There was an educated group of civil servants, teachers, judges, and the place seemed to work. I never imagined that 40 years later the country would succumb to savage violence and fall to pieces. In retrospect, the impact of the British was superficial, and the country reverted to tribal conflict.

Q: Did you find the students fairly well disciplined and interested in what they were doing?

WILCOX: The students were disciplined and respected their teachers. They felt privileged to be going to school, and their parents had sacrificed to pay their fees. While they were not as well educated as American students of that age, many if them went on to pass their "O" level high school certificates that qualified them for the junior college level.

Q: I have never served in Africa, but I understood that various groups in west Africa are considered better at some things than others. The Ibos are traders and that sort of thing. How about the people of Sierra Leone, a small area?

WILCOX: Sierra Leone is a tiny country with a mixture of tribes and one dominant tribe, the Mende, and a small community in Freetown of "Creoles" who are the descendants of freed slaves sent there in the late 18th century to create a colony. This was a distinguished community during the 19th century. They were Christians who established a tradition of education and they created the first modern university in West Africa, Fourah Bay College. Creoles staffed the mid levels of the British civil service in the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Gambia, and were often the lawyers and clergymen in those colonies. Now they are a dwindling remnant, and the tribal Sierra Leoneans have taken over, and many of them have left. I had the high honor of being admitted to the bar of the State of Colorado by a Sierra Leonean magistrate, Christopher Cole, who read me the Colorado oath in his wig and robes. The local bar were invited, and we had a glass of sherry. Cole later became Chief Justice of Sierra Leone. He invited me to join the bar of Sierra Leone, but I declined since I would have been obliged to

swear allegiance to the Queen of England, who was still the Sovereign in Sierra Leone in those days, and to have eaten dinners at one of the Inns of Court in London.

Q: Were tribal matters a matter something you were aware of?

WILCOX: Tribal affiliations were important and political parties were organized along tribal lines, but there was peace in the country and then Prime Minister Milton Margai was a decent man. There was a police force and a bureaucracy and a judicial system that functioned. I arrived just a year after independence, and the entire British infrastructure was still intact. I visited Liberia at the time, and I was struck by how primitive and shabby it looked, in contrast.

Q: When the Peace Corps came, were they pretty much a mirror image of what you all were?

WILCOX: They Peace Corps volunteers were a diverse group, from all over the country. They were enthusiastic, dedicated, and by and large had a positive effect helping to staff a needy school system.

Q: Did you find the school system much different than the American school system?

WILCOX: It was more rigid. There was more emphasis on rote memorization the syllabus in order to pass standardized exams. But the students were forced to learn the basics of literature, mathematics, geography, English, history, a bit of science. As Americans, we wanted them to be more African than British, so I introduced a course in African History that was an option in the syllabus, as an alternative to English history. I became interested in the subject, and discovered there was an interesting history of West African nation states and rather refined civilizations that long predated the colonial era.

Q: At that point was there any inquisitiveness on the part of the Sierra Leonean students about race relations in the United States?

WILCOX: Very little. The west Africans had no grievances against Americans or white people. The British ruled through a handful of colonial officials who relied heavily on the traditional chiefs, and because the climate was so poor – Sierra Leone was known as the White Man's Grave, there were no British settlers and no British women. So, there wasn't any racial undercurrent, nor was there much awareness of American society or history, although President Kennedy was much admired. There were a few black American volunteers, but we all found Sierra Leone a very different kind of society than ours.

Q: Did you have any contact with the embassy?

WILCOX: We invited Ambassador Carnahan (an ex-Congressman from Missouri) to speak at a graduation ceremony, and I had regular contact with embassy officers, especially Larry Williamson. I think those contacts helped steer me toward the Foreign

Service later. I traveled widely in East Africa.

After I left Sierra Leone, I flew to East Africa and hitchhiked around for about four months, and I met Jay Katzen, an American embassy officer in what was then called Usumbura. He and his wife were very hospitable.

Q: Jay is a big politician now in Virginia politics.

Did the Cold War intrude at all from your perspective during this time?

WILCOX: One of the reasons for Washington's interest in the newly-independent states of Africa was the hope that they would be friends and allies in the struggle with the Soviet Union and the communists. We paid a good deal of attention to these countries and launched significant aid programs. Both President Kennedy and Soapy Williams, his Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, were genuinely interested in the new continent. There was a sense of hope and euphoria about the future of Africa in those days as these countries became independent. In light of their later history, this optimism was mistaken.

Q: Were you caught in that sense of excitement?

WILCOX: Very much so. Africa was fascinating and exotic, the people were friendly, and it was absolutely safe. You could travel anywhere. After a year there I bought an old Land Rover for $125 and with two friends, drove to Nigeria via Guinea, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, and Dahomey, all the way to Lake Chad. It was a marvelous adventure.

Q: What about Nigeria and other places? Did you get a feel for the situation, governments, society there was different?

WILCOX: All the West African countries had recently become independent. They seemed to have decent infrastructure and functioning governments, and to be moving forward. The great political debate, in those days was whether there was something unique about African culture that predisposed them toward or required one party government. We had no premonition of the internecine violence, civil wars, and the gross corruption and breakdown that occurred 15-20 years later.

In East Africa, the atmosphere was different. The people were more reserved and less forthcoming, and I sensed some racial tension, perhaps because of the large colonial settler presence in some of those countries.

Q: In Kenya, of course, there was the Mau Mau movement or was it that far back?

WILCOX: It took place earlier, while the British were still there. Even so, as I hitchhiked all over East Africa. The people were friendly, the towns and cities were attractive, and the countryside was beautiful. The only trouble I encountered was in Kivu Province in

the Eastern Congo, where the “Simba” rebellion was already brewing.

Q: By the time you were up into '64, were you beginning to get some ideas about what you wanted to do?

WILCOX: I went home to Denver and joined a large and successful law firm, Holme, Roberts & Owen, where I became involved in probate, estate planning and tax law. I gradually realized that my heart was not in it, and seemed quite prosaic after by my experience in Africa. The only excitement I found in law practice was a few times I served, pro bono, as defense counsel for indigent criminal suspects, one of whom was a bank robber. But, lacking inspiration or commitment, I took the Foreign Service Exam and passed it.

My most important accomplishment during that period was my marriage, in 1965, to Cynda Buxton, who also grew up in Denver and went to Stanford.

Q: Where did you meet your wife?

WILCOX: I met her in the home of Dick and Dottie Lamb at a meeting of the

Denver Young Democrats to stuff envelopes for Lyndon Johnson. I was a member of the board of the Young Democrats at the time, Dick was the President. Dick later became Governor of Colorado.

Q: When did you take the Foreign Service exam?

WILCOX: I took it in the winter of 1965. When I passed, we agreed to go to Washington, and I quit my law firm job in the late fall of 1966.

Q: You took the oral exam?

WILCOX: When I took the oral exam in Denver, the three Foreign Service Officers on the panel impressed me. They asked some very penetrating questions, including my opinion about the Vietnam War. I said I thought it was a mistake, and one of the examiners agreed with me, to my surprise.

Q: Do you remember any other things that were put to you?

WILCOX: They asked me about how the U.S. government worked and what was important about the formulation of foreign policy and the respective roles of the executive branch, the Congress, and the press. They asked me lots of questions about myself and my past. They were skillful interviewers.

Q: I assume you passed both the written and the oral. When did you come in?

WILCOX: Cynda and I came to Washington in late November 1966, and went to what is

called the A-100 course for junior officers.

Q: When you came into the A-100 course, can you characterize the class you were with?

WILCOX: They were a diverse group from all over the United States and many different backgrounds. Most of them I think were a bit younger than I was at the time. But, as I had, many of them had experience in working elsewhere. Most had been to graduate school.

Q: What about minorities, women in your class?

WILCOX: There were, as I recall, only two women in my class, Arma Jane Szczepanski, and Diane Salisbury (she married Bill Salisbury, another classmate.) I don't think there were any African-Americans or other minorities in the class.

Q: When you got in, what was sort of the conventional wisdom you were picking up in the corridors of power of where you wanted to go, what you wanted to do?

WILCOX: I told a personnel counselor I would like to go to Venezuela where I had experience, had some family, and that I spoke a little Spanish. He said, "We'll just take that off the list." The odd implication was that would somehow be a distraction or conflict of interest. I was assigned to Vientiane, Laos, and detailed to the U.S. Information Agency [USIA]. I was very disappointed because my vision of the Foreign Service was diplomacy and being a State Department officer. So, I went to the coordinator of the course, Tom Dunnigan, and complained to him. He said, "Young man, there are many different elements in our Foreign Service. They are all equally important. We have a tradition of service, and if you don't want to be assigned to USIS [U.S. Information Service], you can do something else in your career." Later, I understood that was very good advice later. The Vientiane job with USIS turned out to be a marvelous assignment, one of the most interesting.

Q: You went to Laos from when to when?

WILCOX: We were in Laos 1967 to '69, in the midst of the Indochina war. I served under Ambassadors Bill Sullivan and G. McMurtrie Godley.

Q: Two of the top people.

WILCOX: And I had the good fortune of having two jobs. I started out as a Field Operations officer in USIS. Then, when the Press Officer, a veteran Foreign Service officer, left unexpectedly, the Ambassador asked me to be the Press Officer. It was an absolutely fascinating job, and I learned a lot.

Q: Your wife went with you.

WILCOX: Yes, Cynda went with me, and our daughter, Elizabeth, was born in Bangkok

in 1968.

Q: What was Laos like when you arrived in 1967?

WILCOX: Laos was a beautiful little Asian country. The people were charming; the culture was quaint and exotic. The country was overwhelmed by a massive American presence, since it had become an adjunct of the war in Vietnam.

Q: What were you doing first as a field operations officer for USIA?

WILCOX: My job was to help "win the hearts and minds" of the Lao people in support of victory over the Vietnamese communists and their Lao puppets, the Pathet Lao. I wrote soft propaganda and what were called USINFOs, which were news reports with a policy slant designed for the USIA wireless file, which went around the world, for placement in local newspapers to win support for U.S. policy. Laos was a valuable education. With the benefit of hindsight, the USIS mission there, to make a tiny passive little country into an aggressive ally against the Vietnamese, was unrealistic. The larger U.S. mission in Laos was to use the country to vector bombing by U.S. Air Force planes based in Thailand against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and to stage ground attacks against the North Vietnamese along the border, using Lao irregulars trained and armed by the CIA. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was a major logistics route and supply line for North Vietnamese forces and the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. In the end, this bombing campaign did not stop the flow of arms to the South. We had hundreds of Americans in Laos. The majority of them were involved in the paramilitary or military efforts, but we also had a significant economic development and currency stabilization program, run by the U.S. Agency for Economic Development [USAID]. We invested vast sums of money without much knowledge of the history and culture of Laos, and I believe, with unrealistic expectations about rescuing Vietnam from the communists or helping stop the war in South Vietnam. For me, being in Laos was a sobering education in the limits of U.S. influence and military power.

Q: Did you get out into the field much?

WILCOX: I did a lot. One of my responsibilities was to provide information to the visiting press and the local press. The Saigon war correspondents would come to Vientiane periodically to write Laos stories and I got to know a lot of them. I found that an exciting, heady experience. My job was to provide them with information but also to steer them away from a lot of clandestine activities, which were going on at the time. In some ways I was an agent of misinformation when I had to use Washington's boilerplate press guidance. For example, the prescribed line on our military activity in Laos was that we were "conducting armed reconnaissance flights, and U.S. pilots were instructed to fire if fired upon." In fact, we were bombing the hell out of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. But I tried to be helpful in other ways.

When journalists came to Laos, they always called on the Ambassador. Bill Sullivan liked the press and understood the importance of trying to help them. He always had me

with him when briefing journalists. Listening to him was an education because he was a superb diplomat and a very clever man

The major lesson I learned from my work as Press Officer in Laos was that while there are inevitable tensions between the U.S. Government and the press, a policy of secrecy and disinformation ultimately fails. The press was resourceful enough to learn what was really going on in Laos, and our unwillingness to be candid probably contributed to the great loss of credibility the U.S. Government experienced as a result of our Indochina venture. Our ostensible reason for not discussing our activities in Laos was that we were violating the Geneva Convention, negotiated by Averell Harriman with the Soviets, which agreed that Laos would remains neutral in the Vietnam conflict. Since the Vietnamese had flagrantly violated Laos' neutrality, we probably should have determined that the Geneva Convention was moot, and admitted what we were doing there.

I remember when Charley More of the New York Times told me, after I had recited to him the usual press guidance, that some day the United States would pay a price for its unwillingness to level with the public about what was going on in Laos and elsewhere in Indochina. He was right. Our policy of less than full candor ultimately created a backlash and a loss of credibility that hastened the decline of public support for our involvement in Vietnam and hastened our departure.

Q: What was the feeling among particularly the junior officers of which you were one about that whole business?

WILCOX: I can't speak for officers, but I think we all felt we were part of a cause, and there was a strong sense of commitment. Laos was a victim of North Vietnamese aggression, and we thought it deserved support. Before joining the Foreign Service, I had become skeptical about our involvement in Vietnam, but my views were not fully formed at that time. I did think at the time that the U.S. should be working harder to encourage a political solution in Vietnam, attempt to bring the Viet Cong into the government as a way of separating them from the North Vietnamese, and that we were relying to heavily on military means. In any case, working in Laos and being part of a team was exciting and challenging.

Q: What was your impression about how Sullivan dealt with his staff and then also Godley?

WILCOX: Sullivan was a man of powerful intellect, and strong views. He followed our diplomatic and military efforts very closely in Vietnam, and he was never shy about offering his advice to Washington or to Saigon. He did so regularly in pithy telegrams, and made some enemies among those who felt he was meddling. Nevertheless, he was committed to the broad goals of our struggle in Vietnam, and later when he became a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the East Asia bureau. In any case, he was a very able diplomat, a skilled political analyst, a great raconteur, and a strong leader.

Sullivan was also a thoughtful man. Once he asked me to escort two journalists to Xieng

Khouang Province in northern Laos where they wanted to do a refugee story for Life Magazine. He told me to avoid exposing the journalists to any of the clandestine activities we were conducting in that area. I went to the person who was supposed to plan the itinerary for our helicopter flight. We flew up to a top of a mountain where the journalists had a wonderful time photographing colorful Meo refugees streaming up the hillsides and getting into helicopters. To my great shock, suddenly a U.S. Air Force F-4 bomber flew directly overhead and dropped its ordinance seven or eight miles down the valley. Because of faulty directions, we had strayed into a forbidden area. I was terrified that my two journalist charges were going to rush back and report an eye witness exclusive of the "secret war in Laos," bringing to an early close my career in the Foreign Service. To my amazement, they did not. One of them wrote the story about six months later with a dateline of Hanoi after knowledge of our bombing activity had become much more public. I went to Sullivan and told him what had happened. He was annoyed, but there were no recriminations.

Q: How about Godley?

WILCOX: I didn't know Mac Godley as well. He was in some ways a more traditional Foreign Service officer of the old school. I liked him a lot. When I was getting ready to leave, he offered to help me on my next assignment and through him I was assigned to Sri Lanka, although the Department abolished the position before I got back to Washington. Godley was close to the CIA, and hired his former Station Chief in Kinshasa to join him in Vientiane.

Q: What was your impression of the CIA and its activities and its personnel in Laos?

WILCOX: There was a massive program to train and supply Lao irregular forces. The officers I knew were talented, dedicated people people. There was a pronounced division between the overt political side of the embassy and the clandestine side, which I thought was excessive and unhealthy, although both Sullivan and Godley were strong managers who watched everything closely.

Q: What about the royal family of Laos? From your perspective, was that much of a factor?

WILCOX: The Royal family was respected, but the monarchy didn't have the kind of dynamic leadership that for example, the Thai King had. The country was governed more indirectly by a kind of feudal civilian military aristocracy. There was a lot of drug running going on. An acquaintance of ours, Chao Sopsaisana, who was a prince from Xieng Khouang, was appointed ambassador to Paris, but was arrested by the French police on is arrival for attempting to smuggle in drugs in his briefcase! Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma was a Lao prince from an old noble family, and ironically, his half brother, Souphanouvong, who was known as the Red Prince, was the nominal head of the Pathet Lao, the Lao Community Party that was controlled by Hanoi. Souvanna Phouma, was a patriot who was trying to preserve his country's independence from the Vietnamese and maintain at least a veneer of neutrality.

The Lao were not equipped nor prepared for the massive Vietnamese assault nor the large U.S. presence there. They more or less stood aside while the U.S. took over, and their own regular army was corrupt and ineffective.

Q: Were you getting any reflections from people you know about what was happening in Vietnam itself, whither Vietnam?

WILCOX: Yes, we would read the cables and we would read the press, so we had a pretty good sense of what was going on next door. In a way I regretted that I never visited Vietnam to see it myself. We felt we were a part of that conflict.

Q: Well, when you left there, what was your impression in '69?

WILCOX: Well, as I said, I was growing more skeptical about the whole enterprise, but I hadn't really developed an ultimate view of our involvement. It was not going well, and even then I thought that there ought to be more emphasis on finding political solutions both in Laos and in Vietnam. My impression at that time was that South Vietnam was still a viable entity, and it could emerge in some way without being swallowed up by the North. I was wrong.

Q: Many of us were. Well, when you left in '69, you were going to go to Sri Lanka when they cut you off at the legs. Where did you go?

WILCOX: I went to work for the Deputy Undersecretary for Management, Bill Macomber, who was a wonderful character. He had tremendous energy, commitment, patriotism, and knowledge of U.S. government. He had been John Foster Dulles' special assistant, and his wife, Phyllis Bernau Macomber had been Dulles' secretary.

Q: You did this from...

WILCOX: I did it from 1969 to 1971. Being back in Washington, I could observe the political ferment here in the United States over the war. I remember vividly taking a bus to work from my home in Glover Park one morning. The bus was hijacked by a group of anti-Vietnam protesters during the attempted closure of the U.S. government. During those few days, I remember watching from our seventh floor window in Macomber's office a gathering mob outside of the entrance of the Department on C Street. Bill Macomber went down, and when he saw that the mob was threatening to attack the American flag, he mounted the flag pole and defended the flag. Some days later, he was at lunch on the seventh floor, and the phone rang. The operator said it was President Nixon calling Bill Macomber. I ran upstairs and got him from the dining room. In those days, it was quite legitimate to monitor phone calls or principals, a custom that was later abolished when it was abused. The President said, "Bill, I want to tell you I thought it was a great thing you did the other day when you went out there and saved the flag." By then I had become increasingly disillusioned about our engagement in Vietnam, but I was not so much involved in foreign policy as in staff work and management issues.

Q: William Macomber had a real vision for the State Department and the Foreign Service and how it should be run, and there were lots of proposals and follow through and all that. Could you talk about Macomber and how he was dealing with these things, and what was happening?

WILCOX: After an unsuccessful run for a Congressional seat, Bill Macomber worked for Mr. Dulles, and then became our Ambassador to Jordan and later Assistant Secretary for Congressional affairs before he became Deputy Undersecretary for Management. He had a great commitment to and love for the Foreign Service, and a belief in American diplomacy and in the United States. Although he was a political appointee, he believed in the Foreign Service and he wanted to improve it. So, he launched an ambitious reform program called Reform '70.

Q: Diplomacy for the '70s.

WILCOX: Yes. He saw the Department of State playing a leadership role and he advocated better training and coordination. He got talented officers involved in a series of task forces, recruiting Allen Holmes, an FSO who ended his distinguished career as an assistant secretary of defense. I was the junior person in the office as a staff aide. I learned a lot from Macomber about government, the Department, and the art of staff work. It was a marvelous job.

Macomber deserves special credit for changing the policy at State that required female Foreign Service Officers to resign if they married. He took up the case of Katherine Shirley in Warsaw who was asked to resign after marrying Jock Shirley of USIS. Macomber got her reinstated and changed the policy.

Q: Could you talk a bit about working as a staff assistant? What type of things were you doing?

WILCOX: Good staff work should relieve the burden of work for your principal by making modest judgments yourself when you can, and ensuring paper work is polished and manageable. At that time at State, there was a great premium on letter perfect paperwork and good drafting. I did lots of editing and correspondence, and worked very closely with the Executive Secretariat which in those days was staffed by an elite corps of young officers who made sure that the paperwork flowed smoothly and was in proper shape for the principals. That was of professional value to me, but just knowing how government policy worked from the inside was good also. I also got a sense of congressional affairs because Bill Macomber knew the Congress well and the importance of keeping it involved and informed.

Q: This was about the time when there was a fairly strong movement on the part of junior officers who considered they were more important than ever. This was a time when youth was felt to be without sin and of particular value. Did you watch this?

WILCOX: I watched closely. It was a product of our era, I think, and it expressed itself one day when a large group of officers signed a petition condemning the U.S. military invasion of Cambodia.

Q: This is in May of 1970.

WILCOX: This provoked a demand from John Dean in the White house, who later became famous as one of the minor actors in the Watergate scandal, to deny promotions to the officers who signed the petition or perhaps deal even more severely with them. Bill Macomber and his colleague Undersecretary for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson intervened and defended the institution of the Foreign Service. They didn't praise or agree with the officers' petition, but they respected their right to dissent and were determined to protect them from reprisals from the White House. This took courage.

Q: William Macomber known as Butts I think.

WILCOX: William Butts Macomber.

Q: Was renowned for his temper. Did you ever see this in action?

WILCOX: I saw it, but he did not vent that temper on me. He was also a charming man with a large circle of friends. I felt that sometimes people who didn't now him had an unbalanced impression of him because they had experienced his hot temper without really knowing the man.

Q: What sort of weight do you think he carried within the department at that time?

WILCOX: I don't know. State suffered in those days from severe competition between the National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, and Secretary William Rogers. Macomber's reforms were supported by Secretary Rogers, but I think like all secretaries of state, he was so preoccupied with foreign policy crises that he did not devoted a lot of energy to resource, personnel, or management issues. He left it to Macomber because he trusted him and they knew he was an able man. Macomber was also quite good with the Congress. He dealt effectively with Wayne Hays who was a tough, mean guy, serving as Head of the Government Operations Committee of the House Appropriations Committee

Macomber won his cooperation. He also dealt with John Rooney, the chairman of another appropriations subcommittee who had a reputation of being tough on the Foreign Service, calling us cookie pushers. In fact John Rooney always came through with adequate budget funds for State, after some posturing, and Macomber helped that process.

Q: Well, did you find you got a pretty good feel for who was doing what to who and how it was done in your department as a staff assistant?

WILCOX: I found it fascinating and learned a lot about how the Department worked which helped me later on.

Q: Yes because I think this is one of the things that those who have let's say line jobs of being a desk officer and all don't quite get the same feel.

WILCOX: Well there is a trade off. I never served as a country desk officer until I became director of a country desk, so I think maybe I missed something earlier in my career.

Q: Did Henry Kissinger intrude at all into your...

WILCOX: No, he really didn't. He was indeed running our foreign policy from his office in the White House. George Bush was our permanent representative to the UN [United Nations] in those days, and he and Bill Macomber were old college and prep school pals. During his visits to Washington to attend cabinet meetings, he would always come in and say hi to everybody. He struck me as a friendly, engaging fellow.

Q: You were in Indonesia from '72 to '76. When you went to Indonesia, did you take any Indonesian?

WILCOX: I spent six months learning Indonesian at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). Cynda and I had the great good fortune to continue our language study near Bandung, West Java, where we lived in a village and studied under tutors at the local teacher training. Formal language training at FSI and further study in the country of assignment, somewhere removed from the embassy, is an ideal combination.

Q: '72, Indonesia, what was it like?

WILCOX: The country had emerged from the turmoil of the Sukarno era, the challenge of the Indonesian communist party, and the overthrow the Sukarno regime by the military. It had developed a considerable degree of stability and prosperity under President Suharto and a group of talented, largely American trained, technocrats who were running the macro side of economic policy. The country was rich in oil and natural resources, but it was an underdeveloped country, burdened by fast growth of its large population, considerable poverty, a lack of modern legal and financial institutions. There was also deep corruption, in which Suharto and his family were much involved. As a political officer, I reported on corruption in detail and wrote some long dispatches of a kind that are no longer written.

Q: Was corruption a concern and why?

WILCOX: We viewed it as a constraint to economic development, public support for the government, and development of a market economy. At that time, it had not reached the crisis stage, since there was plenty of money to go around, oil and gas production and foreign investment were was growing, and the economy was expanding. There was some student disaffection, but it wasn't serious. Nothing like the '65 era or nothing like what is going on now.

Q: I think one of the problems of all of us who have served in countries where there is a lot of corruption are faced with is the fact that yes there is corruption, if you report on it, the reports taken out of context can get you into newspapers and into Congress, and end up by being a major focus and almost a detrimental effect to relations because Americans love scandal, and if there is scandal, when are you going to do something about the bums.

WILCOX: In those days there was less of a tendency to leak to the press. There were fewer people who had personal agendas, and Congress was not as involved in foreign policy. They had a greater respect for the leadership of the executive branch and the Department of State. We didn't protest to Indonesia about corruption. We were only beginning to discuss with them problems of human rights, and that was considered a departure from traditional diplomacy.

Q: Who was our ambassador?

WILCOX: Frank Galbraith was my first ambassador. He was an old Indonesian had who had served there for a good part of his career, spoke the language, and knew everybody in the country. He was succeeded by David Newsom, a truly distinguished person, a fine diplomat, and a scholar and writer who had previously served in the Middle East, Africa and the Subcontinent. He had been Assistant Secretary for African Affairs before he went to Jakarta. He had a great influence on me because of his knowledge, wisdom and sense of integrity. He understood there were certain limits to what you could and what you couldn't do. He was a very good ambassador.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Indonesian government?

WILCOX: Invariably pleasant. They place a premium on good personal relations and courtesy. It was not easy to communicate with Indonesians without understanding their culture. They dislike confrontation and their politeness often masks their real views, so finding out what they were really thinking and what was going on was real challenge.

Q: What was your impression of how they viewed the United States?

WILCOX: They were friendly toward the United States and quite pro-western. We had large AID and military support programs, and we supported the Suharto government as a welcome change to the radicalism and instability of the former Sukarno era. We recognized Indonesia's strategic importance because of its size and geographic position, and because it was the fifth most populous country in the world. The Indonesians have a deep love for their country and their own culture. They also have a sense of nationalism forged during the colonial era and their armed struggle that ultimately ended the Dutch occupation. Although there was some latent xenophobia, it was far less pronounced than in some other former colonial countries. The Indonesians maintained their culture and traditions during the Dutch era, and Dutch respected this, although colonial rule was harsh in some respects. The Indonesians are a proud people, and their contact with the

West has not created an identity complex.

Q: Was East Timor an issue while you were there?

WILCOX: Yes, East Timor was emerging as an issue. We began to be concerned about their heavy-handed approach toward the Timorese, after the Portuguese pulled out.

Q: What about the situation towards Malaysia?

WILCOX: Suharto restored good relations with Malaysia, and ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations was beginning to prosper. The old days of "confrontasi" with the Malaysians were over. Relations with the Singaporeans were also correct. Their main problem was China. There was a fear of Chinese domination, in part because it was communist, and in part because of prejudice against the very large and prosperous Chinese community in Indonesia.

Q: It seems to be a community when things are bad there is a pogrom. They sort of turn on the Chinese.

WILCOX: The Chinese in Indonesia, like other expatriate Chinese were successful entrepreneurs. The Indonesians in general do not have a commercial, entrepreneurial tradition, and so there is quite a difference in the standard of living. In times of trouble, indigenous Indonesians tended to blame their economic problems on the Chinese. The problem was compounded by the penchant of the Indonesian military leadership to use Chinese as front men and extract funds from them as the price for allowing them to do business. Many Indonesian leaders, including Suharto, were associated with wealthy Chinese who offered them a percentage of their gains in return for licenses and franchises. Through such associations, the Suharto family acquired an economic empire.

Q: What was your impression in reporting on things of the Suharto family and the circle around Suharto?

WILCOX: We did a lot of candid, careful reporting, and there were never any constraints or censorship. In those days we had rather large political and economic sections, and we had the luxury of being able to report on a wide range of topics. Bob Pringle, especially, was an unusually gifted analyst and reporting officer. I also served as an Economic/Commercial officer for two of my four years in Indonesia.

Q: Well as economic and commercial officer what were some of the things you were doing?

WILCOX: I have always thought the Foreign Service has made a mistake in creating separate cadres of economic and political officers. To understand politics and economics, you have to be well versed in both subjects. I also think that commercial work, trade promotion, and assistance to U.S. businessmen is an important part of diplomacy. In the early 1970s, American Foreign Service officers were beginning to take an interest in this

and doing it quite well. Many young officers had abandoned the traditional prejudice against commercial work and found it quite interesting. In Indonesia, I found businessmen were often more accessible, more interesting and more forthcoming than government officials or ministry people. I was disappointed when the Department of State under Secretary Vance decided to abandon the commercial function and hand it over to the Department of Commerce.

Q: You were there during the Watergate period. How did that play in Indonesia?

WILCOX: The Indonesians were bemused by what we regarded as high crimes and corruption, since this sort of behavior was routine in Indonesia.

Q: I was in Greece, and it was the same thing. More importantly, this was the period, '71-'75, we reached a truce in South Vietnam, and then South Vietnam fell after a period of time. How was this playing in Indonesia?

WILCOX: The Indonesians were disappointed that we didn't stay and defeat the Vietnamese communists because they were deeply anti-Communist themselves, but it did not have a major impact on our relationship or their confidence in us.

Q: Well, when you were there, was it pretty well felt that the communists in Indonesia had not only been set back but pretty well taken out of the game?

WILCOX: There was no support for the old communist party, and harsh prison sentences against the older generation communist leaders was a signal that support for communism was unacceptable.

Q: So when you left there in '74, this is a solid country going well?

WILCOX: I was concerned about the race between poverty and fast growing population, although by then Indonesia, with U.S. help, had initiated a promising family planning program. I was also worried about the cost of corruption to stability and development. In retrospect, I was mistaken that these problems could create crisis in the near term. In fact, Indonesia boomed for another 20 years, before the problems of corruption, inequity, and lack of institutional development finally caused an economic and political upheaval. Now the country is in deep in trouble, and is searching for a way to move away from military rule to democracy, and from crony capitalism to market economics. The people now want more participation and more probity in government, although they also want stability.

Q: What about some time before, West Irian had been the great rallying cry. You were there when Indonesia had West Irian. What was happening there?

