

AFGHANISTAN

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DAVID NALLE

**Librarian, USIA
Kabul (1951-1954)**

Mr. Nalle was born in Philadelphia and graduated from Princeton. He entered the predecessor of USIA in 1951. He served in a number of posts including Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Jordan and Moscow. He was interviewed by Dorothy Robins-Mowry in 1990.

NALLE: That would be 1951. I got a call at a job I had in Yonkers, New York, at the time. I had just been married. The caller on the other end was from USIA, and she said, "Your name has been given to us, and we'd like to send you to Afghanistan." [Laughter]

Q: As a beginning!

NALLE: I had a vague idea of where Afghanistan was, but that's about all. I guess my case was not nearly as severe as that of my mother, because when I said to her, "I'm thinking of going to Afghanistan," she said, "Isn't that nice, dear? I've always been interested in the Balkans." And that was about the state of our family knowledge of Afghanistan.

The whole idea intrigued me. I guess it intrigued my wife, and so we went through all the process, came down to Washington, and joined the Agency at that time.

Q: At that time, it was USI--

NALLE: It was actually called International Information Administration or something like that, part of the State Department. And it remained part of the State Department for two or three more years after that. Actually, I was in Damascus when they got around to the formal transfer of USIA people out of the State Department, and we all were required to take an examination on knowledge of the world and that sort of thing.

Q: Have you any idea how come they took you? Did you take any exams?

NALLE: Not a thing, no.

Q: Is there any rationale that you can figure, why they just said they wanted you in Afghanistan? It seems like such a bolt out of the blue.

NALLE: It was, indeed. I mean, if you're in Yonkers, New York, you don't associate your next week with Afghanistan. But it was simply that they had, somehow or other, the budget or mandate to build this up, and certain posts they had to fill. I don't even remember--I think the nice young woman at the publishing house, while I thought she was interviewing me for a job, she was really interviewing me on behalf of USIA. I guess I revealed enough knowledge for her to think that it was worth recommending me.

Q: Did you have any overseas experience before that?

NALLE: I had spent some time in France.

Q: But nothing extensive?

NALLE: No. And English literature.

Q: That's what I realized.

NALLE: So I came down and went through a very brief orientation period, signed the necessary papers, and we were sent to Kabul, I guess, sometime in the summer of '51.

Q: So it was really a very short orientation.

NALLE: Yes. No language at all.

Q: What kind of orientation did they give you at that point?

NALLE: None that I can remember. I had, as far as I know, no preparation.

Q: That's interesting.

NALLE: This is a basic point which maybe I could make now. This is one of the great failings of the Agency, in my opinion, and has been over the years, and I think, to an extent, still is, that the people the Agency sends out are not prepared for the jobs they're undertaking, either professionally or as far as the culture of the country they're going to.

Q: Have you some ideas about what you think would be a good set of basics for this kind of training?

NALLE: I think language is the sine qua non. You must study the language, even if you don't become fluent in it. Or you should. Of course, it all costs money. That means you have to have a much larger corps in order to spend the time training in language and culture. But here I was going to a country, admittedly a small and distant and, at that time we judged a not very important country, but it was a Muslim country, it was a Middle Eastern country between South Asia and the Near East. Strategically, as we've learned since, very important. I was supposed to communicate with those people, so I should have been prepared. Admittedly, at that particular time, they were under some kind of pressure to build up the Agency, so I guess it was better to have someone over there than no one at all.

Indeed, when I went out, I was to be the librarian. I had no training in library work. I taught myself library work to an extent, and found it very interesting. Unfortunately, I never thought at the time that I would be in a country again where they spoke Persian, so I didn't learn much of the language in Afghanistan, which was unfortunate, because my next post was Meshed in Iran.

Q: How many people were in Afghanistan when you were sent out? How many people were there doing so-called information work?

NALLE: I think we probably were not the first people there doing information work. I guess we were the second, but we were the first group that ever went there to do this particular function. Bill Astill was there as, I guess, the information officer, and the public affairs officer was a wonderful man named Joe Leaming, who was an author of a number of children's books and was a wonderful fellow, a great storyteller, great writer, totally unsuited for the work, I think, but literate and fun to be with and all that. Bill Astill was suited for the work and also was well educated and an interesting person. Then a young woman came, Dean Finley, who was to be the information officer, I guess, and Bill Astill must have been deputy PAO. So there we had about four officers all of a sudden in this remote place.

Living was fairly primitive, but we lived, obviously, much better than the local population, and it was basically quite comfortable.

Q: Did you get out of Kabul very much? You were the librarian. Did you start to build up the library, or was there something there?

NALLE: I actually built it, the building. I found the builder and started the building process with the help of the embassy. There were no such things as steel I beams. We had a Czech architect who invented a new kind of truss that would hold up enough ceiling so that you could have a big room for a library and film shows. The truss collapsed two and a half years later. It came down after I left. But we did build a nice, attractive library with American-style furnishings locally made. I was very pleased with that, I must say. It was an attractive library.

Q: Did you have guidance in putting the library together, with the nature of the collection?

NALLE: At that time, as I remember, the predecessor Agency had begun to send books out all over the world, so you got a core collection. We did order books in addition, according to what we divined were local interests. We, of course, catered to the foreign colony, as well as the indigenous people. There wasn't an awful lot of English spoken and read by the Afghans at the time, but there were many coming up who did. We had quite a good attendance--I obviously don't remember now--but very often you'd go in in the late afternoon and the library would be full. That was maybe 50 people. It was a small operation, but a very interesting one, and we showed USIA films, also, once a week. We had a music program and various other activities.

Q: So you almost served as the cultural center, didn't you?

NALLE: Yes. Oh, indeed. That's what it was. That was my job. The librarianship was minimal. I had to understand certain things that one doesn't know about, like the Dewey decimal system and Minnie B. Sears' book of subject headings, which was the Bible of a librarian. Once you've mastered Minnie B. Sears, you know everything. In fact, it really helps you organize the whole world in your mind.

Much as I loved Bill Astill, I must say, he tried to do the library before I came, and he did not really understand Minnie B. Sears. That was his only shortcoming.

Q: After all, Afghanistan at that point was essentially an illiterate country.

NALLE: Yes, I suppose 90 percent.

Q: So the students were the children of the elite, or who were getting ready to study outside of the country?

NALLE: Sort of a classic situation. The best high schools in town, the elite high schools, were run by teachers from certain foreign countries. There was an American high school called Habibia. There was a British high school called Ghazi. The French had a school. The Germans had a school. Germans also had a technical college, as I remember. But they gave good education to these young people, and very often they got pretty good in English, so that they could, for example, come and work in the library and work in English for us, and also come and use the library.

The illiteracy rate in Kabul itself was considerably less than the national rate, which must have been well over 90 percent, I would say.

Q: Did you have any visitors, scholars of any kind, who came in and met with the groups? Have any lectures? Any of that kind of thing at that particular point?

NALLE: Of course, there was much less of it. We had one prominent visitor, Senator Knowland, who came out. This was at the time, of course, of the [Senator Joseph] McCarthy hearings, and [Roy] Cohn and [David] Schine were traveling about the more comfortable parts of the world, looking at the contents of American libraries. I've always been both embarrassed and secretly pleased by the fact that when Senator Knowland came, I took a quick review of the library collection, because we were warned that he was going to be looking at it, and I found one paperback copy of Dashiell Hammett, so I put it in my pocket during Senator Knowland's visit, and put it back as soon as he had left. But we were pretty far away; we weren't affected much by that.

One of the most interesting visitors, one of the most effective we had, was Leo Sarkisian. Do you know him?

Q: Yes, I know the name.

NALLE: I saw Leo just the other day at the USIA luncheon, because he was working with Voice of America and he now works from time to time for them. He's a musicologist and a painter and various other things. He came out and did recordings of Afghan music and played other folk music for them. We had an absolutely full house for his program. He is a great performer, and it was a very effective cultural program, qua cultural program. How much it served the country objectives, I'm not sure, but perhaps as well as anything else we did. It showed a certain amount of respect for their culture and told them interesting things about our culture and other cultures.

Q: So it sounds like a very interesting time. It's interesting because it's so early in the Agency's beginnings.

NALLE: Not many people visited Kabul, as you can imagine. Not many other visitors come to mind.

Q: Do you remember who the ambassador was, by any chance?

NALLE: Oh, yes. Angus Ward was the ambassador, but he was at the end of my stay. At the beginning was George Merrill, a very nice man. He had been, I think, chargé d'affaires in India before he came to Afghanistan, and retired from Afghanistan, from Kabul. A very nice man, not really cut out for Afghanistan, perhaps. Jack Horner was the chargé d'affaires for some time before Angus Ward came with his cats.

Q: His cats?

NALLE: He was in Mukden and had been interned by the Japanese there, and got out of that with the cats, long-haired, as I remember, when he came to Kabul.

Q: You were in Kabul how long?

NALLE: Two and a half years, almost three years.

Q: So it was long enough to--

NALLE: I'll have to include here a biographical note. My first wife, Jane, died in Kabul after we had been there a year, I guess, and is buried there.

Q: Did she die of a locally contracted ailment?

NALLE: Yes, some kind of spinal meningitis. The medical care was not so great there, so I don't know that we were absolutely certain what it was, but it was something like that, and such things were available.

Q: Did she go out of the country for medical help?

NALLE: No.

Q: Was there a doctor at the embassy?

NALLE: It all happened too fast. No, there was a doctor at the British Embassy. There were some U.N. doctors there at the time, and they offered help and were brought in on the case.

Q: This is all part of the living conditions of people in the Foreign Service.

NALLE: Oh, yes. There was, when I was last in Kabul, a very attractive little cemetery which is populated by foreigners, obviously, and a number of Americans are there. Sir Aurel Stein is buried there, also. He's the biggest name, I guess, in the cemetery. Kabul's not a healthy place,

except in some ways because it's high and dry and has lots of sunlight, it was healthier than India next door, but the sanitation, and all that sort of thing, was rather primitive.

Q: When I went out to my first post in Japan, I went out, of course, to the Pacific on the President Cleveland, and all the way over, I read Jim Michener's Afghanistan because it's such a fat book. I think it's the only Michener I've ever gotten all the way through. I guess he came after you left, but he must have been there for some time, because when I went out to Japan, it was 1963 and that book had been out a while.

NALLE: Yes. I never read that. He does a remarkable job. I read what he did on Spain.

Q: You went from Kabul to--I guess by that time you decided you were going to stay with this kind of business after that first stint in Kabul.

RALPH E. LINDSTROM
Consular/Political Officer
Kabul (1952-1954)

Ralph E. Lindstrom was born in Minnesota in 1925. Following high school, he entered the U.S. Army, serving in the Office of Naval Intelligence. He received a bachelor's degree in political science from Harvard University in 1950 and entered the Foreign Service in 1952. His career included positions in Kabul, Hong Kong, Oberammergau, Moscow, Nairobi, and Dhahran. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 28, 1994.

Q: You went out to Kabul where you served from '52 to '54. What was the situation in Afghanistan at that time?

LINDSTROM: It is, of course, a very poor country and I had never seen poverty like that up close before in my life. It's a country which still is, and always has been, caught in between other major powers and crossroads of invasion, and it had borrowed heavily from their neighbors. Their major political concern during the period I was there was with Pakistan, and Pakistan's seeming efforts to incorporate under their control part of Afghanistan which they referred to as Pushtunistan. We were, on the other hand, under the direction of John Foster Dulles, much more inclined to think about the Soviet threat. At that time we were putting CENTO together, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. And the Afghans felt increasingly threatened by that. I was, during my first year or so, doing consular and administrative work, and when I'd go over to the Quang__ ministry on some visa case or something like that, or an American citizen matter, they would make it very clear that they weren't happy with our policy of supporting Pakistan and CENTO. They eventually, while I was still there, began turning to the Soviets, and the Soviets came in with their first well publicized, small aid program in a non-communist country, and built a bakery, and paved the streets of Kabul, and those were the main things. And I used to meet more and more Soviet diplomats who had been very well trained in Pushtu, a rather obscure language that practically no American, with one exception, had studied. I remember the (Soviet) director

of consular affairs said to me, "You see, Mr. Lindstrom, this is what you people should be doing." So they were making an impression, a fairly favorable impression in that respect.

Q: I realize you were down the totem pole in a small embassy. Our policy towards Afghanistan was sort of watching?

LINDSTROM: And giving food aid, which was in many ways a mistake. It discouraged farming, this has happened in many countries as I understand it. Afghan farming became unprofitable in many instances, and began to create urbanization and other radicalization indirectly over the longer term. And also we did provide support and financial aid to some bigger programs through the Morrison-Knudsen Company. It built big hydroelectric projects in the southern part of the country. So we were trying to be friendly to them, supportive of them, but at the same time we were caught in a bind. I don't think we truly realized it at the time of the support of the anti-communist allies. So over the longer term, long after I left there, the Afghans pooh-poohed the Soviet threat. They said we know how to handle them. Increasingly they went to the Soviets for aid, and eventually got into military aid, and military training programs.

Q: What was your impression of how things were run by the Afghans? Was there much of a central government?

LINDSTROM: At that time, the leader was Prime Minister Daud, who was in for a time, was out, and then later came back in again. I think they had reasonably good control over things, but the other provinces, and the non-Pushtu tribes felt pretty much left out of things. But I think on balance they were making progress. And again, they were very concerned by the Pakistani propaganda on Pushtunistan. It was hard to have very much contact with them in terms of conversations on political subjects, not impossible, but a little bit difficult. I remember there tended to be cultural clashes of one kind or another. Women, of course, were in complete purdah in those days. I think I only met three or four wives of high ranking people who were not wearing purdah in their homes during the period that I was there.

We did bring in a Marine detachment while I was there. Before that we had relied on civilian security guards, and of course the Marines managed to get a couple of girlfriends despite the purdah, and this created an incident. They were expelled, of course, from the country.

Our leadership in the embassy was by one Angus Ward, about whom you have doubtless heard before.

Q: Would you describe him, and his method of operation, and background?

LINDSTROM: He was a naturalized American citizen, which I think was an important part of his make-up, a Canadian. He was also not a graduate of a four-year university, so he had chips on his shoulder, I think. He was a very smart man, and he had specialized almost his entire career in the Soviet Union. He had been consul general in Vladivostok. We had a post there then. He was a rather bitter man by the time I got there. He had been incarcerated by the Chinese in Mukden, and he then became sort of a political football to the China lobby. It made him into an unlikely hero. And this was the reason he got the post. He had never been an ambassador, and he

was consul general in Nairobi. But the China lobby put a lot of pressure on the State Department to give this fine, deserving man an ambassadorship. They didn't have Ouagadougou in those days, so it was Kabul. And my very first assignment, I had only been in the post for I think one month, was to go down and meet him and his wife in Peshawar.

Q: And his cats too?

LINDSTROM: And his cats, oh yes. Jack Korner was the Chargé d'Affaires who gave me this assignment. I'm not quite sure what was in Jack's mind, but I was very inexperienced to be doing this sort of thing, and Jack knew very little about the man too, as it later developed. So anyway, I went down to Peshawar, and the ambassador was delayed in getting there. And finally, I remember, I was diving into the swimming pool at the Peshawar Club when somebody came up and yelled at me, "The ambassador is here." So that was the beginning of my not too happy relationship with Ambassador Ward. He'd brought his own Cadillac in, and had three cats, an East African cat, a Siberian cat, and something else, I can't remember what, in the back seat with Hermgard, his Finnish wife. Then we made preparations to go into Afghanistan in sort of a safari, two follow-up trucks that had been furnished by the embassy, so he could bring all of his effects in with him at the same time.

So finally he said, "Let's go." And I said, "Would you like me to lead the way, Mr. Ambassador? It's kind of tricky going over the Khyber Pass." I had an embassy driver with me, and one old Chevrolet. "No, Lindstrom, I'm not going to eat your dust all the way." And, of course, he proceeded to get lost several times. But finally we did get to the border crossing point. This was about three or four days later than his expected arrival, and we had the usual tea at the border with the Pakistani officials, and then they dropped the chain, and we set off across the border. I told him there was probably going to be an honor guard there for him, and, at that point, the paving ceased and it was all just dust and dirt, and he again insisted on leading the way. And we did come up to this company of troops who were then standing at attention in the sun. He stopped, and I stopped and ran up to him, and he said to me, "Lindstrom, in Afghanistan do they review from left to the right, or right to the left." I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I'm sorry, I don't know." And he turned red in the face, very angry, jumped in his car and left them in a cloud of dust.

So we got up to the first border check point which was several miles in, and the colonel of the guard came to my driver who came to me, and said, "Wouldn't the ambassador please like to go back and review the guard because they had been waiting for him all those days?" And I raised this with the ambassador, and he sort of snarled at me, and said no. So we got off to a very bad start in our relationship. And another thing, neither he nor his wife would eat any of the melons that were laid out, and he explained to me that they often soaked them in the ___(?). So I ate to be polite and I didn't get sick or anything like that.

So then we started out, and again he was going to lead the way. By this time I realized, because I saw him racing up the mountainside on the left-hand side of the road, which is the way they drive in Pakistan, that I had forgotten to tell him to drive on the right-hand side in Afghanistan. And these big heavily laden lorries were coming down and they finally stopped bumper-to-bumper on the left-hand side of the road. So I had to go up and give my apologies. "Mr.

Ambassador, the rule of the road in Afghanistan is on the right." Then we proceeded on over the mountains and up to a point midway between Kabul and the border where we were met by our Chargé d'Affaires, Jack Korner. And as I said before he was not a very well briefed Chargé. He came running up. I can still remember him with a thermos in each hand and said, "Mr. Ambassador, welcome. In this thermos I have martinis, and in this one I have manhattans." And the ambassador said, "Well, Korner, we don't drink." And Jack said, "Mr. Ambassador, do you mind if Ralph and I have a drink?"

Anyway, we over-nighted there. It was a German-run construction camp, and then went on into Kabul. So my beginnings with the ambassador were not very happy.

Q: He didn't seem to be very forthcoming to the Afghans. How did he get along with them? What was your impression?

LINDSTROM: He didn't get along with them terribly well. I remember an example, it was in my own bailiwick in consular affairs. At that time we were under instructions from Washington. There was new consular legislation that if we were willing to sign an agreement with other countries, a reciprocal agreement, we could liberalize our laws. Of course, it was being done all over the world. I can't remember the name of the Act now, it was so long ago, but anyway...

Q: The McCarran-Walter Act?

LINDSTROM: It may have been.

Q: I think it was the McCarran-Walter Act, in '52.

LINDSTROM: I raised this with Mr. Mohammed, the head of the consular section, more than once. And he said, "Mr. Lindstrom, this is fine but I'd like to have your ambassador's support on this. He could just say that this is a good idea and mention it to the foreign minister, and then we can do this." So I mentioned this to the ambassador on more than one occasion, and all I ever got was a lecture on the concept of reservoir of good will. That he didn't want to use up whatever reservoir of good will he had for this.

Q: This is a very typical attitude of you don't mess with consular visas. It's just too small a thing to mess with.

LINDSTROM: Apparently, but of course it didn't make a good impression on me, or least on the consular part of the Foreign Ministry. And I'm pretty sure they reported it elsewhere too, that the ambassador wasn't taking any interest in this. But I had many adventures with him. I can still remember one. I was working in consular/administrative affairs in a separate building from the ambassador's office, and he wanted to see almost all outgoing correspondence. In fact he made it very clear. And I remember preparing a telegram in response to a welfare and whereabouts telegram from the Department saying that in effect we were unable to contact so-and-so. And a while later the phone rang and it was the ambassador on the phone and he said, "Lindstrom, I have this telegram, a contact, isn't that sort of lower ___ the knees?" I said, "I'm sorry sir, what

should you have said? I was unable to ascertain the whereabouts of so-and-so." "Well, that's better." I could go on and on.

Q: No, no. I like to hear about this because he's an interesting character. I think it's worthwhile to talk about him a bit.

LINDSTROM: He dressed very formally, morning clothes quite often, that kind of thing. One of his little customs was, and he absolutely blind sided us on this, was to call on people on New Year's morning. I never could figure why he was doing this. Quite frankly it was quite a partying post, as small hardship posts were, and in many ways I think the ambassador was a unifying influence because almost everyone hated him. I can still remember, having been out to one of these parties and being awakened by the servants about six o'clock in the morning, New Year's morning, and the ambassador came in in his formal clothes, and made his pretty little speech. I guess I put on a bathrobe over my pajamas. He did this with everyone else too, and all the other officers on the diplomatic list.

Q: Mrs. Ward was difficult, wasn't she? Because she ranks along with, I guess, Robert Murphy's wife, and Mrs. Loy Henderson. These were some of the old dragons.

LINDSTROM: She hated Mrs. Henderson. Mrs. Henderson was Swedish, if I remember correctly, whereas Mrs. Ward was Finnish, and Mrs. Ward was very proud of the fact that she'd gone to finishing school in St. Petersburg. She spoke this very quaint French that they taught the Russians in those days, often a direct translation of Russian. She'd say grande merci. I don't hear much people going around saying grande merci.

Oh, another thing that occurs to me, yes. My wife ended up being the senior--even though the wife of a third secretary--the senior American-born wife in the embassy, and this did not please Mrs. Ward one bit. She didn't really like my wife, but still from a protocol point of view, we did get invited once in a while to luncheons at the residence. So I remember Gloria, as the senior American, ended up at the ambassador's left at this luncheon which was for...I can't remember who it was for, but it was some foreigners of some nationality. But anyway, we were just beginning the meal, and I was over on the other side of the table, when I happened to look over in the direction of my wife and I saw an orange flash, an orange streak, and my wife yelled, screamed, and started mopping up blood on her arm, and the ambassador said, "That's all right, Mrs. Lindstrom, that's Ranger's place." That was one of the three cats, apparently the cats outranked me, with the ambassador's wife. That was his only apology, as she was sopping up the blood. You're ruining my career, I thought to myself. Anyway, that was another little tidbit.

Q: I've heard other stories about how he spent a great deal of time working on some packing crates made of the very best wood for his things, but also to have some fine wood when he got back.

LINDSTROM: Oh, yes, that was one of the things he did and I got tangentially involved in that. I knew it wasn't the right thing to do, and I would not ever certify it. John Bowie, one of my colleagues and more senior, said he would certify it. It was very expensive, high quality furniture wood, which is certainly not needed for packing cases. I remember once his driver came to me

and said he had used embassy grease to grease his Cadillac, so I sent him a bill for that, and he got quite upset with me. But the board thing is certainly true, and he sent them to Spain and made them up into packing cases.

Q: Did he travel around the country very much?

LINDSTROM: He did, yes. To his credit he did a fair amount. At that time our embassies were very badly equipped. We did not have a nice front-wheel drive vehicle or anything like that; whereas our AID mission did have those things, and this also will tell you something about the ambassador's character. He didn't want to be indebted to anyone. But when he wanted to take a trip, he would call me in and say, "Lindstrom, I'd like to go to ____, or wherever, but I don't really have a proper vehicle." "Well, have you asked the director of AID for this? They have some." "Well, I thought maybe you could just talk to Bill Lathran." Bill was the other junior FSO. He had been assigned for two months to the AID mission rather than to the embassy. So I would go up and talk to Bill, and Bill would talk to Mr. Hayes, and would say, "Why doesn't the ambassador have the guts to ask me directly." So, yes, he did travel around.

Q: What does an embassy do when you've got an ambassador who is very difficult like this? How big was the embassy?

LINDSTROM: We had about 14 people on the diplomatic list. I can recall that from the presentation of credentials ceremony. The AID mission was already quite large, there must have been maybe 30-40 people in it including the people, not just administrative people, who were actually working in the field on seeds and things like that. The non-diplomatic American staff was probably 15 or 20, a lot of them military, and communicators and people like that. So it was already a sizeable staff for that period of time.

Another thing that did not endear people to the Wards was Mrs. Ward's habit of--she pulled this on every new wife--the hats and gloves problem, and if any woman ever put her hand out to shake Mrs. Ward's hand with a glove on, she would just shriek, and say, "No, I won't shake your hand. Haven't you been properly brought up?" and all that. But I think she began to have some cronies. She did get along to some extent with our embassy nurse, and they used to be able to go on the attaché flights out to other countries. And Bill Lathran, this is no criticism of him, he was just simply in a somewhat better position than I was. He had goodies to offer, and wasn't directly under the ambassador, so I think he could see some good points in Ambassador Ward.

Another thing, I remember about Ambassador Ward and his bitterness, was he mentioned to me criticism of Chip Bohlen, "Those young whippersnappers," like that. Very bitter.

Q: Were you inspected at that point, or not?

LINDSTROM: Yes, we were and I can't remember who the inspector was. I guess it was Gordon Madison.

Q: I was wondering, because when you're in a difficult situation like that, and you have an ambassador who obviously is not only difficult, but you're not getting along well with him,

particularly on your first tour, this is where you can see a very short career staring you in the face. And often it's the inspectors who can understand the situation, and kind of save one.

LINDSTROM: Actually it did. I ended up working that way and I can't remember if it was that inspector's report or something else that there was contrary evidence that maybe I had some potential. So I think when I went back to Washington it worked out all right. I've forgotten the details of it.

Q: How did the DCM business work out?

LINDSTROM: Our first DCM was a man who didn't really stand up to Ward at all, and not a terribly good DCM. I've even forgotten his name. He was later replaced by a very good one just as I was leaving, Leon Poullada, who went on to distinguish himself. I think he became an ambassador. Charlie Little was the first one, and he was sort of in trouble himself with the Department, and I think he retired not too long after that. Then we had a kind of a rogue CIA operation. I think many people had that sort of thing in other posts in those days, out of control, and he didn't do much to that. Again they had goodies they could give him to keep him happy.

Q: The first taste of the Foreign Service, I take it, for you and your wife must have been a little bit difficult to swallow, wasn't it?

LINDSTROM: Yes, and there were other hardships involved. My wife became pregnant during that tour. And there was one Danish doctor-midwife there who said she probably would have a somewhat difficult pregnancy and should go out to Pakistan. The only way to get out to Pakistan was on the attaché plane, and I went to the Air Force colonel about that, and he said, "You will have to pay \$1800, if we are going to make a trip like that." And I said, "The State Department doesn't have any funds for that." And he said, "I can't help that." I think this case was one of the things that led to more support for evacuating people when necessary, and, of course, in those days \$1800 was about a third of my salary. Well, we just didn't have it. So we decided she would stay and have the baby in Kabul, which she did do and she was delivered of the baby. I was there too and helping this Danish midwife. But it had been a long labor, 12 hours or something like that, and then everybody went home. Of course there were no phones in Kabul at that time, and then she started hemorrhaging. She's a nurse, so she told me what to do, get out the medical book, you have to massage the placenta, that's the uterus when it goes limp, otherwise you'd bleed to death. So I managed to get her bleeding stopped without getting in there and massaging the placenta. So that was kind of an experience. And we put Karen, the baby, in a whiskey box we'd lined with something, and then I got rid of the placenta by giving it to the jewey dogs. That's the way you disposed of almost everything on the streets of Kabul at that time. Finally everything did go all right, but it would have been better had she gone out to the Seventh Day Adventist's hospital in Karachi. But this wasn't possible. But I think that incident, and maybe many similar ones, may have gotten the Department to realize that they had to give a little more support to the Foreign Service personnel who were overseas.

And then about that time, when the baby had just been born, Vice President Nixon and his wife came to Kabul. He was described as the highest ranking foreigner to visit since Genghis Khan, which I think is essentially accurate. Again, I saw Mrs. Ward lose her cool. I was talking to Pat

Nixon, and they were taking some pictures of us, and she was really quite nice, and all of a sudden Mrs. Ward came in screaming, "Get out of here, out of here, out of here." And Mrs. Nixon said, to me, "Is she always like that?" And I said, "Well, sometimes, yes." She said, "We'll move on."

WILLIAM W. LEHFELDT
Administrative Assistant, Technical Cooperation Administration
Kabul (1952-1955)

William W. Lehfeldt was born in California on July 13, 1925. He served in the U.S. Army in a specialists role. Upon completion of his tour, Mr. Lehfeldt received a bachelor's degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in 1950. He entered the Foreign Service in 1952. His career included positions in Kabul, Bilbao, Buenos Aires, Cordoba, and Tehran. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 29, 1994.

Q: *Where did you go?*

LEHFELDT: I went first to Kabul, Afghanistan.

Q: *You were there from when to when?*

LEHFELDT: From the end of December 52 till the early part of 55. I was on loan to the aid program.

Q: *Was it call AID at that time?*

LEHFELDT: It was called TCA, Technical Cooperation Administration. The ambassador was Angus Ward of Mukden fame. He didn't quite know how to deal with me because I was technically a Third Secretary, Vice Consul. I had the diplomatic titles but I was out of his control in the AID program, he didn't like it but I was the only administrative help the mission director had. At that point a fellow by the name of Bill Hayes who was an old TVA, Tennessee Valley Authority official, quite able.

The major project we had was something called the Helmand Valley Development Project. There were 2 dams built by the Morrison-Knudsen Company in the southwest part of Afghanistan on the Helmand and Arghandab Rivers. The Helmand Dam and the Kajakai Dam. They were funded to begin with by their Karakul and beryllium and other export earnings amassed during World War II. They also got some loans from the Export-Import Bank and the World Bank. We were charged with providing a technical assistance team to help them administer the whole project. My title was administrative assistant for the Helmand Valley although I was headquartered in Kabul. I did everything for the mission director. I worked on some mining projects, we had health and education projects and so on in all parts of the country. But I did get to Helmand Valley quite often.

Q: *What did you see at that time, we're talking about 52 to 55, what were American interests in Afghanistan?*

LEHFELDT: Well, rather slim. We didn't have any investments to speak of. They had a couple of strategic materials, beryllium being the principal one. That was about it. They had no oil at that time.

The Soviets hadn't really begun to do anything in Afghanistan at that time. The Afghans had applied to be taken in under the Truman Doctrine which was designed to help Greece and Turkey. Of course the Afghans at that time enjoyed bad relations with everybody--with the Iranians, with the Russians, with the Pakistanis and, of course, the Brits who were largely suspected of being the *bêtes noires* behind everything that went wrong for the Afghans.

There were the 3 Afghan-British wars, the Afghans asserted they won all 3 of them. They did win two. The 3rd, one which was at the end of World War I, was a little dubious. At any rate, on Independence Day they would parade all their captured British guns and so forth. It was kind of a rag tag army.

They applied to join a lot of things. They wanted military aid because they were afraid of the Russians. Mr. Truman turned them down flat as did President Eisenhower.

It was a country that was largely tribal and kept together by tribal loyalties. That was the role of the Royal family in those days, to serve as the glue. The King was the son of one of three the brothers who had taken power after a guy that was known as Bacha Saqao (literally Water Boy), who had replaced Amanullah as King. Bacha Saqao was an illiterate but charismatic commoner. Saqaos still brought water around in their goat goatskins in my day, it was alleged to be pure drinking water, but you had to boil it. Bacha Saqao led an uprising that tossed out Amanullah who was trying to emulate Ataturk and modernize Afghanistan, if that can be imagined. According to popular understanding, Amanullah's downfall came because he tried to remove the turbans from the men. He built a number of palatial offices outside of town, in his new capital Darul Mo-alamein. He built the first railroad between the new headquarters for the government and downtown Kabul. You can still see some of the remains of that. It was destroyed when Bacha Saqao took over.

But then the elite leaders of many of the tribes, the Mohammedzai being the principal group and the group from which the royal family came, took power. There were 3 or 4 brothers--Shah Mahmoud, Wazir Ali, --neither of which became king, and Nadir Shah who did indeed become king. I guess maybe just the 3.

At any rate, when I got there King Zahir, the son of Nadir who was assassinated in 1932, who is still alive near Rome, was the King, he was considered a sort of figurehead, but an important one. His uncles, assisted by some first cousins, were running the country; Shah Mahmoud was the Foreign Minister. They were all running it--one was the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Defense Minister.

Later on as the older generation passed on, the cousins of the King became more prominent. Prince Naim became the Foreign Minister succeeding Shah Mahmoud; his half-brother, Prince Daud, became Defense Minister, etc. He later became Prime Minister and finally, president, after deposing his cousin.

It was Prince Daud who decided that since the US wasn't going to help then he would seek to take some limited help from the Russians in terms of military assistance.

I have 2 periods of association with Afghanistan, I was later the Afghan Desk Officer.

Q: Why don't we concentrate on the 52 to 55 period.

LEHFELDT: At that time it was still pretty much the old men who were running the show.

Q: Did you have much contact with the Afghan government?

LEHFELDT: Yes I did, partly because I was the only guy in TCA beside the mission director who knew what to do. I wrote up the budgets for those years, I negotiated agreements with the then Minister of Health (later Prime Minister), the Minister of Education. We funded a number of things. I signed for the US government believe it or not. Yes I did have a good deal to do with the senior people.

This was one of the things that upset Ambassador Ward because here I was, a Third Secretary, doing all of these things.

I also represented the mission twice at Mission Directors conferences because Bill Hayes was off on leave. I went to Istanbul for a meeting with Governor Harold Stassen who had then been named by Eisenhower to take over what became the International Cooperation Administration. I represented the Afghan Mission in Athens the following year, 1954.

It was in the Stassen meeting that I first raised, first raised by any mission I believe, the question of what U.S. might do to counter what was the opening of the Soviet aid efforts around the world. Afghanistan was their first real try at putting on something besides subversion and military threats. They built bakeries, silos and whatnots that everybody could see in Kabul.

I raised the question first in Istanbul in December of 1953. It was considered rather seriously whether or not we should try to compete with similar highly visible projects. The answer was eventually-no. We would not in any way compete. We would keep the level of our aid about where it was and do the things that we thought were most necessary. And that was mostly the AID stance all during those two plus years that I was in Kabul.

It was a very interesting time. Kabul was a remote city. We had power for 6 hours a day. Unpaved streets, one mile or so of paved streets, done by Morrison Knudsen as a demonstration project. It took us 14 or 16 hours to drive up to Kabul Peshawar, Pakistan, which was our only way in and out, including through the Khyber Pass into Pakistan. And much more important to

the defense of Afghanistan, there was another pass the name inside Afghanistan, the Lataband. You'd drive up through creek beds and lots of other things to get there.

Later, this is jumping ahead in time, the U.S. built the highway between Pakistan border and Kabul. It then took 4 hours, 3 and a half hours.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Afghan government? It was tribal and all that.

LEHFELDT: Actually the ministers at the time had been young men who'd been picked prior to World War II for foreign training. Most of them were American educated. The Minister of Education was American educated (Berkeley), the Minister of Health was a doctor whose brother, Dr. Abdul Khayum (PhD, Chicago) lives here in Maryland. He was vice president of Helmand Valley Authority, married an American. Dr. Hakimi, deputy minister of Finance, another American wife. There were a number of senior people of this sort who were either American educated or British educated. So they were reasonably easy to deal with. They had to be because I was not given any language training to speak of before I went there. What I was given was a couple of hours of Tehrani Farsi not Dari Farsi. It was mutually unintelligible in a way because Kabuli Farsi, Afghan Farsi of the day, was I suppose akin to the relation of Quebecoise to modern French. There were a lot of archaics and so on, a lot of mixture of Pushtu and Urdu in the Afghan language.

One of the things that I had to do when I was there was to set-up a staff house for the AID mission, the TCA mission. So I rented a big house with 8 bedrooms, I guess, and staffed it. Of course it had a mud roof. When it rained it leaked. The roofs were held up with long wooden trees, poplar trees, lined and covered mud and straw, and what-not on top. The wood extended right through the chimneys, would catch fire and smoulder for days. Let's say it was an experience.

Q: Your ambassador was one of the characters of the Foreign Service, Angus Ward, who'd been a prisoner in Mukden, in isolated Mukden. By the time he was Chinese before he came out, his language especially. What was your impression. How did he operate? Any stories?

LEHFELDT: He was an unusual man, as you pointed out. When he arrived in Kabul he drove up from Karachi with his International power wagon and his Cadillac.

Q: And his cats?

LEHFELDT: And his cats, ashes of cats, and his wife, Irmgard. She was another one of the genuine characters of the Foreign Service.

Q: Talk a little about her too.

LEHFELDT: I will a little bit.

Ambassador Ward was a very correct gentleman. I learned a good deal from him as a matter of fact. If you put aside his idiosyncrasies he had a lot to teach. He taught me a lot about the niceties of the Foreign Service. How to really be a diplomat, in a way.

He had a lot of funny habits. I remember the first New Year's I was there. His habit was to call on his junior officers early in the morning of New Year's day. Nobody warned me about this. Our house-boy, Ghulam, came in to me at 8:00 on New Year's day and said, "The Ambassador is here."

I said, "You've got to be kidding Ghulam. Go away, leave me alone." So I didn't actually get up and greet him. There was no way I could.

He did this around the whole staff, to everybody's chagrin. The next year however, everybody was prepared for it.

If he had let us know--but that was not his style.

He would get to the office early in the morning and work on his 6 or 7 language dictionary because he spoke Persian and Russian and French and German and I don't know what else. This was his life's love.

His other love--because he had a red hot temper he would work it out by building boxes, packing boxes. He would get the best cedar from the northern part of Afghanistan and have it cleaned down to beautiful planks and build packing boxes. So when he went home, actually when he retired they moved to Spain, he had some absolutely gorgeous wood to use for whatever he wanted to use.

One story about his temper--I wasn't along on this but Leon Poullada certainly was, and Ozzie Day was, and a few others whom you may or may not know--but they went off in his power wagon. They had 2 cars, both four-wheel drive, his personal one and the embassy carryall. The Poulladas, and I've forgotten who else were with them up in the Hazarajat which is in the middle of the country, largely Mongolian in populace, mostly untouched by foreigners. Highways or roads were nonexistent.

They were driving along when they had a flat tire. They stopped to get out the spare and change the tire. As Abdullah, his driver at the time, started unpacking things, he unpacked slower and slower and slower because he had realized he had not packed the spare tire. When it became clear to the Ambassador what had happened, instead of saying anything he got a piece of wood out along with a handful of nails and a hammer. He started hammering nails into the wood, pulling them out, hammering them in, etc., just to control his temper.

The cats of course were another matter. They had several cats from China and from Kenya where he'd been Consul General in Nairobi. He also had ashes of previous cats on the mantle. There were stories, again I was not there, but the following one is true, I know because I know the people.

They were sitting at lunch at the residence. The newly arrived Air Attaché was guest of honor, and was sitting at Mrs. Ward's right. One of the Ward's cats came up and started scratching him, really clawing at him and drawing blood. He was flinching not wanting to say anything.

Finally Mrs. Ward noticed his discomfort and said "Is the cat bothering you, Colonel?"

He said, "Well, yes frankly it is."

"Well, no wonder!" she responded, "You're in his seat!"

They tried their best in many ways but they just didn't have the style to be nice to the staff. They would invite whole embassy over for Thanksgiving. Of course the Marines were young and hungry and unschooled. They piled to the front of the line, causing Mrs. Ward to erupt. Mrs. Ward, early in the year, would buy turkeys to fatten up but then when the time came, she couldn't bear to have them killed. So we had turkeys from the bazaar which were strong and tough. You couldn't make those turkeys tender any way, it was simply not possible.

She insisted on some punctiliousness--gloves and hats, but she had some blind spots. One such story involved the late Julie Byrd, Pratt Byrd's wife. When the Wards arrived she, Julie, sent over a plate of cookies with a welcoming note. They lived across the street from the residence. Mrs. Ward immediately sent them back with a note saying, "We don't accept charity from our staff." At which Julie piled into her hat and gloves and went across the street and gave her a lecture on American neighborliness. To her credit, Mrs. Ward took it to heart.

Q: She was like many of the Foreign Service wives--Mrs. Henderson and others--who really didn't understand, they came from a different

LEHFELDT: They did indeed. They'd never served it turned out, I didn't realize it, but they never served in Washington. She had never lived in the United States except in passing so she really didn't have an understanding of what Americans were all about.

When then-Vice President Nixon came through Kabul in 1953, of course there was a large press contingent with him. The Wards gave a party for the American community, such as it was--some teachers, AID technicians, the embassy and maybe one or two businessmen, the Caterpillar representative perhaps if in town and so on. So they held a dinner. Vice President and Mrs. Nixon were very gracious, nice speech by Mr. Nixon, after which they retired. At this point Mrs. Ward expected everybody else to leave.

But not the newsmen, they were anxious to have a drink. They hadn't had very much to go on, they were at the bar as often as they could be. Mrs. Ward was storming up and down the hallways, muttering rather loudly "What are these people doing here? Why don't they get out?"

She really detested Mrs. Henderson too, she used to call her "that Hungarian whore" or something to that effect.

Q: Mrs. Henderson, was he at that time in Tehran?

LEHFELDT: He was in Tehran at that time. Mrs. Ward always felt that her husband was not treated as well as he should have been.

Q: *I think Mrs. Henderson was Estonian.*

LEHFELDT: Something like that.

Q: *She had a tremendous temper too.*

LEHFELDT: Old Ward for all his other idiosyncrasies, I think he did an adequate job, more than an adequate job in Kabul. He was impressive physically. He could speak Persian very well, he'd served in Tehran. He took credit for cleaning up one of the remains of one of the ill-fated American financial missions to Iran at the end of World War II. I think he really knew how to deal with them.

Q: *So he had entree to the Afghan government.*

LEHFELDT: He rarely ever was able to take anything to them that they wanted to hear.

Q: *It was just not on our list.*

LEHFELDT: That's right. At any rate, it was a very enjoyable couple of years.

Q: *Just one last question on that, Bill. How did we view the Soviets? I mean, at this time from the Kabul point of view, what were you getting? Any emanations from your fellow officers or yourself?*

LEHFELDT: We used to go to the Soviet embassy for parties. They invited everybody as did the Foreign Ministry and other embassies. The British embassy doctor was our doctor and so on down the line. The Soviets were very suspicious and couldn't get to know them very well because they were all locked in their compounds. We only saw a few of them at official functions except for the Ambassador who was a charming fellow.

On the more mundane side, on the CIA side, every once in a while a defector would come through that was handled through Kabul. That always gave Mr. Ward a little bit of a heartburn.

Q: *That wasn't part of the old diplomacy.*

LEHFELDT: I was there when Stalin died. We didn't really know what we were going to do in terms of Soviet-Afghan or Soviet-US relations but that was when the Soviets started, really started doing their aid program.

Q: *Was there any feeling about India and Pakistan at that time?*

LEHFELDT: Oh yes. The Pakistanis were always beastly to the Afghans. They would close the border every once in a while to trade. Everything came through Pakistan, came up through Karachi, Peshawar or through Quetta. There was no real good connection between Iran and Afghanistan at the time; and certainly nothing very easy from the Soviet Union into Afghanistan, except in the northern area. We could buy Russian kerosene and gasoline in 5, 10, or 20, I forget in how many liter tins.

The Pakistanis could control Afghanistan through their border controls. Occasionally the Afghans tried pushing for Pushtunistan which was their claim to northwest frontier provinces. The British and the Pakistanis were widely believed by the Afghans to be conspiring to keep Afghanistan in a state of subjugation.

The Indians were respected as were the Turks. The Turkish Ambassador, whose name was Cemal Yesil, we used to call Kelly Green, was a real party boy, the Iraqis were as well. The diplomatic community was close and small. Everybody was included - especially secretaries because there weren't very many young ladies around. So from a purely social point of view it was great fun.

There was a lot of fun going through the bazaars trying to find leftovers from Amanullah's days. One of my friends, who was the Assistant Air Attaché, bought a couple of baccarat crystal chandeliers from old palaces. He still has one, his ex-wife has another, they're gorgeous. You could buy Russian porcelain. It was an interesting place to be.

ARMIN H. MEYER
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kabul (1955-1957)

Ambassador Armin H. Meyer was born in Indiana on June 19, 1914. He received a master's degree from Capital University and a master's degree from Ohio State University. Ambassador Meyer held positions in Beirut, Baghdad, Kabul, and ambassadorships to Lebanon, Iran, and Japan. He was interviewed by Dayton Mak in 1989.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, after Lebanon I see you went on to Kabul as political officer and deputy chief of mission. Could you give us some ideas about how you happened to go there and what you did when you got there? What did it look like? Who was there?

MEYER: I went there somewhat under protest. When I was assigned to Beirut I thought I had an agreement with the people in NEA and the Department that when my assignment would be concluded, I would go to the War College. Everybody seemed to want to go to the War College and I was planning on it.

But in the spring of 1955 I received a letter from Bob Ryan, who was then the Executive Director for NEA. Bob said, "Armin, we're going to assign you as Deputy Chief of Mission in

Kabul." That floored me. I had filled out the usual forms as to what I wanted for my next assignment and the first choice was National War College. If not, I wanted to go to Vienna or some nice European post. To have this letter come out saying you're going to Kabul sort of stunned me. I wrote a mild protest that I didn't think my health was all that good and so on. But they said, "You are going."

The last four to six months of my tour in Beirut (1954-55), I was Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires. Our ambassador, Raymond Hare, who had followed Ambassador Minor, had been there only a year when he was called back in 1954 to be Director General of the Foreign Service. He suggested to the Department that I serve as Chargé d'Affaires until the new ambassador came. The interim was about six months; so I was actually in charge of the embassy for all that period.

In any case, the letter came and I was asked to go to Afghanistan. I did not, at the time, know the background which, subsequently, was made known to me. Our ambassador in Afghanistan at that time was a celebrated man named Angus Ward. He had become a national household word some years earlier when he was in Mukden, China, and the Chinese held him in house custody. The Scripps Howard papers had launched a major campaign across the country to get him out, branding China as a terrible country. One of his colleagues later conjectured to me how that one incident affected our China policy for a quarter of a century.

After Mukden, Ward was sent as Consul General to Kenya. Scripps Howard again was unhappy. It charged that this great anti-communist warrior was being sent into exile in Kenya. The Eisenhower Administration then decided to send him to Afghanistan, which, of course, is right on the border of the Soviet Union. This blunted accusations that this anti-communist specialist was not being effectively deployed.

Angus Ward was a delightful old codger. He was of Scottish ancestry, born in Canada, married to a Latvian wife. He had become an American Foreign Service officer, spending all his career abroad.

But he had certain other interests in life. His main interest seemed to be traveling. In Kabul, he had a safari wagon, a sort of a overgrown camper. Most of his time was spent traveling around the countryside. The roads weren't all that good, but he enjoyed exploring the geography of the country, taking mileages from point zero to the first bridge outside of Kabul, etc. He was also an outstanding linguist; he did a dictionary on Central Asian languages. So he wasn't in Kabul much of the time.

In the meantime, there had been an incident between Pakistan and Afghanistan during which the Pak flag had been torn down at the embassy in Kabul because of an issue called Pushtunistan. The issue centered on the Afghan contention that their brother Pushtuns, on the Pak side of the border, were not being properly treated. The Afghans would like to have had that territory added to Afghanistan. It's a long story. In any case, it's a horse that any Prime Minister in Afghanistan found useful to ride. Prince Daud, who in 1955 was the dynamic Prime Minister, tried to ride it.

The Paks got very angry. After the flag incident, they closed the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan completely. That meant that landlocked Afghanistan had only one major source of entry, and that was the Soviet Union. Almost everything that was imported, either from Europe, or any place else, had to come through the Soviet Union. The Soviets took advantage of this opportunity and came up with an assistance program. Among other projects, they paved the streets of Kabul and this received quite a bit of publicity in America. The perception was that while the Americans were stuck in the Helmand Valley where we'd had an aid program for some time and it wasn't very successful, the Russians were in Kabul scoring points by paving the streets. Well, it was under those conditions that I was asked to go out there to try to help rescue American prestige, or whatever you might want to call it.

In any case, to Kabul I went. I got along reasonably well with Ambassador Ward, but he wasn't in town very much of the time. The border was closed and my first big job was to work on that. I did so by getting to know, not only Mohammed Maiwandwal, who was the Deputy Foreign Minister, and working through him most frequently, but also seeing Prince Naim, the Foreign Minister, the brother of the Prime Minister. Prince Naim leaned toward the West. His brother, Daud, was more neutralist minded.

In any case, during my first month, I worked closely with them and with the Pakistan Ambassador. We finally came up with what we called a "gentlemen's agreement" on how the border would be opened under certain circumstances. One of the points in that agreement was that the Pakistan flag would be restored over the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul, to which Naim agreed.

About that time, after a month of my dealing with the people involved, Ambassador Ward came back from one of his long travels and went to see Prince Naim. Upon his return, he informed me, "Great news." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Naim has called off the gentlemen's agreement." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, he's unhappy about the flag raising ceremony." I said, "What did you tell him?" He said, "I didn't tell him anything. That's his decision to make."

Well, I was pretty blue about it, having worked a month on the project. When I got home, lo and behold, the Pakistan Ambassador came to see me. He was, literally, in tears. He said his whole career was on the line. He had gotten his government in Karachi to go along with this agreement and now the Afghans were reneging. He was very unhappy. When he left, I told my wife I was going to do something that I had never done before in the Foreign Service (nor ever did afterwards); that is to do something of which my ambassador was not aware.

I went over to Prince Naim's home. In those days, not many foreigners ever saw the inside of an Afghan's home. But I tapped at the door and a servant came. I gave him my card and in about five minutes he came back and said to come in. Naim who was in informal attire came in from gardening. We discussed the whole project. He was very upset about the flag raising ceremony. The Pakistanis had sent out formal invitations to the whole diplomatic corps to appear in white tie to see Prince Naim himself pull up the flag over the Pakistan Embassy. He considered this an unacceptable humiliation and was understandably angry. He said that at least the Pakistanis could have told him what they were going to do, and the Afghans could have arranged a similar ceremony in Pakistan (where the Afghan flag had been torn down). But given the way it was,

Naim said he couldn't go ahead. His people wouldn't understand this humiliation. We had quite a talk.

When he talked about what his people would think, I said, "Look, you and your brother, Daud, control what your people think. That's not a valid excuse. The crucial problem is to get that border open and give yourself an alternative. In the eyes of Washington, you've exercised great statesmanship and I'd like to see that reputation of yours continue for the mutual benefit in the relationship between our two countries."

When I left I didn't know what the answer would be but I felt something had clicked. The next day, Sunday, I was at my office in the Embassy looking at telegrams, which was my usual habit. Unexpectedly, I received a telephone call from the Foreign Ministry. It was the Chief of Protocol, a man named Tarzi. He said he wanted to come over to see me. Well, this was highly unusual. Never did an Afghan come to a foreign embassy. But I said, fine, come on over.

I waited and waited. An hour or so later, I saw his car drive out of the embassy compound. Going out into the reception area, I asked the Marine whether an Afghan had been there named Tarzi. He said, "Oh, yes. He came in the same time Ambassador Ward came in." So I went in and saw Ambassador Ward. I said, "Did I see Tarzi's car go out of here?" And he said, "Yes. You know what? He came to tell us that Prince Naim has changed his mind. He's going to put that flag up on Tuesday." Ambassador Ward never did know the background as to how this came about.

On Tuesday, the ceremony took place. It was a very embarrassing one for Prince Naim. He hardly talked to anybody, but he did talk to me, as though I was the only friend he had in the place. So we did finally get that Pakistan-Afghan border opened. We followed it up with a transit agreement so that Afghanistan wasn't totally dependent on the Russians.

Q: Well, that was a fascinating story. I gather from what you say that the Afghans, both officially and otherwise, are not terribly open and not very friendly to foreigners. Could you expand on that a bit? Did you have any contacts, say, with the local business community, other than Prince Naim and Maiwandwal, and a few others? Incidentally, who was king then? Did you ever see him and what did he do?

MEYER: Well, the king was King Zahir Shah. We would call on him once in awhile on some state occasion. The court protocol was interesting. The whole embassy staff or you and your two or three associates would come in at one end of a large room, and the king would be standing on the other. The rule was that when you came into the room, you made a bow. As one rank, the group walked halfway and made another bow. Then you'd walk up to where the king was and make another bow. You could never turn your back on the king. Going out, the group had to walk backwards. This was ludicrous. Americans are not very good at this kind of thing. I remember Prince Naim himself snickering when he saw us Americans going through this exercise.

King Zahir Shah was not really that active politically. The dominant force was Prince Daud, the Prime Minister. He was the strong man, no question about it. Everybody recognized him as such. His brother, Prince Naim, had some effect on Daud and was quite a good man.

As to your question about Afghans in general, yes, they are a people who have a shell. They've been living for centuries in those mountains. Hindu Kush means Hindu killer. Any foreigners invading the country get thrown out. The Russians have now learned that, just as the British learned it over a hundred years ago. The Afghans may not have many resources or much military power or strength, but they do have their pride and they do value their independence. They suspect foreigners of having ulterior motives. The general attitude is one of resisting foreigners, not becoming too friendly with them. I found that to be true with all levels of Afghan society.

But once you break through that shell, as I did with Prince Naim and with Pashwak and Maiwandwal--we'd have the latter two to play bridge, for example, on Fridays--they are really, really friendly people. But the shell is there and it's not easy to break it. However once you do, you have a trusted friend, indeed.

Q: How about the Afghans among themselves? Are they very tribal and fighting all the time, or do they have some cohesiveness?

MEYER: That's one of the main problems, of course. It is a tribal society, very much so. There are different tribes in various parts of the country; up north are Tajiks and Uzbeks and so on. On one occasion when we were there, Prince Daud called what they term a Loya Jirga. It is their form of a national decision-making body, but rarely used. The issue was "Pushtunistan." All the tribal chieftains and their spear carriers are brought in to Kabul for one big session, theoretically to make decisions, but in fact to ratify top governmental policies. They do have a parliament, but the parliament is tame. The real political power in my days rested with the Prime Minister.

Q: You told us how you would advise someone to deal with the Lebanese, in other words, touch base with every element in the country. How would you deal with the Afghans?

MEYER: Obviously, it is not nearly as easy in Afghanistan as it was in Lebanon to meet with people. The Lebanese society is an open society. In Afghanistan there is just a small group of people which is politically active. It is with those people that one must remain in contact. During my days at the embassy it was very useful to have our various sections, our economic section, our political section, be in touch with some of the lower levels of government. And it was possible to do that. Contacts were maintained with the economic people, the Ministry of Finance people, and in the lower levels of the Foreign Ministry. Dick Davies was the Political Section Chief. He had excellent contacts with people in the foreign office. But all of the information that you're going to get comes through a very small group of people who, in Afghanistan, at least at that time, were in charge of political affairs.

Q: I would assume that the Russians, being neighbors, you had a great deal of tension related to them and what they were doing. Could you go into that a bit?

MEYER: Oh, yes. As I mentioned, when I arrived there the border was closed and it was a field day for the Russians. They were paving the streets. Virtually all of the imports to Afghanistan had to come through Russia. That didn't mean the Russians loved the Afghans, but Daud was a very shrewd fellow. He believed that, living on the border of the Soviet Union, he couldn't thumb

his nose at them. For many years, the Afghans had played the "Great Game," pitting off one imperial power against another.

It's very interesting that, when Eisenhower was President, he initiated what was called the Eisenhower Doctrine. He secured a congressional resolution supporting it and appointed Congressman James Richards to head a delegation to visit Middle Eastern countries to determine whether they'd like to be covered by the Eisenhower Doctrine. The Eisenhower Doctrine simply said that the United States would support any country that was threatened by international communism.

By the time this effort of Eisenhower's was initiated, Angus Ward had been replaced by Ambassador Sheldon Mills. Very few countries stood up and said, "Hey, come on over and see us." The Lebanese did. Foreign Minister Charles Malik and President Chamoun were in trouble and they were the first ones to welcome Richards who carried with him the availability of substantial aid funding. Other countries were more negative. He visited some but with meager results. The amazing thing, about which very few Americans are aware, is that the Afghans invited Richards to come to Afghanistan. It was undoubtedly due to Prince Naim, the Foreign Minister, who had been ambassador in Washington and was more oriented toward Western interests than was his brother, who tried to maintain a strict neutrality and was more inclined to play the "Great Game."

In any case, Congressman Richards came to Kabul while I was there. Before going to see Prime Minister Daud, we had a meeting which included Congressman Richards and his State Department advisors, Bill Burdett and Jack Jernegan, as well as Ambassador Mills and his key embassy advisors. During that briefing both the State Department officials said, "Look, there's no way that we can commit American prestige to Afghanistan. We're already overextended by American commitments to Iran. We cannot tell the Afghans we'll support them if they get attacked by the Russians or by international communism." Congressman Richards, with his South Carolina drawl, came forth with the comment, "If I'd a known I couldn't get them covered by the Eisenhower Doctrine, I wouldn't a come here."

Anyhow, we went to see Daud. Daud, the shrewd game player, did not want to make any clear commitments either. So it was a very interesting discussion. We produced a communique, which Pashwak and I worked out. Pashwak was one of the chief aides in the Foreign Ministry and a very dynamic fellow who sided more with Daud than Naim. He kept insisting on the word "neutrality." I wasn't too happy about it, but the word was incorporated. In the end, it was probably better that way. When the Eisenhower Doctrine mission left, nobody knew whether Afghanistan was committed or not committed, or whether America was committed or not committed. Sometimes in diplomacy it's better to leave answers fuzzy, and we left that one fuzzy, indeed. But it is very interesting that the Afghans did want to be associated with the Eisenhower Doctrine, however indirectly.

In general, the Russians were very active. Bulganin and Khrushchev made a visit to India and stopped in Afghanistan on the way back. We all figured that they would leave some goodies behind. Our own aid program, which was about \$25 million a year, was invested primarily in the

Helmand Valley, which was an albatross around our neck for many years. Facetiously, I proposed a theory that our aid would be \$50 million less whatever they got from the Soviets.

On the morning of the Bulganin-Khrushchev departure, I was listening to Moscow radio and heard the astonishing news that the Soviet leaders were leaving \$100 million in aid to Afghanistan. The diplomatic corps at the airport to say good-bye had not heard Moscow radio and my report thereof created quite a stir. It is ironic that the roads built pursuant to this \$100 million aid package, and the Salang Pass tunnel would three decades later be utilized by Russian forces as they retreated from an ill-fated sojourn in Afghanistan.

What concerned us most about the huge aid program which Bulganin and Khrushchev bequeathed the Afghans was the inclusion of a component for the military training of the Afghans in the USSR. Our topnotch economic section chief, Leon Poullada, coined the theme which we often conveyed, in one form or another, to Daud and his closest advisors, "Be careful; you may think you can ride the tiger but you must be sure you will not wind up inside." Of course, Daud and his people ignored these warnings as typical American propaganda. In retrospect, these concerns were clairvoyant. It was the very officers who were trained in Moscow who supported Daud when in 1973 he overthrew the regime of his cousin King Zahir Shah but, more importantly, they were the ones who later staged the bloody Communist revolution against Daud himself. They dispatched Daud and the entire ruling family as the Leninists had obliterated the Romanovs; i.e., complete extinction of Daud, Naim and their families. Only King Zahir Shah survived because he was already in exile in Rome, thanks to Daud's earlier revolution against him.

After the Bulganin-Khrushchev departure a debate started as to the appropriate American response. Do we try to compete? Do we pull out? Leon Poullada, for example, said, "Why should we furnish a house that's mortgaged to somebody else?" We finally decided on what we called the beachhead theory. We would maintain our position in Afghanistan with a small amount of new aid. Subsequently, a mission came out to discuss what we might do. In discussions with Prince Daud and his people, we came up with a package which included helping Afghanistan to improve its internal Ariana Airline. The package included a little more work on the Helmand Valley and also some beefing up of Afghan airports.

What we were not happy about was the big airport at Kandahar. A Polish national who was from ICAO advising the Afghan Government strongly urged Daud to build up Kandahar Airport. The ICAO man predicted planes flying from the Mediterranean to India would stop and would put Afghanistan on the map. Daud bought that idea and insisted on building that airport. None of us wanted it, but gradually went along with five or six million dollars for that project, which eventually became a white elephant. In any case, the package that we developed totaled about \$15 million.

When we finally announced it, I happened to meet Soviet Ambassador Degtyar at a cocktail party. He was a very kindly Ukrainian fellow whom I had gotten to know quite well. Teasing him, I said, "For many years, if you did something, there would be somebody on the other side of Afghanistan that would do something. If they did something, you would react on your side. Now you pumped \$100 million into Afghanistan with your aid program. We've responded with \$15

million worth of aid. You put in another \$100 million and we'll put in another \$15 million. I think, at this game, we're ahead of you."

Ambassador Degtyar smiled and said, "Well, it's up to the Afghans to make the decision." Then, he added, "You wouldn't like it, if we did things like you're doing in Afghanistan, if we did them down in Mexico." The old codger's comment was not without substance.

The Soviets had a number two man at the embassy, Spitsky, who was obviously KGB. In 1956, the Soviets organized a celebration marking the 35th anniversary of the Soviet-Afghan treaty of 1921. Via that treaty, Afghanistan became one of the first countries to recognize the Soviet Union. The Soviets went all out in celebrating this anniversary, heralded it well in advance. The highlight was a massive reception at the Soviet Embassy. At that occasion, when I encountered Spitsky, I needled him, "It is an honor to be in Afghanistan for this great occasion. However, I find one curious anomaly. During all this celebrating, no one has actually printed the text of the treaty that is being commemorated." He was taken aback when I said, "You know, Article 8 of that treaty is particularly interesting." He glowered, "It seems that you've been doing some studying. We can do some studying, too."

Article 8 of the 1921 Soviet-Afghan treaty says that the Soviet Union will forever honor the independence of the central Asian Kingdoms of Bukhara and Khiva. The two kingdoms were, in fact, being absorbed by the USSR when the treaty was signed. I told Spitsky, "You know, since your other preoccupations precluded your printing the text, perhaps our USIS could find occasion to help you by printing it." He got angry. He growled, "We can take care of ourselves and we can take care of you, too, if we have to." He was very bitter about the whole thing.

Q: I should think so. That's fascinating. Tell me, at this particular time, was this the time of the Baghdad Pact or was that before the Baghdad Pact idea came up?

MEYER: The Baghdad Pact was earlier than that, as I recall. 1954 was when the Baghdad Pact really got organized.

Q: But there was no idea of their joining that?

MEYER: No, there wasn't, except that from time to time, I would mention to Prince Naim that there was an old Saadabad Pact that dated back to the time of Persia's Reza Shah (1937). It linked Persia, Turkey, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It never had been canceled. In effect, it still could be considered a treaty in force. But it was never revived.

The Afghans have great respect for the Turks. During my tour there one of my major projects was to get the Prime Minister of Turkey, Adnan Menderes, a very dynamic leader, to visit Afghanistan. I pushed this particularly after we got the Pakistan border open. Meanwhile, I had visited Karachi where Ambassador Hildreth who was close to President Mirza cooperated effectively in persuading Mirza to visit Afghanistan. Our aim was to refurbish Afghanistan's traditional ties with both Pakistan and Turkey.

Menderes did come to Kabul for a highly successful visit. During the occasion, Prince Naim confided to me at the main reception, "We know who is responsible for arranging all this." He was very pleased to have the Turks come and show the Afghan people they had other friends besides the Soviets.

In the meantime, Mirza, himself, came up. My wife and I had gone to Karachi via our air attaché plane to pick up some supplies. The purpose was not to meet with President Mirza. When talking about the Afghan situation Ambassador Hildreth said, "The President told me he wants to see you while you're here." Remonstrating that I had not come (remember, I was only DCM) for any political discussions, Hildreth said, "When the President makes such a request, it is a command performance." So the three of us--President Mirza, Ambassador Hildreth, and I--had drinks for an hour or two on the terrace of the Presidential palace. We talked about Afghanistan and I told Mirza how useful it would be if he felt it possible to make a Kabul visit. A leader of great confidence, Mirza explained how he'd been on the frontier where he first got to know Daud. Sure, he'd be glad to come up. So he did come. This was after the border was open. The Paks put on a good show in coming up there. The only trouble was that Daud slipped in his bathtub in preparation for a dinner one night and was out of commission. But, be that as it may, Mirza and Daud visited each other in Daud's bedroom. In effect, they made peace between the two countries, and plans for a much more productive relationship.

Q: Daud, as I remember, was about your size, wasn't he, except skinny?

MEYER: He was shorter than I am.

Q: Was he short?

MEYER: Oh, yes.

Q: I thought he was very tall.

MEYER: Oh, no. He was short. I'd say about 5'8". Naim was my size, about 6 feet.

Q: The Afghans, I gather, are basically Moslem. Did they have any thoughts at all or any emotions about the Arab-Israel problem while you were there?

MEYER: Not really too much. Obviously, being Moslems, they were on the side of the Arabs, but there was no fanaticism on that subject, no.

Q: They didn't storm our embassy or anything?

MEYER: No. As a matter of fact, it was at that time that the Suez Canal issue was active. The Egyptian Ambassador was the only one trying to stir up interest. When Dulles set up his Suez Canal Users Association, the Egyptian Ambassador had all of Kabul talking about the Suez Canal Losers Association.

RICHARD N. VIETS
Junior Officer Trainee, USIA
Kabul (1955-1957)

Ambassador Richard N. Viets was born in 1930 in Vermont. He served in the U.S. Army and attended Georgetown University and Harvard University. He joined USIA in 1955 and served in Afghanistan, Tunisia and after a break reentered the Foreign Service in 1962 serving in Japan, India, Romania, Israel and was ambassador to Tanzania and Jordan. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy 1990-1992.

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

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

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

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

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

I spent a little over a year in Tunis.

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

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

that time of USIA. I had the advantage of being the youngest person on that Embassy staff and I was also a bachelor. So I was the clean up hitter of the staff and always the guy who was available to do what nobody else wanted to tend to.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes, we were extremely concerned at that point about Soviet influence in Afghanistan. In retrospect, one needed much more of an historical understanding of the region than it seemed to me we were demonstrating in those days. You recall it was the era of the Baghdad Pact. I remember great efforts being made to sign up everybody along the so-called "northern periphery" to the Baghdad Pact. The Afghans would have nothing to do with it, of course.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In any case we went down to the port in Karachi...the Ward family had a collection of three or four beautiful cats. I am sorry I don't recall whether they were Russian, Siamese or what. I am not a cat fancier. But they were gorgeous creatures. I recall that the pouch room at the Embassy

had been raided by the Ambassador and he had taken away two large sea pouches and had cut air holes in them. Those bags had leather handles on them for easy carrying. Two cats were put into each bag. I was assigned the task as we got out of the cars at the port of carrying these bags on board.

The gangway was a rather rickety affair, I remember, and it swung back and forth. I was directly behind Mrs. Ward who was of a certain age and size as I suggested earlier and I recall hanging the two sea bags over the sides of the gangway and trying to use my elbows to steady poor Mrs. Ward who was having difficulty climbing the gangway. The Ambassador was right behind me and about halfway up as we were swinging back and forth and the cats are meowing and Mrs. Ward was complaining, he roared at me, "God damn it, Viets, never mind my wife watch those cats!"

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

RICHARD TOWNSEND DAVIES
Political Officer
Kabul (1955-1958)

Mr. Davies entered the Foreign Service in 1947. He served in numerous posts including Warsaw, Moscow, Paris and Calcutta. He was interviewed by Peter Jessup in 1979.

DAVIES: But we did this for about a year and a half, and then out of the blue I got a letter from somebody in the Personnel Office in the State Department which said that I was being transferred to Afghanistan.

Q: *Hmmm! From Paris.*

DAVIES: From Paris. Actually we had some very good friends there - Roy and Barbara Percival - who had served in Afghanistan earlier and had enjoyed it thoroughly, so this didn't worry us too much. But our second child was just about to be born. This would have been along in February or March - maybe April, I can't remember - and this baby was due in a couple of months.

Q: *Kabul isn't the best place to have a baby.*

DAVIES: No, I would say not. Ha! And there was just no way I was going to take my wife... We had this nearly two year old boy, and she was seven months pregnant, or something like that, and I just said no way.

So I took this letter over to Glenn Wolfe, who was the administrative officer of USRO, and so far as I am concerned really a great guy, you know. In the first place he arranged for the Meehans and us to get Embassy housing there, which initially we were told we were not eligible for, because we were working for an international organization, but as far as we were concerned it

was just another assignment, and why shouldn't we be eligible for Embassy housing. So he worked that out.

Then when this happened, naturally I turned to him. I took it (the letter) over to him and said, "Glenn, you know, I..."

Well, he said, "Of course they can't do this. You are supposed to be there for another six months. They don't seem to realize it. You are there under a bilateral agreement with NATO, and before we can pull you out we have to put somebody else in to replace you."

So he telephoned people in Washington. He knew the right people to call. I said, "I am perfectly prepared to go, I am not kicking at all, I'd like to go to Afghanistan. But I want to wait until this baby is born. I don't want to be out there three thousand miles away in a very inaccessible place. Suppose something goes wrong? There is no indication that anything will, but..."

So he fixed it up. It was agreed that I could wait until after the baby was born, which I did, and then my wife would follow in a couple of months with the two children.

Q: He either earlier or later was the sort of administrative chief for John McCloy in Germany.

DAVIES: Earlier, and he of course had become very controversial there because he was accused of having been profligate in building all those apartment houses, which of course you know...the kind of petty...

It was one of the great things that any American administrative officer could have done. We are still using those apartment houses. The value of them now is fantastic.

Q: Yes, in Frankfurt and Bonn.

DAVIES: In Frankfurt and Bonn. You know there was nothing in Bonn, there was no place to live. And the building that he did there was very foresighted, and he did it at a time when it was dirt cheap. The U.S. Government got these properties and did the building for practically nothing, and you know they amortized themselves in a matter of five or ten years, and we had 20 years or whatever of a kind of gravy.

But he was very controversial in those days. However, all I can say is that he was not only an able man, but he was a man who saw the problem - all you had to do is tell him. He picked up the phone, he solved it, and no nonsense, to use a polite word. He was a great guy. He is still around.

Q: Really?

DAVIES: Oh, yes. I don't know what he is doing now.

Q: Did you know that when the child was born...

Was Angus Ward appointed later?

DAVIES: No, he was there, and I was fully aware of all his back and forth business, the business in Mukden (China), and how he came back, the campaign, and the Scripps Howard...

Q: Hadn't he gone to Nairobi?

DAVIES: He had gone to Nairobi. But as a result of Roy Howard's campaign - you know Roy Howard said, "This is an ignoble assignment for this great fighter."

Q: I didn't know that Scripps Howard...

DAVIES: Oh yes, oh yes. I don't know where he'd known Roy Howard, but he was very close to Roy Howard. Roy Howard depicted him as a hero.

Q: Good!

DAVIES: He'd been in prison in Mukden and treated...and so forth.

Q: He was completely out of touch, he was something like the hostages in Teheran now.

DAVIES: Yes, yes. Then he was sent to Nairobi, and Angus Ward didn't take kindly to that. He felt he should have an embassy, and Roy Howard conducted this campaign, and eventually I think not only primarily but exclusively as a result of that campaign he was appointed Ambassador in Kabul, and he had been there at least a year I guess when we arrived, maybe longer than that.

I must have gotten to Afghanistan some time in July - in early July - and then my wife got there in September with the children.

Prince Daoud was the Prime Minister, and his younger brother Prince Nazim was the Foreign Minister. The country was a dictatorship under Prince Daoud, very tightly controlled.

Q: Was there much Russian influence?

DAVIES: No, that was just beginning. That was why I was sent there. The whole rationale was, we need somebody who has had Soviet experience there because there is this threat or danger now.

Shortly after I got there, as I remember it, in the fall - or in December perhaps - of 1955, Bulganin and Khrushchev visited there. I think it was after I got there, but I can't remember now, isn't that funny?

Q: For example was the Soviet Ambassador a very able man?

DAVIES: No, the Soviet Ambassador...he was a man named Degtyar. I would say he was able, he was quite a capable person, but he really knew nothing about the country and was not interested.

After Ambassador Ward left - retired - Sheldon T. Mills came, Shelly Mills, who was a South Asian hand. He had served in Delhi and he'd been in other places too, Rumania among others.

Well, Shelly Mills arrived. He was an enthusiast for language study, despite the fact that he had really very little aptitude for learning languages. He had learned French and knew it very well, and spoke it quite fluently but very ungrammatically with a strong and unmistakable American accent, but he could make himself well understood. He had learned Rumanian in much the same way, and he believed that wherever you were you should learn the language, and he started as soon as he got there to study Farsi, the Persian which is the lingua franca.

Q: Is Farsi the same as in Teheran?

DAVIES: Well, it's mutually intelligible, but it's a different dialect. Dari it's called. He began studying it. He never really mastered it, but he learned some phrases. He wasn't trying to master it, he didn't need to master it. And in those years we didn't have much in the way of social relationships with the Russians. But I got to know some of the people there at their Embassy. I met the Ambassador at a cocktail party once, at a reception of some sort. I saw Ambassador Degtyar across the room, and said to Ambassador Mills, "There is the Soviet Ambassador. Would you like to meet him?"

"Oh, yes, great. Be delighted to meet him."

So we went over. I don't know how much English Deytgar spoke, but anyhow I translated and interpreted for him. There was some small talk, and then Shelly said, "Are you studying Farsi?" And Ambassador Deytgar looked absolutely non-plussed and said, "No, why?"

And I said, "Well, you know, it's the language here, and in order to understand the culture..."

"Oh, my goodness," - Deytgar said - "No, nooooo! If I learn the language I'll have to come back here again!" (laughter)

All he wanted to do was get out of there. He regarded it as a most backward country, and of course by comparison even with the Soviet Union it was backward, so he just wanted to get out of there. He hated the place, and he made no bones of the fact that there were no Central Asians in their Embassy. They had had one there, and they had there - I think he was still there when I got there - a man from Tajikistan, and there are Tajiks in Afghanistan. They had sent this man as cultural attaché.

Q: To do...

DAVIES: Right. Well, he began to go to the Mosque on Friday, and we all thought, oh how clever, he's blending right into the landscape, and this will convince the Afghans that religion is

not prohibited. But the next thing we knew he disappeared from the scene, so we asked and (were told) that well, no, he was just here temporarily.

Well, that was not the case at all, it was quite clear. There was a big cocktail party to introduce him, "Our cultural attaché, he speaks Persian," and all of this. And eventually the word sort of seeped around that well, yes, he is going to the Mosque, and he kind of liked that, he liked the idea of going to the Mosque, he hadn't been able to do that back home. So I guess they began to be a little worried as to who was converting whom, so they got him out of there in a hurry, and the Afghans were very keen to seize upon this as a why-are-they-afraid, you know.

Well the Soviets were ham-handed, but they were doing things. They provided the equipment, and the technical assistance. They were paving the streets in Kabul, which was the first time any streets were paved in the country, and they built a flour mill there, a bakery - a big flour mill-bakery complex, which was the first modern food processing installation in the country, and they were helping the Afghans build roads in the North, and we of course were helping them in the South. There was a sort of de facto division. Along the line of the Hindu Kush (mountain range) they were working primarily in the North, although south of the Hindu Kush, in Kabul, they built this bakery complex and paved the roads. And they were also working on Kabul Airport, laying that out, putting in the runways.

The UN, the ICAO, had a mission there under the supervision of which this was being done and the airport was being constructed. It was headed by a Pole, Colonel Waclaw Makowski, a great man, who had graduated from the Kiev Polytechnic Institute just around the time of the First World War. The Kiev Polytechnic Institute was one of the premier pioneering schools in aeronautics in the world. Igor Sikorsky, the man who developed the helicopter, was educated there, as well as many other pioneer aviators and designers.

Q: The early American aeronautical industry was quite populated with Russians: designer Alexander Kartveli, Boris Sergievsky. A whole bunch of them.

DAVIES: That's right. Well, many of these people - I can't say all of them, but many of them - had gone to the Kiev Polytechnic according to my good friend Colonel Makowski, and he had gone there and became a pilot as a result of going there. Then when the War broke out - I guess he was pretty young - he ended up as a pilot, I think, for the Russian forces, and when Russia dropped out of the war then he went to Poland and became one of the first Polish military aviators, and fought side by side with the American Squadron in the Kosciuszki Squadron in the Polish-Soviet War. Some of our people from the Lafayette Squadron who weren't ready to...

Q: I have a book on that downstairs. I won't find it now, but it has all the names of all those people...

DAVIES: About the Kosciuszki Squadron?

Q: Yes.

