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

AMBASSADOR FRASER WILKINS

Interviewed by: Peter Jessup
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INTERVIEW

[Note: Ambassador Wilkins died in January 1989, before having an opportunity to edit this transcript. The Oral History Program has made light changes in the transcription regarding punctuation and has filled in some names.]

Q: I was saying that you graduated from Yale in the class of '31, and then you entered business, and you were in Kentucky for a while, weren't you – Frankfurt Distilleries and so forth? What prompted you to get into the Foreign Service? Were there any particular influences at New Haven, or among classmates that led you into that field? And did any of them follow you in?

WILKINS: There's a little prologue to the last part of your statement. I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, on the hot day of August 31, 1908. Rather different than the muggy days of Washington in 1988 – almost 80 years ago. It was the custom in Omaha, in those days, for young boys of middle class families to go east to college. Actually, to go east to prep school, and then to college. In accordance with this custom I went to The Hill School in 1922, having previously lived in Chicago from 1910.

My father moved back to Omaha, having been a vice president of Cudahy Packing Company. Mr. Cudahy had moved to Chicago in 1910, and between 1917 and 1922 moved back to Omaha because he didn't like the Stockyards in Chicago. So In 1922 I went to The Hill, and finished there in '27. Incidentally, many other young men from Omaha also went to The Hill School; among them Truman Moorsman, and J. Ernest Sherman. The former is alive, the latter is not.

I was at Yale from 1927 to '31. At first I thought I would go to the Sheffield Scientific School, because I hadn't had much training on the scientific side. I had always specialized, at the Hill, in English, and all sorts of literary activities. I was the class poet at the Hill, for example. I made the class poet's speech at commencement in 1927. My mother and father had come from Omaha.

After a year at Yale, in which I studied higher trigonometry and advanced calculus, I decided that I was in the wrong section of Yale, and I asked my father if I could transfer back to the college. He said, "Why don't you do what you want to do?"

I said, "Well, I'd really prefer to study English, and History, and International Relations," a subject which only could be pursued in the Yale College. I suppose Yale University is still split the same way, although I'm not familiar with its present set-up under the house system.

An interesting thing about the scientific first year: the only way I passed advanced calculus was by memorizing the five important formulas and matching them to the questions on the six month exam. Thus, I got through the course and gave it up forever.

Q: Well, you did get into foreign affairs?

WILKINS: Then I majored in International Relations, under Professor Spykman, and a man who subsequently became president of Yale and who attended the 1919 Versailles Conference in Paris, Charles Seymour. There was James Rowland Angell himself, William Lyon Phelps, Tennyson, Browning, Stanley Williams in American Literature, and so on. In fact, I won the Henry P. Wright Memorial Prize under John Berdan, who taught the "Age of Pope." So you can see that my interests were really on the history, English, and the literary side.

I never achieved any great fame. I became a member of "Yale Daily News," but did not become a member of the Yale Lit. I guess the verse that I wrote at the Hill was not up to the verse that was written at Yale, in those days. I remember some of the leading lights in the latter were Wilder Hobson, and Selden Rodman. I still have papers in which they made comments about the verses I submitted to them.

Q: They were classmates, weren't they?

WILKINS: They were seniors to me. Some were in my class, and some were in others. I don't remember who was in what class.

Q: Rodman went and lived in Haiti for a long while.

WILKINS: I've lost all track since I graduated from Yale. And incidentally, my father died the day I graduated from Yale, in 1931. He had a coronary thrombosis in Chicago, which was a great shock to my family. I had three younger brothers – my mother and three younger brothers. My father had always said to me, "If I'm not here you are the head of the family."

Well, I took this responsibility very seriously. All of us, in effect, had to go to work. Being the middle of the Depression we had hardly two nickels to rub together. And from 1931 until 1940, when I entered the American Foreign Service, I worked hard for a living.

Q: You didn't go to Cudahy did you?

WILKINS: Well, I did through some of my father's old associates. At one point I was working in Chicago, and through some of my father's old associates I tried to sell them some outdoor advertising, because that was the company I was working for, but little came of it.

Then I was transferred from Chicago to Louisville; and from Louisville to Baltimore, where I worked for Frankfurt Distilleries, Incorporated. So you can see how a young man in the middle of the Depression shifts from one job to another, quite by chance.

And being in Baltimore, I was able to study for the Foreign Service and go to the cram schools in Washington, like Campbell Turner, and Roudebush, and some of the others. Although it took me several years to catch up from the academic training that had fallen behind me, I was able to pass the written exams in the fall of 1939.

Q: As an aside, wasn't one of the Cudahy's an ambassador to Poland? There was a tall handsome Ambassador Cudahy in Warsaw.

WILKINS: I don't recall. There were two branches to the Cudahy family; the branch that came from Milwaukee, and the branch in Chicago. My father was associated with the Chicago branch. In fact, he was a close friend of E.A. Cudahy, Senior and went to work for him. He worked there for 30 years, and died in 1930: he went to work for them in 1887, when he was 17 years old. He planned to marry my mother in 1898. Mr. Cudahy said, "When are you getting married?" He said, "Well, I'm getting married in June." But he said, "I want you to go up to Alaska in June." This is to my father. My father said, "Well, I can't." And he said, "Well, why can't you move the wedding up to May?"

So my father did and went up to Alaska. When he got there – this is interesting – he went up the Yukon River by boat, collecting gold with some miners from the Klondike, who had bought provisions from the Cudahy Packing Company stations along the river.

When he got to the head of the river, in the fall, he turned around to return with the gold he had accumulated, and the Yukon had frozen over. So he was forced to proceed a 1000 miles overland, from Circle City in the Klondike – or up in that region – to Skagway, down on the southern coast of Alaska. And it was very embarrassing to him, because he had always worn shoes with heels on them. Most of the men with the dog sleds wore moccasins. Consequently, his ankles became very cramped because he wasn't accustomed to moccasins. And he was forced to ride in the dog sleds with the gold – a thousand miles.

Then when he got back to Omaha, and went in to see Mr. Cudahy, Senior, and tell him about his journey and to make delivery of the gold, Mr. Cudahy gave him a bonus of *$500.* Of course, that was in 1898 and $500 in those days was a lot of money. That's an interesting little sidelight. But it shows the fact that me father was always an entrepreneur. In 1925 – six years before his death – he had gotten interested in Old Mexico, and in an old Spanish grant from the Kind of Spain to one of the men in Cortez' expedition. And he and one of Mr. Cudahy's brothers and another American named Raymond Bell – a cattle man in Mexico – became partners and acquired 225,000 acres of land, with 15,000 head of Hereford cattle. My mother lost this in 1931 because of his death and because of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930.

And later on, I'll tell you an interesting story about how I happened to get in the Foreign Service, because I knew about the Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930, much to the amazement of the representative on the oral board from the Department of Agriculture.

Q: That's amazing. Well, were there other people in your class, who went on to the Foreign Service?

WILKINS: Yes, there were. Leonard Firestone was ambassador to Belgium. Winston Guest was ambassador in Ireland. Those are all I recall at the moment. As a matter of fact, I was the only member of my class that's listed in the Diplomatic and Consular Service.

Q: I see. And your first posting was Halifax?

WILKINS: I went to Halifax as a provisionary post in 1940. Oh, 1 was going to tell you about the oral exam; when I took the oral exam.

Q: Having had the written?

WILKINS: Yes, that's right. In those days we had a preliminary written, in December 1939, which consisted of three days of really rather arduous examination – in many different fields, including arithmetic oddly enough. We had to do a great deal of essay writing. We had to write papers on special parts of the world: Latin America, Europe, Far East, Middle East, and so on. There was no language test at that point. The language test was given by a desk officer within the Department, after you had passed the oral – having previously passed, of course, the written.

I was going to tell you about the oral exam. When I appeared before the oral exam panel, it consisted of 12 members. Some came from the Department of State, and some from other government agencies: the Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, Chief of Personnel. The reason it included Agriculture and Commerce was those departments had been integrated, with respect to Foreign Service, into the Department of State in 1939. So of course, they would attend oral board meetings to pass judgment on the candidates – whether they were suitable to do the kind of work that they expected.

There was a man named McMichaels, from the Department of Agriculture, with extremely white hair. And he was sitting in the back row. He said, "You showed on your summary of how you spend your summers, that you spent many down in Old Mexico with your father. What were you doing down there?"

So I told him about this famous ranch, which we'd acquired in 1925, which came down from the King of Spain to Cortez's men, and so on. And he said, "Well, do you still have that ranch?"

I said, "No, for one thing my father died, but Mr. Cudahy and Mr. Bell still have it. But I think they're going to have to give it up because of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff, of 1930."

He said, "How do you happen to know about that?"