WILCOX: The Indonesians negotiated with the United Nations for a referendum called the “act of free choice” by the people of what was then Dutch New Guinea. The people opted to join Indonesia. The process was hardly democratic, and the Indonesians contrived to be certain they would inherit the area, which they named West Irian. The

people of West Irian are among the most isolated, in the world, and had not developed unity or a sense a nationalism to counter the Indonesians.

Q: Stone Age is the term used in some...

WILCOX: They are profoundly non-modern. There was no prospect I think, of their creating their own government. At the time, the Indonesians saw that as part of their archipelago and took it over. Indonesian rule there has been rather harsh. But I doubt that there is any feasible alternative to Indonesian control of Irian Jaya for the foreseeable future. In the fullness of time, however, the Irianese will demand to govern themselves and get rid of their Indonesian colonial masters. Irian Jaya is a very wealthy area; the Indonesians recognized that. I think they saw themselves as the natural heir to it. It had been part of the Dutch empire. They have tried to settle Javanese there as part of their transmigration policy, but it is an alien atmosphere. Most Javanese would rather live in Java.

Q: Did you find much Japanese economic penetration?

WILCOX: The Japanese were becoming the dominant foreign investor. Indonesians were not happy about the style of the Japanese that was sometimes insensitive, but they understood the value of Japanese investment.

Q: Was this of concern to us?

WILCOX: We saw the Japanese as a competitor, and Japanese private investment eclipsed ours.

Q: Was there much in the way of Indonesian young people going to the United States for training and coming back?

WILCOX: There was some, but in contrast to many countries of the world, the Indonesians who went abroad and studied usually came home because they loved Indonesia. There was not an urge among young people to go abroad and stay, in contrast, for example, to the pattern in India.

Q: I think that here is one of the interesting things, I mean here is a country that until at least the last year or two has been really quite wealthy with a large population, and yet not much reflection of that within our international student body here in the United States.

WILCOX: It is a little known country with an extraordinarily rich and interesting culture with an artistic tradition that is infinitely sophisticated.

Q: Did you find the embassy was sort of at odds with the prime source of Indonesian studies in the United States, Cornell? Because I know that out of Cornell, I have gotten this in other interviews, Cornell was sort of the premier study place for Indonesia and yet

they didn't like what happened when Sukarno was overthrown. At least I got this feeling.

WILCOX: George Kahan, Ben Anderson and others at Cornell were pioneers in the study of Indonesia and influenced the views of a generation of Foreign Service officers. They did a lot of their work during that period of ferment in the mid-'60s, and a lot of their contacts were with young Indonesian students and intellectuals. They disliked the military government of Suharto, and the feeling was mutual. There has been very fine scholarship on Indonesia in Australia as well. In those days there was lots of federal money in the U.S. to fund regional studies. I'm afraid we don't have that any more. American scholars did a lot to elucidate that country to Americans.

Q: Well, you left there in 1974.

WILCOX: 1976, I spent four years in Indonesia.

Q: Okay, then you were there during the fall of Vietnam. Again you say that had very little...

WILCOX: I don't recall that having a major impact in their confidence in us. They, I think, saw it as a setback. Indonesia is far from Vietnam. Their real preoccupation was China, and keeping the Chinese at bay was their most important strategic objective in Asia.

Q: Did boat people come in, refugees from Vietnam?

WILCOX: A handful came in. It was not a major issue.

Q: How about I can't remember when the first real oil shock, that was when, '73?

WILCOX: The first oil shock, I believe, came, the boycott came in '73 after the Yom Kippur War.

Q: That was October, '73. Did that do nice things as far as Indonesia was concerned?

WILCOX: I think it raised the price of oil, and Indonesia was producing a large volume of oil. A good deal was going to Japan. They had just discovered big natural gas reserves, so they were beginning to produce LNG (liquefied natural gas) and to build big petrochemical and fertilizer plants. The head of Pertamina, the state oil company, was General Ibnu Sutowo, a major empire builder and a crook. He diverted so much money from the company to build satellite enterprises, and also to build golf courses and to enrich his friends and family that he began to be seen as a threat to the rest of the army and the leadership. The technocrats were worried too, since he was amassing foreign debt at untenable level. So he was finally sacked and Pertamina was cut down to size.

Q: Well, you left in '76, I think this might be a good place to stop, and we'll pick it up next time, where did you go in 1976?

WILCOX: In 1976, I came back to Washington and entered the 26-week course in Economics at the Foreign Service Institute. That was probably one of the best things I ever did. It reinforced my views that all Foreign Service officers should have a solid grounding in economics as well as politics. It was the equivalent of an undergraduate degree in Economics. I think genuinely so, and it is something I have used every day of my life since.

Q: Did you find some of the Foreign Service officers say that when they got into the calculus and statistics, they were beginning to find that the water was a little bit too deep for them.

WILCOX: Yes, and for me that was a great challenge because I never had gone beyond solid geometry in high school. The most useful parts of the course were in trade policy, basic economics, and money and banking. The econometrics and the math were really unnecessary, since few Foreign Service officers used these skills in their work.

Q: All right, then we'll pick it up when you left the economics course in 1977.

WILCOX: I was looking for an economic job in 1977, but Francis Wilson, the Executive Director of the Economics Bureau told me it was not her practice to hire political officers, even though I had taken the FSI course. I thought that was parochial,

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Q: Today is May 19, 1998. So what happened? We are talking about 1977, and you were ready to be the next great economist. What happened?

WILCOX: Well, casting about for an assignment where I could use my new found economics knowledge, I discovered that the job of head of the economics section in Bangladesh was open, and officers were not exactly scrambling for that position. I thought it would be interesting, so I applied and was assigned there for two years, '77-'79.

Q: While you were at the economic bureau, did you have any dealings with Frances Wilcox?

WILCOX: Frances Wilson, no I didn't. I knew of her by reputation. She was a formidable executive director, but she had a special fondness for officers who came up through the economic cone, so instead of going to EB, I went to Dacca.

Q: Could you describe Dakha in 197, both the political and economic and also living conditions.

WILCOX: Dakha was coming out of a series of political convulsions following the birth of Bangladesh, it's breakaway from Pakistan, and the Indian invasion. That was a time of terrible chaos, violence and human suffering. In the mid-’70s, there were also natural

disasters which killed a lot of people. Thereafter, this began to make progress. The United States and donors from all over the world had focused on Bangladesh as a country with compelling development needs. Development was the main element of U.S. policy. It was a desperately poor country, about the size of Wisconsin with a dense population and a high rate of population growth. The main goals USAID, the World Bank and other donors were family planning, food production, public health, and job creation. I spent more time working with USAID on their programs than on the traditional work of an embassy economic officer.

Q: Really in a way, this was not a place where there was going to be much investment or purchasing of American goods was it?

WILCOX: Few American firms were interested in investing because of the poverty and the country's history of socialism and expropriation of private property. I got to know the Bangladeshi business community, which was struggling to overturn the policies of state control established by the former government of Sheik Mujibur Rahman, the first president of Bangladesh. Zia Rahman, his successor, was working, albeit slowly, to change those policies.

Q: Well, did you find that sort of the genes of entrepreneurship ran rather strongly? This is basically a Bengali community.

WILCOX: The Bangladeshis are a tough resilient, hard working people. In spite of adversity, which is almost inconceivable to westerners who haven't seen it, the Bangladeshis have actually made some progress. This wasn't readily apparent when I was there, but 15 years later, Bangladesh has made real strides in producing almost enough food to be self sufficient in privatizing a fair sector of their economy, in raising income, and most important of all, in running an effective family planning program to slow down a potentially catastrophic rate of population growth.

Q: What was our attitude towards family planning, because particularly since the Reagan administration which came in in '81, abortion has been considered, you know, we cannot support abortion. What was our attitude in dealing with family planning at this time?

WILCOX: Family planning was far less politicized in those days, and it was a central plank of U.S. foreign policy in underdeveloped countries. USAID had very experienced family planning experts, and did a superb job. I had seen it earlier in Indonesia. The Congress was supportive, there was plenty of money, and abortion was not a big issue. We supported voluntary sterilization in Bangladesh at the time, but recognized this should be carried out without coercion, in contrast to India, where coercive practices had set back family planning.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

WILCOX: Ed Masters was there when I arrived, and David Schneider came later. Both

were solid professionals. While Ed Masters was still there during the early months of my tour, a Japan Airlines flight was hijacked by a group of Japanese Red Army terrorists and forced down at Dhaka. The airplane was carrying well over 100 civilians including a good many Americans. In the course of negotiating with the terrorists, an insurgent group of Air Force officers mutinied and seized the airport, adding to the crisis. Because there were so many Americans aboard this plane, we were very much involved in the process with the Bengalis and the Bangladeshis to get the hostages released.

Q: What were you doing? Were you involved in this?

WILCOX: Yes, around the clock. We worked on the government to persuade the terrorists to release the passengers without capitulating to their demands. They did release some - perhaps all - of our citizens in Dhaka, but the terrorists then forced the pilot to take the plane to Algeria where they abandoned it, released the rest of the hostages in return for a very large sum, I think it was $10,000,000, and disappeared. As a matter of policy, we opposed such ransom payments.

Q: How did Masters and Schneider deal with, how did they operate?

WILCOX: Both very experienced in the developing world. Ed Masters had served as DCM in Indonesia. David Schneider was a premier South Asia expert, having served in India and Pakistan repeatedly. They had a strong sense of the need for economic development as the core of U.S. policy in Bangladesh, and they used our considerable influence effectively to developing close relations with the Bangladeshis and influence their policies. But it was not a tutelary relationship. The Bangladeshis had an upper tier of elite civil servants. It was an effective relationship.

Q: What was our reading on the Indian government vis a vis Bangladesh at that time?

WILCOX: The legacy of the past was still strong. The Bengalis are Muslims and have had an historic rivalry with the Hindus in India. But the Indian invasion in 1978 enabled Bangladesh to break away from Pakistan, so the relationship was ambivalent. The Indians had a large embassy there. Relations were cordial, and improving, but there was a latent fear about mother India because of its enormous size. Both governments were making an effort to deal in a sensible way with water. The water of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers were shared by both India and Bangladesh.

Q: Did they even have relations with Pakistan at that time?

WILCOX: Yes. There was both an animosity toward Pakistan and a kind of nostalgia for the old days. Most of the Bangladeshi civil servants had grown up in the civil service of Pakistan, and their classmates, or as they called them, “batch mates,” were working in Islamabad and around the world, so there was a kind of affinity. By that time, the Pakistanis were beginning to recognize that partition was a good thing because Bangladesh, with its enormous weight of population and its economic problems, and its cultural and ethnic differences from the Pakistani communities was a very different and

troubled country. Moreover it was hundreds of miles away. I think the break up was an historical inevitability. It is a pity it took place in such a violent way.

Q: Did you have any floods, typhoons or the like. They seem to be endemic in that area.

WILCOX: We didn't have any of the catastrophes that strike Bangladesh now and then. The country is extremely vulnerable to this kind of phenomenon because it is basically a river delta at sea level. The Bay of Bengal is subject to typhoons and hurricanes, and when they come, they sweep across the coastal areas and kill or displace masses of people. There was a theory at one time that periodic natural disasters would keep the population down, as nature's way of population control. Modern medicine changed this. While a great many people lost their lives in these disasters, the success of public health programs, including smallpox and cholera inoculations, had long since ended nature's way of maintaining a balance, and the population was soaring.

Q: How closely did you work with our AID effort there? The assistance effort must have been huge.

WILCOX: It was. Besides family planning, USAID promoted agriculture and irrigation projects, including a massive program of building flood control levees, using U.S. surplus food as payment. This was called the PL-480 Title II program. CARE, the private voluntary organization, ran the Title II program for USAID. Another program was designed to reduce food subsidies in order to increase agricultural production and income for farmers. Bangladesh, like many poor countries, had a ration subsidy system. Our programs were designed to wean them away from that so the market could operate. The food grain program USAID ran also emphasized fertilizer, irrigation, and new varieties of hybrid wheat and rice seeds.

Q: I would think that much of our effort which had been concentrated in South Vietnam not long before this, I mean the final pullout was in '75, the expertise and knowledge would have sort of been switched over to Bangladesh, a hot place in Southeast Asia.

WILCOX: A lot of well-qualified and dedicated USAID and other development experts were drawn to Bangladesh because it presented a model challenge for economic development. The middle class spoke English, and there was a coherent government structure. It was a great country for, and as we have subsequently learned – something of a success story for - development assistance.

Q: What about corruption; was this a problem?

WILCOX: Yes, and it was getting worse. I wrote reports on it. As in many developing countries there were close family and political ties between the business community and the bureaucracy and a good deal of corruption and back scratching.

Q: Were you able to deal with this?

WILCOX: It didn't taint our AID program, and the impact on development was not crippling, so it wasn't part of our diplomacy then.

Q: What about social life in dealing with the Bangladeshis?

WILCOX: It was spontaneous. The Bangladeshis are open and engaging people, and it was easy to make friends there. The intelligentsia, including academics, businessmen, and senior civil servants were interesting, accomplished people, although a great many were emigrating.

Q: Was there much spillover into Calcutta, sort of the Bengal area there?

WILCOX: The Calcutta Bengali are Hindu and culturally different with respect to religion. Many of the Hindu Bengali were forced out in the convulsions of the late '70s and went to East Bengal in India. Some of the Muslim Bengalis had been trained and went to prep school or university in Calcutta and were part of the Bangladeshi Muslim elite. The Hindus who were expelled were poor people known as the Biharis.

Q: About cultural life, you know I have never served in the area, but I know the Bengali movie industry is sort of world renowned from India and the poetry is supposed to be particularly good. Was there a reflection in Bangladesh of that?

WILCOX: The people were proud of that tradition, but the real heart and flowering of Bengali culture is in Calcutta and West Bengal where there was more wealth and commerce and a more highly developed urban society.

Q: Were you looking as we were looking at developing Bangladesh towards tying them in to this commercial center of Calcutta and working on that or was this sort of...

WILCOX: We encouraged regional cooperation, but at that stage, Bangladesh's main export, foreign and commercial ties were with the Persian Gulf countries. Migrant workers were the major source of foreign exchange.

Q: You are talking about the Persian Gulf.

WILCOX: Hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis worked there and sent remittances home. Bangladesh imported food grain from the U.S. and Canada in those days. They exported jute, and were beginning to exploit their considerable natural gas reserves. This activity has grown, but trade and business ties with their immediate neighbors had not developed very much at that time. The Indians and Bangladeshis are talking about using Bangladesh's oil and gas reserves for West Bengal and perhaps building pipelines for that purpose.

Q: But that hadn't developed.

WILCOX: No. Gas has been used primarily for domestic energy needs. USAID also

started a program of rural electrification, which has been a success.

Q: You left there in '79. Were you now a certified economic officer?

WILCOX: I went out there with a view that to be effective in understanding the rest of the world and representing the United States, you had to have a grasp of economics as well as politics. I was confirmed in that view by my experience in Bangladesh. It was also a tremendous education living in that part of the world which is utterly different from the west and where human beings faced with incredible odds somehow cope, survive and sometimes thrive. It shows that even with these burdens of population, there is still a way to generate economic development and a better life for people.

Q: Well, was the Bengali sort of example being looked at do you think by our government or any other governments saying "Okay, we can do something in something like this?" What are we learning and passing on, or was it country specific?

WILCOX: In those days U.S. economic development assistance was still thriving. It was very much a part of our foreign policy, and it got a lot of impetus from the Cold War. It was seen as a strategic tool as much as a humanitarian endeavor, so we had high levels of funding. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, as you know, development assistance has declined drastically, and it is struggling to preserve itself as a significant element of U.S. policy.

Q: Was there much carryover, I'm talking about the late '70s, from the Bengali experience to other?

WILCOX: Well, like everything else, development policy goes through different cycles. Human rights, women's rights, and promotion of democratic institutions get more attention today in our aid policy than previously. The lessons that we learned in Bangladesh were that sensible and well-funded development assistance programs can help a lot in family planning and food production. There is lots of transferability there. A lot of the people who worked in those programs are now gone. I hope there is a corporate memory in AID that can sustain and apply those experiences elsewhere.

Q: In '79 where did you go?

WILCOX: In '79, I came back to Washington and spent a year at the National War College.

Q: What were you doing there?

WILCOX: It was a traditional break that Foreign Service officers get in their career for senior training. I had not served in the military and found the opportunity to get to know senior military officers very useful. The curriculum at the War College at that time wasn't particularly rigorous. We had lots of spare time. There was an emphasis on broad self-improvement that went beyond the academic. I enjoyed it a lot, and wrote my

required paper on productivity in the United States.

Q: So in the summer of 1980 you were up for assignment.

WILCOX: Yes. I should mention that I traveled with a War College group to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Bahrain, my first visit to the Middle East. I also visited Jerusalem on the side after we finished the trip with some of my classmates, where I was to return later as Chief of Mission.

Q: What was your impression of the Middle

East at this particular time?

WILCOX: It was new to me. I was captivated by Jerusalem, as many foreigners are on their first visit there. Such visits are rather superficial because you fly from one country to another and don't see very much, but valuable, nonetheless. My impression of Saudi Arabia was that it was rich country, but very traditional and without developed modern institutions.

Q: What about Egypt? I would have thought if there had been sort of a carryover from Bangladesh. Here was a place with essentially a large population, more sophisticated and all that, but at the same time had too damn many people in too small a place.

WILCOX: I have since visited Cairo many times. With its huge, poor population, it resembles New Delhi or Calcutta.

Q: Where did you go in 1980?

WILCOX: After I finished with the War College, I went to work in the Bureau of International Organizations Affairs (IO), as one of the deputies in the office of UN Political Affairs. I was in IO from 1980 to 1983.

Q: What particular slice of international organizations did you have?

WILCOX: I was deeply involved in the Middle East issues which preoccupied the United Nations, as well as arms control issues, peace keeping issues. I got the beginning of my education about the Middle East in IO working very closely with the NEA [Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs] bureau on an annual cycle of UN General Assembly resolutions involving the Arab-Israeli conflict and on a plethora of resolutions in the Security Council on Israeli practices toward the Palestinians, Israeli settlements, the Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, major terrorist attacks against Americans in Lebanon and elsewhere, and so on.

Q: Well, lets start with sort of the structure within the United Nations. You were dealing with these from the Department of State. What was your particular working relationship with our mission in New York?

WILCOX: Our policy toward the United Nations at that time was evolving into a very adversarial one. The Reagan administration, which arrived in 1981, was quite skeptical about the UN and multilateral approaches to foreign policy. There were many in the new administration who saw the UN as a hostile entity in which third world nations and neutralists and pro-Soviet states would gang up against the U.S.

The leading supporter of this view was Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, who was President Reagan's permanent representative in New York. She was an articulate former academic with a desire for influence who packaged and articulated this anti-UN policy very skillfully, very effectively. She appealed to a sector of American public opinion and the Congress. She had little interest in trying to use the United Nations to our advantage and viewed it as a hostile adversary. Many of us in the Department thought that was the wrong policy, and that the U.S. had to work more creatively and constructively with the UN, and we could use it to our advantage. So there was tension between the professional Foreign Service and the policy leadership on our policy in the UN. Part of the Reagan administration's antagonism toward the UN was the way the Middle East conflict played out there. In the absence of other means for influencing U.S. policy and in the absence of an ongoing peace process that could address the conflict through negotiations, the Arab states and the Palestinians used the UN as a forum for attacking Israel. Because of our close affinity for Israel, this sharpened the adversarial nature of our relationship with the UN.

Q: I believe you arrived in the waning time of the Carter administration. What were you gathering about how the administration and IO looked at the United Nations at that time and particularly the issues you were dealing with?

WILCOX: The Carter administration tried to use the UN constructively. U.S. Ambassador Andy Young came a-cropper because of his freelance diplomacy with the PLO [Palestinian Liberation Organization], and the domestic political backlash forced him to resign. There were also a series of resolutions in the Security Council at that time, which were very controversial. One of them involved Israeli settlements and East Jerusalem, and because of an uproar over a U.S. decision to support that resolution, the administration actually retracted its vote afterwards. Ultimately, the Carter administration, feeling the domestic political heat, retreated from its mission of trying to use the UN as an instrument in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Q: After the election of 1980, the Reagan administration was the administration that was going to take over, what was the feeling as the appointments came out including Ambassador Kirkpatrick, within the IO?

WILCOX: Ambassador Kirkpatrick was a professor at Georgetown whose expertise was Latin America and Argentina. She caught the Reagan Administration's attention in an article in Commentary that argued that in facing bad choices between leftist or communist regimes on the one hand, and right wing authoritarian regimes on the other, the U.S. should support rightist regimes notwithstanding their anti-democratic, anti-

human rights policies. Her argument was that once a country goes communist, it is lost forever. This simplistic and overdrawn theory, which history has since disproved, probably helped draw the U.S. more deeply into associations with right wing authoritarian regimes for which we had very little affinity. I think it helped more to contribute to polarization than to diplomacy and to reducing the tensions of the Cold War. It also drove a wedge between the United States and the nations of the developing and non-aligned world who used the United Nations as a forum to assert their own influence and who were fond of anti-western and anti-colonial rhetoric.

It was true that the non-aligned did use the UN to pursue a lot of nonsense and harmful initiatives, but these were in fact of little consequence. We paid too much attention to these negative aspects of UN politics, while we should have been using our considerable influence and power more creatively to influence these countries in a positive way.

Q: It does seem we were looking for battles rather than allowing some shrugging off of some of these things.

WILCOX: John Quincy Adams said, "The United States should not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy." Our policies often bordered on doing just that in those days.

Q: Who was the initial assistant secretary for International Organizations?

WILCOX: Dick McCall who had been a congressional aide to Senator Dale McGee of Wyoming, was the assistant secretary until the end of the Carter administration. Then Elliott Abrams, a brilliant young neo-conservative lawyer who later became Reagan's assistant secretary for human rights, was appointed.

Q: I think he went first to IO and then to human rights and then to ARA.

WILCOX: Eliot was clever, strong-minded, and very able. I liked him, though I disagreed with his ideology. Unfortunately for Eliot, he clashed with Jeane Kirkpatrick, whom he was supposed to be instructing in New York, who was no less strong minded and who did not wish to receive instructions from the Department of State. The two of them were ideologically like-minded, but they were not compatible because both were interested in policy and influence. Jeane prevailed, and Elliott went to the Human Rights Bureau. He was not in IO long enough, I think, to make a major mark.

Q: Did you find yourselves, I mean here you are professionals and you are new boy on the block and all, having to deal with a much more politicized mission to the UN. Did you find yourselves used, bypassed, frustrated, how did this work?

WILCOX: I think it is more complicated than that. It wasn't all black and white. As is the case with all political appointees who assume senior positions in the Department of State, their ideological views over time are tempered by the realities of diplomacy and U.S. interests, and they become more pragmatic. They also recognize that they have in their service a lot of able, dedicated, not apolitical but disciplined, Foreign Service officers

who are there to carry out the president's policy. Over the years, as new administrations and secretaries of state and their political appointees have come in, they and the professional Foreign Service ultimately learn that they need to work with each other. That happened in the Reagan years, and work of the government carried on.

Q: What was the United Nations commitment to Israel, Palestine, the Holy Land, anyway that area prior to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon?

WILCOX: The UN had been deeply involved since the very beginning, since the birth of Israel, the partition resolution of 1947 which called for the creation of the state of Israel. The Arab states rejected this, and the Israel military saw it as merely a stage toward acquiring more territory. The UN continued to be much involved together with the United States. A whole series of landmark Security Council resolutions that we supported and helped to frame were the backbone of U.S. policy. Resolutions 242 and 338, which embodied the principle of land for peace, based upon negotiations were for years the bedrock of U.S. policy. The authority of those resolutions and the stature of the UN as a player in the conflict began to decline in the 1980s, while U.S. policy was becoming more subject to the pressures of domestic politics.

Our policy toward the status of Jerusalem is a good example. We had quite forthrightly voted for a Security Council resolution in 1981 that condemned Israel's extension of its law and authority to East Jerusalem. We viewed this as a violation of international law that treated East Jerusalem as occupied territory. We had also addressed the question of Israeli settlements forthrightly by supporting UN resolutions that criticized settlements as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. But as the years passed, our policy became less pointed. We increasingly abstained, or voted against UN resolutions critical of Israel, irrespective of their merits, and we began to see the Security Council as well as the General Assembly as troublesome, pro-Arab meddlers. It is true, that the Arab states would rush to the Security Council, to the General Assembly where they knew they could marshal majorities, and in the Security Council, force the U.S. into vetoes. But it was also true that U.S. diplomacy toward creating peace was less aggressive that it should have been, and that there were opportunities for moving the stubborn parties, both Israel and Arab, toward negotiations that were not taken. That situation was to continue.

Q: What was the reaction of IO and the U.S. from your perspective of the Israeli invasion or intrusion or whatever you want to call it into Lebanon which sort of kicked over the beehive? This was in '82?

WILCOX: This was in '82. Many historians think Secretary Haig gave the Israelis a so-called yellow light, and many in the U.S., including Henry Kissinger, thought the invasion would effectively put the PLO out of business and pave the way to peace. But our formal position opposed to the invasion, and we became increasingly at odds with the government of Israel as Sharon pushed the IDF all the way to Beirut and inflicted heavy casualties on Lebanese civilians.

Phil Habib and Morrie Draper were engaged in strenuous diplomacy to get the Israelis

out. The U.S. supported UN Security Resolution 425, calling for withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon. After the exodus of the PLO from Beirut, the massacre of Palestinians at the refugee camp of Sabra and Shatila in West Beirut, and Israel's withdrawal from the Beirut suburbs, which Habib and Draper negotiated, the U.S. then pressed Lebanon to enter into an agreement in November 1983 that would give the Israelis a residual military presence in the south. Amin Gemayel, the President of Lebanon, later repudiated the agreement, under pressure from Syria, which had not been a part of the negotiation and believed it had been imposed on Lebanon. (Our Ambassador in Damascus, Bob Paganelli, had warned Shultz that without Syrian participation and support, the Israel-Lebanon negotiations that eventually led to the November 1983 agreement, could not succeed. He was right.) Thereafter, Israel, unilaterally established a "security zone" in the south where Israeli troops and an Israeli Christian backed mercenary force were deployed. Syria also continued to maintain forces in Lebanon, mainly in the Bekka Valley.

Q: What was your impression, I mean here you had a very politicized administration. Were they taking what would be considered a pro-Israeli stance? How were they coming out on this?

WILCOX: I think the United States from the beginning has been pro-Israel. It is a product of a lot of things, including the Bible and the image of the holy land that American Christians hold, and of the strength of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The emotional quality of Israel in the American mind is very powerful. It has deeply influenced our relationship with Israel and the way we looked at the Arab-Israeli conflict. The strategic dimension has also been a part of our support for Israel and our involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. During the Cold War, we saw Israel as a strong, friendly, democratic state whereas the Arab states were hostile, or at least not close to the U.S., especially after the rupture of diplomatic relations between Israel and the United States after the 1967 war and the OPEC [Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries] oil embargo in 1973 after the Yom Kippur war. Strategic considerations pulled us in opposite directions in those days: in support of even greater proximity to democratic, pro-U.S. Israel, and in support of restoring good relations with the Arab states which were at odds with Israel lest they fall under the sway of the USSR and further threaten our oil supply. There was constant tension and controversy over these competing strategic criteria, but by and large, our pro-Israel orientation prevailed.

In the 1930s and early '40s the Department of State and the Near East Bureau were inclined to support the Arab viewpoint and many in the Foreign Service thought that the creation of the state of Israel would lead to war and conflict. Before 1948 many Foreign Service officers were skeptical, if not opposed to the creation of Israel, given the opposition of the Arab world and U.S. strategic interests there.

Q: Yes. A lot of Arabs and a very small Jewish state.

WILCOX: Secretary of State George Marshall, did counseled Truman against support for Israel, and officers in the Middle East Bureau, who had served in Arab countries saw

Zionism as a disruptive enterprise that could only cause trouble and harm our strategic interests in the region. At home, however, the American public, had become increasingly pro-Zionist, because of the impact of the Holocaust and the catastrophe for the Jews of the Nazi era. The need for justice for the Jewish people and a homeland in which hundreds of thousands of refugees, who even after WWII had not been welcomed in other countries, including the U.S., had great appeal. President Truman was responding, in part, to this public opinion when he decided that the U.S. would immediately recognize the State of Israel when it was established in 1948. At that time, Americans had little knowledge of the Palestinians or their equities in this conflict. Striking a fair balance between our commitment to justice for the Jewish people and to the new State of Israel and the need for redress to the Palestinian people has been a dilemma for the U.S. that has still not been resolved.

Q: In a way, the old professionals their motives might not have been pure, but they were right as far as it being a destabilizing force.

WILCOX: It was, and it is easier to make judgments in hindsight, and I have often asked myself how I would have reacted had I been a professional diplomat at the time. I don't know, but having been involved deeply and profoundly in this issue working with both sides, I have a strong sense of the equities, the call for justice of both the Israelis and the Palestinians. Both are people who have suffered terrible tragedies. But history cannot be re-made, and there must be a solution that does justice to them both through an equitable compromise.

Q: Probably there is no such. You either...

WILCOX: Well, you cannot reverse history, but there certainly is a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

Q: Going back to this early '80s time, what was our reaction of the Israeli invasion, they call it different names, of Lebanon occurred in '82, particularly to the shelling of Beirut and then to the massacres at Shatila and Sabra?

WILCOX: Sabra and Shatila. This period in Lebanon, in my opinion, was the nadir of U.S. policy in the Middle East. We had very little understanding of the intricate, complex nature of Lebanese politics. At that time, we saw the Middle East through an east-west prism, and to a lesser extent, an Arab-Israeli prism. The Cold War perspective clouded clear thinking, since it had little to do with the factors that were driving the policies of Israel, Lebanon and the Palestinians. In the beginning, we were less hard on Israel's disastrous involvement in Lebanon than we should have been because we saw Israel as a strategic ally and partner in the Cold War. We also made the dreadful mistake of becoming involved as an actor in the Lebanese civil war, in general allying ourselves against the Syrians and pro-Syrian Lebanese, as the Israelis had done, and eventually becoming involved in military activities, although the role of our forces was supposed to have been peace keeping. Our policy was confounded by terrorism by the Hezbollah, supported by both Iran and Syria, which had emerged as a guerilla force determined to

drive Israel out of Lebanon. The attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut, which killed hundreds of U.S. Marines, repeated attacks on our embassy in Beirut, with serious loss of life, and the taking of American citizens as hostages by the Hezbollah were disasters, that added a very powerful and volatile emotional element to our adventures in Lebanon.