DAVIES: Fantastic. And you know some of those guys, their graves are still in Lemberg, or Lwow as it's now called. Now it's in the Soviet Union, but it was in Poland in the interwar years, and their graves were honored very ceremonially every year by the grateful Poles with whom they had fought in the Polish-Soviet War. These are things that tend to get forgotten, unfortunately.

At any rate Colonel Wakowski was an aviator there, and he told the story of how one day he was flying over or near Lwow - LWOW - during that war, and he said, "Of course the planes we had we just held them together by baling wire, and we had water cooled machine guns that you really had to be careful that you didn't shoot your propeller off, because they weren't synchronized too well, and most of the time it was better to use a shotgun from the cockpit."

And there was this other plane that came, a Soviet plane, equally ramshackle, and they made a few passes at each other, but couldn't really do much damage to each other, and finally the engagement was broken off, and the Soviet pilot waved, and he waved, and they went back home.

Well, then after the war he became the first managing director of the Polish civil airline, LOT, and of course for many years the Poles had no relations with the Soviets. In fact one of the first contacts they had was in the field of civil aviation.

Eventually Colonel Makowski as the managing director went to Moscow to negotiate the first civil air agreement between the two sides. Being a Pole from the Ukraine he spoke Russian naturally, and having been educated at the Kiev Polytechnic he spoke Russian naturally.

And he arrived in Moscow, and they said General so-and-so will meet you first thing in the morning.

Well, they told Colonel Makowski that the negotiations would begin the next morning. His colleagues, his Polish hosts in the Embassy in Moscow warned him how long this was going to take, you know, that it was like pulling teeth to negotiate with these people, and you'd better settle down here for a long stay. It may take you several months, certainly weeks.

Well, Makowski was feeling none too happy about that, because he'd hoped that he could wind it up and get out of there in a reasonable period of time.

The next morning they took him to the Ministry of Civil Aviation. The whole Ministry was really being run by the military at that time - where this General was to meet him, and they took him into a conference room to await the arrival of the Soviet Delegation, and finally the Delegation came, rather glum-looking gentlemen, and they shook hands all around and lined up on opposite sides of the table and...

Q: Did he have a staff or was he alone?

DAVIES: Who, Makowski? No, he had some people with him, experts, the usual thing, a lawyer, a couple of technical people.

Then the Soviet general came in - the Soviet Air Force general - and was introduced to Makowski, and they looked at each other, Makowski looked at him, and the General looked at Makowski, and finally the General said, "You, you! Why, we met above Lwow in 1920."

And Makowski said, "I wondered why your face was so familiar." (hearty laughter and cross talk)

Q: *The Red Baron?*

DAVIES: You are the one. (laughs) So that of course in typical Slavic fashion, the old bear hug, and the General said, "Where is the vodka?" "Get the vodka."

So they began drinking toasts, and he said that started the rapidity of the negotiations on both the Soviet and the Polish side, because he and this General just got along famously, they were both from the same generation, they had had many common experiences, or many kinds of experiences in common, and this bond of having met and not killed each other was such that there was no problem in working out the differences between the two sides rapidly.

I met Colonel Makowski shortly after I got there to Kabul, and he said, "Now, Davies, you know Poles and you know Russians a little bit, and I know Americans," because during the Second World War he ended up as Quartermaster of the Polish pilots who were in the RAF, who did provide... I know there is a lot of romantic nonsense talked about this business, but at a crucial moment, when the British lacked not airplanes but trained pilots, these people arrived in Britain, and they were pilots without planes. They were trained pilots and they were put into the Spitfires for which there were not yet enough trained British pilots. And of course their losses were terrible during the Battle of Britain. But whether one considers that they provided a crucial, a vital margin or not...they did, they were an extremely important accretion on the Allied side at a critical moment in the war.

Q: *They had a couple of aces in the RAF.*

DAVIES: They did indeed, yes.

Q: *Witold Urbanowicz.*

DAVIES: That's right, that's right. He became a general.

Q: *And Boleslav Gladych.*

DAVIES: Yes, by golly.

Q: *Mike Gladych.*

DAVIES: Yes. Did you know these...

Q: *Oh I used to do some articles on aces.*

DAVIES: Oh, terrific. Well, I would never have known that. Urbanowicz...I recognize the name, but Gladych I didn't know. Hmmm. Gladych.

Well, anyhow, he was there. By this time, his flying days were over, but he was quartermaster of the Poles in the RAF, and of course he never went back to Poland. Being of the Polish former people he decided not to go back.

He's been back since. He was back just recently before the 50th anniversary - was it the 50th? - of the founding of the Polish civil airline, last year or this year.

There were a number of small airlines in 1929. They were all combined into a major airline, the National Airline. And he was invited back because, as the current managing director of the Polish Airline told me when I asked him if he knew Colonel Makowski, he said to me, "Mr Ambassador, we are all Colonel Makowski's pupils."

Q: *That's a nice compliment.*

DAVIES: Which of course they are. And he's been back several times. But in those years it was impossible for him to go back. So if you asked Colonel Makowski then...in fact, if you ask him now, "Colonel Makowski, what is your nationality?" he will say, "I am Canadian by passport, Polish by blood, and Scotch by absorption." (laughter) Wonderful man.

Well, he said to me, "What we want to do here - we have a situation where the Americans and the Russians aren't speaking to each other, which is silly. You have to speak to people."

Q: *Which is a basic precept...*

DAVIES: A propos of George Kennan's contention - and it is a rather dogmatic contention - that you cannot do business with Stalin, Makowski said, "You've got to speak to people, you have to talk about these things."

And he said, "What I want is, I want the Americans to put the electronics into Kabul Airport. There's no point..."

He said, "We've got the Russians, and they are going to do the runways. They are fine with the asphalt and the rollers. It's heavy work, and they are heavy people, and they can do that. But the Americans have the radio equipment and the electronics, and I want them to put that in there, so that we really will have a decent guidance system, because it is a tricky airport. You go very high up, and then you come down, you come down into this little valley."

Q: *What altitude is it?*

DAVIES: Kabul is roughly the same altitude as Denver, but it is surrounded. Whereas in Denver you have the mountains to the West, in Kabul you are really in a bowl, and you come up,

usually, through a valley, through a pass. And in those days, at any rate, the planes actually flew in through the pass, not over the pass. And navigating was a little tricky. You wanted to make sure you got the right direction and everything like that.

So Colonel Makowski said, "Well, what about this?"

I said, "Well, I don't see why..." because we had an AID team, an AID mission there.

And he said, "What I want to do is call a meeting, and these guys aren't talking to each other."

He said, "They don't have to talk to each other. I don't care. They could talk to me. Each side can talk to me."

And then what later came to be called proximity negotiations or discussions...

He said, "Will you help arrange it?"

I said sure, I couldn't agree more. I said, "This, you know, makes sense. They are all working on the same project. Just different parts of it."

So without any official foofaraw I spoke with the people at the AID mission, who didn't care, and the Ambassador - Ambassador Mills - and he said, "Sure, this makes sense. The only thing is, you know, I mean we have no objections, but we don't want to be officially connected with it. So let the Colonel get the people together."

And we told the guy who was the head of the American team there, "You know, you are working for the Colonel." Which indeed he was.

So the Colonel convoked this meeting of Russians and Americans. He had the Russians on one side and the Americans on the other. And then he said, "You know, I don't care how we do it, but we are going to work together. And if you want to pass messages through me, that's fine. Or if you want to talk directly together, I can interpret for you. And we'll work this out." And indeed they did work it out.

The airfield was completed, and the radio equipment was installed, and everything went very smoothly from there on, under his very able supervision. He, of course, designed and oversaw the construction of airports throughout that part of the world: in Kabul, in Kathmandu, in various places in Burma and India, Malaysia, Ceylon. He was ICAO's man for that part of the world. He is retired now in Spain.

Q: Sounds like quite a remarkable individual.

DAVIES: Oh, he is another guy, you know. I mean...

And I said to him, "I hope you are going to write your memoirs." He said, "Oh I don't have any time to write memoirs."

Oh, he is kept busy. But he is a man whose life has spanned the century so far as we've gone, and what a remarkable progression from the Ukraine. He's made a real contribution. No matter what one says about the way things have turned out or are turning out, he did some very practical and useful things, and he made an enormous impression on me, as I have indicated. He said, "You have to talk. Sure, the Russians; don't tell me what they are. I know what they are, I know how they are. But look, they are human beings, and you gotta talk with them. And you'll find some things if you keep talking. Keep talking. They are not ten feet tall, also they are not three feet tall, they are somewhere in between, and you've got to find out what their strengths and weaknesses are, and don't let them take advantage of you, but don't think that you can take advantage of them either."

Well, it's not quite so simple perhaps as building an airport. It's a lot more complicated of course in the field of international affairs.

Well, we spent a very interesting three years there.

Q: Three years?

DAVIES: Yes, three years in Kabul. For me it was the best post.

Q: How many people were in the Embassy?

DAVIES: The Embassy was very large then. I suppose there were...there must have been 100 Americans in the AID mission, and in the Chancery and the USIA perhaps maybe 35 to 40 officers. So principals maybe 150 American principals, and of course families, a very substantial American colony in addition to the Embassy and the AID mission, the Asia Foundation, and a very substantial foreign colony all told.

Q: Are the Afghans somewhat like Ethiopians in that they are pretty darned aloof?

DAVIES: No, I don't think they are aloof. They are cautious, they are concerned... Of course as I say it was an authoritarian regime, the secret police were very active, Prince Daoud kept a tight hand on the thing. But even so some progress was being made. He did take the women out of purdah, which... Oh I don't know, one begins to have mixed feelings about this, but I still think it's a progressive step. Well, it's obviously a progressive step.

Q: But there aren't many Afghan emigres.

DAVIES: Oh, there are quite a few.

Q: Are there?

DAVIES: Oh, yes, oh, yes, a lot in this country.

Q: I didn't know.

DAVIES: We sent thousands of Afghans here as students.

Q: Oh! I didn't know that.

DAVIES: Yes, throughout the '50s and '60s and '70s, and a great many of them married and settled down here, a great many of them married and took their wives back there. That didn't work out so well in many cases, although some of these guys - at least some of the ones who were running the Government there - were married to American girls.

Q: Was Taraki anybody when you were there?

DAVIES: No, he was not. It was only later that he came to work for the Embassy. Unfortunately the people I knew I don't know of. I know one of them, according to what one reads, has been killed in prison, and another I just hope and I pray that he is still alive - a wonderful man.

A lot of very fine people, and I just hope that some of them survive this ordeal. It's unlikely that they will, but...

Q: Would you say that the present Soviet Ambassador would be a much more high pressure type with the real Vietnam-type thing that he is running?

DAVIES: Well, the previous Soviet Ambassador was taken out of there because he was the man who tried to ensure that Taraki would be the unchallenged leader. You know they were trying to force Hafizullah Amin, who was a product of Columbia University's Teachers College - he was sent there under the AID mission program, and he is one of the most brutal of the leaders, the now leader - the plan was to force him out because he was so dogmatic and unyielding, and Taraki then being unchallenged would broaden the base of the Government and include for example the man I mentioned, Nur Ahmed Etemadi, who was Prime Minister under the King for a while and was imprisoned, but now I understand - they say at any rate - he has been killed in prison. He was one of the two people there whom I knew and I was closest to, and a very fine man. I spent the better part of three weeks traveling around Afghanistan in a jeep with him and the then police chief of Kabul, Ataullah Azimi, looking for young Peter G. Winant. Of course we didn't find Peter Winant, but I got to know both of them very well during that trip.

Q: Was Peter Winant the son of John G. Winant?

DAVIES: No, the nephew of John G. Winant. His father...I can't remember now, but I think he must have been a younger brother of John G. Winant - worked for the Agency, for the CIA.

Peter graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary - yes, I think he did graduate - with a degree of Bachelor of Divinity and was religiously very much of a mystic.

He then went to study in Scotland. Of course, Princeton Theological Seminary being Presbyterian he went to the fount. He went to Edinburgh, and from Edinburgh he got on a

bicycle and he bicycled to India, and he came through Kabul in what would have been the spring of 1954, I think, or the summer of 1954 - quite a feat from Edinburgh on a bicycle.

We had in Kabul a Protestant - Presbyterian - minister, the Reverend Christy Wilson, who was chaplain to the Protestant community. Christy Wilson I think was two or three classes ahead of Peter Winant, but at any rate they knew each other, and Peter stayed with Christy. Peter went right from the seminary...I don't know... At any rate he wasn't looking for a living, he was trying to sort of find himself at the beginning of this period when young people try to find themselves, and he went to India to an Ashram, and somewhere in India - not at the Ashram, I don't think - he met a beautiful Swedish girl, Gunnel Gummeson, just gorgeous. I only saw photographs of her - a typical Swedish beauty, ash blond, blue eyes, statuesque.

Now Gunnel, who had been brought to India whether by an Indian diplomat or by a wealthy Indian who had been in Sweden, was a trained teacher, and she had been hired as the nursemaid for this Indian's children, or perhaps as a nanny, and she wanted to see India. She was interested, so she went to India, and she and Peter met there. Peter himself was as handsome, tall, rangy, and athletic, a young man as you can imagine, and he quite obviously fell in love with her. She was seeking also I think - she came to India with some mystical ideas or something, I don't know.

But she had got a letter from her parents. She came from I would say the lower middle class, perhaps even a family that was just getting up into the middle class. She had had a good education, but her parents were working people really. But her father wrote to her that there was a job for her. This was the following year. I believe it was 1955, maybe 1956, I can't remember now. Must have been 1956, but I can't remember.

Well, anyway he wrote to her that there was a job for her back in Sweden teaching school. She had taken this other job because she'd signed up but there were no jobs. Now there was a job. Well, now she became very interested: she wanted to go back and take that job. But she had not enough money to get back in time. I guess the only way was to take an Italian ship in Bombay, and I don't know whether it was too expensive or...

And Peter Winant said to her, "Well, we'll hitchhike back." And she said, "Hitchhike?"

He said, "Oh, there's no problem. I came all the way. We won't even spend any money, because the people are very hospitable, and we'll say that we are just hitchhiking."

Well, I don't really know what was in their minds - or rather what was in his mind, because it was he who had this idea - but they came to Kabul. Again they stayed with Christy Wilson. I think Christy was a little appalled to find that these two young people were traveling together in that fashion.

Q: It wasn't the '70s.

DAVIES: No, not yet. All of this kind of thing was really a little, you know...

Q: Premature?

DAVIES: Yes, premature, earlier than...and particularly at a time when... I don't know whether Peter was ordained - I don't think he was ordained, but he was a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, and I think - I don't know, we were never able to find out, because afterwards there was a lot of finger pointing and why-didn't-you-tell-them-how-dangerous-it-was - I don't think he did tell them how dangerous it was, he encouraged them. And they stayed several days there. They never came near the Embassy because Christy...well, you know, he wanted to be at arm's length, he didn't want to be too closely associated with us in one way, although he was chaplain of the Protestant community and most of his communicants, most of his parishioners, most of the members of his congregation were from the Embassy.

He was on a contract with the Afghan Ministry of Education to teach English at the English-language high school. There was an English-language high school, a German-language high school, a French-language high school. There were these three institutions in addition to the regular religious schools and the high schools in the native language.

At any rate they left there on their way to Persia. They were expected in Teheran I guess it was, so they left, and then after maybe three weeks had gone by we got a telegram from Teheran saying that these friends of Peter he had been expecting him. He had written ahead and said he would be there roughly at a certain time - but he had not arrived.

At that point we didn't realize that there was anybody but Peter. They said that they understood that he'd be staying with Christy Wilson in Kabul, and could we check and find out when he'd left.

So we checked. We went around to see Christy and said, was he here, and Christy said yes, he was here three weeks ago, or whatever it was - four weeks ago perhaps by that time.

We asked when did he leave, and he gave us the date, and we then said, "Well, he hasn't arrived in Teheran."

He said, "That's peculiar, but of course he is hitchhiking, you know, and perhaps he wasn't able to get a ride, or maybe he got sick or something."

But he never told us about the girl.

So we sent back a placatory telegram to the effect that Christy Wilson says there is no need to be alarmed, and Peter was probably on his way and so on.

Another week went by, and then another telegram came, and still he hadn't gotten there, would you please begin to check now?

Meanwhile we had sent telegrams to various other places, particularly to the western border post, west of Herat, to a place called Islam Qala, the fort of Islam, which was a border point. Well, the communication was so uncertain - we sent a telegram in Farsi - Persian - saying had a person of

this name shown up but when you put the name into Arabic letters it doesn't really mean anything, you can't tell.

So this time when we went back there we said, "You know, we have to start looking for him.

Finally he broke down and he said, "Well, he was with this girl."

And we said, oh my gosh, what girl? This was the first we had ever heard of the girl.

He said, "Well, a Swedish girl."

We said, what did she look like? He had a snapshot of the two of them, and she was a smasher.

Q: You mean Christy said all this?

DAVIES: Christy finally told us about the girl, and that was the first we'd ever heard of the girl, and we said, what does she look like, and he showed us this photograph of this absolutely gorgeous girl, wearing a very skimpy costume, and in that part of the world, oh boy, you know... And it had been taken when they were there and they had had this developed. A beautiful girl.

So we said, "Gee, and they were hitchhiking like this through Afghanistan, where women are bought and sold?" or were then. Still are, I am sure. And a Caucasian blonde! There were harems - Zenanas - in people's houses. Oh, boy.

At any rate, as a result of all this, finally we organized a search party with the head of the American Desk in the Foreign Office, Nur Ahmed Etemadi, who was later Ambassador to the United States and Prime Minister, and Ataullah Azimi, a wonderful man, a policeman, a police chief who had been trained in Berlin before the Second World War at the police academy in Berlin, Gruenewald, and a very fine man, tough, like all of them.

And we got into a Jeep and went out to the place where they should have crossed the border and we determined that, no, they had not crossed the border there, and then we tried to trace them back, and we finally found the place where they were last seen.

As far as I am aware the case was never solved. They arrested two brothers, Turkomans - it was in Turkoman country that they were last seen. These men had a bad reputation for womanizing, and I am convinced myself that they saw this apparently masterless man, these Europeans with no money - that's the role they were playing. Actually Peter had plenty of money in travelers cheques, and the girl had some money, too, but claiming that they had no money - this was incomprehensible to these people. That means that they are beggars. And here is this beautiful girl who is worth her weight in gold, I'd say.

What finally happened I don't know, but when the hue and cry was raised, and when we arrived with a royal rescript - a beautiful thing written in Arabic script - from the King, signed by the King, ALL MY SERVANTS SHALL GIVE FULL COOPERATION TO MY FAITHFUL SERVANTS NUR AHMED ETEMANDI AND ATULLAH AZIMI, of course we were

authorized to do anything. Or they were. I wasn't authorized to do anything but report, but they could do anything, they could take the Governor, arrest the Governor and put the thumb-screws on him.

Well, they arrested these two brothers who of course were tortured savagely and never confessed, but when I last checked on the case many years ago the brothers were still in prison. There had never been a trial. Apparently no evidence had ever been uncovered, but the Afghans felt that they were guilty, and that was enough.

I got off the track somewhere there.

Q: That's very interesting.

DAVIES: Oh, I was talking about Colonel Makowski. We got the airfield built. And what else did we get done? Can't remember how I got off...

Q: Sheldon Mills stayed after you left.

DAVIES: Yes, he was still there when I left. He stayed for another year, and then he went on to be Ambassador to Iraq. I think he retired. Was it Iraq or Lebanon?

BRUCE A. FLATIN
Political/Economic/Eonsular officer
Kabul (1957-1959)

Bruce A. Flatin was born in Minnesota in 1930. He received degrees from the University of Minnesota and from Boston University. After serving in the U.S. Army, Mr. Flatin entered the Foreign Service in 1956. His Foreign Service career included positions in Afghanistan, Germany, Australia, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.

Q: Your first post was Kabul.

FLATIN: Yes.

Q: Afghanistan. This doesn't sound like something one would just ask for.

FLATIN: No, as a matter of fact it was a surprise. But we were very happy we did go there. It proved to be the real Foreign Service you had in mind when you joined the Foreign Service in every way. It still smacked of Kipling, John Masters, and the old North West Frontier. We enjoyed our tour there very, very much.

Q: What was the situation, political and economic, in Afghanistan?

FLATIN: Afghanistan was then called the "Hermit Kingdom" because it discouraged easy entry. It was hard to get a visa for Afghanistan in those days. The royal family apparently was coming to terms with the fact that they had to modernize the country, but how to do it was a real problem. In those days, King Zahir did not give the impression of ruling as much as Prince Mohammed Da'ud, his first cousin and brother-in-law, who was the Prime Minister. Da'ud's brother, Prince Mohammed Na'im, was the Foreign Minister; the two of them were first cousins of the King. Da'ud appeared committed to modernization, but only at the careful pace that he felt was suitable for the country. This was not fast enough for some eager young Afghan activists who wanted quicker changes--particularly those who had been trained abroad.

Incidentally, at that time Afghanistan looked like it was at a stage earlier than the time of Christ in the Holy Land. In fact in Afghanistan today you can still go to villages that show no sign whatsoever of being even in this millennium. There are no electric lines, telephone lines, water pumps, or anything modern. People are dressed exactly as they dressed back in the days of the Persian Empire. This society presented quite an inertia for modernizers to overcome.

We served in Afghanistan from 1957 to 1959. After we left, Da'ud was eventually displaced by the King who then seemed to take a more direct role in the political and economic events of the country. Political life became more stimulated and active. Then Da'ud himself came back as head of a group that overthrew the King in 1973 and created a Republic. This occurred while the King was seeking medical treatment in Rome (where he still lives in exile).

Q: Let's stick to the time we're talking about. This is 1957 to 1959. What were you doing there?

FLATIN: I was a junior political officer, rotating as an FSO-8. I also served for a time in the economic section, and for a time in the administrative section. And, for that matter, I also handled consular matters from time to time when the Consul was sick or away.

Q: What would a political, even an economic officer do? You say it was a BC time, before Christ type situation.

FLATIN: At that time our relationship with Afghanistan had become affected by the Cold War, vis-a-vis Russia. In 1955, Bulganov and Khrushchev had visited Afghanistan and had extended a 100-million-dollar line of credit to the Afghans. By the time I got there we were going into phases of increasing competition with the Russians in the economic development of the country. The private U.S. sector had already been engaged through the efforts of an American firm, Morrison-Knudsen, which had won commercial contracts after World War II to build roads. They later constructed dams; since the Afghan government had exhausted its money building the dams, USAID was asked to assist with irrigation and hydroelectric projects. Therefore, our first AID programs grew out of commercial projects that Morrison-Knudsen had started in the country.

Afghanistan came to be regarded as a sensitive East-West confrontation point between the Soviet Union and America. Pakistan was then, as you recall, very recently independent and there was a bilateral problem between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Pushtunistan issue. Because of our

friendly relationship with Pakistan, our attitude towards this issue was carefully observed by both sides.

Afghanistan was also in a position of confrontation with its neighbor on the other side, Iran, over the division of the waters of the River Helmand that flow out of Afghanistan into Iran. We were less involved in this issue.

So there was quite a bit to monitor at that time. Additionally, because very little scholarly work had ever been done on the country, we were also encouraged to submit despatches to the Department dealing with anthropological issues and sociological issues. We submitted some of the very first reports about practices such as *qasas*, for example, which is a mullah-supervised ritual execution to permit a murdered person's family to achieve revenge directly.

Q: As a political officer what would you do? How would one go about doing something like this?

FLATIN: Well, one tried to establish as many contacts as one could within the Afghan official community. It was difficult to establish social contacts with the Afghans, because this was generally discouraged by the government. The seclusion of women through such *purdah* practices as the veil was required by law which meant that half the population was inaccessible through gender reasons alone. Naturally one would also try to establish contacts with other people in the diplomatic community as much as possible, even with people in the Eastern Bloc missions. In a place like Kabul where foreigners were thrown together willy-nilly, there tended to be a little bit more social engagement between Russians and ourselves at places such as the International Club of Kabul. You tried to ascertain what was being presented between the lines in the government press. Every single written word in that country was monitored by the government, and produced or distributed under its control. A mimeograph machine couldn't turn out a piece of paper without its having been approved by the Royal Afghan Press Office. But if one read the local press carefully, and listened to the radio carefully, one could discern some indications of current government lines.

We tried also to monitor what was going on in the bazaar because one way in which Prince Da'ud tested the public reaction to ideas would be to float them down the bazaar in the form of "rumors." Then his spies would evaluate the reaction in the various tea houses and shops. If there was a lot of public opposition, the idea would be permitted to die. It had never had any life because it was just a "rumor". However, if it were met with some type of approval or at least with not any great negative feeling, sooner or later you'd see a firman launching the new policy. (A firman is an official order.) This is the limited kind of democracy they enjoyed.

When they had elections, of course, the elections were very open. In order to vote, you went to a neighborhood street corner where mullah had an open book where you could sign "yes" for the government candidate. (There were no other candidates.) That wasn't a very democratic election system.

The parliament had not met for several years when I was there, and yet treaties were being approved by the royal family, and ratified--even though the Afghan constitution called for parliamentary approval. We were told to regard them as approved. In their minds, the type of

democracy they had in that country suited the times. Most Afghans were illiterate and did not appear to care much about political issues. They were very sensitive about religious and social issues, however. The Da'ud regime was cautious, remembering that King Ammullah had been overthrown in a 1928 revolution caused by his pressing too quickly for social change.

The way in which Afghanistan reached decisions then--as they had for centuries--was through the use of an institution called a loya jirga. A loya jirga is an assembly of the country's leading religious leaders, political leaders, economic leaders, tribal leaders, etc., who come together in a conclave to hold discussions and make important decisions. For instance, if a king were to be succeeded by his son, that son would soon thereafter have to be endorsed by the loya jirga. Or the official Afghan position on some very important issues, such as Pushtunistan would have to be endorsed by a loya jirga--particularly if the regime was seeking to reinforce its position for propaganda purposes. This is a flexible type of consensus politics that brings all the various power groups of the country together to express a generally agreed opinion, or decision on certain very important issues. This was the traditional way in which consensus has been formed in Afghanistan--and it possibly could become very useful in arriving at a settlement of the current anarchy in that country.

Q: What were American interests when you were there at that time what was your impression of what we wanted out of this?

FLATIN: Well, we certainly wanted to help the Afghans preserve their independence as a free and sovereign nation, as well as to improve their economic strength. We also hoped to be in a position to encourage a peaceful resolution of Afghanistan's bilateral problems with Pakistan on the one side, and Iran on the other. We tried to make it very clear to the Soviet Union that we did not in any way intend to represent any threat to them. From the Soviet viewpoint Afghanistan would be sort of like Mexico is to us. At no time did we ever engage in any rhetoric or any action that would lead the suspicious Soviets to suspect that we were using our position there in any way to threaten their position. Because we really would have had difficulty projecting American power into that very distant and isolated landlocked region, and it would have been pointless to create additional problems for the Afghans in their relationship with the Soviets. Incidentally, they had a very good bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union at that time. In fact, after the Soviets took power in the USSR they made a treaty with the Afghans--which was the very first international treaty that they had negotiated.

Q: Did you get involved at all in...I would imagine at that time, my dates are a little bit hazy, but we were going through the nationalization and denationalization of oil and all that in Iran--that was a little earlier. Was there a matter of when push came to shove that we were supporting Iran? At least from your vantage point in Kabul.

FLATIN: That particular issue wasn't a real problem for the Afghans. The Afghans, unfortunately, did not have their own oil. They had some gas which the Soviets were exploiting in the northern part of the country, but they had no oil. And what was happening in Iran with the Mossadegh issue, etc., did not really have much effect in Afghanistan. As I told you, the Afghans had this Helmand waters bilateral issue with Iran. It probably wasn't as important as some outside observers thought. The Iranians and the Afghans have elected to discuss this "problem"

over the years, and it is an issue that probably won't ever be resolved. In that part of the world some bilateral issues have more utility value if they are not resolved. They like to keep them simmering for various purposes.

When I say "Afghan", incidentally, that word is a classical word which applies to only one of the ethnic groups in the country. This particular people have other names: they are called Pushtun in the western stretch of their range; they're called Pukhtun in the eastern stretch that goes into Pakistan; and the Indians and the British have called them Pathan. That's a corruption of Pushtun or Pukhtun. When you say "Afghanistan," it means "Land of the Afghans," the country of this particular ethnic group. Other people in that country are the Tajiks, a fellow Indo-European group who are Persian-speaking. The Pushtuns spoke a language called Pushtu, which, like Persian, is also an eastern Iranian tongue; therefore, it is part of the Indo-European language family. Although the Pushtuns and the Tajiks are both Indo-European groups, they have difficulty understanding each other's language. The difference is that like that between English and German.

These are, also Uzbek and Turkmen in the north, who speak Turkic dialects. In the center of the country are Persian-speaking. Mongol Hazaras. Additionally, there are little island groups of Arab and other Turkic minorities.

The Hazaras in the center of the country, and some other people, such as the urban Qizilbash, were largely Shi'a Muslims. But the Shi'a percentage of the total population was probably no more than about 10 to 15%. The remainder of the population was Sunni.

The dominant group were the Pushtuns who comprised about 45% of the population, although they claimed they were about 55%. Through being absolutely tough and ruthless, they had ruled that country since the beginning of time. And the royal family came out of this particular ethnic group, as did, for that matter, most of the communist leadership after the communist revolution.

These other ethnic groups...I'm jumping ahead in the story--are coming more into their own now in contending with Pushtuns for control of the country.

Q: We weren't playing around between ethnic groups.

FLATIN: No, not at all. We were to observe, but not to participate in any politics along those lines. As a matter of fact, one of the key dangers we faced in that country was the ever present danger of the Pushtun tribes from the east, south, and west of Kabul, marching on Kabul should there be some development that offended them. In those days, for example, the issue that worried many observers was the possibility of a premature ending of the requirement that women wear veils. That was still required by law when we were there. And it was felt that should that be prematurely lifted, that these tribes would move on Kabul in their fury--as they had in 1928 when they deposed King Ammullah. This march-on-Kabul was the most likely danger we faced in the country at that time. Interestingly enough, our most logical safe haven was go north to the Soviet Union should that happen--in spite of the Cold War. We, therefore, were closely watching inter-ethnic politics and politico-social developments, but we didn't become involved of course.

Q: Your ambassador was Sheldon T. Mills.

FLATIN: Sheldon T. Mills was the first ambassador under whom I served.

Q: What was Sheldon T. Mills like?

FLATIN: A very typical, straight-line, experienced career officer -- a wonderful boss to have for your first job in the Foreign Service. He had a very nice wife, Francesca. Their daughter, incidentally, is married to a Foreign Service officer. They were an excellent couple to teach us how to begin in the Foreign Service. Ambassador Mills was a very good director of operations; nothing escaped his attention. He oversaw all U.S. agency operations and ensured that everything was in sync. We had U.S. Government programs that appeared to serve our interests well. He was followed, incidentally, by Henry A. Byroade who came shortly before I left.

Q: How did you find him?

FLATIN: A very interesting person. Byroade's personal reputation in the Muslim world was that he had been "right on Egypt" before the Suez War--and had therefore been "rewarded" by Secretary of State Dulles by being sent down to South Africa. So when he came to Afghanistan, this was regarded by many Muslims as being his return to that part of the world where he was really an expert and a friend. Byroade had a long experience in the Near and Middle East and was very highly regarded. He was also sort of man's man. Because he was a great hunter, the King was especially interested in some of the hunting exploits he had had. He got along very well with the Afghans.

Q: He was a West Pointer, wasn't he?

FLATIN: That's right. He was the youngest man ever to make Brigadier General in the history of the U.S. Army. He rode a horse to work frequently. In those days, some of our people rode horses to work and tied them to trees outside the embassy compound. In those days, our embassy was in a compound of buildings where USIS subsequently was located after we built the new embassy out on the airport road.

HENRY BYROADE
Ambassador
Afghanistan (1959-1960)

Ambassador Henry Byroade was born in Indiana in 1913. He graduated from West Point in 1937. He served in the Hawaiian Islands from 1937-1939. While still in the service, he received a master's degree from Cornell in 1940. In addition to Egypt, his Foreign Service posts included South Africa, Afghanistan, Burma, the Philippines, and Pakistan. He was interviewed by Niel M. Johnson on September 19, 1988.

Q: *In '59 you went to Afghanistan.*

BYROADE: Yes.

Q: *Kabul?*

BYROADE: "Kabul." Most Americans say "Kabul." When Eisenhower came out there, he was only out there for two hours on a trip. His advance man came through to take a look at the place, and when he left I said, "What can I do for you?" He said, "I want a stone." I said, "My God, we've got millions of them." I reached down in the driveway and gave him a stone. The next time we went back to the White House it was mounted on his desk and said, "A genuine Kabulstone." A great country. No American that's served there will ever forget it.

We have a reunion once a year; we had forty, about five years ago, with everybody that had served there. Last year we had 400. There's something about the place you just love. I had better morale in the Embassy there than they have in places like Paris, London, or Rome. Nothing much to do socially, but beautiful outdoor country, and you do your own things. We had the world's best amateur dramatic society. We did "My Fair Lady," "Guys and Dolls," built our own ski lift, etc. We didn't have many visitors.

Q: *No major issues to deal with?*

BYROADE: Well, yes, we did. The Russians were making inroads when we were there, and we were sort of in competition with the Russians. They were building grain silos and we were building roads, and then they got into roads. To an extent, it was all right with me if the Russians spent their rubles doing things that the Afghans really needed, such as roads, as long as we built the best roads. We had trouble really staying with much of a presence in Afghanistan; we almost pulled our aid program out. But we did stay. I don't think the king would have ever faced up to getting rid of [President Mohammad] Daud, but for the fact that we were there.

Q: *Daud was, you say, removed?*

BYROADE: Yes, he was removed, and then he came back, and of course, was killed.

Q: *Was he pro-Communist?*

BYROADE: No, not as far as adopting a Communist philosophy, an economic thing, and so on. But, in my opinion, he cooperated a little too readily with the Russians. Of course, they were right on the Russian border and all we wanted was an honestly neutral country. We didn't want any bases or anything like that. We would like to have it neutral a little bit on our side, but nothing to get too excited about, as long as it was neutral. We felt Daud was a little too pro-Russian, but he wasn't Communist.

Q: *But you never foresaw Soviet intervention, military intervention, which came in the late 1970s?*

BYROADE: No, I left there in about 1960. I didn't foresee actual Soviet military intervention. There were a lot of destructive issues. Daud was for Pushtunistan, a very vague concept concerning the Pushtan tribes, which involved a part of what is now Pakistan, and there had been trouble with the border closings.

Q: In '62 you came back as Arms Control Adviser. Did you have anything to do with the treaty to ban atmospheric tests, hydrogen bomb tests?

BYROADE: No, I did not. I was there a little less than a year, and it was the very beginning of our arms control agency. It was a formative year. We were building an arms control agency; Bill Foster was in charge. It was a very educational year, but an unhappy year for me because while I thought it was important and I wanted to see good people working on it, I didn't want to be working myself on something that might come into being ten or twenty years down the road--or maybe never.

Q: It was very preliminary.

BYROADE: Yes, I wanted to get back in the field.

WILLIAM D. BREWER
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kabul (1962-1965)

Ambassador William D. Brewer was born in Connecticut in 1922. He received a B.A. degree from Williams College and an M.A. degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He entered the Foreign Service in 1947. He served overseas in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Afghanistan, and in Washington, DC as desk officer for Arab Affairs and Country Director for Arabian Peninsular States. He was appointed ambassador to Mauritius in 1970 and Ambassador to Sudan in 1973. Ambassador Brewer was interviewed by Malcolm Thompson in 1988.

Q: Your next overseas assignment was as Deputy Chief of Mission at our Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.

BREWER: Yes, and that was a fascinating assignment because Afghanistan, at that time, was the only non-Communist country in the world that bordered both the Soviet Union and China. And it therefore afforded an interesting vantage point from which to observe, first the relatively good relations between those two Communist countries, and then their rapid deterioration after 1961--'62, I guess it was.

When I went out the key issue in the briefings that I got seemed to be, as far as Washington was concerned, whether the Afghan regime had, in the famous phrase, "passed the point of no return" in its relations with Communist Russia. I took this to mean the question of whether the government in Kabul had so come under the influence of Moscow as to be considered a virtual

satellite. Well, on my arrival I found a little to my surprise that the Kabul government was nowhere near being a satellite of the Soviet Union. It was quite true that it paid a good deal of attention to Soviet views as might be expected from a country with a huge common border with one of the two superpowers, but it sought to balance, as far as it could, its relations with the Soviet Union with good relations with the United States. And it seemed to me that our role should be to do what we could to enhance the opportunity of the Afghan authorities to develop this balanced relationship. And Ambassador Steeves, who was a first rate chief during this period, certainly had the view that an effective bilateral relationship could be continued and even expanded.

I found on my arrival, for example, one of the things that I was told, as an example of how nasty the Afghan government was to us, that "The diplomats were not permitted to travel outside of Kabul." And I said, "Well, why is that?" And I was told: "Because we send notes to the Foreign Office as we are required to do, requesting permission to travel to some particular province, and we never get a reply, which constitutes a refusal, you see, so we can't go." I said, "Why don't we try this? Why don't we send them a note saying that we are planning to go on such-and- such dates next month to this province, and see what will happen if we do that." I said, "My suspicion is that the Afghan bureaucrats in the Foreign Office simply do not want to take a decision." And this, of course, turned out to be the case. So by modifying our own note we expanded our operations and we were able to visit anywhere we wished in Afghanistan without hindrance except the Wakhkhan Corridor which was a very restricted area and we were generally not permitted to go there. So some of us did a good deal of traveling in those years in Afghanistan. But that's simply one minor illustration of how a change in approach can actually produce a modification in policy which is helpful.

Another thing we did. This was at a time when the Kennedy administration was getting started and was pushing the Peace Corps concept. We decided that we ought to try to negotiate a Peace Corps agreement with Afghanistan because it was manifest that they needed the type of assistance that the Peace Corps could provide. And since they wouldn't have to pay for it, it seemed that this would be something that ought to appeal to the Afghan government. So I carried out the negotiations with the head of the Economic Section of the Foreign Ministry and they were indeed interested. And, in fact, in due course he informed me that the Afghan government had decided to accept the Peace Corps and they would sign an agreement. I said, "Fine. Now we've only got one question left and that is `what size unit do you wish to come first, how large, how many volunteers do you want in the first unit?'" And he thought for a minute, and he said, "What is the smallest Peace Corps unit anywhere in the world?" And I said, "I don't know, but I can find out." And, of course, I did find out. It turned out that we had a unit of nine in Liberia. So I went back to him and I said, "We have a unit of nine in Liberia." He said, "Fine, we'll have nine."

The first Peace Corps unit into Afghanistan consisted of a mere nine volunteers. They were personally selected, however, by the Peace Corps Director, who was a very able individual, Bob Steiner who had grown up in Iran and spoke Persian which was the language used in Afghanistan at that time, and had a very good sense of the type of person who would go down very well with the Afghan mentality. And as a result I think each of these nine individual volunteers was in his or her own way outstanding. And so great an impact did they make, this first unit, that the

Afghans couldn't have enough of the Peace Corps thereafter. I don't remember the exact figures, but I think the second unit was about 75, and I think the third unit they wanted over 120 or something. They would take all the Peace Corps volunteers that we could find as a result of that. We had Peace Corps volunteers up near the Soviet frontier that didn't seem to bother them. So that this made a tremendous and favorable impact on our relationship.

At the same time we continued a major AID program which had been going on prior to my arrival because it was manifest that the Afghans needed road development, agricultural development, and various other things at which we were working. These projects were also helpful. They were not, as is sometimes seen, in competition with the Russians. The Russians were also doing the same kind of thing, but they were doing projects in different areas. And the Afghans were rather shrewd in trying to coordinate the two. For example: their number one national roadnet, which forms a "U" from Herat around Kandahar and then up to Kabul; the Afghans had the Russians building the road from Herat to Kandahar and the Americans building the road from Kandahar to Kabul. This gave rise to an interesting exchange which shows that our relations were then not all that bad with the Russians on the spot.

The head of the Russian aid mission sought an appointment with the head of our AID mission and he came in to him, and he said, "Look, you know these road projects that we're working on..." He said, "Where precisely in Kandahar is your project terminating?" And our man told him. And he said, "Well, that's what I was afraid of. That's about three-quarters of a mile from where our project is starting. Don't you agree that we ought to link these two roads up to avoid any difficulty with the Afghans when the projects are finished?" And our man said he certainly did. So they split the difference and each one extended the project approximately one-half a mile or less, a third of a mile, and the two roads were linked up in Kandahar.

And this shows that sometimes when you get closer to a particular situation, the relationships and the activity are not quite the exaggerated cold war nature as is shown by the media back in this country.

Another aspect of our AID program which I think was particularly helpful in maintaining and developing good relations with the Afghan government was that, even after Pakistan closed the border with Afghanistan, and we had brought all our AID supplies through Pakistan because it was economic, Ambassador Steeves, with our strong support, took the position that we should continue to bring in supplies for the road via Iran even though it was more expensive because the alternative, that is shutting down the project would turn out to be even more expensive because of various claims that all the contractors would have on the US Government. And that furthermore, by keeping the an option open for the Afghans, that is not giving them the impression that they were isolated and driven into a corner, the Afghans would be more likely to work out some sort of settlement with the Pakistanis which, of course, was something that we favored.

Well, we had some difficulty convincing Washington of this but in due course we did. And Washington therefore continued its assistance, although I think perhaps at a somewhat reduced level of whatever could be transported across Iran. And within a matter of, I think, two months--I have forgotten now exactly the time schedule here--the Afghans were negotiating with the

Pakistanis and the Pakistanis had reopened the border. And I am convinced that if it had not been for that position that we took at the Embassy--I think this is early 1965, maybe late 1964--why the closure of the border would have been much more long lasting and would have had a much more deleterious impact on the total western position in that part of the world.

While we were in Afghanistan occurred the famous White Revolution of King Zahir Shah. He had been King for, oh I don't know, 30 years practically at that time, because he became King when he was 19. But for most of those 30 years the power in Afghanistan had either been one of his uncles or, after they died, his first cousin, Sardar Mohammad Daud, who was Prime Minister when I got there. Well, the King finally decided he'd had enough of this with his relatives in effect running the country. And in 1963, I think it was, he took steps which prompted Daud to say, "Well then, I resign." Which was what the King hoped would happen. Daud figured the King would say, "Oh, no, no, you mustn't do that." But in this case, of course, the King crossed him up and said, "Fine, your resignation is accepted." So Daud was out on his ear and they set up a commoner government. This was a first for Afghanistan with a Prime Minister, who had an engineering degree from, I think, Germany. The Interior Minister had a degree from, I think, Columbia in the United States. It was a government, a cabinet of technocrats, of commoners who were trained in the west outside Afghanistan and who had the interests of their country very much at heart. And the King supported this development wholeheartedly.

We found this an extremely encouraging development and supported it as far as we could. And at the time I left I would say that our relations with Afghanistan were really excellent and there was no longer the slightest question of the Afghan government going past the point of no return in its relations with the Soviet Union. This perhaps was illustrated at the time of President Kennedy's assassination because Ambassador Steeves arranged a very impressive memorial service for the late President at his residence, and we invited all the Afghan authorities including the Cabinet. And I was at the gate to greet the senior people arriving, and when the Prime Minister came he said to me, "Would the Ambassador mind if I said a few words during the service?" And I said, "I don't think so. I'll ask him and I'll let you know." And I did, and of course Ambassador Steeves said, "No, there's no objection." So Prime Minister Mohammad Yusuf delivered a eulogy for the dead American president at this memorial service. And I think that indicates the fundamental attitude of the Afghan government at that time towards Americans and the United States.

JOHN M. STEEVES
Ambassador
Afghanistan (1962-1966)

Ambassador John M. Steeves served in the China/Burma/India theater during World War II in the Office of War Information. His Foreign Service career included positions in New Delhi, Tokyo, Djakarta, Naha, Kabul, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy and Thomas Stern on March 27, 1991

Q: I would like to come now to the time when you were Ambassador to Afghanistan from 1962-66. How did that appointment come about? I take it you had parted on not the best of terms with Averell Harriman. Was this to get you out of the way, or was this something you sought for?

STEEVES: I suppose a little bit of both. I am sure that Harriman was quite happy to see me go, because if he was going to stay for a while as Assistant Secretary for the Far East, as he did, the last person he wanted to see around was me since we had clashed so often over policy. To me he was the ultimate appeaser and he didn't have much use for those of us that thought like we did about things of that nature.

The other side of it was that they had first of all decided that they wanted me to go to Nepal, but my wife had had a very heavy cancer operation just before that and when the medics got to looking it over they said she couldn't go there because of lack of medical facilities in Kathmandu. Then they came up with the Kabul idea. Now I am fair minded enough to realize that it wasn't only somebody who thought it would be a good idea for me to go as ambassador to a part of the world that I knew a little bit about, tinged a little bit with Harriman's happiness to get me out of there, that got me to Afghanistan. I always say that whatever it was he did me the best turn I have had for a long time because I really enjoyed it.

Q: Could you describe the situation in Afghanistan at the time?

STEEVES: Yes, I can. Afghanistan as you remember was a never, never border state sandwiched between ourselves and the Soviet Union. We had decided as a result of the Richards Commission that went up there to try and decide which of the Near East countries we would give military aid to and which we would not that Afghanistan was not the place to get involved militarily. The essence of their recommendation was, "You had better stop before you get into aid on the border up there because it is too close to the Soviet Union. We have nothing to gain and the best thing to do is to try and keep foreign arms out of Afghanistan, because if we supply them with arms, all we will be doing will be to buy animosity and, secondly, almost worse still, we will only give the Afghans arms to fight against Pakistanis and we don't want to do that either.."

So it was with that policy in hand that I went to Afghanistan with orders to be decent and friendly and amicable with the Soviets. Let them know open-facely that we had nothing to vie with them about so far as Afghanistan was concerned. We would be glad to share the AID program with them--we do one part they do another--which we did. The Soviet Ambassador turned out to be one of the best friends I had in the country. I saw him later in Moscow and he gave me a great big bear hug for we had had a wonderful time together in Kabul . When Kennedy was assassinated, Mrs. Antonov wrote from Moscow a lovely letter of sympathy. He was the Doyen of the Corps when he left and I was the Doyen of the Corps when I left. But when he left he said, "I don't speak English, I don't speak French, I don't speak German, all I know is Russian and a bit of Farsi, which makes it very difficult for me to get into too many receptions. So when it comes to farewell parties, leave me alone. " But, when I asked him to come to our place for a farewell dinner, he said, "You know I told everybody no, but for you I make a difference," and he came. So we got along fine with the Russians.

But our biggest problem with the Afghans that had to be negotiated out was their animosity with Pakistan. They did some of the stupidest things. One concerned the closing of all the southern border portal points to spite the Pakistanis! This of course was the routes we used to get our aid to Afghanistan and you can imagine how that went over with Congress! They even let the wheat rot on the border that we were delivering. Imagine how much that upset Congress.

The Shah in Iran finally got into the act, on our behest really. He said, "Why don't you come over to my place and talk this thing over." So they went over to Tehran and sat down. They were almost coming to an agreement to opening the borders and trying to be decent, when word got out that they had clashed over something or other and were going to break up and do nothing. President Kennedy got word about it, I guess from me, and sent word back, "For heavens sake, you get a hold of the king if you can and tell him that as a personal favor to me to stop that nonsense. Get on the telephone to the head of your delegation in Tehran and tell them to stay there and knock some heads together and come to some kind of formula to get those borders open so we can get some aid to you." I went to see the king, he did as I asked him to and got on the telephone and told his Delegation to get cracking and get this thing taken care of. He did, the border was opened and everything was hunky-dory afterwards. That was the forerunner of being able to bring the king and Queen to the United States on an Official Visit. That was the last really big official Reception as a State Visit for a foreigner Head of State that Kennedy ever gave before he was assassinated. So it was a very sorrowful thing, but prior to that a very pleasant thing all together. That visit was a great public relations success. Kennedy was at his best during that visit.

Q: Well now, we have this open policy of neutrality not to play the great game in Afghanistan. You were the Ambassador, Kennedy had sent his letter out saying the Ambassador was in charge, how about the CIA? I would have thought they would have been a very difficult group to control in a place like Afghanistan where espionage started.

STEEVES: I did it very easily. When they told me I was going there and I started meeting the people who were going to go out as the heads of my sections. When they told me that Alan Wolfe was to be my new chief of station and he came over to see me, I said, "Now Alan, I just want one thing understood, and let's have this be it. You will not engage in any activity that I don't make the decision whether I want to know about it or whether I don't. Are we clear that far?" Alan said, "Yes." I said, "Fine. Number two, you don't send any messages out without me knowing whether I want to see them or whether I don't. Is that clear?" He said, "Yes, that's right." I said, "Fine. As long as we have those rules we will get along fine. I am not going to have anyone serving under me in the embassy that is telling one story to Washington and me telling them another. Its got to be together. We work things out in the field as to what we report. You and the military people and me must, from the embassy standpoint, sing from the same song book." He never broke his word. We never had any trouble.

He came to me one time and told me the rudiments of a Soviet defector that they had, and asked how much I wanted to know. I said, "Go on until I tell you to stop." He told me what the story was. I said, "Fine, don't tell me anything more." I never learned anything more but I know the guy got out.

Q: How about dealing with the Afghan government. Was there any problems?

STEEVES: Oh, plenty. But, I tell you, for a country that is considered to be backward in a lot of things, they had some of the sharpest diplomats and people dealing in negotiation of anybody I know. I had some very dicey moments. I had to persuade them that it was to our mutual interest to let a survey team look for poison mushrooms in Afghanistan and they thought that was a very funny, cooked up story. Another time we had University of Chicago museum people who were looking for a special flea that only dwelt on a certain mouse that was found on a certain section of Afghanistan and no where else in the world. They wanted a monograph done on this particular little beast and they asked me to persuade the Afghans to let this team get in to do this research. They did.

I got along extremely well with them. We had a wonderful tour of duty up there. I used to hunt and ride with them throughout their rugged beautiful highlands, I never knew better recreation..

Q: This was at the height of the drug culture in the United States and in other places, and there was the well-known sort of hashish trail which attracted young Americans to Nepal, etc. How did you deal with that?

STEEVES: It was not the national traffic aspect that was bothering us. Our biggest trouble with it as you may remember in the 60s was the hippies and the vagrants of all varieties trooping through like a bunch of bums and that was the level that I had to deal with, not the national problem. For instance, we got a message from a Senior Senator one day looking for a niece , as I remember a niece. We found her in one of the most flea-bitten, filthy, holes down in the bowels of the bazaar in Kabul, high on drugs. We got her out of the country. That was about the level that we knew about the drug traffic. We really didn't know of it being part of the heroin, or cocaine or drug railway.

Q: But it wasn't that at the time. These things change.

STEEVES: It really wasn't back then. But I am afraid it became that later.

Q: You say you got on well with the Soviets, did you feel that they were also playing this "lets not stir things up" game there?

STEEVES: Yes, they really were. The Soviets were building roads at the same time we were. There was a section where somehow in our surveys a mile had been left out. I concluded at the time that it was our fault. I went to the Soviet Ambassador and told him the story and said, "Our equipment is far, far away." "Don't worry about it, we will go out and put it in," he said. And so they did . There is that one little piece of road down there that in the Russian-American kilometer of highway. When we had the celebration for the finishing of that whole circle around Afghanistan, the Russians and Americans attended it together.

WILLIAM PIEZ

**Economic/Political Officer
Kabul (1963-1966)**

Mr. Piez was born and raised in Rhode Island and educated at the University of Rhode Island and the Fletcher School. After service in the US Armed Forces, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Frankfurt, Kabul and Manila as Economic Officer. During his career Mr. Piez dealt primarily with economic matters of East Asian countries, particularly Japan, where he served first as Economic Counselor and, from 1983 to 1985, as Economic Minister. In the Department in Washington, Mr. Piez was Deputy Assistant Secretary of East African Economic Affairs, and from 1989-1991, Deputy Assistant US Trade Representative. Mr. Piez was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: Then where did you go?

PIEZ: I went to Kabul, Afghanistan, arriving there in late July.

Q: Of '63, and you were there until when?

PIEZ: Until '66. I left there in the middle of 1966.

Q: So a three year assignment. What was your job?

PIEZ: Well I was assigned as an economic officer, having just come out of an economic training program. Our ambassador was John Steeves, a very fine person. He decided he needed a political officer instead, so I was sent to the political section.

Q: Well then what was the situation in Afghanistan?

PIEZ: It was a peaceful time. I would estimate that the population of the country was at 15 or 16 million, much less than the population today. An extremely poor country. The country still had a king. He had been king since 1933. His father, Nader Shah, had been installed by the British in 1929. He died and his son, Zahir Shah, succeeded in 1933. He was devoted to his country and to the idea of somehow establishing a constitutional monarchy, perhaps a bit like Great Britain. He was not extremely well educated and was reportedly not of any intellectual brilliance but still devoted to his country. A third country employee who managed the king's farm, and knew him well, once said that if the king was as tall as he is stupid, they would have to feed him with an anti-aircraft gun.

Afghanistan had been for many years under the control of his cousin and Prime Minister, Sardar Daud. He was basically a dictator who would quickly identify his enemies and exile them, usually not abroad but to some isolated, unpleasant part of Afghanistan. He had a number of choices for doing that. I had a contact with a young Afghan who worked in the Ministry of Planning. When he was a young boy his father had displeased Prime Minister Daud and had been sent in exile to the town of Farah in the far southwest. They were very poor. My friend said that his family's Afghan bread, a staple part of every Afghans' diet, was flavored with a bitter herb so

that the children would not eat so much.

Well, not long before my arrival, Daud was forced out of office. I can't say overthrown because he wasn't imprisoned, tried or assassinated. He was still around, but had been replaced. The cabinet members were almost all educated in foreign countries, many in the United States, a number of others in the Soviet Union. This cabinet attempted to establish a constitutional regime. A written constitution was prepared and approved by a meeting of leaders from all parts of the country. This body was called a Loya Jirga. Many members were appointed and some were elected. Elections were held, and the Loya Jirga was organized to function as a parliament with the power to enact laws and approve budgets. Another Afghan friend asked me, when the new constitution was being drafted, about parliamentary procedure. In college I had taken a course in parliamentary procedure and I still had the textbooks for the course. One was by O. Garfield Jones, who had written on the subject and prepared a set of parliamentary procedures for use in the U.S. It was based on Robert's Rules of Order, which in turn is based on the rules of our House of Representatives. I loaned him the text and, of course, never got it back. I have often wondered what happened to it.

Q: Well when you arrived, how stood things in this process?

PIEZ: Well they were very much at the beginning. I think the people still expected an authoritarian regime. And I think pretty much that is what they had.

Q" Were you able to say have good contacts with the people who were part of what you want to call the tribal assembly or the cabinet members and all of that?

PIEZ: The Afghan government and its Ministry of the Interior kept strict controls on the people. It was not expected that embassy officers would just freely roam the country and seek out trouble. The diplomatic corps was not large, and its members were well known. We were left on our own to travel and talk to anyone, but intrusive diplomats were noticed and reported. I once sold a car left with me by a colleague. It had diplomatic plates that I left on the car because I had sold it to a diplomat of another country. I reported the sale, however, to the Foreign Ministry. This was normal procedure. A friend at the Foreign Ministry told me privately that I was wise to make that report because the car with its red diplomatic plates had been spotted at a student demonstration. It was clear that this demonstration and persons involved were noticed and recorded, even though the Afghan Government did not interfere in the event at all. We knew that people we did talk to were often reporting to government officials. We knew that our household servants were sometimes questioned about what they might know. So it was a controlled situation. It was not that diplomats were under constant surveillance. Afghans sized you up determined if they thought you were a trouble maker or not.

Q: Well you as a relatively junior office did you make appointments to see people at ministries.

PIEZ: Yes, it was easy to visit a Ministry official. It was a good idea to telephone ahead to make an appointment, if the phones were working that day. When the phone was answered you asked for the person you wanted by name followed by the honorific *sahib*. You might be told, "*marisas*." Followed by an abrupt hang up. The word *marisas* meant, "he is sick." That was a

frequent excuse for any absence, sick or not. The person you were calling, however, might well be sick. Tummy trouble was common. We all suffered from it now and then, foreign or Afghan. Our house had well water. The well was next to our neighbor's outhouse, just over the mud brick wall. The water could be used for flushing toilets, bathing and laundry, but never for drinking or cooking. Our Afghan servants knew all the sanitary procedures and were good at following them because they knew they were protecting their health as well as ours.

Electricity was erratic. Incoming electricity varied from 80 volts to 230 volts. We had a variable transformer that would alter the voltage to 110, if you kept it adjusted properly. Our servants and my wife and I would check it frequently and reset it often. We had no telephone at home and had no chance of getting one.

The Soviet and the American aid programs were quite active. There was sort of an understanding that the programs would not tread too much into each other's project territories. So we were building highways in the eastern and southern part of the country, and the Soviets were building highways in the northern and western part. Soviet and U.S. roads finally met at Kandahar in the south. The Soviets finished their road to Kandahar after our road was done. The Soviets had a big celebration when their contract was completed. The whole ceremony took place on pavement built by USAID.

Q: Well how stood Afghanistan as far as its international relations towards the United States and the Soviet Union?

PIEZ: Well the Afghans juggled their foreign affairs interests and relations with the two major foreign country powers rather smoothly. They had an interesting arrangement relating to Afghan police forces and domestic intelligence. The most sensitive ministry was the Ministry of the Interior which ran the police and kept watch on any political activity. That was a more important mechanism of control than was the Afghan army. Neither the Soviet Union nor the United States had any foreign aid or contract personnel in that ministry. They all came from West Germany. Afghan police officers were trained only in West Germany. It was an interesting way for the Afghans to handle it.

Q: Well while you were there or by the time you got there were we concerned about whither Afghanistan?

PIEZ: We considered it to be a neutral country but with a pretty strong Communist influence. Their representative at the UN almost always voted on the Soviet side of any issue and was recognized by American political analysts as essentially a kind of stalking horse for the Russians whenever an important issue came up. In Kabul there were communist sympathizers but not many. Ambitious Afghans wanted to qualify for education and training in the U.S. Education in the USSR was not preferred, but Afghans would take that route if nothing better offered. I would say that many of them had been trained, maybe at the university of Wyoming or someplace like that. They had good college degrees. They spoke English well. They were friendly to us. This was particularly true in the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Commerce. USAID advisers were assigned to these ministries and worked there every day. Ministers were quite proud to have them present and would introduce them as "my American adviser." To what extent they took

their American advisers advice was another question.

Q: Was Pakistan a problem neighbor or not.

PIEZ: It was, because the Afghans had a running dispute with Pakistan over control of the Pashtun areas of Pakistan, what is even now called the Northwest Territories. We read about it in the press even today. It was and is difficult or impossible for the government of Pakistan to assert authority there. That was the tradition going back hundreds of years. British control of the region had always been sporadic. The Afghans claimed some sort of sovereignty in that area. The Afghans called the running issue of Pushtun or Pathan autonomy the Pashtunistan dispute. The Pakistan view was that there was no issue since Pushtuns (or Pathans) were happy with the status quo and the Afghans had no basis for complaint.

Q: Well was it more a matter of sort of both sides claiming an area that neither side had any control over? I mean were the Afghans doing something?

PIEZ: Well when I arrived there, the Afghans had just ended a suspension of trade and economic relations with Pakistan over the Pashtunistan dispute. Sardar Daud had been very active in pushing that dispute. This had considerable impact on the country because there were and are no railroads in Afghanistan, but there was a railroad that went up from Karachi to Peshawar, and then for a short distance into the Khyber Pass. That was an important entry point for Afghanistan's access to foreign markets. Daud had ordered that transit route closed, thus bringing much more hardship on Afghanistan than on Pakistan.

Q: Well was there, both the Soviets and the Americans were putting a lot of aid in building roads, why wasn't somebody taking the railroad and building it up from the Khyber Pass up to Kabul?

PIEZ: Well the American aid program actually appropriated money to extend the railroad at least over the border so that goods could pass in sealed railroad cars from the port of Karachi. That would render inspection by Pakistani customs unnecessary. But there was a precondition. Pakistan and Afghanistan had to reach agreement on the conditions for operating the railroad, and they never did. While I was there our AID mission director, I believe his name was Delmas Nucker. Anyway, he put his foot down. He said, "Ok, you have got until the last day of June next year to conclude a transit agreement." The day came and went without an agreement, so the railroad extension was not built. It was a good idea.

Q: Did you have Peace Corps there?

PIEZ: Yes, we did. They were primarily teachers. I think they made a moderately good impact. They adhered to all the Peace Corps traditions. No access to the Embassy commissary. They were dispersed into the provinces, mostly in the southern part of the county, but not entirely.

Q: I take it as we are seeing a very hot war raging between Islamic fundamentalists called the Taliban and American and other NATO forces, and Afghan central government forces. But was Islamic fundamentalism of the aggressive kind...

PIEZ: Well it was not so aggressive when I was there although women almost without exception were in purdah. In other words, covered. The vast majority of women that you saw even in Kabul were fully covered whenever on the street. It was a conservative Muslim country. After I left, when they did hold elections for the Loya Jirga, I learned that they had elected mostly traditional religious and tribal leaders who were very conservative.

Q: As a political officer, were you able to have discussions or contact with tribal and religious leaders?

PIEZ: Sometimes.

Q: How did you find this?

PIEZ: How did I manage that?

Q: I mean what was your impression in talking to them?

PIEZ: Well, they would speak favorably about the economic assistance that they were receiving. Then they might revert to the old Pashtunistan dispute and ask why we didn't support their obviously correct position. They might speak a bit critically about communists because they considered them godless. At times Afghans, being Muslims, might refer to Jews and Christians as people of the book. We would hear that and take it to mean that at least we were better than communists.

Q: Referring of course, to the Bible.

PIEZ: Yes. But as to their domestic political views, there was a great deal of reticence. Asked a direct question, such as might Sardar Daud return to office, they would say they didn't know, or that he still had support, but they would voice no opinion for or against him.

Q: Was there much curiosity about the United States or not. We were going through a time of considerable turmoil at that time with civil rights and also the beginning of the Vietnam demonstrations and all.

PIEZ: Very little. Afghans who had been to the U.S. nearly always had had good experiences, and certainly they envied us for our freedom and the opportunities they did not have in Afghanistan.

Q: Were you married at the time?

PIEZ: I was married. We had two children born in Germany. We had one born in Kabul. The American embassy operated a very small hospital. It was the only State Department hospital in the world, and our youngest daughter was born there.

Q: How did you find life there?

PIEZ: Well in many ways it was very difficult. You could not employ a female servant unless you got someone from India, which we did do. You could not drink the well water. Every house had a well and sometimes a pump to carry water up to the roof tank which supplied the plumbing in the house. The Embassy had a deep well. It was Ok, but you had to tanker in water from the embassy in huge metal containers made in Kabul. The food from the bazaar, everything had to be sanitized. There was no going out to Baskin and Robbins. Across from our house there was a butcher. His inventory would be brought in every morning on the hoof, and during the day these animals would be slaughtered, carved up and sold. At the end of the day there would be nothing left but bones, hide and blood. It was really crude.

Kabul supplied water to homes via a traditional system of irrigation ditches located on both sides of every street. One day a week, usually, the ditch outside would fill with water and you could allow the water to flow into your garden. The same ditch was used to carry away waste.

Q: Were you able to have much social contact with Afghans?

PIEZ: Yes, well with the educated Afghans. Most of the officers in the Foreign Ministry and other Afghan agencies were glad to be entertained. One of our contacts was the son of the wealthiest Afghan, who was in exile at the time, but his son was not. He would come to our house because he loved cherry pie. So my wife, or a servant carefully taught the task, would always bake him a cherry pie for lunch. His name was Rahim. The other reason people would come was alcohol. They could get it in diplomatic homes, but not legally sold in the bazaar. . It is not easy to get it in Kabul where strictly Muslim rules prevailed. And there were some Afghans who wouldn't drink. So you would have soft drinks for them.

Q: Did you have much contact with the Soviets?

PIEZ: A fair amount. They enjoyed coming to our homes. They enjoyed access to our liquor supplies. Their station chief at the time was a considerable alcoholic. At one party I saw him pick up a martini from a tray and pour it into a glass of beer. Then he took the beer and drank it down. There would be teasing and bantering back and forth with the Soviets.

Q: Was this the place that had a lot of volleyball games?

PIEZ: No.

Q: You didn't have volleyball. The Soviets in Africa would set up these volleyball games, and they beat the pants off of us every time because they are good volleyball players. Most Americans weren't up to volleyball.

PIEZ: When it came to sports the Afghans played soccer, and on rare occasions the game of buskashi played on horseback.

Q: That is with a sheep.

PIEZ: Well the carcass of a sheep, and the winner succeeds by dragging it into a circle. It can be

very violent because the players whip their horses and each other, pushing and shoving. If you go off your horse then there is the danger of trampling.

Q: Did the outside world intrude much in your work? Were there things happening?

PIEZ: Not too much. Very little tourism. Occasionally we would have a hippie hitch hiking through thinking maybe this was a place where he could have better access to drugs, which at the time we were there was only partially true. Probably they could get marijuana.

Q: Well what about so much heroin. Were they growing opium?

PIEZ: Were they growing opium? It was prohibited, and I think there was very little of it. While I was there I was approached by a health ministry official who said they had seized six tons of opium that had been brought in through India and Pakistan, he said. He asked me would the United States like to buy it. So I reported that to Washington and got a very quick sharp negative reply saying we weren't even to think about talking to them on such a subject, and that their only proper recourse was to burn it. The Afghans of course were hoping for money. I never learned what happened to it.

Q: Were the provinces more ruled by governors, war lords what have you?

PIEZ: Well of course the local religious and tribal chiefs had enormous influence and basically settled local disputes. To the extent there was a court system they managed it. There were governors appointed from Kabul for every province, and normally if it was a Pushtun province they would not appoint a Pushtun because he would be too beholden to the local traditional authorities. They would appoint a Tajik or perhaps an Uzbek in the hopes that he would be a little more loyal to Kabul than to the local people. To illustrate, we had a case where an American crossing the border from Pakistan and was still driving on the left side of the road as is the rule in Pakistan. He collided with another vehicle and killed a significant tribal figure, I think the son of a chief. Well the driver was insured internationally and the insurance company had a good Kabul representative who negotiated with a tribal leader. There was a traditional financial penalty paid to the family. The sum was determined through direct talks with the family of the deceased and it was paid. The whole thing was settled insofar as all the local people were concerned, and the American was released from detention. He wasn't actually confined in jail but he was being kept in the country. He was given his passport and he proceeded to leave. Then we received a note from the Foreign Ministry that he had not been cleared for departure by the Ministry and was not granted permission to leave. Well he had already left.

Q: So of course you called and asked him to come back.

PIEZ: Our consular officer asked me, "What do I do with this note?" They had sent our Embassy an official note on embossed letterhead and legal size paper. We didn't get many of those. I said just write on it "noted" and your initials and the date, and he did. And the foreign ministry was perfectly comfortable because their position was protected.

Q: How would you find morale or effectiveness of the embassy?

PIEZ: Well one always thinks your Embassy is effective in pursuing and preserving U.S. interests, but nevertheless as to morale, some people just couldn't cut it. They might have a tummy that grumbled and growled all the time, a certain amount of diarrhea. Some felt that there was nothing to do. There were no movies, no TV, and only one international club which most people found boring. There was no music on the radio that you would want to listen to. I had a shortwave radio but could not pick up BBC or Voice of America. There was not much of a real social life for staff even though Embassy staff did entertain each other. There were some sports such as tennis on the Ambassador's tennis court. The British Embassy had lovely grass tennis courts. Well irrigated. We found it challenging. Some liked to travel in the countryside and frequent the local tea houses which you could find anywhere in the country. As foreigners you were extremely welcome among the people who were naturally very curious. If you stopped for a picnic by the roadside in a totally empty desert region, you could spread out a blanket. Your children would be there, and you would get out some sandwiches and soft drinks. Soon five or six Afghans would just sort of turn up, just spring up out of nowhere, and they would join you. They wouldn't touch your food, which might include pork, but they would wait for the empty soft drink containers because those were valuable. If you gave one to them they would probably give it back and ask you to use your can opener and take the top out to make it into a cup. The conversation with them would be limited because our language training focused on Farsi, the Afghan version of the language of Iran, because that is what was used in government and business. Very likely they wouldn't speak Farsi. They might speak Pushto or Uzbek or some other language. But they had some words which everyone knew, basic words like *Salamaalekom* which is really universal not only to Afghanistan but to that part of the world. Another common word was *baksheesh*, which means gift or bribe.

Q: I take it you took to it.

PIEZ: We enjoyed it. It was a great place for young kids. They had their play groups and their ayah. She was wonderful with them. We have pictures of our children wearing Afghan garments, a suit for our son and a dress for our older daughter. They were made by an Afghan woman who lived next door to us. We had very little contact with them since she was in purdah, but they knew who we were and what we were like. She sewed these lovely blue garments for them.

Q: You had just arrived I imagine when President Kennedy was assassinated. How did that hit the embassy in that area?

PIEZ: Well I lived some distance from the embassy. I did not have a telephone. At the time of the assassination I was the embassy duty officer. A flash telegram came through in the middle of the night to Embassy Kabul. There was one telegram announcing he was shot, and then another announcing his death. It came maybe 20 minutes later. We received them instantly. Our communications were up and running as usual. The Marine on duty at the embassy sent the reserve car and a marine to my house and I was the first diplomatic level person to learn about it. I immediately went to the ambassador's residence and got him out of bed. Of course it was a total shock. Everyone rushed to the Embassy. We had to determine what the protocols were under those circumstances. How to put a black drape on the American flag. How to inform the government of the country and the Diplomatic Corps. We produced a formal diplomatic note,

embossed seal and all, and delivered it to the Foreign Minister at his home before dawn, in the hopes of getting to him before anybody else or at least not to seem delinquent providing that information officially. During that day there was a huge gathering at our Embassy of the diplomatic corps and Afghan officials to express their condolences and sign the condolence book. Many Embassies in Kabul joined us in flying their flags at half mast, except China which at that time we did not recognize. The Chinese discreetly flew no flag at all that day.

Q: Did USIA have much of an apparatus in Kabul.

PIEZ: USIS (U. S. Information Service) operated a library next door to the embassy. It was I would say lightly patronized. They were not able to run extensive speaking programs or films but they did provide information. There was the daily USIS bulletin. We knew that English speakers in Kabul of all nationalities liked to read it. There was one English language newspaper in Kabul, and that paper really depended on USIS, though not for all of their material, and of course the Russians were getting to them also. But they really depended on that daily feed.

Q: Was there much of an Indian or Pakistani presence there?

PIEZ: Virtually none. Because of the Pashtunistan dispute and its leftovers, there was no Pakistani presence other than a formal embassy. India had an embassy, and at one time a number of Indians had been employed in Kabul as clerks or accountants. What the Afghan government had done was, on the grounds of creating jobs for Afghans, simply to let the residence permits of the Indians expire. Consequently there were very few Indians or Pakistanis. A very few working for foreigners were allowed temporary status. We were able to bring in an Indian ayah and she lived with us.

Q: Well it does seem that in Afghanistan there was civil connection between, civil, I am using it in terms of politeness, connection between the Soviets and the Americans. I mean there was some intercourse there. In so many places they simply moved in different orbits.

PIEZ: There were unofficial exchanges with them. You would see them socially. They would occasionally target an American and try to turn him. Of course we were on the alert for that. I recall one USIS officer who sometimes seemed unconventional. A Soviet officer tried once to ply him with liquor. That amused us since the USIS officer was a dedicated non-drinker.

Q: Of course this is the turn and turn again thing. Often neutral countries particularly in Africa were seen as happy hunting grounds for both the KGB and the CIA for going out and bringing in cookie credits for turning American or Soviet officials to the other side.

PIEZ: Well I had nothing to do with turning anybody, but you could tell that there were certain people from their embassy who came a-hunting.

As I said there was some informal coordination with the Soviets. USAID had a program to map Afghanistan, the southern half. The Soviets also had a program using aerial photography and all the techniques of map making, and they did the northern half. The line between the two was clearly defined and the maps did not quite match. The contour lines would miss each other when

you compared the two map sets. I was instructed from Washington to buy several sets of those maps, Soviet or American made. I imagine they are still in use.

FRANK E. SCHMELZER
Political Officer
Kabul (1963-1965)

NEA, Afghan Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1965-1967)

Frank E. Schmelzer received a bachelor's degree from Harvard University and a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania. His Foreign Service career included positions in India, Afghanistan, Washington, DC, Vietnam, and Germany. He was interviewed by Michael Springmann in 1992.

SCHMELZER: Subsequently, an officer came out from Washington to look for somebody to be sent to Afghanistan. They wanted someone with a little pizzazz because it was difficult to operate in the police state environment there. Based on my record they chose me. So I went up Kabul.

Q: This is before the coup backed by the Soviets?

SCHMELZER: Oh yes. Well before that. I got there in 1963 and about a week or ten days after arriving Daud, the strongman, was out.

Q: Which Daud for the tape transcriber and those reading this later on?

SCHMELZER: I have forgotten his full title, but he was the Prime Minister and the cousin of the King. [From transcriber: Lt. Gen Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan] He was the strongman in the country and on this particular occasion he wanted to do something and threatened to resign if the King did not give him his way. Much to his surprise, on this occasion the King accepted his resignation and Daud was out. Then a reform government came in and soon all these Western educated Afghans who had been hiding came out of the woodwork to take over this new government. It really changed the atmosphere considerably. So slowly, little by little, it was much easier to operate in this new environment.

Q: I wasn't aware that Afghanistan at this time was a dictatorship.

SCHMELZER: Well, yes.

Q: I thought it was more relaxed and more along the lines of Iraq and...

SCHMELZER: No. Not under Daud. It was essentially a police state. The Afghans were often afraid to talk to foreigners. It was difficult to do the standard kind of reporting which was so easy to do in India.

Q: The King was essentially a figurehead?

SCHMELZER: He had been, but on this occasion he stepped forth and under his guidance the new government came in.

I was a bachelor again at that time and threw a lot of parties. I had been there for a short time when I met one Afghan at the International Club. He had been educated in the United States and it just turned out that he was the Director General of the Ministry of Interior. In other words he ran the police force, the secret police, the jail system. I mean, that man was well informed.

He had four friends, one of whom was dean of the law school, another was a vice president of a bank, another was a director of one of the departments in the Ministry of Commerce and a member of the extended royal family, and the fifth guy was the son of the one true wealthy industrialist in the country. These five guys were buddies and all hung around together.

Well, they started coming over to see me. I had booze and occasionally had friends come in, including Peace Corps volunteers. This came to the attention of the Russians and they used to complain to these guys. I was really surprised how ham-handed the Russians would be about this. They would say, "Why do you see Schmelzer? You no see Schmelzer no more."

Q: This was the KGB from the Soviet Embassy?

SCHMELZER: Yeah. It turned out that one of these KGB officers was talking to them like this. The Afghans would tell me this. This was very interesting to me. Afghanistan at the time was, of course, a neutral country. Our role there was essentially working with our AID program, with the Peace Corps volunteers and with contracts through Pan American for Ariana Airlines and a very small military program which brought trainees to the United States for military training. Essentially what we were trying to do was to counter to some degree the overwhelming presence of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Q: This is an extension of the same game the British and the Russians were playing in the last century.

SCHMELZER: Yes, that is right. Of course, working with us on our side of the ledger we had the Germans, the British, the Chinese and the Pakistanis. The Indians were playing their own game.

Q: When I was there they had Indian Army jeeps taking Russian kids to school.

SCHMELZER: Anyway, this particular KGB guy at embassy cocktail parties in Kabul would come up and start picking a fight with me. (According to the boys, he was the KGB chief in Afghanistan and probably the KGB chief for all of south Asia. He had been formerly in India and

they had caught him with his hands in the cookie jar and they expelled him.) I could never understand why he kept doing this. It happened time after time. I would just stand there for a while and listen to him ranting on. Finally I would see maybe an Indonesian over there, or a Pakistani or Indian and I would say, "Hey" and get a few people standing around. Then I would interrupt this KGB guy and turn to an Indian and say, "By the way, I assume you know that you threw this man out of your country because he was caught with his hand in the cookie jar?" And the Russian would stomp away madder than hell. And he would do this all the time.