Well I said, "I know about that because my father originally intended – because he was the moving spirit in this ranch, with the financial assistance of Mr. Cudahy, and expertise as a cattle man living in Mexico of Mr. Bell – to make it a steer ranch. Steers ordinarily weigh 1,500 pounds when exported to the United States. But because of the Depression and the fall in the cattle prices in the United States, and the subsequent Hawley-Smoot

Tariff of '30 to protect the American cattle industry, my father had to change the character of the ranch in Old Mexico from a steer ranch to a calf ranch. The calves weighed only 500 pounds each. They were able to break even on this basis.

But it really was touch and go. And then, of course, as I mentioned earlier, my father had died in '31. My mother was forced to drop out because she couldn't participate in risky ventures of that sort. But, and this is the important point in my mind, I think the reason my father became interested in Mexico was because of his previous experience in Alaska. In addition to that, he also had a small company in Chicago, called the C.A. Burnett Company – killing cattle for Oscar Mayer – and he also had a small cattle feeding station in Colorado.

But you can see that with his middle-western origin, and always being interested in cattle, he branched out in that area.

Q: And in that oral query, this man was impressed?

WILKINS: Very impressed. He didn't believe it. And then, much to my embarrassment, the chairman of the board was Ambassador Messersmith, who'd been ambassador in Mexico. He was a very senior Foreign Service officer. And at the beginning of an oral exam, they generally ask you biographical questions, to put you at your ease. That's probably where I told them about spending summers in Mexico for five or six years, during the time I was at the Hill School and Yale.

Then they proceeded to a lot of technical questions, some of which I difficulty answering. For example, they asked me which my favorite President of the United States was. I mentioned George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln. Then they caught me short! They said, "What biographies have you read recently of Abraham Lincoln?" And having had to study so hard, I hadn't had time to read Carl Sandburg, or any other lengthy biographies of Lincoln.

So I said, "Well, I did run through Lee's Lieutenants, and that seemed to satisfy them. Then toward the end of the examination, Mr. Messersmith suddenly – out of the blue – started asking me biographical questions again. I was rather surprised at this; I couldn't figure out why he was repeating something he'd asked me about before. I didn't know whether he was doing it as a trick, or because he'd fallen asleep. I think it was probably the latter.

But I commented, and this may have made an impression on the board. I said, "Well, I'll be happy to repeat that information, Mr. Messersmith, but I wouldn't really want to bore the other members of the board." He smiled at that.

One final point: the way they tell you that you passed the oral is, you go out into the anteroom and Mr. Garland, who was sort of the general factotum for the oral board, would bring you a little piece of paper telling you to go take your physical exam at the naval dispensary on Independence Avenue, at their convenience. And also, to get in touch

with the desk officer for the language exam, which is far different from the procedure nowadays.

Q: Well, tell me this. If you did well on the written, and appeared to do well on oral and so forth, why did you have a probationary assignment? Did everybody?

WILKINS: Everybody. All incoming officers had a probationary post.

Q: Is that true today?

WILKINS: No, I don't think it is. I think the way they do it now is that they take you in on a general probationary basis for a period of years. After that, they tell you whether they will keep you or not. They handle it in that way. But this was the system in 1940.

Later on, if you wish me to talk about it, I'll tell you how it happened that the system changed from what it was before World War II to what it became after World War II. I won't go into all that right now, because that's almost a subject in itself.

Q: Well, why don't we touch on it now?

WILKINS: I could do that. You see, the American Foreign Service as it is now – although Agriculture and Commerce eventually dropped out – was consolidated in 1924, under the Rogers Act, when the Diplomatic and Consular Services were integrated. There were famous men like Albee, and Carr, and Elihu Root, people like that in those days. Then as we moved into 1939 Agriculture and Commerce – as I mentioned – were brought in. And the Foreign Service was chugging along on that basis.

It consisted – at the beginning of the war – of about 850 Foreign Service officers. At the end of the war there were only 650 Foreign Service offices, because the State Department was not allowed to bring young men into the Foreign Service during the war. Most young men in the United States were being drafted into the armed forces. This is what caused the 200 decline. That led to the Wriston Plan – well, first the War Manpower Act immediately after the war, and then the Wriston Plan in 1953 – in which the Service eventually expanded to 3500. They had to do this because of the increase in number of principal diplomatic posts, and consular posts overseas. The number of posts increased from about 50 to between 120 and 135. I don't know the exact number today, but it's up in the 130s.

So you can see the cause of a small service gradually expanding into a larger one. It's interesting to note that it now remains at approximately the same size. I was putting away some papers and I found a paper which shows – this is probably the notes for a speech I made back in 1969 – it says, "In 1939 we had 56 embassies and legations, 253 consular posts, at which there were a little over 4,000 Foreign Service officers and staff, of which 826 were officers." In 1969 we had 126 embassies and missions, 135 consular posts, and 8,700 Foreign Service officers and staff, of which 4,400 were officers. The size of the inspection corps: 20 inspectors, of which 16 were traveling. I was inspector general. I had

a deputy, and then we had two administrative officers. We submitted 2,000 efficiency reports yearly from 100 posts.

Under the Foreign Service Act of 1946, which was a later act and not in 1939, it was required that all American Foreign Service posts be inspected every two years. But the average had fallen down to four. So when I became inspector general in 1964, at Dean Rusk's request, he said to me on return to Washington, "Isn't there some way we could speed up the inspection of Foreign Service posts?" And he said, "How about your traveling?"

Well, as none of my predecessors had traveled, except on special occasions, I said, "That's possible." He said, "You can go to all of the 100 posts, in addition to the 100 posts that are visited yearly. You could go to the others in between, regular inspections; and say, twice yearly for a couple of months each." So I said, "Well, I'll try." And I did that, and half of the time my wife went with me so we could present a combined team there.

Q: Now was this done on a regional basis, or on a basis of things are bad in such and such a place, and we'd better look into that?

WILKINS: This was done on a regional basis. I'd pick a different region each half-year.

Q: What about unusual situations where things didn't seem to be going well? Did you send emergency inspections?

WILKINS: Yes, we often sent out a special inspector on emergency. But that was one of the jobs that really became increasingly my responsibility. I wanted to say earlier – to finish one thought – that we got the average visit to post, including my inspections and my deputy's inspections and the regular inspections, from an average of every four years down to an average of every two years, in compliance with the law.

Now, with respect to special inspections, Dean Rusk was always calling up and saying, "Here's a special case." The inspector general, or his deputy, in effect became a personnel counselor, because when you would arrive at a post, people would always come to you and say, "How can I get transferred? How can I get promoted?" and so on. It was an outlet, you see; it relieved tension, and pressure. And the other reason Dean Rusk wanted me and my deputy to go around and visit posts was because so many congressmen and other prominent people traveling for the United States government never go to the small posts around the world. They never go to the small posts in South Africa, or Asia, or Latin America. They'd concentrate, as a rule, on London, Rome, Paris, and so on.

You can see that Dean Rusk had not only a desire to improve the efficiency of the inspection corps system – bringing it up in accordance with law—but also to improve the moral of Foreign Service by having a high-ranking official, such as the inspector general and his deputy, visit those posts.

Q: In that line of inspection work did you party find justifiable grievances, or more malfeasance, or mismanagement? Or was it a jumble of both?

WILKINS: Yes we did, but I'd like to add here, that it really more of an administrative, financial, consular type of inspection. You pass judgment on whether the officers were performing their political well, but the reports that were written were really more meaningful, I on the economic consular, administrative side than they were on the political side

After all, the ambassador is in close touch by telephone and telegraph to Department of State, the senior officers of the State Department, and the House. Also, Congress keeps in touch with all the posts overseas. So they're in touch with how the posts overseas are behaving politically.

Q: Did you find, with your long experience, that things were apt to go more awry a political appointee unfamiliar with Department procedures, or could they go as much awry under a career Foreign Service officer?

WILKINS: Well, there's no doubt they went awry under political men. For example, there was an ambassador to Ceylon – whom I shall not name, unless you ask me – who came from New York. He was a dress manufacturer, d he'd obviously gotten his job through contributions to a political party. When he appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee he didn't know the name of the Prime Minister of Ceylon.

Q: Which had a number of syllables in it!

WILKINS: It has quite a few syllables. And not only that, but his wife apparently thought that Colombo, the capital of Ceylon, would be a very active diplomatic post. Since her husband was a dress manufacturer she taken 1,000 dresses with her to Colombo. Then when the Department found it necessary to withdraw him, ostensibly because he wasn't up on even the name of the Prime Minister, they had a yard sale on the grounds of the embassy residence in which they sold the 1,000 dresses. That's a true story.