Unfortunately, the people who were making our policy in Lebanon, including National Security Advisor Bud McFarlane and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, both of whom at different times were U.S. special envoys to Lebanon, knew little about the country. They were motivated by an exaggerated belief that we could somehow marshal military power in Lebanon to change the balance there, discourage the Syrians and Iranians, and restore American influence in the Middle East. White House staffers at the time were actually calling for large scale U.S. troop deployments in Lebanon. We allowed ourselves, unwittingly, to be drawn in as a participant in the conflict rather than a peacekeeper. As a result of attacks on the Marines, we began to shell the Hezbollah and Druze positions from offshore, and to use U.S. air power. We came a cropper. Ultimately, after saying that we would stay the course in Lebanon and that it was the test of U.S. influence and resolve, we pulled out our forces, calling it a "strategic redeployment." Three basic lessons from this debacle were that it is often a mistake to view regional conflicts as a product of great power competition; that in peacekeeping missions you don't ally yourself with one side or the other; and that the U.S. needs to provide better security for its embassies and military forces.

Q: Moving on down to the specifics of work you were both doing and seeing during this time, Was IO playing any part in this or was this moving over to higher reaches of the NEA?

WILCOX: IO worked closely with the Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs (NEA) because major policy issues were addressed in General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. For example, the question of U.S. peacekeeping forces in Lebanon arose. You recall that U.S. forces were sent to Beirut as part of a multinational force to oversee the peaceful departure of the PLO forces to Tunis and an Israeli cease fire. We subsequently withdrew our forces. But after the massacre at Sabra and Shatila and resumed violence elsewhere, the U.S. decided that a peacekeeping force should return to the Beirut area to help restore calm. There was a question about whether the new force should be a UN force, or another multinational force with U.S. participation. I recall arguing, as a minority on behalf of IO, in a meeting in Under Secretary Eagleburger's office that it would be less risky to create a UN force to do the job, but Secretary Shultz decided that U.S. forces should return. One reason for this decision, I believe, was that Prime Minister Shamir opposed inserting a new UN force or an extension of UNIFIL [United Nations International Force in Lebanon], into Beirut area, believing that a renewed U.S. troop deployment would serve Israel's interests. (Israel was always at odds with UNIFIL, whose purpose, never fulfilled, was to keep the peace in south Lebanon after the first Israeli incursion in 1978, I believe.) So we sent back the Marines, who ultimately met with disaster when their barracks were struck by a massive truck bomb.

Q: Do you recall why the choice was made that way?

WILCOX: Partly it was the suspicion and lack of confidence in the UN, partly because Shamir did not want a UN force there, and partly because there were doubts about the efficacy of a UN peacekeeping force a opposed to a U.S. force which we could control and whose capabilities we knew. There may also have been a question of answering criticism in the Arab world that the departure of the first U.S. peace keeping deployment to Beirut was premature, and that if we had stayed longer, the Sabra and Shatila massacre by Eli Hobeika's Christian militia, which was an ally of the Israelis, might have been avoided.

Q: What was coming from our mission in New York?

WILCOX: I think our mission in New York advocated a U.S. force going back although the decision was made in Washington.

Q: This was very much tied to both experience and particularly the thrust of the administration at the time.

WILCOX: Yes. That's right. UNIFIL had not been an effective force because it had a weak mandate and lacked political support from any of the adversaries, so it had been unable to keep the peace in southern Lebanon. When the Israelis invaded, they rolled right over the top of UNIFIL.

Q: Well, in IO what was the feeling of how could it be an effective UN Force?

WILCOX: It would have been necessary to revise its mandate and strengthen its rules of engagement. This would have required a basic consensus, that did not exist, between Lebanon, that was deeply influenced by Syria, and Israel that foreign forces and Lebanese militias should be withdrawn from south Lebanon and that a well armed UN force should have local and international backing to monitor the peace. In fact, there was no such consensus and no peace. The IDF [Israeli Defense Force] was in south Lebanon, Syrian forces were in the north, and Syria was facilitating the arming of Hezbollah and other militias in the south.

We had to face the question of renewal of UNIFIL's mandate periodically, I think it was every six months. My view at least, and I think one widely shared in IO was that Lebanon, Israel and the U.S. would be best served by having an effective UN force in southern Lebanon. But UNIFIL was toothless. Its troops were not permitted to return hostile fire. It had very weak rules of engagement. It could capture weapons, but then it had to return them. It was a weak because no one wanted it to be strong. It was also not large enough and not widely enough deployed to serve as an effective buffer between Hezbollah and sometimes Palestinian guerrillas who sometimes shot rockets across Israel's northern border. So the idea of an expanded UNIFIL with a stronger mandate never gained much momentum. Congress was not very sympathetic toward UNIFIL in those days, nor was the government of Israel because they thought their interests were better served by having an Israeli force in southern Lebanon.

Q: Did we seem to have much of a handle on who were the Hezbollah and also the rapidly turning subject of the whole situation in Lebanon including Hamas and Iranian influence and that whole thing?

WILCOX: We had superb Foreign Service officers who spoke Arabic and followed Lebanese politics, although it was very hard for American diplomats to travel in southern Lebanon because of the lack of security there. I think there was a high level of understanding and some good reporting on the factional struggle among the Christians and the Sunni and Shiite Muslims and the Amal, the Hezbollah, and the Syrians. There was a sufficient basis of reporting there to guide the Department. I suspect, however, judging from the policies that emerged, that this reporting was not considered very important.

Q: Was the quote Soviet menace seen as part of this whole thing?

WILCOX: Yes, and Syria was seen as a proxy for the Soviets

Q: Well, wasn't anybody saying that Syria has got it own, I mean Syria really has interests in Lebanon as opposed to the Soviet Union. Was this a...

WILCOX: Syria was seen as implacably hostile. The regime was a dictatorship. It had suppressed the rights of Syrians and killed a great many of them, a classic, repressive Arab dictatorship. Syria, indeed, had legitimate interests in Lebanon, but it also expects Syrian hegemony there. Nonetheless, throughout our misadventures in Lebanon, we should have tried to engage the Syrians, because of their influence and their interests, rather than trying to defeat them. In the end, they helped defeat us, for example, by forcing the Lebanese to repudiate the November 1973 treaty, and contributing to the humiliating departure of our forces from Lebanon.

Q: There was the case I have heard of one thing of Bob Paganelli told George Shultz that your plan won't work because Syria won't sign. Shultz practically fired him on the spot. Of course the point was Syria didn't sign on and blew the thing our of the water. Were you getting reflections of that back in IO?

WILCOX: Yes.

Q: On this, was IO, I mean you were a participant with NEA and all, did you have the feeling that it was really NEA and higher up at the top?

WILCOX: Well, it was a collegial process. I spent most of my time in the corridors between IO and NEA. We did much of the drafting, speeches, statements, Policy statements, talking points, draft resolutions in the UN, messages to foreign government leaders. IO was very much part of the process, and weighed in on all policy recommendations. There were times when NEA and IO might have differed and expressed different views to the seventh floor. In those days, when a decision went

forward, often there were split views among bureaus. But in general there was a large area of agreement between IO and NEA.

Q: What was Abrams' attitude toward this? He came out of the New York Jewish community which had its own sort of independent policy. I think he was neo-conservative. His family was on sort of the intellectual side. Did you find that this gave a thrust or not?

WILCOX: Yes, although Elliott Abrams wasn't there long enough to make his mark on these policies. He was a strong neo-conservative.

Q: But he was replaced by...

WILCOX: He was replaced by Greg Newell after a long interim. Greg was a young man who had been an advance officer for President, and he was appointed to the assistant secretary's job. He was an engaging, presentable guy, but had no experience in foreign affairs, which he readily acknowledged. He worked very closely with Ambassador Kirkpatrick and did not attempt to carve out policies of his own. He saw her as taking the lead in our UN policy, and they were quite close.

Q: Well did this, I mean if you are in an organization, I am just thinking organizationwise rather than policywise. But if you are an organization you have a leader, yeah you are dealing with world shaking events, and you have somebody who really is sort of a public relations type person there but certainly has no respect from the other bureaus, I would think this would be disheartening to the people in IO.

WILCOX: There is always that tension in the Department of State where people have come in who have won their appointments on the basis of their political associations and work rather than their foreign policy expertise. Greg Newell was a very courteous, decent, engaging fellow. He treated his Foreign Service colleagues with respect, listened to them, so there wasn't a hostile relationship by any means. Because there is so much going on and decisions had to be made all the time on a myriad of issues, the professionals had a great deal of influence, indeed, they probably called the shots on 90% of the questions that came up. On that 10% of the more politically loaded ones, they didn't. They weighed in and did their job and gave their best.

That's life in Washington. If you don't understand that you are serving a political leadership which has its own problems and is driven by different forces, then you can't function successfully. If the Foreign Service feels that it is the sole arbitrator of what our policy is going to be and it has a mandate to make that policy, then it will fail. I think the Foreign Service has adapted to this reality rather well. Still, I believe that our foreign policy has become excessively a product of the short term domestic and political considerations. As a result, there is a decreasing premium on the knowledge of professional diplomats who know the world, who have lived in these countries and who have a longer range view of American interests.

It is often said that Foreign Service officers tend to reflect the interests of our clients

abroad rather than the United States. I think that canard is not true at all. I think Foreign Service officers are deeply skeptical and realistic. They often understand the realities of the world better than others because they have lived out there and have worked with foreigners. Their voice has been declining in the last generation. U.S. foreign policy must ultimately be a product of American democracy and what the public, the Congress and the President want. But in recent years, it has become excessively subject to ephemeral domestic impulses at the expense of long term American interests.

Q: In every election particularly during the primary season, the candidates of both parties trot into New York and all affirm that they are going to do everything they can to move Jerusalem, make Jerusalem, move our embassy to Jerusalem. This has been going on for 30 or 40 years. All these candidates use this as a base Jewish vote in New York, and nothing ever happens. How about during the 1980 election, were these promises made? Was anything done?

WILCOX: In those days we stuck to a forthright, well defined policy on Jerusalem, i.e., that Jerusalem was occupied territory, that it was subject to resolution 242 and 338, the basic land for peace deal that the UN had set forth, and that unilateral moves by the Israelis in East Jerusalem were a violation of international law. After 1980 we began to muffle and fudge our declaratory policy under pressures from the Congress and the Jewish community. The last time the U.S. defined Jerusalem as occupied territory was when George Bush mentioned it at a press conference. He was taken to task for that, and I think his successors have read a lesson from that, that Jerusalem is a politically radioactive issue. All we can say now is that Jerusalem is subject to negotiation. The problem of Jerusalem will have to be resolved before there can be a stable and permanent deal between the Israelis and the Palestinians and the Arabs. That is a problem that is not impossible, but is increasingly difficult because of the movement of large numbers of Israelis into East Jerusalem.

Q: Was there, again I am going back to this '80-'83 thing, was there tension with the Shamir government on the part of NEA, IO...

WILCOX: Yes. The Likud government that came to power in 1977 was seen as very different and less friendly than the Labor governments that had held power since 1948. Likud was more militant and ideological, being wedded to the belief that the West Bank and Gaza are part of greater Israel and a biblical patrimony to be reclaimed. When Israel occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967, the Likud and the Israeli right, in general, saw this as a fulfillment of a biblical prophesy. The religious-nationalist element in Israeli politics grew stronger and more confident, and the victory of the Likud in 1977 reflected this. The settlement movement, led by religious-nationalist Israelis, was in the vanguard of this change and was aggressively promoted by Likud politicians.

Settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza expanded steadily. The U.S. protested settlements and adopted the policy that settlements were illegal under the fourth Geneva Convention that defined the rules of military occupation and held that an occupying power cannot move its population into areas it occupies. We supported UN

resolutions which made that point repeatedly, and in our declaratory policy, until one day in 1981 or '82 in a press conference, President Reagan, responding to a question, said he did not believe settlements were illegal.

We were shocked by this apparent change in policy, and I urged NEA to contact the White House to urge it to find a way to get the President to reverse his statement. We thought it might have been inadvertent. But in retrospect it was not. Eugene Rostow, who at that time had become the head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and had previously been Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and the Dean of the Yale Law School, had written an article claiming that Resolution 242 was wrong, that the West Bank and Gaza were not occupied territory, since there had been no previous agreed sovereign, and that the Fourth Geneva Convention therefore did not apply. This contradicted the official U.S. legal doctrine set forth in a legal opinion by the Legal Advisor at State under Jimmy Carter, Herb Hansell. I think the President had accepted the Rostow thesis when he effectively changed our policy, although the change was never acknowledged or articulated.

Thereafter, in official statements, settlements were no longer "illegal." They became "an obstacle to peace." We used that phraseology for many years, but under President Clinton we began to say merely that "settlements are unhelpful." I regret that by retreating from our legal doctrine on settlements and attenuating our public statements, we lost an opportunity to stop or slow down the settlements phenomenon that has since become a formidable obstacle to U.S. efforts to broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace. Indeed, the purpose of settlements was to create "facts on the ground" that would make divestiture of the West Bank to the Palestinians impossible.

Q: Well then, you left IO in '83 was it?

WILCOX: I left in '83 and went to NEA as Director for Regional Affairs to run an office involved in region wide issues. One of the major policy issues we faced there was the threat to regional stability from the Iran-Iraq war which was raging by then. There was a heated debate about whether we should tilt toward Iraq and provide Iraq with weapons and intelligence. There was great concern that Iran would win this war, extend hegemony over Iraq and expand the Islamic revolutionary impulse throughout the Gulf region. Saddam Hussein was known to be a brutal dictator, but many thought he was the lesser of two evils.

There were intelligence estimates about the threat from Iran that, in retrospect, exaggerated Iran's ability to prevail in that war. The upshot of the policy debate was that we did indeed tilt toward Iraq. We provided Iraq with intelligence, took Baghdad off the list of state sponsors of terrorism, and viewed positively comments from Saddam Hussein suggesting that he supported an Arab-Israeli peace process. Many began to view Iraq optimistically as a potential factor for stability, and Saddam Hussein as man with whom we could work, notwithstanding his authoritarian background.

Q: In NEA you had been dealing with but you were still basically the new boy on the

block and certainly with the Iran Iraq business. Did you feel there was sort of a visceral carryover no matter what happened? Iran was still the enemy because of the takeover and all that, and that we were sort of projecting that if Iran were our enemy, somehow or other we had to make Iraq into something more than it was?

WILCOX: Yes, I think that was one impulse behind our policy. It was as you say, an emotional legacy of the hostage taking in Tehran. Iran was seen as an expansionist, hegemonic, dangerous country which threatened the whole region. The intelligence community focused very heavily on the military balance, and in a series of estimates and papers saw Iran as prevailing. In addition to some quiet intelligence support for Iraq, we launched a major U.S. initiative called "Operation Staunch" that was designed to block the sale of arms to Iran. We deployed a U.S. Navy flotilla in the Persian Gulf to stop ships carrying weapons to Iran.

Q: Where was the initiative for all of this coming from? Was this coming from outside the Department or was it coming from the White House, NSC, or was it sort of everywhere?

WILCOX: There was not a monolithic view in the Department or even in NEA bureau. The White House leaned toward a more positive favorable approach toward Iraq, as did some in NEA, even after Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against Kurds in the north. Admittedly, this was a difficult shot to call. We were not omniscient about the military balance, and there were signs that Saddam Hussein might evolve into a more pragmatic kind of a ruler with whom we could deal. He had begun, for example, to make moderate statements about the Arab-Israeli peace process which we found remarkable and seized upon as evidence that maybe this is a man who is changing. The idea was Iraq is a big important country with a lot of oil, so let's take a chance. I argued that we should not lean too far toward Iraq, given Saddam Hussein's past and the need to rebuild, some day, a relationship with Iran, but this view did not prevail. My immediate boss on this policy issue, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jim Placke, was also less enthusiastic than others about tilting heavily toward Iraq. The Bureau of Political Military Affairs [PM] and the Pentagon were more pro-Iraq.

Q: What about the Soviet Union? You were saying the Soviet Union dominated most of our talk in the United Nations and all, and here Iraq was probably the biggest sort of customer or friend of the Soviet Union. How did we feel about that?

WILCOX: We thought there might be some chance of drawing Iraq away from the Soviet orbit. It was certainly not locked in to the Soviet orbit although they had friendly relations. There was also a fear in those days, that the Soviets might march into that part of Southwest Asia, might even invade Iran. There was no synthesis between that concern and our decision ultimately to tilt toward Iraq in the war.

Q: Were we getting anything important from Saudi Arabia, the gulf states?

WILCOX: They saw Iran as the major threat. There is a traditional antipathy between the Sunni Muslims in those countries and the Shia, and a traditional rivalry between the

Arabs and the Persians. The Gulf states feared the Iranian animus of Islamic revolution, and so they supported a more friendly U.S. policy toward Iraq.

Q: Kuwait, did this play any role?

WILCOX: There wasn't any anticipation in those days that Iraq might invade Kuwait, no concept of that at all at that time. Kuwait was a major partner in "Operation Staunch."

Q: On regional affairs, was this the main thing? Basically regional affairs...

WILCOX: It was one issue. Another was an NSDD [National Security Decision Directive] on strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel. The idea was to formalize and add new structure to longstanding U.S.-Israeli military cooperation which took the form of $1.8 billion annually in grant military assistance to Israel and extensive exercises and cooperation between our two forces. The rationale behind this initiative was to reinforce Israel and the U.S.-Israel military relationship as a bastion against the threat of Soviet influence in the Middle East and Iran. There was much enthusiasm for this in the senior reaches of the Reagan administration.

Further institutionalization of U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation was also popular in some quarters of the Pentagon. The U.S. had been thwarted in its long time effort to obtain basing rights in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf countries. All we had was a kind of tenuous access to Bahrain, and the U.S. command for the Middle East, CENTCOM [Central Command], was based in and still is based in McDill Air Force Base in Florida. Israel could provide a new platform for access and military support in the event of a war with the Soviets in the region.

Q: We had COMIDEASTFOR which was a very small, little...

WILCOX: The U.S. military command in the Middle East, COMIDEASTFOR [Commander Mideast Forces] had always had superb relations with the government of Bahrain which has given us facilities there, but we didn't have the kind of basing rights and prepositioning facilities that we wanted to make our access to that part of the world easier. Israel offered to preposition supplies and hospital services, for example, and access to air basis in the event of a conflict. While Israel has always rejected the idea of a defense treaty with the U.S., they say "we will defend ourselves," they wanted a more fully elaborated strategic cooperation alliance. They wanted this, not because they saw the Soviets as a primary threat, but because they saw this as a way to cement U.S.-Israeli relations against the Arabs, and as another conduit for military aid and technology. So the U.S. and Israel had divergent views on the basis for strategic cooperation. We saw this as part of a global struggle with the USSR. They saw it as strengthening their position vis a vis the Arabs.

Q: I would have thought that something of this nature, you know, in order to strengthen our position, we just make more enemies. Certainly we would by making this public and doing it would have caused our position with Saudi Arabia which is really very

important, far more important than Israel. This is really a pond, I don't know about Egypt, but I would have thought that the experts would say this thing shouldn't fly because we are just adding trouble.

WILCOX: That was my view. I thought it was useful for the rest of the world and for the Arab states to know that the U.S. and Israel did have a kind of security relationship, that we were concerned about Israel's security and supported it. At the same time, I thought that the Arabs would see an institutionalized strategic cooperation relationship not as an anti-Soviet initiative but something aimed squarely at them, and that this would weaken our role as honest broker in the peace process. They did.

Also, the urge for strategic cooperation with Israel came at the same time that the Congress was resisting, increasingly, sales of U.S. arms to Saudi Arabia and other Arab states. The Congress was strongly influenced by AIPAC [American Israeli Public Affairs Committee], which argued that there were no "moderate" Arab regimes, and that all U.S. arms sales to Arab states threatened Israel's security.

Ultimately, after a long debate and many papers, the Administration issued an NSDD on U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation and created detailed new structures for this. This produced a series of meetings at committees at both the political diplomatic level and the military to military level to enhance cooperation. It also created expanded joint exercises and other forms of cooperation than in the past. These were attractive to our armed forces, who enjoyed engaging with Israel's superb military forces, so they learned from us and we learned from them.

Politically and strategically, the results of strategic cooperation are unclear. In hindsight, the Soviet threat to Middle East was exaggerated. Enhanced military cooperation with Israel and Israel's clear military superiority in the Middle East was doubtless a factor that led Syria and Jordan and the Palestinians to move toward peace with Israel. It may also, have given Israel, as the U.S. hoped, greater confidence in its security and a willingness therefore to be more forthcoming in making peace with the Arabs. At the same time, it can be argued that Israel's overwhelming superiority and assurances of U.S. support gave its leaders a sense of complacency and over-reliance on military force over the years, as opposed to diplomacy, for its security, and that this delayed the onset of the peace process.

Q: What about Egypt? Where was Egypt in this whole equation?

WILCOX: Egypt made peace with Israel in 1978. Part of the deal was that Egypt would receive a very large aid dividend in the realm of I think about $1.7 billion a year in economic and military assistance. Israel got about $3 billion. The Egyptians were far ahead of the rest of the Arab world in recognizing that Israel was an important and powerful state and that ultimately the Arab states had to make peace with Israel. They were not thrilled about our new strategic cooperating relationship with Israel, but we also had close military ties with Egypt.

Q: Was there any concern, and this was the '82 aftermath of the Israeli attack on Lebanon, of both the leadership, I'm thinking of Sharon. This was almost a stealth attack, I mean it was an escalating attack using Israeli forces not aligned it looked like even to their own administration while doing it. One that, and two, the Israeli forces were not as well disciplined as they had been before - I mean with some of the thing that were going on. I mean the Shatila massacres. There was a certain amount of either collusion or suspected collusion with some of the military. I'm told that the Israeli forces were not very careful about where they shelled, about what they did. I mean it was treating of the Lebanese as in a rather brutal way.

WILCOX: I believe the IDF [Israeli Defense Force] paid too little heed to civilian casualties during Lebanon adventure. A great many civilian lives were lost through IDF artillery shelling of camps and villages and the aerial bombardment of Beirut. The Israelis argue that they were fighting a guerilla enemy, the Hezbollah and the radical PLO elements, who used refugee camps and villages as havens for their forces, and that civilian casualties were therefore unpreventable. The Lebanon adventure for Israel was in retrospect, a catastrophe. The toll in Lebanese and human rights violations has been well documented, and many Israeli soldiers were also killed. Sharon was indeed the author of the invasion and he carried it to the city of Beirut without authorization from the prime minister or the cabinet. The whole Lebanon adventure was a loser for Israel, indeed, a strategic, political and humanitarian disaster.

Q: Were there any concerns that the IDF was a rogue army, among the leadership. Not too long after the Israeli invasion,, we are talking about a strategic relationship with the same government which lied like hell to us during the invasion. I have people talking about the famous incident where the Begin government is telling us, "Oh, we are not shelling Beirut," and Phil Habib, who is in Beirut, holds out the telephone and says, "What the hell do you think that is?"

WILCOX: The invasion created considerable strains in our relationship, and the Sabra Shatila massacre was indeed a low point. The IDF could have stopped it. To its credit, the government convened a board of inquiry and wrote a very damning report which resulted in the Ariel Sharon departure from the government for a period, but he has since been rehabilitated.

Q: Were we seeing the radicalization of Lebanon because of all this. Was this of concern to us other than in a hostage...

WILCOX: The Lebanese civil war was in part the result of an increasing resentment by the majority of Lebanese against control by a small Maronite Christian minority. The deal that had been struck for political power sharing among the different factions broke down because it no longer reflected the demographic realities. That was the main indigenous reason for the conflict. The war was vastly complicated by Syrian interference, the PLO's creation of an armed state within a state in Lebanon after they were expelled from Jordan in the Black September conflict, and finally the Israeli invasion. Lebanon was an unholy mess. The origins of the conflict were indigenous, but Lebanon's neighbors made it a lot

worse.

Q: Were there voices saying maybe we ought to get the hell out of this whole thing. I mean what are the voices saying for example, this is not an East West problem.

WILCOX: Yes, but once we made a major diplomatic or military commitment in Lebanon, it was hard to reverse, since the merits of our policy became less important preserving our credibility. That was the major reason why we sent the Marines back and didn't pull them out much earlier. I think it was recognized the Marines were vulnerable, that they were no longer a legitimate peace keeping force, but we felt the United States would be dishonored to turn tail. Ultimately, we did after the Marines barracks were bombed. I wish we could have done it more gracefully and earlier. Indeed, I wish we had not sent the Marines back.

Q: Did the hostage situation in Lebanon, American civilians being taken hostage and all, did that become at this point, I am talking about the '83-'84 period, was that a dominant force, was that something that sort of came up every day?

WILCOX: It was a very powerful issue. The families of the hostage victims were well organized and vocal. The administration earlier had adopted a policy of no concessions toward terrorism, but we were under enormous pressure to do something to release our countrymen. This led ultimately to the fiasco of the Iran Contra scandal during the Bush administration.

I was still in NEA at the time, but I was in a different job. Lebanon was seen as a curse. An American ambassador, Frank Meloy, was assassinated in Beirut, Frank Meloy. Many American diplomats lost their lives. Hundreds of Marines on the peace keeping mission were killed in a murderous terrorist attack, our hostages were languishing in Hezbollah jails. So, there was fear and loathing about Lebanon which tended to cloud dispassionate thinking. And the people in the White House who were really making our policy in Lebanon were doing so without the benefit of knowledge and experience about Lebanon or the Middle East.

Q: This is something I'd like to get the feeling about because as we do these things, you know, it sounds as if there is a mega government making decisions, and so often, I have found in my interviews that you find the more intense something gets in foreign affairs, the more quickly it moves away from people who know anything about the damn subject.

WILCOX: Absolutely.

Q: Who was National Security Advisor and ex-Marine.

WILCOX: Bud McFarlane. Ollie North, Phil Durr, Howard Teicher, and John Poindexter where also involved. Another NSC staffer, who was experienced and respected, had died, and NSC policy toward Lebanon and the Middle East was heavily influenced by people who had little background in the region.

Q: Was NEA aware that it wasn't really in control of the situation?

WILCOX: Yes.

Q: How did this display itself?

WILCOX: Well, the experts in NEA who didn't understand the situation were offering their views and advice, but the policy was really being carried out at a different and higher level. Secretary of State Shultz was sometimes kept out of the picture, for example, in the Iran-Contra episode, although he had been heavily involved in the negotiations of the abortive November 17 agreement. But, as always, the people at the Department tried to do their job and express their views while supporting the President's policies.

Q: I'm wondering too, as new boy on the block you often see things almost a little clearer, the divisions. I would have thought that there might have been a problem with people in NEA who knew about Lebanon, one we are talking about a Lebanon no longer existing, and that they had been sort of caught up in the Christian side of Lebanon, and there wasn't as much contact with the Arabs, particularly the lower class side. I don't know?

WILCOX: Some of the most articulate, westernized, sophisticated and charming Lebanese are the Maronite Christians who have a strong affinity for Americans and other westerners. But the pure Maronite political philosophy was narrow, sectarian and ultra nationalistic. Perhaps some American diplomats and policymakers were beguiled by the Lebanese, especially the Maronites, but I think our Foreign Service officers who served in Beirut on the whole have taken the measure of all the parties and reported back to Washington objectively. Three things, at least, contributed to U.S. mistakes in Lebanon: domestic politics and our strong pro-Israel orientation; misplaced concerns that this was another theater of the Cold War conflict, that were related, in part, to our alliance with Israel; and inexperienced people in the White House calling the shots.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point, and we'll pick it up the next time in '84 when you moved over in NEA to Arab-Israeli affair which sounds like a very quiet spot.

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Today is May 28, 1998. Phil, you were in Arab-Israeli affairs from '84 to when?

WILCOX: '84-'87, whereupon I moved up to become the Deputy Assistant Secretary with responsibility for Syria, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt, and the Palestinians.

Q: All right, well, let' take the '84-'87 period. In the first place, what did Arab-Israeli affairs mean at that point?

WILCOX: The name of the office was the Office of Israeli and Arab-Israeli Affairs. It manages our bilateral relations with Israel, but also to covers the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We saw our job as working to protect U.S. interests in our relations with Israel, but also to relate to the Palestinians and their conflict with the Israelis, which of course, is very central to the whole Middle East conflict.

Q: Did you feel that you were of, I mean the influence of the AIPAC is renowned, and it influence in Congress in unexcelled. Did you have a feeling when you went into that job that you were being vetted by them or worked on by them?

WILCOX: It is called the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee. Yes, indeed. As the pre-eminent American interest group, lobby, which devotes itself to U.S.- Israel relations, they take a keen interest in the activities of the Department of State and the executive branch as well as the Congress. They, of course, cultivate and follow the views and actions of all senior diplomats at State involved in the Middle East. They speak to them regularly, and present their point of view.

Q: Is there anything passing for that from the Palestinian side?

WILCOX: The Palestinian community in the U.S. and the larger Arab-American community are divided by national origin and religion, and are far less organized than the American Jewish community. In the 1980s the Arab-American community became better organized and developed regular contacts with State, seeking to influence U.S. policy. We thought it was necessary to maintain strong ties with both the American Jewish community in all its complexity - not just AIPAC but a host of American Jewish organizations representing a wide range of views - and the Arab-American community which also included many organizations. The preeminent Arab-American group then was the National Association of Arab-Americans.

Q: Well, in 1984 when you took over this, let's talk about the bilateral and then we will move to the Palestinian thing. How was Israel viewed at that time, and what were our concerns with Israel per se?

WILCOX: The United States and the American people had a profound relationship with Israel from the very beginning. It is an unusually complex relationship. I think Americans in general have an extraordinary interest in Israel. We have a sense of emotional and cultural affinity for Israel because of the Bible, the Christian majority in American society, and our definition of our culture and tradition as Judeo-Christian. The creation of the State of Israel in fundamentalist Christian theology, was seen as fulfillment of a Biblical prophesy, so it evoked tremendous enthusiasm among conservative Christians in the U.S. As that conservative Christian community has grown stronger, its religious attachment to Israel has expressed itself in the politics of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

The fact that the U.S. government did not come to the rescue of the Jews during the holocaust for whatever reasons weighed heavily on the conscience of the United States I think was another reason why there has been strong political support in the United States

for the establishment of Israel as a homeland and a refuge for the remnant of the Jewish community and U.S. support for Israel's security. President Truman recognized that and against the recommendation of many of his foreign policy advisors, recognized the new state of Israel immediately when it was declared in 1948.