Then we began to get into a strange situation where we would have "friendly little parties." Twelve officers from our Embassy and twelve officers from the Russian Embassy would get together about once a month or so. Now this was not being done elsewhere around the world.

Q: How large was the American Mission at that time? Was there just the one Embassy in Kabul?

SCHMELZER: The Embassy proper was probably about 30-40 people. With AID we probably had 200-300 people there. Our AID program was quite large and given the nature of the Afghan economy, we had to rely heavily upon technicians. Whereas in India, the economy was more advanced so we proportionately had a smaller group of technicians.

But somehow we had better relations with the Russians, perhaps because Afghanistan was a neutral country. Although we were in an adversarial relationship with them it didn't have the edge that it had in most other countries worldwide.

So we began to get together. One time the Americans would be the host and it would be at one of our homes, and then the Russians would be the host and it would be in their embassy...I presumed because it would be wired for sound and recorded.

Q: How large was the Russian Embassy at that point?

SCHMELZER: The Russian Embassy was very large. They had put in a new compound while I was there. It was so large, indeed, that some of the Afghans became rather apprehensive and wondered why they needed such a large compound. The only embassy in the physical sense that was comparable had been the British. The British Embassy, of course, had been used as an outgrowth of an imperial power. So the comparison, I think, must have made some Afghans uneasy.

About this same time I should say that I kept up relations with Taraki.

Q: Who is Taraki?

SCHMELZER: Nur Mohammad Taraki. In 1979 he suddenly emerged as the first Communist leader, prime minister in Afghanistan. I knew him because when I went to the Embassy in 1963, he was in the Embassy as a translator. He had been in India and liked Indian food. He had been in Washington as the press attaché in the Afghan Embassy. He and Daud did not get along. They hated each others' guts. When Taraki went back to Kabul from Washington, he told me he had left a letter with the New York Times implicating Daud in something or other. When he went

back to Kabul he told Daud that the New York Times had such a letter and if anything happened to him, the Times would publish a scathing story. I don't know if this is true or not, but this is what he told me.

After the reform program had been in place a few months, Taraki felt it was safe to leave the employ of the American Embassy and he did. I kept in touch with him. About once a month I would drive down to the old part of town and park under a certain tree and throw open the back door of my Mercedes. He would climb in, lie down on the floor of the car and then I would drive back to my house where the cook would have prepared a nice Indian meal and have left before Taraki and I arrived. I would park the car, close the gate and then he would be free to come into the house and the two of us would talk over the meal. Later I would give him a bottle of scotch and drive him back. I would let him out under the same tree in the old part of Kabul.

This guy was so well informed. I could prepare interesting airgrams, telegrams, etc. based on my discussion with him.

Q: Did he have an official position at this point?

SCHMELZER: Well, he had opened up a translation business. This was his cover for his political activity.

I knew he hated the royal family, I knew he had socialist leanings and wanted Afghanistan to advance in one hell of a hurry. But I did not know that he was forming the Communist Party of Afghanistan. Apparently no one else did either. The news that he was doing so only emerged later, when I was back in Washington.

Q: But he was giving you correct information on other things?

SCHMELZER: Yes. I don't think he was lying to me. He had wonderful stories, a sharp mind, and sources of information in many parts of the government.

Q: How did Washington and the Embassy receive your reports?

SCHMELZER: Well, they were very pleased that I had this great source of information.

As a result of knowing him and these other five people that I told you about, I was extremely well informed. It was incredible, particularly in a country that had been so difficult to operate in. I was doing quite well.

Well, at one of these parties with the Russians, I remember that this KGB guy finally got under my skin. I must say there was a lot of trouble over Berlin at that time...of course there had been for years. That was before we came to an agreement with the Russians on that subject. This was probably the spring of 1965. We had been talking about Germany and Berlin. I had had a little bit too much to drink and grabbed this guy by the necktie, rather close to his throat, and said, "Listen, you son of a bitch. You know what we are waiting for don't you? We are just waiting for a few Russian troops, three, two, one, to invade, to move into West Berlin. Then you know what

is going to happen to your country, don't you? From Leningrad to Vladivostok not a blade of green grass will ever grow again. Your language will disappear from the earth..." My own eyes were too blood shot to realize it, but a couple of the people standing around were reasonably sober, and this guy actually turned white. I don't know whether he thought my position there was more elevated than it was, and that I was presenting a well-considered USG policy decision, but I do know that thereafter he didn't bother me anymore. Who knows, maybe this incident helped to save Berlin!

The next get together with the Russians was in their Embassy. I remember at one point--it was rather late in the evening and we were all rather far gone--looking around and seeing a big collection of empty vodka bottles at my end of that long table and realizing that there was no vodka in those bottles there I started pounding on the table. "What, no vodka in this Russian Embassy?" Two or three of the Russians, drunk as they were, tottered to their feet and went down to the cellar and came back with more vodka. Afterwards I went to one cafe that stayed open 24 hours and fortunately two or three of my Afghan buddies were there...fortunately I say because one of the Russians followed me and the next thing I knew I was arm wrestling with him and ended up on the floor. I was able to get up and there was no damage done.

But one of the other officers, I think it was the head of our information service, was so drunk that night that he collapsed while putting his key in the front door and spent the night on his doorstep.

The Ambassador heard about this and putting all these things together he decided that maybe the time had come to stop all this. It was getting out of hand. So that was the end of our "friendly parties" with the Russians. But it was fun while it lasted and I think it was really worthwhile.

Later, of course, I went back to Washington and became the Desk Officer for Afghanistan which worked out very well. Obviously I knew all the players. I was the Ambassador's man in Washington.

Q: So you were the Embassy's emissary to Washington.

SCHMELZER: Yes. And whatever the Ambassador wanted, I tried to get for him, Ambassador Steeves. He appreciated what I was doing for him. I was quite effective, I think, in that line.

I also had very close relations with the Afghan Embassy here. I set up a system where I would get together with their second ranking officer, Mohammad Rafiq, at least once a month for lunch. I would always bring along at least one other person who had some interest in Afghanistan, somebody from AID, USIA, Commerce, the Agency, DOD, etc. This was a good vehicle for all concerned. The Embassy appreciated it.

Q: What time frame was this?

SCHMELZER: I was the Desk Officer for two years, 1965-67.

This was a lively period. There was a war between India and Pakistan in 1965, and I shared in the additional duty of serving in the Operations Center. Fortunately I was on duty because I knew something about Afghanistan. Suddenly there was a telephone call...

Q: You were also doing duty in the Operations Center?

SCHMELZER: Yes. While the war was on there was a task force of officers from South Asian Affairs, so there was always one or two of us there around the clock.

On this particular occasion the phone rang and it was the Pentagon. There was some general on the line. "Hello, this is General so and so. Who are you?" "I am Frank Schmelzer." "Well, Schmelzer, I don't know if you know but we have 12 C130s which are now just as we speak on their way from Tehran flying toward Rawalpindi." "Yes, General." "I think you know that we have this stand-down agreement between India and Pakistan so that these planes can arrive at 6 in the morning and the two air forces, the Indian and Pakistani air forces, would not engage during these two hours so that we can fly out American civilians on these C130s." "Yes, General, I am aware of that." "Well, unfortunately, nobody bothered to get permission from the Afghans to overfly their airspace." "Well, General, I think that was a mistake." "Well, Schmelzer, is this going to be a problem? What do the Afghans have?" "Well, they have SAM 2 missiles..." "What, SAM 2 missiles?" "Yes. They have MiGs 17s and 19s." "What?" So we had to send a FLASH cable out to our Embassy and the Ambassador got somebody out of bed and within half an hour or less we had an agreement to overfly the country. As I say, it was a good thing I was there because they might not have bothered to get the agreement and it would have left at very least a very bad feeling among the Afghans. If they had used their missiles or planes they might have shot down some of those aircraft.

Shortly afterwards I called up the Afghan Ambassador, who was taking a shower, and said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, as we speak there are C130s flying towards your country on their way to Pakistan. Unfortunately they took off from Tehran without permission from your government to overfly your country." I heard the Ambassador suck in his breath. I then said, "But we now have your government's agreement." And I heard him exhale.

Another story which I think is worth noting is a reflection of just how parochial you can get. There I was the Desk Officer for Afghanistan, a country that most people hadn't heard about. I would have done anything to serve the interests of our relations with that country, and I did. For example. While I was on the Desk the Afghans suddenly decided that they wanted to join the jet age. They came to us...I mentioned earlier that we had this arrangement with Pan American. Pan American had a contract under which they serviced the Afghan airline, Ariana. So it was natural for the Afghans to come to us when they decided that they wanted to purchase a jet. Unfortunately the Afghans told us right off the top that they wanted to use that aircraft to open service to Peking. During that period this was a "no-no." Treasury regulations precluded moving any American equipment into a Communist dominated country, particularly into Communist China.

However, Johnson's White House was already looking for some avenue to begin to open the door to Communist China. So I could use that interest in the bureaucratic struggle over this issue.

Treasury was against the loan, Pan American was in favor of it, Commerce was in favor of it because it would mean an export of an American aircraft. I don't think the CIA had much feeling about it one way or another. But Treasury was certainly opposed.

The big problem, of course, was the Ex-Im Bank, because they didn't want to touch this thing, particularly since they were going to Congress for an extension of their charter and for authority to provide additional financing. I was gung ho to get that plane. I did not know that the head of the Ex-Im Bank was dickering with State and hoped to become an ambassador. He assumed that I spoke for the State Department. Whatever the State Department wanted they should get because he wanted to become ambassador. So it was a very interesting bureaucratic tangle.

Finally we won. We got the jet. Then, of course, the Afghans decided they would not fly to Peking after all. I happened to know their jet pilot who was on one of the early runs. They hadn't had the plane very long. He flew into Frankfurt on his way to London. London tower told him that there was fog and they had better not come in. Well, you know how these Afghans are. They can be rather thick headed at times, and this guy certainly was. He was gung ho, full of oats, a young guy. He decided to go in and in the process cracked up the plane. Fortunately it was insured so the Afghans got another one.

CHARLES L. DARIS
Political Officer
Kabul (1964-1966)

Charles L. Daris was born in 1938 in Massachusetts. He served in the US Navy before graduating from the San Francisco State College in 1963. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964. His overseas posts include Afghanistan, Vietnam, Western Africa, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Daris was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1998.

Q: You started in January of '64, came to Washington and had the usual basic officer training at the Foreign Service Institute. Did you go abroad then right away?

DARIS: Yes. I was assigned to Kabul, Afghanistan and in my view it was a perfect first assignment. It was a medium sized embassy. I was able to rotate to all sections and the entire last year was in the political section. Political reporting was where my heart was. Afghanistan was an exotic and fascinating place to be. Given the Russian historical antecedents in Central Asia and Afghanistan's role in the Great Game, Afghanistan had become a unique battleground in the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. It was simply teeming with intrigue. We put a certain amount of assets in there, not excessive, but just enough to maintain our presence and to keep options open for the Afghans. It worked until the Russians decided to go for broke; they were able to have their way for a few years but were to regret it afterwards.

John Steeves, who was later to become Director General of the Foreign Service, was the Ambassador while I was there. He was careful and professional and good with his staff.

Q: When did you actually get there, in '64 still?

DARIS: Yes. I arrived in the late summer or fall of '64 and was there for almost two years.

Q: Did you have language training before you went to Kabul?

DARIS: I came into the Foreign Service with no serviceable language, having studied but a little Russian in college. I was given initial French language training by the State Department but I didn't get off language probation. That was to dog me for several years because I never had a French speaking post and that situation actually retarded early promotions. It was frustrating for me.

Q: This is not my interview but I have to tell you that I was in Lahore, Pakistan from '64 to '66 and visited Kabul twice in 1965. There were a lot of things happening in Afghanistan, certainly in Kabul. We drove up over the Khyber Pass and up the Kabul River Gorge and so on. I was impressed with that highway which I guess was an American financed project.

DARIS: I can't remember whether we contributed to part of that, we may have. We and the Russians collaborated indirectly, or inadvertently almost, with the Afghans acting as the clearing house. For example, on the loop highway that went all the way from Pakistan to the Iranian border, we did the Kabul-Kandahar part. We had a big AID project in the Helmand Valley, near Kandahar. The Russians built the rest of the road to the Iranian border; they also did roads to the northern border, which they ultimately used to invade the country. At the time, everybody did their segments and the Afghans profited. They knew how to play the various parties and did it reasonably cleverly. Afghanistan was, and is, a very poor country.

By way of vignette, not too long after I arrived, I was invited by colleagues in the Embassy to join them for the next in an ongoing series of get-togethers with colleagues from the Russian embassy. On the appointed day of the dinner, which this time was being hosted at the standard blockhouse-looking Russian Embassy, we heard the news that Khrushchev had died. We wondered whether the dinner would take place, but the Russians after some hesitation told us to come ahead. It was somewhat unreal; the Russians naturally didn't know what to say about the event, let alone succession, so they were even more boisterous than usual in plying us with vodka and caviar all evening to avoid discussions of their internal drama.

Q: Compared with what happened later on it was a relatively quiet period, or a positive period in terms of U.S. Afghan relations. It was a place of competition as you say in the Cold War context.

DARIS: Yes it was a tranquil period bilaterally. The country was extremely backwards in all ways: economically, politically and socially. It was run by the royal family in, I think, benevolent fashion at least in the period that I was there. I happen to have a number of Afghan friends who immigrated to this country, most of whom had to cross the mountains with their families carrying what belongings they could.

All in all, it was a memorable first tour. I love the memory of Afghanistan. It will never be, never can be, what it was then and I regret that enormously.

DAVID C. McGAFFEY
Peace Corps Volunteer
Farah (1964-1966)

David C. McGaffey was born in Michigan in 1941. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Detroit in 1964. His career has included positions in Farah, Manila, Kabul, Tabriz, Isfahan, Teheran, and Georgetown. Mr. McGaffey was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in September 1995.

Q: You and your wife went to Afghanistan?

McGAFFEY: That's correct.

Q: Where were you and what did you do there?

McGAFFEY: We were in town of Farah. It is a provincial capital and an oasis in the center of the desert of death in the southwest corner squeezed between Iran and Pakistan, Baluchistan. We were the first foreigners who had ever come to Farah to live. We were teachers in the sense of rabbi. The Peace Corps had one definition of what we were supposed to do and we did that plus a lot of other things: set up a science lab, opened the first high school for girls, dug wells and taught carpentry. Mostly we were being Americans in a place that didn't quite believe in those mythological beings.

Q: I think the Peace Corps experience is an important one so I don't want to just let go of it. Here is an area which as you say, particularly at that time, is practically untouched by the outside and probably, I assume, intensely Islamic religious and all, how did you relate to the mullahs?

McGAFFEY: We were obviously objects of notoriety from the moment we arrived to everyone including the mullahs. I learned a great deal about Islam and taught them a good deal about the evangel, the Bible, and about Christianity. About all that they knew was that the Koranic Sharia said that Christianity was holy, it was part of the direct revelation, and that's all they knew.

Q: How did you communicate?

McGAFFEY: In Farsi, in Persian. I was very poor at the other languages but I became fluent in Persian. That was the trade language.

Q: You said you helped set up a girls high school. I would have thought this would have run counter to much of what was going on.

McGAFFEY: No. As a matter of fact, it was very much what was going on. This was 1964. Afghanistan was very much a part of the exploration of limits and deciding what was new. They were trying to establish a central government for the first time but never quite succeeded. They did things like provided money for schools in all of the towns, built roads out, sent Peace Corps. So I was part of a modernist conspiracy that was myself, the principal of the high school, the governor, the chief of police, and the young doctor who was the first doctor ever in town, all trying to refocus the minds of the people in Farah.

Q: I would expect in that society it would have been very helpful to have been married, wasn't it?

McGAFFEY: The only previous person from the Peace Corps was a young man who had been sent down by himself and was installed in a hotel room. He came very close to having a nervous breakdown because the people were so hospitable, and so concerned for him, that they would sit in his hotel room for 18 hours a day just to keep him company and he never had any privacy. He reported that it was an unlivable town. So, yes, having a wife meant that we could have privacy and so it was very important. Elizabeth was also a teacher, which meant that she was ambisexual. She was welcomed in both the male areas and the female areas. I was only welcomed in the male areas, except for a very few exceptions.

Q: You were there for how long?

McGAFFEY: For about two years.

Q: Did you have any contact with the embassy or any feel for the embassy at that time?

McGAFFEY: Elizabeth and I were the most remote of the Peace Corps volunteers so we were somewhat objects of notoriety among the Americans as well. Every time we went up to Kabul we got dinner invitations and invitations to call on people at the embassy. Arch Blood was the DCM there and impressed me out of my mind with his sophistication and his awareness of things. But with that and two other exceptions, I was not terribly impressed by the people in the embassy. Nobody there with the exception of a man who I learned was the station chief, spoke the language to anything like my capacity and my capacity was certainly limited. None of them left the capital. All of them felt that talking to the small inner circle of what we called the prop jet set, gave them an insight to what was happening in Afghanistan, and they were wrong. I was very upset to find out that the only people who seemed interested in what was going on in Afghanistan were from the station rather than from the embassy.

Q: When we're talking about the station, we're talking about the CIA. Were you under sort of strict injunction to stay as far away as you could from the CIA?

McGAFFEY: Yes, certainly on any official basis but not on a personal basis. These people did not identify themselves as "Hello, I'm from the CIA and I want you to come to dinner." They said "Hello, I'm Joe Blow and won't you come to dinner." I only found out about this later. When I went to Arch Blood to complain about this, when I did find out about it, he said "All right, if you think you can do better why don't you join the Foreign Service." I said "How does

one do that?" He told me, so Elizabeth and I took the examination and we both passed. She got a couple of points higher than I did. I got a lovely letter congratulating me on the exam and welcoming me and telling me about the possibilities for the orals. She got a letter which I wish we had saved but we didn't, which said "We note with interest that you have taken the Foreign Service exam but also that your husband took and passed the Foreign Service exam. Since we do not accept married ladies in the Foreign Service, we assume that you took it only out of interest."

Q: It was a different world.

McGAFFEY: It was a different world. Anyway, I still had not made up my mind but they had the traveling road show in those days and a team came to Teheran. Again Arch Blood persuaded me to spend my money and I flew to Teheran and took the oral. I met a real dragon lady, the ambassador's wife.

Q: Mrs. MacArthur?

McGAFFEY: It was MacArthur, yes. After the exam I was asked to go and sit outside. I was sitting there trying to figure out what they were making of me and she walked through the hall then stopped and came back and took off my head because I had not stood up when she entered the hall.

Q: I'm not sure if she is deceased now but she was one of three or four ladies who were renowned as the dragons in the Foreign Service. Her father was at one point the vice president of the United States, Alben Barkley. This is just an aside.

McGAFFEY: I knew that and I knew of her later. My wife and I were on the drafting team writing the Foreign Service policy on wives, the dreaded A-seven. One of the things that a friend of mine who was working for that ambassador later reported was that she personally got 42 copies of A-seven mailed to her anonymously. I had just worked for another one of the dragon ladies in Manila.

Anyway, they told me that I passed and they welcomed me into the Foreign Service. I spent long hours talking about this with my wife and writing letters to my academic mentors who kept telling me about this job that was waiting for me in Ohio. We came back to the States still undecided. REA Express lost two footlockers that contained all of my notes and recording and artifacts and I felt a great sense of relief. I realized then that I wanted to join the Foreign Service.

Q: You didn't have all of those folklore stories hanging around.

McGAFFEY: Although Farah was fascinating for that. The storytellers would come in and sit in the market and tell stories that I had successfully traced from the 1837 publication of *The Little Yellow Book* in London which had been shipped out to the British in India. Picture this Victorian poppy reading to his children and behind every child there was an ayah, a nanny, who would listen and go back to her children and tell the stories. It was picked up and moved from Hindustani through four different languages picking up elements of their culture.

Q: Who was the author? It was Lange wasn't it?

McGAFFEY: Yes, Lange.

Q: How fascinating.

McGAFFEY: It was fascinating. It was a good dissertation topic and I had documented the transmission but having lost it all, I then joined the Foreign Service.

ARCHER K. BLOOD
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kabul, 1965-1968

Archer Blood was born in Illinois in 1923 and received a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia in 1943. In addition to Algeria, Mr. Blood served in Greece, Germany, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. He was interviewed in 1989 by Henry Precht.

BLOOD: And, of course, it paid off in the sense that I was really working not only for Personnel, but I was working for the executive director in NEA, Joe Eggert. And he was the one who said, "Boy, the job you ought to look for at the end of two years here is the DCM job in Kabul." And he was on my side. I zeroed in on that, and luckily I was promoted to class two that winter in time to qualify for the job.

Q: This was in 19--

BLOOD: This would have been 1965.

Q: '65. So you went on to Kabul that summer?

BLOOD: That summer, yes. Things were going very well. And that was a great--John Steeves was the ambassador. He was the one that picked me. Kabul was a tremendous post. It was probably the best time to be there because it was more open. The country was more open to foreigners than it had been before. We could travel a great deal.

Q: Were the roads paved at that time?

BLOOD: Well, actually, the circumferential, you might say, highway net in Afghanistan is better than in Iran or in Pakistan or India.

Q: But it existed at that time?

BLOOD: Oh, yes, yes. Well, we were building--most of it existed. Part of it was the road we were--while I was there, we finished the road from Kabul to Kandahar, but large parts of it were done.

Of course, we had an attaché plane, and we could use that for travel. The Afghan government was sensitive to that plane going to northern Afghanistan toward the Soviet border, and they would only allow it to go if the ambassador or myself were on board which meant that the air attaché for his own business was constantly asking us, "Can't you think of some reason to go up to Mazar-e Sharif or Qonduz?" And we often did. Sometimes we would take our British colleagues or German colleagues along with us on the flight. It was a great way to travel.

Q: But the Afghan government was sensitive because they didn't want to provoke the Soviets?

BLOOD: That's right, yes.

Q: Was it easy to talk to Afghans at that time? Could you talk to university people and other non-governmental people?

BLOOD: It was. I mean, I think that Afghan officials still, in particular the military--I mean, the military would go to the attaché's house, but they wouldn't come to our house. I think the Afghan officials were a little nervous about showing up and say going to foreign embassies or foreign residences. But we had a lot of contact with Afghans.

Of course, again we had a very large AID mission with a network of relationships throughout the education world, the government.

Q: Did they speak frankly to you about their political views, these Afghans that you met?

BLOOD: Yes, but at that time the king was starting his sort of a halfhearted democratization program, parliamentary election. I don't think the issues weren't that burning. I mean, it struck us at the time as a calm period. I mean, now of course, the communist party was established then. But in those first couple of years, it was pretty small potatoes.

Our relations with the Soviets were remarkable in that--I've never been in a post where you had as friendly relations with Soviets as we had in Kabul in those days. The Afghans, of course, encouraged that.

We had what we called Soviet-American bashes. About once a month, several American officers would get together with several Russian officers for dinner, a lot of drinking, and bantering back and forth. We would deliberately introduce our junior officers to this one at a time so they could get an idea how clever these guys were and how able they were. Of course, most of the Soviets we were dealing with were KBG types, but they had good sense of humor, very sharp, very sharp. And that was part of our purpose. To let our junior officers know how sharp they were. It was done in an atmosphere of camaraderie and conviviality.

Q: I suppose we had sort of a condominium relationship with them.

BLOOD: No, no. They were the top dog.

Q: Were they?

BLOOD: Oh, yes.

Q: We didn't have sharp diversity of views on Afghanistan, did we?

BLOOD: No, no, we didn't. In fact, one of our AID contract groups was working with the finance ministry and, you know, how they would work. Say, the Russians would aid one sector of the economy, and we would aid a sector so there wouldn't be overlap. And we were working well this way. They built some roads; we built some roads. We helped out, we built one airport; they built some other airports. And they--

Q: But who did this coordination? We didn't sit down with the Russians and work out this--

BLOOD: No, no. The Afghans did the coordination. But with us and with the Russians. We didn't work directly with the Russians on that. But there was, I think, almost a tacit understanding that we accepted the fact that they provided the bulk of all the military aid, more economic aid than any other country, but that our aid gave the Afghans an alternative to sort of complete dependence upon the Soviets.

Q: What were the implications of being top dog to them? What does it mean to them politically? Do they have more access to the king?

BLOOD: Oh, they have more access. It also means that the Afghans wouldn't deliberately antagonize them.

Q: How did they treat them differently from the way we were treated? Any way you can distinguish--

BLOOD: No, I can't. I'm not really--it's hard to say because I never saw any of their dealings, but I don't think that they were--

Q: They weren't given greater preferences and seatings at official functions or anything like that?

BLOOD: Oh, no.

Q: Yes. Nothing obvious.

BLOOD: No. But I think on important issues, say in U.N. votes or action, certainly I think the Afghan government would think very carefully about taking an action that they knew the Soviets wouldn't like.

Q: What attention did Washington pay to Afghanistan at that time?

BLOOD: Well, in aid terms, quite a bit. I remember that there was another cut, I think, a government cut in that period of '65 to '68. I was surprised to see that Kabul was one of the thirty largest posts in the world because of our AID mission. It was a large AID mission. We had a large Peace Corps contingent there. We had a lot of Americans in Afghanistan and a lot of people on contract there. So in terms of economic assistance, you had within--this is before we really got involved in Egypt, of course--you had Jordan and--

Q: Still had a fair program in Iran.

BLOOD: Iran, yes. India. Pakistan was much more important. Jordan was important. India was important. But Afghanistan was up there in the top four or five in NEA.

Q: But--

BLOOD: While there, we had the big Helmand Valley project had been under way for years. It was a large effort.

Q: But did the assistant secretary visit Afghanistan? Who was the assistant secretary at that stage? Was it Luke Battle?

BLOOD: No. Harriman came out on one visit. He was the senior most American I think had come there when I was there. You would get some congressional visits I think largely because looking at the AID program.

But, no, I think from the political sort of leadership in Washington, there wasn't that much concern.

Q: Did American journalists visit with any regularity?

BLOOD: No, no.

Q: There were none stationed there?

BLOOD: No, we had none stationed there. They would come up from Pakistan or India from time to time. It was a relatively quiet period. At least we thought it was at the time.

Q: Did you have frictions with the AID mission at that post or was it similar to that--

BLOOD: No, not similar. Relationships were better. The ambassadors were able to exercise their authority over the AID missions.

Q: You had Ambassador Steeves.

BLOOD: And then Bob Neumann.

Q: Who was a political appointment.

BLOOD: He was a political appointee who came out.

Q: What change did you notice between the professional and the political appointee? Any?

BLOOD: Well, I think, actually, I would say Bob Neumann was a better ambassador than John Steeves. John Steeves was better at working with the American community. He was very likable. He played a lot of bridge. He rode horses. He fished and golfed. I mean, he moved around a lot in the American community. He wasn't as good as a political analyst in dealing with the Afghan government than I think as Neumann was. Neumann was very effective in that. Very hard working. I'd say Neumann was a better ambassador than Steeves.

Q: All right.

BLOOD: And, of course, it was a little awkward for me because he inherited me.

Q: And how long did you stay with him after that?

BLOOD: I stayed until the end of my tour and then was succeeded by Bruce Laingen. In fact, I was promoted just at the end of the tour to class one. I was doing very well right then. So it was logical that I would move on to something else.

CHARLES C. CHRISTIAN
Controller, USAID
Kabul (1966-1968)

Charles C. Christian was born in Missouri in 1927. He received a bachelor's degree from Westminster College in 1950 and a master's degree from George Washington University in 1971. Mr. Christian joined USAID in 1961. His career included positions in Indonesia, Afghanistan, Laos, the Philippines, and The Ivory Coast. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1995.

CHRISTIAN: Well my next post was Afghanistan. We transferred to Afghanistan after home leave in July 1965, for a two year tour. I was the Controller there. That was a smaller mission in some ways, but there were a lot of people there because it was a technical assistance program. Afghanistan was quite a juncture for East meeting West, though, and the Cold War was in plain view there. The USSR was providing transportation and communications north and south from the Soviet Union down to India and Pakistan, and we were going west to east from Iran to India. One of our white elephants there was the international airport which was built in Kandahar. I think the airport was jointly funded with the World Bank. It was planned, funded, commenced and completed (this may have taken a good part of a decade in Afghanistan) about the time the jet aircraft came into being. After the jets with longer range capability were available this airport was mostly over flown. The new airport was simply not needed anymore. They could fly directly

from Iran to India (before that they needed someplace mid-way to land). The Kandahar airport was hardly used, and that had to be explained by the current Mission Director to every Congressional delegation and all other dignitaries passing through.

Q: Did you get a sense of the conflict between East and West, of the Cold War, while you were there? Did you have any dealings with the Russians there?

CHRISTIAN: You would see a lot of Soviets around. They would have their project activities in certain areas, and in traveling about you would note their camps. We were there from 1966 to 1968 and the Afghans apparently allocated certain areas of the countries for development projects by the Russian and other areas for us. Of course, later on our Ambassador was assassinated there. Maybe this is not the right way to phrase this, but it was almost under the auspices of the USSR. As I understand the political status at the time, it was under a USSR appointed, more or less, government. However, it did not come as any surprise to me that the Afghans were not to be conquered or governed by the USSR for long. They would fight to the last person, and that last person would not surrender. They are the hardest people that I have ever been exposed to. As a little example: We would come home from a late evening out, maybe one o'clock or so, and the temperature would be five below. When we would drive up to the gate, the gardener, barefoot, would come out to open the gate not thinking anything of it. Practically everyone was that hardy a soul. They sent all the British out of there in boxes around the turn of the century. They have never been a conquered people; except maybe Genghis Khan did it early on when he laid waste to the total country.

Q: What were we doing in our program?

CHRISTIAN: There was a sizable vocational education program. The University of Wyoming had a contract team there doing vocational education. Columbia University was helping the University of Kabul develop a teachers training program, trying with limited success to get that off the ground. Morrison-Knudsen was there building highways West to East. A couple of US contractors were working with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning to improve their operations. It was a large technical assistance program, not as well funded as the Indonesia one, but again a large US direct hire presence.

Q: Did you deal with the Afghans directly, the government people?

CHRISTIAN: They were a different breed of cats from the Indonesians. They had an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth mentality, but it was possible to make some good working relationships there, especially with those who had been trained in the West. (Of course we seldom came into contact with those trained in the USSR.) The state treasurer was a particularly good friend, and it carried on for several years. He had been trained at UCLA; he was later accused of being a CIA informant, because of his training in the US. It was politically expedient for his opponents to do so. There wasn't any truth to it. He only received some education in the West. The ones in government, and from another tribe, who were leaning towards the USSR wanted to make some hay out of it. They had banners in the streets of Kabul accusing him of being a CIA participant. Some Afghans were very hard to do business with. You couldn't figure out what you needed to do to get across to them. I can remember when one of my tasks as

Controller was to keep a running account over a period of several months, down to the last hour of the day that we would run out of local currency. We prepared a letter over the Mission Director's signature telling them we were closing down the mission on such and such a day if they did not come through with the funding, the local currency. This went on for several months. I don't know whether it was a game they were playing or whether it was some misunderstanding or just playing hardball with us.

Q: But you were the one who had to deal with the finance people?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, but at that stage it got up to the Mission Director level, with the support of the Ambassador, and it was his name being used, and in turn the prestige of the US government. I was just doing the detail work of letting him know when he should pull the trigger. In spite of the difficulties, it was an interesting country and culture.

Q: Why were we dependent on local currency? What was the financial situation then that we needed a lot of local currency from the government? Were they paying for our development programs?

CHRISTIAN: As I indicated we had a large staff there, and the local currency was for paying for the operating expenses for support of all local expenses, including the furnishing of the many houses occupied by Americans. These local currency funds were generated from PL 480 programs for US uses according to bilateral agreements. This was similar to all the programs I worked on in Asia at least.

Q: Did you enjoy living there?

CHRISTIAN: It was somewhat of a difficult time to be living there, because both our children were of pre-school age. It kept us pretty close to the wigwam. It was difficult to get nannies or help there, because the Afghans did not allow their women to stay in a foreign home overnight. While I did enjoy my tour there very much, it was a very striking contrast to our experiences in Indonesia. It was a ruggedly beautiful country, a lot of it laid waste by the hordes that came through on the Silk route. Some of these folks were Genghis Khan and his friends, and so it was eerie in a way. The other part that was not so pleasant was that between our house and another American's, there was an Afghan family who wanted to lease their house to Americans to make a good return on their investment. But the house was in no condition for Americans to live in. They became very much of a nuisance to us, as they tried to get the USAID executive officer to change his mind. It was very unpleasant, as they would throw stuff (some unsanitary) at our kids. The Mission eventually had to ask the police to intervene. On the other hand the Afghans that you dealt with at a professional level were very nice. Some were oriented towards the USSR, and had been trained in Russia, so they were a little more difficult for us to deal with. Afghanistan was a two year tour for us.

JAMES G. SCOVILLE
USAID Summer Research Program

Kabul (1967-1979)

Mr. Scoville has worked with the International Labor Organization, has conducted research for USAID in Afghanistan, has worked for USDL, and has done various other activities involving Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Mali.

SCOVILLE: In the spring of 1967, I was approached by USAID with an eye to participating in its Summer Research Program. Several countries were mentioned, but we settled on Afghanistan, with a project to look at employment and employee compensation in the developing industrial sector. The idea of the SRP was to assist the research side of developing country universities; hence, the research was intended to be collaborative, conducted with a local counterpart. Unfortunately, Kabul University was linguistically balkanized, each department using as its second language the language of the country assisting it. Thus, the economics faculty all spoke German and Dari (two languages I do not speak). In any event, no counterpart was forthcoming.

USAID provided me with introductions (through the Industry Department of the Ministry of Mines and Industries), vehicles, drivers and interpreters and I conducted a survey of some 30 modern sector industries, ranging from a 2,000-employee textile mill at Gulbahar and a cement factory at Ghorī to a small, inoperative oil-seed pressing mill near Bost. The results, quite interesting in many respects, appeared in the *International Labor Review* in 1969. This caused a bit of a diplomatic flap because the article was not by an Afghan official, either of the ILO or of the RGA. In spite of this, USAID brought me back to Afghanistan in the summer of 1970 to update the survey. This time I did have a counterpart, M. Na'im, but his research affiliation (if any) was unclear. Thus, the overall effect of SRP over two summers on promotion of research experience by Afghans remained very limited, to my way of thinking.

In other ways, I found the SRP experience---or rather, my connection with USAID and the way it operated in Afghanistan---to be rather unsettling. It did not seem to me that the US presence in Afghanistan was being used to its fullest in terms of the various things we might want to promote. At the simplest level, it was difficult to maintain the sense of equality probably essential to a counterpart relationship when the counterpart is barred from staying in the USAID Staff House (when available). Coming into Kandahar with the temperature at 130+ degrees, I certainly wanted the clean swimming pool and air conditioning of the Staff House. (As a labor economist, and not an anthropologist, I didn't think I needed to stay in the bazaar to "pay my dues.") I can understand the rules, regulations, etc. that precluded Na'im from staying there---and I think he did too---but it still made the experience a funny one.

But, more broadly, I thought our US presence was not generating the human resource training and development outcomes that it could and probably should. On my first visit, USAID jobs were very strongly stratified. At the top were Americans, in charge of policy (the finance officer, the transportation officer); next came the Third Country Nationals, mostly Indians, who handled clerical and administrative chores (bookkeepers, cashiers, stores attendants); at the bottom were the Afghans, confined to laborer and driver jobs. In fairness, it should be said that major state (Ariana Afghan Airlines, Radio Kabul) and private (IndAmer Afghan Industries) enterprises were arranged much the same way. I was told that there were at the time about 1200 "official" Americans in Afghanistan (this may have been USAID and Embassy staff combined), so the

whole support enterprise was quite large. Yet, it seemed very little effort was being made to recruit, train and upgrade Afghan staff, at least with the object of replacing the TCNs. I thought we were missing a chance to contribute directly to human capital accumulation and, maybe, even to make a few friends. I raised this subject (naturally), and received the usual litany of previous failures, conclusions that Afghans were unstable workers, untrainable, etc. When I returned three years later, it did seem that some changes had been made, and more training was available for bookkeeper and stores attendant positions.

L. BRUCE LAINGEN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kabul (1968-1971)

Ambassador L. Bruce Laingen was born in 1922. His Foreign Service career included positions in Iran, and Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Malta. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 9, 1993.

Q: Well, then off you went...you couldn't get yourself off the subcontinent...to Kabul for 1968-71. How did that assignment come about and what did you do?

LAINGEN: Looking back on it, it was the most rewarding Foreign Service assignment I ever had. It was a Deputy Chief of Mission slot and that always, I think, is one of the better Foreign Service assignments. Not better than being the chief of mission, but a training ground for becoming a chief of mission. In many posts you have opportunities of being chargé, not unlike being chief of mission.

I was there, again under a political Ambassador, Robert Neumann, an active Republican who in time, and I think today, regards himself as a kind of professional Foreign Service Officer.

Q: He served in at least three different countries.

LAINGEN: Later on he became Ambassador to Morocco after a long stint in Kabul where he wore out three DCMs and then he was in Saudi Arabia briefly. I have a high regard for Ambassador Neumann. His leadership was very effective in Kabul at that time. The regime in power was still a monarchy, King Zahir. The problems that confront Afghanistan today were there then, but very much in the background and the king was safely in command.

I remember that leadership of Neumann also not least because Mrs. Neumann was for us a classic, latter day example of the Foreign Service senior wife who played the role strongly and expected the rest of the staff and wives to support that role. Not as a dragon. I would not call her one of the dragons of the Foreign Service. Not at all. She is too much a human being, too warm and personable to be called that. But certainly someone as the senior wife who expected and assumed that the rest of the wives would play their part in projecting American values, influence and presence in that country.

My wife sometimes chafed under her, as the second wife, and looking back on it I suppose she would have rather played some different role, but I better let her speak to that. But it was a given under Neumann that the wives would play these roles.

Q: What was Ambassador Neumann's background and how did he operate?

LAINGEN: Well, he came out of academia primarily, the University of Southern California at Berkeley. He has an academic streak to him, therefore, in the sense that he tends to examine all issues in great depth to develop as much perspective and understanding as possible. He came from a political background too, but not an active political role. I think, if anything, Mrs. Neumann was a little more of that than he at that time. He ran a tight ship in the sense that he was clearly in command and personally involved in most issues and expected to be fully informed. He ran, I thought, a very effective country team operation.

And incidentally, he introduced there what I think is a useful device and which I used in Malta when I was ambassador there, and that is the idea of a wives country team. He would call in periodically the senior wives of the country team and brief them in a depth that they otherwise would not have of problems confronting the United States at that point in its relationship with Afghanistan. After all, wives as we all know in the Foreign Service, traditionally at dinners and so on sit next to prime ministers and foreign ministers and are expected to carry on some kind of conversation with them. Too often it tends to be about children and family and not much beyond that, but this was a recognition on the part of Ambassador Neumann that wives ought to be a little bit better informed than that and to be able to respond intelligently in such conversations. It is a very useful device. Maybe other ambassadors have done it, probably more than I know. It was the first time that I experienced it.

The country team worked very effectively there, as I think a country team must. He drew on it heavily. He expected the senior officers to operate as a team, keeping everybody informed, including, I think as much as possible the CIA intelligence components and the military components. He had very close relationships with the king, which mattered a great deal at that point. He also had some relationships with Daud who eventually seized power.

Q: Daud at that time was...?

LAINGEN: He was a cousin of the king, out of power, but in the background. He was there and Neumann carefully, with the acquiescence of the king, kept up that relationship. It was important, looking down the road when Daud took power.

At that point we had access, the military attaché did, to a DC-3. So we travelled a good deal around the country and that was very helpful because transportation in Afghanistan wasn't always easy. We were players in the "great game"...the great game being that historical term applied to the time when the British in Imperial India competed with Czarist Russia for influence in this buffer region of Afghanistan. After World War II we inherited that role in a sense. We became the players, with the Soviets on the other side. We, with large aid programs, were the big players to try to keep Soviet influence manageable. We assumed after a decision in the mid-

fifties in the Dulles period that we would not be a military player against the Soviets in that region.

We did maintain a military relationship through training programs which were carefully tended, but the main competition was in the economic area. Very large aid programs, relatively for the size of the country. And a large Peace Corps program in Afghanistan at that time. I am one of those who in the early sixties when the Peace Corps came into place, and I confess it today, was very skeptical about its role.

Q: I think this is true. I certainly was. I thought a bunch of do-gooders wandering around making trouble.

LAINGEN: But I changed my view, as most of us have, I think, and today I have a high regard for the Peace Corps. Above all because of the way it strengthens young Americans to play more effective roles in their own society when they come back home. Not that they accomplish all that much in a tangible sense on the ground in these countries -- although English speaking programs were a large component of that in Afghanistan and I think was certainly helpful.

But the economic competition between us and the Soviets, going back to my comment about transportation and communication, saw us and the Soviets build this remarkable network of roads in Afghanistan. We built between us a great, country wide, circular concrete and asphalt highway. Where our aid program stopped, the Soviet program would pick up either immediately or a few blocks on the other side of the town. That eventually saw the Soviets with a big advantage when they invaded militarily in later years. But we did put in place a rather remarkable highway system.

We also helped build in the early period with Afghanistan a great hydroelectric and irrigation facility down in the southwest part of the country -- the Helmand Valley, and I would love to go back today to see how it has progressed in terms of the big emphasis we put on irrigation and prospects at that time of agricultural development.

We had a visit in Kabul while I was there from Secretary Rogers. It went very well. And a more celebrated visit from Vice President Agnew, then still in office. But he was already a target of a good deal of criticism at home, and it was evident in Kabul by Peace Corps members demonstrating against his being there. One of my tasks as they demonstrated outside the Chancery was to go out there as the Deputy Chief of Mission and try to reason with these young Peace Corps volunteers to keep their protests civil while the Vice President was in the city. Whatever you may feel about Vice President Agnew's later activities, as a visiting dignity which he was during that visit, he played his role beautifully. He followed his script. He then was an attractive, strong figure and he came across very well with the Afghans.

Q: How does one report political happenings in a place like Afghanistan? Or does one?

LAINGEN: Oh yes. Political officers always find things to report. In those days you were still expected to do a lot of reporting, particularly conversations with influential or potentially influential figures. We did a lot of reporting, of course, as we sensed their attitudes towards us

and the Soviet Union. We did a lot of reporting on the Pushtunistan issue. Again the problems between Afghanistan and Pakistan were there all the time. We did a lot of travel. Afghanistan is the kind of country that inevitably compels political officers and economic officers to get out there and look because it is such an exciting landscape. There are long distances between cities and interesting places to go to. So we did a lot of "trip reporting" at that time.

Certainly there wasn't political reporting in terms of daily reports of a parliamentary debate because that sort of thing didn't exist of any consequence. It was mainly the kinds of direct relationships that you were able to develop with the Afghans at all levels. Sometimes you were left with contacts with people in the streets and the bazaars who were in your view at the time possibly reflective of trends in that country.

It was during that time that we were beginning to try to find ways to deal with the Chinese and the Communist system. It was before Nixon went off to China. But it was the beginning of what later saw working contacts in Warsaw between us and the Chinese. That had ripples in places like Kabul because there was a Chinese Embassy there. Neumann was the type of Ambassador who took risks sometimes and had contacts. Quietly he got authorization in that sort of far corner for contacts that I think the Department concluded wouldn't have some worldwide effect. And possibly what Neumann was carefully reporting from Kabul at the time of his careful contacts with the Chinese had some contribution to that larger relationship.

Q: How about with the Soviets? Did you have much contact with the Soviets?

LAINGEN: We saw them socially. A very large diplomatic compound in the country. They had a much larger military relationship than we had. We did not go to their compound daily or anything like that; we didn't have that close a relationship. But we saw them. We invited them to our home. I think it was in Kabul that I saw the movie "The Russians Are Coming."

Q: It was a comedy.

LAINGEN: Yes, a comedy about a Russian submarine landing on Nantucket. I recall that somebody showed that film to some of our contacts in the Soviet Embassy and they were both amused and some times indignant, depending on how a character was projected. Their stupidity was projected, but our stupidity was projected equally, so we both had fun with that.

Our main contacts were with...there were two large components of contact, one was the aid program where political officers got involved too because it was a reporting area. The other was the Foreign Ministry where most of the action was taking place at that time.

Q: A country like Afghanistan always seems so remote, particularly with a monarchy. How interested were they in our affairs and sophisticated in dealing with us?

LAINGEN: Let's face it, it was a very thin upper crust that was interested in talking with us and felt that they could talk with us. Our contacts and relationships were essentially with them. They were very interested. Some of them had been to the United States, most of them had not. The degree of understanding and awareness of the United States was pretty limited at that time. We

used USIA rather effectively with documentaries, etc. for carefully invited Afghan audiences. I don't recall that I was ever invited to an average Afghan's home. That just wasn't done. The Afghans are very hospitable people. You see them out in the villages and that sort of thing and they will take you to tea, but rarely will they take you to their homes. That is private domain and just didn't happen. So most of the Afghans that we had contact with were from this rather limited upper segment who accepted our invitations and came to our homes.

They are very attractive people. They are essentially friendly, deeply hospitable within their limitations, strong willed, very independent minded. If you can establish a friendship with them it lasts, but if you cross them in any way they can be very tough in their response. As we have seen historically in a larger sense, the British have crossed them and had trouble in their day as players in the great game and the Russians certainly came to that appreciation later.

By the way I should add that the Afghans wanted us there essentially during that time as a balance to this overwhelming Soviet presence. That undergirded everything there. We were welcome for that reason above all.

Q: Did you see any of the underlined divisions that cropped up about eight years later between supporters of Communism and the various tribal nationalist groups that are fighting a war that goes on today?

LAINGEN: Oh, these tribal conflicts were there but not burning at that time. The sensitivities, particularly in the Pushtun area, were there. The conflict between the Pushtuns and some of the tribal elements to the north were there but not hot. The Communists were really quite inconsequential at that time, the Khalq.

Q: Khalq being?

LAINGEN: The Communist Party. We had minimal contacts with that group. Probably should have had more. They didn't loom very large. The king and his crowd seemed to be rather firmly in charge and it didn't require of us, as we sensed it, contact. They weren't very visible. They were very weak. They weren't a segment in what passed for a parliament. Frankly much of the way in which things began to break later came as a surprise to me. I didn't sense that degree of difficulty waiting in the wings.

Q: Is there anything else we should mention about Afghanistan?

LAINGEN: I mentioned that we had these visits. As I said at the outset I guess it is my favorite Foreign Service post, not least because the excitement of the place, the way we played this kind of great game role there, the way we were welcomed by the Afghans for that reason, the way the Afghans, I think, as a general rule were fascinated by the United States, a distant place that they knew little of, excited by evidence of us when it appeared like the visit of the Vice President, etc. It was also a place which was on the high road at that time for hippies from Istanbul to Tehran to Meshed to Kabul to Kathmandu and Delhi.

Q: Explain who the hippies were.

LAINGEN: Young Americans out on the drug road, or out on adventure and getting into trouble too often than not. So we had those who came through and we had our consular cases because of that. It was an exciting place also for families. We were a large American community in a hardship post and that kind of situation in a hardship post, as you know, usually means rather high morale because you are thrown in on yourself. With effective leadership at the top, which we had with the Neumanns, the American community was a cohesive group that had a lot of fun together. A lot of community activity because social relationships with Afghans at any depth were not easy, as I mentioned.

The AID community was very large; the Peace Corps was very large. There was limited American business and limited, but important, military role. It meant for me, being the Deputy Chief of Mission, responsibility for a lot of the management of all of that; it was a very exciting job. I enjoyed it very much and learned a lot from it.

I also during that time in Afghanistan had a brief exposure to Iran in the sense that it was there. Iranians tend to look down on Afghans as hillbillies. We put it this way: the Iranians look at Afghanistan as their Appalachia, their hill people. Afghans speak a dialect of Persian. Some people say it is more pure than Farsi. They call it Dari. That relationship was interesting to watch but not then of much consequence. I just mention it in this instance.

I had an opportunity at one point in 1971 to drive from Kabul over the splendid roads that we had built with the Soviets all the way to Meshed where I had served as acting consul for those five months back in 1954. I was fascinated to go back about 17 years later and see how much the city had changed from the time I was there and to be impressed that the Shah's modernization program in Tehran was being felt in provincial cities as well. The Shah's modernization effort was not just something that was evident in the capital city, but the provincial cities were also feeling this. I mention this simply because many of us were watching Iran from distant vantage points during this time of the Shah's modernization drive and were frankly impressed with what he was accomplishing. That clouded our vision all the way up to the last days of the Shah.

Q: Going back to the Americans who got into trouble. These are young people. I am an old consular hand and I am sure Afghan prisons are not very comfortable for anyone, particularly an American. How did we handle people? Were they getting arrested for drugs?

LAINGEN: Rarely. I don't recall that there were more than one or two cases during the time I was there where they were actually put into prison. The Afghans usually cooperated with us. We moved them on and got them out of the country. We had the kind of relationship with the Afghans at that upper level that permitted us, generally speaking, to dispose of the issues rather quickly.

Q: This is about the only way you can deal with this there.

LAINGEN: The Turks put them in prison and then you have an awful problem. A young man named Winant, a celebrated case of a young American and his Swedish girl companion had travelled through Afghanistan earlier, years before in the early fifties when Kabul was really an

isolated place. He just simply disappeared. He was the nephew of Ambassador Winant in London.

Q: *Peter Winant, I think, was his name.*

LAINGEN: He and his companion were traveling through on a bus and disappeared and were never seen again. A tragic case.

Q: *We have talked about the consular side and basically you kind of work things out in a country such as that. Both sides wanted to get them out of the country as quickly as possible.*

LAINGEN: Yes. I don't recall that we had any lasting consular issue involving an individual at that time.

VICTOR SKILES
Deputy Director, USAID
Kabul (1969-1972)

Victor Skiles was born and raised in Idaho. He graduated from the University of Idaho in 1940. After graduation, his favorite professor helped him obtain a fellowship with the National Institute of Public Affairs. In 1942, he entered the Navy and was stationed in Berlin. His assignment to the military government operation was that of assistant to the head of the Food Distribution. He has also served in Germany, Israel, Afghanistan and Italy. He was interviewed by John Kean on December 4, 1998.

SKILES: There had been a number of discussions about moving me elsewhere, and I thought the most interesting elsewhere at that point was Kabul, to become Deputy Director of one of our biggest AID missions, in terms of personnel. Part of that reaction was defensive, because there had been talk, if not pressure, of moving me over to Dacca, and I didn't think Dacca was one of the places I wanted to go, even though it was a more senior job. To me, Kabul was a much better alternative. Timing was not exceptionally good in my case, because the deputy was leaving to go to one of those advanced school programs, the mission director was already due for home leave, and they wanted me to get in there and get my feet wet so he could do so. I went there in June, 1969.

Q: *So what was the state of the situation in Afghanistan as you arrived there? How would you generally characterize it? What when you went in there struck you as its main features; the outstanding issues or problems; the things that struck you about the country that were most dramatically different from anything else you might have encountered?*

SKILES: In general, I guess you could say it's different from everywhere else. It's a country with a singular location and a singular personality. It had repulsed a number of movements in years past, movements designed by outside forces to, in effect, take over the country. In the case

of the British, it probably would have been more along the lines of a presence which would enable them to call the shots without being a conquest. Nonetheless that effort had been repulsed by force of arms. It was traditional of those people to accept working relationships and assistance from outside, but in no way to be taken over by outside countries or agencies. It is a tribal country, and while officially a constitutional monarchy, the King was really more of a major chief - the top chief amongst many of them. It was really an undeveloped country in most respects. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union had been involved in economic aid, the Soviets working mainly but not exclusively in the North and the U.S. in the South. Our technical assistance program was extensive - about 250 people including the contracts.

Q: Did you have the impression that it was in a transition process?

SKILES: No. A stronger impression was that they were way, way back, and were going to stay there. If you go to a place like Gazni, for example - probably 30 or so miles from Kabul - you are back in the 15th century, and it's going to take a long time to get to the 19th, let alone the 20th. In terms of what they had to work with, yes, they were very interested in concentrating for a few years much more heavily on education than they had in years past. You could see the influence, for example, of AID's activities, fairly intensive and over a fair amount of both time and territory, but still the basic conditions in the country, I think, are way behind what we face in most areas.

Q: I believe Afghanistan was, throughout the period that the U.S. was involved, one of the least developed countries among the LDCs, right?

SKILES: Yes, I think I've implied that without having said so. Such generalizations are dangerous, of course - but come to think of it, the UN's official list of Least Developed included Afghanistan. Much of the Arabian peninsula, for example, is still in the same shape, and for somewhat the same reasons; quite a bit of Iran and Iraq, but not the whole country. There are some other peculiarities in Afghanistan, which are not confined to Afghanistan, they are certainly rampant throughout Africa, basically. This refers to the tribes, the tribal organizations, or lack thereof. From time to time peaceful conditions exist amongst them, and they adhere to the leading chief and at other times a much more popular concept is to get rid of him, the best way being to take him out and shoot him. The tribal issues, it seems to me, touched everything you did, and eventually were paramount in, can I say, the country falling apart, and still pretty much in that situation.

Q: How would you characterize our role in relation to the Soviets in the cold war environment?

SKILES: Well, it's difficult to put this in terms of proportions, but I think we'd always regarded Afghanistan as a pivotal but still a border or marginal area in this regard. Having said that, it's not all that pivotal unless you take into account the effects on Iran and of Iran; the effects on Pakistan and of Pakistan. I mean, it's part of a belt. There also is a peculiar arrangement, particularly in the northern part of the country, where the tribes are essentially the same people as those who live on the other side of the river, meaning in that part of the Soviet Union. So there's a natural attraction for them there. There also was a natural ambition for the Soviets to take this as an easy apple that they could pull into their orbit and the U.S. could not prevent this from happening. Maybe Afghanistan could - but the U.S. couldn't. This had always been, it

seems to me, an element of U.S. policy toward the area. I remember a much earlier period when some factions in the U.S. government had wanted us to get started on a military assistance program out there, but Ambassador Byroade took an entirely different point of view, and one which I think turned out to be the right one, at least over a period of a couple of decades, and that is that his attitude was “no way, this is the worst thing we can do in this situation. Our real role ought to be to steer the Afghans in such a way that the Soviets will not move in, at least not by forces other than persuasion and economic help.” And I think that attitude prevailed during the time that you and I were out there.

Q: Did you find this to be especially challenging, in terms of getting on top of the myriad activities you were going to have to manage and supervise?

SKILES: Yes, in a way it was an impossible kind of task. You know, one of my long-standing convictions with regard to new mission leadership came in mighty handy. So often you see situations where the new man feels he has to change everything - how else does he make his mark? I've always thought this was wrong, that in the absence of real reason for change, AID ought to have a continuity, ought to be a continuum. My reaction in Kabul was that in most part there were good reasons for us to be where we were. I could see room for a lot of improvement, but not the need for wholesale changes. Of course, had I been given different guidance from Washington, it would have been different, but I wasn't. We were really pretty much spread out over everything, but the mission setup in these terms was very, very good. You had some good division chiefs, all of whom had been there for some time, as I recall. You had some very able chiefs of party, heading up a number of significant, both in terms of size and function, contract groups. Four of these were involved in developing the University of Kabul, and I think if I'd concentrated on that subject during the entire time I was there I still never would have thoroughly understood what was going on -- whether what we were doing was likely to be more good than it was debatable in terms of targets of certain elements who resisted change. And to digress for a moment, one of the elements, of course, in a country like that, and specifically in that one as well as in Iran, is that women don't have much of a place in society. They certainly don't normally have a claim to a higher education. Yet one of the functions of the university was, in a sense, to create a new class of women in Afghanistan. And it seemed to be working. There were many more of them coming out of the choudri, many more faces to be seen on the streets. And yet this is an ideal target for the reactionary elements in a number of the tribes, if they were going to be against the super chief who resides in Kabul and presumably presides over the fate of the country. (I call it reactionary and that probably is not a good word because it's based in their understanding of religion. That's what makes it so powerful.)

Q: The struggle was then, and the struggle continues today.

SKILES: Hopefully, although I suspect it's better put that the struggle will start again when conditions are peaceful enough to permit it.

Q: The U.N. has been working there, and recently I have heard they've been through a struggle on just that front.

SKILES: I wouldn't be surprised.

Q: Speaking of the university, what sense did you have of the possibilities for success in pulling the university together. You will recall, I'm sure, that the Indiana team had been there for a while, and their task was to try to make the university an integrated institution. Did you give it much hope?

SKILES: Sure. Again, this is one of those things that even if you achieve in policy, it's really going to take a long time to get it done. Indiana was still there; it was down to a two-man team sort of thing. But the team leader thought they were being influential in the direction of creating a university as compared with a number of individual schools or colleges, and I think over time it would work out that way. But even we were guilty of sponsoring competing forces. Our work on the agricultural side, I would guess, tended to keep the university in separate pieces-- I was going to say as much as our work in education tried to put them together, but I'm not sure that these weren't two competing fields. I'm speaking here of education in terms of the Columbia group, rather than the Indiana group.

Q: Yes, we had the Teachers College of Columbia University working in the Faculty of Education, we had the USEP team in Engineering; we had the Wyoming team in agriculture. So these tended, as you say, to be somewhat separate fiefdoms, didn't they?

SKILES: Yes, I think that's inevitable, and for that reason I thought that the Indiana approach was a very useful one. In other words, the right way to go about the business of trying to make a university of it. Incidentally, one of the accidents of history, AID style, is that Dr. Fields, who had been the head of the Teachers East Africa project that I talked about earlier, showed up in Kabul to head up the Columbia contract team there.

Q: Did you think that we were holding our own in relation to the overall Russian thrust into the country where our effort was to expand the contacts with the West and increase the orientation of people toward western ideas, while the Russians were seeking to communize the country, as one might say?

SKILES: Well, this was a very mixed bag. I suppose, as with all Americans with an optimistic outlook operating in that kind of a milieu, sure, it seemed to me that we were making headway. But I confess that I didn't have that feeling with respect to our operations in the north or even in the east. What we had up there was mostly agricultural activities. We had representatives in Kunduz and Mozar Sharif and (closer to Kabul) Jalalabad. And I never had the feeling that we were, if you can put it in these terms, winning more than we were losing in those areas. It's a strange thing, but also rather normal. They were closer to the Soviet Union, they were getting more attention from the Soviets than they were from us. If on the other hand you were to go to a place like the Helmand Valley, the Soviets were not all that involved, and Americans were, then you get the impression that this might be working.

Q: At the same time the Soviets had their own project in the Jalalabad plain, rather similar to our involvement in Helmand, right? There's always a counterpart Soviet activity, isn't there?

SKILES: Yes, even in the Helmand area or right next door. In Kandahar, for example, they were very active. They were, I'm sure, very open eyed about the tank track that we had built between Kandahar and, what's the name of the town near the Iranian border?

Q: *I can't remember, but you're talking about the Herat link to the Iranian border?*

SKILES: We had financed the building of the road between Kandahar and Herat, as I recall.

Q: *That was a Russian road. The Russian roads go from Kabul to the border on the north, over the Hindu Kush, and from Kandahar to Herat to the Russian border, both links to the north. And we built the links to Pakistan, from Kandahar over to Pakistan, from Kabul to Pakistan, and from Herat to Iran. And there's the story. Isn't that the essence of the story. In terms of the linkage to the outside world, we were linking to western oriented countries, and they were linking Afghanistan to the Soviet Union. And if anything typifies the struggle, those roads dramatize the nature of what was going on in geopolitical terms. Did you find it exciting to be in that environment?*

SKILES: Yes, but let me add a further note on that thesis, which I think is great, and I stand corrected. That is, we built the airport in Kandahar.

Q: *And they built the airport in Kabul.*

SKILES: Yes, and looking a little down the pike, the Kandahar landing field was a very big one. It could have been designed as a military airport to begin with. That wasn't true in Kabul.

Q: *Well, the geographic setting in Kabul didn't lend itself very well to one.*

SKILES: It certainly did not. Mountains all around. Even the passenger planes had to wait until later in the day when conditions were favorable to gaining altitude in a hurry. What I was going to refer to, is, in effect, the lack of harmony in the general thesis. Here we had financed the building of an airport, and if you look at it objectively, its primary eventual use would be as a military base. In case the Russians did move in, that's what they would want.

Q: *Isn't it interesting.*

SKILES: That why I started referring to the tank track to Herat.

Q: *It certainly was -- it was an 8-inch thick concrete road, perfect for moving tanks. And, as you say, one of the contradictions was that in the early to mid 1950s, we undertook to and built the Kandahar airport, and as you say, nothing could have been more strategic to a Russian seizure of the country than that airport as a base for operations against Iran and the Persian Gulf.*

SKILES: Right. But we shouldn't leave this without bringing in the rationale, the justification for the airport. It was built as a contact, again to the outside world, and basically to serve as a contact point for Tehran-Beirut in one direction, and Delhi in the other direction, as an international airport big enough to take those international airline planes. By the time it was completed, if I get

the story right, Kandahar as a potential stopping point between those extremes pretty much became irrelevant.

Q: By that time you had even DC-7s. It was conceived in the time when most international air transport was by DC-6, with limited range, but by the time you brought the DC-7s in, you didn't need a stopping point. So, it handled DC-3s quite well, didn't it? Or the Russian equivalent.

Well, let's talk a little bit about Helmand, which was really a river valley development - power dam, irrigation, the lot. Such an overwhelmingly big activity in Afghanistan, something in AID terms legendary perhaps, even far beyond Afghanistan. And yet fraught with many controversies.

SKILES: I suppose even in our own minds we always went from peak to valley on the Helmand development. We paid it a lot of attention, and yet, in my limited experience in it, I was never quite convinced that the government had made up its mind to do what we thought we were doing, and that was leading to a resettlement of rather nomadic people, on an area where they would cease to be nomadic, and where they could become productive on a more settled basis. I don't know whether anybody accepted the story that Afghan planners ever really adopted that approach or not. If they did, it didn't work all that well.

Q: No, and partly because, in my recollection, the Afghans took explicit steps that made it almost a sure thing that local people would not perceive it that way, and it also perhaps a subject of considerable controversy as to whether it made an adequate contribution to the national economy, to justify the investment. What do you think?

SKILES: It depends on how you measure such things. As it worked out, you would never get back the cost of the investment. Now, if circumstances had been different as you went along, and particularly if the disruptions had not been so effective when they did come, you might have had quite a different story. Well, let me answer it both ways. Yes, I think given the conditions, which unfortunately did not develop over time, it could have been a viable kind of investment. You didn't have those conditions, so it didn't become a viable kind of investment. Resettlement was a touchy political issue. If the people thought it was forced settlement of a basically nomadic people then they're against it. Settlement by choice of non-nomadic people is something else again.

Q: In talking with another colleague, who had had direct experience in Helmand, though based in Kabul, as we were, he had a rather more optimistic view, and still another fellow who had been a former assistant director in charge of the Helmand Valley, had an extremely high opinion of the achievements in the Helmand Valley. And I think it will continue to be a subject of great controversy. It was certainly fraught with many, many difficulties, some of which were inherent in the politics of Afghanistan, is that not right?

SKILES: That's right. It also gets you back to another question, which is inherent in your question. And that's how to measure these things. I'd mentioned to you earlier that we sponsored a project in Lebanon called the Litany River Valley Development, somewhat along the same lines, but certainly without the potential for economic contributions that might have existed in the Helmand. The temptation was to measure benefits in terms of what it did for the people,

aside or in addition to, any improvements in crops and this sort of thing. And that certainly would have had to take place in the Helmand. This was, after all, a pretty primitive area - no water control, nor irrigation, no electricity. Had it worked as it was planned to, then a fairly large number of people would have had their lives changed, their standard of living improved considerably, their ownership of land changed completely; their style of life, and this was one of the problems with it -- the Kouchi don't want to be settled. If that's who you have in mind to occupy the territory that's made available by constructing a dam, it's going to have problems.

Q: The project, by the time you got there, had already been actively and continuously in operation for nearly 25 years, although it had some earlier roots than that. But the U.S. had been involved in it from 1951 on, directly, and I guess it was a matter of some concern when you, in the early days of TCA, had some contact with that program. That's the point at which it was decided that we should not go in there with military assistance.

We were involved in a wide range of things we haven't mentioned, although we've mentioned quite a few. What was for you the key feature of the program in Afghanistan that most fascinated you, or most interested you?

SKILES: Well, John, I really can't answer that question. I don't think of concentrating, in fact would have avoided concentrating on any one field to the exclusion of the others, and yet by the nature of things, I guess I would have involved myself more constantly in the Helmand and in our agricultural and engineering pursuits in general, than in the other fields.

Q: What did you think of as the most strategic component, or the few most strategic components on which we had to judge our success in terms of both development and cold war aspects of our program?

SKILES: These are not necessarily the same, because the fields would be education and agriculture, but the results would be almost diametrically opposed to progress on the second part of the question. The more successful we were, particularly in education, the more contentious would become the relationships, with respect to the Soviets.

Q: Yes, I think I'd have to agree, even though that's a sort of contradictory statement. But the Soviets became more concerned as the country took on a more westernized flavor.

SKILES: Yes, and I suspect this would apply to agriculture as well, but not as dramatically, and not nearly as easy to think of elements of proof. We were in a sense in competition in Jalalabad, but we in a very small way, and they in a big way. Our program was an effort to make things better for the regular farmers; theirs more in the construction of state farms or industries such as orchards.

Q: Yes. Could you talk a bit about your feeling about the efforts to try to make Afghanistan, not necessarily fully self-sufficient, but at least self-supporting in terms of its food, notably its wheat production.?

SKILES: It's a long-term proposition. They simply have to learn what they can as time goes on, and be willing to devote resources to those purposes.

Q: Do you think that we were making significant progress in the technical and policy and strategy thrusts that we were making in that area?

SKILES: It comes and goes. I thought, for example, in agriculture, that we were going in the right direction -- these were the things to do. At the top levels in the Ministry there seemed to be fairly full agreement (I think of the squabbles over fertilizer use as one of the friction points, but I believe this was primarily the result of jockeying for position among the Afghans rather than disagreement with the principle of expanded use of fertilizer.) You know in many ways Afghanistan has many attributes or conditions which make agricultural development very promising, if it's ever modernized. The weather is good, some of the natural native crops are outstanding such as grapes and the best potatoes in the world outside of Idaho. Soil is terribly run down, largely a result of always taking from it and putting nothing back into it - and someday the overgrazing must be stopped - but that probably is not for us to do. There isn't any forest left to speak of, but it doesn't mean that that's not a problem. The basic challenge is simply to modernize, but that probably would bring with it a lot of social change, a different way of life for a lot of people, and who are we to say that's what they ought to have? To answer your question, I would say the establishment / improvement of an extension system buttressed by some applied or adapted research activities as a means of carrying out improved policies such as increased use of better seeds and other agricultural inputs.

Q: These things meaning which things in agriculture. What did you see as the main thrusts that were likely to succeed?

SKILES: Mobilized extension activities, built on some research activities, as a means of carrying out improved policies such as increased use of better seeds and other agricultural inputs.

Agricultural education, wherever it was required, and even though I really wouldn't include this in the definition, some larger scale activities, certainly including the Helmand, starting out as demonstrations. But what I was going to say was that while thinking that this was the right direction to go, I was impressed with a sense of disappointment whenever I would go to Kunduz or Mazar-e Sharif, for example, to get a feel for what the local representative was actually doing, and what effect it was likely to be having. There was an experiment station near Mazar-e Sharif, for example, that was doing yield tests on different varieties of wheat seed. I went out during the harvest season, and as often was the case I did this unannounced. In other words, I didn't want them to make special preparations, but to see things as they were. The project manager wasn't there, but the birds were. He was running tests on different seeds, to see what the production results were of using one variety as against another. He had well laid out plots, and apparently had supervised in a good way, the growth and production and maybe even the harvesting, or part of the harvesting, of the crops from those test units, so you could put the figures in a book, and see how the different seeds had done and use the results for recommendations to the farmers on the selected varieties to be sown. When I went there, parts of the crop were being devoured by huge flocks of birds, and if they happened to get into a pile of wheat from one wheat type and didn't get into the competing type, then I'm afraid your research and demonstration isn't worth

much from a comparative point of view. Or, in the middle of the country to give a ride to a hitch hiker who turned out to be an extension agent with no means to extend. There were example after example of this sort of thing, where the approach was being bought enthusiastically in principle and at the top mental level, but things would get in the way of its being carried out satisfactorily, and that was very disappointing.

I have to think substantial improvements were made at the village level, and the developing university was impressive, but as you know it was running smack into deep-seated social problems, and while it was immensely popular in some circles, it probably was a distinct target in others - the anti-progress or anti-modernization factors, for instance.

Q: All right, Vic, we are here now on the 26th of January 1996, presumably this should wrap up our recording sessions and, if I recall correctly, you have some comments further that you would like to make regarding Afghanistan.

SKILES: Just a sort of a summation, John, and to recognize that that was a major AID program somewhat in the old style. It's rather shocking to recall that it was almost twenty years from the early TCA days until I went to Kabul and that probably was one of the few remaining places we were still doing business in an exaggerated old style. Exaggerated in the sense that, while it was basically a technical assistance program, it had also gone much beyond the demonstration project kind of an idea. We were helping to construct and operate a major university in Kabul which, among other things, had female students. It was handled by contract arrangements with four different university complexes from the United States. We were working, as I was leaving, toward a rearrangement of functions so that we would have only one contractor working on the totality of the university but that hadn't yet come to pass. Another example was the Helmand Valley, an area development program which involved, among other things, some major construction works including a dam, irrigated areas, electricity and ideas at least for a major resettlement of people. As you know, that didn't work out quite as well as one might have expected. We'd also financed construction of a major airport in southern Afghanistan, never fully utilized.

The country itself, bordering on the Soviet Union, historically had been a rather contentious area -- a border country. Numerous efforts had been made by outside forces to move in on it but these always were either repelled or absorbed -- absorbed in the sense of Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan, I suppose. Repelled -- the most modern example is the British, who while having a major influence in the area, never were able, really, to take it over and certainly the Afghans never felt subjugated by them. In U.S. eyes, it was on that fringe which we hoped would stay outside of the Soviet area of influence but it had never been brought into any of the security arrangements such as its neighbors had -- Pakistan on one side and Iran on the other. Pakistan, a member of both the northern tier group, the Baghdad Pact, and the Asian group. Iran, a member of the Baghdad Pact. Consideration had been given way back in 1950s to extending other kinds of assistance including military assistance, at least in terms of training missions, but this had been pretty well ruled out as too blatant a challenge on the Soviet border - and indefensible.

We did do, as I recall, over time a little bit of training -- not in-country, but some of the officers did have advanced training in the United States. This was the situation which obtained through

the period I was there. It wasn't long after that, that the internal situation became such that it was possible for the Soviets to move into the country and the country, I suppose, to exhibit its historic patterns. I say "country" but I often think that it is not really a country, it's a conglomeration of tribes and the king was the major tribal leader but he was not an overall monarch in the sense that you normally think of that term. When he was deposed, normally another major leader would take his place. This fracas in the mid-70's was somewhat different. They deposed the king in the early stages but the government was taken over by a different combination of forces than was normally there to represent the various tribes. It was a minority faction supported and joined by the Soviets. It's a shame that Afghanistan has to suffer what took place. In another major way, I suppose it was a contribution to the U.S. view of world affairs in that it, probably as much as any other single factor, led to the dissolution of the Soviet Empire. It was their Vietnam, in a sense, and they never did get over it. Afghanistan will get over it but that, from the looks of things, may take a long, long time. As I say, it's a shame that that country has to continue to bear the burden which results primarily from an inability of the various tribal factors to get together.

Before moving on to the next assignment, John, I would like to introduce an organizational note for a moment. The connection here is, that during my last year in Kabul, AID was going through another reorganization and I am not sure I can remember what this one was called. I suppose it might have been "New Dimensions in Foreign Assistance." We went through these exercises every once in a while if you recall, and not all of them were entirely popular with some of us. I'm tempted to say with field staffs in particular. This one was looking toward a reduction of field staffs, a reduction of the role of the field staffs, a switch in emphasis to project orientation run much more out of Washington. Project monitorship responsibilities in the field mission rather than project management. It was looking toward a substantial reduction of direct hire personnel, far greater reliance on contract personnel both from the NGO's and private institutions including the universities. And it seemed to me, in some respects, not a getting out of business but a reduction in the vision of what AID missions were up to and supposed to do. 1972 became a banner year in terms of reduction of direct hire personnel. I don't recall the numbers but I do remember that it was the biggest year in that respect that the agency had ever enjoyed. Quite by accident, I spent more time in Washington than I had anticipated when I left Kabul and among other things, while I was there I spent a little time on an ad hoc task force on "USAID Role and Style in a Reorganized AID." The purpose of that task force was to charter the implementation of the revised AID, not to question it but to assist in the implementation of the revision. As you know, these exercises never finish, or, if they do, by the time one is over, we're almost ready to start with another. I recall another major similar exercise in 1977 which would make it four or five years later and at that time we were asked to comment once again on proposals for a major effort to redefine the AID role, shape an organization to fit the role, simplify procedures in such a way as to facilitate operations and to quote one of my favorite phrases from it, "reverse a trend of less delivery at greater cost in terms of program impact in the developing country."

JOHN P. HARROD
Information Officer, USIS
Kabul (1970-1971)

John Harrod was born in Illinois in 1945, and received his BA from Colgate University. Having entered the Foreign Service in 1969, his positions included Moscow, Kabul, Poznan, Warsaw and Brussels. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 1, 1999.

Q: *What did you come back to?*

HARROD: I came back to about three weeks in Washington, and then I was off to Kabul, Afghanistan. I had originally been assigned to Calcutta. While I was sitting in the exhibit in Novosibirsk, I got a telegram telling me that I was going to be sent to Calcutta as an assistant IO or something out there in the branch post, and I did the thing you're never supposed to do in the Foreign Service. I wrote back and explained why I thought this was a lousy assignment. They had couched it in terms of, you know, your knowledge of communism and Marxism and blah-blah-blah will stand you in great stead in West Bengal because it's got a communist-Marxist government, and I went back and pointed out that, you know, this is a very different kettle of fish, I'm a Soviet expert, I'm not a West Bengal expert, and I said I'd just as soon not go. And they came back and said, okay, you're not going to go. A friend of mine got the job, and he was trying to get into the Foreign Service. He was a civil servant. It worked out fine. He went to West Bengal and got in the Foreign Service. I didn't know where I was going to go, and then I got back to Washington and I was told I was going to Kabul, Afghanistan, which I remember telling my then fiancée that I was going to Kabul, and she was on the other end of the telephone line and played dumb and later went and had to look it up in a book and find out where it was. I had three weeks in Washington and I was off to Afghanistan, a part of the world I had never been to, had no knowledge of, and there I went.

Q: *Well, you were in Afghanistan from when to when?*

HARROD: It was a little more than a year. It was from the summer of '70, July of '70, until August of '71.

Q: *What was your job and how did it work out?*

HARROD: That was an interesting thing. I was officially sent out there as junior officer trainee. Now they had told me when I went off to the Soviet Union on this exhibit that that was my junior officer trainee assignment, and when I came back somebody said, well, you never really have had a chance to work in an embassy, this exhibit thing has been anomalous. So they sent me off to Kabul ostensibly as a junior officer trainee. When I got there the post did not have an information officer - they had eliminated the position - and so there was PAO, a CAO, and a center director. So I became the *de facto* information officer in Kabul.

Q: *What does being an information officer mean, at that time?*

HARROD: At that time it meant two things. It meant sort of serving as press attaché for the U.S. mission when there something to comment upon and being in charge of whatever outreach information programs we had - film showings, you name it. It also meant, it being a small post, that the center director, for instance, was on home leave for a couple of months, and I took over

as acting center director, so I really had a chance to do other things.

Q: A "center" being what?