And they also tell the story about a more recent American ambassador to the Court of Saint James, whose name again I will not mention unless you ask me. They said his only qualification was the fact that he spoke English.

Q: But it's worked in both directions, hasn't it? I remember President Lyndon Johnson appointed a political appointee, who was a surplus shipping magnate of some kind, and he was assigned to Malta. The trouble with Malta then was that the British had withdrawn, and there was a great deal of unemployment because the shipping repair facilities were not in use. And this operator, and wheeler dealer (Ambassador Feldman), did have shipping connections so he was able to get some of his friends to have their ships repaired in Malta. And that was an achievement of a political appointee – a

particular talent which couldn't have been duplicated by a career Foreign Service officer. So doesn't it weigh both ways, sometimes?

WILKINS: Yes, of course it does. You are quite right. I have a vague memory of that, but I'd forgotten the details.

I wanted to pursue your question about political versus career appointees. I wanted to add, having made those remarks about Colombo and London, that there have been a whole store of very able, political men from the national life of States, who served overseas. David Bruce, for example, served – if I remember correctly – as ambassador in France, ambassador in Germany, ambassador to London, and as Under Secretary of State. There is also John Jay Whitney, and Arthur Burns in Germany, and many others.

And I think, on balance, that it's important that the President of the States have a political ambassador of this type, because when he serves he has the ear of the President. Thus, he is more effective at a foreign post, whereas a career officer might not even be personally known to the President. So I'd like to balance my remarks by pointing out the ability of many political appointees.

Q: Would you say that of all your experiences, before we touch on some of your that the most mind-boggling and the largest view you got in your whole career was really as inspector wasn't it? You got a broader view of more problems than you I have being an ambassador in Cyprus, and so forth, seeing in New Delhi. Is that hard to say?

WILKINS: Not exactly. I got a pretty broad view of the world, during seven years as inspector general, and traveling to 100-130 different countries. In fact, I think that's one of the things that's contributed to state of health – having had a coronary bypass in 1980, and recently any and so on, in 1988. I'm still with you.

I will say this: I think that my experience in the Middle East, and NEA-Bureau of Near East South Asia and African Affairs – in which I served in with the Palestine Affairs, Israel and Arab States, off and on for ten years gave me a broad view. I also served on the Policy Planning Staff, and it went to the National War College. So I got a tremendous world view from that bureau, as well as the posts. All of my posts, with the exception of Canada, were in the Middle Eastern area.

But, as you know, after the First World War Britain and France became mandatory for a good part of the Near East. Britain was also responsible for Burma, Ceylon, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Greece, and Turkey. So you have in the NEA, in effect, one of the principal bureaus of the Department.

Q: So what you are saying is that your other experience was just as broad as being Inspector General. I inferred that it might not be, and I stand corrected.

WILKINS: Of course, they supplement each other.

Q: You were saying that – which raises a point which we might get to when we talk about Palestine – that a political appointee quite often has the ear of the President, or certainly the White House. That brings up the question of who spoke to the President last? And in your experience on the Palestine business, and the recognition of the independence of Israel, wouldn't you say that who spoke to the President last- - such as Clark Clifford, and so forth, with President Truman – that had a bigger impact than people who didn't have that access?

WILKINS: There's a simple answer to that, and it's yes! I will explain if you want me to. It's a rather long story.

Q: We're wandering around and I did have the opportunity to read some of your excellent work you did with the MacKenzie – of the Truman Library. After studying that it raised certain questions. One of which is: you were asked what could have been done that was different? And your answer was that we could have been more closely in touch with the British, in the days before independence of Israel.

WILKINS: Before they referred it to the U.N. in 1947?

Q: Yes. Could you amplify on that?

WILKINS: Well, I would amplify this way. After the Anglo-American Committee Report. I only returned to the Department in December 1946, when Secretary Burns was in charge, and he left shortly thereafter. As I recall, he had not been on good relations with Prime Minister Bevin, in London. Ibis was all during that very active period, you know, when there were troubles Iran in 1946 – in Azerbaijan – and the British were facing difficult political and military situations in Greece and Turkey.

I think what I had in mind when I made that remark earlier, was that we I have been working more closely with the British, and encouraging them to more moves toward compromise between the Jews in Palestine, the Arabs and the Arab States. Sort of taking steps leading up to a compromise solution between the parties.

Q: You implied we just considered it a British headache, to a certain extent.

WILKINS: Well, the British treated it that way. The British, in effect, left the baby at the doorstep of the U.N. They said that they were not going to go on trying to keep peace in Palestine merely because the Arabs and Jews couldn't reach agreement. And unless they reached agreement they intended to withdraw.

But meanwhile, they wished the United Nations would convene a special mission and decide what to do about the problem. In other words, the British just evaded their responsibilities under the Mandate, by turning it over to the United Nations, in frustration of the years of the internecine warfare within the Palestine Mandate itself.

Q: And on that business of 11 minutes after Israel became independent, Truman recognized the state of Israel. General Marshall's opinion, according to you-Secretary of State Marshall – was that you shouldn't recognize a state until it's been established, until you know whether it's going to continue to exist. Was he as surprised as the people in New York, that when Truman made the announcement, that it would come so rapidly?

WILKINS: I don't think so, because after the May 12th meeting, Mr. Lovett and the Secretary were in constant touch with Mr. Clifford and the White House. My comments now would be an extension of the May 12th meeting at the White House, in which Secretary Marshall, Mr. Lovett, Mr. Clifford, David Niles, Matthew Townley, Bob McClintock, and I were present. I think that's pretty well recorded in the foreign relations of the United States.

At the conclusion of that meeting, it was my clear impression that the President had postponed a recognition of the state of Israel, prior to May 14-15, as recommended by Clifford and company. They thought that we ought to beat the Russians to the punch. You see, the Russians had also supported the Partition Plan, as we had. They thought that this would be a coup against the United States. It would please the Israelis, and perhaps settle down the situation if a big country like the United States recognized Israel before its independence, on May 14th.

Anyway, we left the meeting – I did anyway – thinking that it had been put off for the time being. And when I went back to the Department I told Mr. Henderson – who had not attended the meeting – that this was what I thought. And we were quite surprised, frankly, within the Department. Maybe it was because I was fairly low on the totem pole.

The President did recognize Israel within 11 minutes. And what had happened, apparently, was that between May 12th and May 15th, at midnight when Ben Gurion stood up in Tel Aviv and declared the independence of the state, was all sorts of pressures had been brought to bear on the President. Dr. Weizmann was here, and Mr. Jacobson, his former partner in Missouri – they all spoke with him. And great pressure was brought in many other ways, I'm sure, on the White House. Even if he couldn't recognize Israel beforehand, at least to recognize it immediately on independence. That's what happened, according to the general information that was available at that time.

Q: General Hilidring's remark that the State Department had the pieces to pick up was quite prophetic, wasn't it?

WILKINS: It surely was. You can see what's happening today. You have the grandsons of Arab refugees throwing rocks at Israeli tanks. Because the hostility has existed since 1948, when most of the refugees fled from Palestine, when Israel became an independent state; after the massacre at Dir Yassin. These children in the camps are the descendants of the people who fled in '48, and here it is 40 years later. Those people, by in large, have not been assimilated into any of the Arab states: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan. Of course, Saudi Arabia is out of the picture, or Egypt, in the sense of the Gaza Strip. The refugees have

probably increased from around 600,000 to between 2 or 3 million, and they are all in the camps.

Q: Would you say that it unfair, or pro-Israeli, to say that the Jews did the best they could to take care of their own refugees after the Holocaust, and to apportion them wherever they could, with all the H.LA.S, and all their structure, to help? But that the Arabs did very little to absorb any of those? Was that a fair question?

WILKINS: That's quite correct. But I'd like to make three comments, amusing comments in a way. One is, there is a colony of so-called black Jews in Cochin, India. I know this because I was political counselor in India, from 1950 to *1953,* and traveled widely in that area. These black Jews were really Indians, but they'd been taken on as servants by the Jews that came to India after the death of our Lord, under Saint Thomas. Saint Thomas was killed in Madras, you know, with his spear. He's buried there, actually.

But these Indian servants – of Jews from Palestine settled in India way back – were very cliquish. They had their own synagogue, with Dutch tiles. They would not allow their daughters to walk in the streets, unless they married Indians and could pass from roof to roof, by night and so forth.

Of course, when Israel became independent many of them decided to go back to the homeland. But after they were there a while, they didn't like it and returned to India.

The other thing is that the Oriental Jews – so called, say from the Morocco area – when they came to Israel they didn't like it. Or rather, putting it the other way around, the Israelis didn't like them, because they were so backward.