Israel's character as a democratic country also appeals to Americans and is a strong element in the U.S.-Israel relationship.

The American Jewish community which is the largest Jewish community in the world, was wary about Zionism in the 1920s and '30s, but because of the holocaust, WWII, and the struggle for the State of Israel which succeeded in '48, the community became passionately interested in Israel and organized itself to promote U.S. government support.

So U.S. support for Israel has been rooted in broad public support for Israel, based on religions and history, and by a determined, highly skilled, very well organized U.S. Jewish community.

Another dimension to the U.S.-Israeli relationship that emerged during the Cold War has been strategic. The strategic rationale for a strong U.S.-Israeli relationship during the Cold War was that Israel, as a democratic westernized state with strong armed forces was an anchor for the west in the Middle East, a region in which many Arab states were unfriendly if not hostile to the U.S. and sometimes more sympathetic to the Soviet Union. This rationale has waxed and waned. It was not very strong during the Eisenhower Kennedy administration, which supported Israel, but tempered this support because of interests in the Arab world. The strategic rational grew stronger during the Nixon and years and reached its height during Reagan era. As one reason for strong support for Israel, it has been energetically promoted by American Jewish organizations.

Q: You know there is the other side of that which is that if we hadn't been so firmly involved in Israel, the Soviets wouldn't have gotten a foothold in the Arab world because Islam is not very receptive to communism basically and sort of cast it off.

WILCOX: I doubt that there was ever a major threat that the Muslim Arab states would be permanent allies of the Soviet Union, although the U.S. was right at that time to be concerned about Soviet efforts to gain influence in the region. Control of the oil fields was also a factor. However, the Arabs didn't like communism. Although they went through a phase of Arab socialism which was a failure, their economic tradition historically has been capitalist and free market.

There was never an elegant synthesis by any U.S. administration that sought to resolve the tension between our strong support, which became a quasi alliance, for Israel and our need to remain even handed in the Arab-Israeli dispute, or the argument that if we lean too far toward Israel, the Soviets would gain influence in the Arab world to the detriment of U.S. strategic interests. One argument often heard, which had some merit, was that the Arabs, because of their culture and religion, were not going to "go communist," whatever the nature of our relations with Israel.

Q: Coming in to the job, did you find yourself being either obliquely or directly told or at least your mental mindset was boy this thing domestically it has a real, the domestic side is so important in this whole thing and that in your actions that whatever happened you were sort of looking over your shoulder at the domestic side of things?

WILCOX: Absolutely. There are few foreign policy issues that are influenced by domestic politics to the same extent; although, domestic politics has a pervasive and growing impact on foreign policy in general, more than in the past. Yes indeed, the Congress was deeply involved, and a variety of American pro-Israeli organizations that were well organized, funded, and politically sophisticated. It was a job where one had to do ones job had to be mindful of American politics and domestic currents, as well as larger American strategic interests. Reconciling these in the Arab-Israeli conflict has never been easy.

Q: What was your feeling about the strategic importance of Israel?

WILCOX: I think that the strategic importance of Israel as a military ally was always exaggerated. No Israeli government has ever contemplated asking the U.S. to station troops in Israel or to come to Israel's defense militarily. From the very beginning, when Israel was more or less alone and had to develop its own army, it became very self reliant with respect to fighting forces, and developed the most powerful, capable armed force in the Middle East. Notwithstanding our close relations, I think all Israeli governments have avoided forfeiting their independence for a U.S.-Israel defense treaty.

As I have said, there was a strategic rationale which was strongest in the ‘80s, that Israel provided a platform for positioning weapons, materials, temporary basing facilities, even medical facilities that the U.S. could use in the event of an emergency in the Persian Gulf, including a possible Soviet invasion. That was argued passionately. At that time, the Arab states in the Gulf would not allow the U.S. to establish the kind of basing and prepositioning facilities that the U.S. military needed to bring force to bear quickly in a military emergency in the Gulf region. Proponents of strategic cooperation argued that Israel was the only alternative. Eventually that view prevailed in the form of a more formal Israeli-U.S. strategic relationship.

The argument against formalizing this relationship was that for the U.S. to use Israel as a partner in a war against a hostile Arab state would alienate friendly Arab states and cripple our ability to use military power in the region. (The Bush Administration acknowledged this, in fact, when it pressed Israel to stay out of the Gulf War, even though Israel was under fire from Iraqi Scud missiles.) Also, even in the event of a Soviet attack on the region, Israeli involvement would complicate U.S. policy.

Q: Had the Pollard case developed? Would you explain what the Pollard case was because this is the Pollard case and the sinking of the Liberty which we have discussed before have always been a little poison in the relationship.

WILCOX: Pollard was an analyst at the Defense Naval Intelligence Agency who stole sensitive documents and passed them to Israel. He was a troubled, vulnerable young man who was very enthusiastic about Israel. Recognizing his vulnerability, the Israelis recruited him. It was an inept operation, and Pollard was discovered and arrested. This created considerable strain with Israel because or our expectation we were friends and allies. We saw the affair as a breach of trust and told the government of Israel. Secretary George Shultz, who had done much to help Israel and strengthen relations, was livid, especially since the government of Israel lied about their involvement with Pollard, notwithstanding the clarity of the evidence. Pollard pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to life in prison.

Q: When was this?

WILCOX: I think the Pollard thing erupted in 1985 or '86.

Q: So this is on your watch.

WILCOX: Yes. I worked very closely with the U.S. attorney, Joe DeGeneva, at the time, with Abe Sofaer, the Legal Advisor at State, and the FBI. Pollard compounded his problem after his conviction by holding long interviews with Wolf Blitzer, who at that time worked for the Jerusalem Post. In these prison interviews, Pollard revealed more classified information. I think that may have influenced the judge's decision to give Pollard life, whereas other convicted spies had sometimes received lesser sentences. The government of Israel has since implicitly acknowledged its responsibility for Pollard, by seeking his release.

Q: Were there debates within the department within NEA about how do we approach this or what do we do?

WILCOX: There was a firm and uniform view that Pollard should be dealt with by our judicial system and if found guilty, dealt with severely as all spies and traitors should be. There was no effort in NEA to trim or compensate because of the impact of Pollard's crime on U.S.-Israeli relations. It caused real strain in the relationship. There were also cases of suspected misuse or diversion of military technology by the government of Israel in violation of our agreements that also caused recurrent friction in our relationship.

Q: Again we are speaking about the time you were there. As I recall there were things about concern that actually some of our technology was ending up in essentially unfriendly hands or possibly unfriendly hands when it was supposed to be allowed to Israel. Did it happen when you were there?

WILCOX: There was never clear evidence that Israel had stolen our technology and passed it on to other governments, but the government of Israel maintains a very large high tech arms industry. They are very good at studying foreign technology and adapting it for their own uses. Because of the investment we make in our own technology, we prohibit transfer of U.S. technology to third countries to whom we export arms. The

Israelis have cut some corners in this respect over the years. To my knowledge, Pollard's espionage was directed primarily at obtaining sensitive intelligence concerning Arab military capabilities. We were also concerned that these documents compromised intelligence sources and methods.

Q: Obviously in something like this, one always tends to look at the tensions.

WILCOX: Well, in that respect, the fact is that because of the weight and depth of the U.S.-Israeli bilateral relationship, it was not shattered by the Pollard affair. It was an unpleasant incident. It did not result in sanctions or withdrawal of U.S. assistance or other punishment, and after a few difficult months it blew over.

Q: Was there an effort on our part through talking to the Israeli embassy and also from our embassy in Tel Aviv to get information. Was there any forthcomingness on the part of the Israelis?

WILCOX: The Israelis initially denied the accusation that Pollard was their agent. They ultimately acknowledged that he had handed over large numbers of documents to them, and there was a certain amount of cooperation with respect to the nature of that material and its return we requested. An FBI mission went to Israel for further consultation with their lawyers and intelligence officials. But that process was grudging and incomplete. The Israelis were careful both to avoid acknowledgment that Pollard was their agent, and they wanted to avoid providing evidence that would have further harmed Pollard.

Q: Well, at the time, was there any concern, disquiet or something of that nature about the Israeli intelligence operations? It has been built up as being such a wonderful apparatus, but over the years, wrong people have been killed, you know it is like any other intelligence service including our own. It is not that great.

WILCOX: It has been mythologized by the Israelis and others. As intelligence services go, they are skilled at gathering information. Their covert action apparatus in my judgment has been less successful. They have, as you know, believed it necessary to carry out retaliatory, covert assassinations against terrorists who have committed terrorism against Israelis. This is a very popular policy, and Israelis believe that there should be no holds barred against such retaliation, and that if Israel does not demonstrate that it is tough, its enemies will redouble their attacks and eventually defeat Israel. Retaliation is, no doubt, an emotionally satisfying policy in response to the outrage of terrorism. But I believe their policy of retaliation has not deterred terrorism, but has created a cycle of violence and counter retaliation that has cost a great many innocent Israeli as well as Arab lives.

Q: Well moving to sort of the normal relations, it is very easy to get off on one of these things. Here we had this very close relationship. What was your impression of sort of our knowledge of what was going on in Israel during this '84-'87 period? In the first place could you describe what the government was like and our embassy.

WILCOX: Israel is a fascinating country. In the short space of 50 years it has done extraordinary things in developing a strong nation which has excelled in many ways. Another reason for the strong U.S.-Israeli relationship is that Israelis are friendly forthcoming people. They love to talk, and are very frank and outspoken. They devote a lot of attention to the U.S. relationship.

The U.S.-Israeli relationship has many dimensions beyond the security and the purely political. There is a thick web of social, religious, cultural, scientific, academic and commercial relations. There is no major area of activity where we don't have some kind of liaison in activities with Israel, public or private. There are also hundreds of thousands of Israelis who live in the United States and a fair number of Israeli citizens are former Americans who made Aliyah and became Israeli citizens.

One of the main elements of our relationship when I was the Director of Israeli and Arab-Israeli affairs was an effort to move the Israeli economy from a more or less centrally directed economy to a more free market capitalist system. Secretary Shultz as an economist was deeply interested in this. Israel had been through a series of economic reversals and was clearly in trouble. Shultz appointed Stanley Fisher who is now the deputy director of the IMF and Herb Stein, a distinguished American economist and former head of the Council of Economic Advisors, to advise him and the Government of Israel on an economic program which would turn them around and generate economic growth, employment and reduce the role of the state in their economy. That was accompanied by creation of a joint economic [commissions], headed on the U.S. side by the Undersecretary for Economic Affairs, Allen Wallis. This effort was quite successful. Israel changed its policies and since then has experienced, more or less, growth and economic stability. A lot of credit goes to George Shultz, Herb Stein and Stan Fisher.

We hoped at that time that with more rapid economic development and income creation, Israel could be weaned off the very large aid the United States has traditionally provided to Israel. That has not happened. Today, this aid today is less a function of Israel's need, because per capita income in Israel is now higher than it is in the United Kingdom, than of the political bilateral relationship, and the strong commitment of Congress to maintain high levels of aid to Israel. Aid levels were bumped up after the Camp David process and the peace treaty to a level of $1.8 billion in military assistance for Israel and $1.2 billion in economic support funds. and emergency support funds of roughly $3 billion a year. In the beginning those were loans, but the Congress converted them to grant assistance, and in the case of Egypt did the same thing. The appropriation for Egypt was also quite large, of $1.7 billion overall, and that continues today.

Q: Was this a matter of almost frustration? One of my interviews, I think it was Sam Harr, economic counselor there at some point, was saying his office in the embassy in Tel Aviv would carefully analyze the Israeli requests and all and would do what any economic guy would do, say well this doesn't make sense, this is too much; cut it down. Essentially the Israeli officials would say thank you very much, laugh in his face, and go get everything they want from Congress.

WILCOX: The aid is a symbol of U.S. support for Israel. It no longer has an economic rationale. The administration since the mid-'80s has not been able to influence the process in the Congress. AIPAC has seen its ability to persuade the Congress to provide this aid as a demonstration of its power and influence as a lobbying organization. It has also been argued that were it not for this very large assistance to Israel, that foreign assistance for other purposes would have declined even more sharply and that the Israeli appropriation carried the foreign aid bill for years and ensured the votes of legislators who would otherwise have voted against all aid. There is some logic to this. On the other hand, there is deep concern in State and AID that the lion's share of the limited resources Congress appropriates for development assistance, over 70%, I believe, goes to only two countries, Israel and Egypt.

Q: When you arrived there in '84, which part of it was it the labor government that was in power?

WILCOX: There was an election as I recall, shortly after I arrived. The returns were indecisive, and since neither Labor nor Likud could form a government, they created a "national unity" government in which Labor and Likud decided to govern for two and one-half years each. Shimon Peres became the prime minister for the first two and one -half years. His was not, in terms of policies, a government of national unity, but rather a Labor Party government, and Peres himself began to pursue peace process diplomacy which we welcomed. We worked very closely with him.

Let me step back to recall another element of our economic relationship which is important. During that time, we negotiated with Israel a free trade area agreement of the kind we have with Mexico and Canada. That was also part of our larger effort to promote economic development and, ultimately, self sufficiency.

Back to the coalition government. Peres was interested in furthering the peace process. His vision of peace at that time and ours was to encourage Jordan as the successor state in any kind of territorial transfer of the West Bank and Gaza. For many years, the United States, because of its aversion to the PLO, and, I think, lack of understanding of the Palestinian issue, thought that Jordan should return to all or a portion of the West Bank, and should even govern Gaza, which Egypt had controlled before 1967. All Israelis were opposed to Palestinian control of the West Bank, and saw Jordan as a moderate and potentially friendly neighbor. There was a long history of collaboration between the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan and the Jews, beginning before 1948, since they shared a common opposition to Palestinian nationalism.

So we worked with the new Peres government to create an Arab negotiating delegation that would be led by Jordan, with Palestinian representatives in a subordinate status. For months we negotiated with the Israelis and the Jordanians about a cast of Palestinians, that is non-PLO Palestinians, who would be acceptable to Israel and could associate themselves with the Jordanian delegation to carry out some preliminary discussions about peace. We also sought funds from the Congress to enable Jordan which was the former occupying power before 1967 in the West Bank, to carry out economic development

programs in the West Bank for Palestinians in an effort to strengthen its influence in the West Bank among Palestinians. We assumed that King Hussein would speak for the Palestinians. He had a cadre of supporters and former civil servants, who were kept on the Jordanian payroll, in the West Bank. We did not envision the PLO as a negotiation partner. Our diplomats were forbidden to talk to the PLO. We regarded them as an intransigent terrorist organization, and did not foresee that the PLO would change its policy.

In retrospect, Washington's belief that the Palestinians would have accepted Jordan back as the sovereign in the West Bank and Gaza was a serious miscalculation. The Jordanian era between 1948 and '67 in the West Bank was an unhappy memory for the Palestinians. Although many of them had family members in Jordan, and many Palestinian refugees had fled there in 1948 or in '67, Palestinian nationalism had emerged as a powerful force. If Israel had handed back the West Bank to Jordan in 1967, history would have been different, but the PLO and Palestinian nationalism developed growing momentum thereafter, and the PLO clashed with Jordan in the Black September Palestinian uprising in Jordan in 1970, which sharpened the PLO-Jordanian divide. By that time, I doubt that there was any realistic prospect that Jordan could have peacefully absorbed the West Bank and its Palestinian populace, much less the Gazans. Indeed in 1987, King Hussein, forswore Jordan's historic claim to the West Bank, telling the Palestinians they were on their own. In my judgment, King Hussein recognized that absorbing another two million Palestinians, would have severe destabilizing effects on his own kingdom, where over half the people are already Palestinians. His historical goal was to preserve the Hashemite dynasty, and absorption of the West Bank would have created a dominant Palestinian majority that would not, for long, acquiesce in Hashemite rule.

Q: How were we looking at the Palestinians in this '84-'87 period? Were we beginning to sort of acknowledge to ourselves that there really is sort of a thing as the Palestinians as a unique entity?

WILCOX: Only very slowly. As I say, the assumption was still that Jordan could take care of the Palestinian issue. We did not support the notion of a Palestinian state which the Palestinians were already talking about. Our view toward the Palestinians had been heavily influenced by Israeli views and Palestinian terrorism. There was too little appreciation of the weight and strength of Palestinian nationalism. From the beginning there was inadequate understanding in Washington, except among American diplomats who had served in Jerusalem, about the Palestinian dimension of the conflict.

Our vision of the conflict was skewed because of our profound attachment to Israel and the lack of historical understanding about what had happened in 1948. Because of a justifiable and understandable commitment to Israel's security and the success of Israel after the Holocaust as a refuge for the Israelis, we lost sight of the fact that the tragedy of the Jews in the holocaust which led to the creation of the State of Israel brought forth another tragedy. The other tragedy was the exodus of some 600,000-700,000 Palestinians from their homeland, many of whom were forced out by Israeli forces, and the creation of a massive refugee community.

I think it is futile to try to weigh the tragedies of different people in terms of relative suffering. The creation of the Palestinian Diaspora in historic terms was not as profound an event as the extermination of six million Jews in Europe and the destruction of the European Jewish community. Nevertheless, it was a profound event for Palestinians and one that was certain to have enormous consequences, as it did. The United States was focused on the tragedy of the Jews, and did not take the full measure of the Palestinian tragedy, until they, themselves, asserted themselves in various ways. First was a futile but noisy and fearsome series of terrorist attacks which caught our attention, but alienated American citizens and policymakers. Palestinian terrorism, rather than creating sympathy, obscured the Palestinians' equities, and enabled the Israelis to paint the PLO and the Palestinian national movement as essentially a terrorist enterprise, determined to destroy Israel. Of course, the Israelis used terrorism as a tactic against the British and the Arabs in their pre-48 struggle for independence. Mainstream American views toward the Palestinians did not change substantially until the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza launched a civil revolt, known as the Intifada, that put a human face on the Palestinian cause. It dramatized the anomaly of continued Israeli control over a subject people who wanted their freedom.

Q: This did not come during your time though or did it?

WILCOX: No, the Intifada broke out in 1987 on the eve of my arrival in Jerusalem as consul general.

Q: Speaking about Jerusalem, you are talking about the Palestinians. I want to talk about this time when you were in Washington dealing with this. Were we beginning to develop a set of officers untainted by sort of the old vision of the Arab as just plain anti-Israel that came from missionary families. It was sort of a creation that I don't think was ever there. Anyway, there was that taint. But a new set of men and women who were beginning to deal with the Palestinians and looking at them you might say Cold Warm blooded terms as far as communication.

WILCOX: Absolutely. We were. We did a wise thing many years ago by giving the embassy in Tel Aviv responsibility for covering Gaza where there are almost a million Palestinians, while the consul general in Jerusalem was responsible for East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The focus of the consulate general was almost exclusively Palestinian, and its diplomatic contacts were by and large with the Palestinians whereas the embassy dealt with the government of Israel. But this arrangement gave the embassy a window into Palestinian affairs in Gaza. Reporting officers in the embassy would visit Gaza and got an appreciation there. It is very difficult for officers who served in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to have a sense of the other side of the conflict unless they had worked on it themselves. I was very lucky to have been the director for Israeli and Arab-Israeli Affairs before and a Deputy Assistant Secretary in NEA before I went to Jerusalem. A core of officers was emerging who had served in both Israel and the Arab world and who understood both sides of the problem. To deal effectively with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, one must know both sides. I think those of us who have worked

the problem have a deep respect for both the Israelis and the Palestinians and see these two communities caught up in a terrible historic dilemma where they both have suffered and they both have powerful equities and needs. That is what makes this a particularly compelling and interesting conflict. There are powerful claims for justice, security, identity recognition on both sides. The art of U.S. diplomacy should be to find a compromise where the legitimate needs of both sides are recognized in a fair way. For the last twenty years or so, the new generation of Middle East officers in the Foreign Service are trying to do that. They have no illusions about the failings of the Palestinians and the Israelis, but they respect both peoples' and their basic desire for peace.

Q: In a way it is easy when you look at the Arab-Israeli or Israeli-Palestinian equation to see it almost as a zero sum game. The territory is quite small. Was this a problem that you almost mentally had to get over yourself to see that how can you reach a compromise.

WILCOX: Propaganda from both sides throughout the conflict had described it as a zero sum game. For years, most Israelis believed, influenced heavily by education and propaganda, that recognition of the PLO and creation of a Palestinian state would be a slippery slope that would lead to a Palestinian takeover of Israel. Palestinian and Arab hostility were primordial, they thought, and thus the Israelis would have to occupy the West Bank and Gaza forever or be themselves destroyed. This bleak view was strongly reinforced by the ideological right in Israel that wanted to retain the West Bank and Gaza for religious or nationalistic reasons. This element skillfully exploited Israelis fears about security by framing the issue in terms of Israel's survival.

The Palestinians were also slow to recognize the necessity of compromise. It took them decades to recognize that the Israelis were there to stay, and to accept UN Security Council Resolution 242 as the basis for a compromise peace and to acknowledge the existence of Israel.

The zero sum view is nonsense in my view. There is a ground for compromise which most Palestinians and I think a majority of Israelis now support. That is, to divide the land in an equitable way and create a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. This has become vastly more complicated now because of the encroachment of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, pushed by the Israeli religious-nationalist element which believes they have a Biblical obligation to reclaim all of the West Bank, which they refer to as Judea and Samaria.

Q: But keeping to this '84-'87 period, did you see that the Peres Labor government was someone who was a rational one you could deal with and that the Shamir government which was coming up would be a continuation of the Begin government and sort of this messianic outlook towards the West Bank and Gaza? There would be, you know, almost insurmountable problems.

WILCOX: In general, yes. We saw the Labor party as more disposed toward making peace with the Palestinians and the Arabs. Peres himself began to develop very expansive

and attractive visions of Israel's integration into the Middle East, relations with all the Arab states, and justice for the Palestinians. Washington saw the Likud, because of its hard line ideology, as the more difficult party to deal with. On the other hand, we recalled that Prime Minister Begin made peace with Egypt and had agreed to Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai. So we didn't despair working with a Likud government, and we continued to try to do so once Shamir took over from Peres.

Let me go back a minute to our policy in general. We had helped to fashion a series of Security Council resolutions in 1967 and 1974, Resolutions 242 and 338. 242 is basically the land for peace equation which envisaged an Israeli withdrawal in return for peace from the Arab states. It did not define that withdrawal precisely, but our view was that it would withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza. 242 did not mention Jerusalem, but we also regard it as occupied territory. 338 was a Security Council injunction to achieve a land for peace settlement through negotiations. As for the Israeli settlement movement that took root and gained momentum after 1967, we saw it as a growing danger that would complicate an eventual territorial compromise and an Israeli withdrawal.

Q: Explain the settlement movement.

WILCOX: The settlements were Israeli government sponsored, usually government sponsored and financed towns. Israeli settlers, many of whom were religiously motivated, have occupied settlements all over the West Bank and in part of Gaza. The agenda of the settlement movement was to create an Israeli settler population so large and so widespread as to make divestiture of the West Bank by any Israeli government virtually impossible. U.S. officials who worked on the problem from the beginning understood that, and believed that opposing settlements should be a basic element of U.S. policy. The U.S. adopted the legal position, recorded in a legal opinion by State Department Legal Adviser Herbert Hansel during the Carter years, that settlements were a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention governing occupying powers, and were therefore illegal under international law.

Unfortunately, President Reagan reversed this policy when he said in a press conference that he did not believe settlements were illegal. Thereafter, U.S. officials said only that settlements were an “obstacle to peace.” In recent years, our declaratory policy has become even more attenuated and spokesman have said merely that settlements are “unhelpful,” or that they are an issue that must be negotiated. The failure of the U.S. to oppose settlements more aggressively has encouraged successive Israeli governments, Likud and Labor, to build more settlements. Today there are about 180,000 settlers in the West Bank, not counting those in East Jerusalem, roughly 100,000 more than there were in the mid-1980s.

Q: Were you dealing with these affairs when Reagan made this pronouncement?

WILCOX: I was still in the Bureau of International Organization affairs at the time. We discussed with NEA trying to get the President to qualify or reverse this, but this was not done. It turned out that the President knew what he was saying. It was not a slip of the

tongue. There were people in the Administration, for example, Eugene Rostow, who thought the Israelis had a right to occupy the West Bank and Gaza, and that the Fourth Geneva Convention was not applicable. Rostow rejected the concept in Resolution 242 that the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza were occupied territories.

Q: This brings up a subject. During this time, what was your impression of the National Security Council and the advisors to the president dealing with those affairs? This was a relatively ideological president and one who, coming out of Hollywood and California and all, and I think from his won roots, was highly sympathetic to Israel. Did you see his advisors as being an obstacle to the problem?

WILCOX: The NSC staff in those days lacked a clear understanding of the history of the Middle East conflict. The area was seen very much through a Cold War prism. The leadership of the Department of State being responsive to the President did not take a markedly different approach, although George Shultz was deeply interested in promoting peace in the Middle East. He invested a lot in the so-called November 17 agreement in an effort to bring about an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, and became deeply involved in the issue of terrorism which outraged him. Stopping terrorism for Shultz became a very important part of his agenda. Toward the end of his service, he began to search for ways to reach out to the Palestinians. He actually tried to meet with a group of Palestinians at the American Colony Hotel in East Jerusalem. They boycotted him, which was a serious mistake.

Shultz made a decision of historic importance when he recognized that the real Palestinian interlocutor was going to have to be the PLO, or at least the U.S. was going to have to engage in a dialogue with the PLO. NEA Assistant Secretary Dick Murphy, a wise and experienced diplomat, understood this, and doubtless influenced Shultz. Just before the end of the Reagan presidency, Shultz authorized a process through private intermediaries, in which Murphy was heavily involved, that led to the PLO's renunciation of terrorism and the beginning of U.S.-PLO bilateral talks in Tunis where Bob Pelletreau was our ambassador at that time. It was a politically courageous and wise thing to do. Historians should give Shultz his due for that.

Q: Well, sitting in a position which is dealing with this issue, during the time you were there, was there any sort of discussion of dealing with the PLO as sort of something you just couldn't even put on paper?

WILCOX: The engagement of the U.S. with the PLO came in part through private parties, including liberal American Jews like Rita Hauser who were involved in third track diplomacy. The Norwegians were also an intermediary. I think by that time most Foreign Service officers recognized that the PLO had a mandate from the Palestinian majority to represent it. I was convinced of that by the time I got to Jerusalem. It was obvious that the PLO was not just Yasser Arafat. It was the embodiment of Palestinian nationalism and their collective identity. To deal with Palestinians, you had to deal with the PLO. And our elaborate efforts to get the Jordanians to lead the Palestinians or to find some alternative leadership were futile.

Q: But during this time, was it sort of an unstated fact of life that you couldn't even write a paper suggesting that maybe we should get together with the PLO, I mean '84,'85.'86.

WILCOX: We felt constrained in that respect, since the PLO had been so demonized. I, myself, as Director of Israeli and Arab-Israeli Affairs found some merit in the idea that Jordan should play a major role. The idea of identifying respectable non-PLO Palestinians also had some appeal. But, as I learned more about the problem, I realized that the PLO was the address for the Palestinians, and King Hussein's announcement of disengagement from the Palestinians in 1987 confirmed my view that the "Jordan option" was an illusion.

At that time, the PLO did little to change U.S. attitudes toward it in a more positive direction. It was still quite obdurate and there were a series of terrorist acts which made things worse. The Achille Lauro hijacking by a faction represented on the PLO executive committee and the murder of Leon Klinghoffer hurt the Palestinians a lot. There had been a moderate, pragmatic current in the PLO for years, but it did not emerge as preeminent until the Palestinian National Congress in Algiers in 1988. There they produced a famous paper by Bassam Abu Sharif, a former radical, saying that Israel and the PLO should make peace on the basis of a two state solution, 242, and mutual recognition. That was a seminal paper, but it wasn't recognized in the State Department as such at the time. An internal debate was growing within the PLO, but it took the Intifada to force a decisive shift in PLO policy toward peace and compromise.

Q: We'll pick that up when you are in Jerusalem. What about our reporting? Who was our consul general when you were in both dealing with DAS and office directorate.

WILCOX: The consul general was Morris Draper, and earlier, Wat Cluverius.

Q: Both of whom we have interviewed, by the way. What about the Ambassador?

WILCOX: The Ambassador was Sam Lewis when I was director for Israeli affairs, and Tom Pickering succeeded Sam Lewis. I worked closely with both of them. While I was in Jerusalem, Tom was Ambassador. He left to go to the UN and Bill Brown who had been the Deputy Chief of Mission under Sam Lewis and who had long experience in Israeli affairs, became Ambassador.

Q: Did you find that Jerusalem at the time you were dealing with those affairs was adequately represented in you might say the other side of the hill from what was going on in Tel Aviv?

WILCOX: Jerusalem has always been a sought after post for Foreign Service Officers, and there is an archive of superb political reporting and analysis from the consulate general which goes way back. The officers who had served there had more or less full access to the Palestinian leadership there. They traveled freely, developed a deep knowledge of Palestinian politics, and turned out, year after year, superb reporting on a

real situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Reporting from Jerusalem was sometimes seen in Washington, with its Israeli orientation and ignorance of Palestinian affairs, as special pleading by diplomats who had been coopted by the Palestinians. Such "clientitis" is, indeed, sometimes a problem in Foreign Service reporting. I think in retrospect, most of the reporting of the consulate general has been fair objective. It was controversial, since it reported anomalies of the Israeli occupation that in earlier days were not well known and that contradicted the more benign, pro-Israel view that often dominated. Although reporting from Jerusalem foresaw much earlier than others what had to be done, the nature of the problem, it was very seldom a decisive factor in U.S. policy because of the pro-Israel orientation in Washington. I had the good fortune of having a superb staff of young officers who did wonderful reporting. When that is open to historians, it will shed a lot of light on the Intifada.

Q: Well, what about, again back to this time, Sam Lewis who we also have an extensive interview with in our program. He was seen by many of the people who served in the Arab countries as being succumbed to localitis. He had been there for a long time and was a very influential figure. How did you find both him and our embassy in Tel Aviv?