HARROD: Cultural center - American library, English-teaching programs. In those days in Kabul we had a fairly large program of English teaching and also a very nice cultural center and library, which was right next to the regular USIS offices, which were in what had once been, I gather, the old American embassy, but by then we had a new embassy, which was the one that is, I guess, still there under somebody's caretakership right now.

Q: What were relations like with Afghanistan 1970-71?

HARROD: Very interesting place to be. As I said, I knew nothing about the place when I went out there. There are two different schools of thought on a training assignment: whether you should be in a big embassy where you can do a million different kinds of things or be in a small embassy. This was a very small embassy; it turned out to be a perfect training assignment because I got to do lots of different things and dealing with Afghan government ministers which, you know, junior third secretaries would never do in Paris or London.

Relations with Afghanistan were modest. Somebody said at the time that Afghanistan was the only country in the world whose foreign policy was both made and executed in the capital city, since none of their embassies - and they had not too many of them - counted for anything. So Kabul was the place to be. It was a neutral country. We and the Soviets had development programs in Afghanistan, but it was officially neutral, and we got along in strange ways. The Soviets sort of developed the northern part of the country, and we were developing the southern part of the country, and we were on neutral turf, so we would fire off our daily news bulletins and give our different versions of Vietnam and things like that, but essentially, us being neutral, we met on neutral ground and had some interesting contacts. I remember getting a New Year's card from the head of the KGB office in Kabul, and there was a captain from the Soviet military intelligence who kept popping up at a lot of places where I went, and again, it being this kind of a country, I remember I introduced the captain to my boss, the PAO, at one cocktail party, and I said, "Peter, this is Captain Khrisanov from the Soviet embassy," and my boss said, "Oh, Captain, what do you do over there" and he said, "I steal your secrets." It being a neutral country you could do this kind of bantering, but the main thing I remember is it was a great place for a junior officer because we would get a visiting American speaker in and we'd say to the foreign minister, would you like to meet him? And the foreign minister would say yes, and you'd go over and see the foreign minister. I dealt with the minister of culture all the time on things. You didn't deal with low-ranking people in a large bureaucracy because they didn't have one. Fascinating place to be.

Q: At that time what kind of government did Afghanistan have?

HARROD: They had a king. This was before everything fell apart. There was a king, there was a prime minister, there was a quasi-parliament, but still officially it was a not-very-constitutional monarchy. I met the king once, I think, met the crown prince once. The day I arrived in the country I was picked up at the airport by the center director, who later became a very good

friend, who took me up to the hotel where I was going to be spending the first week or so till I could move into housing, and we went to the restaurant on the top floor of the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, and as we went into the restaurant, some guy at a table on the other side said, "Hey, Ed," and Ed said, "Excuse me for a minute," and so Ed's wife and I went over to the table and sat down, and Ed went and chatted this guy up, finally came back and sat down, and I'm jet-lagged and I said, "Who was that?" Ed said, "Oh, that's the crown prince. We play tennis once a week." That was the kind of country it was.

Q: Was there any feeling at that time about Kabul was the government center but its writ didn't go very far beyond the walls of Kabul?

HARROD: Oh, yes. In fact, one wondered whether its writ even went to the city limits. You had this definite feeling that it was Indian Country out there. The military attaché at the time, in giving a briefing for newly arrived Americans, said that as far as he could tell the Afghan military was incapable of protecting the country against any threat, foreign or domestic. It was pretty wild. There were stories of Peace Corps volunteers out in the boonies who had been intimidated by tribal chieftains, and it was clearly not a unified country. And it was very 16th-century. When my then fiancée arrived to join me in Kabul, where we were married shortly thereafter, she landed at the airport, and I was indisposed at the time with a bad case of hepatitis, so she was kind of on her own when she landed at the airport. She walked out the front door of the airport, and here were guys sitting on donkeys and camels walking down the street and people carrying guns and, you know, "What have I gotten myself into?" It was a very wild place.

Q: Was there sort of a small ruling elite with whom one dealt and all that?

HARROD: Pretty much, yes. I mean the small government apparatus, so, as I said, we dealt with ministers. There was a small intellectual group. That was it. It was a pretty small operation.

Q: What were you doing?

HARROD: Doing daily news bulletins, press releases, a lot of work with our AID program there, taking Afghan journalists out to visit AID projects, film showings, as I mentioned before. We had an exhibit. One of the things that they sent me there to do. I hardly walked off the airplane and I was put in charge of a pavilion that the U.S. had for the annual Afghan fair. Every August they had a fair, and we had a moon rock there, and I had had a moon rock on our exhibit in the Soviet Union, so I was the moon rock expert. And I spent my first month in Kabul basically running this pavilion at the fair with this moon rock. And I think the moon rock was less interesting to the Afghans than the turnstile that we installed to control access. They'd never had one in Kabul before, and so people would go through the line to go through the turnstile and then run through the exhibit and go back and get in line again. But it was a fascinating country, and while I was there we did have some issues that popped up from time to time, like impending famine, and we were trying to work to get increased food aid for Afghanistan, and things like that.

Q: Well, did you find yourself on the information side in competition with the Soviets?

HARROD: Yes, in terms of putting out our version of things. I mean, we would get every day, every morning I would come into the office and we would have what we called the Wireless File which had come in from Washington, the teletype service, with speeches and articles about the American policy, and I would go through that and edit it down to a couple of pages of material that we would then put out as an American news bulletin and distribute to all the Afghan government offices and news media and foreign embassies, and the Soviets did the same thing and the Chinese did the same thing and the British did and the French - everybody did it. Once in while we'd get into a feud because you're technically not supposed to take on any third country when you're in a foreign country like that. You're not supposed to say anything bad about the Russians or the Chinese. Once in a while the Russians would say something bad about us, so we'd do the same, and I once in fact said to my Russian counterpart, I said, "Look, I'll lay off if you'll lay off." He said, "You have that discretion?" I guess he had to put out whatever they gave him, and I could edit if I saw fit. Because whatever they sent us was official policy, I could use this or that, but I could select.

Q: Did you find that it made any difference?

HARROD: Made any difference - that's a very broad statement. I mean, given the fact that Afghanistan fell apart and went through several increasingly worse coups and finally civil war and everything else, you could probably say, no, it didn't. I think if Afghanistan had continued on the path that it was going on when I was there, which was a little bit more constitutional democracy being fed into the system, it probably would have made a difference. Most of my Afghan contacts and co-workers from the time are either dead now or in the United States, so ultimately, no, it didn't, I guess, but it was a good effort.

Q: What about during this particular period, were we avoiding the Chinese - we're talking about mainland Chinese?

HARROD: We were avoiding them officially. While I was in Kabul, Kissinger made his first secret visit to Beijing - or Peking, I guess, at the time. I remember that was a big surprise to all of us, but we had no contact with the Chinese. In fact, we would, I think, almost daily send them our news bulletin and they would reject it and send it back, so there was no real... In Afghanistan, at the time, there were essentially two branches of the Communist Party. One was the sort of pro-Chinese wing, and one was the pro-Soviet wing. There would be demonstrations from time to time. I remember at one point there was going to be a demonstration by the pro-Chinese faction, and they were going to come right down the street outside our cultural center, so we sort of battened down the hatches and put on increased security, and they came by with their big red banners, and as they went by they started shouting "Long live America" and went on down the street, and we had no problem whatsoever.

Q: Were there any groups that you were focused on that you felt that you know, given the situation at the time, that you felt these were the people we should get to?

HARROD: I spent a lot of time working with students because I was one of the youngest people in the embassy at the time, and I sort of had the USIA brief for students. So I got to know some of the students at Kabul University, and there was a polytechnic institute in town, and I would do

things like when I first got there I remember there was a flag football league. And Kabul University had a team that was mostly Afghans who had studied under American Field Service auspices in the U.S., and so I went out and joined the Kabul University team instead of the embassy team. And there were Peace Corps volunteers and Afghans, and I got to know a lot of the students. A couple of them run a restaurant in suburban Arlington now. I was trying to work with younger groups when I wasn't working with the minister of culture or the foreign minister, whatever.

Q: What was your impression of the university students? I mean, what type of education were they getting, and again, so often universities tend to be hotbeds of Marxism, just sort of a phase young people go through?

HARROD: I supposed they were. There were the university and the Polytechnic Institute in Kabul, and there were a lot of politically active students there, some of them of the Marxist persuasion. The ones that I dealt with pretty much weren't, although I did deal with a few Afghan faculty types out there who spoke Russian. They'd been educated in the Soviet Union. I had that one advantage of speaking Russian, which is what attracted the KGB station chief and the GRU guy to me, because I was the guy in the embassy that spoke Russian. So I could do some work with Afghans who had studied in the Soviet Union because I could speak the language. But most of the students I dealt with weren't of that particular persuasion. I think it's kind of a self-select. If you are a member of, let's say, the pro-Chinese wing of the Communist Party and you are a student at the university, you are probably not going to do a whole lot at the American Cultural Center or with the American embassy's third secretary.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

HARROD: Robert Gerhard Neumann, who had been born in Vienna and was later ambassador in Morocco, I think.

Q: How was he as an ambassador? What was your impression?

HARROD: I thought he was very good. He was quite an educational experience for a very junior chap like me, to be working for this Viennese professor, and he taught me a few things. I must say, looking back at my career, I've worked for a whole bunch of ambassadors, and I've had good things to say about all of them. They've all been career, except for the last one. Neumann is arguably-

Q: He's one of those mixed ones.

HARROD: Yes, he was a political appointee in the Johnson administration, but because he was head of Republicans for Johnson in California he kind of slopped over, and because he was a professor of political science he was more than a political appointee. No, I learned a lot from him, including that when he said *bazaar* I had to be careful whether he meant *bazaar* or *bizarre*. I had to do a transcript of one of his speeches, and he said - I thought he said - "bizarre rumors;" he meant "bazaar rumors."

Q: How about English teaching? Was that popular or not?

HARROD: Yes, we had an active English-teaching program because a lot of Afghans, as people all over the world do, saw English as a necessary requirement for higher education. A lot of the people we were teaching English to were targeted for AID training programs, so there was quite a bit of that. It was a big program. There was also the sort of residual English interest there because with Pakistan and India nearby, even if Afghans weren't going to the United States, they felt that English was important because of their neighbors. My wife - first fiancée, then wife - taught in the English-teaching program there in Kabul when she came to join me. Of course this gave her something to do, and she had a degree in linguistics, so it was a very good thing for her. One of her students, I remember, came to the States after we were back in Washington and he brought a nice gift for her because she'd "learned him English so good." But it was a good program.

Now I must also say that Ambassador Neumann taught me that you don't always necessarily have to play by the rules because one time we were there and there was this potential famine we could see over the horizon. If they had a bad winter, they didn't have enough food, and we had been trying to attract Washington's attention to this. And Washington wasn't paying much attention because India was going through a similar but much worse experience, so we couldn't get anybody's attention, so I was told to sort of give the Afghan government some advice on what might attract attention. And I suggested to the foreign minister's people that perhaps a formal Afghan government statement appealing for assistance would attract some attention and we could then send it to the media or whatever. And they thought this was a good idea, and they said would I write it? And I pointed out that we weren't supposed to be doing this for other countries. The ambassador said, "I know that. Now just go ahead and do it." So I did and was then later summoned to the Afghan government news agency to pick up a copy of the statement that I'd written. And I must say, it did get some food aid out of Washington finally.

Q: What was your impression of the role of India and Pakistan in Afghanistan during the '70-71 period?

HARROD: Well, while we were there was when the Bangladesh business happened, and Pakistan basically broke in two. Pakistan and Afghanistan had border disputes for probably a couple of hundred years. Afghans basically didn't have particularly close relations with any of their neighbors, which is why they were neutral. So they had problems with the Pakistanis. India essentially related to Afghanistan as a way to give trouble to Paks, and then the Paks at that point were busy with their own Bangladesh problem. There was a correspondent for a very large news weekly (whose name I won't mention but it sounds very much like "news weekly") who came into Kabul to file his story on the Bangladesh business because he couldn't file it out of Pakistan. They wouldn't let him file the story, so he flew in, landed, I picked him up at the airport (he'd requested assistance to get him to file his story), and as we were riding into downtown, he said, "Now what kind of a country is this? What kind of government do they have?" Afghanistan was not in everybody's attention then.

Q: Was Iran under the shah doing anything? What was happening?

HARROD: Not a whole lot, because again, the Afghans thought the shah had hegemonistic intentions, and so there wasn't. The shah had ideas of building a railroad and all other kind of things, and the Afghans weren't having any of it, I don't think. They preferred dealing with the Americans or the Russians, I think, to dealing with their more immediate cousins.

Q: *Was it sort of unwritten or apparent that the Afghans were allowing both the United States and the Soviet Union to play there and they were balancing both off to get whatever they could get out of it?*

HARROD: I think that's a fair statement, yes. That's exactly what they were doing.

Q: *You left there in, what, '71?*

HARROD: '71.

Q: *What was your impression at that time of whither Afghanistan?*

HARROD: I thought, incorrectly, that it was going to slowly evolve into a more pluralistic democratic system. I remember being at a wedding where one of the distinguished guests was the king's cousin, Daud. He was retired at the time, a former prime minister, and he was so described and looked like that was what he was. And of course, a couple of years after I left, he had a *coup d'état*, ousted the king, and took over, and then it all went downhill from there. But no, I thought it would evolve in a more reasonable way, and I was quite wrong.

Q: *How were we seeing the role of women at that time?*

HARROD: Just beginning to emerge. I had a female assistant at the embassy, at the USIS, who was my press assistant, and she was one of the few, I would say, modern, educated, Westernized women in the country at the time. Most ordinary women still wore the, you know, top-to-bottom veil, but there was an emerging women's - it would be wrong to call it "women's liberation," but it was at least a group of educated women who were coming to the fore. Now all of that has been thrown out the window, but it was starting to happen. I really did think that the country would be making strides toward a more reasonable system, but all those various *coups d'état* began to take their toll, and finally the whole place went to hell.

Q: *What about Islamic fundamentalism? What sort of role was this playing at that time in our perception?*

HARROD: Not much that I can recall. There was more of an issue in Afghanistan about the tensions between the majority Sunni Muslims in the country and the minority Shiites, ethnically different Hazaras from the central part of the country. So there was some attention to the difference between the two Islamic communities. But this was sort of before Islamic fundamentalism became a term that people bandied about. This was the early '70s, and Afghanistan was a very fundamentalist country no matter how you looked at it. It was just a question of... I remember when we had our moon rock at that exhibition. There were some people, very fundamentalist, who claimed it was impossible to have a moon rock because there

were seven layers of heaven between the earth and the moon and you could not possibly go to the moon, until one fairly enlightened mullah apparently quoted a chapter or line from the Koran that said he who captures knowledge can unlock the secrets of the universe. He said clearly the Americans have done this, so this is a moon rock. And suddenly it was okay that it was a moon rock. So there were varying shades, but we didn't look at it in those days as Islamic fundamentalism I don't think. When the country is basically still in the 16th century, it's hard to say what is fundamental and what isn't.

Q: What about our strong support of Israel during this time? Was that an issue?

HARROD: I don't recall it being an issue. Again, Afghanistan is not an Arab country, and Iran in those days was a fairly strong closet supporter of Israel itself, as were the Turks, so I don't think it was on their radar screen very much. Among some groups there was a certain Islamic solidarity, I suppose, with the Arabs, but the Afghans aren't Arabs and probably didn't care that much.

ARNOLD SCHIFFERDECKER
Political Officer
Kabul (1970-1972)

Arnold Schifferdecker was born in 1934 and attended the University of Missouri. After service in the US Navy, Schifferdecker joined the Foreign Service in 1964. He served overseas in Turkey, Israel, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Morocco. Schifferdecker also served on the Board of Examiners for the Foreign Service. Schifferdecker was interviewed by C. Edward Dillery in 1996.

SCHIFFERDECKER: At that time I was ready to be in the Department of State. I felt that two tours abroad and then one tour in the Department would give me a better grounding. I toyed with the idea of working on the 7th floor in the Secretariat, but ended up taking the advice of one of my mentors, former ambassador Bob Dillon, who was in Personnel at that time and whom I had known in Turkey when I was in Istanbul. His advice was that perhaps I should go for a hard language and use that as my vehicle to get a good job overseas. Up to this time I had not had a good solid political reporting officer job overseas. I was assigned to Persian language training and to Tehran as my onward assignment. That assignment to Tehran was changed to Kabul in mid language training. Fortunately the languages of both countries are quite similar, although there are differences between Dari, which is Afghan Persian, and Iranian Persian. But, I was able to make the transition. I was assigned to Kabul in 1970 as the second political officer in a two man section.

Q: Did you get language training by volunteering for it or was it suggested to you?

SCHIFFERDECKER: I picked the language and the post went with the language. Normally at that time, it was just beginning to happen, we didn't have an open assignments bidding process that came later as a result of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, but I was able to spot a job

opening in Tehran a year a head of time and volunteer for the language training at the same time with the help of my assignment officer. So, that was the beginning of identifying jobs before language training, although there were many who went into Arabic language training or Chinese or other hard language training assignments that lasted more than a year in some cases where you didn't know where you were going yet. You only knew you would go to one specific country, or in the case of Arabic, one of several countries that would be able to use your language skills.

Q: And as it was, even knowing your assignment, you didn't know it.

SCHIFFERDECKER: That is right. I had the position identified and didn't have the orders in hand. What happened was someone left their post in Kabul a year ahead of plan, so I was asked to fill that gap.

Q: You didn't really lose the job in Tehran to somebody else through a tour extension or something like that, it was because of the Kabul situation where they needed somebody.

SCHIFFERDECKER: That's right. The job, I think, in Tehran that I was going to was left unfilled for a period of time or someone filled it without language training.

Q: So, what was the situation in Kabul in 1970?

SCHIFFERDECKER: Well, in Kabul it was quite peaceful and tranquil. The decade of the '60s in fact leading up to the early '70s was a period when the King of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah, introduced parliamentary democracy. He called it an experiment in democracy because the country had not known much of that kind of governing. Up until that time they had a series of strongmen prime ministers where the king presided over the country but did not rule...reigned but did not rule. The prime ministers up to the early 1960s were strongmen, usually members of the extended royal family. After that time commoners were brought in to head parliamentary governments. That process was just going strong when I got there and was just beginning to show some results after two elections in the '60s. Politically the country was stable. We had a fairly extensive AID program, not so much in dollar terms being something between \$25-\$30 million per year, which was not a large program in those days, but a large number of AID people. We had a lot of Americans on the ground at that time. Probably, including Peace Corps, 250 or more Americans plus dependents. There were a lot of contractors for AID.

When I arrived the ambassador wanted to more fully integrate the economic and political sections of the embassy with AID. He felt that some of the AID projects that we had had in the past, rightly so, had not worked out so well in every case because they had not been grounded in the political or economic realities of the country. So, we worked very closely with our AID counterparts and with the rest of the country team. The ambassador at that time was Robert Neumann, who later became our ambassador to Morocco and then, for a short time, to Saudi Arabia.

Q: He was a non-career?

SCHIFFERDECKER: That's right. Robert Neumann was an academic from California and had been ambassador in Kabul for three years, at least when I got there, and was ambassador for another two years afterward.

In any case, things fell apart in Afghanistan.

Q: During that time?

SCHIFFERDECKER: Shortly after I left.

Q: Oh, so it stayed stable the whole time you were there.

SCHIFFERDECKER: Pretty much so. There was a serious drought the summer that I left and in order for our emergency assistance program to be operational in any country we had to have a request for the government, basically a declaration of an emergency. After much pushing on the Afghan government which was reluctant to issue a declaration, they did issue one which was basically drafted in AID. Because it was viewed in the country, by the people, as begging for assistance instead of being self-reliant as Afghanistan frequently had to be because there were no aid programs in earlier years, the king and his government were severely criticized and a year later a coup was staged by a member of the royal family but a coup in which Muhammad Daud, the leader of the coup, ended up by seizing power and abolishing the monarchy. That eventually became the end of both parliamentary rule in Afghanistan and independence. The pro-Russian Communist Party in Kabul was able to seize power on behalf of the Russians who moved in quickly several months later in 1979 and you know the rest of the story.

Q: Were there signs of this happening even while you were there?

SCHIFFERDECKER: Very little. During my time, 1970-72, we saw the interests of our government and the Russians as being compatible in Afghanistan. Afghanistan had occupied the position of a buffer state between British India and expanding Imperialist Russia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. That status continued in independent India and Pakistan and the Soviet Union. The United States felt that there were no basic incompatibilities between our position in Afghanistan, which was to assist in a modest but responsible way to educate and help the Afghans develop their own country. Whereas the Russians had a larger program, an infrastructure program and military assistance program. We had a very, very small military training program where we trained some of the Afghan officers. But the Russians had a heavy arms supply and training program of a Russian nature and the army ended up being the nucleus for the Russians to move in and take over. And, of course, the infrastructure, the highways, that they built in the north were used to bring tanks into the country from the Soviet Union to take over control of the capital and other major cities in the country.

Q: Our relations with the Soviet Union at that time were kind of on the upswing anyway weren't they, leading toward detente?

SCHIFFERDECKER: Well, it was a period of detente, the period of the Nixon administration when we were signing some of our first strategic arms agreements with the Brezhnev regime and

no one felt that Russian interests were threatened by what we were doing in Afghanistan or any other country. There was a large international presence of Germans and United Nations. It was only when the Shah of Iran started courting the Afghan government in the mid-1970s and tried to cut deals to wean the Afghans away from dependence on Russia that the Russians became alarmed. The Russians thought that we, Iran and Pakistan were trying to roll them back--sort of a U.S.-led "plot" against them. In fact, some believe that this was the proximate cause for the Russians to move into Afghanistan 1979, even though Iran was already engulfed in the Khomeini revolution generally, I believe the Russian occupation was mainly opportunistic, that is, they moved in only when the Afghan Communists took over the country but then began to falter and they needed outside help to survive.

Q: You have talked about the monarchy and the coup that took place later, but what about the ethnic divisions in the country, were they sort of stamped out at that point or like in many places very real at all times?

SCHIFFERDECKER: The ethnic groups of the country were basically bought off by royal patronage and by the classical political balancing of one group off with another. Each ethnic group seemed to feel that it had a piece of the pie, small as it was and not expanding very rapidly, but yet it seemed that every ethnic group had a stake in the country continuing on an even keel with political stability and a growing national consciousness, which was occurring when I was there. Unfortunately, it didn't last.

Q: Were you free to travel around the country and did you do that?

SCHIFFERDECKER: I certainly did. The highway construction had not been completed fully in the north yet, but there was access through the Hindu Kush Mountains north of Kabul to Mazar-e Sharif, to the beginning of the steppe country of central Asia and to some of the rug weaving country of northern Afghanistan, which is where I first developed a taste for oriental rugs. I traveled north, south, east and west. We were able to travel out of Afghanistan by road to Iran, which was quite remote on the other side of the country from where Kabul was in the eastern part of the country. We were also able to travel by road, built by the United States incidentally, through the Kabul Gorge and the Khyber Pass into Peshawar, Pakistan. It happened that that road was the main road used by the Americans who were being evacuated out of Pakistan during the Indo-Pak war of 1971 when I was there, and that is another story.

Q: Tell us a little about that?

SCHIFFERDECKER: There were large numbers of Americans in Pakistan when India and Pakistan went to war over Pakistani repression in the East Bengal, out of which emerged Bangladesh in 1971. Because of my language capability, I was asked to go to the border at Torkham, which is at the head of the Khyber Pass on the Afghan side, to help process Americans being evacuated from Pakistan along the road to Kabul and then to fly out of Kabul by the Afghan National Airline to either Rome or Frankfurt where they flew. We did process several hundred American families, dependents, contractors working on the big Tabala Dam project in Pakistan and had a very interesting time of it.

Q: How long were you there?

SCHIFFERDECKER: I camped there for three days and nights; no hotel or anything other than a sleeping bag and a couple of tents to stay in; we cooked our own food. On the second day there was a big stir at the border as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, shortly to become prime minister of Pakistan, was coming through the Khyber to go on to Kabul to fly to New York to defend Pakistan's position at the UN Security Council which was drafting a resolution to stop the war. I spoke with him briefly, verified that he was going to Kabul (because all of Pakistanis, civilian airports were closed down), and wished him a safe trip. I then radioed the Embassy, to make sure our government was aware of what was going on.

Q: Later Pakistan became quite a big player in Afghanistan, was there any of that at that time or did they have enough problems with India to not worry about it?

SCHIFFERDECKER: Relations were correct but occasionally tense during my time because Afghanistan would periodically play what we called the Pashtunistan card. The idea was to have the Pashtuns on both sides of the border, which was the British imposed Durand Line dividing the Pashtun tribes between Afghanistan and Pakistan, to be brought together. It was never stated that Afghanistan wanted to annex this territory, but the Afghan idea was to use this as a pressure point on Pakistan and also as a way of stirring up Pashtun national sentiment in Afghanistan, thereby diverting attention from internal problems that bedeviled the monarchy and the government in Kabul. In any case the tribes straddling the mountainous border area moved more or less freely back and forth, a feature that was very useful later on for supplying the Afghan freedom fighters against the Russian invaders, as you noted.

Q: For the benefit of those who might not know, what are the major tribal groups in Afghanistan?

SCHIFFERDECKER: The main Afghan ethnic groups are roughly six in number. The predominant group are the Pashtuns who comprise maybe 40-45 percent of the population. There are the Tajiks, the next largest group, maybe 20 percent. I use approximations because nobody ever knew exactly how many people belonged to each ethnic group or the total population of Afghanistan which was roughly estimated to be about 14 million during my time there. Then you had the Uzbeks, probably less than 10 percent also predominantly in the north along with the Turkmen who numbered less than 150,000. In the southwest and west you had the Baluchi group, related to similar groups in Iran and Pakistan, including some who were partially nomads and who led their camels and donkeys and herds of goats to higher elevation pasturage in the northern part of Afghanistan in the summer and then went down to the Indus Plains crossing the border into Pakistan to winter over. They were always a colorful sight with whole families on the move and chickens riding precariously on the backs of donkeys or camels. Last you had a Shia ethnic group called the Hazara living mainly in the center of the country. They numbered about one million and were said to be the descendants of Genghis Khan's army. I mention them last because the Hazara was low man on the totem pole, the most discriminated against and occupied the lowest rung on the economic ladder, in part probably because they were Shia instead of Sunni which was the predominant Muslim sect of the country. Physically, they were also easy to identify because of their Oriental features. In fact, many of them found jobs as domestics for

American homes in Kabul. I had a cook and a bearer in my time in Kabul, both of whom were Hazara.

Q: Interesting how that kind of situation arises where Americans get to know countries through their associates, including their servants, and there is a little bit of bias towards that. Did you sense that at all?

SCHIFFERDECKER: Of course, and the reason being that many of the other ethnic groups would not take such menial positions. You even saw on the streets of Kabul in my time heavily loaded wagons and carts being pulled by Hazaras, by people, not by donkeys or by horses or any other beast of burden. You would see two Hazaras at the yoke pulling these heavily laden carts around Kabul. This really grated on Western sensibilities and gave many the impression that Afghans could be very cruel to each other.

Q: So, here you were new in your first political assignment. Did it meet your expectations and what were your thoughts about that aspect, the professional side of your job?

SCHIFFERDECKER: I was given pretty much free range on doing political reporting on domestic political issues. I handled some foreign political issues, but that was usually the chief of the section, the counselor's job. At one time I was acting counselor and handled all of the issues, both demarches and foreign policy issues as well as domestic political reporting. The non-urgent political reporting was done, still in my time in the early '70s, by airgram and I did a weekly roundup of political developments in and around Kabul and elsewhere in addition to special reports that we did about the parliament and the parties or the judiciary or the media, the student movements at the universities, and that sort of thing.

We had wide access to all of the domestic political elements in the society, including the Communist parties. In fact, I even had Communist party deputies to my home for lunch occasionally or for a reception. The ambassador and the DCM at that time felt that they would not entertain Communist party diplomats, so I was able to do that with relative ease, although it wasn't a frequent occasion. We would have rival party members who didn't speak to each other at my home for a reception with a buffet, usually a garden type of reception in the summer when the weather was pleasant which it was in the evenings, Kabul being at over 5,000 feet altitude.

Getting back to my job, one of the things I was able to do was to get a lot of the other official Americans to let me know what was going on in their areas. We had many contractor employees for AID. I would not be able to cover all of the ministries that they dealt with in the course of their work, so frequently at meetings at the embassy or in social occasions I was able to talk with them. They would tell me what was going on at the university and I was able to tell them the larger political picture into which that fit and it helped them to understand some of the problems they were running into. So, we had a mutually beneficial exchange of information within our own official family. Of course, I dealt a lot with other international residents, including the UN people and colleagues of other embassies and their political officers for the exchange of information and of course with the Afghans. I frequently attended parliamentary sessions where I learned about the concerns of the entire country. And, of course, we took field trips all over the

country, political reporting trips to size up other regional and ethnic concerns as we discussed earlier.

That sort of sums up what I was doing.

Q: Were you able then to be independent with the language not taking an interpreter with you?

SCHIFFERDECKER: I had to use my language capability. Fortunately I had developed it well enough, although certainly not with total fluency, to speak Dari and understand it and also to read the newspapers. We did have a couple of local employees who did a lot of translations of articles for the benefit of all Embassy staff.

Q: You mentioned being able to meet with Communist party leaders who the ambassador and DCM did not feel free to see. Isn't that really one of the great things about being a mid-level reporting officer, that you do have access to a wider range of people than the ambassador, who by the very nature of things is confined to ministers and permanent secretaries and ambassadors and people like that?

SCHIFFERDECKER: Yes, I agree with the thrust of your comment and question entirely. In some cases if the ambassador had entertained say, Communist parliamentarians who were viewed by the establishment as the lowest of the low, he would have been roundly criticized by the Afghan establishment and probably warned. Yes, it did allow me to have a wide range of contacts, although there were some who did not want to be entertained by an American. The main plotter of the Communist coup of 1979, Hafizullah Amin, head of one of the Communist party factions, hated the United States because he had gone to Columbia University and had flunked out and there may have been some other incident besides that which soured him on us. But he came back to Afghanistan with a chip on his shoulder toward Americans and was very reluctant to accept any kind of invitation, even from me. It took a while before he agreed to have lunch one-on-one with me because he, being a very secretive person and a plotter at heart, thought that other people would find out that he had had met alone with me at the embassy. I frequently dealt with parliamentarians on a one-on-one basis as it was easier to get information that way.

Q: But, he finally did it?

SCHIFFERDECKER: He did.

Q: Was it a good lunch?

SCHIFFERDECKER: I had an Afghan cook who knew how to serve a good lunch and many Afghans would not drink alcoholic beverages in front of each other, but in a one-on-one situation some would enjoy a beer, nothing stronger than that, or a glass of wine. Whereas at a reception they would not imbibe in front of others. But, there was a certain amount of reluctance to do things that might be considered risqué in their society with a foreigner. That is because Afghanistan was still emerging from being a closed conservative Muslim society.

Q: Did he open up in these conversations at all?

SCHIFFERDECKER: Oh yes, quite easily. Usually Afghans would have some message that they wanted to get across to the Americans and, of course, we would be basically trying to get more understanding and information about what was going on in that session in parliament that morning or the day before. So, we were basically in an information gathering mode and understanding mode, and they were in a message giving mode. Many of the parliamentarians, not necessarily the Communists, were interested in taking a parliamentary tour in the United States, which was one of the benefits of our International Visitors Program we were able to hold out to some of the parliamentarians.

Q: That is a very important point because I always felt those International Visitors Programs were a wonderful way to spend money. How many did you have during your time?

SCHIFFERDECKER: We only had one group that made it off the ground while I was there. They spent over a year haggling over who should go. At one point they decided that no one should go. Eventually, one group did go, but it was like pulling teeth.

Q: Basically you had entered the Service wanting to be a political officer and now you were one. Looking back on the two years was it what you thought it was going to be, as good as you thought it would be?

SCHIFFERDECKER: It was as good or better than I thought it was going to be, the opportunity to be a classical political reporting officer in Afghanistan. There weren't high priorities for reporting in Washington about things going on in Afghanistan at that time, but there was quite an audience as I found out when I went back on consultations later and did a lot of debriefing around the town, including at Langley, the State Department and other departments like Commerce. I was surprised to find out that there were some people at the National Security Council who followed some of our reporting there.

I had a fairly free rein to do a lot of reporting on subjects of my own choosing, although there were the classic set of issues that we are normally interested in in looking at domestic developments in any country. In fact, I was rewarded by being nominated as the Foreign Service reporting officer of the year for my reporting in Kabul. I didn't get the award, but I was one of six nominees.

Q: I'm sure the reporting came in handy later on when Afghanistan did become important because a lot of the characters were probably the same people.

SCHIFFERDECKER: Some of them were but many were done in to my chagrin and dismay, of course. It was a brutal change which occurred later on when I was Afghan desk officer.

Q: We will get to that later, but what years were they?

SCHIFFERDECKER: That was the first coup, I'm talking about 1973, after I had returned to the United States. I first did a mid-career fellowship at Princeton for one academic year and then I

was recruited to be the desk officer for Afghanistan and also worked on Pakistan affairs from 1973-75.

Q: Before we leave Kabul, do you have any other incidents or anecdotes about your time in Kabul that you want to report on?

SCHIFFERDECKER: There is one other anecdote I felt proud of being involved in. At that time, of course, the cold war was going strong. We had a Russian defector on our hands who had come into the embassy. Of course, we had a procedure of turning any would-be defector over to the normal interviewing people assigned to the embassy. It was decided by higher authority in Washington that the United States would accept custody of this person and try to get him and his family out of the country because Afghanistan would not itself facilitate the departure of a Russian national to the United States. They did not want to alienate their Soviet friends.

The embassy decided, after putting our heads together, to take this man, his wife and two children out in a large diplomatic pouch across the land border, again at the Torkham border crossing that leads to the Khyber Pass into Pakistan where the government of the time would be more amenable to allowing someone to depart its country who had entered it irregularly. I was in one of two cars that accompanied these people to the border. Now, this Russian was a technician, he was not a political officer of the embassy, which would have been a much bigger prize, but it was felt that he knew enough about things going on in Russia and Afghanistan and how the Russians ran their technical assistance programs, that he was worth lifting out and being brought back for debriefings. When we got near the border, this was in daylight, which was the only time you could cross, we put the family all in one big diplomatic pouch with a few holes in it in the back of a carryall van, one of the embassy's vans, and I was following in an embassy car driving it myself without a driver because we didn't want any Afghan driver involved in this operation. We were all a little bit nervous but we went through the normal procedures of checking out with the Afghan authorities and checking in with the Pakistani authorities, and there were the inevitable waits of 15 or 20 minutes at each side of the border.

There was a lot of nervousness, but we did manage to get them through and I was rather proud of the fact that we were able to help a man and his family to freedom, which was what they opted for. They had made a difficult commitment and choice to do that without much idea of where or how they were going to end up. From what I heard, everything went successfully and as far as I know they are living somewhere here in the United States today.

Q: That is an example of the kind of unique thing that occurs to you once in a while. It seems to me that in most posts at some point there is a moment when something quite unusual occurs and usually you are glad that you have the chance to do it.

SCHIFFERDECKER: Yes, indeed.

Q: It was a big American mission in Kabul, mostly AID, but some Defense people, I assume, and some intelligence?

SCHIFFERDECKER: Yes, we had intelligence officers and a Defense Attaché's office, although no Naval Attaché however, Afghanistan being a landlocked country, and in addition to a sizeable AID Mission we had a Peace Corps presence.

Q: How about your observations on the Peace Corps?

SCHIFFERDECKER: We had Peace Corps when I was assigned to Turkey and I had some encounters there with Peace Corps and their problems. The Peace Corps in Afghanistan was largely dealing, at least when I arrived, with teaching English. There was a voracious appetite to learn English, although we did have some volunteers in health and rural development. That rural development program expanded a lot while I was there. We sent more people outside the main provincial cities, especially during a terrible drought that I referred to earlier in 1972 when people were starving and we had to develop some programs mainly to get food to the people who needed it. The Peace Corps was very instrumental in making that happen. They developed a food-for-work program and implemented it very successfully.

Q: Was it a useful program for the United States, for the volunteers, for Afghanistan?

SCHIFFERDECKER: I think it was useful for Afghanistan to develop competency in the English language. Overall, I would say that since the Peace Corps is a people intensive type of development program, a lot of the benefits of it were the personal contacts that later on when the Russians invaded and many Afghans were forced to leave the country they were able to reestablish contact with volunteers back in the United States that they had known. I have heard enough of these stories and have experienced myself the nice human aspect to the kind of Peace Corps work that deals on a daily basis and very intensively with host country people, in this case Afghans. So, I would say that it was not as effective as you would want it to be, but on the human level very effective in cementing personal relationships and useful in teaching some skills, especially language skills.

WILLIAM A. HELSETH
Political Counselor
Kabul (1971-1974)

William Arthur Helseth was born in Florida in 1925. He graduated from the College of William and Mary in 1948, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1949, received a PhD in 1962, and served in the U.S. Navy from 1943 to 1946 overseas. After entering the Foreign Service in 1950 his assignments abroad have included Frankfurt, Izmir, Ankara, Tehran, and Kabul. In 1996 Mr. Helseth was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Then, you went to Kabul, where you served from '71 to '74.

HELSETH: Correct.

Q: As political counselor.

HELSETH: Yes.

Q: What was the situation in Afghanistan when you arrived?

HELSETH: I arrived at the time when the king was still in power. He was beset with problems domestic and abroad, particularly the issue of Pushtunistan with Pakistan because the Afghans had never given up their dream of acquiring that part of Pakistan on their borders, which was the ethnic Pushtun area. They wanted their "brethren" there to join them in a greater Afghanistan.

They were also concerned about the Soviet position. We ourselves were under no illusion there. We knew we were number two in Afghanistan. The Soviets, who had an adjoining border, were number one. That was acceptable to us. That decision had been made 20 years before in the mid-'50s when an Afghan delegation came to Washington to say "We want to join CENTO. What do we sign?" We rebuffed them then and ever since, we have been number two. We tried to keep a presence there. We had a small AID (Agency for International Development) program. We trained a few of their military in the United States. But we recognized that the Soviets were number one. But the Afghans wanted us there. They wanted that window to the West. They didn't want the Soviets to be so dominant that they lost any freedom of action. To some extent, they had. There was always the specter of the Soviets looking over their shoulder at any of their decisions internally or externally. So, I arrived at a time when there was some discontent there. There was some opposition activity. But it didn't seem to be too great in that period of '71 to '73. It was fairly quiet.

Q: How did the government work at that time?

HELSETH: Somewhat facetiously. I guess you could say, with difficulty. But there was a cabinet under the King. There again, he could change the cabinet.

Q: The King was Sardar Mohammad Daud?

HELSETH: No, King Zahir Shah. Daud had been sort of discredited and was on the outside. He was not the king. He was Prime Minister for a long time in the '60s, but had been replaced before I got there in the late '60s, early '70s. Zahir Shah had several prime ministers while I was there. They were changing. Basically, it was a very, very poor country, very little in the way of resources, too hard to govern, a very backward area, still living several centuries ago. But Zahir appeared to be on top of things then, but he wasn't, obviously. I went on home leave in 1973 as scheduled. Late one night, early one morning, one of my sons called me from where he was in college and said, "Dad, what's going on?" I said, "I haven't seen anything yet of TV or newspapers today." He said, "Well, there's been this terrible overthrow of the government in Afghanistan." So, I scurried around to get the newspapers, the press, and called State and talked to the Afghan desk there. I learned that Zahir had been overthrown. The military apparently in conjunction with Daud had moved. Daud had accepted the position of civilian leadership with the new government. That began the first phase. That was the first coup, in '73. Then, I think, after I left there, there was a second one, then a fatal one. Then gradually by three coups, it

moved to a communist government.

Q: You went back at the time.

HELSETH: From home leave, I went back to Kabul after my two months here in the States. I was there essentially another year, perhaps 10 months.

Q: How did you find the Daud government?

HELSETH: More restrictive with foreigners, but still wanting to work with us as long as we would accept them, and we did recognize them and moved with them. They were not insensitive to the fact that we could be helpful there. Daud still was interested in having our presence there, this window to the West. That changed later, as the country became more closely tied to the Soviets. But in that first year, year and a half, we were, as I say, a little more restricted. We still could move about the city with no problem. We could still get permission to visit outside the capital. I took several trips that 10 months after I got back, going around the country as I had before in my position as the political counselor there. It was almost business as usual, but not quite. They had moved away from the king entirely, so it was a new type of government. But it was not all that firmly in power itself. There was still sniping going on within the leadership. There were two factions to the communist party. There were two parts of the communist party. They were fighting amongst themselves, devouring the leaders of the Revolution, as it turned out, and that was what caused the second and third coups there that eventually led the country to the Soviets.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

HELSETH: While I was there, we had two. The first one was a political appointee from a university in California. I believe it was Robert Neumann. I'm having trouble today remember ambassadors, aren't I. The second ambassador was a career officer, Ted Elliot. He was there my last year.

But the political appointee, Neumann, was a very good ambassador. His, particularly with Zahir (and that's the time he was there mostly), was unique. It had something of a classroom atmosphere. But he had good rapport with them. He basically understood them and was able to be a very effective ambassador, in my view. Ted Elliot came in as ambassador during the last year of my tenure there, so he was dealing mostly with the Daud government, which was still in power when I left there in '74.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Soviets while you were there?

HELSETH: Very little. We were still under that US security rules where, if you'd initiate contacts, if you had any parties or anything, you would have to write it up and report it. There was a slight relaxation. I remember calling once or twice on my counterpart in the Soviet embassy and his return, strictly pro forma, a protocol type of thing. But that again had to be written up as contact with Soviet Bloc personnel. That overall policy was still in effect. So, there was very little direct exchange with the Soviets, except near the end, where there was some

relaxation.

Q: Did the opening to China on the part of the Nixon administration have any desirable effect on Afghanistan while you were there?

HELSETH: No, I don't recall any direct effect of that. The Chinese were present in Afghanistan with certain aid projects, fisheries, and some other agricultural cultivation. They had an ambassador there at their embassy, but they were not a major player. There was some concern of the Afghans about Badakh-shan province up in the northeast corner, which bordered China and the Soviet Union. But the Chinese were not a major player at the time and our opening of contact with them did not lead to any major changes or developments in Kabul.

Q: How did we get information about these internal disputes within the Afghan government, which essentially led to this revolving series of coups, which brought in the Soviets?

HELSETH: We maintained contact ("we" meaning the Agency and the embassy) with the Afghan government at this time. It was not as close as it had been before. They didn't tell us as much. They didn't ask our assistance as much. But we also had contact with other elements of the Afghan society. We learned some things through them. We had the ability therefore to monitor, to a limited extent, what was going on internally. There were press items that we could learn. We could see what they were doing publicly. We were not privy, of course, to the internal quarellings of the two communist factions that were going on, except when they erupted and broke out publicly in the street and one side lost and somebody was imprisoned or changed. So, it was with some difficulty, but we still had sources that we could go to and keep relatively well informed.

SAMUEL W. LEWIS
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kabul (1972-1974)

Ambassador Samuel W. Lewis was born in Texas on October 1, 1930. He received a bachelor's degree from Yale University and a master's degree in international relations from the Johns Hopkins University. His career included positions in Naples, Florence, Rio de Janeiro, Kabul, and an ambassadorship to Israel. Ambassador Lewis was interviewed by Peter Jessup on August 9, 1988.

LEWIS: By chance, I had been to Kabul with "Chet" Bowles on one of the trips to India, and had gone down through the Khyber Pass on the way out of the country by car, so I had a sense of what the country was like, and I thought it would be fascinating. So I jumped at the Afghan job and went there as deputy to Bob Neumann, who had already been there as ambassador for about five years by that point and was a real expert on the country. He had come from academic life, a professor at UCLA for years, but he also was quite a political animal, strong and hardy.

Q: Still is.

LEWIS: Still is. He turned out to be a super ambassador. We worked very well together. He was ideal for Afghanistan. He had a real touch for dealing with monarchies, particularly, and he went on and did very well in Morocco for the same reason, and later would have done well in Saudi Arabia, except he said the wrong thing after he'd been there a month about Al Haig, and it got back to Al Haig, and so his ambassadorship to Saudi Arabia lasted, I think, 40 days before he was canned. But he really did have an excellent rapport with the King and the government, and understood the way to deal with the kind of feudal tribal monarchy. I learned a great deal from Bob, and he gave me a lot of responsibility in running the embassy, and trying to coordinate this far-flung AID program that we had. My AID background helped, because the AID people didn't look on me totally as an interloper. I had more credibility and could discuss their problems with them with quite a bit more credibility than some of my colleagues.

There again, I come back to this point. I think it is terribly important for political officers, if they can find a way to do it, to get some experience with other agencies, and understand the problems, because later on when you get to be an ambassador or DCM, you're really responsible for the whole U.S. operation. You can't just be the State Department's ambassador if you want to be effective and if you want to carry out the mandate of the President, the law. If the other agency reps look on you as somebody interested in their problems and knowledgeable about them and willing to fight some of their battles with their bureaucracies in Washington, they will then be much more loyal and supportive of the total mission in the country. That we had going for us in Afghanistan, together with Neumann's real leadership skills. We had a country team that was very loyal to him and really quite well articulated.

It was an exciting period, in a way, because we were there at the time of the old monarchy, but there was the coup in the summer of '73. Neumann was on home leave, and I was in charge. Old Prince Daoud, who had been in disgrace and sort of under house arrest for many years, after having been prime minister for many years before that, had been plotting successfully with some elements in the military. While the King was out of the country on holiday in Italy, along with his son-in-law, Abdul Wali, who was the real military power behind the throne, Daoud's people, in an almost bloodless coup, took over. There was a little shooting right around the embassy, because the palace was right down the street, but nobody in the American community was hurt. There was excitement for a few days. We didn't know what was happening. Our contacts, all of a sudden, disappeared. But it was an interesting experience for me, being in charge of an embassy at a time of some considerable crisis and tension and danger.

Q: Was there any signs in the distance, way back then, of traditional Russian expansionism?

LEWIS: We played this game with the Russians throughout those years in Afghanistan. The Soviets had a huge AID program of their own, many thousands of technicians. We had nearly 1,000 and a large Peace Corps of several hundred. Their AID program, however, was bigger. It was concentrated in different parts of the country, and they had a big military training program in the army. We had a small military training program, very small. We brought a few Afghan officers here to the States for training. But the Afghans were very anxious to really remain neutral. They wanted us there as much as they could get us there, as a counterweight to the Soviets.

Q: Good afternoon, Ambassador Lewis. Today is September 23, 1988. It's nice to be here again after a lapse of a month and a half. As we can see from the transcript in front of us, you were dealing with Afghanistan when we left off. I believe you had a few additional remarks to make on that.

LEWIS: Yes. I just wanted to go on and say a word about this question of Russia-Afghan relations which we touched on at the very end. As I indicated, there was quite a lot of competition between our programs in Afghanistan and the Russian programs, though theirs was much bigger. The Afghans were playing throughout that era a very skillful game of balance to maintain their independence, despite their very energetic neighbor to the north, whom they've always had great distrust of, indeed, hatred of, by keeping as much of an American presence as possible, but keeping the American presence in the economic area where it wouldn't be seen by the Russians as any military or strategic threat to them. We, of course, had a small military training program. We brought a few Afghan officers to the United States, a handful, but the main part of the Afghan military were trained by the Russians.

Afghan leaders, the King and Prince Daoud, when he was prime minister in earlier years, had always done a great deal to reassure the Russians that they were in no way hostile to the Soviet Union, and tried not to provoke them, tried to be seen as genuinely neutral, leaning perhaps a little bit to the north. It's always puzzled me, in a way, that some years after I left Afghanistan in early 1974, the Russians decided that to protect their interests, they had to invade and, in effect, take over the country for a number of years. It was a kind of miscalculation about the Afghans, that it's almost impossible to understand how they made such a miscalculation. They knew the country very well, they were there in large numbers, they had many Russian agents in the country, and they knew the Afghan character. It seems strange that they wouldn't have realized that the way in which they tried to turn Afghanistan into a puppet regime with a large occupying force of Soviet soldiers, was inevitably going to stimulate an enormous Afghan Nationalist reaction. I guess they underestimated how tough the Afghan rebels would be in the long run, but it strikes me they shouldn't have made that miscalculation. If they were going to try to take over the country in order to shore up a failing Communist regime that came in after a later coup, I would have thought they would have known that they had to put in a whole lot more troops than they ever used in Afghanistan, in order to have a chance of really subjugating the country permanently.

Q: Would you say that this was a Moscow calculation, disregarding solid advice that was available, similar to Washington miscalculations, despite good advice?

LEWIS: We really had no way of knowing, but it seems that's very possible. I think a few things I've seen recently about things which have been coming out in the Gorbachev era, about the Afghan decision, suggest that they have realized that some military figures in particular made some really incredible miscalculations about what it would take to subdue Afghanistan, and gave very bad advice to the politicians. It remains a mystery to me, though.

In any case, that coup took place in the summer of 1973, and Daoud took power while the King was in Italy, proclaimed a republic, and made himself president. In fact, it was really a monarchy

just called a republic, and the institutions changed barely at all. It seems to me he did dissolve the Parliament, which was a weak but functioning institution, and his own Oriental-style intelligence system became extremely active in rooting out and throwing in jail and treating very badly a lot of supporters of the King and, more importantly, people who had not been very nice to Daoud in recent years. But he functioned really like an Oriental monarch. He was a very shrewd, wily fellow, and during those last six or seven months that I was there, in the first months of the Daoud regime, our relations got rather tense for quite a while. We had no good contacts left except one or two of his friends who we had been fairly close to, even while he was out of power, one of whom turned up as acting foreign minister in the new government.

It was very difficult to find out what was really going on in Afghanistan, having very rudimentary institutions, the press and media, and everybody being scared to death of being seen with foreigners, in general, not just Americans. Our contacts dried up for quite a while. They were beginning to stick their heads up again about the time that I left in February, 1974.

Meanwhile, Ted Eliot came and replaced Bob Neumann as ambassador toward the end of 1973, and I served with Ted for a couple of months as his DCM. Then all of a sudden, out of a clear blue sky, along in mid-January of 1974, I had a telephone call from Washington one day from Winston Lord, who was the new director of the policy planning staff. He had been a close staff member with Henry Kissinger at the White House on the NSC staff, and when Kissinger came over as Secretary of State in the autumn of 1973, he brought Lord over with him and made him head of the planning staff. Winston was reorganizing the staff and upgrading it, because Kissinger wanted to use it much more rigorously than it had been used by Bill Rogers. He asked me if I would come back and be his deputy. He wanted to have a mixture of career people and non-career experts. Where he had gotten my name, I have no idea, but he asked me to come back to Washington and talk to him about it. So I flew back, was very impressed with Lord and with the way Kissinger apparently intended to use the policy planning staff, so I accepted and left early in February 1974, leaving my wife and kids in Kabul to finish out the school term. They were both in the American School. As a matter of fact, my wife was directing a play at the time for the Kabul Amateur Dramatic Society, which we were both very active in. "Music Man" was going to be produced later in the spring, so for a variety of reasons, she stayed on in Kabul for about three months after I went back to Washington.

VINCENT W. BROWN
Director, USAID
Kabul (1972-1976)

Vincent W. Brown was born and raised in the San Francisco area of California. Brown attended UCLA where he received his Bachelor of Science in business administration. Brown was hired by the Marshall Plan in Paris in 1950. In June of 1968, Brown became a fellow at Harvard's Center for International Affairs. He has served in Tunisia, Libya, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan. The interview was conducted by W. Haven North in May of 1997.

BROWN: In April 1972, I was transferred next door to USAID Kabul as Deputy Director to replace Victor Skiles (who had already left). It was understood that I would replace Bart Harvey as Director in Afghanistan after his departure in late Fall.

Q: Afghanistan is among the 25 least developed countries of the world. What did your family think about the move?

BROWN: Our family had visited Kabul as tourists two previous times, and had enjoyed our brief visits. However, we were very happy in Pakistan. Françoise and the children were great. They were prepared to make the move cheerfully, mainly because they knew the new posting offered an opportunity for me to become a USAID Director in the late Fall.

As I mentioned earlier, I left for Kabul to take up a post as Deputy Director at the end of April, and Françoise stayed behind in Islamabad to allow the children to complete the school year. I returned to Islamabad in early June and we left on home leave returning to Kabul at the end of the summer.

Q: Was the long overlap with the outgoing Director awkward? You arrived in April and he left in late Fall.

BROWN: It was not difficult; in fact it worked out well. The outgoing Director, Bart Harvey and his wife couldn't have been more charming, and Bart did his best to introduce me to my counterparts in the Afghan government and prepare me for my duties as Director once he left. On my side I tried to be a loyal and effective Deputy Director, understanding that Bart would be fully in charge until he left. I think this approach was effective with the USAID staff, and they were spared having to deal with two management approaches simultaneously.

During this transition period I also had a chance to get to know the US Ambassador, Edward Neumann, a political appointee ex professor of political science from UCLA, who took a strong, detailed interest in the aid program. He was very supportive, and understood AID's development concerns; however, he saw the AID program very much as a tool of diplomacy. While his priorities were clearly in the political domain, he understood its potential of a successful aid program to produce a positive impact on US/Afghan relations. The deputy chief of mission was Sam Lewis, a career diplomat of great talent, who went on to become our Ambassador to Israel.

Ambassador Neumann was replaced after about a year by a career diplomat, Theodore (Ted) Eliot. Ambassador Eliot did a marvelous job. He was well liked by both the American staff and the Afghans. He and his wife (Pat) both spoke the local language (Farsi) which was a important asset. He was very supportive of the AID program. He allowed the AID Director maximum flexibility, and was always there to help out with senior levels of the Afghan government should the need arise. He left Afghanistan and retired about a year after I left in December 1976, about six months before the communist takeover. After he retired, Ambassador Eliot went on to become the Dean in charge of Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (located on the Tufts University campus in Boston).

Q: What was the size of the USAID program? Give me some idea of its composition and goals.

BROWN: The AID mission consisted of about 50 direct hire and 50 contract American employees and 300 Afghan employees. The development program involved \$10 million in grants annually and an active loan portfolio of over \$50 million. The capital loans were for long term (40 years and a low interest rate.) In addition, during the drought years we provided substantial amounts of PL 480 emergency food relief.

To give you some background on the conditions at the time, it is worthwhile noting that Afghanistan was identified as one of the “25 least developed countries” by UNCTAD (The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). Estimates of yearly income averaged out to about \$100 per person compared to \$690 in Turkey and \$900 in Brazil at that time. Fewer than 12% of all Afghans were literate and the percentage in the rural areas was much lower -- for rural woman only about 6/10th of one percent. In a public health survey taken around 1972, on the average only four children survived to adulthood of an average of eight born to each woman. The infant mortality rate was over 20%, and less than two percent of the woman had ever heard of a modern family planning method.

The USAID Afghanistan projects were focused on helping the people : to grow more food; be healthier; and live better. While we still had a very active loan portfolio when I joined the mission, new bilateral loans were few and far between. We were no longer a major direct financier of large, capital projects under our program. The capital projects mantle had shifted to the World Bank (IBRD) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). We, of course, pointed out to the Afghan government that as the major contributor to both banks , we were providing assistance indirectly for major capital projects carried out by the World Bank (IBRD) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Q: Can you be more specific about some of the major development assistance activities while you were Director from 1972 through 1976.

BROWN: I'll be glad to. First, I would like to put our position as a donor in the 1970s into perspective. The cold war was still very much with us, but our aid posture had changed from the '50s and '60s when we were major contributors to the building up of Afghanistan's basic infrastructure. Some of the larger projects included: the US financed the Kabul/Khandahar/Herat road to the Iranian border, plus a substantial part of the Kabul/Jalalabad road to the Pakistan border, and most of the costs of the road going north to the Hindu Kush mountain. The Soviet Union financed the only other major paved road in the country covering much of northern Afghanistan to its border. Afghanistan's northern frontier borders on the states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

Another substantial US capital investment was in the Helmand Valley. In the '50s and '60s the US had made considerable investments in such things as: a dam which supplied the water to the Helmand Valley, a hydro-electric power plant, and the construction of irrigation canals, etc., not to mention a major technical assistance effort to help the Ministry of Agriculture turn desert nomads into irrigation farmers.

We also contributed to the construction of Kabul University along with the French and Germans.

By the '70s the nature of our development assistance program had changed. Major capital assistance projects were to be done by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Any talk of balance of payments support, stabilization programs, commodity assistance, infrastructure was the domain of the World Bank (IBRD) Rep. Fortunately, the Bank's reps were excellent and easy to get along with. We had frequent opportunity to meet informally and work together.

Our program continued to be a major one for the Afghans. Its focus was on people oriented projects and programs, and technical assistance to help open new areas, as well as maximize the value of our earlier capital investments.

A principal concern from the outset, as Director, was the continued success of the Helmand-Arghandab Valley Authority project (HAVA) in the southern part of Afghanistan which literally made the desert bloom by bringing thousand of acres under irrigation (about 100,000 acres). The US had already provided to the Helmand Valley project more than one hundred million dollars over the past two decades, and this irrigated area was producing increasing amounts of wheat, corn, melons, cotton, and other valuable food and fiber crops. Our focus in 1972 was on draining the water from four large irrigated farm areas in the Helmand Province to prevent water-logging and salt build-up that was damaging crop growth. The HAVA as we called it was literally the "bread basket" of the country.

One very innovative project which went hand in hand with the Helmand Valley project was a US financed fertilizer distribution project to help build an effective fertilizer distribution network utilizing private retailers. Before its establishment fertilizer was virtually unavailable to Afghan farmers, and it was needed to take advantage of the new high-yielding varieties of wheat and corn and to increase production of cotton, grapes and other crops.

The Afghan Fertilizer company (AFC), an Afghan Government corporation, was set up in 1972, to import much needed fertilizer as well as arranging the distribution of local manufactured nitrogen fertilizer. The government corporation was a new concept for the government long used to doing everything through the Ministry of Agriculture bureaucracy which had very limited capabilities. The AFC also distributed other agricultural inputs (pesticides and seeds). To help assure its operation success the USAID financed a key technical cooperation project which provided four experienced advisers under a contract with Checchi and Company. The advisers were well selected and the project was an outstanding success. When I left Afghanistan in December 1976 there were 400 retail dealers located in every significant farming area in the country.

Our emergency food program played a vital role in 1973. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Afghanistan experienced a number of unusually dry years, and by 1973 the US, UN, Soviet Union and other governments at the request of the Afghan government, were all beginning to contribute important amounts of food to help meet the urgent needs. The crisis had reached famine proportion, and it was estimated that some 80,000 had died of hunger the preceding year before the government formally asked for help from foreign donors. Generally speaking, US assistance went to help the population south of the Hindu Kush mountain range, and the Soviet

and UN supplies were distributed north of this mountain range (many peaks over 14,000 feet) which divides the country in half. Given the limited road network, much of our PL 480 food supplies were distributed by a combination of rented trucks and camel caravans (some of the caravans were as long as 100 to 200 camels). Our Assistant Director for Administration, Abe Aschanese, was a tremendous force in helping the Afghan government get organized to deliver the food quickly over almost overwhelming odds. During the “famine” years, the only area which continued to produce food was the Helmand Valley which depended on irrigation, and was instrumental in limiting the loss of life during those years.

Health services for those living in rural areas of Afghanistan were virtually non-existent. A basic health services project was established to help the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) extend health services to rural areas where 85% of the people lived. Four professional consultants were provided from the US non profit firm Management Sciences for Health, MSH (under USAID contract). The MSH team did an incredible job assisting the Ministry in planning, training, carrying out basic health field demonstrations and analyses, personnel, commodities, administration and general management. The advisors had the full confidence of the Minister and his senior staff. While small relative to the need, the million to two million dollar a year grant budget provided substantial leverage in helping get the primary health care program off the ground. One of the constant battles was to design the program so that it included women and children. Prior to this project, what little public health effort that existed, was limited to the urban area and focused on providing help to the male elements of the population.

Grant money was also available to help finance simple primary health care centers around the country. A pilot effort of 50 centers were built and staffed during my stay and plans were under way to expand the effort.

Q: Given what's gone on over the last 17 or 18 years and the political chaos which continues to reign, are there any signs remaining of this highly successful Primary Health Care program carried out by MSH?

BROWN: I'm glad you asked that question! I was just reading a very recent “Afghanistan Trip Report” written by Elisabeth Kvitashvili of the Office of Food for Peace covering the period from April 23 to May 5, 1997. In Section XII. Implementing Partners: (UNICEF), she writes about UNICEF activities in Afghanistan, and I quote: “NB: I questioned UNICEF if they saw any evidence of the cold chain system put in place by Management Sciences for Health (MSH) during the 1980s as part of the AID Cross Border program. UNICEF said that in many places, Jalalabad, Ghazni for example, the MSH cold chain remained intact and functional.”

Actually the first steps of introducing “cold chain” systems (necessary for preserving vaccines and other medical supplies) in the major primary health care offices was initiated by MSH when they were working with the Ministry of Health in the mid ‘70s. This is good example of the lasting impact of work well done, even under chaotic conditions.

One of the critical needs was to train women to serve as health care workers. The training of Auxiliary Nurse Mid-wives (ANMs) was done at a ANM school partially financed by the USAID with two nurse advisors furnished under contract from the University of California (Santa Cruz) campus. Women mid-wives were essential since cultural taboos inhibited women

from seeking medical help unless female personnel were present to serve them. It was extremely difficult to get any of the educated Afghan women to live in the rural areas, so the recruits were carefully recruited from the rural areas so that they could live with their families in the rural areas near the primary health care facilities. By April 1976 100 ANMs had been graduated and were working in the field. While this project was very tiny compared to the nationwide needs, it was revolutionary and ground breaking in the male dominated culture.

In 1976 the USAID made a grant to the Afghan Family Guidance Association (AFGA) to help expand the delivery of family planning and maternal /child health services to provincial areas. This was a small private organization with links to the International Planned Parenthood Federation in London. This was a small beginning, but was indicative of opening of government thinking we were experiencing under President Dad's leadership, with Minister Khorram in charge of the Ministry of Plan.

Before leaving our aid program, I should mention the outstanding work done in the field of education by Columbia University Teachers College and the Ministry of Education. Together they revised the primary education curriculum and textbooks, especially in Farsi and Pushtu (the local Persian languages) and mathematics. Afghan educators were trained in the US and with the help of American advisors resident in Kabul completely revamped the primary education curriculum, field tested it and supervised its installation in the primary schools. The new textbooks were actually printed at the local Education Press. The learning results in the first year in mathematics were 30% quicker and better, and about 25% more effective in the local languages of Farsi and Pushtu.

At the University level, the University of Nebraska furnished a team of professors (deans) that advised primarily in the fields of agriculture, education and engineering. In addition, the Rector of the Kabul University (a wonderful US trained Afghan) could call on their experienced advice in running the University. Many of the Afghan university professors were educated in the US and contributed to a high quality of instruction in the respective departments. The President of the University of Nebraska took a personal interest in Afghanistan, and later created a Center of Afghan Studies at the University headed by Tom Goutierre, who had worked in Afghanistan on the University of Nebraska contract as an advisor to Kabul University.

I've gone on at some length about the USAID program which was in its 20th year when I arrived in Kabul. I've done so because I think it made a significant difference in the lives of the Afghan people.

Q: I understand that the USSR also served as a major donor to Afghanistan. How did the Afghan government handle the two cold-war powers?

BROWN: The government dealt with us separately. The Soviet Union was largely restricted to Afghanistan north of the Hindu Kush (a western extension of the Himalayas), and the United States and other Western donors restricted to the South. The modest UN agency activities (e.g. UNICEF, the World Food Program, etc.) were permitted to operate throughout the country, as were the World Bank and Asian Development Bank projects. Since Afghanistan was on the periphery of the Soviet Union, their Ambassador was a senior official in his government's

hierarchy. Prior to his posting in Afghanistan he had been Prime Minister of Russia, and a member of the politburo. Fraternization of between our two countries' aid personnel was not encouraged by either the Afghan government, or the US or the Soviets.

Q: Was Afghanistan politically stable during your stay? Did this have an effect on your aid program.

BROWN: Basically, it was a stable period. When I first arrived, Afghanistan was still a monarchy. The heads of the various Ministries were generally well educated in one of the Western countries -- France, Germany, UK and the US. Occasionally one would meet someone at Ministerial level who had done their studies in the USSR. It was rare. Most of the civil servants who were trained in the USSR were at modest management levels in the government. Most of them were unsympathetic to the communist way of life.

In the summer of 1973 the King Zahir was overthrown, and a republic was proclaimed, headed by his first cousin, Muhammad Daud, who had been Prime Minister from 1953-1963. The coup only lasted about 24 hours, and in about a week things were back to normal. The king and his family were exiled to the Isle of Capri in Italy on a generous pension.

However, during the takeover there was a lot of shooting and some lives were lost. I still remember very clearly the morning of the coup. About 7:30 in the morning of the coup we were on our way to the airport to pickup my cousin and his wife and two children who were coming for a two week visit. Before we left home, I was suspicious. Our telephone would not work, and jet planes were flying over the city. However, our chauffeur who had come to pick us up and take us to the airport explained that he thought there had been a jail break and we could go ahead with our plans.

Françoise and I and the children got in the car and started for the airport. At the first major intersection, there was a tank parked with its cannon pointed down the road in our direction. Out in front was an Army sergeant waving his AK 47 and signaling us to stop. We all got out -- including the wife and children -- with our hands held high in the air. The soldier looked terrified and I thought I noticed that the safety latch was off on his AK 47. Fortunately, our chauffeur had the presence of mind to explain in the local language (Pushtu) that we were on our way to the USAID compound which was nearby. He did not reveal that we were headed for the airport. He then asked, very politely, if we could be allowed to proceed to our office compound. The soldier agreed and said we were to stay off the streets. By the time we got to the USAID office most of the staff had arrived. We all stayed inside for the rest of the day with automatic weapon fire heard from time to time in the near-by streets. By late afternoon, we were able to send the staff home -- one car at a time.

We later heard that the Ariana (Afghan airlines) plane our cousins were traveling on had been diverted to Tehran. Four days later they arrived on the first commercial plane to land at Kabul airport since the coup. We met them at the airport and when they came down off the ramp there were two lines of soldiers on each side with fixed bayonets. Our cousins thought it was great fun, and we had a marvelous two weeks together.

For the balance of the my stay in Afghanistan, President Daud was firmly in control and we had no feeling of political instability. In fact, the government was a bit more open to new ideas and a bit more vigorous. On the political side, the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Bahktari, was a communist. He had been educated at American University in the '50s and became one there at that time. While we were able to continue with our existing agricultural programs (albeit, reluctantly), no new projects were initiated after his arrival.

I (we) decided that it might help relations if we sent Minister Bahktari, back to the states on a short term participant training visit. We arranged for him to meet with the then Secretary of Agriculture, visit irrigation sites in the Imperial Valley, the TVA etc. He had a wonderful time, drank himself silly on weekends. When he got back, the first thing he did was to report to the Afghan nation on what he had found in the US. He described the incredibly rich narrow minority, and further explained that most American citizens were worse off than the Afghan farmers in the rural areas. He was very proud of himself. Fortunately, for us after a couple of years he made so many mistakes he was removed by President Daud for incompetence. Moral of the Story: Perhaps it was a bit naive to think that a "VIP" visit to our country would be enough to change the point of view of a dedicated communist -- especially one that had never been to the USSR.

President Daud's appointment as Minister of Plan, Mr. Khorram was excellent. Within the limits of the local political realities, he did his best to move things along. We got along very well. Unfortunately, a year after I left, Minister Khorram was assassinated in front of the Planning Ministry offices. In April of 1978, about six months later, President Daud was killed during a violent coup d'etat. The new rulers organized a "Revolutionary Council, suspended the constitution and initiated a program of "scientific socialism".

Unfortunately, much of the good work done during President Daud's reign was lost when the Revolutionary Council took over.

Q: You were in Afghanistan for almost five years as Director. How do you rate this posting in your long career with AID?

BROWN: On the one hand, Afghanistan was one of the most difficult and challenging assignments of my career, on the other it was also one of the most rewarding. The Afghans, on the social side, were very "stand-offish" for the first year. We gradually made a number of close Afghan friends. Our two boys loved it. They learned Farsi and were often invited out into the country to visit with Afghan families.

Understanding the decision-making dynamics in Afghanistan was very demanding because decisions often depended on tribal politics in the different regions, and within the government structure who would benefit if a certain project was approved. Most of the projects were well appreciated and were moving ahead -- albeit slowly.

I remember one case where we had had an enthusiastic reception from the Governors of Herat and Khandahar and local leaders to a proposal for a Rural Development Project emphasizing village self-help. To help get it started we proposed most of the AID financing to be on a grant basis including a portion of the local financing. Most of the governments contribution was to be

in the value of the local labor furnished in the villages. Months went by and the Project Agreement was not signed. The Minister of Plan indicated that although he supported the project, he was helpless to get it approved at cabinet level. Washington was about to deobligate the money. I had recently hired as my “cultural advisor”, an ex-peace corps volunteer (Marti Kumorek), who spoke Farsi fluently and had many contacts in the Afghan community on local contract I asked Marti to look into the matter informally, and he found out that the opposition was purely political. Certain members of the Cabinet did not want the Governors of Herat and Khandahar to benefit from the project. Once I knew this, I was able to go to Ambassador Eliot explain the situation. He was very helpful and spoke to President Daud, who sorted it all out. Shortly afterward, the project agreement was signed. On a number of occasions after that when the government was not reacting “logically”, Marti was able to determine the reason, and help us work out a strategy to get the project or new policy approved.

In the Fall of 1976, I received an offer of a position with a five country African Development Organization, “le Conseil de l’Entente”, in Abidjan as a Development Counselor in charge of their loan and grant portfolio with the English-speaking donors. I was needed in Abidjan by January 1977. So I decided to retire from the Agency for International Development in the month of December 1976.

WILLIAM E. RAU
Economic Counselor
Kabul (1973-1975)

William E. Rau was born in Michigan in 1929. After receiving a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Montana, he served in the U.S. Army as first lieutenant from 1953 to 1955. His postings abroad have included Thessaloniki, Port Said, Cairo, Pretoria, Izmir, Istanbul, Kabul and Athens. Mr. Rau was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: You were in Kabul from ‘73 to-

RAU: To ‘75. We wanted to drive overland to go there from Istanbul. We could have done it. The ambassador’s wife, Ted Elliott’s wife did it. She drove down in a Land Rover. But there was a *coup d’état* that took place in Kabul. The king was in Italy on vacation or something, and he was overthrown by his cousin, Mohammed Daoud, while he was out of the country. And so I couldn’t get a visa because all the people in Ankara etc. were *persona non grata*, and our embassy told me to fly in and they would have a visa for me at the airport, which is what we did.

Q: In 1973 when you arrived there had just been this coup. Was this just a garden variety palace coup or-

RAU: It was more or less a palace coup because Daoud was a cousin of the king, and he was of royal, you know, princely blood as well. So he took over and it was, well, a continuation of the same old without a king. He established a republic, so called, and he was the prime minister and

president both, and for two years we lived in, I'd say, relative - well, not altogether - isolation because we had a big AID mission. We would go down to the southwestern part of the country to where they were doing a lot of agricultural things, but most of our life was still around Kabul. In fact, it was an R&R post, and the closest place we could get to outside that environment of Kabul was Peshawar in Pakistan. We'd drive out there once in a while to spend a day or so. That was about it. Beautiful country but very stark, very primitive, feudal, tribal, which it still is today.

Q: You were economic counselor.

RAU: I was economic counselor there. The AID mission was on the other side of town, and that was a major part of the US presence there. I acted as the ambassador's representative to the AID mission. I attended all their staff meetings got involved with all their projects on behalf of the ambassador.

Q: I would have thought that being an economic counselor, other than the AID role, there wasn't much to look at.

RAU: No, there wasn't. I made an arrangement with the consular officer there, Bruce Beardsley. Do you know Bruce?

Q: No.

RAU: He was the consular officer there. Now, anybody who asked for a visa to come to the States who claimed he was a businessman, I wanted to see him, I wanted to talk to him. And he did. He'd introduce me. The funny thing was these guys would come in in turbans and the long dress, etc. and they were in the market, merchants in the bazaar, and when Bruce would ask them, "What wherewithal do you have to show that you won't become a public charge when you get to the United States?" they would open up (a couple of cases I remember) a passbook from the Dime Savings Bank in Brooklyn. They'd have something like \$40,000, because they were dealing everything in that bazaar. The biggest export at that time from the United States to Afghanistan was used clothing, these huge bundles of used clothing.

Q: They were mostly suit jackets, weren't they?

RAU: They were remnants. You know at the end of the season, they'd pack them all up and sell them by the pound or whatever, and they'd buy up a whole shipload of these things and send them over. Then you'd see them when you'd go out in the bazaar. You know, they'd be hanging up. You could buy last year's fashion, whatever.

Q: How about with the government? Did you have much to do with the government?

RAU: Yes, I had a lot to do with the minister of commerce, and that was mainly on the aid program. That's what they were really interested in, with the agricultural assistance program, training programs for sending people to the United States, etc. I didn't have much to do on the strictly political side. The ambassador, Ted Elliott, spoke Farsi fairly well, and he learned Dari well enough to, in fact, give a television interview with them. So he and the DCM and the

political counselor had most of that under their belts. And the foreign minister (he was not a full-fledged foreign minister because Daoud kind of kept that to himself), he was kind of a deputy foreign minister. Wahid Abdullah was his name.

The one event that was hard to forget in Kabul was when Henry Kissinger came to Kabul on one of his trips to India, I guess it was, and he stopped off in Kabul. It was supposed to be only for a few hours, and of course, the embassy was in complete turmoil trying to take care of him, because he traveled, as you know, in very royal style. He'd have one plane that would carry his car to the next one and people who were dealing with various parts of the world where he was going would join him at different times. Wells Stabler was one of those that came on this particular flight.

Anyway, he came, and this Wahid Abdullah, this deputy foreign minister, convinced Henry that he should stay there and go see a real *buzkashi*, a game they play there. It's a primitive form of polo.

Q: Oh, this with the sheep, the headless sheep?

RAU: Well, the headless calf they used to use. Goat I think it was originally. It means 'pull the goat' or 'drag the goat.' But they played it with a headless calf, and they would change the carcass at half time. It was so beat up. Anyway, there was a place called the Jeshyn Grounds which the king used to observe it in Kabul, but it wasn't the real thing because it was an enclosed area - good horsemanship, but they had to stay within that area. But Abdullah said, "No, you've got to see it up north," in Mazar Sharif, which is up near the Russian border, the Soviet border. And there they play it in a natural bowl surrounded by mountains, and in the middle of this they'll ride off into the mountains fighting over this carcass and come back five minutes later. So we all flew up there, several of us, with Henry, who decided to do that. But that meant, because Kabul had an airport where you couldn't take off at night, that he had to spend the night there. We had to make all kinds of last-minute arrangements for him and his party. And they had to go to the Intercontinental Hotel there; we kind of took that over. And he spent the night, but I remember the whole staff was exhausted after this day and a half of the Kissinger mission. He came out to the airport with us the next morning and shook hands with us saying, "Thank you for your help. I know it was an imposition." He went off on his way to India, I guess it was, from there.

Q: How about the Soviet hand? How was that?

RAU: Very strong. It's the only place I've been where they had a much bigger embassy than we did. Even including our AID mission, they had a huge establishment there and a very good working relationship with the Afghans, including Daoud. A lot of them had been trained in the Soviet Union, a lot of their army had been trained in the Soviet Union, and we were definitely second-class in terms of that relationship. We were trying to keep Afghanistan neutral, not get them on our side. As you know, it all came tragically to an end afterwards. Spike Dubs was killed out there.

Q: After you left, there were four years and all hell breaking loose and the Soviets getting

involved: did this seem at all in the cards when you were there?