There was a third point I wanted to make. Prime Minister Ben Gurion was distressed that immigration, in those years, among American Jews was very small. Very few, in fact, wanted to go to the new state.

Q: Except as tourists.

WILKINS: That's right.

Q: But now, of course, the Sephardic Jews – the ones from the orbit of North Africa, and the other countries of the Middle East – they outnumber the Ashkenazi – the ones originally from Eastern Europe.

WILKINS: That's interesting. I really didn't realize that.

Q: That's why those are the people who were behind Begin and Shamir. And they are the ones who are more intensely opposed to the Arabs.

WILKINS: As a matter of fact, I know many Sephardic Jews, because I served in Tangier, Morocco from 1944 to 1946. My banker there was Moses Abensur, from Moses

Barriente. The Jewish bankers in Morocco were very influential ever since the days they were forced out of Spain. I don't know what the situation is in North Africa now.

With respect to the Ashkenazi coming from Eastern Europe, you know the story, of course, or the two theories about the Jews of the immigration? I heard this from Fans El Khoury, the one-time Prime Minister of Syria, when he came to the United Nations in 1957. He said that in the 8th or 9th century A.D. there was a kingdom named Kiev in Western Russia, with a very enlightened monarch. He summoned all the wise men and philosophers of his day to court, and said, "What is the best religion?"

They considered the matter and declared for Judaism. And he converted his people, willy-filly, to Judaism – as kings could do in those days. Well, eventually the kingdom collapsed and many of what were Ashkenazi Jews fled westward, and settled in Eastern Europe. Later on, when Hitler rose to power-and having taken over Eastern Germany and Austria and so on – most of the Jews that went to Palestine were originally descendants of people from the Kingdom of Kiev, and were not, according to the Arabs, really entitled to go back to Palestine.

The other theory is this: During the declining days of the Roman Empire, the Roman legions were running out of manpower. And so they were drafted from the mandate area into the Roman Army. Then after the Roman Army broke up, in *5* or 600 A.D., those troops of Semitic Jews remained behind, having intermarried locally. It was their descendants – according to the Arabs – who were immigrating. So you see the two opposite theories on the subject. You can take your money and take your choice. I'm inclined to think it was the latter, because it seems unlikely that there could have been a complete conversion of all the people of the Kingdom of Kiev.

Q: That sounds a bit legendary.

WILKINS: There's no doubt in my mind that they were, actually, the Jews of Eastern Europe. But their origin may have been genuine, you know. The Arab theory is that they are all descendants of the mixed blood – maybe it was a combination of both.

Q: Now, during the time when you were in Washington, and the creation of Israel, Truman actually did make the remark that the State Department was anti-Semitic, or there were anti-Semites in the State Department. You know what he meant. And McKenzie, I believe asked you about that, and you said that really wasn't true. Do you still feel that way?

WILKINS: Yes, of course, I do. I never saw any evidence of anti-Semitism in practice, for fact. I do know that several officers resigned about the time of partition and independence. For instance, Colonel Eddy, who had been American Minister in Saudi Arabia, and my boss at the Department Gordon Merrill – although, he retired for reasons of health, being very hard of hearing, Of course, Eddy was a very prominent man. He'd served in Saudi Arabia. He was present with President Roosevelt when he saw Ibn Saud, aboard the deck of USS Quincy – at Bitter Lakes – after the Yalta Conference. President

Roosevelt made his famous, semi-commitment to that he would – in the form of a memorandum – take no action with respect to the Arabs and Jews, regarding the British Mandate in Palestine, without first consulting both parties.

Q: We1l I think maybe some of the origin of this reverse prejudice – so stated by President Truman – is based on, possibly, there were quite a few Foreign Service officers who married, or were the sons, or connected closely with missionaries and missionary families in the Middle East. And they were naturally more closely attuned to Arab ways, and Arab culture. It was believed unfriendly to the insertion of Israel, and America's heavy leaning on Israel is that possible?

WILKINS: I must say that in my experience, having served in Iran, Iraq, in effect in Palestine, in Cyprus, and in Morocco, I never saw any evidence of this. I don't want to talk in clichés, but it seems to me the attitude of the average American Foreign Service officer is that he's an American first; he's pro-American in effect. He's neither pro-where he is, or for example, when I was in Cyprus, I never considered myself as either pro-Greek or pro-Turkey. I think the same thing is true of most people. Because you have to look at it from the point of view of the interests of the United States. As you know, in the Middle East we had tremendous interests out there: in oil, in communications, in transport, in religion, and so on. So it's wrong to take a biased point of view. In a situation like that you have to think of what is good for us.

As I said at the outset, I don't want to put it in terms of clichés, but I think that's the approach most American Foreign Service officers take.

Q: That's an interesting point. Shall we continue?

WILKINS: Yes, please.

Q: I might ask you about your experience of Americans serving in the U.N. For instance, at the time of the independence of Israel, Ralph Bunche was up there at the U.N. I think you quoted him as saying he had to do a lot of work for the Arabs, because they didn't do their own homework very well.

WILKINS: That's correct.

Q: Did the Department of State, or the administrations that you served with, have any role in assigning Americans to the United Nations, and seeing that better people got there? For instance, the Russians ignored the UN for quite a while, and then sometime in the '50s they decided this was a wonderful place to put key people, wield influence, maybe fill some KGB slots, and so forth like that. What was the attitude of the Department about Americans serving in the UN? Because McCarthy was very angry at some of the Americans who were working at the UN, figuring they were leftists, and so forth.

WILKINS: I think that's completely wrong. I think the United States government was interested in proper staffing at the United Nations from the outset, in 1945.

Q: But, could the State Department send people up there to apply? Or how did it work?

WILKINS: Of course, people would even leave the State Department and join the staff of the United Nations; or go up there on special assignments. I don't know the details of Bunche's early career, but he was a United States government officer – not only in State, but perhaps elsewhere. Anyway, he was well known here in Washington, and he was on the staff at the United Nations. I think he's a living example of the attitude of the Department of State, with regard to the quality of people we wanted at the United Nations.

Later on, as you know, he took the place of Count Bernadotte in his duel role as conciliator and mediator. That was when I had that conversation with him. I was, at that point, serving as his advisor to the American representative in the Palestine Conciliation Commission; and made a trip from Beirut to Rhodes to find out how he was progressing in his truce arrangements with the Arab states of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. He considered himself in a very embarrassing position because the Arabs, in their usual matter, didn't really prepare themselves very well for meetings. To have a fair truce agreement, he would be forced to take their side. And of course, the Israelis complained about that.

One other thing about Bunche: you know, later on he was offered the job – showing another example of his quality – of Assistant Secretary State, for Near Eastern Affairs. But he declined. He felt that he could not afford to live in Washington and raise his family here, being black. And his salary would be taxable, whereas by serving at the United Nations his salary was non-taxable. So for two reasons it was more desirable for him to be in New York, in the high position that he was – not only after [inaudible], but later on at the U.N. itself. So I think all of this is testimony to the type of man the State Department wanted in the U.N.

Q: But I still don't understand – most of the staff positions in the U.N., that were held by Americans, were not Foreign Service officers; they were people of other origin.

WILKINS: Well, I'm not up on that.

Q: One thing – since we're skipping around – in a previous conversation we had, not recorded, you talked about the difference of style of Secretary Marshall, and Secretary Dulles – in dealing with assistants and staff people. Could you point out the differences? How Marshall would want you beside him, and I think you said Dulles [inaudible]

WILKINS: Well, they were certainly different types of secretaries. But, at the same time, they had many characteristics in common. I'll describe a couple of incidents with respect to each, if you like.

Q: I think that would be interesting to the people in the future.

WILKINS: This may take a little time. With respect to Secretary Marshall: shortly before Israel became independent on May 14-15, 1948, Marshall was having one of his weekly press conferences in the State Department. Carl Humelsine was Chief of Staff at that point, and he called me up. Marshall never called me. Marshall, they always said, when he wanted one of his aides and couldn't remember his name, he would say, "Send me that general with the pint eyes."

I said to Carl Humelsine, on the phone, "What does the boss want?" He said, "He just wants to talk to you about his upcoming press conference."

So I went up to the 7th floor and went into Carl's office, and he said, "Go right on in." I went in, and Secretary Marshall was sitting there in his red leather chair, at his desk. At the two opposite corners of the desk were Mike McDermott (the press secretary) and Chip Bohlen, who at that point was counselor to the Department. They were obviously preparing for the press conference. There were many subjects that could come up, and I suppose that's why Bohlen was there also.

Anyway, Marshall said to me, "Well, sit down in that chair in the corner and I'll be with you in a minute." I felt like a dunce in school. But I sat down in the chair, Marshall continued, and then he told them they could go in a very abrupt sort of way. I thought it was a funny way to treat Bohlen, who after all in '48 he'd been the confidant of President Roosevelt at Yalta. He was one of the ablest officers in the Department.