WILCOX: Sam served in Israel for eight years. He had not served in an Arab country. He was an immensely capable, strong person. He carried a very heavy burden during the Begin years in Israel, and on many occasions spoke very firmly and frankly to the Israeli government on a host of issues where we were at odds with them. I think he was always committed to a fair just peace, and he understood that the Zionist nationalist Likud approach to the Arabs and the peace process was not a tenable one. He had the confidence of President Reagan and George Shultz, and they asked him to stay on, so he had a long tenure in Tel Aviv. Sam had left Tel Aviv by the time I got there as consul general, having been replaced by Tom Pickering. Sam was a key figure in our relationship with Israel. Over the years he developed a strong attachment for Israel, and the need for U.S. support, as did many others who served in Tel Aviv. Sam had little personal or historical acquaintance with the Arab and Palestinian side of the issue, and sometimes his views were at odds with those of our diplomats in Arab posts. But Sam was not a patsy for the Israelis, and in critical moments he could be tough.

Q: What about the feeling about the Palestinians because I have one of my Arabist friends who said look no matter how you slice it, I wouldn't trust the Palestinians at all because they can be swayed and if the Israelis are really worried about their security, it is all very nice to talk about agreements. Political leaders can rise. The Israelis have a real problem, and that is that an Arab neighbor is not a safe neighbor.

WILCOX: I think that the ultimate security for Israel lies not in creating a military fortress confronting its Arab neighbors, but in making peace with them. In order to make peace on a broader level beyond just Egypt and Jordan, the Israelis will have to make a deal with the Palestinians. The Arab states by and large are ambivalent about the Palestinians. They have postured about the Palestinian cause, but the have done little for the Palestinians. Indeed some Arab leaders may see the Palestinians as a threat because the Palestinians, in part because of their proximity to the Israelis over the years have

developed a more progressive approach to politics. The Palestinians are also energetic business people and generally well educated. Until recently, there was ambivalence in the Arab Middle East about a Palestinian state which might become a democracy and serve as a destabilizing example for Arabs ruled by autocratic regimes.

The security dilemma for Israel is real because Israel was created on land which was taken from the Palestinians in war, a great many of whom were expelled by force. However, 50 years later, Israel has become a powerful, successful state. No Arab government today believes that Israel can be dislodged or that it is a temporary phenomenon. Back in the '70s, Arabs used to talk about how the crusaders came to and left Palestine, and that Israel would go the same way. I don't think any Arab politician believes that today. Moreover, the Israeli-Palestinian issue has less salience for them now as the increasingly realize that they have got to deal with their own internal problems to survive, and that they cannot wave the anti-Zionist banner as a way of diverting public attention from their own misgovernment or failures. So the Arab states no longer present a significant security threat to Israel, which is vastly stronger, and most of them are prepared to follow Egypt and Jordan and make peace with Israel and establish relations if Israel can negotiate a fair deal with the Palestinians.

The Palestinians have no military wherewithal and understand better than anyone that Israel is a powerful and permanent state. On the other hand, the huge Palestinian community can make life unpleasant for Israelis if there is no fair peace settlement. The Palestinians are also there to stay, and they are not going to abandon their cause.

A comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace thus depends on resolving the Palestinian issue. Peace with the Palestinians and all the Arabs does not mean they will love each other. The legacy of the Arab-Israeli wars and the Palestinian issue will go on for many years. The Israelis will not become Palestinian nationalists, and the Palestinians will not become Zionists. But love isn't necessary to achieve peace.

Israel by virtue of its small size and exposed borders in a region of the world that will probably be unstable, even after an Arab-Israeli peace, will retain strong military forces. But military superiority will not achieve peace with the Palestinians and an end to this conflict as long as Israel continues to occupy most of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. This conflict is not primordial, and can be resolved. Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and Jerusalem make a territorial division more difficult, but this can still be done and a Palestinian state can be created that will be acceptable to Palestinians. If so, the Arabs will fall in line.

As for whether Palestinians are untrustworthy, I mistrust such ethnic stereotypes. People sometimes act in their own interest, sometimes they don't. The Palestinians are now acting in their own interest in opting for a compromise. I think they made a profound and wise decision to shift from rejectionism, confrontation and violence to the search for peace. Ex- Prime Minister Rabin deserves the same credit for accepting the need for doing that. I fear that the present Minister Netanyahu has a different vision that is bad for Israel, not to mention the Palestinians.

Q: Well speaking of sort of ethnic stereotypes, was there any thought given, going back to this time when you were in a position of responsibility, for going for what could be on historical terms, the natural proclivities of the Israelis, the Palestinians, and the Lebanese for dominating commerce. I think this has been shown wherever these people have gone. I mean in the heart of Africa, you have Lebanese traders. We are talking about the Levantines. Say cut it out fellows. You are damn good merchants, and you can probably take on any aggregate of other people in the world and beat them at their own game in the mercantile world. Was there any thought of looking ahead to something of this nature.

WILCOX: Yes. I have always believed that. There is an extraordinary symbiosis between the Israelis and the Palestinians. They have lived next to each other for decades. They have both suffered historic tragedies. They both believe profoundly in education as the most important investment. They are hard working, enterprising people. There are probably more Ph.D.'s per capita among Palestinians around the world than any other society in the world, and there are a disproportionate number among the Jews. The potential for cooperation and profitable trade, industry, other kinds of exchanges between the Palestinians and the Israelis are terrific. The Palestinians could serve as the bridge to the rest of the Arab world for the Israelis. And the Palestinians and the Israelis both need each other to create a harmonious and functional environment. They use the same water. Their communities are now so intertwined that in order to avoid strife, they have to figure out ways to get along with each other, and to gain from their relationship. It may be idealistic, but I think in practical terms a partnership between Israel and a Palestinian state which is negotiated in a just and equitable way could be successful. These people have much in common. The idea that they are locked in a permanent confrontation need not be true.

Q: While you were this is the '84-'87 period, was the thought of a Palestinian state around, being batted around?

WILCOX: It was at the leading edge of the agenda of the PLO, the Palestinian Diaspora and the West Bank and Gaza Palestinian community, but there were still those in Washington who were promoting the so called Jordan Option. But, at that time, the Palestinian leadership had not abandoned the position that Israel should not be accepted and that Palestinians should someday reclaim all of Palestine. There was some ambivalence about the PLO among a minority in the West Bank who had strong ties to Jordan.

During this period, the Palestinians still felt abandoned and were in many respects a very demoralized community. Many of them had been dispossessed of their land and homes in Israel and they been living first under Jordanian and then under Israeli occupation for 40 years. They had experienced a serious of convulsions going all the way back to the British era. Because of this sense of weakness and demoralization, Palestinians tended to cling to the past and to take highly principled, absolutist positions concerning Israel. They were unable or unwilling to articulate or admit what they really understood, that the

Israelis were there and were not going to leave, and that the Palestinians were not going to return to their homes in what is now Israel.

This self deception and lack of realism did not change until the Intifada erupted. By confronting Israel for the first time with the anomaly of occupation and the grossly unequal status of the Palestinians and catching the attention of the world as a people with legitimate and compelling grievances, the Palestinians regained a sense of self confidence. The Intifada was an expression of suppressed anger, especially by the young, who objected to the rather passive acquiescence and adaptation to Israeli rule that they saw in their elders. It baffled and frightened the Israelis, who were entirely unprepared.

The Palestinians gained and held the initiative in terms of world opinion, and this gave them new confidence. This confidence enabled them to become more realistic and pragmatic about their situation, Israel, and the encrusted positions that they and the PLO had taken for years in rejecting any compromise. Recognizing that compromise was essential, they pushed Arafat and the external PLO, who were also caught by surprise by the Intifada, to accept resolution 242 and to renounce claims to Israel, changes in doctrine that led to a dialogue with the U.S. and ultimately to the Madrid conference and then to the Oslo peace process.

Q: Again this is before the Intifada again I keep dating back '84-'87, what was your and NEA's reading on Arafat?

WILCOX: Very skeptical. We recognized his popularity, but we did not recognize him as a statesman. We thought he was rigid, mired in the past, and a supporter of terrorism. There was information that he might have sanctioned the Palestinian attack on our embassy in Khartoum where Cleo Noel and Curtis Moore were murdered. No one in Washington liked Arafat, or recognized that he was the pre-eminent Palestinian leader with whom the U.S. and Israel would have to deal with some day. We saw Arafat as part of the problem, not the solution. Arafat seemed to be just the kind of Palestinian leader that the Israeli hard liners wanted because they could point to him as a man who espoused violence and was intransigent.

Q: Were we looking for a successor to Arafat, the "moderate"?

WILCOX: We didn't have much knowledge about the expatriate Palestinian community because we didn't talk to them. The last contacts we had with them were in Lebanon during the early ‘80s when our intelligence officials there had a dialogue with the PLO. This gave us some insight but the principle reason for these contacts was the protection of American officials there from terrorist attacks. We had unwisely acceded to Israeli pressure to avoid any contacts with the PLO in the form of a commitment from President Ford until the PLO met our conditions. This denied us contact with a key player, insights into the complexity of PLO politics, which included moderate as well as extremist trends, and the opportunity to use diplomacy to push the PLO toward greater moderation and realism. In retrospect, our self imposed isolation from the PLO was a serious policy failure.

Q: There are those who have given oral l histories saying that we were being protected in Lebanon by the PLO.

WILCOX: Yes, that is true, but our limited contacts with the PLO in Beirut were no substitute for diplomatic contacts. The negotiations over the departure of the PLO from Lebanon after the Lebanon war in which we gained safe passage for Arafat and the Palestinians was an early step toward the change in our relationship. We also strongly protested the Israeli bombing of the Palestinian headquarters in Tunis. There were Americans, Jews and others, who recognized at early stage that it was important to talk to Arafat, and private Americans began contacts with him in the early 1980s. When George Shultz realized at the end of the Reagan administration that we needed to work with the PLO, and we ultimately got commitments from Arafat, through third parties, including a renunciation of violence, [which] led to the beginning of the U.S.-PLO dialogue in Tunis, I believe in late 1988. That dialogue was terminated or interrupted after the abortive attack at Herzliya outside Tel Aviv by Palestinians guerillas loyal to the radical splinter Abu Abbas faction. Although Arafat condemned the attack, he did not expel Abu Abbas from the Executive Committee, as Washington had demanded as the price for continuing our dialogue.

We didn't resume the dialogue until after the Madrid process. Even in the Madrid process and the events that led up to that, we did not acknowledge that Arafat and the PLO would be our main interlocutor. We thought there might be some constellation of local Palestinians with whom we might deal, associated with Jordan. As you recall, Jim Baker met only with Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, and the delegation at the Madrid conference was still a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. The Israelis insisted on that and we acceded to it. The Israeli-Palestinian talks that followed Madrid in Washington involved only Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, although by then everyone knew they got their instructions from the PLO.

Q: What was our reading on Shamir when he came in?

WILCOX: A tough guy, committed to retention of the West Bank and Gaza. U.S. officials respected Shamir as a man who spoke honestly and candidly. He had a certain kind of solid quality about him. At the same time, we saw him as a narrow hard liner and not the man who was going to make those tough decisions that Israel had to make. He didn't. He fought Jim Baker's effort, and he lost, and Baker dragged him into the Madrid conference with very resourceful diplomacy. Shamir was always opposed to making any concession for peace or to talking to the PLO. He admitted later that Madrid for him was just a holding action and that he never intended to relinquish an inch of territory.

Q: Well, I am sure there are other things we should be talking about on Israel. Is there anything in other things?

WILCOX: There is a strain in Israeli politics and political culture that has been there from the very beginning, but became much stronger after 1967 and the election of the

Likud in 1977, that is committed to the recovery of the Biblical land of Israel. These "Zionist Revisionists" do not see Israel or the Jewish people as living in peace and harmony with the rest of the world, but as a people destined to live alone and forever at odds with the gentile world. In their view, Jews, in order to redress previous wrongs and protect themselves against further persecution in the future, must be strong and uncompromising.

This political ideology is a deviation from traditional, universalist Jewish values, and pays less attention to considerations of justice and equity, at least with respect to dealing with the Arabs, who are seen as implacable enemies. This strain of Jewish ideology emerged early in the century, but was strengthened and made more extreme by the Holocaust. It is the ideology of the Likud Party and groups even further to the right than the Likud. In recent years, this element in Israeli politics has been making common cause with the ultra orthodox factions, who are increasingly anti-Arab.

Q: Was Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union at that time a factor?

WILCOX: The major influx of Russian Jews didn't take place until the Gorbachev era. There was a long effort by American Jewish organizations and the governments of Israel and the U.S. to persuade the Soviet Union to release the Jews that wanted to emigrate. At first Moscow refused, but a massive wave of Russian Jews to Israel began in the Gorbachev era and accelerated after the Soviet Union fell. The majority were Russians. They have had a big impact on Israel.

Q: In '87 you went to Jerusalem.

WILCOX: I went to Jerusalem in early spring of 1988.

Q: 1988. We were talking about Arab-Israeli affairs. Did that have a further response?

WILCOX: As a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, I worked on Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and Syria, as well as Israel and the Palestinians. Throughout my service in NEA, the center of influence and decision making for the peace process moved to the seventh floor from NEA, because of its political sensitivity and importance. Charlie Hill, who was Secretary Shultz's Executive Assistant and who had served in Israel, was a very key figure in our peace process policy. In recent years, the power has shifted from the immediate office of the Secretary to the office of the Special Coordinator for Middle East (SMEC) who reports to the Secretary. Moving the center of influence from the NEA bureau to the seventh floor and the White House occurred as the issue became ever more entwined with domestic politics. I think at times, it has deprived the process of the kind of expertise and knowledge that is needed. Dennis Ross, who formerly did this work on the NSC staff, has held the SMEC job for many years. He had come from the University of California at Berkeley where he was a Soviet expert, worked for Defense, and joined the NSC staff in the late 1980s.

Q: Well, this is something I've noticed as I have done these interviews with anyone

looking at our diplomatic process. At a certain point, when things get critical, there is a tendency to move it to the secretary's level or to the NSC where unfortunately there is a tendency to figure out how will this play in the United States, how will this play in the press, with Congress, and if we get those, who is going to pay for it.. In any crisis, and often it doesn't take into account how people in country X react. I think the major one was with George Shultz putting together his wonderful peace thing while our Ambassador in Syria, Bob Paganelli, was saying Assad won't buy it. I mean this is a classic, but it happens again and again

WILCOX: I agree. Nevertheless, there have been some career diplomats who made their mark in the peace process, although the power has gravitated elsewhere. The reasons for the "domestication" of our foreign policy is based, in part, on the fact that our political system relies heavily on money. Politicians need to raise funds, and they are therefore unduly responsible to constituent groups and lobbies who can raise money. This is ultimately a corrupting influence. It affects both parties. It has brought more and more political people into senior decision making roles at State, and into Ambassadorial jobs, who are not there because of their expertise but because of patronage. I don't know how to reverse this trend without reforming campaign financing.

Let me emphasize that I don't think that foreign policy should be exclusively the domain of Foreign Service officers or technocrats. It must be linked to the democratic process, but there ought to be a better way to do it.

Q: Well going back to this period, you were at DAS for this wider responsibility for '86-'87.

WILCOX: Just one year. It was 1987.

Q: What about looking at some of the other countries. What about how were things developing in Egypt at that particular time?

WILCOX: We had a close relationship with Egypt on the political and military level. We had great esteem for Egypt because it was the first of the Arab states to recognize Israel, and that gave it a very special place in the Arab world for us. There were no major crises in our relationship. We were very worried about economic development and the lack of real progress in creating jobs and building a more modern economy in Egypt, but we had close relations across the board. We were dissatisfied that the peace between Israel and Egypt had not resulted in a kind of spontaneous opening of commercial, social, cultural relations. It was, as the Israelis described it, a cold peace. The Egyptian intelligentsia continued to oppose Israel in very strident terms, our hopes that Egypt-Israeli peace would be a catalyst for broader Arab-Israeli contacts were disappointed.

Q: What about Jordan?

WILCOX: We always had a special relationship with King Hussein, and at one time provided very large levels of aid to Jordan. Those declined as our aid budget declined.

Our main interest in Jordan was as an important player in the peace process. Jordan has been a successful state in many ways, creating a nation under difficult circumstances. King Hussein was regarded as a moderate, and one of the keys to solving the Palestinian issue. Traditionally, the Hashemites had a more pragmatic and accommodating view toward Zionism and Israel.

Q: Syria?

WILCOX: Relations were very strained because of Syria's rigid anti-Israel policy, its policies in Lebanon, and its active support, in the 1980s of terrorism. The Syrians tried to engineer the bombing of an El-Al aircraft after it took off from Heathrow in 1986, but security agents discovered the bomb before the plane took off. As a result, the U.S. designated Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism and imposed widespread sanctions.

On the other hand, we continued to recognize that Syria was an important player in the peace process. It was a big country with a big army, close relations with what was then the Soviet Union, and the only country which posed any kind of military threat to Israel. We saw the Golan Heights as another area where the land for peace equation under Resolution 242 should be applied, and realized that Syria also was a critical player in the future of Lebanon. Relations were strained. The Syrians didn't make any effort to improve relations either; they were tough and stubborn.

Q: Really, it does sound that this wasn't an easy group to deal with. Was it because they were taking their cue from Assad or was this sort of a Syrians?

WILCOX: Assad is an Alawite whose government is a minority, and highly authoritarian. Assad has used the anti-Zionist issue as a way of maintaining unity and support for his regime. He has allowed the economy to languish, and Syria is a backward country, though it has real potential. Syria, of course, is a new nation which emerged out of the old British and French empires. It is not yet a mature state.

Q: What about Lebanon at this '87 time?

WILCOX: We were still involved in the aftermath of the civil war, and the hostage crises. Because of our deep frustration over the hostages, effective lobbying by hostage members' families, and an unrelated need for covert money to arm the contras in Nicaragua, we got involved in a hare brained fiasco which violated our own laws, the Iran-Contra scandal. It was run by Ollie North and the NSC out of the basement of the White House, and which caused a grave crisis for the Reagan administration.

When Secretary Shultz, who had been kept out of the plot, learned what was going on, he realized the need to deal with it publicly and repair the damage. A special prosecutor was named as this unhappy chapter in American foreign policy was revealed.

Q: How did that affect you in NEA?

WILCOX: NEA didn't know anything about the shenanigans Ollie and others were carrying on. There was tight secrecy, so the Secretary of State and the Department were out in the cold. This disaster occurred because irresponsible and uninformed staffers were given great power. Their enthusiasm greatly exceeded their competence, and we came a cropper.

Q: Did we see during this '84-'87, particularly '87 period, did we see Lebanon as being part of because there were Israeli troops. There still are in south Lebanon. Did we see this as being part of the general peace complex?

WILCOX: We did, and we worked hard, George Shultz worked hard in an effort to solve it. As you pointed out, we did not engage the Syrians in the negotiations, so it was doomed to failure. We did not strenuously oppose the initial Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and it is true that Al Haig was sympathetic to this venture gave the Israelis at least a "yellow light." But later we worked very hard to get the Israelis to withdraw, with effective diplomacy by Phil Habib and Morrie Draper. We saw Lebanon as a source of instability, danger, and terrorism, especially by the militant Shia Muslim Hezbollah. The Israeli and Hezbollah confrontation in southern Lebanon was another flash point, so we engineered resolution 425, calling for withdrawal of all foreign forces.

Q: By '87, did you see Lebanon as being a functional government or not?

WILCOX: The government did not govern in substantial parts of the country. In the south where there was the Israeli army and Hezbollah militias. In the Bekka Valley which the Hezbollah and the Syrians were in charge. The Syrians also had troops elsewhere, including in Beirut, so the government was not entirely in charge of the country. Lebanese politics, were still characterized by a lot of sectarian strife, and there were few politicians of any stature.

Q: Was this before they started blowing, well we already had an embassy or two blown up.

WILCOX: The embassy was bombed twice, and the Marine barracks was blown up. We had made a commitment to stay the course in Lebanon, but the bombing of the Marine barracks led to withdrawal of our forces. We made a mistake by allowing our peacekeeping forces to be drawn into the conflict as protagonists. We also deployed them in a vulnerable place with poor perimeter defenses.

Q: During the time you were with NEA, was there any thought of just pulling our embassy out?

WILCOX: There were constant recommendations that the place was just too exposed. We had lost so many Americans there. But, NEA persuaded the senior level that it was important to keep a base there with an ambassador and reporting officers to maintain contact and keep Washington informed. We did, however, forbid the travel of Americans using American passports to Lebanon. That travel ban was lifted in 1997 by Secretary

Albright. I think the travel ban lasted too long, since the threat of terrorism had declined considerably by the mid-1990s. Telling Americans they cannot travel somewhere is an extreme measure, and it is, in a sense, a surrender to terrorists. Still, this was necessary in Lebanon in the earlier days when terrorism and hostage taking was rife. But we kept it in force too long.

Q: Well then, you moved to Jerusalem in '88. You were there until when?

WILCOX: I was there until 1991

Q: Why don't we pick this up gain when you go to Jerusalem in 1988?

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Today is June 22,1998. Phil, let's move on. 1988 you went to Jerusalem where you served from '88 to '91 as consul general.

WILCOX: That's right.

Q: How did you get the job?

WILCOX: I had been serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary in NEA with responsibility for Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. I previously had been Director for Arab and Arab-Israeli affairs, so I was prepared for Jerusalem, and when I was asked to go, I readily agreed.

Q: Was there any vetting of you at that point or had you already been vetted by the various, I'm talking about the American-Israeli organizations.

WILCOX: I don't think there was any vetting process outside of the administration. I had been involved in the issue and the policy and knew the players, including the Israelis and the leaders of the American Jewish community, and I was qualified by experience for the job

Q: By any chance during this time that you were in Washington, did you run across Martin Indyk?

WILCOX: Yes, I knew Martin quite well. He was the Director for Research at AIPAC, and I had considerable contact with him while I was on the Israel and Arab-Israel desk, and when I became Deputy Assistant Secretary.

Q: What was your impression, I mean where was he coming from during this time?

WILCOX: He had by the time I left NEA, Martin had already moved over to the job of Director of the newly-created Washington Institute for Middle East Policy Studies. Some of the board members of the Institute were also directors of AIPAC, so there was an

intimate relationship between the two groups. Martin himself had been a scholar in his earlier days in Australia and had written his doctoral thesis on the Egypt-Israel peace process, and so he had expertise on the area. I worked with him and other officials of AIPAC when I was on the Israeli desk. It was a friendly, but often adversarial relationship, since AIPAC often opposed administration policies concerning the Middle East, Israel, and the peace process.

Q: Did you find that AIPAC reflected the politics of Israel in that you had equivalent to the Likud which takes a very strong and pro-Israeli line as opposed to Labor which is how can we get along in this difficult part of the world?

WILCOX: AIPAC came of age during the Likud era after 1977 and it grew into a very skilled, well financed and sophisticated lobby. AIPAC's role was to enhance the American-Israeli relationship, and it generally reflected views put forth by the government of Israel. It worked very hard to promote stronger support in Congress, and later began to give attention to the executive branch, the Department of State and the Department of Defense. It had an effective, capable group of people who were knowledgeable, dedicated, hard working, tough, and single minded.

Q: Did it seem to reflect, most of the time in the people who were brought on were true believers even to use an old biblical term zealots as far as the cause of a greater Israel?

WILCOX: No, I wouldn't call them zealots. I think that the leadership in AIPAC were people who believed deeply that a strong U.S.-Israel [relationship] was valuable for the United States, that our interests converged in all major respects. The major point of friction with AIPAC during that time were U.S. arms sales to Arab states, and AIPAC worked aggressively to prevent or postpone or to subject to conditions the sale of U.S. weapons to Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other Arab states which had not made peace with Israel. AIPAC argued that to sell sophisticated weapons to these states would erode the qualitative military edge that it was U.S. policy to preserve for the state of Israel. So there were very difficult and almost chronic disputes whenever an Arab state would propose to purchase U.S. arms, and AIPAC would almost invariably oppose them. AIPAC also preached the Israel view that it was necessary to retain the West Bank and Gaza for security reasons, that there were no moderate Arab states, and that the Palestinians were permanently committed to the violent destruction of Israel.

Q: Could you describe Jerusalem in 1988 when you arrived? The area was kind of keyed up. Okay, we wanted to go back to AIPAC first.

WILCOX:. AIPAC was opposed to the administration’s view that the basis for peace lay in a land for peace arrangement based on resolution 242. We were also at odds with AIPAC over the question of the PLO office in Washington. The administration realized that this office, which was run by American citizens, would continue operations under some other name if it was closed down, but eventually acceded to strong pressure from the Congress and from AIPAC to shut down the office. As usual, AIPAC played very hard ball on this issue.

AIPAC is a single issue organization. Its members lacked the knowledge and perspective of other foreign policy issues and for that reason, did not have the understanding that there were other U.S. interests that had to be weighed in considering our policy toward Israel and the peace process. So at times it was an adversarial relationship. But the Administration also recognized AIPAC's influence and courted its able Director at that time, Tom Dine, as an important player.

Q: Was the issue raised say particularly with Saudi Arabia, because Saudi Arabia was essentially no threat to Israel. It just didn't have the military capacity, the population. Was the protection of the Persian Gulf, because this obviously became very important in our next episode we are going to be discussing, but was that raised at all with AIPAC saying, you know fellows this is all very nice but Saudi Arabia is being threatened by both Iran and Iraq, and we have to have AWACS and protective weapons and all that.

WILCOX: That, of course, was part of our case. It usually didn't prevail with AIPAC or Congress. The administration won an early fight with AIPAC and Congress over the sale of AWACS surveillance aircraft to Saudi Arabia. After that defeat, AIPAC vowed that it would never be defeated again in such a stand up contest. It wasn't. I believe that AIPAC was every bit as concerned about its own power and influence as Israel's interests. Steve Rosen, AIPAC Director for Research who succeeded Martin Indyk, once acknowledged this to me, saying "we are a fighting organization, and we like to win."

Q: Well, then let's move to Jerusalem. At the beginning things obviously really heated up. Let's talk about when you arrived there in '88. What was the situation? We are talking about the whole area, but basically centered around Jerusalem.

WILCOX: Well, at that time the Likud government and Prime Minister Shamir were governing Israel. Its policy was to promote the Israeli settlements and to hang on to the West Bank and Gaza which they regarded as part of greater Israel. The Likud never proclaimed an intention to annex these areas and absorb them into Israel, realizing that were they to do so, the Palestinians in those areas would have to be enfranchised. That would upset the Jewish demographics of Israel. Still, they wanted to maintain control of these territories under some form of limited autonomy where the major decisions and security would be controlled by Israel. To prevent the emergence of a local Palestinian leadership and self governing institutions, the Israelis removed or deported Palestinian mayors, for example, who had nationalist views, and appointed Arabs who were puppets. Local leadership, therefore, scarcely existed. The Palestinian PLO leadership abroad was in retreat having been driven out of Beirut and landed in exile in Tunisia. There was a deep stalemate.

Q: How had the previous incumbents reported from Jerusalem? How did they perceive their missions as consuls general?

WILCOX: I think reporting from Jerusalem over the years made a real effort to try to understand the dynamics of Palestinian politics, the society, the economy of the West

Bank. The embassy was responsible for Gaza.

As for the role of consuls general, by definition they all led schizophrenic lives, living in West Jerusalem among Israelis, and dealing professionally with Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. I and some of my predecessors thought it was important to keep and eye on the Jewish side of Jerusalem to keep our Palestinian analysis in context and to look at the city as a whole. While my official contacts were with the Palestinians, since Israel prohibited its officials from dealing with the consulate, I also developed very close contacts with Israeli writers, journalists and academics, especially those who were interested and involved in the peace process and human rights and had contacts with Palestinians. In any case, I viewed my role as the American representative in the City of Jerusalem, as well as our channel to the Palestinians.

While the bulk of our contacts were with Palestinians and we concentrated our reporting on that sector, I gained perspective and insight by keeping in touch with Israelis. Our job, of course, was to encourage the Palestinians to take a more creative and positive view toward peace.

By and large, it was not possible to bring Palestinians and Israelis together at the consulate because of the depth of Palestinian feelings about the occupation and their Israeli adversaries and the embarrassment they felt in associating with Israelis under American auspices in a setting they could only regard as political, not social. We did so only on rare, carefully controlled occasions. Nor did we try to bring together peace-minded Israelis whom we knew were already in touch with Palestinians, since this probably would have been counterproductive. These relations were close, though very discreet, and did not need U.S. sponsorship.

The only major mixed event at the consulate was our annual Fourth of July reception. In the past, following the practice of other consulate generals in Jerusalem, the U.S. held two receptions, one for Palestinians and the other for Israelis. One of my predecessors, Wat Cluverius, broke with this tradition and combined the two parties. I agreed with this policy, since it was designed to demonstrate that the U.S. saw the Jews and the Arabs in Jerusalem as neighbors who had to live together. The Palestinians saw our policy differently, however, and some of them regularly boycotted the event, while otherwise maintained close relations with us. I think they suspected that holding a Fourth of July reception for both communities implied that the U.S. had accepted Israeli control over all of Jerusalem and had abandoned the policy of leaving the question of Jerusalem's status open for future negotiations. That certainly wasn't the intention of having a single reception, but all things in Jerusalem are political including Fourth of July receptions. Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem made things worse for us by constantly saying in public that he was responsible for persuading the U.S. to hold a combined Fourth of July reception. This made it look to the Palestinians that we were doing the Israelis' bidding, which was not true.

Q: In your talk just now, you always state in Jerusalem and Jerusalem and Jerusalem. What about the West Bank?

WILCOX: The West Bank was under our jurisdiction, and I and all my predecessors traveled extensively in the West Bank, using our Arab drivers. We used Israeli drivers in West Jerusalem. My officers were out in the West Bank every day talking to people, administering a small economic development assistance program, promoting U.S. views, and trying continuously to persuade the Palestinians to take a more activist and positive view toward the peace process and to accept resolution 242.

Q: Could you explain what resolution 242 was?

WILCOX: Resolution 242 has always been the foundation of U.S. policy in the peace process. Essentially, it calls on Israel to withdraw from territory occupied in 1967, that is the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, in exchange for peace and mutual recognition. is essentially a bargain for the exchange of land for peace. Resolution 338 calls for the negotiations to bring that process about. The Palestinians for years had been paralyzed in their political approach by refusing to recognize the existence or the permanence of the state of Israel. They clung tenaciously to this view in public that because Israel had taken their land, they had a right to recover it and compromise with Israel was not acceptable. I think most of them did not believe that this was a realistic policy, but nevertheless, they would not bring themselves to admit that, and for reasons of pride they clung to this uncompromising position. So there was a terrible intellectual and ideological lag among the Palestinians on the West Bank. Their policy was one of steadfastness, to hold firm to their views and to hope that somehow someday their cause would prevail. It wasn't prevailing. Their land continued to be taken by the Israelis, settlements were expanding, and steadfastness was a failed policy. We worked to urge the Palestinians to look at their own situation more realistically, to find ways to engage with Israel, and to make peace through a compromise that would salvage something for them and their children. Our view was the only route to peace was a division of the land and a mutual recognition between Israelis and Palestinians.