RAU: It didn't because I didn't think that the people we knew who were at all politically minded were at all communist-bent. I mean, Islam was still very much in the ascendance there, and I couldn't see them really doing this for ideological reasons. And as long as the government didn't want it to happen I didn't think it was going to happen, but then they had two they had a Chinese communist-oriented party and a Russian-oriented communist party. And the first one was the Russian-oriented that won out, and they seized power, and when their leader was in danger of being overthrown that the Russians were invited in, or the Russians invited themselves in. Brezhnev. But no, when we were there, I wouldn't have thought that was a possibility. And then as it turned out, it *wasn't* a possibility.

Q: And it still isn't.

RAU: It's a feudal society. It's a tribal society. The best example I can give you of that: as I mentioned, Ambassador Elliott was a good Farsi speaker and he decided - there weren't any roads all over the country - there wasn't a railroad all the way around - he decided he was going to go in a four-wheel drive vehicle and see parts of the country nobody else had seen. And he did, he took a convoy of them. They went up north and they went over to Herat on the Iranian border and then back down to Kandahar, etc. And he would spend a lot of time spending the night at teahouses, which was the only place there. And he'd come back and tell stories about this. You know we'd be in this one teahouse, and this huge picture of the king would be on the wall. He'd say, "Why do you have a picture of the king on the wall? He's been out of power for almost two years." They'd say, "Oh, he's our king. He's still there." He wasn't there. Their leader was really the feudal leader of that tribe, and that's exactly what defeated the Soviets.

Q: What about our aid mission, since you were very much involved with it? What where they after?

RAU: Well, it was mainly a traditional aid program in the sense that they had a small contingent that was trying to help the business community in Kabul, such as it was, but the principal function was in agriculture, on making them self-sufficient in agricultural goods. And one of the things we were able to do in the embassy, strangely enough, was to help these two young men who had an arrangement with the Genesco Company in the States for shipping animal skins - that was another big product there - for making shoe leather to this Genesco in Tennessee. And we helped them put together a working arrangement with Genesco where Genesco took all of their - there's a technique they call the "wet skin" process, where they get it to a certain process. So we were able to do that, and that was one of the few business ventures involving an American firm I know of. Another thing was Pan American still had very much a vested interest in Ariana Airlines and Pan American had a representative there in Kabul who took care of them, made sure that they had Pan Am pilots and trained Afghan pilots, etc. But other than that, there wasn't any American presence as such. And the AID mission concentrated primarily on trying to improve the self-sufficiency of Afghan agriculture.

Q: So this was not a country where we saw any particular gain for us; it was just a matter of keeping them neutral.

RAU: That's right. It was a continuation of the old British "great game" in that area: who was going to win the hearts and minds of these people? It used to be the British and the Russians and the Indians; now it was the Americans and the Russians. And if we could keep them neutral, we thought we had accomplished our purpose.

Q: Did the hand of India rest at all in Afghanistan?

RAU: No, Pakistan, to some extent, but not India. India had a mission there, but it wasn't much. Pakistan had a very active mission. They were active with some of the Tribal elements, trying to keep them helping Daoud and some of his people.

Q: What was your impression of Daoud?

RAU: He'd had an interesting background. As I say, he was a prince of the royal house, if you will. We got to know a person who ran the one first-class attempt at promoting tourism up north in the Bamiyan valley. He was an Afghan who had been in California. He had also dealt in used automobiles, etc. And his wife had been a model in California, a very beautiful girl. Well, when she went to school when Daoud was Minister of the Interior, at that time I guess, she was the first woman to go to school without the *chador*, without everything covered. And you now, she was in danger of being stoned, etc. Well, he protected her, Daoud did, made sure that she could go to school. So he was a strange bird. He overthrew his cousin the king because he had power, a lot of power, he was power-hungry in a sense. But he was not a young man when he did this, and he was not a young man when he was overthrown again and killed.

Q: We're talking now in 1998 where you have an extreme fundamentalist group, the Taliban who are dominant right now, for what it's worth, in Afghanistan. Did fundamentalism raise its head very much?

RAU: It wasn't a primary factor, except as I mentioned earlier: that I couldn't see this country ever going communist, because from an ideological point of view, it was completely anathema to them. But later the student movement, which was what the Taliban movement was, has returned into a very strict fundamentalism, in some ways stricter than Saudi Arabia. Women have gone back into *pardah*, no education for them, etc. We have a group here in the Washington area called the old Afghan League. It goes back to the '50's. They send out invitations once a year or so. I went to the last one of those gatherings, and they had somebody there from Doctors Without Borders who had been out there recently, and he had some statistics that just blew my mind after the Soviets had been there. He said that they think that there are something like 10 million land mines in Afghanistan and that there is no way they're going to eradicate all this. The number of cases they're dealing with there with all the lost limbs and that sort of thing, when they go out gathering firewood. These are kids, you know, little kids. Some of these the Soviets, when they came in there, made to look like toys. So the kids were trying to pick them up, and they would blow up. It's really bad news. It's really a wrecked country. I saw the article in the New York Times just a few months ago. The central part of Kabul - we used to live near there - it reminded me of Dresden; it was just a shell of a city.

Q: Well, is there anything else we should talk about here?

RAU: No, I mean, if you want to continue the assignments, after that I went back to Washington.

Q: We'll continue that, but I mean -

RAU: Oh, I see. In Afghanistan.

Q: Yes.

RAU: No.

DAVID C. McGAFFEY
Economic/Commercial Officer
Kabul (1973-1976)

David C. McGaffey was born in Michigan in 1941. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Detroit in 1964. His career has included positions in Farah, Manila, Kabul, Tabriz, Isfahan, Teheran, and Georgetown. Mr. McGaffey was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in September 1995.

McGAFFEY: At the end of that for my sins they told me that regardless of any protest they were going to send me to Kabul, Afghanistan as the economic officer and they didn't want to hear any objections.

Q: You were in Kabul from '73 to '76 is that right?

McGAFFEY: That's correct.

Q: You were the economic officer?

McGAFFEY: No. I was the junior economic officer, the economic-commercial officer, and there was an economic counselor, Bill Rowe.

Q: What was the situation in the '73 to '76 period in Afghanistan?

McGAFFEY: When I was there in the Peace Corps, there was a king in Kabul who was a protégé of Ataturk. He wanted to be the Ataturk of Afghanistan to modernize the country, modernize society, change things. His wife would appear with the chador, without the head covering. He did a lot of changes and he approved things like high schools for girls.

Immediately before I arrived, his uncle, cousin, and brother-in-law, all one man, took advantage of Zahir Shah's vacation in Italy and declared that they were going to abolish the kingdom and make a republic of Afghanistan headed by himself, Mohammed Daoud Khan. The State

Department thought that this meant that the communists had taken over because Daoud had some training in the Soviet Union. He was very much focused on economic development and saw the Soviet Union in some ways as the model for economic development, as most of the world did, including the United States. We objected to it but we saw it that way. The U.S. was very concerned about this Soviet communist coup, falsely.

I arrived there in '73 as the first diplomat to arrive after the announcement of the republic. My visa was issued by the royal Afghan embassy and was accepted by the Republic of Afghanistan. What I found was, despite what I had been told in Washington, it still very much a modernist family affair with Daoud disagreeing with his cousin the king about the focus. He thought there should be more focus on economics and less social, and on speed because he wanted things to change quickly. The biggest problem they faced was this huge neighbor to the north, the Soviets, who leaned on them and had the power to lean on them. They had tried under Daoud to get NATO assistance for developing the army and NATO, the U.S. principally, said no because they saw nothing of interest. All of their trade was going through Pakistan, with whom they had a border dispute and had a lot of restriction. Their only access to the rest of the world except the informal access (there had been smugglers for the last 5,000 years) was through the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union dominated them economically and potentially politically. He was trying to develop a modern state, and a more developed state, richer state, without angering this colossus.

As the economic commercial officer I was right in the middle of a lot of what was happening and it was a very exciting time. I was having some successes. We managed to get some independent development in the oil and gas industry which had been developed by the Soviet Union. They had pipelines that led across the river into the Soviet Union where the only meters were, as it was all exported and measured by the customers. He got some independent development by some western firms. We had American companies coming in and bidding for projects. They got a lot of students out of the country to the U.S. as well as to the Soviet Union. There was a good deal of ferment for which there was mostly a positive reaction, as opposed to the ferment under the Shah when a lot of it was negative because it was social under the king. It was an exciting time. I was there for much of it. I got a medal for knocking a Soviet firm out of the competition for one contract. The American firm lost it also because it went to a German but they still gave me a medal because it had been guaranteed to be a Soviet contract.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Afghan bureaucracy at that time?

McGAFFEY: There was no Afghan bureaucracy, there were Afghan people. They were not quite developed enough to have a bureaucracy. Everything was done on an individual basis. Because I was the teacher sir from Farah and I had cousins of my students in all of these various ministries, I could go in and get things done quite effectively. I spoke the language, I knew something of what was happening outside the city, I knew what towns they came from. There were three or four of us younger officers who were able to operate in this way. Ambassador Ted Eliot supported us entirely against some opposition of some counselors who felt that this was somewhat inappropriate. He told us to go ahead and used our reporting verbatim and gave us every support. It was an exciting time.

One of the first things that happened was that somebody came to me from the Ministry of

Finance and said “Look, we understand that the government of Afghanistan has borrowed a lot of money from the U.S. but we’ve gotten rid of the old trappings of the kingdom and are now a republic. We don’t know how to work these files so could you tell us what we owe you and when because we don’t want to default on any loans?”

Q: When you left there in ‘76, what was the situation?

McGAFFEY: I left when everything looked like it was moving forward well and there was real change in the air. There was visible change in the economy of the country, a faint beginning of something like central government and there was beginning to be some acknowledgment of the authority of Kabul.

Q: Had the, you might say, visceral reaction of the American government to this new one as being sort of a Soviet system developing, kind of died down?

McGAFFEY: It very much diminished partly because the Saudis and the Iranians and others had decided to provide some support on their own and they were beginning to realize that this was not a Soviet puppet. There was still a great deal of unhappiness about UN votes because they did vote the Soviet line on everything that the Soviets considered important but on other things there was the apparent evidence that it was not a Soviet puppet. The expectations were high for continued improvement.

As a matter of fact I had gotten into serious trouble it seemed finding out some of this. When I had gone to Iran to take my Foreign Service exam, I played chess with a young man in the Ministry of Finance. Eight years later he came on an official visit to Kabul as the head of foreign assistance in the Ministry of Finance, a deputy secretary, or undersecretary. I don’t know what his ministerial rank was but it was senior and he was now in charge of all foreign assistance. I invited him over to my house to play chess and pumped him about the Shah’s plans for Afghanistan. I sent in a long cable about this which my ambassador thought was great. Then we got a rocket from Ambassador Helms next door in Iran demanding to know who was responsible for this outrage because in Iran access to ministerial level people was strictly limited to heads of departments and had to be cleared by the ambassador so that there was a single voice. This had not been reported out of Iran and to have this major report on Iranian plans for Afghanistan to be coming out of Kabul was unacceptable.

THEODORE L. ELIOT, JR.
Ambassador
Afghanistan (1973-1978)

Mr. Eliot was born and grew up in the Boston area and graduated from Harvard. He served in numerous posts including Colombo, Moscow and Tehran. In 1973 he became ambassador to Afghanistan and served there for 4 ½ years. He was interviewed by Robert Martens in 1992.

Q: So then, as the second Nixon administration began, or into it a little ways, you went off to become ambassador to Afghanistan, and remained there for quite a while I think.

ELIOT: Four and a half years.

Q: Four and a half years?

ELIOT: Yes.

Q: And left, of course, before the communist coup.

ELIOT: No, I left just after it, six weeks after it.

Q: I remember that Spike Dubs went in after you.

ELIOT: That's right. The coup was late April of '78. I left in mid-June, and Spike got there in mid-July and was assassinated the following February.

Q: Why don't you discuss this, both from the standpoint of what it was like during that four and a half period, and then probably with some insight into the subsequent period-- sort of retrospective, if you will?

ELIOT: Just before I went there--as a matter of fact it's kind of an interesting little anecdote--I think the last time I was woken up in the middle of the night as Executive Secretary, was the Operations Center calling me to say there had been a coup--this was in July of '73--in Afghanistan, and I asked the usual questions: has the White House been informed? has Assistant Secretary of State--then Joe Sisco--been informed? are Americans safe? All the usual questions. And I made the decision that the rest of the apparatus could learn about it in the morning, that there would be no great disaster if we went to sleep. I put the phone down and then I suddenly realized, "My god, there's been a coup in the country that I'm about to go to. Am I still going?" Of course, my predecessor had to go into the new government to get a new agreement.

Q: Who was that?

ELIOT: That was Bob Neumann, who later was Ambassador in Morocco, and briefly in Saudi Arabia. And then I've already referred to Henry's desire to keep me in Washington. And then my confirmation hearings were held up because Henry's were held up because of the bugging of his subordinates issue which I won't go into at any great detail. And finally the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was ready to take me up, and they agreed to do so without a hearing. I don't know how many of our Ambassadors have been confirmed without a hearing. I may not be the only one, but I'm kind of proud of the fact they didn't have to see me to approve me. And off I went in the fall of '73.

The new government in Afghanistan was headed by the first cousin, and brother-in-law, of the King whom he had ousted, and in fact, the new President, Mohammed Daud, had been the Prime Minister during most of the 1950s into the early '60s, and the King had removed him primarily

because he disagreed with Daud's policy vis-a-vis Pakistan. I don't know how much of this history you want me to go into, but when India was divided into Pakistan and India by the British, the Pakistanis ended up with the Pushtun tribal areas along the eastern borders of Afghanistan. And the Afghans said at that time that those people should have been given an option for independence, or even for joining Afghanistan. And this became known as the Pushtunistan issue. And Daud was one of the prime pushers of that issue when he was Prime Minister, and because of the tension with Pakistan, Daud in the 1950s decided that he had to beef up the Afghan armed forces, and he came first to the United States for military assistance. We turned him down after a great deal of soul searching, because of our own close relationship in both CENTO and SEATO with Pakistan and because we did not want to cause the Russians to get overly anxious about what was going on inside Afghanistan and attempt to intervene in Afghanistan. Well, unfortunately Daud decided to turn to the Russians for this military equipment, and in the mid-'50s the Russians began their infiltration of Afghanistan through military people who had been trained to use Russian equipment in the Soviet Union. And at the same time in the '60s--not at the same time, but a little later in the '60s--the Russians were able to get a Communist political movement going in Afghanistan. As it's Afghanistan, of course, there had to be more than one communist party--there were two, which has plagued the communist movement ever since, the Parcham and Khalq parties. But at any rate, Daud opened the door.

When I first met with him, in '73, he tried to take care of his knowledge of his reputation in the United States by saying to me, "I know I was known as the Red Prince, and I know you Americans think that because the Russians gave us all this equipment, and because they built this road through the Hindu Kush and the Salang Pass, that I've opened up Afghanistan to invasion. I want you to know that's not going to happen." He was strangely, for a very powerful man, for a very patriotically powerful man, and a ruthless man when it came usually to his internal political enemies, he was strangely naive about the Russians. And it was only quite late in his tenure in '77 that there was evidence that he was beginning to understand that the Pushtunistan issue had opened up opportunities for the Russians. And it was only in that very last year of his term, including one visit that he made to Moscow, that he began to stand up to the Russians. He came in in '73, and he brought a lot of pro- Soviet Parcham or Khalq people into the government with him, and gradually in '75-'76-'77, he moved those people out of the central government. But not all of them. In fact, I think he did not know that some of the people close to him were in fact Communists and undoubtedly in the pay of the Soviets. His naivete, and his strange--which I still can't understand--failure to act ruthlessly at the critical moment in April of '78 cost him his power, and his life.

There was a strange set of circumstances which has been well written about elsewhere, notably in some works by the Afghanologist Louis DePree, which I need not go into in detail. But in April '78 the climax was reached when there was a major funeral procession for an assassinated Communist leader. This was the first non-government-sponsored political demonstration in the entire Daud regime, and Daud responded by arresting the known leaders of the two Communist parties. But he did not arrest enough people. He did not kill them, which I think he would have done earlier in his career. He did not arrest some of the Communist leaders in the military, nor did he cut off communications between these arrested political leaders and the military. And the result was the arrested political leaders asked their friends in the military to stage the coup,

which they did successfully April 27-April 28, 1978--exactly 14 years ago, as far as this interview is concerned.

So Daud was an interesting man. The only American political figure I could compare him to would be somebody like Sitting Bull. He was a powerful tribal chief, devoted to his larger tribe, namely the country of Afghanistan, but naive about the power he faced north of the border. He tried very hard in the beginning of '76 to solve the Pushtunistan issue. He met a couple of times with Bhutto, and then later after Bhutto was overthrown by General Zia, he met a few times with Zia. And, I think he was making a lot of progress. That fact, plus his beginning to stand up to the Russians, plus his having moved a lot of the Communists out of Kabul, all contributed, I believe, I'm convinced, to Brezhnev's conclusion that they didn't need Daud anymore and that they'd be better off with somebody much closer to them running Afghanistan. I don't think the Russians planned the coup in '78, but once it started they certainly helped the Communists in the armed forces to direct the attacks on the Presidential palace in Kabul, for example, and run a successful military operation. And then the minute their friends came into power, they poured in all kinds of psychological, military and economic assistance.

Q: Well, they were sort of stuck with him too because the communist world view, up to that time, and for some time after that was, that you can never retreat from anyplace that you've already taken because the world revolution is inevitable. You're sort of hoisted on the petard of your own ideology to doing some things that are more extreme than you might want to do from a strictly rational standpoint.

ELIOT: Absolutely. A lot of people have asked me the obvious question: why did the Russians do this? You've just given one of the reasons. The other reason is what I call Russian imperialism. The march of Russian expansion into Asia was stopped by the British empire in the 19th century, and here they had an opportunity to expand the empire. It was both ideological and imperial. And it's as simple as that. There is no better explanation than that, though the Russians themselves would put out disinformation such as they were fearing Islamic fundamentalism in Soviet Central Asia. That's baloney. The Afghans posed no threat.

Let me go back just a moment then to say a few words about American policy. From the Second World War on, American policy in Afghanistan had two prongs. One was to help the Afghans maintain their independence from the Soviet Union. And secondly, it was to give humanitarian aid to what is one of the poorest countries in the world. We also worked as best we could to solve the Pushtunistan issue, but we weren't very effective in doing that. We worked hard at it, bearing in mind that this was a wedge for the Russians. Obviously we didn't succeed in keeping Afghanistan out of Soviet hands. I think we did, however, do about as well in that regard as we could have. The fact that Kissinger came twice to Kabul while I was there was an indication to the Russians that we cared what was going on there.

Unfortunately, when the Carter administration came in that kind of global strategic thinking disappeared from the higher levels of the American administration. And you will recall that in that period in '77-'78, the Shah was collapsing, and the Russians could see we weren't doing much to keep him on the throne. You remember the incident of the Soviet brigade in Cuba where we ran up that hill, but unlike Teddy Roosevelt, didn't take it? We retreated back down again.

And we had cut off aid to Pakistan because of Pakistan's development of nuclear capability. So the view from Moscow was, I think, that they could get away with something in Afghanistan without too much concern for what the American response would be.

Q: You know in retrospect, one thing I was involved in in that period--although sort of sniping in a guerrilla way from the sidelines, was something called a Soviet-US negotiation to restrict arms in the Indian Ocean area. That went very far. It was very naive, extremely naive.

ELIOT: I agree with that too.

Q: As a matter of fact, I helped to kill that, but that's another story. In retrospect, and I put this together with Afghanistan, what they were getting there must have been signals that we were so naive that we were willing to scotch alliances, including the ANZUS relationship. When the Australians got wind of all this, they helped to kill this. But it was the American side--before I heard about it--that proposed that, not only was this whole Indian Ocean area to be more or less neutralized, but the area was defined in a way, at American initiative, to include the seas around Australia all the way up to the eastern end of Australia. So the Australians would be in a position of finding the ANZUS relationship valuable only against invasion from Fiji, which they were not really thinking of too actively at the time. That's a little aside. Go ahead.

ELIOT: Well, I think your point is well taken. Moscow looked at all this and saw a weakness. And, I think, probably rightly so. In retrospect, clearly the Russians, the Soviets, Brezhnev and company, and Andropov, and the others involved in this decision, made a terrible mistake. And I must say, I would have told them so had they asked my advice. They had everything they wanted in Afghanistan. They had a friendly government. There was no threat from Afghanistan--I'm talking about Daud. They were able to milk Afghanistan's economic resources--natural gas and some minerals, without interference from anybody else. It all reminded me of Mark Twain's saying, "overreachin' don't pay". I have a very good friend, Tony Arnold, who was Deputy Station Chief at that time in Kabul, a Soviet specialist, who has just finished a book which hopefully will be published sometime in 1992, on the effect of the Afghanistan war on the break-up of the Soviet Union. There's absolutely no question but that it had a major effect on subsequent domestic political events in the Soviet Union. It also, right today, we're seeing that the Mujahideen are emerging triumphant after fourteen terrible years for the people of Afghanistan. And one can say, looking back over history now, that the British and Russian empires both reached their apex in Afghanistan. And all I can say is, three cheers for the people of Afghanistan.

It's a wonderful country, a wonderful people who have suffered tremendous losses of infrastructure, and over a million people killed, etc., in the last fourteen years. They are going to have a hard time getting their political act together again, but at least they've got the Soviet Union totally off their backs and have a chance at resolving their own problems in the future in their own way. And I hope the United States will be able to assist, with the rest of the international community, in helping reconstruct that country. We're so broke I'm not sure whether we'll be able to do that, but I hope we will contribute to that effort substantially.

While I was there, I was, of course, always aware of the fragility of the Daud regime. It's political base was very narrow, and as he got older he made it still narrower, and I was always concerned about what the Soviets were up to. I hoped that our continuing forceful interest in Afghanistan would restrain the Soviets, and I worked very hard, and with some success, on Daud in getting him to realize, as many of his advisers realized--and I wasn't the only one talking to him--that the only threat Afghanistan faced in the world was from the Soviet Union. But he moved too late, and Soviet ideological and imperialistic imperatives were too strong. And we, in the Carter years, looked too weak for that policy to succeed.

Certainly one of the lowest moments of my life was listening to Kabul radio in the morning following a night of fighting all over the city, hearing that the President and most of his immediate advisers had been killed, and that these new characters, on whom we had some files, were taking over. And it was equally difficult as Ambassador to go to these new characters who killed some of my closest friends, not only saying that the United States was continuing relationships with the new government of Afghanistan, but asking, as my predecessor had to do, the new government to approve the sending of a new American Ambassador, which Daud had already approved before he was killed. So two consecutive ambassadors had to get two agreements from the Afghans.

Sometime later, and this pleased me a lot, I saw Henry Kissinger somewhere, and he said, "Ted, we did everything we could. There was nothing we could have done to keep this from happening." I think that's right. I think we did our best given, Daud's naivete, and given the other factors that I've mentioned.

Q: Yes, well it's awfully remote from the United States. We don't have the power to...

ELIOT: That's right. The Foreign Minister, I was told later, asked Daud to call me up while the battle was raging in the city, and ask for American air support. Now, where would that have come from? Whether the Shah would have stepped in at that point, I very much doubt. Culturally, and otherwise, there's not a hell of a lot of love lost between the Iranians and the Afghans. I don't think that was a feasible option. I don't think at that point he could have been saved. The question was whether six or eight, or a year or two earlier, things could have been done to make it come out differently. But I don't think so in retrospect, and that's not, I hope, seen as a self-serving, or self-justification. I think that's the way it was.

Q: A little footnote that...I can't remember his name now, it started with a T. The first communist...

ELIOT: Taraki.

Q: Taraki, as I remember worked as a Foreign Service national in our Embassy when I was there.

ELIOT: In USIS as a translator, and his second in command, who succeeded him in a bloody coup in the fall of '79, Hafizullah Amin, who was a real butcher, was educated at the same school you were, Columbia University.

Q: *Is that right? Now I understand.*

ELIOT: Then, of course, the Soviets had Amin killed, or killed him themselves, and brought in Babrak Karmal who was putty in their hands. Then they trained a new KGB chief inside Afghanistan, and his name is Najibullah. One of the reasons, of course, that it's taken so long to get the Mujahideen to work on a settlement which they're now in the middle of, is that they would never have anything to do with Mr. Najibullah, and I don't blame them. Any diplomatic effort to include Najibullah in the internal political solution in Afghanistan could never succeed. He's seeking refuge in the UN headquarters in Kabul, and he better not stick his head outside is all I can say.

Q: *Yes, there's too much history there.*

ELIOT: The Afghans have long memories and long knives. Oh, I could tell an awful lot of stories about Afghanistan. It's a spectacular country, and a wonderful people for whom laughter lies right beneath the surface even in the direst poverty. I've never known an American who served in Afghanistan...and at our peak when I was there we had some 600 people in the official American community--A.I.D., Peace Corps, USIA, you name it, including descendants and I've never known an American who did not enjoy the experience. It's a very special place.

Q: *Well, Ted, I guess we've covered Afghanistan.*

ELIOT: ...more or less.

Q: *...as far as we could, we're not going on forever.*

ELIOT: This is not my usual lecture which takes an hour or so.

ROBERT THEODORE CURRAN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kabul (1974-1977)

Robert Theodore Curran was born in New York in 1931. He received his bachelor's degree from Haverford College and his master's degree from Columbia University. During Mr. Curran's career he had positions in Germany, Jordan, Yemen, Mexico, Afghanistan, and Morocco. Mr. Curran was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November 1998.

CURRAN: American policy in Afghanistan in 1974-1977 was to strengthen the Afghan economy (one of the worst in the world) by building roads, modernizing farming in the Helmand Valley, improving public health (with a birth control component), fight the war on drugs, improve public education at all levels, and work to improve relations between the Afghan government, Pakistan, and Iran. Also, the U.S. was supposed to keep an eye on the Russians and

their plans.

To carry out this ambitious agenda, the U.S. mission was huge: at least 2,000 American employees and several thousand Afghans and third country nationals. The mission supported a school, a small hospital with two U.S. physicians and a British dentist, a commissary, two sports clubs, and an eating club. There were 3,000 Peace Corps volunteers in Afghanistan, a military attaché with an airplane, and several hundred AID employees and contractors with their families. All of the full-time American staff had their own homes with 100 % maintenance by the mission.

Ambassador Eliot and his extraordinary wife, Pat, did an amazing job of keeping the whole U.S. enterprise marching in step. Eliot's background and connections with Iran almost achieved an historic breakthrough in improved relations between Tehran and Kabul. [This daring initiative was thwarted by the Russian invasion in 1978-79.] In general though, the Eliots had their creative leadership eroded by a constant stream of difficulties associated with keeping so many Americans - most of them unable to communicate in the local language - content with their jobs and family lives. There just was too much sense of isolation, too much illness, and too much impatience with the difficulty of "making" the Afghans do things the American way. The Eliots worked patiently to reduce the size of the mission, to focus AID operations, to bring the Peace Corps back to realistic sizes and tasks, but time and tides were against them.

If the Russians had not invaded and destroyed all the infrastructure developed by the West; if the Iranians had not imploded; if the American government had had time away from the distracting transition from Nixon to Ford to Carter to focus on foreign affairs, things might have been different.

Q: Today is the 16th of February 1999. Ted, you're off to Kabul in 1974. How did that come about and what were you up to?

CURRAN: I was assigned to Kabul in 1974 at the request of Ted Eliot, who had been my boss in the Executive Secretariat. He wanted me for his DCM, deputy chief of mission, and it was interesting because, in retrospect, as you may recall from the last tape, I was working in the Office of Personnel Management, and the director general at that time, Nat Davis, suggested that I go and be ambassador in Oman. And I talked it over with my family and some friends, and I decided to go to Kabul for a couple of reasons. One was, I didn't see where Oman led to. It would have been nice to be called "ambassador," and I know lots of people who'd die for the title. But at that time I was young enough, so I felt that wasn't important. And I thought Kabul was a bigger show, which it was. And really, the most important reason, was that it really would have been very tough on my family to go to the Gulf. The girls were at an age where they would have had to go to boarding school, and I didn't think that was so great. And my wife wasn't too wild about being separated from the girls either. I think it was the right decision.

Q: Oh, yes.

CURRAN: Oman - I visited it later - was really a tiny little place, charming. It was a key place during the Gulf War but I would have been long gone by then.

Q: Excuse me, you were in Kabul from when to when?

CURRAN: I went in the summer of '74 and left in the summer of '77. It seems to me now, and looking back, I went to Kabul about 20 years after I entered the Service, and the Vietnam War was over, and Watergate was over. Nixon resigned in August, just after I got to Kabul. And I believe, looking back now, though I don't think I was so aware of it at the time, that it was the beginning of a transition for our country from the post World War II era, we-can-do-anything, we-can-manage-anything - the famous Kennedy line in his inaugural, "We will bear any burden" and so on in pursuit of our objectives. I think, as I look back on my notes from Kabul, we began to be aware that we actually couldn't do everything, and particularly our people, Americans - it's a wonderful country, but we really don't have a pool of people who are trained and ready to serve all over the world. Quite different, I think, from the British positions in the 19th century, where they sort of had God and Kipling on their side. I think we began to lose confidence in the ability to be a superpower. Or if we didn't lose confidence, we began to lose the ability or recognized the lack of it. In any even, as we go through this, I believe, now, reading these notes again, that it was a little inchoate but I began to sense this problem.

I'd like to start out by setting the scene in Kabul. Afghanistan is located in South Asia. It's north of Pakistan and India and south of the then USSR and east of Iran, all of which countries have had a long interest in what went on in Kabul.

The British called the struggle for influence in Central Asia - including Afghanistan - "The Great Game." Afghanistan in '74 was an oligarchy run by the military dictatorship. The oligarchy centered in the Mohammedzai family, which had been dominant in Afghanistan for about 100 years. A monarchy had been in place until 1972. Then one of the princes dismissed the King and set up a military dictatorship. The ruling family was the same as it had been under the Royal Family, the Mohammedzai, and the president when I went there, President -formerly Prince - Daoud, was in fact a first cousin of the King Zahir, whom he deposed. And Daoud and his brother, Naim, ran the country from about '72 to '78/'79, when they were murdered by the communist opposition. All the governors in the country, of which there were about 15, were personally appointed by Daoud, and they were mostly family; they were Mohammedzais. And then most of the key positions in the country were Mohammedzais, and Daoud had a very efficient secret police, and as a result, the place was really under wraps. It was very, very difficult to meet Afghans. Local officials were very much afraid that if they were seen in the company of a foreigner it would get back to the President, or at least the secret service, and there would be trouble and they wouldn't be able to keep their jobs. One of the devices that Daoud used for controlling people was, if someone got a little bit out of line or the family got out of line, the person who had a government job or even a business job was told to go stay home - no jail time, but effectively taken out of circulation, and in a country which is as poor as Afghanistan was - certainly one of the poorest countries in the world even then - this was quite a threat. That was brought home to me because my dad had had a medical student in the '30s, I think, or maybe early '40s, from Afghanistan, and my father took quite an interest in him and followed him after he left and gave me a note to hand to him when I got to Kabul. And I tried to deliver the note and wasn't allowed to, stopped at the gates and so on. And I finally got word to him that I was in the country and would like to call on him, and it took him a year to figure out whether he could do this, and we eventually met at a third party's house, and it was very formal and stiff. It was quite an amazing experience, a good introduction for me to personal relations in

Afghanistan.

Q: I'm surprised. One thinks of Afghanistan as a country with a whole bunch of sort of feuding clans and all, and the fact that you could have a dictatorial apparatus put over this is quite a feat.

CURRAN: Quite an achievement, and it was done by this family over a period of 80 years. They came in in the late 19th century, and they gradually extended control, using members of their own family, and so it was almost a classic oligarchy. I just might mention some features about the place. You might want to think of Afghanistan as an elongated American football, and it was divided east to west in the middle by a spine of mountains, the foothills, more or less, of the Himalayas. In Afghanistan, they're called the Hindu Kush, which means literally 'Hindu Killers,' because in the "good old days" of the Moguls, who came from Kabul under their King, Babur, bearers were swept up in India and brought back to carry packs over the mountains, and they died, I suppose, by the hundreds. Therefore, the name of the mountain: Hindu Kush. Anyway, they ran east-west. On the southern-eastern part, south of the Hindu Kush, the area was dominated by a Pathan or Pushtu group who had also spilled over into Pakistan in what the British called the Northwest Frontier area. And then there were a variety of Persian and Uzbek groups in the north and west, obviously the Persian groups next to the Iranian border centered around a town called Herat.

The official language in Afghanistan was Dari, or I think literally 'court language,' a Persian dialect, but most parts of the country spoke other dialects, either their own or Uzbek dialect or something related to Persian - very, very difficult to communicate. And I did learn some Dari, but really just about 1+, maybe 2, I got to eventually. The official religion was Islam, but the clergy was undereducated and most people were animists and/or worshiped local gods. The country was, as I mentioned before, one of the poorest of the world.

The main elements of the economy, if you could call it that, included some wheat growing, fruit farming (orchards, olives, whatnot), a little bit of oil and gas, which the Russians were developing in the northern part of the country, opium, and a very large livestock business - again, I use the word advisedly - run by the "Kuchis," or nomads, who managed herds of sheep and goats. The Kuchis would start in the spring or late winter, and drive their basic herd north and east up onto the Russian steppe. In most cases, I believe, the nomads were employed by wealthy individuals who gave the Kuchis a percentage of the herd increase in payment. Then the animals, mostly sheep, would breed and foal up there, and then they would drive them back in the fall to market. And depending on the year, they usually doubled the size of the herd. But these were spectacular sights, these herds being driven by caravans of Gypsies, basically, which I think they are. And so that was a big business, and then opium gum was a big business. You could grow opium poppies - I don't know if you've ever seen one; they look something like a tulip - obviously very easily, and the Hindu Kush were high enough so they caught the monsoon rains, which became snow, so the snow pack stored water for the country for the summer. If you had a poor winter, you had a poor harvest, but that was life there. Anyway, it was a bleak, broken-up, no-infrastructure place, to speak of, and really, looking at it academically, there was no American interest in Afghanistan.

Q: One always thinks of “The Great Game” that was played there, but did we at that time - I’m trying to capture the spirit of that time - was anybody talking about, well, the Soviets coming down through the mountains and on to God knows what, into Pakistan or bypassing Iran? I mean, was that part of our thinking at the time?

CURRAN: Well, as they used to say to us, I’m glad you asked that question. In my notes here - it’s funny you should ask this - I have “Why was the U.S. in Kabul with a \$20 million aid program, 2000 Peace Corps volunteers, and a DOD airplane?” And the story really begins in the John Foster Dulles era, 1953 to 1957, when he wanted to set up a defensive alignment of countries around Russia - NATO, CENTO, SEATO. And Afghanistan was supposed to be, if not a part of CENTO.

Q: Central Treaty Organization.

CURRAN: I guess it’s just the Central Treaty Organization. In any case, the Afghans were clever enough, or foxy enough, not to sign on formally to CENTO, but, in good bargaining fashion, they agreed that they would accept some aid and then for this they would remain neutral and inclined to listen to whatever concerns we had about the Russians.

And you’re correct. This was a version, if the implication of your question is correct, of the Great Game played in the 19th century, with the British trying to keep the Russians out of Persia and India. And they did, at considerable cost in treasure. There were three major wars in Afghanistan, the three Afghan Wars, and the Afghans won them all because it was hopeless for foreigners to fight a war there. The Afghans knew their hills and they’d disappear up in the mountains and they’d wait till you took an afternoon nap or looked the other way, and then they’d descend and slaughter the foreigners. It was really great “sport” for the Afghans.

So over the years, starting in the late ‘50s, the U.S. began to develop programs with the idea that we would help protect Pakistan and India. People would make the argument, and I’m sure I made it to visitors - that Karachi was a very important port, and presumably one could easily go to the southwestern towns of Zabid and Zeranjan and from there you go overland by vehicle to the Persian Gulf. But in point of fact, I now believe it was really not worth the effort we were putting into it.

Q: Were we sitting there in the country team meeting almost mulling over this and saying, “Is there any real validity to this and that?”

CURRAN: I’m sorry to say there wasn’t, and I’m going to kind of talk a little bit about that because it’s part of this thesis I’ve sort of begun talking about, which was that we kind of got trapped in the fact that we were all there and we had to justify the fact that we were there, even though, I think, if we’d really been hardheaded about it we would have said, “Well, we can achieve U.S. objectives with a much smaller presence.”

During the early part of the Cold War, the U.S. started the business of trying to outbid the Russians for influence with the Afghan government. The Afghans were very skillful at encouraging our competition. We built a modern airfield in Kandahar, which is southwest of

Kabul, and then the Russians began to equip the Afghan army. We built a road system which went from Herat in the west past Kandahar and up to Kabul and then on down to the Khyber pass. A terrific engineering feat. The Russians developed oil and gas in the north and also developed a fruit production system in the Jalalabad area in the eastern part of the country on the way to Pakistan. And the irony is that neither the U.S. or USSR really enjoyed much influence, after spending all this money. We convinced ourselves that we had a role, and when the Cold War justification began to be a bit threadbare, that the Russians would not be able - at least that was our view at the time - to seriously threaten Pakistan, the drug war took the Cold War's place, and we all began to write long messages about how to save the world from Afghan opium. I remember an interview I had with Roy Atherton, who was Assistant Secretary at the time, and I think Atherton in his heart of hearts knew that this was, you know, maybe overuse of U.S. resources, but his approach to me was he said, "You know, you're going to a difficult place," and so on, "Just keep it quiet. That's all I ask."

Q: I might point out also in the context that you had Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State, who tended to see everything in East-West terms, and I would think that of all the Secretaries of State he would probably be the one who would be least receptive to the idea that a place on the border of the Soviet Union didn't matter.

CURRAN: We're getting ahead of ourselves a little bit. Kissinger came to Kabul to check it out because we were at that time trying to develop a formula which would have encouraged the Iranians to have more influence in Afghanistan, and we wanted to have Washington interest in this, and Kissinger came. But I'll get to that a bit later.

Kabul was a city - of course nobody knew how many people lived there - have you ever been in Central Asia? It was basically a mud hut city. There was a sort of a modern downtown, which was called the New City, *Shar e Nau*, which had an Intercontinental Hotel; it had our embassy, it had some other modern office buildings which the Russians had built. But there was no sewage system in the city. There was no health system. There were some paved streets. There was endemic dysentery, and lots of tuberculosis.

There was a large international community, a big UN group, and about 40 embassies. Everybody had sold themselves on the notion that this was a pivotal place in the world. Rather than try to describe the physical scene, I recommend to anyone who wants to get a sense of the flavor should read the book by George MacDonald Fraser called *Flashman*.

Q: Oh, yes.

CURRAN: It's his first book, and he describes very accurately what Kabul looks like today, and that was written, supposedly, a hundred years ago.

Q: The fictional hero was the second survivor of the massacre in the First Afghan War.

CURRAN: It was the First Afghan War (1839-1842).

Q: That's a great series.

CURRAN: Well, the first book is the best, and very accurate as to a description of Kabul - even now. The U.S. community was a huge enterprise - housing, a school, a good embassy building. We had a commissary, a PX. We had sports clubs. We had a Pan Am office there, and they had a subsidiary called Ariana, which was the Afghan airways, but run by Pan Am, which would fly in and out with some security. The marvelous Pan Am representative in Kabul was named Charles Bennett, Charlie Bennett, who made a special effort to take care of us going to and from the States. And since it was about an 18-hour trip one way, it was nice to be well taken care of, the only time of my life when I've belonged to one of these airline clubs, courtesy of Mr. Bennett. But our family had a wonderful time in Kabul. Sara and Diana had a horse. They could ride. They had great sports at school. The school was okay academically, but not great. School teams traveled to Pakistan and India to play soccer and softball. They look back on it as one of the best times they ever had.

I would say that the main issues that I had to worry about, besides trying to help manage this huge enterprise - I think all together we had 3,000 Americans there at the peak, including the Peace Corps volunteers - was the AID program. It was run by a very nice guy named Vince Brown, very able, but in an ironic sense he was trapped, because he had a \$20 million budget, and in those days, as now, if you get \$20 million in the beginning of the fiscal year, you're supposed to spend that by the end of the fiscal year, even though you might not think your expenditure was the wisest thing in the world, or you "lose" the money in your next budget. And Vince was a good spender of money, and he convinced himself that he was doing good work. It was difficult to get qualified people to serve in Kabul. The post was not popular because of the disease, the distance from home, etc., so to get people to serve in Afghanistan, the mission had to offer lovely housing, the PX, and the commissary I mentioned before. Of course, everybody had their own automobile sent in at government expense. In those days, perhaps you remember, in some places you had to get an exception to have a non-American vehicle, but in Afghanistan we had exceptions for everything, plus the 25 percent differential. And all this resulted in Americans really living a life of affluence, and it was so clear to the Afghans around that we were terribly privileged, and they were very angry about it. And I often heard from the AID people, I mean the Afghans who were involved in our aid program, they'd say, "Why don't you send off half these people and give us the money that they're soaking up by being here?"

The Russians, by way of contrast, lived in a huge compound, mostly out of sight, and their technical experts went various places, but when they lived in the field they lived in their own little encampments. So the Afghans hardly ever saw Russians, except on holidays when they came out and spent money at the Afghan bazaars, which was a very nice thing. So in a very funny way, the Russians were quite popular because they didn't seem to be lording it over the Afghans.

Now the individual aid programs, probably the U.S. showcase was the Helmand Valley program, southwestern, sort of generally the province of which Kandahar was the capital. And in order to provide water, AID built a dam up the Helmand River, in the foothills of the Hindu Kush, in a little place called Kajakai. An extraordinary American engineer, whom I knew very well and very much admired, John Givens, was the director of that project. He was one of the few people who was very down-to-earth and realistic about Afghans. He and his crew at the Dam lived with

the Afghans and shared everything they had. They shared housing and meals, and everything was on an equal basis. And as a result, Givens was greatly admired by the Afghans. John didn't speak a word of Dari or Pushtu. He just spoke English, but he just found ways to show that he really cared what was going on, and of course the work was very high quality. John also built a tennis court there, and he and the Afghans had a little tennis club and they batted the ball back and forth. And a couple of them turned out to be pretty good players. When I went to visit there I usually took a case of tennis balls or something like that to show appreciation. The first time Givens heard that I played tennis was on a night we were having, I regret to say, quite a boozy party. The Afghans generally didn't drink, but Givens and I were doing our share. At one point, Givens challenged two Afghans to a doubles match the next morning. I got out of bed with not enough sleep and much too much antifreeze in my system, and we went out on the tennis court. Givens, as we were walking to play - he had this wonderful Tennessee drawl - said, "I guess I ought to tell you, we're going to play for money. We're going to play for \$100." Well, I guess I wouldn't have been wiped out by it, but I never gamble for that amount of money. And the first set, these guys just tore us apart. I couldn't see the ball. But actually we managed to prevail in three sets, and John just laughed. He said, "I can see money means something to you."

Further down the valley, down in the Helmand, there was another story. We had a lot of Americans who were so-called experts from various parts of the U.S. trying to teach the Afghans how to grow wheat the right way and how to market their product. The central part of this effort was in a little town called Lashkargah, and there was a little dirt strip there, and our DOD airplane could fly down there, so often we'd make use of that. It made the trip a lot easier. But the difficulty was the Afghans already knew enough about farming and didn't care to have Americans lecture them on how to farm. There was a constant tension over this, and also it began to be pretty obvious, even to the untutored eye, there was a lot growing besides wheat down there. In these nice little irrigated farms you'd see these little tulip like structures everywhere, and the Afghans if you challenged them, they'd say, "Well, we don't have any doctors, so we have to have opium for the odd headache, toothache," whatever. Of course that was nonsense. You could see the camel caravans going down to the southwest loaded with opium gum. AID legislation prohibited use of AID-supported projects to grow drugs. The U.S. mission couldn't figure out what to do and looked the other way.

A second project area was what was called family health. This was a very ambitious effort to put what amounted to mini clinics in many of the larger towns. A component of the clinics was family planning, although no one ever said it. They called it the Well Baby Program, but they were teaching women birth control, and the conservative Muslims really were angry about this. And I can't underestimate how much trouble that caused.

Q: What type of trouble?

CURRAN: Clinics were trashed. I don't think we ever had anyone attacked, but we had a lot of threats. And the clerics would send in scrolls to President Daoud and say such and such a place is a troublemaking operation, and the clinic would shut down for a while and then AID would negotiate to get it started up again. The Afghans, some of the higher officials, particularly those I dealt with at the Foreign Ministry, couldn't understand why we were pushing this so hard, why it mattered to us how many Afghans there were. Of course, the mortality rate was just dreadful. I

can't remember what the infant survival rate was, but I think the average lifespan for males was around 40 years, maybe even 35. It was just dismal.

Another big area we were active in was higher education. There was something called Kabul University, originally formed largely as a place to teach people to recite the Koran, a religious institute really. So AID signed a contract with the University of Nebraska to send people out to help modernize Kabul University. Now the Afghans really liked this, and the reason is that part of the project description involved trips for the Afghans back to Nebraska. And if you live in a country like that and you have a chance to live in Nebraska for a year and maybe even stay in Nebraska, you grab it. So they loved that program, and the Nebraska faculty and staff over there were wildly popular in Kabul.

By the way, the Germans and the French had organized two very, very good secondary schools in Kabul for Afghans, and these schools were part of the development of higher education. Education programs probably would have led somewhere if there had been maybe 50 years more for them to function. But the problem with all assistance programs was that there was no real accountability. Nobody knew what they were supposed to be achieving besides "educating Afghans better," and there was no data over what percentage studied medicine, law, and what percentage didn't do anything. It was really too bad because anyone - and we had lots of critics that came through - would point to this and say, "Well, you're just throwing money away and there's no result." And the answer was, "Oh, yes, there are results," but in terms of better qualified people in the government, you couldn't prove it. There were no numbers to prove it.

Q: My impression, looking at what I've noticed here in the States and all, is that in some ways the Afghans really took advantage of education more than, say, some other countries where you give education and it's nice but there isn't sort of the family commitment to education. For really a very backward country - correct me if I'm wrong - there was a real impulse to get a good education, and many did quite well.

CURRAN: You're absolutely right as pertains to the elites. The ruling family was particularly adroit at taking advantage of these opportunities, as they would because they were in a position of influence. And when the big exodus took place, when Russian-backed government (1979-1984) expelled or killed this whole Mohammedzai clan, the refugees showed up here with terrific education, and many of them are very successful in the United States.

A case I had to referee is interesting now. A retired Foreign Service officer, Herb Lebezni, who had been in the legal division at the State Department. Lebezni set up a little consulting group, as many Foreign Service officers do, and he had a contract with AID to come to Kabul every year and pick 30 lawyers to come to the States to have a summer legal program. The idea was he would develop people who were friendly to the U.S., understood U.S. law. And one of the U.S. ideas which the Afghans were thinking about was developing a regularized legal system. Without a legal system you can hardly do anything, especially attract investment. Herb Lebezni set up a very good program, and there was only one problem. The people who he picked were supposed to meet a certain level of English. In my second year as DCM, somebody in the aid program blew the whistle on Lebezni and said he was picking people because the Ministry of Justice told him who to pick and they didn't necessarily qualify in English. And I began looking

at the test scores, and I found the allegation was correct. About three-quarters couldn't pass a TOEFL test, even at a minimum level. So I said to the ambassador, "I don't think this is a good practice." He agreed. But in insisting on standards, a storm blew up, because many people picked by Lebezni at the behest of the Minister of Justice were from very prominent families. The families really howled about it, and people having been, quote, "picked for the program" and then not going, and it's a disgrace, and so on and so on. The situation got very emotional and difficult, and Lebezni was very, very upset, and reported his feelings to Washington. A small incident can blow way out of proportion in posts where people are isolated and unhappy. Finally, a solution was negotiated, but it left a very bad taste in everybody's mouth, and it was too bad.

Another incident in the AID area, which also turned out to be very uncomfortable, was they had a showcase bridge in a rural community. It was probably a three-hour, four-hour jeep ride from Kabul. Somehow the village played some role in the back country trade and the governor asked for a bridge. The village was located on sort of a promontory, with a stream that went around the promontory, and in order to function in the role that the elders and the governor wanted, they needed a bridge to get across that river. They actually already had a bridge. It was a wooden bridge, poles and so on, and about every two years it would wash out in a flood. The American head engineer said, "We're going to build you a beautiful bridge." He got it done, but the Afghans all said to the American engineers, "You know, this is a beautiful bridge, but it's not going to stand up if we get one of these five-year torrents." And the American engineers are very indignant. I think there was some question about spending another million dollars and, you know, lengthening the abutment so that it would divert the water or something. Well, the flood came in one year, and the bridge washed out, and the Afghan engineers came into Kabul to report on this, and one of them was related to one of the people in the embassy, who told the ambassador, who blew up about it and summoned the AID director over, Vince Brown. I still remember, it was a terrible shouting match. And the funny thing - not so amusing at the time, but in retrospect - the AID director wasn't so angry about the bridge as he was angry about the fact that it had been discovered.

Assistant directors from AID came out... Bob Nooter - he's still around - managed to get everybody cooled off. But these instances of Herb Lebezni's legal project and this bridge and other things - the clinics - I mean, we tried hard, our people meant well, but almost none of them spoke the local language. A few of the ex Peace Corps volunteers spoke the language well. What the Afghans really wanted was money and things. They didn't want advice. And we are just good advice givers, and if we're paid to go to a country like that to give advice, we like to give advice.

Q: Well, when you're talking about \$26 million, a significant portion of that went to actually Americans.

CURRAN: Absolutely - 20 million it was. And the Afghans weren't slow in pointing that out to us. And now we get into the thing I talked about earlier. We're in a trap. You've got a budget, and you just wouldn't have proposed to Washington that we send half the AID people home and hand the money over to the Afghans. You know how far that would have gone. So it was kind of a no win for all sides.

Now I'd like to just say a few words about the Peace Corps. There were three thousand

volunteers in the country in 1974, many more than the Afghans wanted, but Peace Corps/Washington had their various country quotas and insisted that the embassy fill them. So we did send the volunteers out, and mostly they taught English in rural areas. And quite a few of them did a great job. I mean, American kids are really wonderful about going out and living in mud huts and living like the people, and generally they were okay. But the volunteers in Kabul, where there were, I think, maybe 500 Peace Corps volunteers, didn't have enough to do, so they hung out at our club or played tennis or they went to the movies. They were expected to be in the classroom for an hour or two a day and that was it. I mean, for grown people who are idealistic, it was just a festering problem.

Mixed with the Peace Corps was another kind of foreign presence problem - conservative Christian. A group of fundamentalist Christians had decided to convert the Afghans to Christianity, and their first attempt was to build a church in downtown Kabul, which the King, I guess, had authorized. And they put up a very large building with a very bright blue roof, and I think that would have been okay, but then they put a large cross on the top. And one weekend the Afghans came and just tore it down - bulldozed it. And that was a setback for the missionaries, but from there they sent missionaries out to remote villages where the Peace Corps kids were, and it didn't take very long for the clergy - that is, the Muslim clergy - to report back to Kabul that "bad things" were going on. All foreigners were seen as disruptive. Fortunately, none of them were injured or killed. Senator Percy got very interested in this issue. I know Chuck Percy pretty well, and he's a wonderful man.

Q: I've interviewed him, and he's a very lovely man.

CURRAN: He's a lovely man. The Christian missionaries were his constituents from Illinois, and they would say, "Gee, Senator, we're just trying to do the Lord's work and the embassy's not helping us." So the first year I was there, I handled a lot of correspondence, and finally when I was back in the summer of 1975, I went to see the senator, at the request of the Department, and I kind of laid out what the problem was, and he was pretty understanding about it, but he also said to me, "Look, I've got my problems, too." And eventually the missionaries lost interest and left. They just couldn't stay there.

Q: Obviously. Trying to proselytize Muslims just doesn't work.

CURRAN: Anyway, it wasn't the Peace Corps' fault, but the combination of underemployment, these rural conservative conditions, the mix of the Christians - all bred trouble. And the Director who was there just as I arrived and had let, pretty much, his idea was, "Well, laissez faire. Let's try to get by and not make big issues. Don't beat on the volunteers. If they want to play tennis all day long, let 'em." And he tried to keep everybody happy.

A new director came in, a fanatic, hairshirt purist named Dick Haig, and Haig's eyes popped when he saw what was going on. I don't think he was religious, but he was very conservative, and his mission was, "By God, we're going to have a "real" Peace Corps operation here." His first act, when he had unpacked his hairshirt was to ban the volunteers from going to our club or having anything to do with the American embassy or U.S. mission. Well, it just didn't work. I mean, the volunteers revolted, and lots of bad blood was created, but Haig dug in his heels,

wouldn't compromise, wouldn't let them have cars, and insisted that all Peace Corps had to ride in buses. Anyone who's ever ridden in an Afghan bus would never do it again. People are packed into old buses, filthy, and God knows the condition of the passengers, and so on. So anyway, the U.S. mission had to send him out. The Peace Corps director at the time was a very, very feisty lady named Lorette Ruppe. And so on my second visit to Washington, my 1976 R&R, I was summoned by her and really read the riot act. Who did the embassy think it was changing Peace Corps directors, and so on, and she was really angry. So I listened. I couldn't do much else. And at the end of this harangue, I, at Ted Eliot's suggestion, said, "Well, Mrs. Ruppe, why don't you come to Kabul and visit? You can see for yourself, and if this is the wrong approach, I guess we'll have to discuss it." Well, she didn't come herself, but she did send her deputy, a very nice gentleman, and he saw at once the problem. First of all, there were too many volunteers, and you couldn't exclude Peace Corps volunteers from the Western community - I mean, that just wasn't equity. So he reduced the numbers. I think by the time I left there were less than a thousand Peace Corps volunteers there. Even so, they were underemployed, but anyway, there were a lot fewer. And of course, they were allowed to take part in Western activities.

I cite that as a bridge to the DEA operation, the Drug Enforcement Agency. We had, while I was there, two door-kickers as directors.

Q: *Would you explain what a "door-kicker" is?*

CURRAN: They were agents who had worked in the slums of the U.S., and their method of interrogating people or finding suspects would usually be to knock on the door, and if there wasn't a prompt answer to kick the door down. So therefore we called them "door kickers." The first one - I'm so sorry, I don't remember their names, probably just as well - got to town, of course, didn't speak any known language but English, and that not very well, and he zeroed in on the Peace Corps volunteers. Instead of going after the people growing the drugs, he zeroed in on the Peace Corps volunteers and "busted" one of them. That means he tried to arrest them. And I remember, he called me, and said he'd caught a Peace Corps volunteer abusing drugs, so he said he wanted him put in handcuffs and taken out of the country. I said, "Well, let's see now. Maybe we'd better check our legal authority here." Anyway, I finally got the Peace Corps volunteer into my office, with this fellow, and the Peace Corps volunteer said, "Well, I wasn't smoking marijuana. I was smoking a bidi." That's a local, very fragrant cigarette - I'm not sure what that sound stands for - which smells something like marijuana. He showed me the cigarettes he had in his pocket. So I sent him away, and I said to the DEA man, "You know, I don't think we can arrest anyone, number one; number two, it looks to me like it's innocent." I also asked, "Do you know the difference? Can you smell the difference between this stuff and marijuana?" He admitted he couldn't and he backed down, so we got over that. But he was a very roughneck guy, and he tried to go out on an opium bust with some of his Afghan colleagues, and they got caught - that is, they were ambushed.

And the next DEA representative who came was, I would say, a more reasonable person, and he decided he would "put heat," as he put it, on the local governors to stop these camel caravans carrying drugs. And the DEA man and another embassy officer and I drove to a town called Zabid, in the southwestern part of the country, which is quite close to a town called Zerange, and we "amused" ourselves by singing "Home, Home on Zerange" while we were on this trip. And

we went down to meet the governor, a very competent English-speaking official out in the middle of, the end of East Succotash, Afghanistan. And he said, "I'm really glad of your interest," he said to this DEA man, "and if you'll come with me at sunset, I think I can show you what my problem is." So we got in this official's jeep, a rickety old vehicle, barely able to move, and we creaked and groaned up a sort of a hill overlooking a plain. At about 7 p.m., a fleet of Mercedes trucks escorted by air-conditioned Land Rovers with machine guns mounted on the tops came down the river valley loaded with opium gum. These men on the Land Rovers looked like pirates - mean, vicious-looking people. And the governor gave the DEA man a nudge in the ribs and said, "Now, you know, if you want me to stop this, I've got to have armor, people, money..." and so on. That was the end of that trip. We went back.

But it coincided with a visit by a Congressman Wolff from New York.

Q: Lester Wolff?

CURRAN: Lester Wolff, good for you. And Lester Wolff was stimulated by what he heard about the drug trade, and came to visit. He and the DEA representative made the rounds and Wolff decided that the answer was an alternative for farmers instead of growing drugs. So he had us send in a cable proposing a five-billion-dollar program-

Q: Five-billion-dollar program?

CURRAN: Yes, to pay farmers not to grow poppies but to grow something else, perhaps sorghum. Well, the State Department gave a tepid reception to that cable. And that was the end of any serious effort to deal with the opium growing. We did one modest thing: under U.S. law, it was legal to buy some of this opium gum and send it off to drug companies to make legal medicine. But these purchases didn't even dent the supply leaving Afghanistan.

Q: Were you running into young Americans who were sort of on their wander-year, who would come to Afghanistan and then load up with enough to maybe make tuition for their graduate studies or to keep them happy or something like that?

CURRAN: There were certainly a lot of travelers, "world-travelers" they were called, and they did come out to enjoy the drug scene, but because the standards for the kind of stuff they were smoking and injecting were so mixed, a lot of them got in to very serious health problems, and several of them died. In fact, in our own school we had high-school kids getting into trouble. I suppose it's possible that some of them loaded up to sell the stuff, but I think most of it was just sort of young gypsies. The ambassador's son was involved in a problem - this is kind of by-the-bye. Ted Eliot is as straight a shooter as they come, and has a lovely family. The summer after I got back in '77, one son was attending Colorado College. The phone rang at 3:00 a.m. in my house here in Washington, and it was Peter Eliot on the phone, and he said, "I've got a little problem here. Some police officers want to arrest me." And I said, "Well, do they have a warrant?" And he asked, and they didn't. I said, "Okay, you tell them to go get a warrant, and then you meet them in the dean's office tomorrow morning." And in the meantime, I got a lawyer to be there, too. Well, it turned out that one of Peter Eliot's "well meaning" friends had put some hash - hashish - in a map tube, and when he went off to go to college, the boy slipped

the tube into his effects, and the dogs at the Denver airport sniffed the stuff out. The agents picked up the tube and went to the addressee, and they wanted to put the arm on him. He swore he knew nothing about it. They found a palm print on the map tube, and he submitted to having his palms printed, and fortunately for him, it turned out not to be his palm print, and he got off. But that's the kind of thing that probably went on.

USIS had a very good public affairs officer in Kabul, a guy named Jerry Verner, a lot of Russian experience. Jerry was a very hard worker. He very much appreciated the role of USIS, and they did some things quite well. One of the most effective things USIS did was hire the spouses of prominent government officials to work as local employees, and therefore they had a lot of influence in getting their programs done. Unfortunately, Jerry had a staff which was, at best, a C+ staff - unhappy officers who were sent there more or less for punishment than for any achievements.

The Defense attaché mainly ran the airplane. We first had Colonel Hutchinson and a Convair and then later a Beechcraft. The DOD aircraft gave the U.S. an extra dimension. For example, the U.S. was concerned about how much Russian armor and so on was around the country. Also, the plane was a great, great convenience to be able to visit the outlying governors. The cities around the country that were critical were, starting in the northeast, Kunduz and then west of that Mazar Sharif and then Herat, Kandahar, and Kabul was kind of a circuit. And those were where the most important governors were. And to be able to go out and back in a day and avoid the dangerous road trips was really a great benefit. The Convair, however, began to wear out, and it developed a disconcerting habit of swallowing a valve in one of its two engines. One such incident occurred as I was flying back from Herat with the governor and his wife, and the engine stopped right over the highest Hindu Kush mountains. I must say, it was one of the few times in my life when I was looking back at my life and regretting some of the mistakes I made. But we got safely back to Kabul.

The Convair had a great merit in that it could, because it was an older airplane and a prop gasoline combustion engine, it could land on rough terrain, like Lashkargah. The new airplane, when it arrived, was a Super King Beech, and couldn't land on dirt runways. Whether I was a jinx or not, the first trip I was on an early flight and all the electricity went out on the plane. Luckily, the engines kept running, but we lost our radar and radio. If it had been bad weather, it might have been difficult. We had to lower the wheels by hand, not an experience I recommend.

Q: Speaking about the military attachés, did they ever talk about the military terrain and the importance of the Soviet threat there, using their expertise?

CURRAN: Well, they certainly did, and as it turned out, the Russians were able to move substantial armor down from the Soviet Union through a tunnel the Russians had built through the Hindu Kush, and the military correctly pointed to two things. One was you could move armor through that tunnel. It was built with the tanks in mind. But the second thing they pointed out was interdicting that traffic wouldn't be very difficult because the tunnel went through one of the most difficult terrains in the country, and as the Afghan guerillas proved later, they could with one dynamite stick blow up the tunnel, and that was that.

But, yes, we were watching the Russians, and I thought that the military - and I think generally military officers - are a terrific asset to our embassies. I mean, they're well trained, they're well disciplined, and they know why they're there, and they have kind of a specific task, and running an airplane is pretty specific.

I also would like to say a few things about the CIA people in Kabul. In general, I think the Agency, CIA people, like USIA and like the consular service and like the military, are very good to work with. They're well trained, good morale, good spirit, they know what they're doing, they have a defined task. In Kabul, their work was mainly trying to obtain defectors from the Russian and East European communities. And of course, that's very "Cold War," and everybody knows how that's done and so on. The first station chief they had was a very, very good team player and very good to be around and sensitive. The second station chief considered himself an intellectual. He studied Chinese while he was in Kabul and was quite gifted, if that's the word, in speaking in Confucian riddles in staff meetings, which made quite an impression but it didn't lend too much to what was going on. He was a very bright guy, and he's still around. I'd rather not use his name.

Q: No, no. Well, what about China? You know, you've got that little appendix, or whatever you want to call it, that actually abuts on China.

CURRAN: Right.

Q: And we've just started opening up to China in this period. Did China play much of a role?

CURRAN: Well, the short answer is no. They had a very large compound there, kept very much to themselves. There are two stories which might be of interest. One was that, while Mao was still alive, Pan Am was thinking about going into Beijing via the big airport in Kandahar, where they could refuel and then fly to Urumchi, which is in northwestern China, and then on to Beijing. And I went with Charlie Bennett in one of the 727s they had up for a visit to sort of look Urumchi over, and I don't think we were on the ground more than two hours, but it was very clear that Urumchi was no place to fly in a multi-million dollar airplane. It was a very rough strip, and no fueling facilities. And the Chinese were very suspicious. You can imagine. The local officials were very suspicious and nervous about the visit, so it never came to anything.

One interesting thing that happened, as China after Mao's death began to open up, I got a message from some kind of intermediary that the Chinese ambassador wanted to see me. And after getting permission from Washington, I went to see him, or I think we met at a hotel or something. It was a very circumspect meeting, on his part. And he said that Zhou En-lai was coming to a position of more prominence - of course, this was after the "Ping-Pong Diplomacy," and as you point out, as I already mentioned, Kissinger and Rogers and Nixon had gone to China - and he said that Zhou En-lai had known my father and wanted my father to come back to China. So I was of course very pleased and I had a very nice talk with this man, and he told me that China was changing, and I wrote a cable about this. I think the substance of my cable was no news to Washington, but anyway it was quite interesting to me. I told them how to get in touch with my father, and I told my father what had happened, and they did invite him to China. But just about that time, my mother had passed away - it was the winter of '76 - and my father was

then in his 80s, and he didn't really feel like making a trip. I mean, he was understandably upset, losing his wife, so he thanked them and so on but said he couldn't do it. So Zhou sent someone. They found one of his medical students that worked with him in China, and she flew to Boston, took him to dinner, and gave him a medal, which is up in the Harvard Medical School Library. And I was very touched and I thought it was a very lovely gesture, and we tried in vain to find out when my father's path crossed with Zhou En-lai, and I can't find any record. My father saw thousands of people when he was a medical missionary in China and then was with the American Board for Military Aid to China and was also on the Marshall mission, so he probably ran into him at some point.

Q: Enough to make an impression.

CURRAN: My guess is he probably treated him in some way, after the Second World War maybe. Anyway, it was a nice moment for my dad. He missed my mother very much. They were a team for 53 years.

Overall, Ted Eliot really did a terrific job in running that mission, and I'm not saying it just because I'm a friend of his. He had to deal with an isolated community, very difficult, things going on, too many visitors coming in to see for themselves; but he kept his morale up and our morale up, and he was very good at improving the dialogue with the Afghan government. He spoke pretty good Persian, which the Afghans appreciated, although we teased him a little bit because he spoke the language with an Iranian accent, and the Iranians were widely regarded as effeminate by the Afghans. Eliot is anything but effeminate!

Q: Sort of like speaking with a lisp.

CURRAN: And they used to quote a poem - I think it's Omar Khayyam - where the poet says, "There's a boy across the river with a bottom like a peach. Alas I cannot swim."

Well, anyway, to be politically correct, you know, we wouldn't have discussed it, but there was in the Eastern cultures - I suppose everybody knows this - there's a lot less tension about sexual relations between males than there is in some other cultures.

Eliot's core idea was to improve the Afghan-Iranian dialogue, to get the Iranians interested particularly. And the Iranians had some interests in Afghanistan. They were interested in Helmand water, and they would have, I think, done some joint projects. There was a very good Iranian ambassador in Kabul. And I think things were inching along in that direction, especially when Kissinger came out and stopped in Kabul (early 1976). It was quite a visit - you know, when the Secretary of State travels, and particularly the imperial Dr. Kissinger, airplanes came in ahead of time with trucks and guns and armored Cadillacs and so on. The Afghans' eyes were popping right and left about this. And Kissinger came in and he and Daoud got along pretty well. Daoud wasn't swayed by much. He knew another *capo* when he met one, and they had a nice talk, and Daoud said to him, you know, "We're standing here holding back the Russian menace, and so we need your help." And Kissinger responded appropriately. What I remember about Kissinger's remarks - he came and talked to the embassy community, and he mentioned the fact that (you know, I was there) and he said that when I was in the State Department in the

Secretariat, and he, Kissinger, was running the NSC, he had always remembered me as a bridge - pause - "because vee [we] could valk [walk] all over him." So Kissinger came and went. Indira Ghandi came for a visit. She was, surprisingly to me, anyway - I had a sort of tough cold feeling of what she would be like, and she wasn't - she was charming and pleasant and delightful company and I spent an evening chatting with her. Hank Byroade was the ambassador to Pakistan. He came up to visit. We thought of him as being sort of the John Wayne of the Foreign Service. I think he was the youngest general appointed during the Second World War, a real man's man.

Q: *Also a ladies' man.*

CURRAN: Byroade had served as ambassador, and knew both Daoud and Naim very well, and the only time that I ever was at a social occasion was the night Byroade came back, stayed with Eliot at the ambassador's residence, and Naim came to dinner and I was there also. A couple of things about the residence. There was some kind of tradition from the Byroade era that high-level gents would come to dinner, and then they'd go out after dinner and have a pee in the Garden and then talk, presumably away from any bugs or servants or anything like that. So they did this. We all went out after dinner and dutifully peed on the petunias and talked to the extent that we could. Naim spoke a little English, which was lucky because Byroade just spoke John Wayne-ese.

Q: *In African posts this was known as "going out and toasting Africa." This was Kenya.*

CURRAN: Now, when Byroade was ambassador in Kabul, he had a mistress, who was the wife of the Yugoslav ambassador, and Mrs. Byroade was in residence. So the Yugoslav lady was smuggled in through the servants' entrance to the guest bedroom, and Byroade and she consorted, and then she was smuggled out again. And she eventually became the new Mrs. Byroade, and I don't know what happened to poor first Mrs. B. But the servants were still talking about that one.

There were some other sort of notable visitors. Part of the highway we built went down through something called the Kabul Gorge, on the way down to Jalalabad. It was a drop of about, oh, it must have been a couple of thousand feet down a very rough canyon, and somehow our American engineers built this road - very, very treacherous road to drive, and Afghans always drove it with great alacrity and recklessness. And two of our families were involved in a very serious car crash. They were really smashed up and it was pretty clear they couldn't be treated in Afghanistan. So the military in Frankfurt flew in a C-5, and I'd never seen one before - a huge plane. And it flew over Kabul, and the crew flew over Kabul several times to look at the airfield and figure out a landing procedure. It was a good strip, but anyway, they wanted to be absolutely sure, you can imagine. So this thing flew over several times. I suppose it was about 5,000 feet up. And it didn't quite blot out the sun, but that's the sort of general feeling you had. And by the time it landed, there was a great crowd to see what this was all about at the airport. And everyone was waiting. The Afghans, I think, imagined that some tremendously senior important person with glittering medals and so on would leap out of this plane. So after they finally got parked and the little ladder came down, out popped this 22-year-old, and he was the chief pilot. The Afghans just couldn't get over a young person with such authority. Anyway, the people were loaded on

the plane, and it saved their lives. I'm sure all the Americans' lives were saved by this. It was a very generous thing for the military to do.

We also had a salesman for the DC-10 - I guess McDonnell-Douglas at the time - brought one of their airplanes out to try to sell it to the Afghan airline. He gave everybody rides. And that was fun to be packed into a plane with the whole government. I amused myself by wondering what would happen if the plane went down. It would certainly have finished off that particular regime.

And Prime Minister Bhutto came up for a visit, after the Byroade visit. Byroade convinced him that he wouldn't be scalped, and he came up, and he and Daoud had a pretty good talk. So, just coming back to the kind of policy overview, I mean, we had the Afghans and the Pakistanis talking to one another, the Iranians, and I think if that had continued, something better would have happened, certainly better than the demolition of the infrastructure and the people that was carried out under the Russian auspices.

1977 was a pretty difficult year for me because my father passed away, and at about the same time, my wife had to be medevaced because she had very severe dysentery and bilharzia, and the antibiotics for treatment ruined her digestive system. Anyway, it was pretty serious, and we determined that the children would stay with me, because of school and we didn't have really a house to move back to. Raising teenage girls in Afghanistan and trying to help run the embassy was a pretty big burden. But out of the blue I was asked by the new leadership in Washington - Secretary Cy Vance, who was in the State Department, and John Reinhardt, who was head of USIA - to come back and help manage the Carter Reorganization Plan #2, which moved CU (Cultural Affairs) out of the State Department and into a new agency to be called the U.S. International Communications Agency. I accepted the new job and my daughters and I left. Kabul was really a tough place to have worked, but it had an even worse future. I think the things that the kids and I and my wife remember, looking back, are Bamiyan, the town with giant Buddhist statues in the center of the country; the Mazar Sharif Mosque, which was where the Prophet's son-in-law, Ali, supposedly is buried; Herat, which had a beautiful old *madrasesh*, they called it, with lovely pillars; the minaret of Jam, which is right in the middle of the Hindu Kush, a beautiful mosque; the Khyber Pass, of course, on the way to Peshawar; and my daughter remembers fondly walking the British retreat route, which she did in her junior year in high school there in Kabul. And probably no American in our lifetimes will ever see this stuff again.

Q: I have just a couple of questions.

CURRAN: Sure.

Q: What about dealing with the government? We have political officers, economic officers; it sounds like a difficult place. I mean, you couldn't really talk to opposition or anything like that. How about just dealing with the government itself?

CURRAN: The one time I got into trouble in Kabul was when the Foreign Minister, whose name was Wahid Abdullah, heard that I had met with some family representatives of what amounted to an opposition. They were one of the elements who led the opposition to the Russians, and we should have been talking to them, but Abdullah made such a scene about it that we then backed

away from meeting with anybody in the country. The political officer dealt with the Foreign Ministry. It was a very informal place. You would walk in there and rap on people's doors. If they were around you could talk with them. My interlocutor was a fellow named Samad Gaus. He had a British mother. The father had married on the diplomatic circuit. I think I met her once in three years. The mother was very Afghanized and never came out unless she was heavily shrouded. Gaus had a wonderful sense of humor and was very easy to deal with most of the time. Other political officers dealt with more junior people. Economic people and AID people dealt with the Ministry of Economics, a man who lives here now, a former economics minister. The intelligence people concentrated mostly on the East European and Russian market, as it were. And I don't remember that we had difficulty getting our message across to the Afghans. They could come to our receptions, as long as they were official, and one device that worked pretty well for seeing Afghans that was USIS used to send movies around in those days, and we would have a movie evening and not invite just the official you were interested in but his whole family. And they'd come and have popcorn and watch a movie, and they really enjoyed it and didn't feel it was threatening at all. And the lights would go down, and the servants would slip around and ask them if they'd like a little "English tea," (which meant Scotch), and most of them did, had a nice stiff drink while in the dark.

Q: *What about women?*

CURRAN: Well, the women were hardly liberated. This Mohammedzai family had some women who were at least educated. There were high schools, as I mentioned earlier, the German and the French schools, but they particularly favored the French school, I'm not sure why. But I'm trying to think, I don't believe I can remember any woman with any position of authority in the country.

Q: *Did what is now the ruling group -*

CURRAN: The Taliban.

Q: *The Taliban - did that raise its head or anything?*

CURRAN: No, and certainly there was conservative clergy, but they were conservative in the sense of being extremely rural mountain people rather than politically radicalized.

KENNETH YATES
Information Officer, USIS
Kabul (1976-1978)

Kenneth Yates was born in Connecticut in 1940. He served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1960-1962 and received a BA from the University of Pennsylvania in 1967. After entering USIA in 1967, he was posted abroad in Seoul, Kabul, Tokyo, Reykjavik and Beijing. Mr. Yates was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: Then, 1975 whither?

YATES: I was then given an assignment to Afghanistan.

Q: You were there from when to when?

YATES: I arrived there in 1976 and left in 1978. I had about three months of Dari while I was still finishing up research projects. By that time, I had Japanese, Korean, and now Dari. Dari is a variation of old Persian. To a Farsi speaker, which is the contemporary form of Persian, it has an odd accent which some see as crude; something like that heard from someone from Brooklyn if they should visit Boston.

Q: What job did you have there?

YATES: I was Information Officer.

Q: What was the political situation in Kabul in 1976-78?

YATES: Afghanistan was a monarchy, and the people had overthrown the king, who left the country. Their prime minister was a prince of the royal family, Mohammed Daud. The problem with Afghanistan was that it was never a unified country. The borders were created by the British. The British invaded Afghanistan three times and lost three times. They did foolish things. For example, they would build fortresses as they would do in Europe and put them on the highest hill to command the surrounding territory. This was great for artillery but lousy for water. The Afghans thought they were crazy and they were. Those fortresses the British built still stand unoccupied and pristine, since nobody could ever use them because of the lack of water. If the British built and occupied one of these hilltop fortresses, the Afghans would simply surround them and wait for them to die of thirst. The British tried and tried and tried. They saw Afghanistan as an important buffer between British India and the Russian empire.

However, the interior part of the country hasn't got much to pull it together. The center of the country is mountainous and occupied by the Hazara. In the north, you have all the Turkmen types. In the south, you have the Pashtuns. To the west, of course, you have the Persians. You have the Dravidian culture in the southern part of the Indian peninsula, the Turkish culture to the north and the Persian culture to the west. In the middle of all this are the leftovers from the time when Genghis Khan swept through, the Hazara. Alexander the Great went through Afghanistan and was finally defeated by disease after his marriage to an Afghan bride. Anybody who wanted to conquer anything sort of ended up there.

Q: All the fun guys.

YATES: All the fun guys did a lot of damage. Afghanistan is a beautiful land, and the traditional kings that lived there had a very different life style from many of their peers in other states. Kabul was the capital, but it got cold in the winter, so they went south to the Helmand valley, which is a beautiful valley that the U.S. had worked with the Afghan government to bring water

in for irrigation. The old kings, who predated the Mogul period in India, built palaces - not fortresses - at Lashkar Gah, located where the Helmand and Arghandab rivers meet. They had running water and sewer systems but no defenses. They built a small citadel on a slight rise to which they retreated in case of conflict. But the palaces themselves were not very well protected. It is graphic testimony to the fact that the kings lived a rather pleasant, peaceful life among the people.