Anyway, when they left, Marshall said, "Now, tell me what I should say at my press conference," very abruptly, as though I were a school boy. So I took the chair beside his desk. He said, "There are 150 newspaper men waiting down there, and they want to know what the United States is going to do."

You see, at that point we had not recognized Israel; this was before that day. So I told him what the present military situation was in the Mandate, and around Jerusalem. And we had had no word, either from Israel or from the White House as to what they planned to do. Obviously, the decision by the President – to recognize Israel – had not yet been made. I said, "It seems to me [we should] tell the President, because of the fluidity of the situation, it's impossible to predict at this moment what will happen – whether the Arabs will continue fighting with the Israelis, and what the White House intends. Anyway, Israel has still not declared its independence."

So, he said, "Good, you can go." Now Dulles, on the other hand, he treated his *staff* like assistants in a big New York law office. He came originally, and used to be associated, with Sullivan and Cromwell. This was his method of operation. I wish I could think of the name of his one officer that was very close to him. He later went to Johns Hopkins.

Anyway, as far as I was concerned, he used to call me up practically every morning around 8:00, 8:30, so I'd have to get into the office around 7:00 or 7:30 and read the telegrams. You see, the action copies of telegrams would come to the desk officer – or

me, being Director of Near Eastern Affairs – first, for action. The Secretary, of course, would have a copy. He would want to know, "What are you going to suggest we answer this one?"

Q: Secretary Dulles saw the cable before anyone had briefed him on it?

WILKINS: Yes.

Q: He read it?

WILKINS: And then he'd call the desk officer and ask.

Q: Well, isn't it usual that cables are presented to higher-ups.

WILKINS: Not the action copy.

Q: Not the action copy – with some kind of a summery on top, or recommendation?

WILKINS: No, not in my day.

Q: I see.

WILKINS: Actually, there was one yellow copy – the action copy – and then there were hundreds of white ones, to all that were interested. Mr. Dulles, of course, had one, the under-secretary, and so on. But he would come in early and then being the kind of man he was he'd call you up. On just routine affairs they wouldn't bother to call you; you'd draft a reply and send it on up.

Q: I should think that could be a disaster if he'd read an action copy of some area and somebody down below hadn't seen it yet.

WILKINS: Definitely. I never got caught short; I had to be in early to anticipate the telephone call from him. On one occasion, during the Suez Crisis of 1956, he called me up one morning – it wasn't early – and said, "What are the provisions of the Malta Convention, with respect to armed ships and cargo ships passing through the Bosporus?" That was from the Treaty of Lausanne of 1925, I think. I had a mental picture of this treaty, because of all the furor with respect to Suez, and Nasser: two detailed pages in a textbook on the subject.

I said to Mr. Dulles, on the telephone, "Before I answer that question I'm certainly going to have to refresh my memory. With your permission I'll call you back." That's the only time I ever dared do that.

[Second interview by Peter Jessup of Ambassador Wilkins, done on November 2, 1988]

Q: You hadn't finished at the conclusion – last July – in talking about John Foster Dulles. We just made a brief comparison, at that time, of his method of operating and that of General Marshall So you did say that you have more to say.

WILKINS: I've got a lot more to say, because my experience with John Foster Dulles was extensive. Of course, now it is November 2, 1988, and my relationship with John Foster Dulles took place between 1952 and '56, when he became Secretary of State under President Eisenhower. I think I've already compared the methods in which George Marshall and Dulles operated.

Q: You did.

WILKINS: Well, in addition to that I probably should have told you how Mr. Dulles conducted his staff meetings. He conducted them, I believe, as would a New York lawyer, in the sense that he would delegate responsibility to one officer. He would ask everybody's opinions at the table, like Herman Phleger, Bill Rountree, and the rest, and assign them special tasks to do. I believe this is the method of solving problems.

I was on fairly close terms with John Foster Dulles, although I found him rather stern. He used to call me regularly at 8:00 in the morning, and I'd have to get in to the Department early, because he'd already read the telegrams and I had not. So I had to be prepared. One day, for example, he asked me, "What are the regulations with respect to armed ships passing through the Dardanelles, on the way to the Black Sea?" He was interested in what the Russians might to with respect to imminent invasion of the British, French, and Israelis into Egypt. He suspected, all along, that they might be cooking up something in that respect.

I said to the Secretary on the phone, "Good heavens, that covers two pages in the legal textbooks. I'll just have to call you back."

He said, "Well, do that right away, because I'm very much interested in the subject." Then on another occasion I remember, at a staff meeting – which were quite late in the afternoon – and Mr. Phleger was wiggling in his seat. He obviously wanted to go home for dinner, because he and his wife were going out. He got as far as the door and Mr. Dulles, in his magisterial way, said, "Herman (Phleger), come back here and sit down." He treated all of his – even his highest level aides, and his other aides like myself – exactly the same way.

On another occasion, for example – just before Suez, in the fall of '56 – Mr. Dulles was up on Duck Island in Lake Ontario for the Labor Day weekend. Herbert Hoover, Jr., being number two in the Department, was acting Secretary of State. He called Bill Rountree, assistant secretary for NEA, my boss, and me up to his office for some matter. Bill called me when I was just about to go home and said, "Junior wants us." I said, "What about?"

He said, “I haven’t any idea.” So we went up there to his office. Hoover was very deaf you know. He had hearing aid, which he would place on the table so he could hear. For this reason, he was always suspicious of his subordinates; not hearing them, he didn’t think that he was hearing the whole story always.

He said, to Rountree, “I’ve got here a speech, which John Foster Dulles drafted for the President, and the President sent it back with a lot of changes.” And he said, “Since Dulles is away, I don’t want to send it back to the President without having him see it. So will you, Rountree, take it up to him?” Rountree said, “Where is he?” He said, “Well, he’s up on his island in Lake Ontario.”

So Rountree said, “Well, Mr. Hoover, that’s very embarrassing for me, because I planned to spend the Labor Day weekend down in Atlanta, with my wife and daughter.”

Then, of course, they both looked at me, and I had no choice but to go. So Hoover said, “I’ll send you up on the President’s aero-commander,” which he did. I spent the night in Watertown. I forgot my shaving cream, and had to borrow it from the pilot. And then Mr. Dulles and a friend of his had a private, little seaplane, which flew me from Watertown to Duck Island.

Dulles did not like to have anyone come to the island. He had started as a boy sailing in Lake Ontario, because the Dulles’ and the Fosters all came from around Watertown. He had built a little cabin on the island together with his wife, Janet, and they used to hole up there in the summer. He had no telephone. There was just a Canadian lighthouse keeper with whom he checked, once or twice a year, because it was in Canadian territory.

When the little seaplane landed, why Mr. Dulles came down to the shore with Mrs. Dulles behind him, and said “Who had declared war on whom?” Well, I had brought with me not only the speech he had drafted – corrected by the President – but also a book of telegrams. That was about it. I thought the trip was sort of foolish because the changes made by the President were not important; but Hoover thought they were.

I said, “Well, nobody’s declared war on anyone, as yet. But Mr. Hoover wanted you to check the speech you drafted for the President. So he said, “Come on up to the cabin.”

Q: Was the cabin quite modest?

WILKINS: Oh, very modest; it was just one room, and a bedroom, and a little curtained-off place for a kitchenette. He had an easy chair, and books and papers scattered all around. He’d obviously been working on various documents. He said, “Sit down.” And I sat down in the chair. He said, “Now, what have you got?”

So I showed him the speech, which the President had corrected. And he said, “My God, did Hoover send you up here with this?” and threw the thing across the room. He said, “That’s ridiculous. Those are just textural changes. But I’ve got something I want to talk to you about.” So I prepared for the worst.

It was then that he proposed to me what became known as SCUA (the Suez Canal Users Association). It was the Secretary's theory that under the Treaty of 1888 between Britain and Egypt and the maritime powers of the world, they had an easement across the territory of Egypt. And that would be the basis in case Egypt interfered with the canal – the British could intervene if they wished. Everybody forgetting, as we in the State Department did, that the treaty of *'56* would have expired in '68 anyway. So to say that Nasser took the canal – why he could have taken it anyway.

Well, anyway, Dulles had this legal theory. He always had legal theories. And on an earlier occasion I remember that – in the Gulf of Aqaba – we were talking to Abba Eban, the Israeli Foreign Minister, at his house on Woodland Drive on Saturday morning. (He was always calling us there on Saturdays.) He suddenly said to him, "You know, American destroyers have a right to come into the Gulf of Aqaba because the middle of the Gulf is in international waters. It's more than 12 miles from the Saudi Arabian shore, and also from the Egyptian shore. So for that reason, American ships can pass through the Straights of Tehran, into the Gulf of Aqaba.