This was a hard sell, not just because of traditional Palestinian stubbornness and the lack of strong, visionary leadership, but because the Likud governments in those days offered the Palestinians little in return for peace. “Peace for peace” was Shamir’s policy, and he envisaged a future of permanent subordination of the Palestinians under effective Israeli control, since his view and that of his colleagues was that the West Bank and Gaza belonged to Israel. It was difficult, to say the least, for the Palestinians to recognize Israel when Israel refused to offer any compromise itself or to recognize the Palestinian as a people with rights and aspirations of their own. The Israelis until well into the late ‘80s clung to the view that the Palestinians were basically Jordanians, and that Palestinian nationalism and the idea of a Palestinian state were not only illegitimate but dangerous. So there was a grave ideological time warp on both sides. Both thought they were stuck in a zero sum game in which one side had to win and the other had to lose.

Q: Did you have dealings with the Jewish settlers?

WILCOX: Yes, we did. We would meet occasionally with settler representatives in

Jerusalem, and members of my staff would sometimes visit settlements and talk to settlement leaders. It was important to learn more about it and to report on the internal politics and dynamics of this movement, which represented a threat to an ultimate peace. We also reported in great detail on the expansion of settlements.

Q: Were you viewed with hostility by the settlement leadership?

WILCOX: Absolutely. The leadership of the settler movement were religious fundamentalists and ultra-nationalist Jews who believed that they were fulfilling a Biblical prophesy by reclaiming the ancient Biblical homelands and had a God given right to take that land and to live on it. The Palestinians would somehow have to make do or leave. They were deeply angry at the U.S. for suggesting that settlements were a threat to peace and stability in the region. Up until the early 1980s, the U.S. government held that settlements were illegal. Unfortunately, President Reagan changed our policy, and our opposition to settlements thereafter was more attenuated and spasmodic.

Q: Did you find when you were there particularly dealing with the settlers, much of the impetus for this movement was being supported particularly in Jewish circles in New York I would have thought. Almost everything you did would be on a hair trigger, and the hair trigger would be almost in New York. New York City I am talking about.

WILCOX: The impetus for the settlement movement didn't come from New York, it came from the various Zionist revisionist ideologues and religious leaders like Rabbi Kook who created a new variant of Jewish philosophy which held that to recover the land of ancient Israel was a divine mandate, central to the future of Judaism and linked to the coming of the messiah. This was a very powerful concept emotionally and religiously. It grew after the Israeli victory in 1967 and the take over of the West Bank which the followers of this stream of Judaism saw as a miraculous act of redemption. It is true that this movement drew support and funds from some American Jewish donors and religious cohorts. Also, a significant number of the most enthusiastic and ideological settlers were American Jews from New York and elsewhere in the U.S., although many were born in Israel.

Q: Did you find yourself caught between you might say this ideological group which was essentially doing something which was against our policy, but the spearhead of which was often American, I mean holding dual passports. When things went wrong of one sort or another, did you have to go in and sort of help Americans who were really Israelis? Did this cause problems?

WILCOX: Any American citizens who requested assistance from an American consulate or embassy would always receive assistance, irrespective of their political views. But militant settlers who were also Americans tended to avoid the consulate. I don't know how many of the Americans who chose to live in Israel retained their American passports. Some did, some did not.

Q: I would have thought that you would have had a problem dealing with your staff

Particularly your officers, I mean here in a way was comparable to the situation in South Africa in dealing with what was considered an oppressive government, the white government on the blacks. Here from the perspective of a junior officer, they are focused on the plight of the Palestinians. Yet it is very tricky. The older officers can understand the dynamics of American politics, but young people tend to see things in black and white. This is just; this isn't just. I would have thought that this would be a problem.

WILCOX: Any American diplomat who served in Jerusalem quickly became familiar with the realities of the Palestinian problem. Those who had some previous experience dealing with Israel knew the other side of the issue as well. My officers were young, but while they were deeply involved and had strong views about the situation, they were professionals, did not go off the deep end, and maintained a necessary degree of detachment. I made it a point in myself and encouraged my staff to report objectively and honestly about what was going on, and we called our shots as we saw them. We worked hard to be honest and objective, without glossing over the unpleasant realities of the Israeli occupation and Palestinian failings as well. We saw ourselves as American diplomats representing U.S. interests in the midst of a problem that required a solution.

Q: How did you find your reporting, yours and with your officers. How was that received both in the embassy in Tel Aviv and in Washington? Did you find you had to fine tune the reporting; how did you deal with that?

WILCOX: I paid a great deal of attention to our reporting, and I wanted to make sure that our reporting was not special pleading on behalf of the Palestinians, while at the same time accurately conveying the situation and Palestinians views. I also sought to put our reporting in the larger context of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. I thought I was in a good position to do that having worked on the Israeli side of the street for some years. I was proud of the reporting the consulate general did at that time. I though it was timely, analytically rigorous, and directed to the Department's policy concerns. Our reporting officers were in the field constantly. Some of them spoke Arabic and Hebrew. We knew the political and business community in the West Bank and East Jerusalem very well, and reported voluminously on what they were doing and what they were saying.

The response to the reporting was varied. Among colleagues in the department it was appreciated. There were often positive comments, but there were also those in my time and during the tours of all previous consuls general whose reporting I previously read in Washington who thought the consulate's reporting was biased toward the Palestinians. In any case, we believed our professional vocation was to report objectively and honestly. I also thought my job description obliged me to make policy recommendations from time to time and I did so. Those recommendations were sometimes welcomed and sometimes not welcomed, but that is to be expected. I tried to make recommendations with recognition of competing factors, including, sometimes, Israeli equities that Washington policymakers would have to balance and to give my best advice.

Q: Can you comment on any of the recommendations that you made positive and negative back in Washington?

WILCOX: During the Intifada, a young Israeli reservist at a bus stop near Tel Aviv killed a group of Palestinians and serious rioting broke out in Gaza. Israeli forces responded in an excessive and heavy handed way, killing seventeen Palestinians. Palestinian emotions, already running high in the midst of the Intifada, grew even more intense. The local leadership was already involved in a hunger strike against Israeli policies. The PLO introduced a resolution in the UN Security Council condemning the use of excessive force by the Israeli forces. I recommended that we engage in negotiations on this resolution rather than veto it as we were increasingly doing. If we were unable to achieve balanced language, we should abstain from the resolution. Our policy was to oppose the use of excessive force against the Intifada in violation of recognized human rights standards. We were also working to defuse the conflict and to encourage the Palestinians to consider a political solution. I reasoned that a veto would further reduce U.S. influence among the Palestinians and undermine our efforts to get the Israelis to pursue a more sensible response to the Intifada. My recommendation for an abstention was not welcomed in Washington and the U.S. cast a veto in New York. The upshot was that the local Palestinian leadership in the West Bank and Gaza decided to boycott further official contacts with the U.S. officials, including the consulate. This was a foolish, counterproductive move on their part, but it demonstrated their sense of anger, despair and powerlessness.

Some time later while on consultations in Washington, John Kelly, the Assistant Secretary in NEA, who had earlier urged me to give my best advice to Washington, told me, by way of cautioning me, that Robert Gates, the then Deputy National Security Adviser in the White House, had said that "Wilcox has gone off the deep end." I surmised that my recommendation for an abstention in the Security Council vote, which I thought I had presented in a thoughtful way, taking into account my long experience in Washington dealing with U.S. votes in the UN, was regarded as a radical proposal.

Q: Well, it sounds as though we were locked into almost the same sort of diplomatic response that the Israelis and the Palestinians were. At a certain point we wouldn't engage in any talk. It sounds like a rather sad commentary on diplomacy.

WILCOX: We were frustrated by the tendency of the Palestinians, with the help of some of the Europeans, to go to the Security Council every time there was an issue that should have been addressed through negotiations. We had been trying for years to promote negotiations on the Palestinian issue, but were making little headway with either the Palestinians or the Israelis. The Israelis would not recognize the Palestinians, much less the PLO, as their negotiating partner, the Palestinians expected the U.S. and the international community to do their negotiations with Israel for them, and the U.S. at that time would not deal with the PLO, whom all Palestinians regarded as the address for negotiations. The tendency of the Arabs and the Palestinians to run to the Security Council every time they had a serious grievance, combined with domestic pressures in the U.S. to veto all UN resolutions critical of Israel, tended to increase alienation between the U.S. and the Palestinians and their Arab friends.

I always thought we should have used the Security Council more creatively, with our influence and our leadership, to craft resolutions in the Security Council which would go beyond sterile Israel bashing and help the situation. Instead, the policy in Washington was that when it came to Security Council resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we should not negotiate and that the "worst" draft resolutions were the "best" because they were easier to veto.

Q: What was the state, I am a little bit foggy on the chronology, one the Intifada, the uprising. When did or was this to take place? The other one was the beginning of talks with the Arab, the PLO in Tunisia and all of this.

WILCOX:. The Intifada began in November, 1987, with riots in Gaza and in the West Bank city of Nablus sparked by the deaths of Palestinian youths in confrontations with the IDF. It spread spontaneously, with strikes, marches, barricades, and stonings of Israeli forces.

In a matter of months a full scale mass protest movement emerged, led by a clandestine Intifada leadership dominated by the PLO Fatah faction. Protesters had no firearms, but used stones against the IDF. The leadership also issued regular leaflets which contained propaganda and calls for strikes, boycotts against Israeli products, and the withholding of Palestinian day laborers from work in Israeli factories and homes and fields. The leaflets contained a lot of rhetoric, as well as the core of the Intifada's ideology and tactical advice to the Palestinians. We read these documents with great care and reported them.

The Israelis were caught by surprise, since the Palestinians had been relatively passive since 1967, and had never before mounted a sustained protest movement. The IDF was forced to deploy many more Israeli troops in the West Bank and Gaza than they ever had in the past. Its strategy was to respond with major force, for fear of being seen as weak, instead of ignoring the riots and letting them play out, which would have been a sounder strategy. So thousands of young Israeli conscripts and older reservists found themselves involved in street battles with stone-throwing Palestinian kids. The IDF saw themselves as a fighting army and they were cast in this new role as policemen to put down street riots. They were unprepared. Although the policy was to use live fire only in self defense, the death toll from live fire grew. Many Palestinians were also killed or wounded by rubber, steel-cored, bullets that were widely used. The IDF also used beatings, curfews, massive arrests, and the confinement of people in whole villages or areas, a form of collective punishment.

Rather than subduing the Intifada, these Israeli practices intensified it, and the IDF was put, increasingly, on the defensive. The uprising had a profound effect on Israeli public opinion which in the past has assumed that the occupation could be maintained without much effort and that the Palestinians had been subdued. Now they were sending their sons and husbands to subdue Palestinian teenagers and they found this troubling. The troops themselves disliked the new role they had been cast in, and a process of soul searching about the occupation began.

At the same time, the Palestinians began to sharpen their propaganda and to articulate more carefully their cause to sympathetic Israeli journalists and to the western media. The western press reported on the Intifada intensively and the specter of heavily armed Israeli armed forces beating up unarmed Palestinian youths created a lot of sympathy in the United States and Western Europe for the Palestinians. [As a result of] this renewed interest and attention to the Palestinian cause, many for the first time saw the human dimension of the occupation and all its anomalies. In Israel, people began to ask how the occupation could be sustained - and the peace movement and political ferment grew.

Some Israelis advocated harsher crackdowns on the Palestinians, but many others said this [was] an untenable [price] for a liberal democracy to pay in terms of repression and violation of human rights and began to advocate a political solution. The Palestinians, themselves gained a new sense of pride. [They] gained new respect and increased understanding in the world, where they had often projected a negative image. This external recognition, plus the fact that the Palestinians had for the first time stood up to the Israelis, gave the Palestinians a new sense of confidence and, in return, realism and honesty about their situation with the Israelis. The fact that the Palestinians in the

West Bank and Gaza took the initiative in the Intifada themselves, without prompting or direction from the external PLO, added to their sense of confidence. As a result, Palestinians began to talk among themselves and to us about recognizing Israel and a negotiated peace which would result in the creation of a Palestinian state which would live peacefully with Israel. Such talk was almost never heard in the ‘70s or the ‘80s when I had first met Palestinians. We engaged with Palestinians and encouraged them.

There had been signs over the years of pragmatism and moderation within the PLO, but the mold of rejectionism had not been broken, in part, I think, because the U.S. did not engage with the PLO. A major change in Palestinian doctrine came at the Algiers meeting of the Palestinian National Congress in 1988 when an aide of Arafat's, Bassam Abu Sharif, published a paper, with official blessing, that called for the creation of two states, the recognition of Israel, and peace between them. At first, Washington was skeptical and paid little attention, but this was a seminal document that reflected an important shift in Palestinian thinking.

The Intifada was the impetus for this change. The Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza, for the first time, began to assert themselves with the external PLO. They were in constant touch with Arafat and the PLO leadership and were urging them to be more creative and to seek a political solution with the Israelis. Arafat and his leadership reacted positively, recognizing that they had to be responsive to their constituents in the occupied territories who had initiated and were bearing the brunt of the Intifada. A new synthesis emerged in the PLO that led to its commitment to forswear terrorism and recognize resolution 242 and to the beginnings of a U.S.-PLO dialogue in Tunis. That dialogue was suspended when the gang of Abu Abas, a radical member of the PLO executive committee, staged an abortive attack against Israel on the beach at Herzliyya, near Tel Aviv.

To summarize, the Intifada created real political movement on both the Israeli and Palestinian side in the direction of accommodation. It was an important event in the history of the conflict and the peace process.

Q: What was your role during this time, when the Intifada had reached full proportions. Could you talk about how we were seeing it there? Was there a different perspective from our embassy in Tel Aviv and also with Israeli officials, sort of how did you fit into this and what were you reporting?

WILCOX: The embassy in Tel Aviv received the full weight of Israeli views and reported them. I think the embassy in Tel Aviv also understood that the Intifada was a serious crisis and that it created a new situation which [called] for renewed diplomatic efforts. Tel Aviv was also responsible for covering Gaza, so it had a window into Palestinian affairs. Naturally, since most of the embassy's interlocutors were Israelis, they tended to pay more attention to Israeli urgings and demarches, but I do not think the embassy's reporting was biased or unbalanced. I made a point of visiting the embassy almost weekly and consulting with our ambassador. The ambassador was Tom Pickering when I arrived, and Bill Brown during the latter part of my tour there. I felt it was very important for the embassy and the consulate general to avoid an adversary relationship and become the advocates of their respective clients. I urged my staff and embassy likewise to get our two staffs together so that we could talk about a common U.S. approach to these things. There was not always agreement, but there was regular contact by phone and in person, and I felt it was critical to maintain this. There had been times in the past where there was severe tension between the consulate general and the embassy. In some respects it was kind of built in to this situation. I was aware of this and worked hard to avoid it.

Q: What was the great focus of the press, TV news, CNN with particularly cable news. I mean you can always lead with a story showing Palestinian youths throwing rocks at Israeli troops and groups of Israeli troops firing back. I mean here you were, this was your area of responsibility. Did you find it difficult dealing with the press?

WILCOX: I dealt with them regularly as I always had in Washington. I tried to give them the most objective appraisal I could to expound U.S. policy. The press did a particularly good job of reporting on the Intifada. The U.S. press helped illuminate the issues to the American public, as did the Israeli media for the Israelis. Media reporting helped create the political catharsis on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides that was quite encouraging.

Q: What did you and your staff do during this time to sort of get out the word. You know, this is an opportunity. Whom were you talking to about this?

WILCOX: There wasn't an elected or formally recognized leadership structure in the West Bank. The old municipal leadership had been undermined by Israeli deportation, and the Israelis discouraged the emergence of other leaders by arrests and deportations. This lack of a coherent recognized political structure on the inside made it difficult to find the points of authority and key interlocutors.

The Intifada leadership were young people who were unidentified and carefully concealed. There was an overt tier of respected pro-PLO Palestinians, however, including journalists, lawyers, doctors, businessmen, notables, and political figures like Faisal Husseini who were influential and served as a kind of local leadership. We saw these people regularly. They and the younger clandestine Intifada leadership were all trying to persuade the PLO to move further toward compromise.

There was chronic rivalry among Palestinians, as there had been historically, that threatened their unity and sense of purpose. This rivalry, based on regional and clan ties, weakened the cohesiveness of the community and its ability to deal with their situation. Arafat and the external PLO encouraged this rivalry, since they did not want strong political leaders to emerge in the occupied territories. Disunity was a constant problem when we had American visitors either from the Congress or the executive branch who wanted to talk to Palestinians. Our job was to invite Palestinians who have some stature and who might in some way be representative to meet with Americans. But because of rivalries, it was not always easy to get a group of Palestinians who would come to meet with senior Americans. Often they were interested in who else was coming. That was part of our burden in the consulate general, but we generally succeeded. We had to work very hard with the Palestinians to identify a team of Palestinians to meet with Secretary Baker when he began his round of diplomacy.

Most Palestinians viewed the U.S. as partisan and pro-Israel, and this complicated our relations with them, but most realized the value of contacts with the consulate, and during my first year in Jerusalem we had superb access. However, after the U.S. veto of the Security Council resolution following the killing of the Palestinians at Rishon Lezion and in Gaza in the midst of the Intifada, the most prominent Palestinians decided to boycott all further contacts with Americans. This interrupted some of our contacts, but we stayed in touch with many others and with intermediaries of the boycott group.

Q: During this time of great tension and confrontation, I would have thought you would have been quite concerned about Americans who were settlers there. Just by the filtering process as you say, these tended to be the most zealous of the group who have come over and made this choice. Were you kind of keeping an eye out of saying You know I am a little worried about this guy or group or something. They might start shooting, because they were armed.

WILCOX: One of my colleagues, Bob Silverman, who spent a good deal of time following the settler movement, once approached a settlement and was accosted at gun point by a settler and forced to leave. At my request the embassy protested this to the government of Israel.

Q: What about dealing with the Israeli officials in Jerusalem?

WILCOX: The only relationship we had with Israeli officials was with the municipality of Jerusalem. That tradition was established many years ago, so I would regularly deal

with Mayor Teddy Kollek and his deputies. We had housekeeping, security, and logistic problems, so we needed to have contact with the municipality. Those relations were usually cordial and direct.

On the other hand, we did not have formal relationships with the foreign ministry and the foreign ministry instructed it personnel not to deal with consulate officers. Nonetheless, having worked earlier in Israeli affairs, I had friends in the government of Israel and occasionally they would come to my residence, but they did so after hours. There was no formal relationship. Israeli doctrine of the indivisibility of Jerusalem and permanent Israeli control of Jerusalem was vigorously asserted, and the Israelis resented the fact that the Americans had an independent diplomatic mission in Jerusalem that reported directly to Washington, while we maintained our embassy in Tel Aviv. There was always tension there, but it has existed for many years. By and large, Israeli diplomats were professionals, very sophisticated people. They generally handled this in a civilized way.

There was one major exception. Several members of my staff who lived in West Jerusalem reported over a period of months that their apartments had been broken into and items were moved in a way designed to show that someone had been there surreptitiously. Nothing was stolen. When I was convinced that there was a pattern to this, I called on the Director of Protocol at the Foreign Ministry to alert him to this problem. I strongly suspected that Israeli security personnel had entered the apartments as a form of harassment or game playing. I wanted to let the Foreign Ministry know of my concern [by] alleging official involvement. Thereafter, there were no further entries.

Q: When did you go to Jerusalem.

WILCOX: In 1988 in April.

Q: I'm not sure whether you missed it but it is almost a rite of passage that in any election year around the time of spring is when the primaries come. That's when every candidate for anything goes to New York and promises that they are going to see that our embassy is moved to Jerusalem. That hasn't happened, I mean it comes up all the time. It may happen some time. Did that come up in your watch?

WILCOX: It came up constantly. We kept our embassy in Tel Aviv in 1948 after the [Israeli] government moved to Jerusalem, and maintained the independent status of the consulate general in Jerusalem to demonstrate that the status of Jerusalem had to be resolved in negotiations, not unilateral acts. When Israel occupied East Jerusalem in 1967, we regarded that part of the city as occupied territory.

Today, the Palestinians demand the recovery of East Jerusalem and the establishment of the capital of the Palestinian state there. They no longer seek recover West Jerusalem where many tens of thousands of Palestinians lived before 1948 and were forced out of their homes to East Jerusalem or the West Bank or elsewhere.

There was a wall between the East and West sides of the city between 1948 and 1967,

and Jews were denied access to their holy sites. Some Israelis fear that if the Palestinians are given East Jerusalem they will re-divide the city. The Palestinians, [however], say they want and need an open city in which the two communities can deal with each other. Jerusalem has enormous emotional significance for both Israelis and Palestinians, and it is wrong to assert that one side or another has a superior claim to Jerusalem or that one or another has more historical significance. The fact is that it is of supreme political and religious importance for both Palestinians and Israelis will ultimately require a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and perhaps some novel arrangements for shared sovereignty in certain areas. This can be done, although it is increasingly difficult because of the construction of huge Israeli settlements in large areas of East Jerusalem on confiscated Arab land.

Because a solution of the Jerusalem issue is critical to a comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement, the U.S. must continue to insist that the final status of East Jerusalem must be settled by mutual agreement. If we move our embassy to Jerusalem before that happens, we will undermine or role as intermediary and therefore risk prolonging conflict, with resultant damage to our interests in the Middle East and a stable peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Q: How did the Gulf War between Iraq and the United States and other powers impact on you?

WILCOX: Staying with Jerusalem, for a minute, there has been a lot of rhetoric about the unity of Jerusalem. But it is, in fact, a deeply divided city in which 30-40% of the population are Arabs who oppose Israeli rule. The city is divided politically, socially, and psychologically, and there is chronic tension. The Jewish-Arab geographical division is far less distinct now because of the settlers in East Jerusalem. The current arrangement is unsatisfactory in every way. I have always believed that a political division of the two peoples in the city will bring about a closer social, economic and cultural relations between them and create a much happier city. The city would remain open, in any case, since the Arabs want an open city as much as the Israelis do.

Q: When you are talking about Jerusalem, did you and your staff have any problem with the tensions there during the time you were there or with the extreme orthodox element?

WILCOX: The ultra orthodox ignored us, but the settlers disliked us because the U.S. opposed settlements and advocated a territorial compromise with the Arabs. However, we watched security very carefully. I think Washington often exaggerated the threat to American citizens in Jerusalem through the frequent issuance of travel advisories, especially during the Intifada. At one time there was pressure to actually move my staff who lived in East Jerusalem into West Jerusalem. I successfully resisted this.

Q: That would be a political move, too.

WILCOX: It would have had profound political significance and would have crippled our mission. The mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, was quite unhappy with our security

advisories on Jerusalem, and he once called me in and told me that there had been 11 homicides in Jerusalem in I think it was 1989 whereas, there had been X-hundred homicides in the city of Washington that year. He said we should pay more attention to security in our own country and avoid our alarmist security advisories about Jerusalem because it hurt tourism, which was and is hugely important to Jerusalem's economy.

Q: Well, then let's go to the Gulf War. Could you explain one, what the Gulf War was, and then talk about its impact on your operations.

WILCOX: In 1990 and 91, President Bush, mobilized a brilliantly successful coalition of western states who deployed multinational forces led mainly by the U.S. ultimately to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait. That required vigorous diplomacy with our allies in the UN Security Council. The coalition victory against Saddam Hussein and was a great victory for the United States and the west. The Gulf War drew in Israel because Saddam began to launch SCUD missiles against Israel. The United States, fearing that Israeli retaliation against Iraq would undermine the U.S. Arab cooperation against Saddam, urged that the Israelis forebear from retaliating against Iraq. Deputy Secretary Eagleburger visited Israel in an effort to persuade them not to, and succeeded.

Q: You were saying the Israelis did not respond to these attacks in part because of the Americans and in part because...

WILCOX: The Israelis decided not to respond to the Iraqi attacks in part, because of our urging, but also in part because of the lack of militarily effective means of retaliating. The SCUDs were being launched from the deserts of Iraq. They were very difficult to pinpoint. Aerial attacks from Israel against Iraqi sites would require over flights of Jordan or Syria which those countries certainly would not have permitted, and therefore would have meant a violation of the airspace. The Israelis probably recognized they couldn't find these sites, some of which were mobile, and that bombing them wouldn't be an effective response. They probably also recognized that they did not have the capability of sending ground forces to Iraq to destroy these missile sites, even if they could locate them. Another over flight route would have been over Saudi Arabia.

So, they did not retaliate, departing from the normal tradition of hitting back hard. The Israeli public hunkered down and withstood the missile attacks. Miraculously, they killed no one, but did considerable damage in Tel Aviv in certain neighborhoods. The Iraqi SCUDs were primitive and poorly guided. To help Israel, the U.S. deployed batteries of Patriot anti-missile missiles in Tel Aviv. There was a controversy about how effective these missiles actually were, but it was a political gesture by the United States which helped reinforce the Israeli policy of not retaliating against Iraq.

Q: What about your staff in this? What changes in your work was happening?

WILCOX: There was real concern about the safety of Americans, and a good many Americans from Tel Aviv were evacuated with their wives. A number of my own staff were evacuated also including spouses. My wife Cynda also left, reluctantly. No missiles

were launched against Jerusalem. I predicted this, because Jerusalem was also an Arab city, and the site of many Islamic holy places. But, there was real concern. These missiles were also quite inaccurate. We could see their trails passing overhead in the night. You could never tell where they were going to land, so there was much anxiety.

Q: Were you hit with a wave of visa requests?

WILCOX: Some Israelis left the country. Tourism virtually stopped. But for the most part the Israelis hunkered down. There was a massive, well organized civil defense effort. There was great concern about chemical warheads on these missiles, and Israelis were issued gas masks and vinyl sheeting to seal up their houses and Atabrine, a medical antidote, were available. The Israelis did an excellent job in reacting to this. There was no panic.

Q: How about within the West Bank community? One, reaction to Iraq's war and two, how they reacted to the missile threat and what the Israelis were doing to them.

WILCOX: Before the war started, Palestinian intellectuals were for the most part contemptuous of Saddam Hussein. They saw him as an Arab tyrant, not a leader they wanted to emulate. But when the war began and the missile attacks started, there was a spontaneous support among many Palestinians for Saddam. There was shock and chagrin of course, on the part of the Israelis and West that the Palestinians could support Saddam. But this behavior was quite understandable, if regrettable, given the Palestinians enmity for their Israeli occupiers and their apparent helplessness to do anything about it. Arafat, you will recall, actually went to Baghdad and was photographed embracing Saddam., a step he later regretted when Saddam lost the war. The Palestinians support for Iraq alienated them, for awhile, from the U.S. A more important consequence was the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from Kuwait.

Q: Did you have either a problem or a situation to deal with let's say before the missile attacks, because there was a period of a few months almost six months I suppose. The Iraqis went into Kuwait in August of 1990, and we really didn't start attacking until January guess, of 1991. The United States was sort of shocked to see particularly these Jordanians jumping around with joy about what Saddam had done to Kuwait. Did you have the same thing in Jerusalem and the West Bank?

WILCOX: Palestinian support for Saddam was influenced, I think, by the inferior status that the Palestinians had been given in Kuwait where there were thousands and thousands of Palestinians, professionals, working people, businessmen. Very few had been given Kuwaiti citizenship, although they made important contributions to Kuwait. As for Jordan, King Hussein's support for Saddam also infuriated Washington, but given Jordan's critical economic relationship with Iraq and support among the masses for Saddam, the King had less room for maneuver that the U.S. realized.

Q: Did you find yourself having to say come on fellows, Saddam Hussein is our enemy, and you are not helping yourselves. I am talking during this time.

WILCOX: Of course that was our message. We said it was crazy for the Palestinians to support Saddam Hussein when it was in the interest of the Palestinians to make common cause with the United States which was better positioned than anyone else to try to help the Palestinians make peace with the Israelis and do justice to the Palestinians. It was a disaster for the Palestinians.

Q: What was your take when you went out into Jerusalem on Arafat and his leadership, and did this change over the time you were there?

WILCOX: Arafat and his PLO leadership were in part responsible for the stalemate and lack of movement toward a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. Arafat as I said earlier, his leaders clung for years to the notion that Israel was not a legitimate entity, that it should not be recognized, and the policy should be steadfast confrontation. There were people in the Palestinian national movement and the Palestinian diaspora who saw clearly some years ago before the Intifada that this was a hopeless position. Israel was a strong powerful state. It was there to stay and had powerful friends, and if the Palestinians wanted to salvage something from the disaster that had befallen them, they would have to treat with Israel for peace and try to divide the land. This view did not prevail in the PLO until 1988. The moderate voices were overruled and some of the moderates were even assassinated by PLO extremist groups, such as Abu Nidal's gang. Arafat's first goal was to preserve a tenuous unity among the PLO factions and to stay on top. He had devoted his career to keeping this diverse group of Palestinian exile organizations. They ranged from the moderately peaceful to the most violent and fanatic. Arafat did this quite successfully over the years.

If Arafat had been a leader of broader vision, he might have faced down the radical factions of the PLO much earlier and pursued a more pragmatic policy toward peace with Israel. If he had done so, he might have found a willing partner in Israel, but he also might not have. Israel is also to be blamed for rejectionism, since for years, there was no interest in Israel in dealing with the PLO, which was regarded as a terrorist organization, and the great majority of the Israelis were in denial about Palestinian nationalism and the need for a Palestinian state and a withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. So was the United States, which had forsworn any political contacts with the PLO or Arafat. Like Israel, the U.S. failed to understand the reality and depth of Palestinian nationalism and the centrality of the PLO, and continued to pursue the chimera of a Jordanian solution to the Palestinian issue. So, the radicals, the hard liners prevailed for decades among the Palestinians and the Israelis until the Intifada and the Gulf War precipitated changes that led to the Madrid conference and the Oslo Declaration of Principles.

Q: Did Jordan have any, did you see the hand of Jordan any time you were there?