They each had a big palace with water fountains and all those things you see in Persian literature. In fact, the architects who came from Persia did all the architectural work which we now remember as part of Mogul India. These architects influenced buildings like the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, and many other places in and around Delhi. You found that the palaces that were in ruin in Lashkar Gah and the mosque, part of which was still standing when I visited, greatly resembled the things you see in India as examples of Mogul architecture. It was a fascinating place to have visited. I always loved to go down there, wander around the ruins of the palaces, and sit and look through those old windows over the river.

Q: What was our policy towards Afghanistan during this time?

YATES: We didn't have much of a policy, because we didn't have much interest in Afghanistan. At the time, the Soviets really had control of the country. They had everything but the flag. They were the advisors in the military and the teachers in most of the higher institutes of learning. They controlled the medical system, and there were strong communist supporters throughout the government. Essentially, they had a throttle-hold on the country at that point, so we didn't have any specific or direct influence.

You may recall that back in the Eisenhower days, the king asked the U.S. to supply them with weapons, but we refused. He then went to the Russians, and the Russians came across with the weapons. That is essentially what brought the Russians in, our refusal to give them arms. Now, you can say this was a wise decision to stop the spread of armaments, and this was clearly the intent of the Eisenhower administration's policy. We have to draw the line somewhere, and this is as good a place as any. But the consequences of that decision later on meant that the Russians had full sway in Afghanistan.

When I got there in 1976, the Afghans were making progress. They had leather factories going and were making significant strides in women's rights, giving them education and bringing them into the workplace. Traditionally in Afghan society, women were not given an education. They were considered to be barefoot, in the kitchen, and pregnant. That is what their function was. Only males could receive education. When we gave aid under the USAID program, a stipulation was that whenever we built a school, it had to be coeducational or at least divided in the middle, so that all the boys were on one side and the girls on the other. I visited some of those schools and saw the education that the girls were receiving. Smart kids.

On the other side, we gave aid also for social welfare progress. We had gotten out of the capital intensive projects such as dams and roads. Previously, USAID programs had built all of the east-west roads; the Russians built all the north-south roads. The roadbeds were different, although all very good. Ours were built for internal communication, and the Russians were obviously built

for external communication. The Russians were extracting stuff, copper, oranges, and natural gas. They were sucking the place dry. It was clear what they were up to. The Afghans were very unhappy, because the Russians were pumping natural gas out of Afghanistan, but the meter telling how much gas they were taking was on the Russian side of the border. The Russians would report to the Afghans how much they had taken. The Afghans were not sure the Russians were being honest in the amount.

Afghans were uncomfortable with the Russians and didn't trust them. The Russians were non-believers, atheists. They didn't have a book, the book being the Bible, or in this case the word of Mohammed. They were ambivalent about Christians; since they had a book, they must have a soul. The Russians had no book, and thus no soul. If you shot a Russian, it was of no consequence. You would be more distressed over shooting a dog, because, although the dog couldn't read, it had a function, to protect the family or caravan. A Russian had no soul and no function. There was nothing lost, in the Afghan way of thinking.

The Russians had a big embassy in Kabul, much bigger than ours. Their policy of assignment was that Russian Foreign Service Officers would be assigned there for life. Every six months, we had a Russian/American night as part of our detente activities, because the two Ambassadors had set the practice up as an expression of good will. Nobody ever wanted the responsibility of setting these up, and it was usually relatively junior members of the embassy who ended up doing it. I remember one afternoon, I went to the Russian Embassy in order to fulfill my responsibilities in organizing the next Russian/American night. The Russian Embassy was located in a rather unkempt building on the other side of town.

Q: You are talking about the Soviet Embassy at the time?

YATES: Yes, but to the Afghans they were Russians. Anyway, I went to the Soviet Embassy and was ushered into a very large empty room. In the middle of this ballroom was a settee, two arm chairs, and a coffee table, all nicely covered. I was met at the door by a younger staffer who took me into the room and sat me down and said, "Would you like tea?" I said, "Thank you, yes." He then left me all by myself in the middle of this big room. I looked up at the walls, and they had big portraits of Brezhnev, Stalin, and other Soviet leaders hanging there. But there were a couple of places on the wall where there was an outline of a former portrait which was gone. Obviously, there had been a change in the line up, and they hadn't bothered to replace the portrait that they took down.

Two or three minutes after my young man went off to the right, on the left hand side one of the little panels in the side of the wall slid open, and a lady comes through with a tea service and three cups, which told me I was obviously going to be joined by somebody. Sure enough, a couple of minutes later in comes another man. We conversed for a while, but there was still another cup, so I knew we had another to join. He said, "Well, maybe it would be a good idea if we had someone join us to plan this thing." I thought that probably was all right. About three seconds later, a door slides open and in comes a third person. The Soviets obviously had cameras and microphones trained on us, because somebody somewhere was communicating in and out of this room without my knowledge and without direct contact. It was kind of fun.

The KGB people, who were all over Kabul, were assigned to the embassy under cover, but you could always tell who they were, because they would come to these Russian/American nights dressed like Americans in sport coats and kind of flashy ties, something you would see in a movie. They spoke very good English and were very polished. They were very cynical about Afghanistan, obviously to try to drag you out and make you express yourself cynically about Afghanistan as well. One can only speculate on the reasons.

The local stratification within the embassy was very clear. Policy people spoke very good English, dressed well, and fraternized with Americans, but people who were not policy people did not speak to you. If you spoke to them, they would smile and run away. Most of them were women, probably spouses, or possibly house servants. The Russians, of course, did not hire Afghans to man positions in the embassy at any level. One of the basic differences among the foreign embassies was that the east bloc would only be staffed with nationals of the country of the embassy. Americans were always surrounded by Foreign Service Nationals from the host country. In many instances, they were more important to the conduct of bilateral relations than were a number of the Americans.

The Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) provided continuity - they often were career people who spent decades working for the embassy. Their eyes and ears provided insight into what was happening locally, apart from the public record in the newspapers, and their responsibilities often were fairly senior. While Americans set the policy and the direction of embassy programs, it was FSNs that offered local judgement, gave counsel on contacts, served as intermediaries with the leadership and other “movers and shakers” of the country, and assisted with translation duties. Naturally, direct hires from the community supplied drivers, cooks, cleaning staff, and other services that a complex embassy needed. They kept all of us in touch and eased the problems of living abroad. Embassies that did not utilize FSNs to the degree we did were seriously handicapped. In addition to all their work, they also became good friends and really committed to establishing and maintaining active bilateral relations. The Russians, however, had none of these benefits.

Q: Who was our ambassador when you were there?

YATES: Ted Eliot.

Q: How did he operate?

YATES: He was very relaxed. He had worked for USIA at one point in his career and had a lot of interest in what we did. Another reason was that in Afghanistan, there wasn't much other work to do. We didn't have much in the way of economic connections and no significant military programs to speak of. Politically, Afghanistan was an important buffer state between the Soviet Union and the subcontinent, but Americans had little connection there. Internally, there was the usual intrigue and infighting that provided the fodder for political reporting, but activities in that landlocked country did not figure large in American concerns.

However, the USIA program was a very vigorous one. We had one USIA center in Kabul with a library and small auditorium, as well as a pretty good staff. We operated throughout the country

with our programs and while travel was important, most of our contacts were in Kabul where all governmental activity was concentrated.

Q: I have always been surprised at meeting Afghans who, since the unpleasantness in 1979, seemed to have gravitated to working in libraries, at least in the Washington area. I have seen them in Georgetown and George Washington University libraries. Very pleasant and obviously well-educated people.

YATES: USAID operated a very big dam and irrigation project in the Helmand area during the late sixties, and as Information Officer, I came up with an idea for a film explaining the project to the Afghan public. I wrote the concept, did the research on location, took a film crew down to get some initial footage, wrote the script, arranged for the soundtrack music, and completed the storyboard for the film crew we used from Afghan Film. Because of the film, I made a number of trips to Lashkar Gah, Kandahar, and the Helmand region. It was an interesting story.

We were having troubles with Soviet pressure on the Afghan government to withdraw its support from the AID project in the Helmand valley. We had built a big dam at Kajaki with support by the Afghans. The Afghan government was putting money into this program in a matching arrangement with the original USAID grants. The problem with the program was that we had irrigated the land, but the Afghans had said they didn't want big drainage ditches. Their reasoning was that the ditches were useless and would just take water away, while they wanted to keep the incoming water in the area of the crops.

Of course, since the water did not have a means to run off, what remained evaporated, leaving behind a deposit of salts. Over time, the irrigated land became saline, and crop yields were diminishing. The Soviets wanted the Afghans to put the resources that they had into the Soviet-sponsored provinces. We had the Helmand-Arghandab River area and the Soviets had the orange growing area in the east and northeast part of the country. The Soviets wanted to see those resources diverted and we didn't. So what I came up with as Information Officer, was to do a film to explain the project and frankly deal with the desalinization problem and show what can be done when you do irrigate with drainage ditches.

Wisely, USIA in Washington hired an American Director out of a Boston documentary film company, Urban Image, to do the final work on the film. We produced a 15 minute documentary on the valley that I think was very effective. After the revolution in 1978 when the communists took over, we closed up the embassy and sent everybody home. I am told that the only thing that was running for any entertainment in Kabul at all was that film. They ran it continuously about eight or nine hours a day. They had full audiences all the time. There was nothing else to do in town.

There were even a lot of communists from the government who came over to watch the film, because there was nothing else to do. They enjoyed the music. The music that I picked was through a friend of mine named Madadi who worked at Radio Afghanistan, a music major who was trained in Germany. He was a collector of Afghan folk music, and would invite people from outside Kabul, sheep herders and others who would learn self-taught flute and traditional instruments, to come in to Radio Afghanistan studios at any time. He would record their music,

and if he liked it, he would put them on the air. You would get some beautiful, haunting music, mostly based on local folk tunes and traditions. All of it was recorded and then archived at Radio Afghanistan. It was wonderful music - completely artless, pure music.

I asked him to come up with some suggestions as to what he thought would be suitable. He came up with a couple of tapes, and I went through them and picked out the pieces I thought sounded right for the kind of story board I had put together. I heard later there were some comments about where I got the music. It was one of the most satisfying projects I completed in my career and possibly had some sort of undetermined effect on the thinking of Afghans who watched it. When I returned to the U.S. some time later, a friend rescued a print from the archives that were slated for destruction, and I ran it through a "film chain" to make a videotape copy. I still have that copy and will reminisce by watching it now and then. It was a lot of fun to do.

Q: What was your impression of the political officers. Was it difficult for them to do anything?

YATES: There were some dangers there, because the society at the time was at least half communist and there were threats. The CIA station chief specifically was threatened with death. Toward the end, we all were threatened with being shot on the street if we were to come out. We got what was described as an "educated Afghan" letter dropped in our library, saying unless the U.S. government declared solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle with Israel, they would start shooting Americans on the street at random.

We had the usual security lectures. We were supposed to vary our route to and from the embassy or our USIS offices daily. That didn't work at all, because there were few roads and equally few options to use as variations. The threats were serious nonetheless, and we all had to take precautions. For example, the security officer brought a crew to the USIS compound to install solid metal doors which he planned to have propped open during normal times, but which might be dropped over the windows in an emergency. I protested strongly, since the solid metal doors probably would not provide much protection in any event and would serve principally to block the natural light from our offices and probably diminish the flow of fresh air in the dusty climate.

One victim of the plan before the whole project was abandoned was a small tree outside of my window. I had cherished that tree, since there were few green things in the compound where we were located, and although it was not much more than a weed, it was a green weed that softened the stark atmosphere of the office. Security problems caught up with the embassy, however, and after Ambassador Eliot left, his replacement, Spike Dubs was captured and taken to the Kabul Hotel downtown where he was killed in a shoot-out between the rebels and the army. To my knowledge, no one ever determined who was responsible for the Ambassador's death.

Q: That was after you left?

YATES: Yes, shortly thereafter.

Q: Tell me about the 1978 revolt.

YATES: I had a bird's eye view of it. I was in the office on the Saturday morning in April, as usual to pick up the traffic and read and work on the wireless file. A few of our local employees were in the back, working on a project for our print shop. It was about 10:30 when I heard a commotion and a big explosion somewhere outside, not very far away. In no more than about 30 seconds after that, the telephone rang and the Marine guard at the embassy asked if I had heard anything funny? The embassy was about a mile, or a mile and a half, from the USIS offices. I said that I had. He thought I had better leave for home, because there was something serious going on.

The American Embassy where the Marine Guard stood watch was somewhat outside of town on the road to the airport. He said that they had seen a column of tanks heading into town a few minutes earlier. What had happened was, the tanks had proceeded down the airport road and had come to a stop in front of the Ministry of Interior, about a block and a half away from the USIS building. They had fired a round into the ministry and that was what I had heard.

I shooed everybody out, the local employees who were working in my graphics shop and those in the print shop, locked the place up, and went home. By the time I got home, things had started in earnest. I put the car in the garage and locked the gate. Fortunately Young Ne had earlier gone back to the U.S. for a break away from the boredom of the two-year tour. She was staying with my parents in Mystic, Connecticut, awaiting my return at the close of my tour in Kabul several months later.

Inside the yard, our house man, Saqui, was mowing the lawn. We had an enormous lawn. The house had been owned by a German couple many years ago and then a mayor of Kabul or some other high ranking official had lived there. It was an enormous piece of property. We paid a pittance for it, because the embassy had leased it on a very long lease years before. Saqui was mowing the lawn, and I told him there was trouble and he should come into the house, which had very thick walls. Saqui said, "No, no, I am cutting the lawn, and I am almost done. Just another five minutes, no problem." He kept pushing the hand mower, and I repeated my insistence that he come into the house. Just as I finished the sentence, there was a "tut-tut-tut" through the trees above our heads and leaves began to flutter down around our ears from the shells going through the trees. Saqui then decided the idea was probably good and came into the house.

Afghans were fighting Afghans, so they were all using the same equipment and wearing the same uniforms. Our house covered the better part of a half a block, with the remaining part the block consisting of a Mercedes dealership and a small battery factory. At one point, an armored personnel carrier appeared on one side of the block. You could hear the grinding of the armored personnel carrier as it crept slowly along, obviously searching. It had a machine gun mounted on top.

On the other side of the block, the other side of the compound, was a tank. If you looked out the window, you could see the phosphorus streak of every third or fourth shell when the tank fired. They weren't firing at us in the house, but they certainly were close. This cat and mouse game went on for about an hour and then ceased, as they tired of the game and moved away. I never knew what finally happened. There also was a machine gun on the top of a police box which was

about a block away to the southwest, and whichever factions controlled the police station kept firing over the yard beside the house. So there was a lot of stuff flying around.

I didn't feel directly threatened at that time, because the walls of the house were pretty thick and would have stopped any kind of ordinance from a smaller weapon. The danger was aircraft. In the early afternoon, they started strafing the royal palace which was about two blocks away on the other side of a park in "Sharinow," the new city of Kabul, near the Blue Mosque. I was on the northwestern side of the palace. The jets were approaching from the south, strafing the palace and then lifting up. Just about where the house was, they would hit the afterburners to give enough boost to come around to make another run. There were one or several jets continuously at the game for at least an hour and a half.

The problem was stray shots that landed in places that were unintended. At one point early in the afternoon, I was in the kitchen. I had moved the refrigerator slightly away from the wall, since I thought that crouching behind it would increase my safety while in the kitchen which had thinner walls than the other parts of the house and therefore did not provide the same protection. I decided I would eat as solid a lunch as I could, before it got dark and we possibly lost power. Behind the refrigerator was an interior wall and then a small room about 6 feet wide, somewhat bigger than a closet, where we stored firewood. It also served as a pantry. On the other side of the external pantry wall was a battery shop where they repaired car batteries.

While crouching behind the refrigerator trying to wolf down a piece of steak I had managed to fry for lunch, even though everything had to be done reaching up from the crawling posture on the floor, there was a bang next door, a sort of thud and crash. I didn't pay much attention to it, with all the noise of the jets passing over. Not until later did I learn that a stray rocket that had been fired at the palace hit the shop, was a dud and didn't go off. Luck was with me that afternoon, since had the missile exploded, it would have blown me away or at least buried me in the rubble of the pantry and kitchen wall. I was thankful for the inefficiency of Russian arms. It was probably old ammunition. The Russians were famous for giving the Afghans old junk that the Soviet forces could not rely on any longer. At the time, I was thankful for that policy.

The strafing, noise, and vibration went on for about an hour and a half. Then about 3:00 in the afternoon, there was a sudden violent thunderstorm. That sort of event was most unusual in Kabul. Normally, a dust storm arrived around 3 to 4 in the afternoon. You could almost set your watch by it. On the days I was at home in the afternoon, we would race around, slamming all the windows shut just as the wind began to suddenly pick up and the rolling ball of dust would come from the east and blanket everything exposed with a thick coating.

On this day, however, all the military firing and explosions must have stirred up the atmosphere enough to disturb the usual patterns and prompt thunder heads. Whatever the cause, the heavy rain and gusting winds drove the jets away and ended the strafing. When the rain let up, the jets did not return to the strafing pattern over the royal palace, and the battle shifted more to the west. Light bombers could be seen coming from the north east, probably from the Bagram Air Base, on their way to the western part of town where the sound of explosions could be heard. They were bombing military positions west of the city. Thereafter, the bombing ceased in the vicinity of the Blue Mosque, although small arms firing continued. The fight went on for about a day and

a half. I spent most of that time crawling around on the floor. I didn't dare go upstairs where stray rounds might pick off the curious head above the window sill.

Q: Was your family with you?

YATES: Luckily Young Ne had gone off to the U.S. to study English at a summer course at Georgetown. I was very thankful for that since it was a frightening experience. She, of course, had similar experiences during the Korean War, and the repetition of such events might have been unbearable for her. The worst part of the fight was the uncertainty of what was going on and the prospect of losing communication with others.

When the fighting started, the telephone system was, of course, the first thing to get damaged. I had one of those Motorola hand-held radios that the embassy had issued for just such emergencies. Before the experience of the revolution, those radios were a significant bother. They had to be left in a plugged-in charger so that they would have a full battery, but the Marines used the channels to run tests now and then, and the things could go off at all hours. Those of us who had not gone through a real emergency did not have enough experience to know how valuable they would become when things got hot.

People who didn't have them suffered. In the beginning, I was able to maintain contact with the embassy by telephone. When the telephone system started to go down, it turned out I could call the western part of Kabul, but the embassy could not. For some strange reason involving the exchange system, the embassy could still call me by phone. So the embassy was able to relay a message to me, and I could then call the AID people out in the western part of the city and pass the information along. Of course, they could pass information on the fighting in that area back to the embassy. If anything, their experiences were much more severe than mine.

I remember a call to one of the AID workers in the western part of Kabul. He said, "What do I do? What do I do? I have two bodies in my driveway." I told him not to touch them and stay with his family under the heaviest furniture. The greatest danger seemed to be curiosity, since the diplomatic community was not among the combatants and had not taken sides. But inadvertently being in the way was a real danger.

For example, we in Kabul had a visiting baseball team from the American school in Pakistan. Parents in Rawalpindi doubtless were worried about their children, and there was a great sense of urgency to get word back that everybody was accounted for and safe. We got most people accounted for. They were told to stay inside, keep their doors locked, and stay underneath tables or anything heavy. As it turned out, they did and no one was hurt.

While unscathed, there was some psychic damage. The wife of one of the political officers did not have a portable phone, and she could not understand anything that was going on. Her husband was caught in the embassy when the fighting started and could not return. Without his presence at home and lacking one of the usually bothersome radiophones, she became distraught with fear and worry and suffered enough psychologically to require medical attention, adding to the concern of the rest of the community. The noise of the jets and the firing and explosions just were too much.

The only foreigners who were hurt in the fighting, as far as I know, were one or two German embassy staffers who went outside and took pictures of the aircraft while they were bombing and got hit in the legs by shrapnel or stray rounds. Their wounds were only superficial, but later served as a warning to those who would scoff at the constant remonstrations of the security people.

The fighting gradually cooled over a day and a half. In the interim, I finally lost telephone communication with the embassy and could no longer provide news and information back and forth with the western part of the town and the USAID compound there. Remarkably, however, the power remained on, and my trusty radiophone kept me in touch. On the morning of the second day, I crawled upstairs to look out and make sure that the quiet was real and that there was nothing moving. I saw one taxi, as I peered over the second story window sill onto the street running across the front of the house.

Unbelievable as it was, a tennis racquet slung over his shoulder, a German man dressed in tennis whites pedaled into view on a bicycle, going to the German club which was about a block to the north. To insist on the usual set of tennis in the morning, in the face of the fighting and destruction of the previous hours, was amazing, a display of total disdain for an obvious situation, one that I had not seen before or since. He had to be either crazed by the fight, simply did not care, or had found refuge in the sanity of habit. Perhaps he reasoned it was not his fight, and no one would bother a diplomat on a simple errand of tennis. I have no idea if he was able to play his game, but the sight was remarkable, nonetheless.

I later learned that several Peace Corps volunteers almost got hit, about the same time as I was crouched behind the radiator. A live rocket that strayed from its intended path into the Royal Palace flew over the Blue Mosque and killed seven Afghans in an apartment immediately opposite the mosque. The apartment that received the deadly munition was next to the one where the Peace Corps volunteers were gathered. Fate was measured in fractions of degrees in altitude and direction of the errant missile. It was perhaps the closest call for any of the Americans resident in Kabul.

After the fight was over, Afghan military people - I don't know from which side - came around to ask if we had any damage and offered to fix whatever was necessary. They went overboard to make sure that the foreigners who were not combatants were not injured in any way. From all of the later reports, it was evident that the Afghans took great pains to check on all foreigners and to repair whatever damage their houses suffered from the fight. Some houses had multiple bullet holes and other related damage, but no one had been seriously hurt. Perhaps it was the traditional sense of Afghan hospitality in action. Under the time-worn code, no harm must come to a visitor in your home, even if he is your sworn enemy and has inflicted severe injury on you or your clan. As long as the guest stays at your home, you are obligated to ply him with the best food and hospitality. This is true, even though as soon as he leaves your portal, you may murder him in retribution. Cruel code, but deeply imbued in the Afghan psyche.

Q: What was the impression of who did what to whom?

YATES: The Afghan politics of the time were complicated. The previous king was living in Italy. A prince of the royal family, Mohammed Daud, was serving as President at the time of the coup and was summarily executed. There were a lot of people who were similarly killed at the time of the coup, including people I knew and had worked with. For example, Daud's son, who was a really quiet and shy man with a beautiful wife and two young children, was a television producer. I had worked with him on programming cultural events, such as "Clark Terry and His Jolly Giants," live on Afghan Television. As a producer, Daud's son had worked with us several times on cultural programs. These programs had even included a live performance of a U.S. Air Force band, the first such appearance of an American military band in Afghanistan. He had no interest in politics. If the subject of politics came up, he always politely and quietly demurred. His only concern was his work at Afghan TV and his family. Later, I heard that he was executed, along with his wife and two kids. They wiped out the family. The Foreign Minister under Daud, Waheed Abdullah, with whom I had many visits to bring in guests or reporters, was executed in his office. A lot of people whom I knew from my work were either killed or driven out during that time. Some went off into the hills and crossed over the border into Pakistan.

The source of the revolution was partly ideological but more factional than anything else. The Parchamists and Halquis were the two big major communist factions involved in fighting the government. They feared that the government was becoming more and more Westernized, and each had a particular vision of the fate of the country and, of course, of the leadership which was to assume control. The revolution was not founded on religious differences, even though the communists, for the most part, were atheist, and the Muslims were essentially on the previous government's side. For a long time, the communists had complained about the privileged elite and the clear influence the royal family still had in the affairs of state.

How much direct influence the Soviets had on the event of the revolution is not clear, although their agents thoroughly permeated every part of the military, academic, and administrative sectors of society. Afghanistan was among the poorest nations in the world, according to UN figures on per capita income, and strong willed members of the communists placed blame for continued poverty on those in charge.

Supposedly, the Parchamists had strong ties with Beijing. In fact, I don't think anyone ever proved conclusively that there was this kind of ideological tie. The Chinese were certainly more friendly with one faction than with the other. The Halquis, either by conviction or default, were considered more on the Soviet side. But it wasn't very clear, at least to me. To me, both sides were of the same coin.

After the Saur Revolution, questions began to emerge about which faction would take control. An effort toward a coalition government faltered and then fell apart, as the several factions continued to squabble with each other. This constant internal strife continued on during the later Soviet invasion and is evident today, although with different players, even though the *Mujahedeen* ultimately defeated the militarily stronger Soviet forces. Today the Taliban are at odds with their former allies, as the unifying effect of a common front against the hated Soviets was lost with victory. Afghanistan has always been infected with factional fighting. The Afghans do things differently from other nation states. They use the Koran as basis for conducting and resolving their conflicts. That meant they had strict rules to their fighting.

There is a little town that you can visit as you pass through from Kabul to Peshawar in Pakistan. I drove back and forth to Peshawar several times through the Khyber Gorge, a spectacular natural wonder that is unparalleled for rough scenery. In contrast, the touted Khyber Pass is little more than a bunch of rolling hills that had the good fortune to become the outermost limit of the British empire and thereby was romanticized by generations of British writers. In three frustrating wars, the British tried to subdue the Afghans and thereby, prevent Russian influence on the subcontinent. Each time they were soundly defeated. That defeat was perhaps as much from the difficulty of the terrain as from the fighting effectiveness of the Afghans, but the result was the same, the humiliation of the British Army.

You have to go north through the Khyber Pass to reach the narrow roads and multiple switchbacks that add a touch of adventure to the spectacular views. It is as though one could drive up and down the mule trails in the Grand Canyon. Particularly in the early or late hours of daylight, the canyons and rills were particularly beautiful, even if the winding switchbacks were dangerous from erratic busses and overloaded trucks plying back and forth to the border and from falling rocks and an occasional herd of goats.

A short distance outside of the Pakistani city of Peshawar to the south of the Khyber Pass, there was a gate which was closed at dusk. It was a gate with no fence flanking either side of it, and the road ran directly through the gate. The act of locking the gate at sunset was symbolic rather than practical, as the Pakistanis did not control the area next to the border, and it was a no-man's land after dark. A small village at its midpoint was a bandit village called Landi Kotl. It was said you could buy anything there that you wanted. You want a DC10 tire? Next Tuesday they would have it. You want the latest refrigerator? They would bring one in. Everything was smuggled.

Young Ne and I visited the town on one of our trips, escaping Kabul for the cultural change from southwestern Asia in Afghanistan to the subcontinental life of Pakistan. In Landi Kotl, people walked around the streets with bandoleers similar to those you can see in the old western movies. All they needed were sombreros, and they would fit right into the archetypal horse opera. They bristled with guns of all sizes and shapes. Rumor held that if you could find a picture of a gun in a magazine, a gunsmith in Peshawar could fashion a reasonable likeness that performed something like the original. It was quite a place. The Wild West in the middle of Asia.

Everybody was armed in Afghanistan, and when the different factions would do battle, they would always go to the mountains. It was against the rules of Afghan warfare to fight in the villages or involve women or the children or the elderly. The rules went so far as to stipulate that you never even involved cattle. You never killed somebody's cow. You never fought in a person's home. So if you were invited to an Afghan's home and he hated your guts because you had killed his brother, he would be a wonderful host. As soon as you left his gate, watch out, because he probably will put a knife between your ribs. But as long as you were in his home, you were a guest. They have very strict rules.

When the fight that swirled about the Saur Revolution spread outside the capital, there was an incident in a mosque in a village south of Kabul. In the aftermath of the struggle, into the village mosque strode a young, bright-eyed communist cadre who pronounced, "All you old men get out

of the mosque. This is going to be a museum. We are doing away with religion.” The old men attending the service got themselves up, grabbed him, cut his head off, and threw the body along with its severed head into the river. Those in the revolutionary command in Kabul evidently decided that they had to teach this village a lesson to intimidate others who might have entertained similar measures to inflict on the new leadership.

Although I never had the full story, the commonly accepted version that was passed from person to person was that the new revolutionary government in a fit of anger dispatched jets to strafe the village to teach them a proper lesson. Afghans at the time refused to believe that an Afghan pilot was at the controls and guessed that it probably was a Russian pilot, for only a kaffir (non-believer) could commit such a heinous act. Once the carnage became known, it was as if an electric shock passed through the country. The purposeful killing of villagers, women, children, elderly, and cattle was not done by even the fiercest Afghan warrior. It was completely outside the code. It was not Afghan. It matters little now just who sat at the controls of the offending warplane, for the die had been cast, and the course of the eventual fight against the new leadership and their atheistic supporters irrevocably determined.

I had a young man on the staff who we knew was a communist. He was a very talented graphic artist and a generally pleasant person who appeared to be eager to learn and produce quality work for us. On that basis, I hired him. I didn't care what his politics were as long as he produced the quality of graphics we wanted. He would go to his political meetings and probably reported what he saw and heard at work, but we didn't mind, since the messages we were sending were intended as much for his coterie as they were for those who generally sympathized with the West. On one of the mornings following the revolution, we had managed to get the office back to semblance of order and one of my staff came to me and reported that the young man was in one of the back rooms crying and feared to be close to violence. None of the Afghan staff could get him to quiet down.

The reason was that, as a bright young college graduate and a nationalist to the extent that an Afghan can be a nationalist, he had taken pride in the communist revolution which he saw as taking back control of the country from the royalist elite. That morning, he had been coming to work when he saw on the street what he recognized as a Russian soldier in an Afghan army uniform. He became distraught with the realization that this was not what they had fought for. Their idealistic struggle had not been to turn it all over to the Russians. This was a revolution upside down. He and others in his group had put their lives on the line for those Russians! It destroyed the very fiber of his convictions and violated his sense of justice as an Afghan. Through his tears he wailed, “This is not what we fought the revolution for!”

Afterward in my office, I asked the Chief of my print shop what he thought was going to happen if the things the young graphic artist saw and the stories of the jet strafing a village turned out to be true. He wordlessly shrugged his shoulders and just stood there with his head cocked to one side, looking pained. I pressed, “What are you going to do if the Russians stay; how are you going to handle the Soviet pressure?” The Print Shop Chief who was also a head-man in a small village in the outskirts of Kabul looked up and quietly drew his finger across his throat in a silent threat to the Soviets who had violated his religion, his tradition, and his people. He turned, and without further explanation quietly left my office. For me, it was an encapsulated prediction of

what would take years of fighting and bloodletting on both sides to accomplish. But that is essentially what happened.

The foreshadowing of the tragic Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the slow bleeding of the Soviet forces in an unwinnable war, and the ultimate cutting off of the head of the “Kaffir” Russian troops were summarized in the silently shrugged shoulders and the finger across the throat. To my Print Shop Chief, it was obvious. The Afghans have a creed: if you are wronged, you must redress the injury, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. If you were wronged by any member of another family or clan, the wrong must be avenged by a member of the injured clan or family. The injury might be to someone you had never laid eyes on, a distant cousin, but someone of the same blood had a debt of honor to repay the wrong. When the Russians strafed that village, everybody who had relatives who were killed, maimed, or injured was committed, regardless of their politics, to redress the act. The effort to avenge the sin inflicted on Afghanistan had to continue as long as one Afghan had the breath to continue the fight, and fight they did to the everlasting regret of their Soviet tormentors.

Q: This was during the 1978 revolt?

YATES: Yes, 1978.

Q: Were the Russians involved?

YATES: While the incidents I recounted involving members of the Soviet military were beginning to occur, the Soviet role at the time was on the sidelines, supplying arms and giving moral support to their supporting faction. The Chinese were also in the role of supporting the revolution, but either distance from the action or a general wariness evidently kept them from a more direct role.

Q: You mentioned Prince Daud’s son, his wife, and children were killed. What about the fact that they killed the wife and the children?

YATES: That’s right. That act confirmed to true Muslims that these were unquestionably “Kaffir.” Afghans believed that none of their kinsmen would do such things. It is a society of harsh rules and similarly harsh penalties when those rules are broken. Yet another example of this rigid code was played out at our own house. We had two brothers who worked for us, doing chores and serving as watchmen. The two were from the Panshir Valley, reputedly the toughest part of Afghanistan and the bane of the Russian presence when they later took over the country. Panshiris are born fighters and have a long history of real rough and tumble.

The two brothers had asked to go home once in a while to visit with their families, so on alternating weekends one brother would go home, leaving Friday night and returning the next Monday morning. We had to keep somebody in the house all the time, because theft was a real problem, and a house untended was an easy mark. One weekend, the younger brother, Mahmut, went home but failed to return on the following Monday. Mir, the older brother, said that he did not know where his brother was but not to worry, he would certainly be back the following week. So we had one man left in the house that week, which meant he couldn’t leave, because

someone had to be in the house all the time. The second weekend came and went but still no Mahmut. I told Mir he should find out where his brother was, because help was needed to watch the house. He tried to get a telephone call through to the Panshir Valley, working at it all day. Finally, his call got through, and after much animated conversation, Mir turned to me and said he would have to go right then because his brother was in jail. I asked what happened, and he said he was not certain. He went off in great haste and much obvious worry.

He was gone for more than a week without a word, so we concluded that the brothers had to be replaced since we had an urgent need of help at the house. We did not hear from the Panshiri brothers for more than a month. Finally one day, the doorbell rang, and when the door was opened, there was the younger brother Mahmut standing there smiling and requesting his job back. I replied that he was gone for so long, how could he expect to get his job back. "Oh, yes, long story" he grinned sheepishly. "What happened?" I pressed.

As it turned out, he had gone back for the weekend, and during his stay, his wife got into a fight with a cousin's wife over a coin found on the floor. They started to shout and pull hair and ultimately drew the two husbands into the fray. At some point, a large machete-like knife of the sort Afghan raisin farmers use to cut grapes became a part of the fight. In the midst of the struggle over the knife, Mahmut caused the end of his cousin's nose to be sliced off. According to Afghan law, if you cause another to be maimed, it is an automatic five year jail sentence with no questions, no trial, no lawyers.

Mir, the older brother, went back to find out what happened to Mahmut and to try to get him out of jail. After arriving home, Mir was jumped by the members of the maimed cousin's immediate family who proceeded to cut Mir's ear off. That act balanced the earlier injury, so Mahmut was then eligible for release from jail. Two wrongs might not make a right, but in Afghanistan, it can lead to a removal of penalties. Everything was now settled. Mahmut was out of jail and Mir was healing. Both of us felt sympathy for the plight of Mahmut and for the well-being of his older brother, but by that time we had employed a replacement and there was no job waiting. Mahmut understood but was very disappointed.

About three months later, Mir appeared at our doorstep with a dark knit hat similar to a ski cap pulled down one side lower than the other. Sure enough, he was missing an ear. That is the level of toughness in that country. For some reason, the Soviets either did not understand the code or choose to ignore it. They did so at their peril.

Q: Despite all this, the Russians kept their people at their embassy there forever.

YATES: Yes, that is right. That is the big mystery. Either their communication structure didn't work or they didn't want to believe. They had everything except the flag, but insisted on that too, which drove them into a Vietnam-like conflict. They were sucked into this thing and had no possibility of victory. They would send helicopters into the Hazarajat, the center of the country. The problem there is that the Hazarajat peaks are about 12,000 feet, and the Soviet helicopters did not have the capacity to maneuver well in the rarified atmosphere at that height. The problem was the Afghans with those old British Garand-style rifles, not much improved over a long barreled musket, who would sit on rocks on the tops of mountains, shooting down at Russian

helicopters which unfortunately had armor plating only on the bottom, assuming that ground fire would be received only from beneath the flying aircraft. The Afghans with their antiquated firearms were taking them out like flies in the Hazarajat.

There was another technique that proved remarkably successful for the Mujaheddin. The Soviets would send a column of tanks and armored personnel carriers up the mountain pass to bring unassailable force on the unruly villages. The Afghans, in this case the Hazara, would simply wait until they got into the interior a little bit and push rocks down on the pass behind them and in front of them, so they were bottled up. Then the intrepid Afghans would sit up on the rocks and wait. The sun would get higher and higher in the sky, and it got pretty warm in those armored vehicles. As soon as a head would pop up, they would shoot. So the forces in their otherwise impregnable vehicles died either of thirst and starvation or from being shot when they came out. The technique was a variation on the method used against the British with such effect in three previous wars. The Russians couldn't get columns up the pass. They never did get into the Hazarajat, and never obtained control over that part of the country.

It was an ugly war. A similar thing occurred in the vicinity of the Salang Pass, a series of tunnels through the mountains at about 12,000 feet, connecting Kabul and the southern part of Afghanistan with the northern part. The Afghans would wait until the Russians got halfway through the tunnel and cause a landside at both ends. Accounts of these exploits were frequent in the western press, but the Russians had little choice but to move men and material over very few roads.

The whole Russian involvement in Afghanistan was difficult to understand. I remember sitting in a "Country Team" meeting chaired by Ambassador Eliot, debating whether the Russians would invade. I was on the side that argued under no circumstances would the Soviets directly enter the fray. They could not be that stupid. Others argued that the Soviet-built roads ran north-south, providing an easy invasion route, something the Soviets could not resist and possibly the principal reason for constructing the highways in the first place. Roads built with U.S. aid went east-west and completed the loop around the periphery of the country. In any event, the roads running north-south go to India and Pakistan, not to Afghanistan.

I was convinced that the Russians would not invade. It was a point not worthy of debate. The British had found that out. I assumed that the Russians were sophisticated strategists, had long experience in Afghanistan, and undoubtedly knew Afghan history well. But inexplicably, they did enter. Perhaps the military command in the region took action on its own without considering modern intelligence, or they had better intelligence on the fractured alliances they held and decided to place a firm hand on the situation. Nobody has ever explained to my satisfaction the rationale that led to the Soviet foolishness. Maybe now that we have better relations, someone can dig into the pertinent archives and come up with an adequate explanation.

Q: One thing I heard was how you had the geriatric group of Brezhnev and his cohorts in charge and somebody got the bright idea of teaching the Afghans a lesson. Nobody could figure out why they came in, because it wasn't necessary at all. I think in 1979, there was another little change-over in government.

YATES: There were some things, though, that were going on in Afghanistan that I think the Soviets were unhappy with. For example, I mentioned before the IMET (International Military Education and Training) program that the embassy ran. The U.S. military attaches at the embassy were picking young colonels in the Afghan air force and sending them to a base in the U.S. for a few weeks of training. When they came back, they had remarkably different attitudes. These were the brightest part of the Afghan military. They had a taste of something entirely different from what they had known. Most had been Soviet-trained and Soviet-equipped. When they went to the US, say somewhere in Kansas, they would report to classes with American pilots. They would eat in mess halls with American GI's and would be invited to the homes of Americans on the weekends. They would celebrate holidays with others, go on picnics, hang out with their American classmates, and were clearly a part of the student body.

It wasn't that way in Russia. When the Russians trained the Afghans, they were kept in separate barracks and not allowed to fraternize. Even when they went to and from Moscow, which didn't happen very often during their training of one or more years, they were isolated. On such trips, they had to pass through either Tashkent or Mary, which necessitated an overnight stay. On arrival at the airport, they were put into buses with the shades rolled down, taken to the hotels, and locked in for the night. The next day, they were put back into the buses and taken to the airport where they would depart for Afghanistan. The Afghan ethnic groups extend across a wide region of the center of Asia and of course, knew that they had relatives in those Central Asian cities. They had a strong desire to meet their relatives but were not even allowed to see their city of transit, never mind the relatives. So what was happening was these young, smart, very carefully chosen Afghans, especially pilots from the Afghan Air Force, were becoming very Westernized. I think the Russians felt they were losing their grip on the best of the Afghan military. Although the IMET program for Afghanistan was small and low budget, it was having a significant impact.

IMET is the subject of a lot of controversy. For example, when the Timor massacre happened in Indonesia, Congress mandated that we kill all the programs that supported the Indonesian military. One of the casualties was IMET. The military fought very strongly to get that reversed. It argued that the people who went into East Timor to try to straighten out the problem were the very people they had trained in the IMET program. They were the good guys, the guys with the white hats. By killing the IMET program, we were cutting off our nose to spite our face. And that in fact is what we were doing. It was a reflex action, taken ill-advisedly, because we did not have the sense to carefully weigh the consequences of our actions at the time.

Q: When did you leave Afghanistan in 1978?

YATES: June, 1978.

Q: What did you feel whither Afghanistan as you left?

YATES: At that time, of course, the fighting was over. The revolution was over. The Russians had not yet come in. There was much arguing among the factions, but the ideologues clearly had taken over. The American Embassy had lost much of the earlier close contact we had with the government. However, to me the "revolution" appeared to be one of personal factions more than

ideological communist revolt. I have served in Beijing just after Tiananmen, Afghanistan under communism, and visited the northern part of Korea after the death of Kim Il Sung, but every one of those societies, at least in my view, is based primarily on personal factions, not ideology. Ideology is the window dressing, the veneer. The underlying causes and motivating factors in the politics are not communist in the textbook definition. They are factional.

If these states are looked at in that light, then I think it is easier to understand why they do what they do. It is not very useful to run an analysis on the dialectic and draw conclusions from it. It doesn't work. But explanations do work if you consider factional dynamics, for these "communist" administrations most closely resemble feudal states in their attitudes and functions.

OWEN CYLKE
Deputy Director, USAID
Kabul (1977-1979)

Mr. Cylke was born and raised in New Jersey and educated at Yale University. After a tour with the Peace Corps in Ethiopia, he joined USAID in 1966 and served several years in Washington, where he dealt with African matters. In 1968 he was posted to Nairobi, the first of his overseas posts, which include Kabul, Cairo and New Delhi. In all, he dealt with environmental and development matters with USAID. Following retirement Mr. Cylke continued work in his field, including holding the Presidency of the Association of Big Eight Universities, which also dealt with developmental and environmental matters in the developing world. Mr. Cylke was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1996.

CYLKE: When I went to Afghanistan in 1977, there were two big issues. One was downsizing. The mission director was told to bring down the Afghan mission. It was clearly the end of the Reich, or the end of the old-style mission. We had twice as many automobiles as we had staff members.

Q: Who was the mission director?

CYLKE: Chuck Grader. We had three times as many drivers as we had staff members. We had a compound where every office had its own building. It was an incredible display. We had a fire department; we had a hospital; we had a morgue; we had a movie theater; we repaired the cars for all the people in government. There were salary supplements that went to almost everybody in government.

Q: This was run by AID?

CYLKE: This was run by AID. The country was run by AID, as far as I could see. In fact, when Chuck was sent out to dismantle this mission, one of the first things he did was he gave the fire truck back to the city. It was a great big, old fashioned fire truck. I got a call as the deputy director one day, that there was a big fire downtown, and could I send the fire truck? I said,

"Well, I'm sorry, we've given that back to the city." This voice on the other end of the phone said, "That was a mistake." So, there we were. So, Chuck did a RIF of some 300 people. I just remember going into the lounge or the staff dining room the day after the RIF and we thought there were as many people leaving as there were the day before.

Q: Were they Afghans or Americans?

CYLKE: Afghans. Well, there was also a reductions in Americans, but the big reduction was in Afghans. It was the major dismantling, at least in my time. Chuck Grader was consumed with that issue. However, we had an extraordinary mission.

Q: Were there some political drives behind this or was this budgetary?

CYLKE: Budgetary, as I recall. I never knew how much of it came over from Washington and how much of it came from Chuck Grader. He was seized with the issue when he stepped off the plane as the director. Whether he was really told to do it or whether-

Q: There must have been some political context that was supporting the shift.

CYLKE: I remember, it was one of the great conversations of the Agency. They had safe driving awards for the Afghan people in the Agency's newspaper. I think Chuck had a note from the administrator, that noted that there were more drivers than there were staff members of the mission. So, I think there was some pressure.

This was at the time of the poorest of the poor. AID was going to take a new direction. It was going to be committed to the poorest of the poor. We had a mission staff with people who turned out to be- I mean, I've been in a lot of missions with a lot of people. You can't help but be in an AID mission and have dealt with everybody whose been anybody. In Afghanistan, Larry Saiers was our program officer. He was a very strong-minded guy who ruled the Africa bureau for years later. George was one of the very distinguished AID directors. He's now in Nicaragua and is the one person who was younger than I. But I would say that I would consider that he mentored me. He managed us quite effectively. He was one of those people with a broad development vision. I've talked of Don. Dale Pfeiffer was in the program office. He later became an AID director in the region. Very strong technical offices. We took the place quite seriously.

We said that we were going to move the program to the poorest part of Afghanistan. We were told in no uncertain terms by Washington that we weren't going to do that. We were going to put it in the Helmand Valley, where the Agency had been for 40 or 50 years, with their major project. I remember, there was a tremendous controversy between our mission and Washington. We believed that we really were following the new directions and had the sense that Washington was really coping with the new direction but hoping to keep the program going.

Q: What was your understanding of the new direction strategy or policy?

CYLKE: As I recall, at that time, it was direct interventions in pockets of poverty. You went to the poor sections of the country.

Q: And you understood it as poorest of the poor, not just the poor majority or the working poor?

CYLKE: We did an analysis of the country. We picked the poorest places in the country. We picked the places that were not just poor, but were abused, that were starved for resources. We didn't just pick the desert and decide that we were going to make the desert bloom. A place with some development prospect but had been systematically left out of the process.

Q: And with development prospects?

CYLKE: With development prospects. There was a tremendous battle with Washington over this, which we were surprised at. It really, as far as we were concerned, was headed to "This Agency has had an investment in this other part of Afghanistan over 30 years and we're going to continue that kind of investment."

It was my first time in a mission. I had been in the Agency since 1966. This was 1977. I'd visited missions but never served an hour in a mission. I'd gone in as deputy director. So, it was also a learning experience for me. That was conscious. Almost each technical director decided I needed to be educated and this was probably true. I can remember, each one of them took me on at least a two to three week trip to the countryside. Afghanistan was a little school for me. There was also a revolution in the middle of our first year. The mission was kept in place for a year but we did no work in the second year because there was no way to deal with the government. We tried, but we couldn't really do a thing. We ran an internal development study program. Larry Saiers, George Myers put together an internal development study program. We had World Bank documents; we had regular courses and seminars for ourselves. I learned more about development, I think, in Afghanistan than anywhere. We had time. Young people just got themselves organized. They said, "This is silly. We're sitting out here writing papers which aren't getting approved by anybody. We're not going anywhere." The Afghan government didn't exist.

Q: Funds were all frozen?

CYLKE: No, we had funds, but we couldn't sign an agreement. The Afghans wouldn't sign an agreement on anything. It was in the process of disintegration. You couldn't find clothes. I would say, for a year, we operated and then the coup came. We had good intentions for six months. It then started getting dangerous. I left in May and I think everyone was out by October and the Russians came in December. That was in '79. That was a case where you clearly had a sense that the place needed a revolution. It was not a feudal situation like Ethiopia, but you had a small group of people who ran the so-called "country." They ran Kabul. They got the customs duties. They got foreign affairs.

You then had, I think, a genuinely homespun revolution. (Inaudible due to static) those people weren't really ready to take over Afghanistan. They had no interest in taking over Afghanistan. They had a revolution. The loss of young (inaudible due to static). School teachers became mayors of towns. Girls were given education, universal education. All kinds of wonderful aspirations came up on the table in an attempt to (inaudible due to static). It was not like this Taliban that's there now, that's squeezing women out. At that point, it was purely a liberating

revolution. Let's get girls into schools. Let's get schools built. Let's break the hold of Kabul and get some money out for the regions. Let's have land reform. There were school teachers. There were people who had rhetoric. It wasn't a trained (inaudible) of people. They didn't know the first thing about government. Of course, at the government level, you couldn't do (inaudible) everything else was thugs. I remember negotiating with (inaudible due to static) with no sense of where they were going. But it was clearly an idealistic thing and naive.

Q: Where did these young people get their ideas?

CYLKE: There was, obviously, a very well-organized communist party in the country. We had block wardens in our house the day after the coup. (Inaudible) and I were arrested the day after the coup and held for 24 hours. Our families were notified and the Embassy was notified that we were gone. We were arrested on our way to work (inaudible). (Inaudible) had been seen going around on the weekend with his radio car (inaudible due to static), so they were after our license plates going work. This director, by the way, prided himself on always being late to an Embassy meeting (inaudible due to static). The Ambassador wouldn't start the staff meeting. This was the first working day after the revolution, but we never showed up. So, apparently, before they realized we were gone, there was hell to pay at the Embassy because this was just (inaudible due to static).

They took us to the zoo, walked us in the zoo, which was frightening in its first instance. As it turned out, it was to get us off the street. It was interesting because, during the day, there was discussion in the Embassy, "When should we tell our wives?" They came and told our wives that we were gone, told Washington. I asked if, since we had diplomatic passports, could we contact our families? We were told, "No." But their families were also worried because they were still fighting a revolution. This revolution was just a two day affair. About six o'clock at night - so this was from eight in the morning to six - they came in a car and took us somewhere. At that point, I was more relaxed, but we still didn't know what was going to happen. We were taken to the Foreign Ministry. There was an American Embassy officer out in front of the Embassy. He was just stationed there, looking for us, I think. He waved to us. So, I felt like at least somebody knew we were alive. We were taken in to new people in the Ministry (inaudible due to static). This was the first working day after the coup. They went to find out what we were there for and who we were. It was interesting. They came down and they said that they had a message they wanted us to take to our Ambassador, would we do it? "Oh, we'd be delighted." It was interesting: they had this list of things they wanted to get through on this first day. We were clearly on the list, but they didn't get to us until six o'clock. It was a fairly orderly procedure. The message was: "Tell your Ambassador that you Americans are being seen in more places than you need to be seen to get from home to the office." We dutifully delivered the message.

Q: That was the main problem?

CYLKE: That was it.

Q: They thought you were-

CYLKE: We were. I wouldn't call it "spying," but we were all over town, in the markets and

everywhere. But they were in charge. As I say, there was clearly something the Embassy hadn't understood: a very well-organized communist party. We had block wardens that were in the house that day doing inventory. It was a very well-organized thing, but it put the future in (inaudible).

Q: Let's go back a minute to Helmand Valley. Did you have much exposure to that project?

CYLKE: No, I can't say any more. The Helmand Valley ended up with a terrible technical problem. We had done the capital project. We had irrigated the land. The salt had reached up to the soil, so we were down there, essentially digging the whole Helmand Valley out and replacing it with clean dirt. It was a technical machine. But, in fact, in Afghanistan, like lots of countries, you saw- I mean, the evidence of AID in these countries was always extraordinary: health clinics, schools, irrigation projects, electricity. If nothing else, the capital projects in its day not only was important to development, but left a standing memory.

I can recall later in India, where we were not doing capital project. We were doing institutional things. We had a visit from Washington. It was AID's dilemma of where to take your visitors. In fact, there were conditions. They wanted to see things, not talk about ideas - the bureaucrats. (Inaudible due to static) it was pretty easy to organize your tour around a road, a highway, a school. It was much more difficult to organize a trip around price policy.

Q: Could you get any sense of whether the program was having an impact in Afghanistan before the coup and all that?

CYLKE: Well, I think you'd have to say, like all these countries- To me, in my view, if you're not riding the wave, you're not riding anything. You can construct all this stuff, but the fact of the matter is, we were a group of batons in Kabul who had no interest in the rural countryside. You had a rural countryside which had no interest in having any evidence of a central government in their neighborhood. There was an anti-development attitude inherent in the culture. So, no, I think we had a political presence there, but we had no real development - nor did the Russians.

I had already made a decision, frankly, that the program- You know, this was my first overseas experience. Comment on the AID bureaucracy. A mission was a mission was a mission was a mission. So, you had a director, a deputy director, all these technical offices; you had a rather small program. There was no need for a guy with my energy and a director with Chuck Grader's energy to be in the same mission. Not that we got in each other's way, but there just wasn't enough room. So, I had already made a decision that I really wanted to leave after two years. There just wasn't enough growth. Again, this was even before the coup. There wasn't going to be enough growth in the job. I learned a lot, but I needed to know about the administration of the mission. I grew, over my time in AID, to have enormous respect for technical officers. I've talked about people with the prism and how much I regarded them. I guess I regard AID well, but I thought also that the technical officers in most missions were just extraordinary. A guy like Ray Forbes, who ran the agricultural program in Afghanistan, who later I brought to Egypt, who spoke fluent language that lots of agricultural officers prided themselves on, had a tape recorder like this, was always listening to language, to make sure that he could do it. Your technical officers bespoke of that kind of commitment. Superb relationships with counterparts. I guess I

just wanted to make sure that I didn't lose- There was always tension in this Agency between program officers and technical officers, but they both had their roles. I learned a tremendous amount from Ray. The health guy's name just goes out of my mind right now. My program ideas, which I've always liked to think I have these ideas, who then took me for three weeks through rural health clinics- Talk about mentoring, they saw a young, brash deputy director come and decided they'd better educate this guy. They did it in a very conscious way and I would never give up that Afghan experience from that point of view.

BRUCE A. FLATIN
Political Counselor
Kabul (1977-1979)

Bruce A. Flatin was born in Minnesota in 1930. He received degrees from the University of Minnesota and from Boston University. After serving in the U.S. Army, Mr. Flatin entered the Foreign Service in 1956. His Foreign Service career included positions in Afghanistan, Germany, Australia, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.

FLATIN: I'd like to go back to cover the historical setting in Afghanistan during the late 50s. We arrived in Afghanistan in early 1957. It was still known as the Hermit Kingdom. They did not permit people to pass through there as tourists in those days. Indeed, just shortly before we arrived there an American named Peter Winant, and a Swedish girl named Irmgard Gummelsson had disappeared in northern Afghanistan. This took quite a bit of the embassy's time, trying to investigate this disappearance -- which indeed never was ever solved.

Another factor at this time was that the Royal Afghan Government was engaged in trying to modernize the country. They realized it was necessary. The country was in a pre-feudal situation. Feudalism was just starting in some reaches of the country. Feudalism is a rigid political, social, and economic system. It involves a noble's receiving the labor and loyal support of the peasants in his region. He, in turn, provides them with protection and justice. You'd find peasants in certain areas living inside a large Qala, or fortress, of a feudal leader and tilling the fields around this. Feudalism was just starting in Afghanistan. It was interesting to watch. People could only enjoy the use of land; Allah owns all land. Indeed, even the nomads who passed back and forth for many centuries from the Afghan mountains down to the Indian subcontinent, had the use of certain fields as they passed through Afghanistan to plant grain crops on way to the highest mountains, and then they could harvest them on the way back.

As you pass through the outlying villages of the country, it looked like the Holy Land must have looked before the time of Christ. There certainly was no difference from what Alexander the Great would have seen in Afghanistan when he passed through there 2,300 years ago. The people were dressed in the costumes of more than 2,000 years ago, and their housing had not changed over all those centuries. There certainly were no telephone wires or high tension wires. There was not one mile of railroad in the whole country.

I was convinced, as were many of us, that the royal family indeed saw the need to modernize. Now, in the royal family in those days the decision makers appeared to be led by Prince Da'ud (Sardar is their term for prince). Sardar Mohammed Da'ud was the first cousin of the king--and also his brother-in-law. Da'ud was married to the king's sister. The king was Zahir. And then the third member of this triumvirate was Prince Na'im, a brother of Prince Da'ud--and, therefore, also the first cousin of the king. The family met on Thursdays at the palace, Thursday being the last day of the working week before Juma, their Sabbath, and they would have dinner and the three of them would sit on a couch and make decisions for Afghanistan for the coming week. All major decisions were made by these three men.

In those days the most important leader appeared to be Da'ud himself. He was a very powerful person. He had a shaved, bullet head, a Nazi SS-officer type of bull neck, and very piercing eyes. He was feared by many, but he seemed to be very committed to his country. He seemed to be a determined patriot.

Now, during World War II Afghanistan had been a neutral country, neutral largely because of pressure from British India on one side, and Russia on the other to keep them out of the war. They were inclined to be pro-German as they also were in World War I. The Germans were the enemies of the British, and "an enemy of my enemy is my friend." Because they were not involved in the war, they acquired a lot of foreign exchange earnings. In fact, Afghanistan usually had a good favorable balance of trade because of its agriculture such as Karakul skins, fresh and dried fruits, nuts, etc.

The Afghans started to use this money immediately after the end of the war to try to improve the country. And one of their first major projects was improvement of the road situation from Kabul to the Khyber Pass, the country's main road. They had a number of firms bid and an American firm, Morrison-Knudsen won the bid, and worked on this road to try to improve the surface. They did not pave it at that time, but they tried to improve its surface and build bridges. After the Afghans did as much as they wanted to do with that road (and I must say it still was not a great road when we served there), they then decided they wanted to resurrect the great classical irrigation works in southern Afghanistan along the Helmand basin. This was another venture where they sought bids; Morrison-Knudsen, being on the scene, won the bids to build big dams at Kajakai and Arghandab.

Now, having built the dams, the Afghans ran out of development money at that point. And they came to us and asked if we would help them realize the hydroelectric and irrigation benefits of these dams. And this was at a time when we were just beginning to look at aid projects in that region, and it appeared logical that this big investment they'd made should be considered. We started to assist them with hydroelectric and irrigation projects.

Also in the year 1955, Bulganin and Khrushchev, who at that time were the dual leadership in the Soviet Union, visited Kabul and offered a \$100-million dollar line-of-credit for Afghan development. This was a big deal. If you recall, the Cold War was hot and heavy at the time, and aid was seen as an area of competition between East and West. Therefore, we were very aware of the fact that the Soviets were coming into Afghanistan in a big way. As a matter of fact, you may recall the Soviets "paved the streets of Kabul." In reality they only paved a few of the streets of

Kabul. The Afghans used their equipment to pave some other ones. The latter did a miserable job; the first winter chopped up their work.

However, the Soviets got good publicity about their aid in the country. They built a huge grain elevator and milling complex just outside Kabul, which, interesting enough, the Afghans used for storing the wheat they acquired from us under Public Law 480. One way the Afghans promoted neutrality was to balance Soviet and American projects with each other whenever possible.

Our aid projects developed along an interesting line. With the irrigation system we needed engineers, Afghan engineers, and we discovered that their education system wasn't producing them. So the Americans established an entity called the Afghan Institute of Technology, AIT, which was a secondary-level school, not a tertiary level, to train Afghan irrigation engineers. USAID brought in the University of Wyoming under a contract to run the training. Then it was discovered that we didn't have enough English-language capability in Afghanistan to take on this new training burden. The decision had been made earlier that English had to be used because Persian or Pushtu, the two main languages of the country, were not adequate in that they didn't really contain the vocabulary for modern ideas, like hydroelectric or irrigation engineering, and we couldn't get American engineers to train in those languages anymore. Additionally, the Afghans being trained in that area should subsequently be able to follow journals written in English. So it was decided that English was necessary. Therefore, Columbia University Teacher's College was brought in under contract to develop teaching materials in English for Afghan English teachers in elementary and secondary education. And out of that grew an American involvement at Kabul University on the tertiary level which eventually ended with Americans being involved in education in all three levels in Afghanistan: primary, secondary, and tertiary. This, incidentally, indicated the high degree of trust the Afghans had for us. Of all foreign nationalities in the country, they appear to have liked and trusted Americans the most--and the fact that they allowed us into the most intimate aspects of their educational system indicated this trust.

As I said before, the country had no railroads, and almost no paved roads at all, except within the city of Kabul. Therefore we assisted them by building country airports, deciding to go on to the next stage of transportation which was aviation. Among their big airport projects was the one at Qandahar, which was designed for international flights. At this time, most airlines still had propeller-driven aircraft. The large jet planes, such as 707s, came along just after this project had started and, therefore, the Afghan hope that Qandahar be used for a stopping place on flights from Europe to Asia never came to be. Additionally, it was in competition with Karachi, and the Afghans would have had to depend on Pakistani cooperation in transporting fuel through Quetta to Qandahar. So Qandahar never really became a paying proposition for those reasons.

The American aid program, like the aid program of the Soviets and everybody else, suffered from a lack of the Afghan ability to absorb aid. It was difficult to negotiate agreements, and it was difficult to execute them, or to carry them out to completion. Additionally, we had shortages of local currency to pay for local labor and for local materiel. The Afghans had a very conservative monetary policy which led to a very sound currency, the Afghani, that was highly prized in Asia for hoarding purposes. The Afghani was sort of the Swiss franc of Asia, but the problem was there just weren't enough of them. Therefore, Public Law 480 was of great use to us

because, through the sale of U.S. foods, it generated currency like this for our use. The Soviets actually had to sell tea sets, books, and valuable consumer items in order to generate Afghani for their programs.

At that time too, the sociological structure of Afghanistan was of interest to us. There had been very little done on this by scholars and, therefore, we in the embassy were encouraged to report through the old despatch system on such topics as the role of women, the operation of Islamic law, and other scholarly topics. In those days women were veiled by law, and indeed this was a very sensitive situation. We who lived in the country were concerned that were there to be a rapid change in this requirement, you could possibly have violence. In 1928, King Amanullah was overthrown in a violent revolution, among other reasons, because his wife was shown unveiled in public. Amanullah was trying to pursue a modernization program like Atatürk in Turkey, and he went a little too fast.

When we left Afghanistan in May of 1959, the veil was still required by law. Da'ud had it lifted in August of 1959, just shortly after we left, and there was some violence here and there in the country, but it went rather well. That is, that the veil was no longer required by law, but a large number of women still elected to wear it. Indeed when we came back for our second tour in 1977, we were surprised how many women were still wearing the veil. Middle class women appeared to regard it as a sign of respectability. The poorest women usually didn't wear it, nor did the more sophisticated, Western-trained women. But middle-class women preferred it; they seemed to feel comfortable with it. When we talk of the veil, we mean a total burqa--or chadri--from the top of the head down to the ground.

Other interesting aspects of their society involved the relationships among Afghanistan's many ethnic groups. The two dominant groups are the Pushtuns and the Tajiks, who are Indo-Europeans. They speak eastern Indo-European languages, Farsi (or Dari, as some call it), and Pushtu.

There are Turkic-type peoples in the country, such as the Uzbeks and the Turkomen who are related to the peoples just over the Oxus River in the former Soviet Union.

There are Mongols in the center of the country, the Hazaras. The name Hazara means "thousand" in Persian. There are people who believe that they are the remnants of the occupation armies of Genghis Khan, whose Golden Horde was comprised of units of one thousand each. However, other scholars think the Hazaras were there a lot longer before Genghis Khan's time. After all, Genghis Khan invaded Afghanistan only 700 years ago, which is fairly recent history for that country.

There are also a few groups of Arabs around the country, although, as you know, the Semitic world ends at the Iraqi-Iranian border.

There are some people in the northeastern part of the country which used to be called Kafiristan ("Kafir means unbeliever"). Their land was renamed Nuristan, the Land of Light, after they were forcibly converted to Islam in the 19th century. They are also Indo-European. They believed themselves to be descendants of Alexander the Great's armies. However, it was not unusual to

find blond, very European type people among the Tajiks as well. I visited one village, for example, where the people looked like English persons, they were so Indo-European.

Q: In a way this isn't so much a briefing about Afghanistan. I'm trying to capture as much about your dealings and perspectives.

FLATIN: I was in the political section in Kabul from 1957 to 1959. This was my initial junior assignment, and I rotated through the economic section and the admin section--and did some work in the consular section as well. From the viewpoint of U.S. national interests, we saw many things in the country as linked. Obviously the economic and aid programs were of great interest from the political viewpoint because of their effect on the Afghan political scene and our relationship with the Soviet Bloc. Other Soviet Bloc countries, such as Czechoslovaks and the Poles, were at that time involved in aid in the country too, albeit on a smaller scale.

Q: I think we've covered some of this in the last one.

FLATIN: Are you interested in any of the sociological aspects such as Qasas or the feudal system?

I took a year of Persian, and went back to Afghanistan. I went there as political counselor in 1977.

Q: You were there from when?

FLATIN: '77 to '79, exactly 20 years after our first assignment.

Q: What was the political situation at that time when you went there?

FLATIN: Prince Da'ud had been squeezed out of power after we left the first time, and his cousin (and brother-in-law), the king, appeared to take over more in his own right as leader of the country. This was rather surprising for those of us who had been there earlier because we always had the impression the king was more or less under Da'ud's influence. Da'ud was out of office for most of the '60s, but then he came back in a revolution in 1973 where he unseated the king, and created a republic with himself as president. Helping him in this revolution were certain left-wing elements, such as the Khalq and Parcham branches of the communist party of Afghanistan.

So when I arrived on the scene again in 1977 (twenty years after the beginning of my first tour of duty in that country), Da'ud had just held a loya jirga which is a large special-purpose national assembly which had called to create a constitution for this new government. He had waited quite a time to do this. It was clear to the leftist elements when they looked at this constitution, that they were going to be squeezed out of any real influence. In fact, Da'ud planned to create a one-party system. The party was going to be called the Party of the National Revolution, PNR. Da'ud by this time was getting a little senile, he was a little slow on the uptake of how to handle this complex business. The party was being created, but Da'ud had to pass upon every member. At

the time of the Afghan revolution in April 1978, only 41 people had been approved for the PNR party--so you can see that the pace that he developed wasn't fast enough.

Da'ud was regarded by the Afghans themselves throughout the country as just like another king. He called himself the President of the Republic, but as a member of the royal family who had seized power, he could have easily called himself king. I think most people in the country had the concept that he was king.

Da'ud was trying to continue his modernization programs for the country, but you just can't believe the inertia he had to overcome. It was just incredible. Things just were not done. During the whole time before the revolution, for example, we kept discussing with his education ministry where we were going to place a women's dormitory for the university--and what it was going to be like. There were constant discussions about the women's dormitory, for which one brick was never put upon another.

We were going to build schools in their country. We thought one way to get them done was to have the Afghans build the school first and then we'd give the money after we inspected it. There were about 200 schools which were to be built under the system; and I don't think any more than three were built. In one case one of our engineers from AID went out to a stone building they had built, and he physically tore the building apart with his bare hands because of the cheap mortar holding the stones together. The Afghans were dismayed, and he said, "The U.S. Government certainly couldn't certify a building like this to be safe for children."

Projects were either never built, or they were built inadequately. It was like our history of our aid program during our first tour. We never spent all the money we had available for aid in Afghanistan because of the inability of the Afghans to absorb it.

Politically, Da'ud ran the country with a one-man type of rule. He would head cabinet meetings at which people would make reports; he would make no comment, just look impassively at them. From time-to-time he'd whisper something to an aide on his side which presumably was an instruction to be carried out. It wasn't clear to his cabinet what he'd said. There was still a certain amount of fear on the part of people as to what he would do if he became dissatisfied with them. This carried over from the earlier time when people with whom he had lost patience simply disappeared. At the same time, he appeared to be giving inadequate guidance. The country was being inadequately guided at that time and it was clear that the man was not any longer up to it. He didn't have enough energy to found and run this new republic of his properly. There was dissatisfaction everywhere.

Then the events leading up to the 1978 revolution occurred. The Parcham and Khalq wings of the Afghan communist party, who had been feuding with each other, reached some type of agreement in 1977 which enabled them to work more in unison because they knew they were being squeezed out by Da'ud's new government, even though they had participated in bringing it about. And in the early part of 1978, a labor leader was killed. That man had been leading the first strike in Afghan history, an aviation strike. Not too long after that an important communist ideologue, Mir Akbar Khyber, was shot. There followed a parade of leftist demonstrators, protesting his being killed. This group of demonstrators, numbering over 2,000, passed our

embassy and in very well-organized fashion hurled curses against the U.S., somehow identifying us with his passing.

This was our first look at the Afghan communist party. As we said at the time, it was like watching the Loch Ness monster rising out of the water. We were able to see the nature of this large and well-organized movement for the first time. What had been as often described in rumors was at last in the open. A West German police officer, who was then a police adviser to the Afghan Ministry of the Interior, told me that the same weapon was used to kill Khyber, the communist leader, as had been used earlier to kill the striking pilot union leader. That fact indicated that both killings may have been a government-type assassination.

The Da'ud regime appeared to be shocked by the events that followed the murder of Khyber. They started to arrest members of the communist politburo. They were ineffective at doing this; they didn't get all of them. That was unfortunate for the Da'ud regime, because the revolution itself then broke out during the time they were arresting these people.

The morning of the revolution was rather interesting. The night before we had had our Marine party, and Ted Eliot, who was our ambassador, told me...

Q: ...November 10th?

FLATIN: No, this was in April of 1978. Ted Eliot, on the Thursday night before Friday (Juma, the Muslim holy day), had told me that he'd like to send a cable out as soon as possible discussing the arrest of the politburo members. So I went into the embassy the following morning; this would ordinarily be a non-working day. I was working on the cable when my secretary came into the office, disturbed because she and a friend had wanted to go to the Kabul Gorge for a picnic, and she had been stopped by troops at the Pul-i-Charkhi tank base on the way to the gorge. She said they were very firm and wouldn't let her go by. There had been heavy rains the previous evening. I wondered whether there were some road erosion problems that they were concerned about. Then she explained they were wearing helmets and were fully armed; that struck me as being a little bit more serious than a case of troops just guarding a road.

I asked my deputy, Jim Taylor, to go out and check the roadblock situation, and I talked to the ambassador about it. We decided we should also send the military attaché down there to take a professional look. These two U.S. officers were stopped. It was clear that a major force was coming into being, that it was preparing to launch some type of operation. Indeed, very shortly thereafter a tank force broke loose from that base and came into Kabul at high speed. It took over key intersections, sent a few shells through the Ministry of Defense building, and got engaged in a fire fight with the loyal troops of Da'ud. The latter did not appear effective at dealing with this tank force. The invading force were quickly successful in taking key government buildings in the central part of town. It wasn't until they got to the other side of Kabul that they ran into a stiffer resistance on the part of the loyalist forces of Da'ud. They were able to get to the prison where the politburo members were being held, and liberated them. Many were puzzled why Da'ud hadn't dealt with these people beforehand. The usual Afghan practice would have been they would go from cell to cell to shoot these prisoners. The important party leadership, therefore, was freed by the communist troops early in the conflict--and led them to victory.

We had heavy fighting all over Kabul, much of it around our embassy. Our embassy, unfortunately, is across the street from the radio and television complex. This leads us to exposure whenever there's an attempt to takeover power. Our embassy at Kabul has a little fort-like structure on its roof--sort of a concrete Fort Laramie where we keep our burn boxes. There's a parapet wall, behind which we could get a good view of everything going on in Kabul. From there we saw much of the battle.

We kept our embassy flag up that night, thinking that with the spotlights on it we would be clearly identifying it as the American embassy so the fighting parties wouldn't target us. However, I still remember that later that night we were watching a group of helicopters hanging north of the embassy, launching red rockets at the downtown part of Kabul. I next saw a triangular shape coming across the face of the moon on the other side of the embassy and realized it was a MiG jet making a turn up there. It launched four rockets right at our roof. We ducked, and the four rockets streaked over, barely missed the back edge of our embassy roof, and demolished the house behind us. Our Air Attaché, who was up in our fort opined that the plane clearly saw the American flag; he thought that there was no doubt that the pilot knew what he was shooting at. We then took down our flag and turned off the lights.

Q: Why were elements of the army on the side of the communists?

FLATIN: Because many army leaders had been trained in the Soviet Union. Going back to the 1950s, you will recall, there was the Eisenhower Doctrine through which we were offering defense support to various countries in the Middle East following the Suez war of 1956. The Afghans were not invited to participate in this. The United States Government, for a number of reasons, had avoided much involvement with the development of the Afghan armed forces. One reason was that Afghanistan was geographically beyond our ability to project power realistically. We also made it clear to the Soviets we did not intend to challenge them in that region. From the viewpoint of the Soviets, Afghanistan would be like Mexico for us; it was right on their southern border. You will recall, we were very touchy about Mexico when the French went in there during the Civil War.

Also, the Afghans suspected that we would favor the Pakistanis in such regional confrontations as the Pushtunistan dispute to the point where we certainly wouldn't be interested in developing Afghan military strength to deal with Pakistan. We ourselves did not believe it was in our joint interest to be involved with them militarily. The Afghans then decided to use the USSR to a large degree as a place to train Afghan military personnel and obtain military hardware. In fact, they already had MiG-15s when I was there in the 1950s.

Now, not all people being trained in the Soviet Union necessarily became pro-communist, but certainly some of them did. Therefore, there were elements of the army who were very convinced communists. Other elements were not. The 1978 revolution involved a lot of heavy fighting between communists and non-communist elements. Indeed there were still mutinies after the communists took over. The revolution took about two or three days to secure Kabul, but much of the country remained beyond communist control. Indeed, as the situation developed you saw the Mujahideen resistance created almost immediately after the revolution. They were

already fighting communist forces within weeks. Some soldiers and entire military units went over to the Mujahideen side. The military situation was mixed from the very beginning phase of the "Great Saur Revolution."

Q: How did we see this thing happening? Was this considered a terrible threat to our side? Or was this seen as a local...from the embassy's point of view?

FLATIN: To begin with the people who took over were from two leftist factions who called themselves the Khalqis and the Parchamis. Khalq means "masses" and Parcham means "banner." The Khalqis and the Parchamis had an early falling out. The latter leaders were exiled to diplomatic posts throughout the world. The new leaders did not use the term "communist" at first. They called themselves the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. They went through an early phase during which they called each other "comrade," and then they stopped doing that. There was an attempt on the part of Washington to not rush at trying to label this new regime because we had USAID programs going in the country and we wanted to see how the new regime would sort itself out. But then when the new regime eventually came up with a constitution it was clearly a communist document.

The first dictator was a man named Taraki, a man who was sort of a figurehead. The real leader was a man named Hafizullah Amin, who was his number two man. Amin eventually killed Taraki in September of 1979, and took over sole power. Amin, who had studied at Columbia University at our expense, was definitely a convinced communist. Amin tried to push communization of the country too rapidly. This exacerbated the Mujahideen reaction throughout the country and was, therefore, a concern to the Soviets. The Soviets kept trying to get Amin to "broaden the political base," but he kept trying to push communist advances too quickly. He moved ahead on many fronts which are very sensitive. He pushed ahead with "land reform" which had the effect of disrupting Afghan agriculture. He disrupted the economic credit system for agriculture. Amin also got involved with family life by trying to get rid of barbaric codes, and medieval customs dealing with women. This enraged the men of Afghanistan.

We were trying our best to deal with these people. I'll give you an example: the Khalqis talked about the need for land reform. Washington instructed us to tell them that the U.S. Government had also long been interested in advancing land reform in Afghanistan. We had urged it in the past. If they were now interested, we would be willing to send some of their people to the University of Wisconsin where there was a special land reform program. We also then had a land reform expert with AID who was currently at that time working in East Africa. We offered to move him to Afghanistan to advise them. The Khalqis thanked us very much for our offer, but never responded. We tried to keep our other AID programs going. We kept talking about building the girls' dormitory at the university, but nothing happened. All the other programs we tried to keep moving just became bogged down, largely through the disinterest of the central government.

The important point to note is that many who supported this revolution originally were not necessarily communists. A lot of people had wanted to get rid of the Mohammedzai clan who had run the country for 200 years; they were relieved to get rid of this elite royal class. Additionally not all people who were communists were necessarily anti-American. There were a

few communists in that government initially who were either neutral toward us or were quietly friendly towards us. They were weeded out eventually. Anybody so identified was dealt with harshly, but initially it wasn't all that unfriendly.

However, when our ambassador was murdered, then the break occurred and we terminated our programs.

Q: When was Spike Dubs...how did that happen? Were you there at that time?

FLATIN: Yes. He was murdered on Valentine's day, 1979. I was at the embassy as political counselor meeting with Bruce Amstutz, the DCM, shortly before 9:00 a.m. to discuss the staff meeting we'd be holding at 9:00. The ambassador was not yet in. The security officer, and the ambassador's chauffeur burst into the DCM's office to announce that the ambassador had been "arrested by the Afghan government" and was being held at the Kabul Hotel.

Well, by this time in Kabul one could be paranoid enough not be surprised that an ambassador would be arrested by the host government. In other places that may strike you as being unusual, but in Afghanistan that was not a concept that was impossible to grasp. I told Bruce I'd go to the Kabul Hotel and call him from there. When I passed my office I told Jim Taylor, my deputy, where I was going and what had happened. His first reaction was, it must have been the human rights report. We'd just delivered it shortly before. It was not a very pleasant report. Once again, it may seem strange, but there it was not out of the question that such an unpredictable government would react in that kind of a fashion.