Well, no one to my knowledge – neither the legal division, or NEA – knew anything about this. But he was always proposing these extra legal theories, based on his knowledge of international law. So too, with the Suez Canal Association. He said, "Now, what do you think of that?"

Well, I knew I was on the spot. I said, "Well, it seems to me rather legalistic."

He said, Well, I think it's a damned good idea. You take it back to Washington, and have it staffed on, and we'll discuss it some more on Tuesday." He didn't ask me to stay to lunch, or anything. He just took me on back down to the shore where the little plane was waiting. Mrs. Dulles came along with us; she was not present while we were talking in the cabin. She was sort of hovering in the background.

As we went down to the shore – I had my camera with me – I thought it would be interesting to take some pictures. I knew that he was very particular about his island, and it being very private for both of them. I said to Mrs. Dulles, whom I knew through my mother-in-law, "Do you mind if I take a few shots?"

She said, "No go ahead." So I was clicking away, and he gave me a steely glare as we got down to the plane. I took off, but I was a little bit concerned that I'd overstepped the bounds.

Not long after that he had to relax, either from an appendix or some trouble with his hip, and had to resign as Secretary of State. Christen Herter came in as Secretary, just before I left in *'57.* Francis Stevens was DCM in Iran, and he'd had an alcohol problem. He was a walking encyclopedia on Eastern Europe. The Department had sent him out there under the admonition that if he fell off the wagon again that was it, as far as he was concerned.

Well, Rountree called me to his office, suddenly in the summer of *'57* – Christen Herter, by that time, was Secretary of State – and said, "Fraser we want to send you to Iran." I said, "I've never served there." He said, "Nevertheless we want you to go as number two, to that country." I said, "Well I don't speak Farsi." I'd said the same thing to Loy Henderson, because later he wanted me to go to Saudi Arabia. And I said, "No I don't want to go, because I don't speak Arabic; and besides, it would be difficult for my young children."

But anyway, I went out there and Stevens was in a bad way. He'd disappeared for a week, and he eventually was divorced from his wife.

Q: Who was a Russian.

WILKINS: I don't remember, but they were separated. He fell down later, in Georgetown, and some people passing by thought he was just a drunk. And then they realized that he was wounded; he'd been mugged by somebody. He was taken to the hospital and his former wife returned and cared for him until he died. But I don't believe he ever recovered consciousness.

Q: He was a very strange, erratic man, and a very bright man. I knew him in Germany.

WILKINS: That's why I said he was a walking encyclopedia on Eastern Europe, and I guess, a gifted linguist. I had not served with him; but that was the reason I was suddenly sent to Iran, by Rountree, with whom I'd always had the most cordial relationship-since 1956, when he was on the Anglo/American Committee for Palestine. Before he entered the Foreign Service he rose to a very high level with Dulles. Dulles took a great fancy to Rountree.

Q: To backtrack for a minute, John Foster Dulles being a meticulous, somewhat imperious man – how did he ever end up with Herbert Hoover as his deputy? How did Hoover get in? He wasn't any intellectual giant, was he?

WILKINS: I don't know. Perhaps because he was former President Hoover's son, because he was an engineer; there were a lot of problems pending, like Aswan Dam. Hoover, by way of being an engineer, was knowledgeable about oil. I think also because of the British/American oil interests in Iran and Iraq, probably. I really don't know the ins and outs of why he was selected.

Q: But he wasn't a great deal of help to Dulles, was he?

WILKINS: Well, I rather liked Hoover, although a lot of people thought that because of his hearing, he was not quite with it. He was so hard to talk to. I remember when we had meetings with the British and the French, under the declaration of 1950 – with respect to arms shipments to the Middle East – he would put his little microphone in the middle of the table, with a great clatter. You weren't ever sure that he was quite in charge of the situation. And this was before Suez.

Also, did I talk about Aswan Dam, at all? And Dulles?

Q: No.

WILKINS: That whole subject is fascinating. It was during 1955, you know, when it first became apparent that the Russians were shipping arms, through the Czechs, to the Egyptians. And the Egyptians were paying for it with Egyptian/Sudanese cotton. Simultaneously, the United States – under Eugene Black at the World Bank – Germany, Britain, and other European powers were considering the financing of the Aswan Dam. Even the Egyptian foreign minister came over from Egypt to discuss this with Mr. Dulles. My wife and I took El-Quaisuni, the Egyptian finance minister, out to the Redskins one Sunday afternoon.

To get back on the track: Dulles was very much in favor of the Aswan Dam, particularly being prompted by Eugene Black. Black thought it was a great opportunity for the United States and European powers to do something important in Egypt, because of its overpopulation problem, and because of its lack of food.

So this Aswan Dam, which had been on the books for many years, was projected, and it was estimated that it would cost something like 1.3 billion dollars, of which 400 million would be paid for by the United States and European powers. And 900 million, in Egyptian pounds, would be paid for through labor by the people of Egypt. And it was staffed out by the Army Corps of Engineers, and other experts.

It turned out to be a complete fiasco. As the world knows, in the fall of *'56,* when Dulles became aware of the arm shipments to Czechoslovakia to Egypt, he made a statement withdrawing the Aswan Dam offer "for the time being." This is ignored by American and other historians. But the fact of the matter is that Dulles received information in the form of an amendment, I believe, to one of the appropriation bills, saying that no more aid for Egypt if he went along with the Aswan Dam. Congress was nervous about our spending so much money Out there, in the form of aid.

This is the real reason that Dulles made that statement. He was prompted by the fact that our relations with Nasser were going from bad to worse. Hank Byroade who was the American ambassador, was having increasing difficulty with Nasser, and eventually they had to move Byroade from Cairo to South Africa, thereby upsetting Tom Wales. He went to Hungary and then he came to Iran to be my boss there.

The Egyptian ambassador announced in Cairo, before he'd been on consultation, that Nasser was looking with favor on acceptance of the deal with the World Bank. Dulles, having the message from Congress in the meantime, was forced to make the statement that he did in the fall of 1956. After that the Russians picked up the deal. Instead of being a 1.3 million dollar project, it became a 600 million dollar project under the Russians, and had never been extended.

As a matter of fact, it's been a fiasco for them, too, because the Aswan Lake is much longer – it's 300 miles long – than was expected. It has more evaporation than was expected; it has [inaudible] built into it; and malaria has returned. The dam will probably overflow in another 5-10 years, because of all the sludge piling up behind it, unless they can let the water off in some other way. They couldn't build enough electricity for Egypt. The river below the dam, going into the Mediterranean, is now so clear it has undermined all the bridges and banks, and they're collapsing. And there are no more shellfish at the mouth of the Nile and the Mediterranean.

So, that's why I said at the beginning, that it's incomprehensible to me that this project could have been staffed-out by the Army Corps of Engineers and other experts before hand. The same thing happened on the Helmand River, between Afghanistan and Iran. I discovered when I was in Iran from '57 to *'59* that that project, too, had not been properly staffed. The waters that were supposed to flow in the Helmand River, primarily through Afghanistan into Iran, had not been properly staffed. The water, when the dams were built, was allowed to remain on the land; and all the salts were deposited there, and bleached out. So that was that.

The same thing happened in Iraq, where I served from 1942 to '44. If you fly over the land by plane – as I did with an oil geologist named Snodgrass...And he said, "You can just see that this land is underlain with oil, because of the anti-climbs, and the mounds indicating the oil deposits underneath." And he said, "You can also see the outline of the terraces that were built by the Romans. They were blown up in the Middle Ages, probably, and all the water was allowed to stand on the land, so it's become less fertile than it used to be. Probably Iraq supported a population of 30 or 40 million, but there are only 8 million today. So it just shows that even back in Roman times, as in our times, they didn't have very good staff engineers.

So much for the Aswan Dam. I wanted to say this about it, because I want to support Dulles. I think his intentions were correct. He thought it was good for the Egyptian people, but he was blocked by Congress in the long run. And then, of course, he was misled by the British, French, and Israelis in their intervening, and also by the Russians supplying arms to the Czechs through the Egyptians at that point. But Nasser was really on his last legs in '56, and he was lucky to survive in those circumstances.

But I wanted to add that about Dulles, because he was much maligned, I think, in the history books.

Q: Now, who was ambassador in Iran, when you got there?

WILKINS: Selden Chapin. And he only stayed a short time. As a matter of fact, he left and I was chargé a good part of the time. I happened to be chargé on July 14, 1958, when the King of Iraq – King Faisal – and Nun Said were murdered. The American embassy was the only American office in the Middle East that had communications with Baghdad. July 14 was Bastille Day, and the French were having their usual celebration. As chargé,

I had an opportunity to talk to all the different people; and was thus able, when I got back to the embassy, to send telegrams giving the reaction to what was happening in Baghdad.