WILCOX: Yes, Jordan itself has a fascinating history of pragmatic relations with the early Zionists and the state of Israel going all the way back to King Abdullah. He was the only Arab leader during the 1930s and '40s who recognized that Zionism and Israel had

to be dealt with. Abdullah was also fierce opponent of the Palestinian national movement and saw the Palestinians and the Hashemites as competitors for Palestine, and for this reason he saw that he had a common interest with the Zionists.

In 1948 Jordan assumed that it would remain the sovereign power in the West Bank and Abdullah let the new Israeli government know that he was interested in peace. King Hussein inherited his grandfather's interest in coexistence with Israel, and viewed Palestinian nationalism as a threat to the Hashemite Kingdom. He unwisely bowed to Egyptian and Arab pressure and allowed Jordan to be dragged into the 1967 war, and lost the West Bank to Israel. Jordanian-Palestinian enmity grew worse when in 1970, the PLO, in the Black September movement, challenged Jordan militarily, and lost. Over the next two decades, Hussein gradually began to recognize that it was not in Jordan's strategic interest to recover the West Bank. This would have meant the absorption of two million Palestinians into Jordan which already was composed of a populace that was at least half Palestinian. To have absorbed this additional burden of Palestinians would have threatened the future of the Hashemite dynasty. So, in 1987 as the Intifada was taking root, King Hussein made an historic announcement that he no longer aspired to recover the West Bank, and that the Palestinians were on their own. This reflected his vision as a statesman and a politician.

Q: Although he renounced it, we didn't.

WILCOX: Right. We were still behind the Jordanians. Now we were not committed in any articulate way to the Jordan option, but it was implicitly what we wanted. It was also the arrangement the Israeli Labor party wanted. By the mid-1980s the Labor Party was willing to cede part of the West Bank to Jordan, because it recognized that the status quo was not tenable. They trusted Hussein, and saw the solution in a Jordanian-Palestinian arrangement, with Jordan as the senior partner.

Q: Was there a let down, a disappointment. Iraq collapsed rather quickly. I mean there was supposed to be this great battle, and it turned out that the Iraqis didn't stand up to the allied forces at all, although Saddam Hussein maintained it so. I would have thought that you would on the part of the people in East Jerusalem and the West bank had invested quite a lot of emotional capital in this. Did you see a let down?

WILCOX: There was deep despair. There had been this euphoria, an unrealistic view that somehow the Arab world, the Islamic world would rally to Saddam Hussein. The U.S. victory created a sense of disappointment, and political defeat. By that time the Intifada, which had caused great suffering, was faltering, and it was clear that the Israelis would not yield to the Palestinians. Israeli repression, economic restrictions, various forms of collective punishment had been effective in blunting the Intifada. Internecine rivalries among the Palestinians also played a part. And radical Palestinian groups began killing other Palestinians for political reasons, and to settle scores. It was an ugly business. The early sense of hope and euphoria had faded So, at the end of the Gulf War, whereas the Intifada had inspired a sense of sort of hope and confidence earlier, this spirit was replaced by disillusionment.

It was at this time that Bush administration recognized the opportunity which the victory of the U.S. in the Gulf and the fall of the Soviet Union offered for a resurrection of the peace process. Bush and Baker seized the moment, using the greatly enhanced power of the U.S. and the favorable new geo-political situation to launch a new peace initiative, and they did so in a very determined way.

Q: When did you leave Jerusalem to get a feel for the timing?

WILCOX: I left Jerusalem in September of 1991, after Secretary Baker had visited there five times for negotiations with local Palestinians and with the Shamir government, a process that ultimately led to the Madrid conference, the beginning of the renewed peace process.

Q: What was your impression of Secretary Baker's engagement, and this was really his first time. I mean we had the collapse of the Soviet Union which was enough on anyone's plate, and in a way he was sort of dragged in to this thing by the Gulf War.

WILCOX: The collapse of the Soviet Union was as you say a factor in emerging American supremacy, and it greatly enhanced our diplomatic leverage in dealing with the Middle East where the Soviets were no longer a factor on behalf of the radical Arabs.

Q: Could you talk about your impression of Secretary Baker, particularly from what you saw because oral history is trying to focus on the view, and also members of his team, Dennis Ross and others.

WILCOX: Baker was a tough, skilled negotiator who understood that here was an opportunity for American leadership and for another effort to resolve this chronic, decades-old problem. The convergence of forces which I have mentioned brought about a genuine, full blown negotiating effort. Baker and Bush deserve great credit for taking this initiative. As Baker became more involved, he got the bit in his mouth and began to push both sides hard. He ultimately succeeded in bringing the parties together at an international conference, one of his finest achievements as Secretary of State.

Q: Did you have much contact with him?

WILCOX: Yes, in Jerusalem when he came, he would meet with Palestinians at my residence. He was tough, persistent negotiator, human, and frank. The Palestinians respected him; I think he respected them too. He understood that they had something to say, and I think, had some sympathy for their position. Of course, I was never with him when he was with the Israelis, but he had the same style with the Israelis. Shamir resisted Baker, all the way, but Baker prevailed, and dragged Shamir against his will to the Madrid Conference.

Q: Well, in a way, this was a real historic thing in that the secretary of state was treating the Palestinians as real people.

WILCOX: The U.S. had never had high level contact with the Palestinians in the past, above the level of the consulate general, at least until the dialogue began in Tunis in 1988, but that was quite limited in content. George Shultz made a gesture to the Palestinians in 1987, I think it was that year, when he offered to meet with a group of Palestinians at the American Colony Hotel in East Jerusalem. They foolishly boycotted him and no one came. So Baker's contacts were really the first at the level of Secretary of State. Shultz met once in Washington with Edward Said and Abraham Abu Loughud, but they were Palestinian-American citizens.

Q: Did you have a responsibility to get the right Palestinians there to talk. You talk about these factions and going through a period of depression, I would have thought it would be difficult to get the right group together.

WILCOX: Very difficult. There was jealously and no recognizable center in the Palestinian community. I think that's the way Arafat wanted it, and the Israelis had also done their share to prevent the emergence of a strong local leadership, for example, by arresting and often deporting nationalist political leaders, and undermining local government by appointing puppet mayors. One of the most able and respected Palestinians, Faisal Husseini, had been repeatedly jailed by the Israelis for his nationalist views, as had others.

The idea of meeting with Baker was controversial because the Palestinians had a sense of grievance against the U.S., which they saw as pro-Israel. Indeed, at the time the Bush-Baker initiative was conceived, the Palestinians were still boycotting official contacts with all American officials, including the consulate. Also, they had no local representative institutions for choosing leaders to negotiate for them, and none of the local leaders where ever sure where they stood vis a vis the PLO. The meetings that ultimately happened required Arafat's approval, so there was a lot of to and froing with Tunis, by fax and phone, which the Israelis doubtless monitored. So, it was touch and go, and I was never certain whether the first of these meetings would come off.

My principal interlocutor with the Palestinians had been Faisal Husseini, the son of Abdul Khader Husseini, the famous Palestinian military leader, was killed in the battle at Kastel near Jerusalem in the 1948 war. Faisal Husseini was an educated man, committed to the Palestinian cause, from the dominant Palestinian clan that had produced the leader of the nationalist movement in the late thirties and early forties, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem.

I called on Faisal Husseini soon after my arrival in Jerusalem after he had been released from prison and established a relationship with him. He had had no contacts with the consulate for many years, and was still considered a dangerous radical by the Israelis. I found him a thoughtful man who had studied the Palestinian-Israeli conflict very deeply and was beginning to evolve a new and realistic view of the need for peace and compromise. Notwithstanding his long imprisonment, he took a statesmanlike view of things and avoided the anti-Israeli hatred and the doctrinaire bombast one often heard

from Palestinians. While in prison, he had learned Hebrew, and he was developing close contacts with Israeli liberals and the Peace Now movement.

Husseini had a lot of stature in the Palestinian community, in part because he was smart, steady, and incorruptible, and in part because he was the son of Abdul Quader and the grand nephew of the Mufti. But his aristocratic family lineage was also an obstacle, especially among young radical Palestinians who believed that the time of the old families and "notables" had come and gone, since they had failed to rescue the Palestinians.

When Assistant Secretary John Kelly called me from Washington and announced that Baker wanted to meet with a representative group of Palestinians, I began working to assemble a delegation, putting the word out by phone or in meetings with intermediaries with whom we had kept in touch despite the boycott.

One evening late at night, Faisal Husseini called me at my residence and said it is time to - I think he used the phrase - "turn a new page," that the Palestinian-U.S. impasse should give way to dialogue, and that the Palestinians recognized Baker's initiative as an opportunity and would agree to meet with him. This showed courage and leadership on his part, and indicated he had overcome the rejectionists who wanted no contact with the U.S. It also indicated that he had been given the green light from the PLO in Tunis. So working with him, we gradually assembled the right group of Palestinians, and the first meeting took place with Jim Baker. He made five trips while I was in Jerusalem, and there were further meetings when Molly Williamson took over as my successor. Through his meetings with the Palestinians and separate meetings with the Israelis, Baker put together agreed terms of reference for the Madrid peace conference, a major diplomatic breakthrough.

Q: What was the role of Dennis Ross at this point?

WILCOX: Dennis Ross had become Secretary Baker's principal aide and advisor on the peace process. Others on the team were Dan Kurtzer, who later became Deputy

Assistant Secretary. Dan is now Ambassador to Egypt. John Kelly, the Assistant Secretary of State, and David Welch who at that time was working on the NSC staff with Dennis Ross.

Q: Did you find yourself having sort of post mortems after these meetings with the Palestinians. You know they would come to you and say what was that all about? I mean it is a normal thing, figure out what we would talk about.

WILCOX: Yes. I tried to set the stage for further meetings and to refine the issues and to urge them to focus more clearly and to sharpen up their understanding of what we were looking for. We didn't start immediately with the concept of an international conference in Madrid. That emerged. Baker's approach was "Here is an opportunity for peace. It is good for you and good for your neighbors and good for us. Let's be realistic and

pragmatic, and see what we can put together." This big sticking point, of course, was that the Israelis would not talk to the PLO, who by then Washington had finally realized represented the Palestinians. Also the Israelis feared an international conference, fearing a gang up. Ultimately Baker sold the Israelis a formula for an opening conference, to be followed by bilateral negotiations.

As Baker's meetings with the Palestinians developed, it was implicit that the Palestinians were not speaking for themselves, but the PLO. Baker understood this, but persuaded the Palestinians to go along with the fiction that the PLO was not involved, so that the Israelis could be brought on board. In the end, all sides agreed to a formula that Baker finally sold, though the Palestinians didn't like it, that the Palestinians would not have their own delegation at Madrid, but would be joined with the Jordanians. At Madrid, the facade of Jordanian primacy was quickly broken and it became clear to the world that the Palestinians were speaking for Palestinians, not Jordan.

Q: Did you have a feeling that you were helping to create Palestinian or at least a West Bank Jerusalem leadership?

WILCOX: We didn't create it, but we encouraged it to think realistically and to engage with the United States and ultimately with Israel. I think that was really the main mission and accomplishment of the consulate general at that time, to cultivate, encourage the local leadership to move in the right direction. This took a lot of sympathy, encouragement and diplomacy. We wanted the Palestinians to know we respected them and that we saw them as a people with equities and a cause that deserved our respect and attention. They needed this, because they felt, justifiably, that their cause had been neglected and misunderstood, and there was a lot of resentment.

The Palestinians on their part did not understand the United States. They had limited grasp of the West and they did not know how to project their cause or articulate it. They had done a lousy job of this over the years, in part because they lacked knowledge of the U.S., and in part because their cause was so clear to them that they assumed everyone else should understand and accept it. Also, I think those elements who used terrorism as a political weapon gravely undermined their cause. For many in the U.S., the Palestinian movement was identified with terrorism rather than the legitimate claims of a people who also deserved our support and respect just as the Israelis did. And terrorism played into the hands of the Israeli hard right who preached that the Palestinians were determined to destroy Israel and that efforts to compromise with them were naïve and dangerous. This view was often promoted, of course, by the Likud and other right wing elements who wanted no compromise and for whom hanging on to the occupied territories was more important than peace. Demonizing the Palestinians provided a rationale for their expansionist ideology.

So giving the Palestinians a sense that they were important and we respected them and they had equities and rights was very important. Baker's willingness to engage with them helped a lot. Of course, that was our job at the consulate.

Q: Were you seeing any growth in a political movement in the United States? You know there is a Jewish Israeli one; there is the Greek one, Irish one, and there are a considerable number of Arabs in the United States from various places in the Arab world, and yet they never seemed to be very cohesive.

WILCOX: It hasn't been very cohesive because it is a very diverse community. The Arab world is vast and varied, and this is reflected in the ethnic, religious, national origin differences among members of the Arab-American community. The Arab American community has sought assimilation as its first goal and has not coalesced into a strong and influential lobbying group. So it hasn't been a major force in articulating the Palestinian point of view in the Congress or the executive branch.

Now they certainly have improved their performance. The National Association of Arab Americans and the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee has an articulate, thoughtful leadership now. They support the peace process and an equitable solution with Israel. There are similarly many American Jewish organizations that have been pro-peace and also backed the Madrid and Oslo processes. Many American Jews were relieved and pleased with this turn of events and strongly supported it during the Peres-Rabin era. When the Likud returned to power, official American Jewish opinion became somewhat more conservative. The voices of the moderate and liberal voices within the American Jewish community were not as prominent as they were during the days of Labor governments, and AIPAC has become more right wing.

Q: Well, then you left around the early fall of '91. We might stop at this point and put at the end where you went. Where did you go?

WILCOX: I came back to Washington to become the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), where I served for three years before my final three years in the Foreign Service as Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

Q: All right then we will pick up maybe one or both of those things.

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Today is July 13, 1998. Phil, you are off to INR. What were you doing in INR? This was what, '91-'94 about?

WILCOX: '91-'94. I was the principal deputy assistant secretary. Actually, I served for the first year as acting assistant secretary because the new assistant secretary, Toby Gati, who was a political appointee who had been the head of the UN Association in New York, was appointed sometime after I arrived, and the confirmation process took a long time.

Q: As you were doing it what would you say was the role of INR during this time. The role of INR changes around. What did you feel were your major functions?

WILCOX: I think INR's model and ideal for itself is to be the premier analytic element in the intelligence community. INR is State's branch of the intelligence community, and its role is not to collect information, raw intelligence but to draw information from all sources, secret intelligence, open source information, diplomatic reporting, and to analyze it and give policymakers the very best insight and perspective into the meaning of events around the world. That is INR's mission, and I think INR does that job very well.

Q: During this time, how do you feel your product was used?

WILCOX: The use of intelligence by the principals in the department varies. Some of them are keen and avid readers of intelligence. Some limit themselves to reading finished intelligence, that is analysis. Others like to read the raw material itself. The bureaus, the policy bureaus are avid consumers of intelligence. They are all briefed daily by INR so I think that the department make a heavy and very good use of intelligence and takes advantage of the very high quality product that INR produces particularly in the form of the Secretary's Morning Summary, which is a daily review of current events prepared by INR analysts around the clock, seven days a week.

Q: I understand sometimes that ends up in the White House too.

WILCOX: I think it is widely read throughout Washington and respected as an astute and very objective product. There is a friendly competition between the Secretary's morning summary and the National Intelligence Digest, which is the similar daily journal produced by the CIA. So there is a friendly competition between the two of them. They are both excellent products. I am biased, of course, I think the Morning Summary is the superior product.

Q: Phil, I was reading a book by Admiral Crowe called <u>The Line of Fire</u>, which he talks about intelligence at the time just prior to the Gulf War. It was just a little before the time you arrived there. He was saying he found intelligence, I think he was talking about the CIA and military intelligence tends to always take the worst case scenario so they won't be caught short. They say if such and such happens the world may come to an end and all this. In a way it is sort of covering your behind by showing well we knew something awful was going to happen, but it is not very useful to deal with. What was your impression and were you sort of monitoring our intelligence output to make sure that we were giving good solid you might say middle of the road thing rather than apocalyptic terms?

WILCOX: This is, the art of analyzing and evaluating intelligence is an extraordinarily sophisticated difficult one. I think Admiral Crowe's criticism is apt in part because the U.S. administrations over the years have put a very high premium on intelligence and many in the government, many in the Congress, have come to believe that there is something magic and omniscient in intelligence if it works correctly. If the intelligence community is doing its job, it will be able to predict virtually everything with accuracy and foresight. That is not true. It is beyond human capacity to do this, and so I think too much is expected of the intelligence community, and too often after some surprising comeuppance in foreign policy, there is a tendency in the Congress to blame the

intelligence community and say this was caused by intelligence failure when in fact it may not have been predictable. So, to cover themselves, some analysts will indeed habitually predict the worst case, read the worst interpretation into intelligence. I think this is a fundamental problem in our system. You have to take the threat intelligence seriously, yet for every piece of clandestinely collected threat intelligence we have, ultimately maybe 10% of those threats are fulfilled. There is a big burden on the intelligence people to weigh and analyze that, and they do error on the side of caution.

Q: Well too, State sort of occupies I won't say a middle ground, but it occupies a position where you are not saying all right we have to have our missiles prepared to do thus and so as the military does, so we can take a little more of a perspective as they say.

WILCOX: That is true. Military intelligence is often colored by their own professional and budget priorities, too. The military mission is to protect our security. They are accustomed to very large budgets, and the most sophisticated and capable weaponry. They do not always have a sense of budgetary priorities for other needs in our society. They want the best and the most. They are inclined to take a more dire view of security around the world, perhaps subconsciously, perhaps consciously, because that enhances their ability to mobilize resources and large budgets. Now there are many very able and capable military intelligence analysts, but I think that is an occupational hazard in military intelligence, that it tends to be landed in worst case. State, on the other hand, is less encumbered by that, but no agency is completely unbiased. There is no such thing as total objectivity in analyzing intelligence. The Department of State has a mission to maintain peace, to try to resolve conflicts. There is I think a kind of built in optimism and faith among diplomats that the worst can be avoided through good diplomacy and hard work. So it is not only the military that has an occupational bias.

Q: Well, you came in in '91, and this was sort of the end of the Cold War. It also seems that we are not talking about clandestine fancy intelligence, we are talking about real interpretation of the fact that here is our great adversary that sort of collapsed from within. At least you were sort of untainted by this, but I would have thought there would have been sort of a tremendous look in the intelligence community, particularly with the State Department because this was their baby really, what the hell happened, our big adversary imploded, and we weren't really seen to be predicting this.

WILCOX: I think historically, this was a failure of U.S. intelligence analysis. We were so preoccupied with the confrontation with the Soviet Union and the danger that it presented to us that we did not notice the weakness in that system and its decay. The glasnost, perestroika, and ultimately the fall of the Soviet Union took us by surprise. There were analysts who had devoted their career to the Soviet Union that were still skeptical that change was really taking place up to the end. I think the intelligence is always in danger of being tainted by policy needs and ideology. It is a constant struggle to be dispassionate and objective. There is also a lack, a shortfall, in our intelligence community of analysts who speak the languages, who read all the literature not just the secret intelligence, and who are genuine experts in their area of concern. I think that has affected the quality of the CIA's product. I think INR does a little better in that respect, but INR has been

weakened by severe budget cuts. The CIA has a tendency to move its analyst around. They are much more heavily layered. They probably have too many analysts, and that creates a kind of bureaucratization and homogenization of the product.

Q: Was there any feeling when you arrived at INR that we have got to do something sort of to look back to see what we did wrong? I'm not talking about finger pointing and blame taking, but I mean looking at the system and saying in a way we missed the big one.

WILCOX: I don't know whether there was that process of formal introspection to discover what had gone wrong. I did not participate in it, and INR did not have such a project in my time there. I don't know whether the CIA did. My sense is that there was not a kind of frank reappraisal of why that historic change had not been detected earlier.

Q: Now this is in a way what I, one reason why we have this oral history program, to try to capture the feelings at the time, and maybe somebody at some point will start looking at it. I think it is a great fault of the Department of State of not examining itself. The military it is easier I realize. They would say if we had only gone around the left flank rather than the right flank we might have done better. You know, you can have after action reports. But for us, it is well we won that one or we lost that one and move ahead. The latest one was we didn't have a peace plan ready in Iraq at the end of the Gulf War. It was a terrible diplomatic failure. I mean this is sort of a broad discussion right now, but did you see any tendency to get better at examining what we did right what we did wrong.

WILCOX: No, I didn't. I'm not saying there wasn't some formal effort somewhere; there may have been Congressional hearing by some intelligence oversight committee or the foreign affairs committee, I don't know. I was not here at the time. It took place while I was still in Jerusalem, but I quite agree. I think there should be this process of conscientious review of what went wrong built into the system. I think the fact is there were so few people in the U.S. government or the Congress that anticipated this, that there wasn't a large group who could say we told you so; let's have a board of inquiry.

Q: It is this funny thing about the Soviet Union. People for years have been coming back. We are talking about tourists and say God this place is awful. It really doesn't work. They had a good military, but the military probably wasn't as good as we thought it was too, but somehow this didn't get into the thinking.

WILCOX: Well, we of the Cold War created kind of an easy and greatly oversimplified view of the world and of U.S. foreign policy that was convenient. It provided a framework, and over the decades, we became quite comfortable with that framework. It would be a hard thing intellectually to break out of it, so I don't think it is all that surprising.

Q: As basically director or deputy director of INR in this '91-'94 period, the Cold War is basically over. Iraq and Iran have been neutralized more or less. Where were you turning

your priorities?

WILCOX: Well, our focus was global. We tried to have good people keep up with events everywhere. We had good analysts who covered Africa who quite accurately predicted and analyzed the slaughter in Rwanda. We had very good Soviet and Russian analysts as well who followed the evolution of the Yeltsin government. We probably paid less attention to trade and economics than to political events. We didn't have the resources to follow economic analysis intensively although we had a small office. We paid lots of attention to the Middle East, to the Gulf, and to the Arab-Israeli conflict and reported intensively on the continued growth of Israeli settlements. For example, after the Madrid peace conference, we saw a need to provide daily tactical intelligence analysis to policymakers who were involved in particular projects and missions and to get the intelligence media to concentrate on the collection of information on those events so that it could be analyzed, synthesized very rapidly for the delegation who was out negotiating, and for policymakers who were involved in particular crises. We spent lots of time on eastern Europe and events there, the European Union, NATO affairs, and China as well. I think that the product was good. We spent a fair amount of time on India and Pakistan as well. There again in recent weeks is another example of a failure to anticipate what in retrospect we should have, the Indian nuclear testing and the Pakistani test. One problem I think, is that over the years, we have become too focused on secret intelligence as a way to get at the truth. Secret Intelligence, that is intelligence that is gathered through clandestine means, is important and it has its needs and it is essential in some cases. But while we have devoted enormous resources to gathering secret intelligence, the resources we are investing in overt collection of information have dwindled. The best single source of intelligence is Foreign Service reporting by our political and economic officers. The flow and the quality of that reporting, I think, has declined over the years for lack of adequate reporting staffs overseas and as a product of steep budget cuts. Most intelligence, almost all intelligence analysts throughout the intelligence community, will readily acknowledge that the single most important source is Foreign Service State Department reporting. That was information that astute enterprising officers would find out by getting out on the street and talking to people. It didn't require paying agents or fancy technology. I think there is a missing element here in our overall approach to intelligence. We put too few resources into old-fashioned diplomatic reporting.

Q: Well also talking about where our interests were, one of the great changes was the fact that the world was opening up. Our people could really go out and talk to people in the streets of China and certainly in the fall of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The world is sort of the oyster of the political and economic officer as compared to the old days when they were pretty much confined to the barracks.

WILCOX: And there always has been a kind of overlap in the collection of material between the efforts of State Department political sections and other intelligence gatherers.

Q: Particularly the CIA.

WILCOX: Yes, and there is a weakness in information that is collected through clandestine agents. Sometimes it is brilliant; sometimes it is critical, but you have to temper your confidence in that kind of information by the realization that the people you use are being paid for it. That can sometimes color what they are telling you. There is also, I think, an over reliance on technology. Technology is very important. We have brilliant means, but we spend a minuscule portion of our overall budget for gathering information [from] the most important single source, that is Foreign Service reporting. In a time when the world is opening up, there is so much more opportunity to go out and talk to people, [but] we [are] closing consulates and cutting back embassy staffs, and really reducing our ability to pursue a much greater opportunity for gathering intelligence.

Q: You mentioned that our economic and trade intelligence analysis was rather short in the INR at the time. This would strike me as also a real problem.

WILCOX: Well, I am not sure. The private sector, while the U.S. government has pulled back from its engagement around the world in many ways, the American private sector has expanded in a very aggressive and enterprising way. The private sector has marvelous resource for gathering and analyzing trade and commercial and financial information. The U.S. government should not try to compete with it. There are some areas where information is not available to open sources, and that is where we should and where we do concentrate our intelligence assets.

Q: I'm trying to figure out what the role at the top would be as the director and deputy director since you essentially played both roles. What are you trying to do in INR?

WILCOX: INR, I think it is fair to say, perceives itself as the conscience of the intelligence community and tries to minimize bias, distortion, ideology, and the influence on the intelligence product [of] policy. The intelligence community produces what are called national intelligence estimates on many subjects. These are collective products in which all the agencies contribute. They are reviewed by the National Intelligence Advisory Board. An INR principal sits on that board, so INR has a strong voice in these intelligence products. Then INR produces its own products. INR has a voice in shaping the collecting of intelligence by conveying to the collection agencies what the Secretary of State and the Secretary's deputies need. INR plays a very active role in making sure that the sensitive activities, the clandestine activities of the intelligence community, are in harmony with our policy, and that is a major role for INR, the intelligence coordination role. The Assistant Secretary under whom I served, Toby Gati, was an activist, extremely energetic, talented person who was committed to getting more resources for INR. She was able to get very substantial funding that the department was unable to get in the past for a new state of the art computer system which was desperately needed by our analysts. She did a terrific job in that respect. She had help from one of the other deputy assistant secretaries, Jennifer Simms, who had served on the Senate oversight committee and knew the committee appropriation process, the congressional appropriation process very well.

Q: What was her background?

WILCOX: Toby Gati's background? She was a Russian specialist who spoke fluent Russian. She had gotten to know the Russian dissident community before the fall of the Soviet Union and was a genuine expert in Russian affairs. She came to the White House having served [with] the UN Association in New York. Perhaps she was the deputy. She became a member of the NSC staff following Soviet Russian affairs.

Q: Under whom?

WILCOX: President Carter. Then when Doug Mulholland, under whom I worked. Actually I worked for Doug Mulholland who was Jim Baker's assistant secretary for eight months. Toby Gati succeeded Doug Mulholland when the administration changed and President Clinton came in.

Q: So you came in '91. The election was '92, so she came in with the '93 group. Did you see a different thrust at all towards INR or pressures on INR with the new administration?

WILCOX: No, I think, Secretary Baker took good advantage of INR's resources, as did Secretary Christopher and Secretary Albright. The department because it was under desperate financial pressure, had not been able to fund INR's needs. That was our major preoccupation, saving people, getting some budget so we could do our job adequately.

Q: Obviously coming out of Jerusalem, you were I'm sure, casting a wary eye on how things were working in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Did you find both within INR, its product and also the intelligence community any caution or concern? I'm particularly thinking of the Jewish American influence. You know, if you come out with something even though it was highly classified analysis you are going to get in trouble.

WILCOX: No, never. I never saw any analysis by any element of the community on the Arab-Israeli issue that was somehow tainted by politics or caution. That is not to say it was all perfect. I think there was a severe lack of understanding, information, and insight into the Palestinian community up through the late ‘80s. The Oslo accords took the Department of State and everyone else by surprise. The Israelis and the Palestinians managed that with extreme secrecy on their own. Not to say that was a failure on our part, but it was a surprise.

Q: Talking about this, I don't know if we discussed it last time. I have one of my colleagues who works with me on this oral history program is an Arabist going back to the 1950s, who said although associated with the Arab cause, you might say he understands the Israelis completely because he would never trust the Palestinians because he feels that within that it is too volatile a group, that it would always be pressing for something and that it couldn't be trusted to keep its word mainly because of the volatility of the leadership and all that. What was our feeling toward that?

WILCOX: Well, I think there was some surprise at the historic change that Arafat and the

PLO made when they decided to renounce terrorism and acknowledge the existence of Israel and then in the Oslo accords to recognize Israel. There was a kind of implicit recognition by both sides there would be two states. People in Washington were quite impressed by that. They saw it as an act of statesmanship by the Palestinians and by [Israeli Prime Minister] Rabin on his part for his reciprocity. I mistrust theories that one society or another can't be trusted for various reasons. There are trustworthy people and untrustworthy people. The Palestinians are a volatile society with an unformed government. They have not achieved that aspiration for a state. I think they will, but there is bound to be some instability and uncertainty in that enterprise until negotiations get back on the right track and the final settlement involving both the land, the Jerusalem issue, and the resolution of the question of a Palestinian state: [including the] guarantees for security that the Israelis expect and deserve.

Q: How did you find the analysis of political development in Israel because these were changing. Russians were coming in, Russian Jews were coming in; the old guard was dying off.

WILCOX: I think the analysis was quite good. Israel is an open society; people like to talk there, and it is quite easy to gather information there. The place is just exploding with information on all subjects. I think that the administration was a bit surprised by the election of Yitzhak Rabin, although I think Jews were mixed about how that election would go, but by and large, we did a good job of analyzing Israeli politics, and I think in a dispassionate way too. I think most American administrations including the last two have seen the Labor Party as more compatible with U.S. interests and values. So, there was a great sense of relief when Rabin was elected and Shamir was defeated.

Q: Well, now just a little tour through your eyes of a few of the spots that have popped up lately. How were we seeing developments in India at this time?

WILCOX: Well, India and Pakistan have been neglected by American administrations for many years. In spite of the enormous problems of those societies, their great population, their strategic importance, after the Afghanistan war, where we relied heavily on support from Pakistan to help defeat the Soviet Invasion, we lost interest in Pakistan, and Afghanistan, and India as well. The U.S. over the years has had a kind of scratchy and difficult relationship with India. My own view is that we have not given it the attention it deserves as a great nation, as a democracy, as the second most populous state in the world. It deserves more attention. It is a complicated and serious place.

Q: Was there a concern about the rise of Hindu nationalism?

WILCOX: Yes, there was. There was a concern about communal violence and terrorism in both India and Pakistan. Interest in India waned to some extent when it no longer became a player in the Cold War. But more recently during the Clinton administration, there was growing interest in India as a market for U.S. goods and services and for the transformation of India from a neo socialist economy into a market economy, and some progress was made in that respect, particularly under Ambassador Frank Wisner who was

a very dynamic, capable ambassador who pressed this cause with the Indians.