I traveled to the Kabul Hotel with a couple of other people from the embassy. We used the ambassador's car. I saw letters he had been prepared to post--and noted that he had been reading the New York Times. When we got there the hotel lobby was swarming with police and troops. We were told that terrorists had seized the Ambassador. They had one down in the lobby as a prisoner, and the other ones--they didn't tell me how many there were--were up in a room with the Ambassador on the second floor. (The original report stated that four men had seized the Ambassador.) It struck us as odd that the terrorists would come to a hotel in the center of town to hole up with the Ambassador. Soviet embassy people were there as well. I was talking to the Soviet official, and the Afghan police and military leadership on the scene. They told me that these people were demanding the release of some anti-regime people in return for Ambassador Dubs--specifically a man named Yunus Khalis.

The important point to note is that we Americans never ever had any direct contact with the people holding the Ambassador. Everything we knew, about who was holding him, and what they wanted, was through the Afghan communist leadership and the Soviets. This is an important point. We brought up our embassy doctor, ambulance, nurse, and the ambassador's blood type--just to be ready in case there were problems with his being injured. We wanted to make certain we could take care of him right away.

In the meantime Bruce Amstutz, the DCM, got in contact with the Department and was told that Secretary of State Vance wanted to ensure that the Afghans did not do anything precipitous--and that they should negotiate with the people holding the ambassador and not do anything that

would in any way bring about any danger to the ambassador. We conveyed this message frequently at the hotel. The DCM was trying to reach Foreign Minister Hafizullah Amin. We sent officers out trying to find him like process servers. He was not available anywhere, and couldn't be reached on the telephone.

At the hotel, I kept telling the police that our embassy was trying to reach Hafizullah Amin with a special message from Secretary of State Vance urging that there be no precipitous action. This was the theme we repeated all morning. I was assured by the Afghans and the Soviets that they would not endanger the Ambassador. I was assured they were going to do their best to negotiate. I said that we would like to get someone up to the second floor to talk to the Ambassador, so we could reassure him that things were going all right. They did not respond to this initially, but later at a certain point a Soviet officer came up to me--the Soviet I'm referring to was a person whom I knew to be a Soviet security type. He asked me, "What languages does your Ambassador know besides English?" I replied, "His best language, of course, is Russian." He responded, "Besides Russian?" I said, "He knows German rather well." He asked, "Do you know German?" When I replied that I did, he went away.

Then a little later, the chief Afghan police official came up to me and he said, "Would you please come upstairs with me?" This was finally the moment to see what the situation was upstairs. He said, "We'd like to have you talk to your ambassador in German so that the people inside the room will not be able to understand what's being said." I replied, "Fine." As we walked down the hallway, I could see a group of troops and police outside this one room. I noted that the suite next to it was open too. I asked, "Do you want me to talk through the wall from this suite on the other side?" The police official replied, "No, its best if you talk right through the door into the suite where the Ambassador is being held." When I looked at this keyhole through which he wanted me to talk, I could imagine myself swallowing a bunch of bullets. I said, "Are you sure the people inside the room have agreed to this procedure?" And he replied, "Yes." I said, "I want to hear you once again talk to them to hear their agreement." So he talked to them and they appeared to have agreed that this embassy political officer could talk to the Ambassador. (I suppose his captors were assuming this was going to be in English, because it was an American officer who would be talking to the Ambassador.)

And when that was made clear, I knelt by the keyhole, and I said in German, "Good morning, Mr. Ambassador. How is it with you?" And the Ambassador replied in a strong voice, "I am all right." Then the police instructed, "Now ask him what kind of weapons they have." So I asked, "What kind of weapons do they have?" The Ambassador started to answer but unfortunately in his German he used words close to "pistol" and "revolver." By that time, his captors caught on to the fact that English was not being used, and they ordered, "Stop this conversation! We won't stand for any tricks. There'll be no further conversation." The Ambassador then remained silent. The police tried to get the captors to loosen their controls, but they refused to let any more conversation continue.

Then the police official said to me, "Tell your Ambassador that exactly ten minutes from now he's either to try to go to the bathroom, or he is to fall to the floor." I replied, "Just a minute, I want to talk to you elsewhere." So we went down to a cross hallway where I said, "We've spent the whole morning telling you that we don't want any precipitous action here, and you're now

telling me to help you light a fuse that's going to go off in exactly ten minutes." I said, "I want to repeat once again that we're trying to find Foreign Minister Amin to deliver an urgent request from Secretary Vance that there be no attack on this room." He shrugged his shoulders, and muttered, "I have my orders."

So then I went to the Soviet security officer, and I said, "Once again, I want to tell you that we have said this many times that we don't want any precipitous action here." The Soviet then talked to the Afghans and that particular raid appeared to have been called off.

But later in the morning, I'd say about an hour and a half later, it was clear they had received an order to hit the room. They got prepared. The Soviets came forward and provided some with some special weaponry. They had police and troops on a building across the street who were responding to hand signals from the Soviets in our building. At a certain point there was a loud shot and then a gun fight lasted exactly 40 seconds; I checked this with my watch. That's a long time. The floor just shook with the gun fire coming from the hallway where I was standing and from the bank building across the street into the room.

When the whole thing was over there could not have been one cubic centimeter in that room that didn't have a bullet pass through it. A gnat flying in that room would have been hit.

Other Americans had in the meantime come up the stairs and were on the opposite side from this cross corridor with me, and they had the stretcher. When the initial burst of firing stopped we were ready to go to the room with the stretcher, and the Afghans told us to wait a minute. Then there were four more loud shots. Then we were told to come.

When we looked in the room, the room had water all over the floor because the gunfire had shot up the radiator. There were some two or three inches of water on the floor. The Ambassador was slumped in a chair against the wall, but one-half of his body was wet as though he had been lying on the floor. He was taken out on the stretcher, clearly dead. He had many bullet holes in him. There were two men in the room; they were brought out and dumped at my feet. One was probably dead, and the other one looked definitely dead; they were taken away.

The third man they had held as a prisoner, who appeared to be a confederate of theirs and had been used from time to time to talk to them through the door, was held nearby in the hallway--as alive as you are. They put a brown bag over his head and took him away screaming and kicking.

Then I went downstairs and saw the police official in charge and said, "I just want you to know our Ambassador is dead." He's the one who had kept assuring me that if anything happened there would be a very small chance of any problem. He said, "I'm very sorry." He did not sound very convincing.

I went back to the embassy then and after about a hour I got a call from the Afghan authorities asking me if I wanted to come to the military hospital to see the dead bodies. So I went there with the security officer and our consular officer. We were brought into a hallway where there were four nude, dead bodies on the concrete floor.

I should point out, incidentally, that one of the earlier reports, including that of the Ambassador's driver, was that four people had seized the Ambassador. One of our USAID wives thought that she saw four people going into the hotel with him. One of these people, incidentally, was reportedly in a police uniform. He was said to have stopped the Ambassador's chauffeured car in front of the USIS building. So, since we were told there were four men, they apparently thought they had to account for this number. As I told you, there were only two "captors" in the room, and both were now definitely dead. The man who was just as alive as you are with a brown bag over his head was now dead too. He had contusions all over his body, and was turning greyish blue. Then there was a fourth person whom I had never seen before in my life lying there. The police colonel, who was showing us this display, said, "These are the four men shot in the room during the shoot-out." He and I had been standing together in the hallway, outside the room. He knew perfectly well what we'd seen--but this was going to be their official story.

The Ambassador's body was then brought by our medical crew and ambulance to the American AID compound, where they brought him into the dispensary. Afghan troops then entered the AID compound in violation of our diplomatic status. When we complained about it, they said they were in there to "protect" the Ambassador. We were very concerned that they would try to seize the body. The White House, responding to the situation, sent a special plane from Washington. We let the Afghans know that it was on the way to pick up the body. So they didn't press us any further inside the compound.

The body was brought back here to Washington for autopsy at Walter Reed. There were many bullets in the body, but the ones that caused death were .22 caliber bullets in the brain, about four of them. The official Afghan incident report to us, in the form of a diplomatic note, had listed weapons found in the room -- and none of them were .22 calibre. And as you know, police and troops don't use .22 caliber, but certain types of official security agency assassins do use .22 caliber as a favorite weapon.

Q: More an assassination type.

FLATIN: Anyhow, this became a focus of ours. We insisted on seeing these weapons taken from the room, and they promised us we could. We went after this issue time and time again. It must have been ten or eleven different times we insisted upon this in notes and personal conversations. (Bruce Amstutz became our Chargé, and I became acting DCM.) Whenever we saw Foreign Minister Amin or any other appropriate official, this subject would be raised and we would receive slippery answers. On one occasion Amin told us, "We have all kinds of weapons we pick up here throughout the city for various crimes all the time." We were apparently to get the impression that weapons were being thrown in some coal bins somewhere, and who could tell which weapons were which anymore.

In June of 1979, we sent a note to the Afghan Foreign Ministry telling them the results of the autopsy at Walter Reed, and, in essence, telling them they were liars, and challenging them to give us a straight account as to what really happened--in view of the fact that their original note was incorrect. It had conveyed false information. Well, we never got an answer to that note. That was the end of that subject from their viewpoint. We also discussed this with the Soviets who drew the obvious conclusion that we were saying the Afghans had murdered the Ambassador.

Therefore, you couldn't help but reach the conclusion that his death certainly seemed to involve the responsibility of the Afghan government, and probably the Soviets--but it always puzzled us as to why they would do it.

Q: One can say obviously they were involved, but what the hell was in it?

FLATIN: Some people said it was because Spike Dubs was a Soviet expert, and the Soviets wanted him out of the way before they went into the next phase of their Afghan adventure. But that made no sense, because we have many Foreign Service experts on the USSR who could have been assigned there. He was not the only Soviet expert we had.

Q: I served with him in Yugoslavia.

FLATIN: Others said it was because they wanted to terminate our relationship with Afghanistan. And, indeed, that did happen. It did terminate the AID relationship, but that wouldn't have made any sense either, because if I were the Soviets I wouldn't give a damn if Americans were shoving money down that rat hole. I didn't see any communist purpose served by getting us out of our AID programs there. Whatever the reason, he was dead. It was a hardball game there. This occurred, as I said, on Valentine's day 1979. Our bilateral relationship went steeply downhill from that point onward.

The Mujahideen reaction, as I mentioned before, started right after the revolution and got worse and worse for the regime. We reported that huge amounts of military materiel were being brought in the country. Far more tanks were brought into Afghan tank parks than there were tank crews in the Afghan army. At the same time the Afghan government army was melting away, as we described in our messages, "like an icefloe in a tropical sea." Entire units were deserting to the Mujahideen. Therefore, the Russians had to face this manpower leak. Something had to be done to give the regime replacement manpower. We were evaluating what the Soviets were going to do along these lines. There were people who said maybe they'll bring in Cubans. We said, "No, that wouldn't make any sense." Soviets then started to beef up their strength in the country with Soviet forces. They actually took over military installations, such as the big air base at Bagram, north of Kabul. It was put under direct Soviet military control. Then things really got rough on the political scene.

In September, Amin killed Taraki in a botched attempt on the part of the latter to eliminate Amin. It appears that Taraki was more favored by the Russians, and the Russians had hoped that Amin could be eliminated. Something went wrong in this bloody encounter. The Soviet ambassador was physically present at the palace when this happened. Amin was the one who survived, and Taraki was the one who died. Therefore, the Soviets now had a dangerous man who was clearly alerted to their hostility--although he was a convinced communist. Things became very tense toward the end of 1979. At Christmas time, Soviet special forces came into Kabul, where they killed Amin themselves. Other Soviet units joined Soviet forces already in the country -- and launched a direct assault against the Mujahideen.

Q: When did you leave?

FLATIN: I left at the end of November.

Q: At that time it sounds like our relations were in absolute tension.

FLATIN: Yes. I should point out that we had a security committee that met every day at 9:00 a.m. to decide whether or not we should evacuate. Our decision was based upon the safety of our evacuation routes. We only had two ways out of Kabul; either to go overland through the Khyber Pass to Pakistan, or to fly out of Kabul from Kabul airport. Therefore, we decided in our security committee that should we lose either of those two routes, we'd immediately use the remaining route to evacuate our women and children--and least essential personnel.

Q: How would you lose them?

FLATIN: Well, I'll tell you how we lost the route to the Khyber Pass. We started to have Europeans being attacked as they drove that road. The incident that decided us was that a French car was shot up on the road near the Kabul Gorge. It was a very demanding trip to go from Kabul down to the Khyber Pass, even in the best of times. One tough feature was a switchback road called the Kabul Gorge. Kabul is on a high plateau 6,000 feet above sea level. In order to get to the city from this desert valley, coming from the Khyber Pass, you climb on a switch-back road, going higher and higher. You're like a sitting duck in a shooting gallery. Anybody who doesn't want you to go up or down that road could pick you off very easily. Once it became clear that Europeans were also being shot on this road, we decided that we had lost that route. So we evacuated our women and children at the end of June and beginning of July of 1979. Next, we drew up three different lists of the embassy people who were the least essential, the next essential group, and then the most essential group, who were to turn off the lights as they left.

The evacuation went off very well. You see we had just had that evacuation problem next door in Iran. Our embassy at Tehran had been taken over earlier, also on Valentine's Day, in 1979 (it was taken twice that year). The first time it was taken over, if you recall, they evacuated our people in a very ragged evacuation. For example, we had women coming from embassy Tehran arriving at Kennedy Airport missing one shoe. Others arrived carrying their valuables in pillow cases. Well, we had every single one of our Americans leave Afghanistan safely in an organized fashion, with suitcases, on regular airliners. We had absolutely not one single scratch. It was a successful evacuation. We drew down our embassy to a bare-bones strength. By the time I left the country we had very few people left there--and no wives.

Q: How did we regard Mujahideen. I'm talking of the time you were there. We want to stick to that. Did we sort of watch it with a benevolent eye, or did we have contact?

FLATIN: Well, we certainly would officially deny any contact with the Mujahideen. Indeed, the regime accused us at that time of providing them with arms, and we denied it. This is in 1979, before the Soviets finally came in with their full forces. We portrayed ourselves as observers. Everybody was certainly interested in the developing spread of the Mujahideen uprising. We reported what was going on, and did not at that time maintain direct contacts in the Mujahideen leadership. We couldn't move outside the city of Kabul. It was unsafe if you were to go

anywhere in the country. The roads were subjected to Mujahideen activity all around the city. Mujahideen would come out of the mountains just west of Kabul, and frequently cut off the road going down to Qandahar.

Q: I'm talking about when you left in November of '79, how did you see this thing playing out?

FLATIN: We had long reported that the regime would be unable, in the final analysis, to maintain enough military personnel strength to save itself. Our reporting indicated that if it was going to be saved, it would have to be saved through some augmentation of personnel. That augmentation finally came in terms of the Soviet incursion of December 1979. Otherwise, the Khalqi revolution would have gone down the tubes. Remember, I said that entire military units were then going over to the Mujahideen side.

One incident I remember very vividly involved an army garrison in the eastern part of the country near the Pakistani border, surrounded by Mujahideen. It was cut off, with this constant sniping going on, but it was being supplied from time to time by helicopter. Then one day, the army commander in this besieged fortress asked for the district communist leader and his Soviet advisor to fly in more weaponry. He also wanted the top district Khalqi and Soviet leadership to come in for a conference. When these helicopters landed, the troops in the besieged fortress took the communist district governor and the Soviet advisor as prisoners. They turned them over to the surrounding Mujahideen. It turned out that the communist government garrison had decided to defect to the Mujahideen who had been surrounding them--and their last act was to entrap as much of the district leadership and get as much weaponry and ammunition in as possible. That whole garrison unit then became a Mujahideen unit.

The Mujahideen were very tough, you know. Once I remember, a convoy of trucks coming up to Kabul from Qandahar in the south was stopped by Mujahideen, and taken prisoner. In fact, this was an interesting engagement where Mujahideen cavalry was involved. The Mujahideen tried to disable escort tanks by firing into their barrels and blowing up the shell in the barrel.

They brought their captives, including Afghan truck drivers, up to some tents on the side of the mountain. The Mujahideen commander went into this one tent where the civilian truck drivers were, and issued a strong invitation to join the Mujahideen forces. Then he left the tent. One of the truck drivers commented to his buddies that he didn't think that was a good idea to join the Mujahideen, and he certainly didn't want to. Whereupon Mujahideen, who had been listening outside, came into the tent and pulled him out and shot him outside the tent. Everybody decided to join the Mujahideen at that point.

Or the Mujahideen would stop buses on a road to "cleanse" them from all Khalqis. Once I remember they stopped the bus, got aboard the bus, and started to argue with an old mullah sitting near the front of the bus. (Incidentally, I should mention they were dressed as Afghan government soldiers.) They berated this mullah as being from the old order and a blood sucker of the people--and gave him a generally rough time. And then they said, "How many real Khalqis are on this bus?" And two or three people put up their hand, and they were immediately brought out and shot. Then they apologized to the mullah for having used him for this purpose, and then

they gave the driver a chit which said the bus had been “cleansed of Khalqis,” and the bus was able to go on its way. The bus driver could show the chit to other Mujahideen roadblocks.

We also started running into trouble on the roads. We used to ship our household effects from the embassy back to Europe overland through Iran and Turkey. Some of these shipments were ending up arriving in Europe full of bullet holes. Our people complained that there were bullet holes in their mirrors, rugs, and other household effects. The reason for this damage was the way the Mujahideen stopped the convoys. They didn't just simply swoop down and point their weapons. They would instead rain the trucks with gunfire. That would be their way of ordering the trucks to stop. Therefore, we had to shift to air shipments for our people out of Kabul from that time onwards because it was just impossible to send anything overland through the country. The Mujahideen never made any attempt to contact us at the embassy. And each Mujahideen unit had its own agenda. As you know some Afghans are Shiites and some are Sunnis; therefore, some of their Mujahideen would shoot at each other. There were these different ethnic differences that made a big difference. The communist leadership, like that of the earlier royal regime, were Pushtun, not Tajik. Your tribal affinity in Afghanistan is all important.

I'll give you an example. Najibullah, the last communist dictator, supposedly is still being given refuge in the UN compound at Kabul. (He may be elsewhere.) His Ahmadzai tribal affinity is so important that when he was deposed in Kabul, his tribe said they wanted him back--and that they didn't want him hurt. They made it clear that if he were hurt they'd come up to Kabul and take retribution. Your tribal affinity in Afghanistan is far more important than to be known as an "Afghan," per se. (Note: Najibullah, who was unfortunate enough to be in Kabul when it was subsequently taken by the Taliban, was hanged in public.)

JAMES E. TAYLOR
Political Officer
Kabul (1977-1980)

James E. Taylor was born in Oklahoma in 1938. He graduated from the University of Southern California in 1960. He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1961-1965 and entered the Foreign Service in 1965. His career included positions in Iran, Germany, the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, and Israel. Mr. Taylor was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on December 5, 1995.

Q: You left Moscow and where did you go?

TAYLOR: Kabul.

Q: This is December 13, 1995. Jim you came back and took language training first?

TAYLOR: We left Moscow in the summer of 1976 and came back here for about five months TDY language training in Dari, which is the Afghan dialect of Persian or Farsi that is spoken in

Iran. The languages are very similar. The only differences are a few linguistic nouns and the accent. It is very much like American English and British English in differences.

Q: Here you are an old Moscow hand, what attracted you towards Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: Well, Personnel. We were, for a long time, a tandem couple, and didn't have that much flexibility in terms of what you can try to push for. So, Kabul was one post that came up with both USIA personnel and State personnel appropriate assignments for my wife and me. It wasn't as if we knew anything about Afghanistan or were attracted to it, but that was a post that came open, so we took it.

Q: I am thinking a decade later, but when you were in Moscow, had Afghanistan been even a blip on your radar at the time? Were people talking about Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: No. There were no events up until that time that would have attracted anybody's attention in Afghanistan from any point of view. It was just fortuitous that we happened to be there when all of the events that everyone knows occurred and the Soviets became extremely involved and eventually militarily invaded the country. And also it was just by accident that Spike Dubs, who was the DCM in Moscow, himself an old Soviet hand and Eastern European expert, was named Ambassador to Afghanistan after the first communist coup in 1978. Some people believed that was one of the reasons he was murdered, because he was too much an expert on Soviet affairs. I don't believe that is the case, but some people believe that theory.

Q: First place, talking about your Dari training. Sometimes taking these courses you learn quite a bit about the country just from your teachers. Did you get any feel about Afghanistan from the course you were taking?

TAYLOR: Yes, we did. Our language instructor was an Afghan who had been in the States five or six years. He came over as a student and married an American girl and stayed in the United States, got his green card and by now I am sure is an American citizen. But, at the time he was recently arrived from Afghanistan so he had a lot of stories to tell us in English when we would break and get away from the Dari. He spoke about life there, what one could expect, how one behaves, etc. So we learned quite a bit from him. The area studies, however, associated with Dari and Afghanistan was South Asia and they lumped Afghanistan in with India and Pakistan. Of course, India and Pakistan tended to dominate the intellectual and scholarly discussions and presentations from area professors and senior officers. But a couple of times we got presentations specifically oriented toward Afghanistan. One of the more colorful Afghan experts of the time was a fellow by the name of Louis Depree, who has since died. At that time he was probably the foremost scholar on Afghanistan and he was in Afghanistan at the time we were there and then came back to the States, and I think he was associated with Duke or North Carolina or one of the universities in North Carolina. He had written probably the basic textbook on Afghanistan, a 800 page tome that one had to wade through. He was a very colorful guy. I think every other word was a profanity of some kind. So, at cocktail parties and things of that sort he could raise a certain amount of interest.

Q: What was your job going to be and what was your wife's job going to be?

TAYLOR: I was going to be a political officer. We had three officers in the political section in Afghanistan. My wife was going to be the assistant cultural officer serving as director of the American Center in Kabul. So, given those two areas of specialty we met a lot of different people in different walks of life. We were able to sort of cross breed, if you will, the various contacts and areas of interest.

Q: When you arrived there, we are talking about early 1977, what was the situation in Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: Afghanistan had had a sort of palace coup in 1973. The king had been overthrown by his brother-in-law and cousin, a member of the family, if you will. The king had been exiled to Rome and the new ruler of Afghanistan in effect maintained many of the same policies, foreign policies as well as domestic. There had been very little change. Initially in 1973 there had been a growing, increased influence from the left. There was a communist party in Afghanistan although it didn't call itself that. But Muhammad Daud, the ruler who had overthrown his brother-in-law, the king, gradually reduced the influence of the left and by the time we got there Afghanistan was being ruled in a very traditional fashion with Kabul as a center of power but using provincial and tribal leaders as sort of the conduit of directives and policies coming out of the capital.

Q: Let's talk about the embassy at the time and what were our perceptions at the time.

TAYLOR: The embassy on the State side was relatively small, with two econ officers, three political officers and the usual two or three admin specialist. So that wasn't a terribly big mission. USIA had five or six officers so it was fairly big for the country. We had a very large AID and Peace Corps. Afghanistan was among the five poorest countries in the world. There wasn't a lot of money in AID but the Helmand River project had been in progress since the early fifties so that was an ongoing major AID project for the irrigation and control of the water of the Helmand River. It was one of AID's worldwide show places and really quite successful. But they were also, in those days, building schools, roads, health centers and infrastructure. They have gotten away completely from that now, of course. But at that time, that was their main operation. So we had AID people all over the country in small villages. The AID kind of person was entirely different in those days too. They were specialists in things like construction and irrigation, sewage systems and health. So the AID person was different from the more business oriented individual that you have in many of the AID operations these days.

Afghanistan was a sleeper post, but in the sense that there was a wonderful climate, it was about 7000 feet, Kabul we are talking about, had all four seasons of the year and was a very, very interesting country with a lot of history and varied cultures and you could travel quite easily. The ambassador was Ted Eliot who had been an economic officer in Tehran when I was there 10 years earlier. He encouraged us to get out of Kabul as much as possible. He recognized that Afghanistan wasn't the center of Washington's attention, but he tried to get everybody active and participating in the country and our efforts in Afghanistan in a bilateral sense.

We, in effect had the first year of our tour, from early 1977 to early 1978 under the old regime, the traditional rule of a government by the elite families called Pushtuns in Afghanistan and Pathans in Pakistan. These were the tribes that lived along the Pakistani border that gave the British so much trouble in three wars in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This Muhammad Zai clan had ruled Afghanistan for years and Muhammad Daud was a member of that clan. The view of the embassy and mission was that that would be the case, probably forever. There would be modifications one way or the other in policy, but there was virtually no anticipation of any great upheaval.

My particular responsibility was internal political affairs, assessment and analysis of internal political affairs in Afghanistan. And, so for that first year I was able to travel a great deal to all parts of the country.

Q: You say internal affairs and you say Muhammad Daud was a tribal leader, I would think for a political officer in a way to understand what was happening it would be much more difficult than in the normal sense where you read the party papers and talked to the party people, etc., but in the traditional society where the ruler is in effect sending off messages and getting together with various tribal chiefs, this is not a matter of public knowledge. It is done over coffee or by indirection. How do you tell who is doing what to whom?

TAYLOR: Well, that is a good point. It was very difficult because a lot of decisions would presumably be discussed in private. When it was made it was not necessarily announced publicly. Daud, the ruler, would call in these various subrulers out in the provinces and inform them of what the policy would be or what the decision had been and when it had been taken and what they were supposed to do. Sometimes, the way it normally worked, they would accept that and go about their business of implementing it up in the north or the south, etc.

Our ability to determine what was going on was limited a lot to looking at personnel changes, shifts in the cabinet, shifts in the sub-cabinet, rumors making the rounds in Kabul among our Afghan contacts. That kind of thing. We didn't have a whole lot of confidence that we knew what was going on although outwardly there were few signs of any kind of challenge from either direction, the extreme right or extreme left. We had virtually no contacts with the extreme left. That had been squashed by Daud soon after his coup in 1973 and accepted by the U.S. ambassadors. This ability of the host government to dictate U.S. contacts with potential opponents was very similar to what had happened in Iran under the Shah. The efforts of our CIA colleagues in Kabul were focused on Soviet affairs. Everybody knows that in the old days the way you made a career in the CIA was to focus on Soviet activities and recruit Soviet agents. It wasn't a focus on what was going on in Afghanistan because that had no interest for the professional intelligence operation, it was what the Soviets were doing.

Q: Could you talk about the Soviet presence and our view of what they were up to and what were American interests in Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: The Soviet activity in Afghanistan was perceived at that time as an effort to maintain the predominant position of influence that behooves a super power in a small country on its borders. This was perceived by the Soviets as a natural thing, that Moscow deserved primary

external influence over Afghanistan because of its location and relative size of the two countries. The means by which they did that were basically economic in those days rather than political. It was trade and economic aid. There was a great deal of activity especially in the north where there were large natural gas resources which were Afghanistan's major export at the time. Signs of any kind of subversive political efforts were not there. They simply exerted their influence by being the 800 pound gorilla right next door and Afghanistan had to sort of accept the facts of geography that that was the way it would be. Throughout history the Afghans have done their utmost to avoid dependence on any external power and this was basically directed at both the Russians over the centuries and the British in terms of British India and what eventually became Pakistan. But, within those constraints, the Afghans tried to be as independent as possible and were using us and other Western countries, the Germans had a small operation as counterweights. But basically your major external powers were the Soviet Union, India and Pakistan.

Q: How about Iran at that time?

TAYLOR: Iran under the Shah was again a natural power in the region but the Iranians played a reasonably aloof role. Afghanistan to the Shah was simply a country cousin. That is the way the Persians, Iranians considered the Afghans, as sort of mountain hillbillies, as best you could describe the attitude of the Iranians toward the Afghans.

Q: There wasn't meddling along the border as far as trying to bring tribal leaders into the Iranian orbit?

TAYLOR: No, not until after the Shah's fall did that begin to happen. All of this happened in 1979, the Shah fell, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and after those events, the Iranians under the new regime became very active in Afghanistan based primarily on their anti-communist, pro-Islam point of view. That was the reason that they wanted to overcome the Soviet rule in Afghanistan.

Q: Particularly though your wife's activities, I would have thought you came into contact with the intellectual society, those who were educated abroad. Did you get any feel for the newly emerging educated class?

TAYLOR: Well, we did to some extent. The American Center was really quite effective and an active place. The teaching of English was extremely popular. There were hundreds every day in the center learning English, using the library and, of course, mingling among themselves and bringing stories of what it was like at the universities. The universities under Daud were really very sensitive places. We weren't allowed to go out and just wander around universities and talk to people, to make contacts with professors, etc. So, if the students came to us that was one way you could pick up rumors and trends of attitudes among the university crowd and the young post-university crowd who were eager to learn English. Therefore, the Center was also able to provide openings to the intellectual professors and some of the professional people among the ministries who would come to activities at the Center. There would be cultural presentations, speakers coming out under USIA auspices who would go to Iran or India or Pakistan and then just stop by this mountainous backwater place in Afghanistan just to see it because it was a pretty exotic place that was off the beaten track. So, in that way we were able to establish contact with some

of educated, not only American educated, but Western European educated, Afghan emerging middle class, if you will, although the population was still by far a rural village population and with very few technocrats and educated specialists of that kind.

Q: Was there a sort of bazaari class?

TAYLOR: Yes. It was not nearly as potentially influential as the same kinds of people in Iran. Every city, of course, had a bazaar in it and the merchants and money changers were always local leaders in the economic sense and from that economic position would be able to exercise local political influence and leadership as well. But, we, in the embassy had little, if any, contact with the bazaari crowd. It was simply not something they would want or welcome and there weren't any means to work with them. Our econ guys who would be the ones to naturally deal with them focused mainly on the commercial side of those people who were dealing with the banks and the simple commercial operations, and not necessarily the bazaaaris but the Westerners, the guy who represented Mercedes or Air France, or somebody like that.

Q: How about with the military? At that point what was the Afghan military like and how did we deal with it?

TAYLOR: We had, I think there were four attachés, Army and Air Force attachés, and a few enlisted men supporting them, so it was about the right size, I suppose. The Afghan military since the fifties had been trained and equipped by the Soviets. Hundreds and thousands of Afghan officers had been taken to the Soviet Union for training in the use of this equipment and as it turned out, as we learned later, had also been indoctrinated. We had suspected there had been efforts in indoctrination, but we were unaware that the indoctrination had taken hold enough to the extent that it would lead to the coup of 1978 conducted by a bunch of youngish military officers who had been trained and subsequently at the same time indoctrinated by the Soviet Union. We were able to deal basically with the top leadership in the military and had virtually no contact with the younger officers, majors, captains, lieutenant colonels, who actually conducted the coup of 1978 and subsequently rose to positions of command under the new regime. So, we were dealing with the generals in Kabul and some of the major commands who were picked by Daud and would, of course, not have been prone to express negative views of the way things were going and were not likely to mount coups against the fellow who had in fact hand picked them for those particular positions. It is almost a classic example of how things operate in the third world.

Q: It is so difficult because in any country I am sure military attachés, including foreign military attachés in the United States, don't really get much contact with majors and captains and in some armies the generals don't really know what is going on with their majors and captains. Anyway, what was our impression of Daud during this period? What were you getting from the ambassador?

TAYLOR: The ambassador had the view that entire year that I was there that Daud was in control, knew what he was doing, was being very cautious in implementing any kind of reform programs. He had come in in 1973 on a reasonably ambitious reform program, land reform, education reform, reform for increased rights for women, etc. A lot of the programs that were

necessary to bring Afghanistan into the 19th century you could say. But, he had moved very, very slowly and the ambassador was of the opinion that Daud had everything under control, that there was no evidence than anybody was going to challenge him and that there was no reason not to support what he was doing through our programs, AID and the Peace Corps and a small military program amounting to training of about 20 people a year. There were no arms sales programs. So, in effect the ambassador was the one talking to Daud and he felt that Daud had things well in hand. So, that was our marching order. Again I point to Iran. I think my two experiences in Tehran and Afghanistan have led me to believe that sometimes ambassadors get so close to the ruler of whatever country they are serving in that they lose sight of potential problems, the potential demise of that ruler through his own mistakes or own shortsightedness or lack of foresightedness or whatever, and that they can misread situations completely. This is not done maliciously or on purpose, it is just the fact that they are the ones talking to the ruler and the ruler seems to have everything under control and if he tells him he has everything under control, who am I as the American Ambassador to disagree with him.

Q: Well, you reach the point where you could take the other side and say, "Ah, yes, it is quiet but.....," always waiting for something to happen and in effect undercutting your effectiveness with the ruler who may be around for 20 more years. If the ruler doesn't understand what is happening in his country, the American Ambassador is not necessarily going to be any better informed. It depends.

TAYLOR: Well, I recall there was an incident professionally in the embassy when probably two or three months before Daud was overthrown I drafted a paper about Daud's succession. He was in his late sixties and nobody knew about his health, but we thought it might be worthwhile putting a think piece out. I did the best I could to get some information about the status of the radical left. We knew pretty much the status of the right and the military and the intellectuals at the universities and the normal sources of challenges in the third world, but the left we had very little information on. But I wrote a paper that raised the possibility of a leftist attempt to take over based not on intelligence or information but mostly on what the situation was. The fact that here was this country that was dreadfully poor, dreadfully ignorant, and the elite ruling just about everything, all the economic and political aspects, it was just ripe for a big leftist takeover. These kinds of things happened in so many places in the sixties and seventies, that it was just ripe for the same kind of takeover. Then I also discussed the mullahs and the military and basically most people felt that if Daud were going to be overthrown it would probably be by a group of traditional military generals who felt that his reform programs were not going too slowly but too fast. But that paper never got out of the embassy. The ambassador said there wasn't any evidence of a leftist challenge which I admitted. We didn't have contacts with the left so how could we produce evidence. So, just discussing the left was an impossible effort and that paper never went anywhere.

Subsequent to the coup there was an interesting exercise the outcome of which I never heard. Somebody in Washington contacted the embassy in about June of 1978 and wanted to know why the embassy had never discussed the possibilities of a leftist takeover. The ambassador, to his credit, scrounged up everything that the station had been reporting, which was not very much, and this particular draft that I had done, and said he was going to send it all back to Washington. I presume he did and what happened to it I have no idea.

Q: Was there any evidence, while you were doing internal affairs, of discontent in the villages...unhappiness of the tribal chieftains or the mullahs off doing things they didn't like, etc.?

TAYLOR: No. Well, there were people obviously in poverty in a stricken country like that and unhappy with their lifestyle, but nothing that would indicate that they were ready for a popular uprising. I would like to stress that the coup against Daud in April, 1978 was not a popular uprising, it was a strictly military operation by a group of indoctrinated and dedicated leftists, young military officers, who were accompanied and supported by the Afghan leftist communist party, which had an infrastructure but it was not by any means a popular uprising from the villages among the poor. The Afghan communist party had been around for a long time and its basic leadership had been known for 30 years by both the Afghan government and security forces and us and just anybody else who paid attention to Afghanistan. The cadre, however, were mostly university students, university drop outs, people who had been exposed to a system where they were outcasts. They tried at the university, couldn't make it and became very, very hostile to the existing situation in Afghanistan, the political environment, and the fact that they had no future there. But, they were ambitious enough and young enough that they then gravitated toward the communist party and established contacts with the younger military officers who actually physically carried out the coup d'etat.

Q: I would like to have a personal account of what happens in a coup. What you were doing, what your wife did, what the embassy was doing, how you saw it and how it operates and the story of it.

TAYLOR: The spark that set it all off occurred the night before. The coup was on April 27, 1978. A couple of days before, one of the leaders of the communist party was gunned down in a part of Kabul where many of these people, sort of middle to upper middle class lived. He was gunned down by parties unknown. We subsequently learned that his senior colleagues in the communist party believed that it had been done by the regime and were very wary of what would be the next step by the regime. The next night, the night before the coup, Daud made a fatal mistake when he ordered the arrest of all of the leadership of the left for reasons that never became clear because he and all of his senior advisers didn't survive the coup itself. So, we don't know exactly why he sent out orders to arrest all of these people, but he did. In a general sweep that night, he got most of them but didn't get all of them. The ones who remained at large were able to establish contacts with the military members of the party who had this operation all planned. They were simply waiting for any kind of instructions to come down from the political leadership in the party. That occurred the next morning and it was carried out by two armored divisions that were stationed about ten miles east of Kabul. These were the best trained and best equipped armored divisions in the Afghan military. Presumably they were there for the government to protect itself against this kind of event.

So, Daud's palace guard was completely out gunned. Most of the palace guard remained loyal but they couldn't withstand a couple of armored divisions. So, militarily it wasn't much of a contest.

I recall I was in the embassy and it was a day off, we had a Thursday-Friday weekend in Afghanistan in those days. I was working on this paper I was talking about and got a call from my secretary, actually, who had been trying to take a picnic east of town down toward the Kabul gorge, to the very scenic area nearby. She said that there was some kind of unusual military activity going on out by the two armored division bases. I said okay and got one of the embassy vans and driver and headed out to see what I could see. I ran into roadblocks by regular army troops, heavily armed. They were not your normal traffic police or even security police who normally conducted these kind of things. These were regular army troops in combat gear and they seemed very, very nervous. I talked my way through a couple of them. They were only about a half a mile apart. As I got closer and closer to the base the roadblocks became more and more frequent and it seemed to me the troops became more and more nervous and the guns pointed at us were locked and loaded and I could see battle-ready tanks moving around. They were battened down and the covers were off the main guns so they had the capability of firing immediately. So, at about the third or fourth roadblock, I heard an exchange between one of the troops, not one of the officers, and I believe it was an Air Force officer who was in his sort of day off dress uniform. This Air Force officer was trying to find out what was going on and this soldier, GI, pointed his machine gun at the Air Force officer and told him to go home and stay there. At that point I decided it was time for me to get back. I didn't especially want to get shot or arrested. As it turned out one of our colonel attachés who was also out in the streets trying to find out what was going on was detained by troops for about an hour that day. So, I then had to talk my way back through the same roadblocks I had gone through 30 minutes before and eventually passed the last one and, got back to the embassy. There was no one there, the ambassador was over at his residence, so I hustled over to his residence and there were the political counselor, my immediate boss, and one other officer.

Q: Who was the political counselor?

TAYLOR: A fellow by the name of Bruce Flatin. I think they were at the pool. I came up to the ambassador and that group and explained what had happened. They were working on a MemCon of a conversation between Daud and Eliot that had taken place the previous day, I think that was what they were trying to iron out to get sent off that day. And, just as I was telling them what I had seen, we heard machine gun fire from somewhere in the city, seemingly from the palace area, and then a couple of heavier rounds of ammunition which were tank guns obviously. You can tell the difference, at least I can now, between a tank round and an artillery round. We decided that something was going on.

At that point we got a call from the marine guard at the embassy saying that ten or fifteen tanks had just passed in front of the embassy on their way to the palace. The main road went from the area of the military base, past the embassy and then down towards the palace. So, obviously we decided that something was going on and that we ought to find out what it was. I got in my own personal car and drove down toward the palace to see what I could see and passed a number of troops who were deployed, these were palace guards, in what we called Juis (Joeys) which were open sewers on the sides of the streets, although no longer used for that purpose, but they were about three feet deep or so and a couple of feet wide. The troops were deployed in those with their machine guns and individual weapons. Then I got down towards the palace and there were tanks running around in different directions in seemingly a fairly chaotic situation. At the same

time it was quite busy with pedestrians. You had commercial activity going on at exactly the same time. People were going in and out of hotels and fellows were pulling two wheeled carts.

So I went down to the major traffic circle and dodged a couple of tanks, there wasn't any major gun fire going on at that time, but there certainly was a lot of deploying of troops and equipment. When it became obvious that things were not terribly safe right there, I went back to the embassy and by that time virtually everybody had gathered at the embassy to compare stories and what we had seen to determine what was going on.

Q: Had anybody called or telegraphed Washington at that point to say that something was going on?

TAYLOR: I don't think so, but I am not sure. I don't know when our first Situation Report (sitrep) went out, probably it would have taken an hour or so and this was about that time. I think probably we were beginning to gear up towards planning SitReps. Obviously we needed to try to put together what was going on. So the ambassador authorized a couple of us from the embassy to go out to see if we could put together all of the fragments of the developing events. One of the econ officers and I went out in an embassy van and we had an embassy driver with us. We went down past the palace and saw a lot of tanks around deployed with their guns pointing out and some palace guard troops at the same time in and among these regular armored units. We subsequently learned that the armored division had used deception, claiming that they had come to the palace to protect Daud rather than to kill him. So that is why we initially saw this intermingling of these troops because the palace guard had been duped into thinking that these guys were coming to save the regime.

Then we were going down past the Ministry of Interior located right by the ambassador's residential compound which was a pretty substantial compound with traditional big walls around it. Just as we were slowly approaching the main gate I looked back and two or three tanks had pulled up in front of the Ministry of Interior which in a coup is one of the normal primary targets. When they swung their main guns around and fired on the building, at that range it was a fairly noisy operation. I decided that it was time to be a little more prudent so my colleague and I swung into the ambassador's compound for refuge. We were able to establish telephone communication with the Embassy; the coup leaders hadn't gone after the PTT building, which the Soviets did during their invasion, being their first target. But the coup didn't do it that way. So, we were able to establish contact with the embassy and I told people there what we had seen and where we were. By that time there was a lot of fighting around the Interior building, so we just stayed put. The compound wasn't hit by anything as far as we could tell.

Q: Was there anything on the radio or from your Afghan drivers saying who was doing what to whom?

TAYLOR: No, in these initial hours there wasn't any information of that kind. In round terms this started about 12 noon. As I recall an announcement came over the radio about 5 in the afternoon that in effect Daud had been overthrown and killed in the fighting at the palace and there was a new government in control and that everybody should stay calm and stay at home and not resist.

So at the compound there were the two of us and Pat Eliot, the ambassador's wife, and a number of her staff and a couple of his guards at the front gate and our driver. So there were eight or ten people in the house, all pretty much taking cover in the middle of the house which was probably the safest place.

During the afternoon there was a lull and about 3:00 the Air Force arrived and they began bombing and strafing the palace. A standard joke was that even though an Afghan pilot might be aiming at the palace he could hit anything in town; they were not the best pilots or most accurate in the world. So, the chances of random casualties among the Americans, I guess were fairly high and neither the embassy nor the compound were that far from the palace which was the main target. So, that's where we were. The Air Force played probably the key role in destroying any opposition that was approaching Kabul and the armored units consolidated control. Fighting in the palace resulted in the death of Daud and any number of his senior colleagues and a lot of the palace guards.

Q: Was the feeling that Daud and his senior people were killed in the fighting or were they killed later on?

TAYLOR: We got reports second hand but these were supposedly from people who had actually witnessed what went on that Daud and others were holed up in one of his offices within the palace, and when the troops burst through the door they all opened fire on each other and he went down in a blaze of gun fire. Given the Afghan attitude and behavior pattern, I don't doubt that at all. I can't imagine that he would have surrendered to what he would consider a group of dissident troops.

If I could digress one second, the next day the regime opened the palace to the public and invited anybody who was interested to come through to see where the historic events had occurred and what had happened. To see how the regime had lived so opulently at the expense of the masses. So Eliot authorized me to do that. He thought obviously it would be unseemly for him to go. He said given my particular responsibilities I should be the one to go through the palace to see what it was like. I, of course, had never been inside. Eliot may have been there at some time but usually business was conducted elsewhere. So not many people had been through there. So I joined a long stream of thousands of citizens and went through the palace. One of the things that struck my mind was the room where the final moments had taken place which was really shot up with windows blown out and holes in the wall. They had taken the carpets covered with blood and had laid them on the grass outside wanting everybody to see the last remnants of the former regime. That happened for one day and then I guess decided it was a questionable public relations effort and closed it off and nobody was able to go through.

Q: What was your impression of the palace? Was it opulent?

TAYLOR: No, it was by no means as opulent as what I had seen in Tehran, for instance, and not by any means lavish in that sense and certainly not by Western European standards of how monarchs used to live. It was a large compound, had a lot of buildings on it, traditional old buildings of interesting architecture, but by no means lavish.

Q: I take it then the situation, if they were able to do this, was over rather quickly?

TAYLOR: Yes. There was some fighting that went on after dark, and after dark was when everybody got very nervous about the security because the Air Force again came out and if the pilots were risky in the daytime, at night they would be worse. You just didn't know what would happen and these concerns were legitimized because about midnight the largest explosion of the whole operation occurred and nobody knew what it was. It just shook the compound that we were in and when I was able to get through to the embassy they said it had shaken their building and nobody knew exactly what it was. The next day we were able to find out by looking at this very, very large hole in what used to be the middle of an intersection near the Chinese embassy which was reasonably close to the palace that presumably had been the target, unless the pilot had just simply dropped it some place as a warning to anybody. But there was this huge crater in the middle of an intersection in front of the Chinese embassy and that was the kind of thing we were extremely worried about, an accident by some random bombing and shootings, etc. Nobody got very much sleep, of course, and the embassy was pretty crowded, there must have been 30 or 40 people at the embassy. My wife was there and other officials and communicators. By that time SitReps were pretty much going out on a regular basis. The embassy had not been hit, but colleagues who were there said at one point a helicopter gun ship was firing rockets at the palace and apparently made a turn and fired one of the rockets when it was turning and that one came right over no more than 20 feet above the embassy and slammed into a house behind the embassy and killed a family of four or five people there. So it was a dicey night, but by dawn it was pretty clear that everything was over.

Q: You have a situation when obviously you want to find out who is doing what to whom. Also as you mentioned Afghanistan is not a centralized country, you have these tribal rulers and what happens in Kabul might not have much effect elsewhere. You have a lot of AID people out there. What was the original analysis, how did you make contact with the powers that were in control and finding out what was happening outside?

TAYLOR: We had the original announcement and knew by then who was behind all of this. It was the communist party, the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Those were the people who were behind it and claiming to have political power and that was their regime that had been established through this military operation. It took a long time to sort out how we were going to deal with this regime and how to go about establishing relations between AID and the government and the Peace Corps and the government.

In the initial days it was essentially just listening to what was going on and we dealt strictly with the Foreign Ministry. Of course, you had a tremendous turnover there. You had a new Foreign Minister and new deputies and our normal contact, the director of the American Division was gone and I don't know what ever happened to him. He was never seen in Afghanistan. Whether he ever got out, I don't know. The Foreign Minister had been killed at the palace during the fighting. So, the whole senior leadership at the Ministry was gone and replaced by, quite frankly, people who were less impressive in terms of their knowledge of how to deal with foreign governments and our concerns. But basically in those initial days, we had a number of responsibilities, only one of which was to try to find out what the political situation was. There

was a great deal of concern about security within the American community and what the situation was in the countryside. Eliot did authorize several teams to do road reconnaissance missions down to the Qandahar and up through the pass to the north and even trying to get down towards Peshawar to Jalalabad, down towards the east, just to see if there was any kind of evidence of resistance by other military units elsewhere in the country, whether there was any kind of reaction elsewhere. These teams came back within a day or two with reports that there was virtually no evidence that anything had happened.

Q: It really is surprising. From what you described you would have thought that this would have unleashed essentially tribal unrest in support or against.

TAYLOR: Initially, I guess, it was a matter of surprise, shock, disbelief. There was nothing. I didn't go on one of these. I stayed in Kabul continuing what I was doing there. They came back and said it was as if nothing had happened. They ran into very few roadblocks once they got outside the capital and said it was very bizarre. But, we filed these reports and the analysis seemed to be that the coup had been a palace coup and was not a popular uprising but had been a very effective coup d'etat and the new regime in Kabul was in place and the old one had been gunned down. Whether that would last or not we were not quite sure, but that was what we could see.

Q: Well, this wasn't quite at the height of the Cold War. This was the Carter administration and we were trying to do more business with the Soviets, etc., but did this send up both in Washington and in our embassy, all sorts of communist, Soviet meddling in affairs? Did we realize this was a turning point?

TAYLOR: No, not to the extent that the Soviet invasion 18 months later caused. This particular coup, to the best of my knowledge, didn't set off a lot of alarm bells in Washington simply because Afghanistan is such an isolated, exotic place that it wasn't a front burner issue for American interests. Therefore, I don't think it had a great impact in Washington or at our embassy in Moscow in terms of, "My gosh, the Soviets have grabbed another country through their surrogates in the Afghan military."

The best information we could put together weeks afterwards was that the Soviet government, and particularly the Soviet embassy in Kabul, itself, were surprised as much as anybody else by these events. It occurred very quickly from the gunning down of the first guy to the subsequent decision to arrest all of the rest of the communist leadership to starting the coup in motion. The Soviet mission was just as surprised as anybody else. And, I think that is true. The ambassador felt in those first few days that that was being naive, "obviously the Soviets" were behind the coup and instrumental in carrying it out. But, then he subsequently tempered that because there wasn't any evidence really that they were in the decision making process or in effect consulted by the coup makers. He was right in the broadest sense that the Soviets were behind the coup because they had trained and indoctrinated all of these guys and they were behind it because it was Soviet equipment that was used. But, in the immediate sense, I think the Soviets were not behind it and had not planned it that way. I think they were content with simply being the most influential power in a country that was right on their border. They didn't need all of this violence and takeover and radicalism.

Q: Well, this is, of course, the general conception of what we had learned to live with and accept as detente. You have spheres of influence and you don't mess around. Afghanistan turned to be crucial in the breakup of the Soviet Union. What you are talking about is the first step that led essentially to the Soviet disaster in a way might have been precipitated by Daud making his move against this leftist leadership and they felt if they were going to something they had better do it now or they might not have another chance.

TAYLOR: That's right.

Q: Well, what about talking to the drivers, the local staff, your contacts, your wife's contacts were they running around saying, "Who are these guys?"

TAYLOR: No, essentially most of the people you just described knew who these people were. They were quite aware that this group of leftists...as I said many of them had been prominent 20 years earlier in political affairs, but had been sort of under house arrest for a long, long time...but everybody who would talk to us, like the drivers and cooks and people like that, were critical, hostile and hated them in effect because they were godless communists and everybody knew they were godless communists. Most of the Afghans, of course, were very devout Muslims, so there was a natural antipathy towards this new regime which in the broader sense became the resistance movement in the countryside that lasted ten years. As you say, the first step was the coup in 1978, followed by the gradual disintegration of control over the countryside and then some of the major cities. Eventually the Soviets, believing the Afghan regime was losing control, made the decision to invade, throw out this regime and put in a puppet regime and keep an army there to crush the resistance in the countryside. We decided to bloody the Soviets' nose as much as possible in Afghanistan so we started supplying clandestine military support and training for the next ten years. This bubbled along until they had to pull out in 1989 and by that time you had had so many Soviet casualties and disillusionment that it began to play a role in the whole undermining and breakup of the Soviet Union.

Q: Was there a problem with recognition of the new regime?

TAYLOR: I guess the short answer is no, there wasn't a problem with recognition. We continued to deal with the regime. We had our AID and Peace Corps operations going. We had USIA operations going. We had normal Foreign Ministry contacts. So, it wasn't a question of recognition. We took the position that the issue of recognition did not arise, we just continued dealing with whatever government was in Kabul.

Jumping ahead to 1979, when the Soviets came in, I felt it was appropriate to raise the question of recognition because this was a regime that was thrown out by a Soviet military operation and a puppet government was installed by them. I argued with the chargé that therefore it was not a legitimate regime and therefore not deserving our recognition. He agreed with that point of view and sent a message back saying that we felt we should withdraw our recognition and close down. The Department did not accept that argumentation, therefore maintained an embassy for the next ten years as we all know until we did close in 1989 after the Soviets left. But I think the circumstances were different in 1989 than they were in 1978 so we took the position to continue

as we were before the coup. And that is what happened. Eliot left in the summer of 1978 and was replaced by Spike Dubs who came in and presented his credentials to the new president Taraki, so that conveyed the concept of continued formal recognition.

Q: How did we look upon this new government? Was it one that was going out and taking retribution, was it heavy handed? How did it take the controls?

TAYLOR: It was pretty brutal. It did in fact execute a number of people who were potential leaders of a possible counter coup. It imprisoned a lot of people who were from the former elites. There was an infamous prison outside of Kabul that was overwhelmed with prisoners and former military officers and security officers and just about anybody who had a position of influence or minor influence in the former regime. Torture was quite well known and that was carried out in a building right across from the embassy. There was a security installation there that we learned was the center of the torture operation. The people involved were really a pretty unsavory group of people, both the civilians and the military, although a couple of the military who had carried out the coup seemed to be okay, not quite as sleazy as the civilian side of the operation. So, it became a difficult time because the people with whom you had to deal were not the kinds of professionals you would expect to deal with. This was especially true in the non-foreign ministries. The Foreign Ministry crowd who came in were reasonably sophisticated and tolerant of viewpoints that were not as doctrinaire as their own, but the guys who came into the information ministry, ministry of commerce and any of those ministries with which you normally have contact and business, didn't know what they were doing. There were stories of people making official calls with business to take care of and the guys carried pistols or had them right on their desks because you never know when you might need them. It became sort of a hall mark of cabinet meetings that somebody would get shot. There were actually gun fights at cabinet meetings. The president, Taraki, was gunned down at one of the outbreaks, and eventually we called them OK Corral cabinet meetings. These people were extremely violence-orientated.

Q: This sounds very Afghan rather than a communist environment. They might have come from the left but this was certainly a home grown product.

TAYLOR: Yes, the political solution in those days was through the barrel of a gun and it led to the down fall of any number of leaders. As I say Taraki, the president, who was the oldest member of the leadership and who tried to present himself as sort of a grandfather figure, was killed at a cabinet meeting later in 1978.

Ambassador Spike Dubs arrived about 3 months after the coup in 1978. His approach, and I mention it in the chapter I wrote in the Joe Sullivan book, was: "Yeah these guys are pretty bad, but they are in control. Many are unsavory, they are anti-West, they don't like us and will do everything possible to make life miserable for AID, Peace Corps, USIA and everybody. But, still they are the government here and we have to work with them. If we don't work with them we might as well go home. So, let's get on with the job the best we can. Do what we can to work with these guys and try to persuade them that perhaps we have a point of view and a world outlook that is preferable to the one that they have been operating with and come to believe is the wave of the future."

So, that was his approach and that is what we did for roughly the last six months of 1978.

Q: What were we seeing the Soviets doing at that point?

TAYLOR: The Soviets were responding in a sense to this passionate embrace by the new regime. I am not sure that was welcomed as much as just a realization that they had this new regime down in Kabul doing everything possible to strengthen the ties between themselves and Moscow. So there were new trade agreements signed, new commercial agreements signed, new missions that came in, new projects welcomed. Taraki went to Moscow and signed a new friendship treaty with the Soviet Union. So there were all kinds of new ties between the two. I always thought and argued, some didn't agree, that all of the initiative for this came from the Afghan side, not necessarily from Moscow, but Moscow did respond because it was a new ideological regime and you remember in those days the great buzz word was called "correlation of forces," and the Soviets and the intellectual leadership under Brezhnev believed quite fervently that the correlation of forces was on their side and the wave of Marxism was rising and every regime was eventually going to become a Marxist regime.

Q: There really was concern as to whether this really was the wave of the future. As things were basically getting ready to fall apart, there was a feeling that this was the new wave. This was appealing to the discontent, etc. When you were there was anybody looking at China?

TAYLOR: Yes, that is a good issue to raise. China had a very large embassy and served very good Chinese food a couple of times when they had us over. It was an unusual situation. Nobody knew very much what China was trying to do. They had a few aid operations going, but this very large mission didn't seem ever to be doing much. We couldn't figure out why they were there. They did have this common border way up in the Himalayas but nobody could even get there and no one knew where the border was probably. But, those were the days of Chinese/Soviet competition and they were trying to offset the Soviets by giving them a little competition in Afghanistan. But, they didn't play a major role in these events. Even though they were ideological brethren, the Afghans looked to Moscow, they didn't look to Beijing as a source of direction, advice or resources. So they were sort of an odd man out in much of this. There wasn't a great deal of concern that they were going to play a major role. It was sort of one of those things not that we ignored them because we overlooked them, we just ignored them...

Q: ...because at this time we were going through a rather pleasant stage of relations with China. How did Spike deal with the new regime? What was he bringing back from his meetings, and what were some of the issues we were having to deal with?

TAYLOR: Basically we were trying to establish an acceptable environment for carrying out the operations we had been carrying out before this new group came in. In other words, trying to overcome or avoid the regime creating obstacles to successful operations, specifically on the AID, USIA and Peace Corps, the instrumental agencies of the US government, not people like us. A lot of it was deliberate, but a lot of it was complete incompetence. These guys, as I said, didn't know what to do, didn't know their job, so when somebody from one of the operational agencies would bring up an issue and say that we want to do this because and this is how we are going to do it with these resources and will bring in a team to do it, the new guys would say no, you can't

do that, adding, "How do you expect us to approve a program like that? Get out of here or I will shoot you," or something like that.

So, these were the kinds of problems. It was deliberate obstacle making, if you will, and at the same time incompetence. They were just not experienced enough to know how you go about approving a commercial contract, an AID operation, or letting some Peace Corps people, who were obviously "spies from CIA" as everybody knows, out into these villages. It was not a very fulfilling time for anybody because the kinds of people you were dealing with were difficult and unpleasant and the programs you were trying to continue, to carry on or create, were not going anywhere. So, a lot of stuff just came to a grinding halt.

Q: What about the American Center?

TAYLOR: The American Center came under criticism publicly a few times. The regime placed some thugs at the entrance, you know uniformed guards, for security reasons, but, of course, it was designed to intimidate people who would normally go there. Attendance at the language center pretty well stopped for a few days, but then when people could see that they could go back and we were going to continue operating, within a reasonable period of time, the operation came back up to the same level it was before. The thugs were able to intimidate some, but not very many. So that continued and some of the programming continued.

Just after Spike Dubs' murder, for instance, the little theater group did a performance of *Oklahoma* for morale purposes and to just keep people occupied. That was a resounding success. I think we gave five performances and at each one they were hanging off the rafters, if you will, it was such a popular thing. This is one example of what we were doing and the response of the Afghan population.

So that was a very active operation and a lot of people came to learn the language and the other programs there simply to try to find out what the United States was going to do, and expressing their opinions in sort of whispered terms that they really hated this regime and could we get a visa sometimes, etc. They didn't all ask for visas but some did. And they would pass on information of rumors, there were a lot of rumors on every possible issue circulating, as you could imagine in an environment like that. Everybody lived by rumor because nobody believed the newspapers and radio any longer and they no longer had any of the traditional sources of information as they used to have under the old regime.

In the countryside, the resistance was beginning to mount. In the really remote regions the regime had very little control and there was beginning to be information about some kind of resistance in some of the larger towns, not in the major cities, but in the larger towns. I don't know exactly when our support of the resistance actually started, but it was about this time.

Q: Well, this is moving ahead so...

TAYLOR: No, this was in 1978.

Q: Oh, still in 1978.

TAYLOR: I don't know when our actual arming of the resistance began, but the resistance was getting arms from some place then.

Q: Did you have the sense that our CIA operation was beginning to shift to take a look at what was happening within the country as opposed to the Soviet Union?

TAYLOR: Yes, they began devoting some resources to domestic events. I don't know either when the political policy decision was made back here that we were going to use Afghanistan as a means to bloody the Soviets.

Q: Well, the Soviets, of course, were not that committed at this point.

TAYLOR: That's right, they weren't.

Q: There was no Soviet military so it was still a local home ground operation.

TAYLOR: Yes, although there were lots of advisers, but they were at that time I think genuine advisers. There weren't any organized Soviet military units until the actual invasion.

Q: And also we had a President and administration which was not trying to overplay the Soviet card. If this had happened very early in the Reagan Administration, it might have caused quite a different reaction.

TAYLOR: Yes, I think that is valid. You also have to remember that they were in that period really focusing on the Camp David process.

Q: Camp David being a peace between Egypt and Israel. Were you getting much in the way of media attention there?

TAYLOR: No, the coup was covered by *Time* and *Newsweek* and other periodicals but once the coup was over and this new regime was in, there was very little media attention. The contrast between the coup of 1978 and the Soviet invasion in 1979, in terms of American media, was really stark because after the invasion in December, 1979, within two days when that airport opened and they decided to give visas to come in, we were inundated by 30 or 40 correspondents. It got to the point where we had to hold a daily briefing in the afternoon. That didn't happen in 1978.

Q: Today is February 1, 1996 and we are starting in 1978 the immediate aftermath of the coup. What happened then?

TAYLOR: Well, in the initial days after the coup of 1978, our major task, responsibility and objective were to try to assess what the new regime wanted to do, who the people were involved in the new regime, what their policies might be and things of that sort. It was a complete change from the regime that had been in power before. We had a little bit of a file on some of these guys because there had been a legitimate leftist movement in Afghanistan throughout the post World

War II two decades, until it had been suppressed and outlawed by the former king, who, himself, was overthrown in 1973. So there was a little bit of bio information, a little bit of knowledge of who some of the top leadership was. It turned out that the guy who actually became the number one on paper at least, had been an IV grantee to the United States (exchange program) way back in his early days and had had a brief tenure working for the USIS operation in Kabul, but he went on to academic work after that and then got involved in leftist politics. He, himself, was eventually gunned down in one of these cabinet meetings that I mentioned earlier. I think three times there was violence, bloodshed and death at cabinet meetings. So, when we talk about nasty politics in this country, they play for keeps over there.

Q: How did you operate in this post coup period?

TAYLOR: It was difficult to get anything firm. Rumors, of course in an atmosphere like that, were wild and rife and were just impossible to pin down. But basically rumors were a lot of what we had to deal with and were our basic source of information. It was useless to go to the Foreign Ministry and try to find out what was going on. All of our so-called contacts had been swept aside and if they had survived, they were no longer in office. So, we began in effect from scratch making calls on various ministries and trying to develop some kind of relationship with the new people. But, the quality of the new people was dreadful. Many of them, if not most, were completely uneducated, maybe out of high school, mostly not. They were the kind of people who would be drawn to a dissident, outlawed movement and in a very poor and backward country to begin with they were even more on the outside more than most.

Q: Was there any tribal basis to this group?

TAYLOR: No, it was a mix of the Pathans and some of the other minority groups as well. There wasn't any specific ethnic group that would make that identification.

Q: Do we have an ambassador at that time?

TAYLOR: Yes.

Q: Who was he?

TAYLOR: Ted Eliot at the time.

Q: Well, did you all sit down and figure out, okay we have a coup, it is a leftist group, what are our interests and what really is at stake here outside of trying to keep informed?

TAYLOR: We still had an AID mission, a USIS operation and a Peace Corps operation, so basically the policy decision that was made by Ambassador Eliot and Washington was to continue as much as possible business as usual with the new guys, if we could. Afghanistan at that time had very little strategic interest to the United States, if any at all. Our primary policy objective was to help the country develop as much as possible and our two major tools for doing that were AID and the Peace Corps and on a more intellectual level, the USIS operation in the capital. So, therefore, there wasn't a whole lot of interest in Washington in the domino theory

that we have lost Afghanistan and others will follow. It wasn't that at all. It was basically humanitarian development and economic development.

How we were to be able to continue, was our basic question mark in the embassy. Could we develop a rapport with this new regime whereby they will accept an active AID operation in the countryside and accept Peace Corps volunteers out in the villages and places like that, because it didn't take long before the hostility and the anti-Americanism and the pro-Soviet leanings of the new regime became very clear even in the public press, which of course had always been a controlled press, but not like it became in 1978. So, that was basically it. We would have staff meetings in the embassy and Eliot would say, well, how are things going in the last few days in terms of developing any kind of meaningful contacts with some of these ministries. We had a large, very active AID mission and I thought they were very talented people. They were doing their utmost to develop the right contacts with the right people to get permission to continue various programs they had going. It became very difficult because of two factors, the anti-Americanism and the sheer incompetence on the part of the new regime in staffing right on down the line. They just didn't have the right kind of people. The technicians, for instance, working in the Ministry of Public Works, didn't know anything about repairing bridges or highways, or anything, the kinds of things that AID was doing in those days. The AID mission now is entirely different, but in those days they were doing infrastructure.

So, it became more and more difficult, but we kept trying. My particular responsibility was to report all of the political leanings and whatever tea leaves I could read in terms of policy and orientation of the new regime. It didn't take much skill because it became so anti-American that anybody could see it.

Q: Were you getting any reflections from the Indians, the Pakistanis and the Iranians? These were neighboring people who would have the most concern.

TAYLOR: That's right. We worked very closely with the Indian and Pakistani embassies. They had large staffs and had much of the same kind of operation as we did, aid operations. They didn't have a Peace Corps naturally, but they had an economic assistance program and information programs at their embassies. The Iranians, yes, until obviously the fall of the Shah, we worked reasonably close with them. But they were never as forthcoming as the Pakistanis and the Indians. Anybody who knows South Asia knows that Indians and Pakistanis love to talk, so getting them into a conversation at a cocktail party was quite easy and sometimes difficult to stop. They were well informed. There was no doubt that they had lots of sources that we didn't have and lots of language ability that made it easy for them and their sources to move in Afghanistan far easier than for us.

Q: Were they concerned at what was happening or was this just for the interest?

TAYLOR: The Pakistanis were very concerned, yes, they were alarmed at the direction things were going. Therefore, anything that alarms the Pakistanis pleases the Indians, of course, so the Indians were much more relaxed about the way things were going. The Indians had always had a hand in the Afghan till because it was a way of increasing their leverage over Pakistan and that had gone all the way back to support for various groups that would come across the border and

raid Pakistani villages and things of that sort. So, the Indians took a very sanguine approach to the direction of new regime and the Pakistanis did not at all. Therefore, given the anti-Americanism involved, we tended to work and deal more closely with the Pakistanis even though we dealt closely with the Indians and exchanged views and to some extent affirmation. The Indians always thought we were wrong in our assessments, but that is nothing new.

Q: How did things develop after that?

TAYLOR: It didn't take long, only a matter of a couple of months before the onset of opposition out in the countryside. It wasn't only the anti-Americanism and pro-Soviet lean of the regime, it was also the communist doctrine that was coming out and within that doctrine was the anti-religion element. This wasn't played up necessarily, but it was clear to a lot of people, especially the villagers and the very devout people within Kabul that this was an anti-religion regime. The leadership in the party were known to Afghans as to what they represented, so Afghans by and large being very devout Muslims didn't want any part of the new regime. So, within a couple of months we were getting reports of actual armed clashes out in the countryside, way out in the boonies where we could no longer go. It had become too risky to make too many trips. The last trip I made down to Peshawar, across the border, and that is a main road between Kabul and Peshawar through the Khyber Pass, was probably in August or September, 1978. After that it was no longer permitted to travel that road. They had a number of checkpoints, I recall, and there were some indications that there had been fighting along that road. You could see shot up trucks and things of that sort. So, after the fall of 1978 we were really confined to Kabul and never did see the countryside again.

Anyway, the insurgency began very, very soon after the coup. So, it was not a popular regime. It was not a popular uprising in the first place. It was a coup with a very narrow base of support and became even more narrow as time went by.

Q: Did the United States become a target as instigating this uprising?

TAYLOR: No, the regime generally took the position that the opposition in the countryside didn't exist. They didn't report it or discuss it. They wouldn't acknowledge that there was any major opposition. We did not, therefore, become a target of the regime by association that we were actually supporting this and to the best of my knowledge we were not at that point. In the early life of the Afghan story it was not a policy to do that. To the best of my knowledge most of the *Mujahideen*, the Afghan word for freedom fighter which became very well known in the eighties, probably got their weaponry from the fact that they all were armed in that country anyway. Everybody was armed. And then there were raids on various outlying police stations and small army posts and things of that sort. So it was all more or less a self generated kind of movement. It was not until several years later that it became a very cohesive movement, although I wouldn't call it a national movement. It became a lot of individual movements around the whole country. As we have seen since the Soviets left, it has all fallen apart, the *Mujahideen* unable to agree on anything.

That was the beginning of the opposition and was mostly in the countryside but there was opposition within some of the intellectual and educated circles in Kabul. In fact, we were

approached by a medical doctor representing a group of medical doctors and they wanted United States support for some kind of opposition movement within Kabul among this educated group. And we had to turn them down. We didn't want to get involved in any plot against the government with people about whom we knew nothing other than what they said they represented. That occurred in the summer of 1978. So it was only a couple of months into the regime that we were actually being approached by people claiming to have organizations behind them. That operation was rolled up about a year later and I assume all of them were shot. Remember the old doctors' plot back in the Soviet Union in the early fifties? Well, we called it the doctors' plot in Kabul. I guess they were all eliminated.

So, as we were working with the regime we realized they were not a popular movement, they were meeting quite a bit of opposition in the countryside and it was growing in the major cities as well.

Q: What about our AID and Peace Corps?

TAYLOR: They were gradually meeting more and more resistance. There was concern from a security point of view about having these people out in the countryside so gradually they were brought back from their projects and either reassigned elsewhere or stayed at headquarters and did what they could dealing with the ministries in Kabul. The Peace Corps the same way. They were gradually in effect being downsized. Actually, they were terminated after the assassination of Ambassador Dubs in February 1979. They were just totally eliminated. But they were being phased out by security concerns and the opposition of the host government six months earlier.

Q: When did Ambassador Eliot leave?

TAYLOR: He left in the summer of 1978, June or July. There was a slight gap of two or three weeks before Ambassador Dubs arrived. He arrived in the summer of 1978. There was policy discussion as to where we, the United States, should go in dealing with this kind of regime. He listened to all views but decided that we should continue doing as much as we could to try to work with these guys despite their hostility, inefficiencies, their pro-Soviet leanings and what was becoming more and more known, the brutality of the regime and confirmed reports of opposition killings and torture. So, there were a lot of reasons, human rights concerns, ideological, political, all kinds of reasons to pull back or even close down, but he decided that we are going to keep trying as much as we could to continue the policies of working, addressing humanitarian concerns out in the countryside.

Q: You had been there awhile, how did you feel about this? Was the embassy divided whither the US role in Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: Yes, there were some divisions. There were people who argued for the concerns I just mentioned, there were valid reasons for saying this regime does not deserve American economic assistance, or Peace Corps volunteers and we should, therefore, just terminate those programs, unilaterally, and reduce the size of the embassy to just a listening post. That was, in effect, my view, but it was rejected, of course. One of Spike's great features was he listened to everybody

and would not just pay you lip service. He would listen and mull it over and make his own decision.

The AID people, and not only for bureaucratic reasons, argued that they should stay and keep on doing what they had been doing and make every effort possible to be successful. I don't think it was simply they had good jobs there and didn't want to move to some place else.

The Peace Corps were pretty much ambivalent because they are pretty much exposed in a situation like that. People in Washington from the Peace Corps were very concerned about the security of their kids. Most of them in those days were still kids. It is only in the last 15 or 20 years that they began taking more and more mature people, shall we say. So, they were a little bit concerned.

The intel guys, I am a little cynical about them some times because I think they did have bureaucratic reasons for wanting to stay on and keep their fairly sizeable operation going, so they argued in effect for the policy which we were pursuing.

So there wasn't a whole lot of division. Those of us who expressed the former view were really in the minority at that time.

Q: What about the Soviet role in Afghanistan during this time?

TAYLOR: This was a constant subject of debate and analysis. Spike, of course, by that time had arrived and he was an expert on the Soviet Union having been our DCM there and I think had had three assignments in Moscow. So, he really knew how to evaluate what was going. On the public side, the press and the statements by the regime, were so pro-Soviet that it was also as though they were coming from Prague or East Berlin. The number of trade missions and scientific missions from the Soviet Union coming and going, and all kinds of activities and delegations representing this and that, just sort of swarmed over Afghanistan. If you read the information that the econ guys were coming up with, there was a sharp growth in economic assistance programs and all kinds of different activities, including agreements on the purchase of natural gas, which was the only natural resource Afghanistan had. It was basically up in the northern part of the country and therefore easy to ship over the border to the Soviet Union. So, it was quite a large presence and still growing in late 1978.

Politically it was hard to determine the exact extent of Soviet political influence. The ideology of the new regime was so pro-Soviet anyway that it was difficult to say, "Ah ha, the Soviet influence is growing," when these guys were so receptive to the ideology that it was almost a given that the Soviets were not only the principal but perhaps the only source of advise. They weren't necessarily anxious to get into the position of being, in effect, the sole source of economic assistance of a very poor and increasingly fractured country and society. But, they recognized, I think, that their ideological soul brothers had come to power in Kabul and one of the tenets of communist ideology, remember this is under Brezhnev and he was not exactly a flexible intellect at that time, was that once a communist revolution takes place it can never be reversed and should never be allowed to be reversed. If you remember the old phrase of correlation of forces throughout the seventies, the Soviets, I think, genuinely believed that the

worldwide correlation of forces were moving in their direction just exactly the way Marx and Lenin said it would move. So, they were not receptive to the concept that a brother socialist regime could be reversed or overthrown or a revolution turned back. It just didn't happen that way. History just wouldn't allow it to happen.

They had very good people at their embassy. As you know the Soviet Foreign Service has a practice of developing experts on every area of the world and their entire career is spent in that field. They had some guys who had been in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran for 20 years and really knew the country. I am sure that some of them probably were advising Moscow..."wait a minute, this place is unstable, this regime is unstable and the opposition is growing and maybe we should not become so closely identified with it." But, obviously that view did not prevail in Moscow for reasons I just explained.

Q: What about security forces? I am thinking about secret police, intelligence police and all on the Soviet side, were they coming in?

TAYLOR: Yes, that is where we first detected a growing Soviet participation with the regime. As I said earlier, the military and the security forces had been virtually all trained in the Soviet Union, except for a minuscule number who went to the United States, Pakistan or India. So, these people were not only ideologically indoctrinated, they were indoctrinated on the training side. When the opposition started growing to a point where there might have been concerns, Soviet active participation on the security side became evident. Our intelligence guys picked it up because that was what they were watching for and were able to pick it up very quickly. We assumed that it was going on on the military side as well. There were reports of Soviet advisers showing up in various places around the country. We couldn't really confirm those for a while, but we assumed these reports were accurate. It just made sense and seemed logical that that would happen. This was a larger presence than had been before the coup, even though there had been a Soviet presence with advisers before this particular regime came into power. So, when the Soviet activity on the security side came to the point where they were participating in some of the arrests, interrogations, torture and killings...well I don't know if they actually pulled the trigger on some of these executions, that was probably done by the Afghans, but still they had a role in this so we were watching that as carefully as possible.

Q: Did you find that surveillance of the Americans was increasing?

TAYLOR: No, I don't recall any reports that they had adopted any of the techniques that the Soviets used to surveil us in Moscow. But, of course, we couldn't travel, by this time it was impossible to travel. Our SY guys were becoming more and more nervous about the situation in Kabul, too, because we still had all the dependents there. We were very concerned about the school which was still operating because it was simply like an American high school in the middle of Kabul and a very, very vulnerable place if one were to try to launch some kind of terrorist operation. So they were getting nervous, too, and I guess they were justified in that.

So, that was the way we more or less rumbled along and the way the trends developed throughout the last half of 1978 until the great trauma of the Dubs assassination.

Q: Can you talk about, particularly from your point of view of what you knew and what you were doing at the time of the assassination? Well, it was really murder rather than assassination.

TAYLOR: Yes it was. Do you mean leading up to the assassination?

Q: Well, is there anything else you want to mention before we move to that?

TAYLOR: No. I think those were the basic trends. The growing opposition in the countryside; increasing reports that maybe the Pakistanis were helping out; to the best of my knowledge we had not become actively involved in arming the *Muj* as we began calling them; economic deterioration, even though it was such a poor country it was hard to measure, it was still getting worse than it had been before; increasing Soviet role, increasing dependence on the Soviets, increasing propaganda on the great brotherhood friendship between the Afghan people and the Soviet people; anti-Americanism, I think there was a sort of stonewalling against us and the active tools that we had. My particular job was to keep reporting this and analyzing it and keep telling Washington the direction that everything was going, which was not a terribly promising one. It was just downhill in effect until the Dubs murder.