Q: Speaking of Iran, do you remember a book that was written back around 1912, by Morgan Schuster, called The Strangling of Modem Persia?

WILKINS: Yes, I do.

Q: Was that read in the State Department?

WILKINS: Not as late as 1957.

Q: It was sort of a pioneer work, wasn't it?

WILKINS: The history of Iran is a fascinating subject. You know, the Iranians are the cleverest people in the Middle East. They can run circles around the Arabs, any day. They haven't lately, but they did before. For example, in the time of Philip II. Philip and Iran were great powers; it was called Persia then. I think it was [inaudible] dynasty, in Persia.

And when the ambassador of the King of Spain arrived in Tehran – this is a well known diplomatic incident – the Persians didn't think that he would give due credit to the Shah. So they – at the time he presented his letters of credence to the Shah – lowered the doorway, because they feared that he would not prostrate himself three times in the usual fashion. They thought by him lowering his head at the doorway it would give the appearance of prostrating. But the Spanish ambassador pulled a fast one on the court. After he made the usual ceremonial remarks, when he withdrew he presented his backside when going through the door.

There's another famous story about the father of the last Shah, Reza Shah, who was an illiterate army sergeant who came up through the ranks, and took over from the deteriorating Qajar Dynasty. His minister in Washington, in the late '20s, early '30s – this is another story around town – was driving up through Elkton, Maryland, the marriage center, with his mistress; an American lady I used to see at the diplomatic functions here, when I returned in '46. He was not driving very well and was stopped by a local policeman. The local policeman said, "You're driving very peculiarly. I'm going to have to take you to the station."

This infuriated the American lady, and she hit the policeman over the head with her parasol. And she said, "Why, he's the minister from Persia. You can't take him to the station."

And the policeman replied, "But he hasn't got his collar on backwards." That's on a par with the other incident. But it shows their attitude. Now in that case, the Persians did not break diplomatic relations, but they withdrew the minister, if I'm correct.

Q: What were the influences of the Russians in the years that you were there, in Tehran?

WILKINS: Well, the first time I went to Iran was when I was stationed in Baghdad. I made a trip in 1943, by car, with a British major named Satow. His father was a famous British diplomat, and wrote books about British diplomatic and consular practice. I've lost track of him.

But the British, you see, were in force in Iraq; and also in Iran. Actually, American and British forces had more or less divided Iran in 1943. Those were the years when we were sending supplies to Russia, through the Persian Gulf.

Q: There was a regular Persian Gulf command.

WILKINS: Yes, it was called Pifors. Actually, when I went up to Tehran in '43, with Satow, I met my colleague Van Ferguson who was working there; and also Arch Calhoun, who was later ambassador in Tunisia. We were all about the same age.

Q: Now the name you were going to recall was Louis Dreyfus?

WILKINS: Louis Dreyfus, and his charming wife. They were living in what had been a legation, in front of which was a huge basin for a water tank. That is now the foundation for the present embassy. But they still have there the picture window that was in the old legation – the same kind of picture window – in the new embassy. Because, I went there when Julius Holmes was ambassador, Also, when I was Inspector General.

I was going to tell you that Ferguson, Calhoun, and I drove in his car, with my wheels, because his wheels had been stolen. Tires were worth a $1,000 a piece in Iran in 1943. So we drove down to Isfahan, and saw the sights there – which I won't describe, because Isfahan is half the world away, as they say. And it's been well described by many. Also, we drove down to Shiraz – Persepolis – and back. And we had quite a journey, sleeping outside of Chihanas, and teahouses; and breaking down, and seeing the tomb of Cyrus the Great. It's a fabulous country, with its blue domes.

I was down again when I was stationed in Iran, in *'57-'59,* to Qum, where Khomeini now hangs out. Naturally, driving south from Tehran you pass through Qum, which is a very sacred place, where Fatima is buried. We, of course, couldn't go in there; we just drove straight through the town until we came to Isfahan. My mother-in-law, Mrs. Hamilton Brown, was visiting my wife and me at that time. And we went on down to Shiraz, and visited Persepolis. And for the first time in 13 years, the whole area was covered with snow. I've never seen a more beautiful sight, than Persepolis, and Shiraz, and especially Isfahan in the snow, with those blue domes. A miraculous sight!

Q: What's the altitude in those cities?

WILKINS: Tehran itself is about 5,000 feet; and as you go south, it gradually slopes off. In the plateau of Iran, between the Elburz Mountains on the north, and the mountains

between Iraq and Iran – it slipped my mind, for the moment. There are a number of passes; I've driven, as I told you, from Baghdad to Tehran. The way you go is up through Qum, to Hamadan, through Kermanshah. I tried in '43 to go back. Oh, I forgot to tell you something about the Russians in Tehran.

I wanted to go back to Iraq, by way of the Rawanduz gorge, of northern Iraq. To do so, I would have to drive up through Tabriz, up through northern Iraq, and down Baghdad, through Sulaimaniya, and Kermanshah. But Colonel Schwarzkopf, who was famous in the Lindbergh kidnapping...

Q: Yes, Norman Schwarzkopf of New Jersey.

WILKINS: Yes, he was in charge of the gendarmerie during the war of '43. And he said, "No." I couldn't go. He said, "You'd probably get captured by the guerrillas up there, and put me to a lot of trouble to get you out. I just won't give you permission."

Meanwhile, I'd gotten permission from the Russians, because they were in charge of that area. I'd gone to the Russian embassy, and they looked at me in a very peculiar way, and said, "What does this American want to go up into Tabriz and over into the Rawanduz gorge for?" They must have thought I was a spy or something. Because even then, you know, we had German spies being dropped in northern Iraq.

As a matter of fact, in Baghdad, in 1942 and '43 – when I was there – before Montgomery was successful in the western desert, we had swastikas on our gate every morning. It was only after Montgomery was successful in the western desert, did the sentiment of the Iraqis change. It again illustrates the flexibility of their mind – to put it politely.

They were not especially friendly when I arrived, but they became very friendly when they saw the allies were beginning to win the war. That was the same year in which we – being successful in North Africa – set up an American intelligence agency in Cairo. That greatly affected the activities of the American legation in Baghdad, at that time. Did I get off the track?

Q: We were covering the role of the Russians in the '50's, when you were there.

WILKINS: Well, the Russians had no representation in Baghdad, but they did in Iran at that point. Then, of course, it culminated in the Azerbaijan crisis of 1946, with George Allen under Secretary Byrnes as the moving factor. That was the reason he eventually became the youngest ambassador – at the age of 43 – in the Foreign Service, when he was sent to Iran. I later knew George Allen when he came as ambassador to India, in 1953, after Bowles had left.

First, Loy Henderson was there when I arrived; and then Bowles came in *'51.* He thought he'd be continued by Eisenhower, but wasn't. When he returned to Washington George Allen took his place, briefly. And then I left. I got to know Bowles quite well. To such an

extent that we became close friends. He invited me and my wife to go sailing with him the year I came back from India, in '53.

Q: In Essex, Connecticut?

WILKINS: I went to Jonesport, Maine. We went all the way up to the Canadian border and back down the coast, through the Cape Cod Canal, to Essex; where he had a summer house and his catch with his wife, daughter, son, and one of their friends. A lot of people criticized Chester Bowles. I think he was the right ambassador at the time.

He became too pro-Indian; he carried it to an extreme, by riding bicycles, his wife dressing in saris, putting his children in the Indian schools – contrary to the British custom and the American custom there. But I think it was more to influence Nehru than anything. But the Indians soon caught on to this, and they thought they had Bowles in their pocket. Also, Bowles was extremely articulate. They used to say he could charm the monkeys out of the trees. But he would talk forever; a *45* minute talk would last two hours.

But he was extremely interesting, well-versed on economics, good in politics, and everything, but he was [inaudible] man – in his early days in advertising. He came from Springfield, you know. He was a real New Englander, and sailor. I liked him. I did my best to make him like the Foreign Service.

When he first arrived, he brought all his own people with him. And it seemed to me it was our duty, as American Foreign Service officers, to convince him that the Foreign Service had some *merit.* And *I* think I was successful.

Q: Loy Henderson war slightly estranged from Nehru by the time Bowles came, wasn't he?

WILKINS: No. Our difficulties with Nehru stemmed – much to our surprise – from his reluctance to let us have manganese ores, which he considered as being used for nuclear purposes. That was the sticking point. We never could understand it, because we'd been so generous in supplying grain to India. In fact, we alleviated the crisis, in that respect, through our aid program.