Q: What about Indonesia? You know one of the charges sort of laid on the Foreign Service, and I'm using it in the broadest sense including military, CIA and everything, we are sort of a status quo type of an organization. We don't like things messing up. Here is a country obviously in the time we are talking about now, nothing major happened but things were bubbling. In fact all of Asia were making some pretty horrendous choices on economics which we are suffering from right now. Were we looking at, particularly in Indonesia but elsewhere bout saying you know these guys are lending too much money and going into debt, that type of thing.

WILCOX: I think we were lulled into a false sense of security and complacency about Southeast Asia by all the publicity about the new Asian tigers and how they had solved the problem of government and economic development. [I don't think] we fully understood the structural weaknesses, particularly in Indonesia. I served in Indonesia 25 years ago. Not to be self serving, but when I left, before I left, I wrote some very long analyses of the problem of political corruption there with all of the Suharto family aggrandizing themselves with enormous wealth and saw that this was a threat to future stability. I was surprised that in later years Indonesia had thrived, notwithstanding this. It took 20 years, I think, for this massive corruption and structural weakness and the lack of any real democratic institutions to catch up. I don't think the intelligence community or the government anticipated this. Indonesia was sort of off the screen. It was a country that was working well; we didn't pay attention to it. I must say, the world is a big place. For us to have to deploy the kinds of resources to pay the attention that these places deserve costs a lot of money, so we have to establish some priorities. That said, I think we have really shortchanged our ability to understand the world, to report back to Washington, to keep abreast of events around the world, and to engage with foreign governments, and business communities because we have been investing such a pittance in the budget for those things. It wouldn't cost very much money.

Q: This brings us back to my earlier question on the economic side. Businesses do a lot, but at the same time we are talking about what I mean, right now what is happening in Asia which for the historian in future eras, the economic situation from Japan to Indonesia to Thailand, and the so called tigers for the most part is really beginning to unravel because of cronyism, bad loans and all that. I mean this is in a way where the United States government could be paying attention to economics. The businessman is looking for what does it mean for selling widgets or producing widgets, but we are looking at the stability of governments. This one is really threatening the whole business.

WILCOX: Our tendency is of course, to vote for stability. Although we recognized the Indonesian government was not a democratic government with a good deal of corruption, the thing seemed to be working, and we didn't recognize the underlying weakness. We did, however pay a great deal of attention to the human rights failings of the Indonesian government. Indeed we seemed to fixate on these particularly on the problems of East Timor. In my judgment, we might have shifted our priorities a little bit and looked more closely at the economic problems and political problems in Indonesia. It became more

difficult for us to speak to the Indonesians candidly and frankly about a lot of problems because we paid so much attention to their human rights failings. The Indonesians badly blundered in the way they dealt with the East Timorese insurrection, but the secession of East Timor and the creation of an independent republic there would create a genuine threat of centrifugal forces leading other ethnic minorities in the Indonesian archipelago to break away, so they had a genuine reason for caution about East Timor, not to excuse their very heavy handed human rights violations.

Q: What about China? Here you came in not too long after the June, '89 Tiananmen Square massacre and the really cooling of relations with China. How were we looking at China, I'm talking about your job.

WILCOX: We looked at it as a very important country. We had two superb China analysts who spoke Chinese, read the literature, really knew what was going on, and could describe it for policymakers. The debate, of course, waxed and waned over [whether] human rights or trade would dominate our China agenda. I think the administration, eventually after some lurching about, struck the right kind of balance between the two culminating in the Clinton visit. We also saw China as a very important factor in the Korean peninsula, and we engaged with the Chinese on the North Korean problem. We [have] spent a lot of time in recent years worrying about North Korea, trying to analyze events in that impenetrable country, and working on the North Korean nuclear issue. INR, I think, played a stunning role in analyzing events in North Korea and North Korean intentions with respect to its nuclear power plants and weapons policy. INR was the odd agency out in the intelligence community debate on this. The other elements took a worst case view that the North Koreans would not make peace, [and] were developing nuclear weapons. Whereas, INR said there was a chance that they might change and took a less dire view of their actual capabilities. INR was correct in the long run. I think that the INR analysis helped to form what was really a brilliant diplomatic initiative by the Clinton administration to talk the North Korean regime out of an incipient nuclear weapons program and the beginnings of some kind of communication with the south. That was an example of where unorthodox objective intelligence analysis, I think, really served policy well.

Q: In China, one of the big questions is really whither China. I would think there would be several ways one could look at it. One, it is such a big country it might start falling apart and end up with a bunch of warlords and all that which is not out of sight. Another one is that the regime will be able to perpetuate itself. Another one would be that the Chinese are eager to get involved in the world. Over a quarter million Chinese students have been to the United States and returned and elsewhere with the Internet and all that China might gradually move into the more democratic field. We are talking about the '91-'94 period. I would have thought this would have been a major debate and a major focus of INR.

WILCOX: Yes it was, although there was no crisis. Crisis tends to focus analysis. The biggest crisis in Asia at that time was the so-called North Korean nuclear threat, and that was our biggest preoccupation. There is not a lot of searching analysis in the intelligence

community about what is going to happen 10-15 years out. That kind of analysis is very hard to do. It is highly speculative. I think there is some humble recognition that none of us are very shining futurologists. Most of the analysis on China was a more short-term nature.

Q: What about policy planning. I mean policy planning in each administration varies. I mean sometimes it is just the speechwriters. But I would have thought there could have been a relationship between INR and policy planning. Let's take China, you know for policy planning they would be the ones that would take what is happening, look at centrifugal forces working on China, democracy's continuation and all that. Did you find any relationship there?

WILCOX: Well, policy planning in the State Department has not prospered over the years. The office of policy planning has been used by different Secretaries in different ways. Increasingly it has become a kind of staff adjunct to the Secretary's office doing special projects, giving advice on delicate issues. It is now less than a fully staffed office that looks at the entire world in depth. Also, policy planning over the years has never been welcomed by the regional bureaus who view themselves as responsible for policy. So, since the days of George Kennan when it prospered, it has not really fulfilled its theoretical mandate.

Q: What about relations with the CIA during this time. I mean you had two, you had the Bush administration and then the early part of the Clinton administration. The CIA under Ronald Reagan had gotten rather political hadn't it with William Casey? By this time had you found a shaking out? Was it a different CIA?

WILCOX: Yes, the CIA, I think, by and large has gotten a bad rap because of the excesses of some of its directors who were responding to ill advised political initiatives by their bosses. But for the most part, the personnel of the CIA intelligence community were smart, loyal, patriotic, hard working professionals. The CIA was corrupted during... There was also a tendency in the ‘80s to cook the intelligence. You served up the product the policymakers wanted to hear and to bend it to current needs. Casey, I think has been justly criticized for that.

There was a recognition of that after the Clinton administration came in. There were also, of course, a series of searching hearings by the Congress, a lot of inquires into the intelligence community and what it ought to be doing. It became more sober and responsible, the leadership became more responsible and sober under Jim Woolsey who took over from Bob Gates and John Deutch, and now George Tenant. The State Department as the parent foreign affairs agency is charged with coordinating intelligence and monitoring intelligence activities. That’s very difficult role because these agencies are vastly larger than the State Department. Their budget dwarfs the State Department, huge personnel and advocates, and for that reason they have a tendency to go their own way and have a sense of their own worth and internal bureaucratic needs. So, it is not easy for a secretary of state much less an assistant secretary in INR to instruct or direct a DCI. These are powerful agencies, and so there is a lot of diplomacy between the State

Department and the intelligence community. In my own view, the Department of State has not always exercised its oversight role as vigorously as it should have, but State policymakers are preoccupied; they have lots of things to do. They don't want to spend all of their time fighting with the CIA. Now, there are also areas of very close, successful collaboration. It isn't all friction and adversary relationship. [There is often] a broad sense of collegiality and teamwork, although that is not always the case. You get a wall between the embassy and their intelligence counterparts which is very counterproductive. It shouldn't be that way, and usually that is the fault of the ambassador who has a mandate to supervise his entire mission. Not all of our ambassadors have carried out that presidential mandate with full vigor.

Q: How about sort of on the nuts and bolts of INR, did you have trouble recruiting well picking both civil servants and Foreign Service officers?

WILCOX: We did. INR is not seen as a route to rapid promotion, so we had trouble getting good officers, although we did. We worked hard at it. Many of the more senior Foreign Service officers in recent decades have done duty in INR during their career, and that has helped maintain a clientele at the top for INR's work, but these people sort of labor silently in the shadows. They don't get a lot of profile on the seventh floor; they don't get bylines for their products. It takes a kind of discipline and scholarly dedication. It is hard work to do it right, so it is always a struggle to get the right people.

Q: Well did you find that you were able to get support from the director general of Foreign Service personnel because part of the problem is the Foreign Service Act of '82 talked, I mean it usually ends up you want to be in a command position either being a staff assistant to a very senior person in the State Department or having a lot of people under your command. I would have thought the INR, the Foreign Service Act would work against the INR.

WILCOX: There was, in recent years, a lot of emphasis on management skills as a route to promotion, and in INR you don't get that much of that kind of management experience. So, it is remarkable that officers still go to INR and do excellent work, but it is always a struggle. The system is not a directed system; it is a negotiated system where you have to go and recruit your own officers. The office of director general is kind of a mediator, but it doesn't really weigh in heavily in most personnel disputes.

Q: Well then, let's say you

WILCOX: It doesn't have the mandate to do that from the secretary of state so the directors general can't crack the whip whenever they want to because the seventh floor doesn't wish to have them play that role.

Q: Well, you have the Foreign Service side, but in many ways the backbone of INR has been civil servants hasn't it?

WILCOX: Yes. Absolutely, and some of the finest analysts are civil servants and have

been there for many years and who are renowned experts, linguists. Perhaps over the years, the best of the INR analysts have been civil servants. There are also some time servers and marginal performers in civil service and INR, a few of them, but many INR civil servants are terrific. It is a struggle to retain them because the civil service cohort in the Department of State lacks the kind of promotion opportunities that it needs to maintain high morale. There really ought to be some special dispensation for more senior grade positions for excellent intelligence analysts. There also, to come back to the problem of funding, there are very few travel funds in INR, so analysts seldom have opportunities to visit their countries, which is criminal, frankly.

Q: Well then, you left INR in '94. Where did you go?

WILCOX: I became the Coordinator for Counter Terrorism and the Ambassador at Large, heading an office established years ago in the State Department that reports to the secretary of state. This office was created to respond to the growing incidents of anti-U.S. terrorism back in the '70s. It went through various transformations, and is now well established. I came to the job I think because of my intelligence background and my experience in the Middle East.

Q: Well it makes very good sense. You were doing that from '94 to when?

WILCOX: To '97 when I retired.

Q: Could you talk about what you were doing in this time?

WILCOX: The U.S. has been disproportionately targeted by international terrorists over the years, and it has always been a preoccupation of U.S. policymakers to reduce the risk of terrorism. Our ability to do that has been bedeviled over the years by a lack of coherence and unity among U.S. government agencies who have a stake in counter terrorism, that is the FBI, the Department of Justice, the Department of Defense, the CIA, and the State Department. It was recognized some time ago that there had to be better coordination, and so the State Department was designated the lead agency to coordinate policy and operations for international terrorism.

That system failed during the 1980s when Ollie North and others in the basement of the White House conspired with the CIA to run their own counter terrorism operations, which led to the Iran-Contra scandal. Arms sales to Iran were the most stunning example of that folly. We violated our own terrorism policy by selling arms to the Iranians in an effort to get the release of the Lebanon hostages. The result, of course, was that further hostages were taken. So, the process of coordination worked at some times and failed at other times depending on the ability of the leadership of the Department of State to weigh in and insist on discipline and coordination. If the President and the White House wanted to do it another way, then no secretary of state could manage the process. George Shultz, of course, was cut out of many of those escapades in the 1980s.

When I came on board as Coordinator for Counter Terrorism, the system had settled

down. There was recognition that things had gone wrong, and that a more orderly and professional approach was needed. I found a good degree of cohesion and understanding on policy and practice among our team, the FBI, Justice, Defense, and other agencies, an understanding that foreign policy considerations were important as well as law enforcement considerations, and that there had to be a very careful attention to working with foreign governments where we were investigating or pursuing terrorists overseas. My role was to ensure that this happened and that all the elements of the team were pulling together. It usually worked, although there were the usual prima donnas and turf protectors in the community.

We were quite successful in indicting terrorists overseas and persuading foreign governments to extradite them or hand them over through informal renditions. We also took advantage of expanded U.S. laws. Back in the '70s and '80s we lacked the statutes to confer criminal jurisdiction over some kinds of terrorist activities against U.S. citizen abroad. We were more ready to resort to military means, because we didn't have the legal tools to go after terrorists. There was also a different attitude among many foreign governments during that earlier era toward terrorism. Terrorism was highly politicized then because of the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and its friends often supported terrorist groups. Many third world countries didn't want to take on the Soviets, or had leftists governments that condoned terrorism as "freedom fighting." Also because of the Palestinian cause, Arab and Islamic countries and many others were often unwilling to vigorously condemn Palestinian or other Arab terrorism that was motivated by anti-Israel policies. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the PLO's renunciation of terrorism, and the advent of the Madrid and Oslo peace process, more and more countries were willing to treat terrorism is a crime, irrespective of the political motive. Arab and Islamic governments were increasingly willing to condemn terrorism for the additional reason that they realized it threatened the stability of their countries, which were increasingly being targeted. So there was a more objective process of criminalizing terrorism around the world and therefore much greater cooperation among governments in going after terrorists.

Q: The one I keep coming to mind that is so political in the United States is the IRA, the Irish Republican Army. Could you comment on how we from your perspective dealt with the IRA and its supporters '94-'97?

WILCOX: The policy issue came up when visas were requested by people who had some contact with the IRA. Often those people would get visas, not always, over the objection of the law enforcement community and sometimes my office. The White House, as you know, saw an opportunity early in the Clinton administration to address the conflict in Northern Ireland, and it took some chances. Allowing Gerry Adams to come to the U.S. and to visit the White House was criticized, and there was a lot of criticism at the time, especially in the law enforcement community that the White House was playing politics because of the Irish vote. But Clinton's policy has borne fruit, by encouraging negotiations that have brought about, I hope, an historic change in Northern Ireland. The administration's IRA policy was high risk, but it worked.

Q: Did you feel the hand of Senator Kennedy or his sister Jeane Kennedy Smith as our Ambassador to Ireland. In this we seem to be weighing in more for the Irish vote than for the policy or not. Was this...

WILCOX: I don't know what was most important in their calculus. My office became involved in immigration and visas, and we were preparing to list the IRA as a designated terrorism organization pursuant to a statute that requires designations of all such organization, The Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act that was adopted in 1996. However, as negotiations mediated by George Mitchell progressed and the IRA renounced violence, we took it off our draft list.

Q: Where did you see the biggest threat during this '94-'97 period?

WILCOX: The biggest threat was in the emergence of fanatic groups and individuals that claimed to be acting for Islam. One of these was the Ramsi Yousef gang, which blew up the World Trade Center and which conspired to blow up 12 U.S. aircraft over the Pacific. They claimed to acting for Islam and out of vengeance for the U.S. support for Israel. Another was the Hizbollah, which had earlier bombed the Marine barracks in Beirut. They were almost certainly responsible for the bombing of the Israeli embassy and Jewish Cultural Center in Buenos Aires in '92 and '94, and were backed by Iran. Other assassinations and terrorist attacks were carried out by the Egyptian Gamat Islamiya and the Islamic Jihad. In speaking publicly about such terrorism, we worked hard to distinguish between Islam and criminals like these gangs who were abusing and distorting Islam. Some of them were genuine religious fanatics, others exploited Islam to gain sympathy and justify their crimes and political ambitions.

Q: How did we see Iran in those days because I assume with the collapse of the Soviet Union and all, that support for terrorism has ceased.

WILCOX: Well, it hasn't ceased altogether. The U.S. has been preoccupied also with state-sponsored terrorism. By statute, the U.S. designates nations who actively support terrorism. Iran, Syria, Sudan, North Korea, Libya, Iraq, and Cuba are on this list. Cuba no longer supports terrorism, although they harbor some terrorists from former times. Because of this, and for political reasons, we keep them on the list, although they probably don’t strictly meet the test for designation any longer.

State-sponsored terrorism has waned in recent years in part because of growing rejection and criminalization of terrorism. It can't be tolerated whatever the reasons. Libya has been constrained by UN sanctions that were imposed after the Pan Am 103 bombing. Iraq has been more or less contained by the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War and severe UN sanctions. Iran continues to carry out assassinations of both Iranian and Kurdish dissidents overseas, but there are signs that activity might be declining as the new regime of President Khatami re-appraises policy, although he is not responsible for security and military policy. We have dealt with Iranian terrorism by a series of unilateral U.S. sanctions. We have been unable to persuade our allies in Europe to impose similar sanctions, and we have taken the desperate step, in the Iran-Libya Act, of imposing

sanctions against the Europeans for dealing for certain kinds of energy transactions with Iran. This is a U.S. secondary boycott, and it has created real friction between our EU allies and us. The counterpart to that is the Helms-Burton Act concerning Cuba. I think the weapon of sanctions has been successful against terrorists only when there is international support, as in the case of the UN sanctions against Libya and Iraq. When we have tried to impose sanctions unilaterally, they have a poor record of success and are sometimes an impediment to working with offending governments in other ways to change their policies. We haven't stopped terrorism and we have sometimes alienated ourselves from our allies. Combating terrorism is an important U.S. interest, but it is not our only interest, for example, in countries like Pakistan, India, and Iran. I think the Congress has been to ready to use sanctions as a weapon, without critically evaluating whether they work and support our overall interests.

Q: I think it was probably on your watch that they had the deadly explosion in Al Khobar in Saudi Arabia where one of our military barracks was badly damaged and some 20 or so Americans were killed. What was the reading on that and how did we react from your perspective?

WILCOX: The Al Khobar bombing and the earlier bombing of the OPM Saudi National Guard headquarters in Riyadh, a U.S. military facility, created a real crisis in the defense establishment and concern about the security of our forces abroad. This coincided with a growing aversion to any casualties to our forces abroad. As a result, billions more are being invested now in protecting our forces against terrorists. As you know, in Bosnia the peacekeeping forces there are very limited in their range of movement and there is great concern there that there will be a terrorist event there. The Department of Defense is very worried, I think with good reason, that if other U.S. forces are killed in acts of terrorism, the Congress in going to demand that the forces be withdrawn or their budgets may be reduced, so it is a big problem. On the other hand, we have to recognize that our forces must sometimes place themselves in the way of danger if they are to do their job abroad. There is no complete guarantee against terrorist attacks. We have lost a great many American diplomats to terrorist attacks, but that hasn't in most cases moved us to withdraw our diplomats. An exception, I regret to say, was our decision to shut down our embassy in Khartoum because of fear of a possible terrorist attack. In recent years, there was a single terrorist attack against an American official in Khartoum, and, in my view, the intelligence community and the White House exaggerated the threat in Sudan. In the early 1970s, our Ambassador, Cleo Noel, and our economic officer, Curt Moore, were murdered by Palestinian terrorists in Khartoum. In contrast to our recent closure of the embassy two years ago because of fear of terrorism, we kept our embassy open after Noel and Moore were murdered, and sent a new charge out within a few days. I think we made a mistake in closing our embassy in Sudan recently on the basis of a generalized, non-specific threat of terrorism. This was a victory for terrorism.

Q: How did the counter terrorism community react to the Al Khobar bombing?

WILCOX: Because U.S. criminal statutes were violated by that attack, the FBI was sent abroad to investigate the crime in cooperation with the government of Saudi Arabia. The

Saudi Arabian government consented to this. But relations between the FBI and the Saudi authorities were troubled, because of vastly different cultural and legal approaches and Saudi political sensitivities. They didn't give the FBI a free reign to investigate in their country and this created strain. The authorship of the crime has never been discovered to this day, although the working hypothesis, based on uncertain evidence, was that Iranian agents were responsible. Leaks from the FBI and unwise remarks by U.S. officials, for example a statement by Secretary of Defense Cohen that if Iran was responsible, the U.S. might attack Iran made the Saudis doubly shy. At the time, they were in the process of improving relations with Iran and that last thing they wanted was a U.S. attack on their large neighbor.

Q: Looking at this and the projection of our legal system abroad, and the FBI sort of being the agent designated to look into this thing, Was there any attempt to work with the FBI in a training program to have a cadre of you might say internationally politically sensitive investigators?

WILCOX: The FBI is developing such a cadre of legal attaches who are part of the Foreign Service at large. They are good officers who, having lived abroad, often speak foreign languages and are sophisticated, sensitive people. They understand, better than the FBI's domestic cadres, that when you are dealing abroad, you have to deal carefully with local political and cultural realities in order to succeed. That said, when there are major crimes, most of the investigators come from Washington, and so they need to be briefed and have to be sensitized. [FBI Director] Louis Freeh, with whom I worked, was receptive to counsel from the Department of State. I had a very close relationship with him and his counter terrorism deputies, and I found them thoroughly professional people. I had a lot of admiration for most of our FBI colleagues, with the exception of a few who were secretive and overly turf-minded.

Q: Were we working to develop you might say a Washington investigatory cadre of the FBI to, you know certain number of people are going to have to deal with explosives. I mean you kind of know what you need. I would think that it would be possible to develop a team that would be sensitized and knowledgeable of foreign cultures before it went out.

WILCOX: They are doing this to the extent that they have a growing corps of legal attaches. In the end, it is up to our ambassadors to make sure that all American officials in their countries are protecting U.S. foreign policy interests and not operating unilaterally. State-FBI-embassy coordination was excellent in Pakistan where the government was extraordinarily helpful in helping us to arrest Ramsi Yousef and bring him back to the U.S. We had superb support from our embassy and our ambassador, John Monjo, and his deputy, John Holzman. We were very successful in a similar operation where we brought back from a foreign country Mir Amal Kansi, the fellow who killed CIA colleagues at Langley. In that case, I asked Secretary of State Albright to weigh in with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and we got great cooperation. It is a model exercise in inter agency coordination here and abroad. We did the same thing in the Philippines when we stopped the airline bombing plot, and we have done it in a number of other cases.

Q: What about some of the home grown problems of the '70s and '80s. I am thinking of the Japanese red army, the red brigade in Italy, and well there was the Bader Meinhof gang and all of that. Have those things sort of it is a different climate or something like that?

WILCOX: Remnants of those groups still at large. The Japanese government is still searching for some of the Japanese Red Army terrorists. But these radical groups have almost vanished. There is more concern in Europe now about Middle East terrorists, Algerians, Egyptians and others. There was a concern that terrorism might emerge from the conflict in Yugoslavia. It hasn't in fact.

Terrorism is a very volatile and emotional subject. I think we have made progress in what I call the criminalization of terrorism and the use of the law as our primary weapon against terrorism. We now have strong laws that enable us to operate around the world with the help of host governments. This makes it less necessary to consider using extraordinary means like military retaliation. We have superb military forces that are available for such missions.

In Lima a year ago Christmas, when the MRTA terrorists captured the Japanese embassy with scores of diplomats inside including seven Americans, the Americans were released within a week. We thought they would use our hostages for bargaining purposes. Instead they released them, while holding on the others. I speculated that the MRTA may have reacted to a rumor circulating in Lima that U.S. special forces were there poised to storm the embassy and rescue our hostages. That was not true in fact, but the terrorists may have feared such a strike by our forces. Having such skilled hostage rescue forces available is an effective deterrent. The use of military force to carry out retaliatory attacks against terrorists or terrorists states is another issue. We did retaliate against Libya after the bombing of the La Belle discotheque in Berlin in the '80s. Perhaps out of revenge, a few years later the Libyans bombed Pan American 103 and killed hundreds of Americans and other civilians.

There is a dilemma here. We may be legally justified to retaliate militarily as an act of self-defense, but we have to reckon on the potential for counter retaliation. There was a lot of talk in the press about retaliation against Iran after the Al Khobar attack, but we had no firm basis for incriminating Iran in that case, so I think all such talk was premature. The military understands the limits of force and sometimes has a more sober appreciation of that than some civilians do.

Intelligence is very important in identifying terrorists, monitoring their movements, and going after them, and the intelligence community is doing a very good job at this.

Our preoccupation with terrorism is justified because of the fear it causes and the disruption it causes. But in fact the actual number of lives lost American lives lost to terrorism is quite small compared to the other kinds of violence. In 1995, 25,000 American were victims of common murders in this country, whereas only 200 or so

Americans killed by terrorists overseas and in the U.S. and that was an unusually high toll because of the Oklahoma City bombing. So we have to keep our perspective about terrorism as only one of many forms of violence, and a relatively insignificant one, comparatively speaking. The victims of other forms of violence, whether political or simply criminal, vastly exceeds the number killed in terrorist attacks. Sometimes we play into the hands of terrorists, whose main objective is to create fear, by overacting and sensationalizing the topic. But given its human interest quality, perhaps that is inevitable.

Q: Well, were you put into gear in the Oklahoma City bombing when it first came off because there were I remember there was talk about Middle Eastern looking type people and people who had been arrested and all that.

WILCOX: After the World Trade Center bombing, there was a great concern about the threat of Middle Eastern terrorists in the United States. So, immediately after the Oklahoma City bombing, a lot of so called experts went on television and said this had all the marks of a terrorist attack by radical Muslims or elements from the Middle East. That was all over CNN. An Arab American, I don't know if he was a citizen or a green card holder, in Oklahoma City was identified in Chicago in an airport talking on a telephone. Someone there thought he looked suspicious and he was detained temporarily. The Arab-American community was incensed that the seemed to be pointing the finger at Arab Americans. In fact, immediately after the bombing, the first working hypothesis of the FBI was that this was a domestic crime by right wing anti-government Americans, with no Middle Eastern links, and that it might be in retaliation to the FBI's raid in Waco. They were right, and within days they discovered McVeigh and his gang.

Q: How about during the 1996 Olympics? There was a bomb that went off. I imagine your office would have been on high alert during the Olympics anyway just because of the nature of it and particularly with what had happened in Munich.

WILCOX: The FBI, the Secret Service, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security in State had worked closely other governments to ensure adequate security for the Atlanta Olympics, a massive effort. There was an inter agency command center there. The bombing happened anyway, proving that such things are not entirely preventable. There was a frenzy of activity afterward, as you know. This sensitized other governments to the need for better security for such international events. My office held a conference in Hawaii last year to invite foreign governments to discuss together security for major events.

I made many trips abroad, usually with colleagues from other agencies, to talk to foreign governments about how we could work with them against terrorism. We had a remarkable meeting of Arab security and counter terrorism officials here in Washington after the bus bombing attacks in Israel to discuss cooperation against terrorism, something of a precedent. Palestinian and Israeli officials also attended, which was unprecedented. But such meetings that included both Israeli and Arab counter terrorism experts could not be repeated thereafter because of the deterioration of the peace process. Still, there has been a tremendous increase in the tempo of diplomatic, law enforcement, and intelligence cooperation in counter terrorism.

A new preoccupation in the U.S. counter terrorism community is the threat of the use of materials of mass destruction by terrorists. Some have speculated that religious fanatics and other apocalyptic terrorists like the Aum Shinrikyo in Japan who gassed people in the subway will use biological and chemical substances to kill not just a few but hundreds of thousands or millions of people. The U.S. is making a major effort to address this threat.

Q: Why is Syria on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism?

WILCOX: Syria is on the list because it continues to allow radical Palestinian groups as well as the Kurdish Marxist terrorist group, the PKK, to have offices in Damascus. We have asked them to shut down these offices and explained to them that we regard these as terrorist groups because they kill civilians for political purposes. Syria disagrees with our definition and claims these groups are involved in a legitimate struggle against Israel. Syria also has given aid and comfort to the Hezbollah by allowing Iran to export arms through Damascus airport into Lebanon for the Hezbollah military.

Although we haven't succeeded in changing Syrian policy, we have a very important dialogue with the Syrians on the peace process and the need to resume negotiations with Israel over the Golan Heights. Syria has not carried out acts of terrorism since 1986 when Syrian intelligence officials tried to plant a bomb on an El Al airliner leaving Heathrow. The bomb was discovered in the bottom of a bag that a young woman was carrying boarding the aircraft.

Q: What was our analysis of why Syria is still doing this when it sort of has other fish to fry?

WILCOX: It's a very isolated regime, and Assad is caught in a time warp. I have always thought it would be in Syria's best interest to shut down the groups it harbors in Damascus, but it views them as a card to play in their contest with Israel. In fact, Syria does not allow the groups it harbors to use their offices in Damascus to organize and support terrorism, so they don’t provide the Syrians any leverage against Israel. One reason Assad keep the Damascus offices of the rejectionist Palestinian groups open, I think, is to spite Arafat, whom Assad dislikes intensely for his unilateral decision to make peace with Israel.

Q: How did you find cooperation with the Israelis on terrorism?

WILCOX: Very close. The Israelis have needless to say a deep historic concern about terrorism. Their doctrine is different from ours. They carry out assassinations of terrorist suspects to punish and deter terrorism. We prohibit that by executive order. Their policy has contributed to a cycle of terrorist violence, rather than deterring terrorism. For example, there is evidence that the rash of horrible suicide bombings in Israel may have been provoked by Israel's assassination of Ayash, the Palestinian Hamas bombing expert. I think it is a crazy policy, but the Israeli public supports it.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has helped advance his career by manipulating the issue of terrorism and preaching that terrorism is really the cause of Israel's conflict with the Palestinian conflict rather than a symptom of it. He cleverly emphasizes the terrorist threat to obfuscate the real causes of the conflict and uses it to argue that the Palestinians do not really want peace. Netanyahu has argued that there can be no serious negotiations until the terrorism stops, and he holds Yasser Arafat fully responsible for further acts of terrorism. Arafat has not been as vigorous as he should have been in dealing with terrorists, for example, HAMAS the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, who oppose him as well as Israel, and he is sensitive to criticism from his own constituency that he should not be Israel's policeman. He has tried to negotiate with these groups to pacify them, but this has not always succeeded. On the other hand, he does not have full control. His security services do not have the capability of stopping this threat altogether any more than the Israelis did when their armies occupied the entire West Bank and Gaza.

Q: Well, I can't think of anywhere else to cover at this point. How are we doing?

WILCOX: I think we have covered it.

Q: Well, all right, we will stop at this point then.

End of interview