Also, The Rockefeller Foundation eliminated malaria. And it seemed to us in the American embassy at New Delhi – in the period of '50-'53 – that we were doing all the right things for India, and that Nehru was consistently blocking us through the Bandung Powers.

I would not say that Mr. Henderson had any difficulties with him. I think the reason that Henderson went from India to Iran was because Chester Bowles had gone in to see President Truman, just before he ceased being President, and was looking for an ambassadorship. Truman said, "Well, I'm thinking of sending you out to India."

And Bowles, I was told, replied, "Well, I don't want to displace any Foreign Service officers. But if India should ever open that's the place I'd like to go." And in fact, he came there.

He made a big splash when he first came, with his Indian mannerisms. Also, because – for example – he was accredited to Nepal where we had no resident ambassador. So he had a dual title. And he decided, for example, to go up to Nepal in the traditional way – as the British always had – by pony. And he took the whole embassy with him – or most of it. As I showed you, I have pictures of all that.

That's why I liked serving with him. Because he was a great innovator, great talker, got along well. I don't recall any difficulties between Henderson and Nehru, other than the ones about the shipment of manganese.

I do think, as I said at the outset, that the Indians began to think less of Bowles because he seemed to be too pro-Indian. In fact, Ray Hare was deputy assistant secretary later. He told me one time – before Bowles went to [inaudible] – that Bowles' telegrams to the Department from India, would be two or three inches high. All the other telegrams from folks in the area were an inch high. He said, "I just don't have time to read everything Bowles has to say."

This illustrates, I think, the differences between Henderson and Bowles. Bowles was a great public man. He was making a name for himself in every way he could. He was a good ambassador. Henderson was a true, Foreign Service career officer, and always trying to tell the Department the exact truth.

Q: How did you suddenly switch, after two years, from Tehran to Cyprus?

WILKINS: Well, I mentioned earlier that Mr. Henderson had spoken to me on occasion about going to Saudi Arabia; and I declined. Well, there I was in Iran, and my wife and children had gone home ahead of me. I guess it was a coincidence that the Cyprus thing came to a head at that point. They were looking for someone to be ambassador there, and I was selected; primarily because of Loy Henderson, who by that time had returned to the Department as deputy, to under secretary of administration.

I can't think of any other reason why they would have taken me. I didn't speak Greek, but I studied Greek when I got back here, for six months. The independence of Cyprus was delayed from the spring of 1959 until August of 1960, because of the conference in London; between the British, the Greeks, and the Turks. They couldn't reach an agreement about the shape of the government in the new island, and the way in which the British governed the island.

So I had time on my hands. I used to spend the morning in the Department reading cables and doing necessary things. Then I'd go over in the afternoon, to the Foreign Service Institute, and study Greek. Incidentally, I got up to a 3 on a scale of 5. I continued to

study Greek while there, but I've forgotten most of it now. I could say a few words they were always putting guns in my car, and so on. I said, "That's my flag," and so forth.

But the first three years at Cyprus were keystone. That's all explained in the talk I made in 1971, at the Naval War College, when I was advisor to the president of the Naval War College. I used my experience in Cyprus – being a small country, career officer-in-charge – as an example of how an American embassy operates. And that talk, which was transcribed and fortunately I found among my papers, I've now had typed up and am sending to the historical division of the State Department, for inclusion in the file.

Q: Makarios spoke English, didn't he?

WILKINS: Yes. Although, sometimes in involved conversation it was difficult. I never attempted to speak Greek with him. We'd call him, "Your beatitude." I've forgotten the words for it in Greek. He was a Byzantine character, as I explain in this transcript, and a very difficult man. Like Nasser in '56, Makarios was really on his last legs in '64. And was saved by the fact that the British forces in Cyprus, under Duncan Sandys, moved out and restored order on the island.

You might recall here, that it was during this period in February of 1964, that they attacked the American embassy. There were two bombs. I was in my apartment upstairs, and they blew up my exchange, made my office a shambles. I had to evacuate 1,200 of the 2,000 Americans on the island. We had an unusually large embassy there, totally something like 500 people, of which 35 were embassy proper. The rest were all secret communications under NSA, and F.B.I.S, and so on.

We'd inherited the British radio stations on the island, as they gradually withdrew in '59-'60.

Q: Didn't you have an air base, also?

WILKINS: No, we didn't have an air base, but the British continued to have an air base in Akrotiri, and they had an army base in Armington. They more or less gave up the army base, while I was there. They continued to maintain operations in Akrotiri, because the British considered Cyprus a stepping stone for them – to other areas of the Middle East. And they'd always looked on Cyprus as a relay point for telecommunications, during the Second World War. They withdrew from the Middle East, beginning with India, and Pakistan, and Burma, and Ceylon, in '47 under Atlee.

Then later they withdrew from everywhere. They withdrew from Palestine, and as the French did, from Syria and Lebanon. They ran out of money and could no longer maintain troops in any of those countries.

Q: Now who set off these bombs?

WILKINS: Greek separatists, no doubt. Because they considered the Americans very pro-Turkish.

Q: Would Makarios have been aware of this extremism?

WILKINS: I always thought so, and I asked him on many an occasion to knock it off. But he never did anything about it. He was always evading the issue, in a Byzantine way.

Q: And did you have any dealings with Denktash?

WILKINS: Oh yes, I knew him very well. He rented me all the furniture in my house. As a matter of fact, he never charged me any rent for it, which is probably contrary to Foreign Service regulations. When the war broke out, nobody bothered about those things. The house was burnt out, so who cares.

I rented a small house up on the north coast, just as a weekend retreat. Because the embassy proper was in Nicosia – some 50 miles away. I might add here, that I became a 3rd class scuba diver while there. I was more active in those days than I am now!

Q: And who succeeded you?

WILKINS: Toby Belcher; he'd been consul general before I went there. After the Department decided that I'd been there long enough – I'd been there four years, and I guess I was suffering under considerable strain. But the Department apparently thought well enough of me that they made me Inspector General on my return.

They said at first that they wanted me to supervise Cyprus' relations in the Department, but nothing ever came of that. In any event, I was too busy being Inspector General, under Dean Rusk. Is that enough?

Q: You've *talked quite a bit, and we have quite a bit of material.*

WILKINS: Did I ramble too much?

Q: There are different styles, and I think you cover a lot of things you wouldn't cover otherwise, if you let it roll.

WILKINS: I can talk so much about all these things. If you look at those pictures, it brings back things I'd forgotten.

Like Johnson Bennett, who was working for the OSS up in northern Iraq. I was a great friend of his.

I had Saluki dogs. I had a redneck partridge in my house. And I could tell you some nasty stories about the chargé, and the minister. I'm not going to.

Q: Well, we'll have another session and finish it at another time.

[End interview]

Fraser Wilkins oral history addendum…

WILKINS: I got Syrian Prime Minister Faris Bey al-Khoury's statement to me, at the November 1948 (also mentioned in a speech at a Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly) a little twisted in talking to you on July 21, 1988.

What Faris Bey said was to this effect "There are two theories with respect to the ancestors of the European Jews of Eastern Europe who started coming to Palestine after the rise of Hitler in Germany in 1933. These Jews are the Semitic descendants of the tribal kingdom of Kiev, whose ruler, after calling many wise men to his court, mandated his people to adopt Judaism as the best religion. With the ombudsman of that kingdom, 800/900 AD, they moved on, fled eastward to the area of Eastern Europe. The Arabs now conclude that these Jews are not descendant's Semitic people of the Mandate area and therefore have no claim that they may return."

A minor comment may be made that there are Semitic peoples in Russia, Iran, Afghanistan and all over the area between Europe and China. Some of them are Jews and some are Muslims. The Arabs are actually another branch of these Semitic peoples. In many ways they look alike but some have a different religion because of the ruler of Kiev in 800/900 AD. According to the Arab view, during the final years of the breakdown of the Roman Empire in 400/500 AD, the Roman legions required reinforcement as the ranks were thinning with time. They were stationed more or less permanently in North Africa, Spain and primarily in Gaul, etc. Reinforcements were drawn from the coastal area now known as Palestine and sent overseas.

These were the true ancestors of the Jews of Eastern Europe as these men intermarried with the local inhabitants and now claim they have a right to return to the land of their ancestors. This is, of course, the Zionist claim but the Arabs dispute it, say it was long ago and prefer their theory. I myself can see how both theories may be correct because all of the European and Arab Jews (Palestinians) look alike (they were all originally descendants of different tribal groups). The main difference today is that the European Jews are of Russian origin and, according to Arab reasoning, have no claim on any part of Palestine. Both theories seem to have elements of truth. Hard to say which is correct after 1,000 years.

End of interview