On February 14, 1979 on his way to the embassy about 9:00 in the morning, Dubs was being driven in his car. He was coming down the street in front of USIS when the car was stopped by a man in a police uniform. The driver stopped because it seemed to be a legitimate representative of the government making this request to stop. He asked the driver to roll down his window and according to testimony from the driver, the driver asked Dubs if he should do it because one of the principles of security driving is not to lower your windows.

Q: Because we have armored vehicles.

TAYLOR: Right, and his was well armored. But, Dubs told the driver, again according to the driver, that he thought he should lower the window. He did, and the cop pulled his pistol and put it to the head of the driver and said to open the door. Again he said he asked Dubs and Dubs said at that point he had no option but to unlock the doors. When he did three other guys, not in police uniform, from somewhere in the vicinity jumped in the car along with the biggest cop and told him to drive to one of the hotels in downtown Kabul. So they took him to this hotel. They came through the lobby and demanded a key, again they were all armed, and took him up to a room on the 3rd or 4th floor. These guys were not professional terrorists because one of them came back down by himself to get another key, he eventually said, and was immediately overwhelmed by the security people who had shown up by that time. So, they did some very dumb things and were not very talented guys in that particular operation. So, that left Dubs with the three others up in the hotel room. By this time the driver had returned to the embassy and reported what had happened. This is all detailed in the book if anyone wants to buy and read the book which we just recently wrote on some of these crises that we have had.

Q: You might mention the book again.

TAYLOR: It is called "Embassies Under Siege" and was published by Brassy Publications, sponsored by Georgetown University. It just came out this year. This is the chapter that I covered, the murder of Ambassador Spike Dubs. It is in quite a bit of detail.

In any event, the driver had come back to the embassy and reported to the DCM, Bruce Amstutz, what had happened and Bruce immediately alerted everybody who could possibly be concerned about that. We then established contact with the Afghan security forces and they had by that time become aware of where he was being held at the hotel and Amstutz immediately sent a team down to the hotel to see what was going on and what could be learned and what could be accomplished down there.

That team consisted of about ten guys. Bruce Flatin was the senior man on the team down there. And, as I mentioned in the book, one of the smartest things that we did at that point was to assign one of the guys at the hotel to do nothing but write down what was happening, everything, to have a complete record of who was seen, what was seen, what was said, who would make a statement to the Afghan police, and who came and went, etc. So, eventually, when everything was needed to be reported we had a complete record of what had taken place. Anyway, that was the team down at the hotel.

He sent me to the Foreign Ministry to talk with the deputy Foreign Minister who was the guy supposedly dealing with the United States on bilateral issues but had no political power whatsoever. The Foreign Minister was really the guy who had the political power but he never dealt with United States representatives, he always shoved us off onto this deputy. I found out nothing and just told the fellow that American policy in situations like this was to do nothing that would endanger the safety of the hostage. Don't attack, don't threaten, don't show that you are going to attack or anything like that. Try to wait them out, try to find out who they are first and what they want and then try to wear them down through negotiations, but don't take any precipitous final action. He said he would take note of that and report it back, but whether he did I don't know. And that was what the guys at the hotel were telling everybody they could reach or would talk with them, that our policy was don't do anything that would endanger the ambassador's safety.

Then I returned to the embassy. That team stayed at the hotel. It was composed of several reporting officers, the doctor, SY guys. Amstutz was at the embassy trying to establish contact with Washington. We had a dreadful time with communications with Washington. As I pointed out in the book this was the old Foreign Service where you didn't have computers and you had to type up every cable and the communicator had to type it into a tape and then the State communicator would give it to the other guys to actually send it. So, it was a slow, slow process. Telephones were useless because on a good day you could barely call Peshawar in Pakistan, much less the United States. So, there was very little initial communication other than our reporting cables and Washington as well as I remember reinforced the policy of not doing anything and to tell the host government not to do anything. This was from the Secretary, it was Vance at the time and I think he had been waked up by the watch and been informed. He eventually showed up early in the morning in the Department.

Eventually Amstutz sent me over to the Ministry of Interior, which is in charge of security and we knew that the guy in charge of security, not the minister, but the actual head cop, was a real thug and had been central to all of the arrests and murders and torture and everything else. He and Hafizullah Amin, the fellow I just mentioned earlier as the Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, were very, very close so we assumed in tandem were making decisions as to what to do in this particular situation. It was Amin's anti-American outlook that was really driving the regime's policy towards us and the pro-Soviet policy which was the opposite side of that coin. I got to Taroon's office, the chief of the security police...

Q: This is the thug.

TAYLOR: Yes, this is the thug.

I told them I was coming and they said if you want to come, come, we make no promises. So, I went over there with an Afghan driver to act as an interpreter. I could work with Dari in sort of a structured meeting with the Foreign Ministry types, diplomats, etc. or in villages, but my Dari was not good enough to really work in a tense, rapidly developing situation such as I anticipated. So, I took the driver into the office with me and explained what his role would be as an interpreter to make sure that everybody understood what my messages were. Well, I was stopped in the waiting room outside Taroon's office by a couple of gatekeepers and these guys would be formidable in any situation but when they were very heavily armed and there was a lot of tension in the air it was not the kind of situation where you try to brush them aside and charge in. They kept me waiting out there. They did take a couple of written notes that I gave them regarding "do not attack, do not do anything involving force, this is American policy and the President is going to send a message to your President as soon as possible," etc. They took the messages and would go into Taroon's office. I could hear that there was radio communications going on all the time. I couldn't understand them, I can't understand radio communications in English the way the military communications are. So, I asked my driver if he could listen carefully and pick up anything that he could. He informed me that they were talking with the people at the hotel, the team they had at the hotel, by which time they had a lot of security people there, a lot of units that were paramilitary. I don't recall if they were army or not, they might as well have been, they were very heavily armed at the hotel.

So, that is how we were deployed for the next couple of hours. This was by now about 11:00 or 11:30. I was cooling my heels at the Interior Ministry, we had our team down at the hotel and we had Amstutz and our communicators back at the embassy trying to call back and forth. Again, the chapter in the book has a lot of detail as to what efforts we were making to get the message across. There is no doubt that the Afghan decision makers knew what our policy was and knew that we were imploring them not to take violent action. There was no question that they didn't have that message.

Let me give a little background on what was going on back at the hotel. Not only had there been a lot of Afghan security people show up at the hotel, Soviet security guys were there now and were very active and were known to embassy people and we had some of the intel guys down at the hotel and our SY people who were familiar with some of these faces. They were working very closely with the Afghan security forces. These were not Soviet armed uniform people, they

were civilian, or at least dressed as civilians, and were acting in an advisory role to the Afghan security people to the extent that they were seen pointing out how to deploy the security people in the hotel across the street. They were seen giving hand signals to some of these Afghan security people as to where to move and things of that sort. So, there was no doubt in the minds of our guys at the hotel that the Soviet security people were playing a very intimate role in what was happening and what is going to happen and this, of course, led eventually to a real diplomatic spat between Washington and Moscow after the events played out.

So, that is where we were until just after 12:00 when it became obvious to the guys at the hotel that the Afghans were going to attack the room and they did. They allowed several embassy people, the doctor and a stretcher crew, to come up inside the hotel to about two rooms away from where the ambassador was being held, but no further. They were held right there, stopped. And then the guys deployed across the street at a commensurate level in that hotel, opened fire with AK-47, military automatic weapons and the guys said it was really quite a racket and went on for about 30 to 45 seconds. That length of heavy firing by who knows how many, 10, 12, 14 guys, can really put out a lot of fire power. That particular firing stopped and the guys in the hotel corridor started to make a move towards the room, especially those with the stretcher and the doctor, and were held back by Afghan security people who themselves went down the hall and into the room. Our guys then heard, it was never agreed upon how many shots they heard, some said two, some said three, individual shots from...again some of these guys had had experience in Vietnam, and there was one military guy in that team, and they subsequently testified that they insisted that it was a small caliber handgun, it wasn't a military weapon and these guys could be seen not carrying rifles into the hotel room, they just had on normal sidearms that police and security types have. Once those shots were heard, and I can understand why some guys said two and some three since there had been a racket just before, all kinds of firing, and the adrenalin must have been flowing tremendously, so some heard two, some three, I didn't think it was a terrible discrepancy. Anyway they were allowed then to come into the room and bring the stretcher and the doctor was obviously one of the first in the hotel room. They found the ambassador's body in an easy chair in the hotel room. The doctor said he was dead; he had been shot several times. A subsequent autopsy report indicated he had been hit a couple of times with this great outbreak of shooting from across the street, but those wounds were not potentially fatal, they were just flesh wounds here and there. The fatal wounds were to the head, at close range, small caliber weapon, 22 caliber weapon, and he was dead at the scene. That was the pronouncement at the time by the embassy doctor.

So, they took him to AID's compound which is where the doctor's quarters were and at Washington's instruction he began whatever kind of medical examination of the body that he could. It wasn't the kind of facility that lent itself to this kind of thing.

I remember I could hear the initial outbreak of firing from the Ministry of Interior which was a mile away. You could faintly hear all of this happening. I remember asking the gatekeepers what had happened and they wouldn't answer. And then Taroon, in a matter of a minute or so after the initial firing came out of his office and sort of brushed past me even though he knew who I was and who I represented and wouldn't answer. I kept asking him in Dari but he wouldn't answer. Finally one of the gatekeepers said that they had attacked and the ambassador had been killed by

the terrorists. So, there wasn't much I could do at that point so I went back to the embassy and we began then the postmortem reporting of what had actually happened.

The guys at the hotel did up their report and I did up my report. We put all of these into a massive report which was subsequently accused by some of the media as being too cold, I guess is the way they said it, too official, and unemotional. I don't know what they expected us to say, but we had to get all of the information down and reported as accurately as we could. I guess it didn't read like *Time* magazine and they felt it should have. It showed up in the *New York Times* in a couple of days, it was leaked. The reason it was leaked was the Soviet angle because Washington took the report we had and what leaped out at them was the Soviet role in all of this. They called in Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador at the time, and Vance really pounded the table with Dobrynin saying this was absolutely an inappropriate role for the Soviet government to play especially given the outcome.

Q: You are back at the embassy, what was the feeling about what had happened? First what was this whole thing about, the initial kidnaping, and then the security response?

TAYLOR: We were all stunned and outraged and, of course, emotionally stretched by what had happened. So, we really didn't focus on why and what it was all about at that time. That, of course, became a focus in subsequent days, but it wasn't at that particular moment. We had just lost an ambassador so we were all focusing on what to do about that. We were getting messages that the White House was sending Air Force Two or Three, and a whole delegation of senior officials from State, including the widow, Mary Ann Dubs, who was back here working on the Hill at the time, to come out and get the body and bring it back for a state funeral. So, we were really overwhelmed with reporting and responding to those kinds of issues, that afternoon, rather than why and who the people were. Although before the actual killing and while there was still dialogue on the scene we were asking what did the Afghan government know about who these guys were, were they making demands, what was their objective, and never got any information or response other than we don't know who they are.

But your question and the focus is exactly what became our major concerns within a matter of the next day. Every resource we had was focused on these exact issues. Unfortunately we never learned who these guys were and who they represented and what their objectives were. The three terrorists who were in the room were all dead and the guy who had been captured alive turned up dead that night. A couple of guys from the embassy were called over to identify the bodies. So, this guy who had been taken alive and could have possibly provided information on these particular questions was murdered by the regime to shut up everybody who would have been involved in that room and what had happened and what demands they may have made. It was never clarified who they were or what their objective was. There were rumors everywhere, of course, but no firm evidence as to what they wanted. The most convincing report I saw was an intel report several months later that said that these particular people were supported and were members of a very leftist organization, a splinter group from the Afghan left, basically identified with the Communist Chinese and who were so radical they were even hostile to the regime that I described earlier. If they were that radical they were really crazies, and they had somehow come to the conclusion that kidnaping and holding the American Ambassador hostage would somehow give them leverage over the regime in Kabul. That shows you how out of touch they really were

because that regime could care less about the security of our ambassador as demonstrated by their action.

The VIP delegation and Mary Ann arrived the next day and stayed one night. We had a memorial ceremony at the residence. She chose me to come back as the embassy representative. The Department in Washington had agreed to have one person go back with the delegation to represent the embassy community at the funeral and she asked me to do that. So, I did and was honored to do so. We got back to Washington and between the arrival and the funeral the next day, which happened to occur during the great blizzard of 1979 but we were still able to hold the funeral in Arlington, the experts did an official autopsy on the body and that report was highly classified at the time but was made available to me and certain people at the embassy in Kabul. That concluded and proved, as well as our guys can do it, that the fatal wounds were caused by a small caliber gun to the head from close range. In effect, they put it to his head and murdered him. I believe that Mary Ann knew that. I never asked her if she had access to the autopsy report, but somebody told me that she was aware of this, that the conclusive forensic evidence pointed to this kind of action that killed him.

We never were able to say officially that that is what happened. I think the guys who make these kinds of decisions probably concluded that we couldn't say that and make it stick in an American court of law so they probably decided that we can almost conclude but not absolutely for certain that this was the cause of death. So they probably fudged it a little bit that way. And this is mentioned in the chapter I wrote in the book. But, my belief and that of a number of people with whom I have talked to are convinced that that is what happened in that hotel room.

Q: Well, who went in? Was it a Soviet security person?

TAYLOR: No, Afghans. The Soviets were not involved in the hotel room at that time. They were in the advisory capacity down in the lobby, across the street and down on the street prior to the actual assault on the room. To the best of my memory there were no Soviets involved in the corridor either. I don't recall that any of our guys there claimed to see a Soviet at that little point in the drama. I don't recall that anyone said a Soviet was actually involved in going into the room. They could have gone to the trouble of dressing up a Soviet of an Afghan ethnic group as an Afghan, but that is kind of stretching it.

Q: Now, you have returned from Washington to the embassy and it is basically confirmed that the Afghan security forces very likely killed the ambassador.

TAYLOR: Well, back up a little bit. While I was here, I stayed in Washington for about a week, there were any number of discussions about the policy implications of this. What do we know and what do we do about it? There were again arguments about the hostility of the regime and its pro-Soviet leanings. Now, they have taken an action and generally it was not widely known that it was probable that they had actually murdered the ambassador, but whatever the case they had ignored our pleas to not take any action. They had ignored the safety of the ambassador. If he had been killed in that military assault, that would have been cause enough to result in tremendous strains in the bilateral field. But we were making the argument that they had taken actions which resulted in the death of our ambassador. They had ignored whatever we had said.

We had by that time delivered pleas from President Carter and Secretary Vance. So there was a lot of hostility in Washington, both on the political and diplomatic front, as to what to do about it and what our reaction should be. So, there were some debates in the Department as to what to do.

To summarize a long story, we decided to terminate all Aid operations, all Peace Corps operations and all economic assistance operations in the country. It turned out to be moot in any case because Congress subsequently, fairly quickly for Congress, passed legislation that said that this was to be our policy, they were going to terminate all funding of all assistance programs until such time as the Afghan government took responsibility for the death of the ambassador. And, of course, they were never going to do that, so in effect you had the Executive deciding a policy and it being imposed by Congress on the other side. So there was no question but that we were going to just close up operations, which we did gradually. By the summer of 1979, over the next three or four months, everything was phased out. AID was gone and the Peace Corps was gone and we began phasing down dependents to the point where we just had essentially a listening post. It wasn't as small as it became after the Soviet invasion, but it was pretty limited. We still had econ, admin and consular officers, but after the Soviet invasion we downsized even more.

Q: The embassy was being run by a chargé?

TAYLOR: Yes, a chargé. There was never another ambassador sent. There was only a chargé for the next ten years. We eventually closed down in 1989 completely, but for the next ten years we had a very slim operation from the Soviet invasion to the Soviet withdrawal.

Q: What was the atmosphere in the embassy when you came back?

TAYLOR: Very tense and very emotional and very uncertain as to why this had happened. Dubs was held in tremendous regard by the whole community. It was a real shock and people were outraged and, of course, they knew by then, by the time I got back, that we were phasing out everything that had to do with working with the regime on a broad front. As I said, it was a very large AID operation, one of the largest in terms of people in the world. So, the community in effect was going to be down 60 or 70 percent by the time all of them left. The school would be closed and all kinds of things.

Q: In your work as a political officer, did things change particularly as far as relations, bad as they were, with the government?

TAYLOR: They were fairly limited with any kind of contact with the host government and so it didn't really get worse. It was hard to say how it could get worse than it was. But, the hostility of the regime remained at the level that it was. The trends tended to continue and to the best that we could see there was virtually no reaction on the part of the regime to the fact that we were going to phase out AID, etc. They simply seemed to say they could care less. My particular job continued to be analyzing as best I could the political trends and things, but they were already in place and the fact that we were phasing out all of the meaningful operations that we had going, sort of meant that my work was going to be even more limited in access and information available. It was going to be even more limited than it had been.

So, we were focusing, we in the political and the intel side, were focusing on the issues of the growing opposition in the countryside, what the Soviet role was in all of this. Those were basically the two major things, and without any major operation by AID and the Peace Corps there wasn't much else to do. I think the econ section focused on trade figures with the Soviets and whatever they could pick up in terms of production, agricultural production in the countryside. Was the opposition causing economic problems? Things like that.

Q: Were you seeing growing opposition from whatever vantage point you had there?

TAYLOR: Yes, in 1979 the reports, and believable reports, that were coming in indicated that the opposition, the *Mujahideen*, was becoming more and more organized and better armed. There were various gun fights in some of the major cities, Qandahar and in the north. There had been a curfew in Kabul ever since the coup of April, 1978, from 11:00 until 6:00 in the morning. It was wise to be in your compound by 10:30 because you didn't want to be on the street with nervous Afghan GIs. You could hear gun fire at night periodically.

And there were incidents of opposition within the military several times throughout those months. There would be an outbreak of fighting within Kabul by dissident military. This didn't happen only at night, a couple of times it happened during the day. Everybody hunkered down and tried to figure out what was going on and trade notes.

One of the major outbreaks was in Herat, over in western Afghanistan near the Iranian border, when the *Mujahideen* mounted, along with some dissident military units, a major attack on the city specifically aiming at the Soviet presence. Apparently there was a large Soviet operation over there in terms of assistance, including dependents. There were a number of reports, which I believe were accurate, of deaths among these Soviet dependents along with Soviet advisers and security people. And lots of Afghans were killed in that particular incident. That caused tremendous reaction by the regime and by the Soviets and also among our SY people who became even more concerned about the safety of those of us still remaining. We were all in Kabul, but they felt if this could happen in Herat, it could happen in Kabul as well. I don't remember the exact date of that particular incident, but it was in the early fall of 1979. In retrospect, I think that particular incident was probably incidental, to some degree, in the Soviet decision to invade later that year in December. They had lost personnel and therefore they couldn't say they would just write the losses off, they had to do something to justify those losses, especially the dependents.

Q: There must have been almost a feeling of satisfaction seeing this regime having problems, wasn't there?

TAYLOR: Well, I suppose. There was a debate within the embassy, and I suppose within Washington too, as to how much trouble it was in. How do you measure something like that when the information we had was pretty sparse, although accurate, I think. How long could it last? Did it make any difference that the *Mujahideen* controlled the wastelands of Afghanistan when the regime was in solid control in Kabul and the big cities? So, we went along for the remaining few months of the year debating that and eventually got to the point of addressing the issue of

what would the Soviets do if things really got bad. Then, of course, you get into the bureaucratic problem of, "Hey, we are the embassy in Kabul and are not supposed to be reporting on what the Soviets will or will not do, that is embassy Moscow's job." Of course, everything we sent out went info to Moscow and a couple of times they came back and in effect told us to mind our own business.

And oddly enough, a little anecdote, it got to the point where I had to draft the reporting messages on this issue in the context of: Will the Afghan regime ask Moscow to send troops and help save the regime? If so, what do the Afghans think the response will be? That is how we got around that particular bureaucratic problem, because we, in Kabul, concluded that the Afghans were going to ask for help eventually and the Afghans believe that the Soviets will respond positively and send troops to help them out. Embassy Moscow, in this particular debate, constantly took the position that the Soviets would not send troops to Afghanistan. It was just outside their vital sphere of interest and they don't belong to the Warsaw Pact, and all of the reasons that it just made good sense for Soviet specialists. So, therefore, you had the two opposing positions. We could not say, "Yes, they will send troops," we said in effect, "Yes, the Afghans believe that the response will be a positive one when they request it [not if they request it]."

Q: Had the regime shaken down by this time to a particular kind of leadership?

TAYLOR: Yes, it had. The fellow who I mentioned was the titular head of the regime, the president, was, himself, shot at one of these cabinet meetings in September, 1979. Hafizullah Amin, the foreign minister and deputy prime minister, as a result of that ascended to be officially the number one, not just the official number two. He was the guy who was probably the most brutal ideologue among the political leadership. There were lots of other thugs worse than he was, but not among the top leadership. Yes, some of the more "reasonable" people among the cabinet political leadership had been replaced by other people. Naturally, as every political officer does you look at the cabinet members and their background and are constantly reporting on who has changed portfolios, etc. So, by the time we got to late 1979, Amin and his identified loyalists were in solid control. There wasn't anybody who could be identified as a member of the non-Amin faction of the political party. There were two factions in the Afghan left movement and there was always a competition and struggle between the two to dominate the results of the 1978 coup, the great revolution of 1978, as they called it. By 1979 Amin and his faction had prevailed and many of the members of the other faction had actually been exiled as ambassadors to various countries. To jump ahead, these were people who the Soviets brought back in December, 1979 and put into power when they invaded. So, they put into power a less radical group of the leadership.

Q: What was your perspective and the embassy's of the events that led up to the December action, both within Kabul and then the Soviet invasion?

TAYLOR: We were constantly reporting on the opposition movement. We were getting rumors in Kabul and there would be these events in Herat and a gun fight in Qandahar, and then a report that a complete village had been taken over by the *Mujahideen*. So that was what our focus was. Another focus was, what does that mean for the staying power of the regime? Does it mean it is

going to be overthrown? If so, by whom and how? There was a difference there. My opinion was that whoever controlled Kabul was in essence in charge of the country; a lot of the countryside didn't make that much difference, politically. Some people were arguing that if the trends continued this way, the rotten apple has to fall. I didn't necessarily agree with that. We were also focusing, again, on the Soviet role and trying to identify the best we could what that involvement amounted to, the extent, the level and the nature of that involvement. What we were really focusing on was identification, if at all possible, of active Soviet military troops. Did anybody ever see Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

Q: As opposed to an adviser.

TAYLOR: That's right. Were they active and attached to a Soviet unit that was there as opposed to an advisory role.

So these three major elements were essentially about all we did because everybody else was gone. My wife was director of the American Center in downtown Kabul, I think we had 3 or 4 female employees who remained in town after the great downsizing, and she was still running the English teaching programs which were very, very popular. Hundreds of students would still come to the American Center despite the nature of the bilateral relationship and the attitude of the regime. So, you could use that as a barometer to some degree as to the activity and the success of what the American Center was doing. But, she was just hanging on by her fingernails in terms of trying to think up useful activities and programs aside from teaching English, and we didn't have too many other programs that were working.

So this was the focus of everything up to December 27, 1979 when the Soviets invaded.

Q: Was there something that precipitated the invasion?

TAYLOR: The extent of the brutality of the regime was becoming increasingly clear. Actually Amin had the Soviets in a great bear hug. His pro-Soviet ideology and propaganda was embracing the Soviets, I think, to a degree that was considered intolerable by Afghanistan's conservative society and the opposition was growing. The only conclusion that I can draw from the Soviet decision was that they had concluded that the regime was going to be overthrown and that the only way to prevent a reversal of this socialist revolution was to take direct action to prevent the downfall of the brother revolution. And, so they did.

Q: So, there was nothing that happened in Kabul?

TAYLOR: Not a precipitating event. I read somewhere that a respected Soviet watcher said that the decision to make that invasion was made very abruptly with no precipitating event. Very suddenly, Brezhnev and his closest allies, decided Afghanistan was going down-hill, let's invade.

Q: And we are really talking about an increase in the senile, or at least not very competent leadership at that time, particularly on Brezhnev's part?

TAYLOR: Yes, I think so. I think that has been portrayed by a lot of people in subsequent years, that he was really gone mentally several years before he actually died. I haven't read anybody who has said who was actually having the most influence on the decision-making process...was it the security guys, the military, the foreign ministry, the apparatchiks in the Party? Somebody may be working on that, but I haven't seen it in print as to who was having the most influence on the decision making process at that time. It will come out, especially with all of the information that is coming out now and probably will be available soon as to what happened and why. You could conclude now the fact that nobody has written it up and analyzed it points to the fact that such an abrupt and closely held decision indicates there was no staff work. That they just sat around schmoozing one night and said, "Let's go into Afghanistan."

Q: All of that group died within a few years anyway for physical reasons. So, Christmas Eve, you weren't sitting around saying, "Oh, my God, something is going to happen," or something like that?

TAYLOR: Actually, you know the way it all started, it was Christmas morning, the 25th of 1979, about 5:00 in the morning, and I was 90 percent asleep and 10 percent awake, when my wife nudges me and says, "Why does that plane keep flying over all of the time? What is he doing flying in circles?" So, I woke up a little more and realized that about every 15 seconds a plane would go over the house. I thought that was a strange thing. Remember this is December and Kabul is about 7,000 feet, so it is winter time and you normally have no air operations in the dark in Afghanistan. It was still dark. About 6:00 I went out in the front yard with binoculars to try to figure out what was going on and I could see just above the house and therefore all around Kabul, planes stacked fifteen high. They were in a downward spiral of approaching and as high as I could see with the binoculars. Their last approach was over the house. It was still curfew and I thought this was really weird. Having been an Air Force Intel officer I could identify the kinds of transports. They had all kinds of different planes coming in, all Soviet marked. None of it was Afghan. By the time the curfew was off, I jumped in the jeep and headed out to the airport and talked my way through a couple of roadblocks until I got to the airport when a couple of guys told me to go back. These were nervous Afghans and by that time you could see organized Soviet units being off loaded and deployed around Kabul. So, I returned.

By then, Christmas Day, everybody got in contact with everybody else and we were trying to figure out what was happening. You could just drive and see that these units were being deployed all around Kabul. By then we were asking ourselves what this meant and why.

So, for the next two days it continued, this constant airlift. It was nothing that anybody had ever seen before, such an aerial deployment of units. I suppose it probably happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968. So we were out in the streets, and we had the attaché guys and intel guys out reporting back what they were seeing. But, you could just sit in the front yard of the embassy and lose count of the airplanes arriving. Our conclusion at that time, because nobody could perceive what was coming, was that the Soviets had decided to provide backbone, to demonstrate to the *Muj* that the Soviet commitment is real and they are willing to send in all kinds of active participation.

Q: Were you able to talk to the Soviets, the Indians, the Pakistanis, or anyone else at that time?

TAYLOR: Yes. We consulted with the Indians and the Paks, but the Soviet embassy people wouldn't see us.

Q: Today is February 12, 1996. Jim, we had you watching planes coming in. What were you doing in the embassy while this was happening?

TAYLOR: The morning of Christmas, as I recounted, began with this massive airlift of troops and equipment into Kabul and we in the embassy were going around town and doing everything possible to report what was going on. It was impossible to hide something as massive as that. So for the next two days that is what we did. We scouted around outside the city as far as we could, but travel was very controlled and limited. We watched from the embassy, which was very near the airport, all of the aerial resupply and bringing in of Soviet airborne troops. They would be deployed throughout the city. For the next couple of nights you could see a massive movement of troops and equipment around the town. And then, on the 27th of December, it was like the previous two days with nothing too eventful or out of the ordinary, we were at home and my wife was giving a holiday party for her staff at USIS because she and the PAO were the only ones left in the USIA operation. So, there were about 40-45 people, some families had come, at the house, and all of a sudden, about 7:00 at night, already dark, there was a loud explosion and the telephone sort of jingled and almost jumped off the desk. I picked it up and it was dead. There were no phone communications throughout the city. We subsequently learned that the Post, Telephone and Telegraph (PTT) office and building in downtown Kabul, had been one of the primary and initial targets of the Soviets in terms of knocking out communications throughout the city.

Q: Just to go back, the Soviets put a hell of a lot of stuff in there. Were there military people saying, "Well, I have counted planes and there must be the equivalent of a brigade or a division?" We must have been trying to figure out what they were up to.

TAYLOR: We had made identifications of active Soviet units. They were right there on the streets and moving around and from patches, etc. on their uniforms you could tell who they were. It was clear that there was a Soviet airborne division deployed in and around Kabul with some light airmobile armored equipment. Not heavy tanks, they couldn't fly those in at that point, so they had light armored equipment. The general wisdom, after asking ourselves for several days what is going on and what are the Soviets up to, which seemed to be accepted in Washington and in Moscow and every other Soviet watching place around, was that they were aiming to provide backbone, if you will, to the Afghan military effort. The Afghan military forces were having trouble with the *Mujahideen* in the countryside and there had been, as I mentioned earlier, some cases of mutiny and revolts within the military against the regime. So, we all in the embassy, I don't recall that anybody ever expressed a differing viewpoint, believed that the Soviet forces were there to provide some kind of stiffening to their allies, because they had, in fact, been allies. They had just the previous year signed a new Soviet-Afghan friendship treaty which superseded one that had been signed in the 1920s, I believe, so were considered their allies. There was no indication or speculation, at that time, that they were there to do what they eventually did on the 27th.

Q: In other words, from a practical point of view it really hadn't changed the situation?

TAYLOR: No, the main thing that changed was that you had on the ground in a foreign country outside the Warsaw Pact, Soviet active military forces, which was highly unusual and was being watched by everybody in the whole US government and other governments as to what they were doing and how they were going about it. Of course, you can't move that many troops and equipment without it being picked up by the guys who listen for those kinds of things. So, they were being tracked by the NSA and everybody else. But, the policy objective of what they were trying to do was, of course, what anybody could analyze and talk about and report on. Across the board it was concluded that they were there to provide this stiffening to the regime.

Q: Were you getting this from the Afghans, too?

TAYLOR: More or less in the rumor mill. Mind you there were only three days in which this happened, so the rumor mill really hadn't had a chance to find out a whole lot. But, most of the Afghans were extremely worried about what was going on at that point. What was their country coming to, it was being occupied? Something was happening when you have a massive influx of very good Soviet units. They were top line troops, not second rate.

Q: So, anyway, we are back with the telephone failure.

TAYLOR: The actual attack took place beginning, as well as I can remember, about 7:00 in the evening on the night of the 27th. The PTT office was one of the first targets hit and we subsequently learned it was deliberately knocked out for the purpose of disrupting communications among the Afghans. A second major target was Afghan Radio and Television operations which were right next to the embassy. They were hit very quickly by fast moving Soviet armored units of this airborne division. That was being watched by our marine guards who had these externally mounted cameras and they could watch that, because once the firing started they, of course, didn't know what was going on. Everybody was alert, of course, to the movements of the Soviet troops around Kabul, but nobody really expected an outbreak of fighting, an actual attack.

Q: There hadn't been any noticeable deployment of Afghan troops to counter the ...?

TAYLOR: Not that we could detect. They were normally deployed around strategic points like the PTT, the palace, etc. but we didn't see any great buildup and there was none. The attack as it unfolded surprised the Afghan government and Amin, as much as it surprised everybody else. He didn't expect his so-called allies to turn on him in such a vicious way as they did.

Immediately after the telephone incident you began hearing a lot of heavy firing around, explosions and there were tracer rounds going through the sky and a couple of the search lights had been turned on. These lights had been used during the curfew to illuminate certain areas of the town. Of course, we didn't know what was actually happening except that it was obvious that a lot of fighting was going on.

I had to decide whether to stay at the house where we had 40 or so people there when this broke out, or head for the embassy because that was generally what we did. We tried to get enough people to the embassy during these various crises that had happened ever since the April, 1978 coup, so that we could report and inform Washington about the situation, not only the political and military situation, but the situation of the American community that was still in Kabul and operating. So, I decided to head for the embassy and leave my wife in charge of her party, and took off in the Jeep that I had at the time.

So, I was driving very slowly down some of the back streets heading towards the embassy. On one fairly large, four lane, divided, residential street, I was going no more than ten miles an hour, not wanting to attract anybody's attention who might conclude that I was fleeing or something, I saw coming towards me two headlights which were sort of bouncing. I thought it had to be some kind of Pakistani truck, some of them are not in terribly good condition, that was just on the wrong side of the road being confused and driving on the left...we drove on the right in Afghanistan, but as you know everybody drives on the left in Pakistan and India like the British. It wasn't until maybe 20 or 30 yards that I saw that those headlights were on the front of a Soviet armored vehicle with infantry on top moving towards me. So, I did a very quick left turn bouncing over the median that was in the middle of the street, and this column went past. There must have been 10 or 15 armored vehicles in that column all with infantry mounted on top.

That was a little bit of a jolt so I was very careful to get on the main highway that went to the airport and passed in front of the embassy. I turned on all of the interior lights of the car, wanting to make certain that nobody would mistake me for something else, and got to the entrance of the embassy and turned in. Oddly enough, one of our embassy guards was still at the gate and he was extremely agitated, I recall. He didn't know what was going on. I could see that there were several larger, standard, heavy armor, T-55 tanks and T-62s down in the front of the Afghan Radio. Those were the ones usually used by the Afghan army and were Soviet supplied. I made it into the embassy and at that point we had about 3 or 4 marine guards in the embassy, 2 communicators, and myself. At that time, given the holidays, even though we had a small community, it was even smaller because several officers had gone to India or Pakistan for vacation and things of that sort, and some were in Western Europe. So, as it turned out I was the acting DCM, although I was reasonably junior. It turned out that after the Chargé I was the senior FSO there.

I tried the phones again but they were dead. I started calling on the radio to the Chargé, who was Bruce Amstutz at the time and who lived farther from the embassy than I did. He said the fighting in front of his place and in the neighborhood was such that he didn't think it was safe to try to get to the embassy. So, he did not leave his house, but we were in radio communication.

And then about that time the security officer showed, Fred Lecker, who had come over the back wall, if I remember. He had been able to get over from his residence which was very near the embassy so he didn't have to drive. We agreed that he would focus on trying to establish the security and whereabouts of everyone in the community through our radio net, which we had tested and was working much better than it had in the coup of 1978. So, he was able to focus on that. I was focusing on communications with Amstutz and trying to find out what anybody could

see and what was happening in the area at least around the embassy where we could see what was going on.

And so, after about 30 minutes, three or four other officers had shown up. The senior military guy was a warrant officer, all the commissioned officers were on leave. He was there, a couple of CIA guys and a communicator for each agency was available in the embassy. So, we had about 10 or 11 people and that was maximum. After about 30-45 minutes the fighting around Afghan Radio broke out again. You could hear some wounded troops yelling and screaming in the night and you could see some had been taken prisoner by the Soviet troops.

Q: By this time it was obvious that the Soviets were fighting Afghan military.

TAYLOR: Yes, that's right. At one point, as I said, the marine guard sitting there very early on had seen Soviet troops drive up in front of Afghan Radio and open fire on the Afghans who were guarding Afghan Radio.

Q: To just get the state of mind at the time, at this point you knew the Soviets were doing it, but did you know what they were about?

TAYLOR: Well, we sort of said, "What the hell is going on?" We could see what was going on, but didn't know why.

The general wisdom in that first hour or so was that there had been a split in the Afghan military. That somebody in the Afghan military had decided that he wasn't going to have his country occupied by the Soviet Union, so he and his troops and units decided to attack the Soviets and the regime, and that was what was happening. So, in that case one would have, obviously as we had seen in the past...we had seen Afghans fighting Afghans ever since the coup, and the Soviets were on one side, presumably on the side of the regime. That was what we presumed. It turned out not to be the case, of course, but at any rate that was what we thought.

And then we had these indications that the Soviets had attacked Afghan Radio because our marine guards had seen the Soviets surround the building and actually occupy it. And then you try to figure out why would the Soviets attack Afghan Radio, which was the mouthpiece of the regime and presumably loyal to the regime. We couldn't answer that at that particular point because a lot of stuff was happening in the neighborhood. The fighting would flare up and then quiet down and flare up again. After about an hour and watching the deployment of the troops around Afghan Radio, we could watch it from the roof of the embassy which had an enclosure on top with cinder block walls that you could look over. There were three or four of us up on the top of the embassy watching and in communication with everybody. Fred Lecker and the SY guys were trying to find out where everybody was.

The view from the embassy was very clear on the Afghan Radio side. I decided at the time that I wanted all of the lights in the compound left on. I wanted it as brightly lighted as possible. I didn't want anybody to be able to make the case for misidentification because it was dark, etc. So, I told Fred to keep all of the lights on, everywhere throughout the compound. I had one of the marines put the flag back up so there would be no question that this was the American embassy.

And then all of a sudden I recall seeing one Afghan troop come running out of someplace carrying an RPG, which was a rocket propelled grenade and antitank weapon. He stopped about 100 yards from us and let loose with that at a Soviet vehicle and the whole thing just blew apart. And then the fighting flared up very, very quickly and became very violent. A couple of tanks were knocked out and if you have ever been near a tank that goes off and the shells going off inside, the whole neighborhood felt they were just rocking and rolling...

Q: Had you made communication with the United States by this time?

TAYLOR: Only through telegraph. We had sent FLASH messages back to Washington telling as best as we could tell what had happened. That there was firing taking place. We told them who was at the embassy and what we were doing, what we could see, and that we were trying to make contact with all of the American staff. So we were in constant contact in an outgoing sense with Washington, Moscow, Pakistan, the posts which we felt would be interested in what was going on. And that was not an easy operation because there were no secretaries there and what I had to do in effect was to just hand write on a legal pad, reporting messages and give it to a communicator who had to type it into the machine himself from my handwritten notes. And various other officers from every agency, the ones that were there, were writing it up as well because somebody would be up on the roof and I would be somewhere else. So, whoever saw something, would immediately come down and write up a message and give it to the communicator and they would send it up. I imagine a lot of it was disjointed reporting and not very clear and perhaps not very cogent, but that was the way we were working.

And, so the fighting would flare up. At that point when the first major flare up occurred, and the embassy had been hit a couple of times with machine gun fire, nothing heavy, I decided that it was time to institute the final phase of our burn operation. We had drawn down all of our paperwork to I think what we estimated to be a 15 minute burn time. I told, Fred, who was in charge of the Marines, to give them orders to institute the final burn. So, they went through all of the safes and burned everything. Unfortunately they got a few passports, money, savings accounts documents, etc., which sort of ticked off a few people. But the situation was tense and one that nobody had ever faced before, and the Marines were just kids at the time and were probably as nervous as anybody and a little over reactive by burning everything they found. Anyway, it eventually straightened itself out and those of us who had cash burned received repayment from the Department.

Another minor detail was, well it might not have been minor if anything had happened...Fred had had these Marine guards heavily armed with shotguns and 45s, etc. and I told Fred that that was a Soviet Airborne division out there on the street and three or four guys with shotguns were not going to be any kind of defense, so don't have any fantasy about defending the embassy. If anybody walks in and they want to come in here, they can come in here. We are not going to resist. It would be foolhardy to try to resist. So, if these guys want to walk around with shotguns and 45s they can, but they are not going to use them. It is a direct order that they are not going to use them against anybody. Well, he understood that.

But, there was never an incident of that kind, although we were hit a few times and once on the roof. I was up there with two or three of the guys and they were watching over at the Afghan

Radio and somebody fired over our heads. I assumed it was over our heads to get us to stop watching them so carefully and one burst hit the wall right beside where I was. Fortunately the cinder block stopped it so it wasn't a heavy weapon. So, at that point I decided it was a little too risky to be sitting up there in that particular place and Fred agreed, so we ceased and desisted for a couple of hours. But eventually we sent one or two guys up at a time for observation, but not a whole crowd.

So, that was where we were for the rest of the night. The fighting would flare up and come back down, flare up and come back down. We were able to establish the welfare and whereabouts of all but two of the staff. One of the secretaries turned her radio off and hadn't decided to turn it back on, so she was safe at home but we didn't know that. I can't remember who the other person was. We eventually found out the next morning where they were, they radioed in. But, Washington was concerned about the welfare of the staff, and obviously so. And, that was a bit of concern the rest of the night, as to where these two people were because there was a lot of fighting in the areas where people had residences and apartments in the area around the embassy.

During the periods when it would be fairly quiet, we would send messages back to Washington sort of analyzing what we could, telling them our opinions, what we could see and things like that. At one point I wrote a message that so far as we could tell there hadn't yet been any instances where Afghans were fighting Afghans, that it seemed to be solely a Soviet/Afghan fight, and, this addresses the point you made earlier, what we might be seeing.

From the embassy we couldn't tell a whole lot, but we knew there was fighting on the other side of town where the regime leadership was. Amin had taken up residence across town and you could see a lot of fighting over in that direction. There was no air power used at all as opposed to the coup in 1978. No aircraft were heard all night long doing anything, no helicopter or anything. That indicated that somehow the regime had been grounded, at least that is what our assessment was.

So, because of these very admittedly flimsy pieces of evidence, if you will, we sent the first message in saying that what we might be seeing is a Soviet coup d'etat aimed at the regime. I subsequently learned a couple of months later that when that message hit Washington everybody thought that was out in left field, a crazy notion.

So, we were more or less deployed that way with us trapped at the embassy and Bruce Amstutz at his residence. Through radio contact we knew where everybody was, except for the two people I mentioned earlier. So, we felt that if everybody just stayed put we were in fair enough shape if nothing further happened, such as a Soviet decision to occupy the embassy or something like that, which would have caused all kinds of different questions to be raised as to how we behave and what happened next.

On two occasions that I recall, we knew that people had come over the wall into the embassy compound. I saw one on a camera and someone else said that they had seen somebody come over. The one I saw was in an Afghan military uniform, so it must have been a troop trying to get away from the Soviets in some way, and presume it was the same thing with the second incident,

but nobody came to the door or sought refuge. No Soviet came to the gate insisting that we cease and desist what we were doing or anything of that sort.

So, it more or less stayed that way for the rest of the night. We subsequently learned that the Soviets had attacked Amin's compound where he was staying and gunned down his particular bodyguards, a special unit for his protection, and they had all been wiped out. They burst in on him and he, I guess, drew a gun or something like that, and they shot him and all of his other aides at the time. So, that particular regime disappeared.

A couple of the embassy guards had stayed at their post at the gate, but then when the fighting really got bad, I told them if they wanted to they could come in the embassy and go down into the basement where it might be a little bit safer. I then had them the rest of the night stay next to a commercial radio and about 5:00 in the morning they told me they were picking up a very faint signal in Dari an announcement by the leader of the Afghan leftist faction that was opposed to the one in power under Amin. He was saying that he was in charge and was going to take over with the great friendship and help of the Soviet Union and that he would be making further announcements and statements when required. So, that was our first indication that the Soviets had in fact decided to bring back and sponsor, if you will, and put into power another Afghan, leftist regime. Maybe they felt that could be more effective, or more acceptable to the people, or something. I think the Soviet analysis and decision making in this whole thing was really flawed from the beginning.

Q: What was your reaction to this? Why would the Soviets do this?

TAYLOR: Well, that is a very good question and we were asking ourselves why they did this. What is going on, what do they expect to do or achieve? I think everybody assumed that the Soviet army would not face any serious challenge on the Afghan scene because they would be just too overwhelmingly powerful to be opposed effectively by any segment of Afghan society, the *Mujahideen*, or the Afghan army, even. And, so, given that assumption, it was more or less felt that what they were thinking they were going to do was to get rid of this regime that was ineffective, bring back another one that was an ideological brother to Moscow, and again, representing the ideological requirement not to allow a socialist revolution to be reversed, and back it up with Soviet military force that could not be opposed by any Afghans who were just a bunch of villagers anyway. That was how we thought the Soviets were thinking.

But there were two things that we at the time, "we" meaning almost every analyst involved, didn't know that were the keys over the next decade of fighting between the Soviets and the *Muj*. One was that the Soviets imposed upon themselves a maximum number of troops to be deployed in Afghanistan. It was about 140,000, or something like that. So, therefore, by imposing this limit on themselves, they did not in effect apply the overwhelming force that they could have done, they physically had it, the Soviet army was huge, as we all know, and well equipped, but they didn't. The second factor that we didn't know anything about at the time was the extent to which we and other countries would support the *Mujahideen* in providing arms, training, etc. That program hadn't been created. So, those two factors were the keys leading to the Soviet problems in Afghanistan that led to their decision to pull out, that it wasn't worth it. But, at the time we thought that the Brezhnev Doctrine of overwhelming force would apply, although it

turned out not to be the case. Although 140,000 troops is a lot of force in a country like Afghanistan, it turned out not to be adequate to either occupy the whole country effectively or destroy the whole *Mujahideen* effectively.

The Soviets in the next two days sent in over 100 thousand troops across the northern border which were deployed through Qandahar and Herat and everywhere in the country. Obviously they had already established control of Kabul, so they were pretty much in charge.

The next morning, the morning of the 28th, it was very strange. After all of the events the night before there were people out trying to pursue their normal everyday life. You could see guys driving donkey carts down the streets and trying to go about their business. It was very bizarre because right in the midst of this there were burned out tanks...they had gotten most of the bodies off the streets by the next morning and I don't think anybody saw any grim results of the night's fighting except for burned out equipment that was still around. I went out on the streets the next morning when it became obvious that the Soviets were not going to impose a curfew right at dawn, because people were up walking around. So, I walked over to a couple of Soviet GIs next to Afghan Radio and tried to chat them up a little bit, asking obvious questions like where did they come from and what were they doing here and what was their unit? I was able to use my Russian. The basic answer that these guys had was that they came in last night and didn't know why they were there, they were just following orders. After about five minutes an officer came over and told me to go back and mind my own business, and so I did.

Life among the embassy staff was finally sorting itself out. We did find out where those other two people were. Everybody had been a bit nervous over night, but nobody had been hurt. I made contact with my wife and she said some of the Afghans were so nervous they got fairly drunk during the night and had passed out not knowing what was going on. They woke up the next morning and were told that their country had been invaded.

Q: Now, you keep using the term "invasion." Was it an invasion?

TAYLOR: I think you can call it an invasion. Using forceful deployment of that many troops into a foreign country, I think is an invasion, especially when you take into account the destruction of the host regime, your so-called allies. If they had, in fact, come in simply as backbone for the host regime, which obviously the regime thought they were doing, inviting this guest in to help them survive and then it turns out that they in fact were butchered by the invitees. So, I think you can call it an invasion, especially when they did that to the government that invited them in, I assume they got invited in, and then put in place another government that they, in fact, brought in themselves from the outside, even though it was an Afghan regime.

Q: Did you make contact with any of the other embassies to find out if they had any...?

TAYLOR: I think that first day, the 28th, I think we began as best we could to try to make contact with the Indians and the Pakistanis. Actually, most of them came by to see us. Everybody assumed that we knew everything. It turned out that that first day, and again as opposed to 1978, everybody started moving around that first day after the Soviet attack. You could drive back and forth, so Amstutz showed up, and we made contact with all of the staff. Then we began starting

up normal operations and reporting back to Washington as to...well we just talked to the Pakistani political officer today and he thinks this or reported this and nobody was hurt in that embassy. Various things of this sort. So, within 24 hours we were in effect beginning to report all of the rumors that were going around.

For about three days the airport remained closed so nobody could come in. None of our personnel who were on leave could come back and there were no foreign journalists coming in. So, it was a fairly peaceful period for us. But, when the Kabul airport opened up, virtually all of our staff came back, but at the same time we had a second invasion consisting of foreign journalists, some of whom were well known and capable journalists, many of whom didn't know a thing about what was going on and didn't know much about anything as far as I could tell. Because of that and their insistence, and there were a couple of journalists who had international reputations, Armand DeBorchgrave was probably the most well known of all the journalists who came to Kabul for that initial period, we decided that we would have a briefing every afternoon at 4 or 5:00 or something like that and try as best we could to answer their questions and tell them what we thought was going on. That lasted for about a week when the attention span went on to something else. Most of them left after about a week and started writing about the next crisis some place. But, that is the way we handled it.

There was a lot of pressure because we had a very small staff and trying to do your own day-to-day business and then the care and feeding of these numbers of journalists, was a little bit difficult. But, we were up to about five or eight reporting officers from various agencies. The military attaché had come back and it was helpful to have him back and running around town seeing what was happening and all. But, nothing further really happened. In many people's minds, including my own, I thought in those first few days that that was sort of the end of the story. Nobody is going to defeat the Soviet army, especially with all the force you could see on the streets and reports coming out that additional divisions had deployed throughout the western and southern parts of the country. I thought that was the end of the story. Obviously, for reasons that I mentioned earlier, the story went on for roughly ten years.

In terms of what happened afterwards, there was, of course, a great deal of bilateral US/Soviet tension involved. President Carter made a somewhat unfortunate statement that he felt that this particular development betrayed his trust in the Soviet behavior and policy making. This didn't make him look very presidential, I think. Most people felt that he was surprised at this, and all of us were surprised, but we didn't say, "Gosh, how could you guys do this to me?" Well, at any rate, there was a lot of bilateral tension and a lot of regional tension. The Paks were alarmed and the Indians to some extent were alarmed but they had Pakistan as a buffer between them and the Soviets. There was a lot of speculation as to whether this meant an extension of the Brezhnev Doctrine to the entire world. Did this mean that the Soviets can deploy force whenever they feel they have the right to deploy force? There were a lot of security concerns in the region as well as in other areas.

Q: There was concern in Central America, too, as the Nicaraguan revolution had already taken place.

TAYLOR: So there were a lot of broader concerns other than just Afghanistan. Again, in the broadest possible sense, Afghanistan per se represented little of importance to the United States, but this particular development could have been viewed as a real factor in US security concerns not only in that region but in regions that were more of an immediate and strategic interest, such as the Middle East. Even though the Camp David Accords had been implemented the year before, still there was the problem with the security concerns vis-a-vis Israel and Syria, etc.

So, that, I guess in a nutshell was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Q: What about your relations with the new government? What did you do after the invasion?

TAYLOR: That is a good question, because it was never very clear in my mind what the policy was, but the official policy was that the issue of recognition did not arise. I don't know if this is a known story, but I drafted a report, a cable, and convinced Amstutz to sign off on it, recommending that we break relations, that we close the embassy and withdraw everybody out. There is no legitimacy to this regime and we should have nothing to do with it. It is nothing but an imposed puppet government, imposed by Soviet military force. He signed off on it. Washington didn't buy that, obviously. They didn't want to pursue that policy and we would remain as more or less a listening post...we were not much more than that even before the invasion. We did close down USIA operations, and most everything else. We brought out various people...the econ people, it didn't make much sense to have them there. One consular officer stayed for a while and then we had another officer doing consular work. So, we continued as a listening post. We took the position that we would not deal in any kind of political sense with the new regime. That we would deal with the new regime only on consular and security matters and in effect do the minimum amount of business with the new guys. Only what had to be done such as arranging for the shipment in of supplies for the embassy and asking them for an exit visa for people being transferred out and things of that sort, actually consular and administrative matters. There was never supposed to be any kind of political contact in the political sense.

Q: So, you never went to the Foreign Ministry or things like that?

TAYLOR: Only for reasons that I have just described.

Q: These were orders from Washington?

TAYLOR: Yes, that was Washington's decision as to the level and the nature of the relationship with the new regime.

Q: Carter had come out fairly strongly. I think he had put undue reliance on personal relations. That there was going to be a whole new ball game with the Soviet Union. If you were honest and above board with the Soviets they would respond in kind. Although he had a National Security Advisor who down to every toe nail detested the Russians per se in Brzezinski... What was your reaction to Carter's reactions that you were getting from news, etc.?

TAYLOR: Well, that is more or less related to what I said before. His initial reaction was that he felt betrayed. Yes, I think that was probably true. He probably really felt because of his confidence in his ability to deal and establish a personal relationship with someone like Brezhnev and the rest of the Soviet leadership and that they couldn't possibly do something that would be detrimental to that relationship. I think because of these statements and initial reaction a lot of people felt that he was unduly naive in thinking that this would play any role in reigning in Soviet tendencies for expansion. So, that was sort of the view of most people who followed these kinds of issues, that this naivete was too naive, if you will, and somehow Brzezinski had not been able to convince him that nations, especially somebody who was as hostile and expansionist as the Soviet Union would not take some actions just because somebody had led the President of the United States to believe they would behave in such a manner. They just viewed events in Afghanistan as far more important to the Soviet Union than they were to the United States and that they had on their borders the right to determine what happened in Afghanistan and play the dominant external role and if Washington didn't like it that was just too bad.

Q: What happened to your wife? Did she become a dependent spouse?

TAYLOR: Okay, what happened to my wife and me in the next few weeks. We went on doing these reporting jobs, etc. and about three or four weeks after the coup in late January, our CIA colleagues uncovered a report of unknown veracity and reliability and the source was not terribly solid, that the KGB had come in in full force and was working with the new Afghan security services and were targeting me personally and some kind of unknown operation and that they were intending to create some kind of situation involving me in a security sense. Now, this was reported back to Washington and the Department and Amstutz asked me whether I wanted to leave or whether I wanted to stay. The end of our tour was coming up that spring and I thought I had a lot of institutional memory as to what had happened in Afghanistan during these years and didn't think the report was terribly reliable, so I said I was willing to stay. Washington then came back and said no, no, no. This was 1980 and we had the hostages right next door in Iran, they had been taken in November, 1979 and Washington didn't want any further security problems, I assume. It was never explained, but you salute and do what you are told. So, I got instructions to get on the next plane, regardless where it was going. Orders would be cut later concerning my next assignment, etc..

So, about two days later, air connections were still fairly unreliable, I got on a plane to New Delhi and had to leave without packing up, just carrying a suitcase. So, I was in New Delhi for a few days and then was told to go on back to Washington, that I would find a job somewhere there. The decision had been made to close the USIS operations so my wife stayed on another month, I think, to finish up all of the administrative business having to do with just closing up...terminating employees and transferring somehow all of the responsibility of the USIS buildings and equipment and things to the admin section remaining in the embassy. So, she was able to get out and come back to Washington as well in about April. So, we ended up in Washington after that.

Q: This was April, 1980?

TAYLOR: Right.

Q: So, what happened when you got back to Washington? It was still NEA wasn't it?

TAYLOR: Yes.

Q: How did you find things within the NEA Bureau and all that? Was there much interest in what you had seen and your knowledge of this and how did you find the Bureau looking at this situation?

TAYLOR: Well, it is odd that you should ask that question because as it turned out nobody had any interest in talking to me at all.

Q: I have to say that this happens in the Department again and again and again which is why I asked the question.

TAYLOR: Well, they offered me a job in the Office of Regional Affairs doing something that they would create. They didn't have a particular slot for me or a portfolio of particular issues that they wanted me to work on. Nobody mentioned a job working on Afghan affairs or anything, really. There was no debriefing. It was kind of strange. I thought that people coming back from a place like that would presumably be of interest to at least the desk officer, but it didn't happen. If I may add a personal opinion, I have gained the impression over 25 years of Foreign Service work that the incumbents in any particular job consider themselves to be the expert on whatever that particular portfolio is and somebody who is no longer in a particular job of responsibility on that portfolio is of little interest to him.

I recall a conversation that I had with Ambassador Ted Eliot at the time of the funeral of Spike Dubs. Eliot, of course, was a pallbearer as I was. After the funeral I said to him, "Given these events and the murder of Spike Dubs and the growing relationship with the Soviets and all of these events, while here in town for this funeral I assume that you are going to be talked to by the people in the Department, having been the ambassador there just before Spike Dubs." And he looked at me as if I was absolutely crazy and he said, "Nobody here wants to talk to me." He had been the ambassador there for a long time and you would think that in that context somebody would have wanted to ask what he thought about all of these events. He said nobody had asked him.

Q: I have tried to figure out this. All I can figure out is that we hire people on the policy side people who feel that the more a person knows about something the more inhibiting it is. It is a lot easier to come in with a blank slate and have your own perceptions rather than have somebody say, "Well, that was done before." It makes for a poorer decision making process, but within the thing it allows the hard charger to go ahead without the inhibitions and prior knowledge.

TAYLOR: That means a lot of wheels are being invented all of the time.

Q: Yes,

TAYLOR: This is one reason why I do this oral history way after the fact. Frankly I think they could do with a solid oral history of people coming out of trouble spots, just for this and have it within the system.

LOUISE TAYLOR
Director of American Cultural Center, USIS
Kabul (1977-1980)

Ms. Taylor was born and raised in Illinois. She was educated at Wellesley College, George Washington University and Boston University. After joining the Foreign Service of USIA, Ms. Taylor served in Washington and abroad in the field of Cultural and Information. Her foreign posts include Moscow, Kabul, Tel Aviv and Rabat. She also served in Washington as USIA Desk Officer for Afghanistan/Pakistan and for South Asia and as Policy Officer for Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States. Ms. Taylor was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You and Jim went to Afghanistan and were there from when to when?

TAYLOR: We arrived in the spring of '77. We left after the Soviet invasion of 1980. We were there almost three years – March of '77 to February of '80. He left a few months before I left.

Q: Talking about 1977, what were you getting from the desk and people before you went out to Afghanistan and when you arrived there? What was the situation in Afghanistan in '77?

TAYLOR: In '77, Afghanistan was a thriving developing country. AID was probably 100 strong. The Germans, the French, the Chinese, the UN, any number of smaller countries, even the Iranians, I believe, had assistance programs there which were helping the Afghans. The Afghans had four major high schools, each of which fed into the two university systems. In one high school, the students were bilingual in English and Dari. In another German; in another French; and in another, Russian. Kabul university was originally founded by AID, had an agricultural basis to it but grew up to be a major university specializing in all fields, a lot of American faculty, and the medium of instruction was by and large English. The Polytechnic was a Soviet-designed university. The staff was largely Russian. The medium of instruction was Russian. Afghanistan at that time was, as it has always been, part of the so-called "Great Game," only the Great Game was now between the United States and Russia. But Iran played a major role. So did Pakistan and India. The atmosphere in Kabul was wide open. Afghans, third country nationals, just about everybody, participated in everything. The American Cultural Center, of which I was the director, had 1,500 students in its English teaching program along with another 100-200 in the professional level program whereby AID would funnel its scholarship students through our English teaching program. So, we had very level range of students from ministries, from universities, about to go off on an AID grant to the United States. We had a 15,000 volume library, an open stacks library. It was mobbed with Afghan university students every day. Members of the Afghan press were there. Members of the third country communities were there.

Social life in Afghanistan was the best social life in terms of getting to know everybody from Peace Corps to Afghans of all walks of life to diplomats from all the countries, including the Soviet embassy. It was just a wonderful environment. I'll never forget it. It was the happiest I think I was in my Foreign Service career.

The government at that time was a so-called "republic," although it wasn't really a republic. The president of the government, a man named Daoud, who was overthrown and killed in the '78 Marxist coup, had overthrown his own brother-in-law and cousin, King Zahir Shah, in 1973 in what was essentially a bloodless coup. I think one soldier was killed in that '73 takeover. Zahir Shah, the king who was overthrown, lives today still in Rome. He is quite elderly. But he plays a role in the attempts at a peace process. So, Daoud had been in power with a lot of enemies since '73 when we arrived in '77. But it was a very calm environment. There were concerns the Soviets had been training thousands of military officers on an annual basis. Our military officer training program was limited to fewer than 20 on an annual basis. That was a matter of concern. No one, however, in any agency, in any office here in Washington or in Afghanistan, predicted what happened April 27, 1978, which was the great Sauer Revolution.

Q: Prior to that, what about the countryside? One always thinks of Kabul being an international city, but you have all these fundamentalist tribal groups sitting out camped around the hills.

TAYLOR: That's the impression one has now. It is true that Kabul was very much an international city. It's located at an elevation of 6,000-plus feet, so it has a delightful climate. There is extreme poverty in the poor parts of the city, but nothing like the poverty you see in the countryside. But we were able to travel and did in that year and a half before it became impossible and very unsafe to travel. Jim and I as well as others usually traveled in groups of maybe 10 or more in small caravans. That was the safest way to travel. The countryside is magnificent. The villagers are the model of hospitality that you've always read about in that part of the world. One time, we were blocked from our destination of Bamiyan, the Buddhist pilgrimage point from the Silk Route days. We were a group of four. We ran into a huge landslide where a 600 foot cliff had fallen down into the road. We couldn't get back to Kabul; we were too far away. We had to camp out at about 10,000 feet. It was late October and was very cold. We were in our four wheel drive car, but we were not prepared to camp out. And the villagers nearby came and said, "No, you can't sleep on the ground. You can't sleep in the car. It's too cold. Come and sleep here in our little huts with us." Fundamentalism is something that has come to Afghanistan in the last 10 years. In the '70s and prior to that, the way I would describe Afghanistan and the villagers, the people outside the major cities, is, these are people who are devout Muslims, committed to their religion, but they really couldn't care less what their neighbor did or what you did. Certainly they would pray five times a day. They would give the zakat. But there was nothing about Afghans – and it really hurts so much to see them depicted this way in the press now and to see this actually has happened – that the fundamentalist movement largely coming from groups in Pakistan has now become the outward identify of the Afghan people. If there is ever a group of Muslim peoples, and I have lived in many Muslim countries and traveled and worked in other Islamic countries, that was what I would call "moderate" in terms of its approach to religion, it was the Afghanistan of the 1970s. Again, this is not to say they were not devout Muslims. Indeed, they were. But they didn't have a crusading motivation. Many of them in the countryside lived in extremely narrow, isolated valleys. The

concept of Islam being their everyday motivating factor was about as far from reality as anything. Their motivating factor was simply to survive and to eek out a living on these rocky plateaus where they lived. Sometimes we traveled through valleys which were so steeply graded that sunshine never got in there for more than a couple of hours a day. So, these were not people who were crusading around to cause everyone to conform to a certain behavior standard. They loved music. They loved their cassettes of their favorite singers. Tabla players were on in every little café – by “café,” I mean just a little hut with a couple of straw chairs to sit on. Everybody had a radio or a cassette player. Very rudimentary cassette players were available and maybe one person in the village would have a cassette player. Somebody would come from Jalalabad and bring the latest cassettes. So, they loved music. They loved film. Film was very popular. All of these things are forbidden now. Women in Kabul, both professional women and not professional women, didn’t necessarily go about covered up. Many women in Kabul wore western dress, knee length skirts, jackets, nothing on the head. This was also true in the countryside. You would see women working in the fields where it’s very cumbersome to wear a chador or a burqa or anything like that. So, they didn’t. The nomads, called Kuchis, from the Dari word “kuchkadan,” meaning “to move,” the women never wore anything on their heads. Very striking women, by the way, with wonderfully colorful dresses with coins and things sewn into them. This has all come about in the last 10 years. To me, it represents a dramatic change not in the basic Afghan character because I don’t think the basic Afghan character has changed. But this is something that has been imposed on them and out of fear now you see people in the villages as well as women in the urban areas covered from head to toe. I’m not saying that there were not women who were covered when we were there. There were. But it was a matter of choice. No one looked disparagingly on someone else for choosing one way or the other. That’s the major difference in Afghan society today and it’s all imposed by fear.

Q: How did the mix of the students of the technical university trained by the Russians and you were training the ones in liberal arts...

TAYLOR: Also the sciences.

Q: And also the sciences. Was there much mixture? Was there rivalry?

TAYLOR: That’s a good question. I don’t know the answer to it in detail except that Kabul University graduates up until the time of the first Marxist coup were the ones who got the good jobs in the ministries. They were the ones who got good jobs in the private businesses which existed. I don’t know that there was a rivalry in the sense that there is between two big college football schools or such. I think there was not much interchange between the two schools. On the other hand, you have the vast family networks in Kabul at that time. Again, this is prior to the politicization that occurred once the Marxist coup of ’78 took place. That is a very interesting question. I’d like to know more about that, whether or not there was actual rivalry between these two groups. Again, I don’t think they mixed very much. There were polytechnic students who came to the American Cultural Center all the time. They were learning English. They knew that they didn’t have much of a future, at least not until the coup of ’78, if they didn’t learn to speak English. The irony was that our cultural center was in what you might call the pretty central downtown part, whereas both of these universities were located on the other side of town divided by a spectacular series of mountain passes and out near the AID compound in a more rural-

looking part of Kabul. It was still the city but it was more residential. It was a four afghani or a two afghani bus ride. That was considerable pocket change. There were 40 Afghans to the dollar in those days. So, it was a two to four afghani bus ride from the university to the cultural center.

The Soviets built this enormous marble cultural palace about a quarter of a kilometer from both of the two universities right on the bus route from the polytechnic and the Kabul University in the town. That place was empty. They built it in '77 or so. I remember the Soviet cultural counselor at that time invited me out for tea because he saw that our little bungalow was just stuffed with students and ministry people and newspaper people and all the people we really wanted in our so-called "target audience." They came and saw the programs. They were watching what we were doing. They came to our movies. The whole Chinese embassy one night came to see "The Old Man in the Sea." It was one of the best things I ever did. That was closer to '79, of course. Anyway, they were all keeping an eye on what we were doing and the Soviet cultural counselor when he had this enormous palace with every bell and whistle you can imagine, totally empty, invited me out and said, "How do you do it? What are some of your programming ideas?" I gave him everything. I gave him copies of old programs. I gave him a lot of printed material. I showed him how we set up our English teaching process. I showed him the library. I showed him the seminar room where we did exhibits and held seminars. I gave him my speaker ideas. Still, nobody stopped at the Soviet cultural palace. They all came downtown either to the Alliance Française or mostly to our place. The Goethe Institute had a smaller operation. But again, these high schools would feed into the different cultural programs. So, the poor Soviets were out there with their multimillion dollar cultural palace totally unused, very cleverly situated a quarter of a mile from the universities, yet the students paid the money, took the long bus ride, including the girl students... Getting on a bus for an Afghan woman, despite the fact that they were fairly modernized and free, riding on a bus with a bunch of rowdy male students was not an easy thing to do, so the young Afghani female students would take a taxi to come to our English language center, to come to the library, and they would come with two or three girlfriends and they would mix freely with the young men students there. It was almost like being on an American campus.

Q: Was there much flow from there to graduate schools in the U.S.?

TAYLOR: There was a Fulbright program with Afghanistan which was quite small. I think we offered six scholarships a year. That was commensurate with our interest level in the country and with the budget. It was a matter of finance. There would have been more students had it not been so costly to come to the United States. Yes, there was a flow in a small way. Ironically, one of the students who did somehow make his way without a Fulbright scholarship to the United States was the infamous Hafizullah Amin, who played a role in the first Marxist coup. He was a member of one of the two communist parties in Afghanistan. But years earlier, he had been a student at Columbia University. He was a very bad pick for a scholarship. I'm not sure what kind of scholarship he got. It was not a Fulbright. I don't think it was an AID grant. Somehow, he got there. He was not prepared for Columbia University. He did very poorly there. He did not have any friends. I don't know that he encountered prejudice, but his English was so limited at the time that he probably just wasn't able to make his way very well. He came away from that experience with a great deal of anti-Americanism. It festered over the years and eventually obviously showed up. He played a role in the abduction and assassination of Ambassador Dubs

in February of '79. Hafizullah Amin himself was killed in the second Marxist coup in the fall of '79 shortly after that. Sometimes these programs backfire and Hafizullah is a good example of that.

Q: Kwame Nkrumah went to Lincoln University and it didn't take very well.

When you were at the embassy, did you get any feeling of what we wanted there? What were our interests in Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: Our interests were in keeping Afghanistan as neutral as possible. We had humanitarian interests. I believe the United States' foreign policy in countries like that has always been conducted from a humanitarian standpoint partially. We did have an interest in helping the country develop. We certainly didn't want undue influence from any sector – either the Iranian... Until '79, we still had a stable relationship with Iran. But all you had to do was look below the surface and you could see that that was deteriorating. Of course, the assassination of Ambassador Dubs and the first Iranian takeover of our embassy occurred on the very same day. There was some thought before we sorted it all out on that terrible day that these things might have been related. They weren't, but it was very unclear what the forces were at work. The overarching policy goal we had in Afghanistan prior to the '78 coup was to keep Afghanistan from becoming a Soviet platform, to keep it from becoming entirely dominated by Iran. Both countries were interested in natural gas resources which were said to exist in the northern part of Afghanistan. We had our own alliance and relationship with Pakistan. It's a geostrategic location despite the difficulties of traversing the country and the Himalaya range coming through the middle of it.

Q: I've never served in that area, but I have the feel that we kind of liked the way things were. The Soviets were doing their thing and we were doing our thing. I'm told the roads would sometimes connect.

TAYLOR: That's true. There was only really one road in Afghanistan. It was circular. If you look at the shape of the country, it went around the interior perimeter. Part of it was built by us and part of it was built by the Soviets. One of the seven wonders of the world certainly has to be the Salang Pass Tunnel that the Soviets built through the Himalayas at about 12-14,000 feet. Ten months of the year, this particular terrain looks like the highest peaks of the Alps. It is covered with 20 feet of snow or more. It's spectacular scenery. But what the Soviets did there in the '50s-'60s was to construct what at the time and what to this day must be one of the truly remarkable engineering projects of our time, a nine mile passageway from one side of the Himalayas from the northern side through to the southern side. For a country with very few resources and one of the six poorest countries in the world in the 1960s, what did the Soviets have in mind. There is the warm weather port theory, that this was the way to the ports along the Pakistani coasts and so forth. In any case, they built this. We went through it twice. It's a remarkable experience. The actual tunnel itself through the mountains is probably two to three miles inside the mountain. There are two or three miles on either end of what I would call a gallery. The road skirts the edge of the mountainside. Again, you're way up in the clouds. The mountain comes across the top and forms the roof of the gallery, but then it's carved out of the edge of the mountain so that you actually are able to see through the cement posts out into the top of the world. It's an

extraordinary feat of engineering. During the worst of the Afghan-Russian war in the '80s, the Afghans were said to have at least once and possibly more times succeeded in blowing up huge convoys of Russians as they came through the tunnel. Obviously, you're pretty vulnerable once you get a convoy in the tunnel. If you can blow up either end, you've got them. Yes, I guess you could say that up until '78, we were very satisfied with the balance of power, if you can call it that, that existed there.

Q: How would one describe the Daoud government? Was it communist? Was it socialist?

TAYLOR: There are differences of opinion. There were some in our embassy who felt that Daoud was dangerously to the left. There were others who felt that he was dangerously colluding with the Iranians. I felt – and again, I wasn't in the Political Section – that he was really just trying to keep the balance, to keep from becoming a puppet in any way, to keep the Russians happy, to keep the Iranians happy. I think Daoud had a view of the Americans as being fairly naïve about that part of the world. I don't think any ambassador of ours was ever on what you would call friendly close terms with Daoud. Ted Elliott was our ambassador before Spike Dubs. I liked Daoud because he used to drive around town in a little grey European Opal or something like that, a very modest car. I thought he was trying to establish a relative degree of stability which would then allow more resources to go for development. I don't think he was stealing the country blind. When he was murdered, killed, in the coup, the Communist Party opened up Daoud's residence the day after the coup finished. We went through it. They opened it up to the public. It was really quite modest. Of course, it was modest to us as westerners. But they opened it up to show the people how Daoud had stolen the country blind. I'm sure that a lot of people were stealing a lot from the treasury of Afghanistan over the years on all sides, but what you saw in the so-called "palace," and it was a very modest palace – it was only three blocks from our house – was some furniture that someone of moderate wealth might have and a few dishes here and there, but nothing lavish and nothing elaborate. And the funny little car was parked in the courtyard. I guess that history will look at Daoud as someone who failed to maintain control and to know what was going on in all sectors. But I think there is even some evidence to say that even the Soviets did not fully understand that on April 27, 1978, these Soviet-trained military officers were preparing for a coup. So, I'm not sure therefore that it's fair to say that Daoud had totally lost control. Had he not overthrown the King, would the Sauer Revolution have happened? I think it would have. Sauer is one of the Dari months of the year. The propagandists who came along with the Communist Party always referred to it as the Great Sour Revolution. It became sort of a joke.

Q: When did Spike Dubs come on board?

TAYLOR: Ted Elliott was there for the Great Sauer Revolution. That was in April of '78. He must have left in the summer of '78. Spike, who had been our DCM in Moscow, came in the summer of '78. He was killed less than a year later in February of '79. The transition between Ted Elliott and Spike was in the summer of '78.

Q: What were your experiences during the revolution?

TAYLOR: I will not call it a "revolution." They called it the Great Sauer Revolution. I called it

the “military coup.” On April 27, 1978... The weekend in Afghanistan was Thursday-Friday, which put us out of touch with Washington for four straight days. It was kind of nice. We all liked that. I happened to be the duty officer that day. My mother was arriving from Frankfurt on that day having had eye surgery in Frankfurt when Father was assigned to Peshawar, coincidentally enough, during this period. We had seen a good deal of my parents. It was very nice being so close by, although those assignments were not done in tandem. So, my mother was arriving at the airport at noon. I was duty officer at the embassy which was a mile and a half from our house, maybe two at the most. I forget what Jim was doing. We had this wonderful compound, a typical old-fashioned bungalow just sprawling everywhere. It made no architectural sense, but it was a wonderful place to live. It was a peaceful Thursday morning. Friday, of course, was the holy day. Wednesday night, which was like our Friday night, we had had the Russian embassy over to the American cultural center for a big Soviet-American friendship gabfest. They had invited us at one point and we were reciprocating. We did it at the American cultural center. There were 200 Soviets with their spouses there, one of the few times you saw the Russian spouses being allowed to go out. We had a wonderful dinner in the library. We had speeches by Ted Elliott and my husband did the translating into Russian for that. (end of tape)

So, it’s an interesting confluence of events to think that within a day or two of this major military coup, if the Soviets were behind it, there had been a major American-Soviet friendship night. It was something we had planned for months and months. I was the hostess for it since it took place in the cultural center. We all worked on it.

The Wednesday night before the Thursday, there had been a big springtime dance at the Intercontinental Hotel, the only hotel in town, a beautiful place. The whole international community was there. We had a wonderful time, a good band. Everybody partied a lot in Afghanistan. It was a party post. So, Thursday morning, I’m at the embassy as the duty officer. It’s fairly quiet until all of a sudden ... I managed to get to the airport, pick my mother up. Nothing unusual at the airport. I brought her back to our house. I said, “I’ll be back from the embassy in a couple of hours.” By about noon or 1:00 pm, an enormous tank file of 60-70 tanks rumbled down the street in front of the embassy which led from the military barracks past the airport and down in front of the embassy to the palace. Radio Afghanistan was right next door to the embassy. At the same time, within an hour, there were MIGs in the air bombing the city. This was fairly frightening. I had never been in a place with tanks 100 feet in front of the embassy nor had I been in a place where bombs were falling. The bombs were falling close by. One of them barely missed the United Nations headquarters and the Chinese embassy. Those two buildings were right next to each other. One huge 800 pound bomb fell in the intersection directly in front of those buildings. That was half a block from the American cultural center. Everything was happening very close together. We were stuck in the embassy. Ted was there. The ambassador was there. I was there. A few communicators were there because we were trying to get the Thursday traffic out. We were winding up the duty. My husband and Larry Thompson, the number two in the Economic Section, who was a good friend of ours, heard gunfire in town. They then began to hear the tank fire. They ended up in our tiny Toyota. That’s what Daoud also drove. Jim and Larry were driving all around town following the tanks which were firing every place they went. They fired on the ministry of interior, which was right next door to the American ambassador’s residence. They fired on the palace. They fired on Radio Afghanistan. So, Larry and Jim were kind of dodging through these tanks. It was a cops and robbers type of

thing. But eventually it became clear that this was extremely serious. The ambassador ordered most of us to remain in the embassy. We could not leave. There was no going out on the streets. Jim and Larry, having followed the tanks all around town, ended up at the ambassador's residence. Mrs. Elliott was there along with Ambassador Heck and Ernie Heck, who just happened to be visiting from Nepal. Ambassador Heck was in Nepal at the time. They were houseguests of the Elliott's. They certainly didn't expect to come for a coup.

The other thing that happened that day that was of concern was that there was an international debate or drama contest among the international schools. The American International School in Kabul was host to 200-300 American kids and kids of other nationalities from the international schools in neighboring countries. So, there were all of these kids running loose in the souq and in the bazaar because it was Thursday, the day to go to the bazaar. There were high school teachers with them, but basically they were on their own. They were stuck in the bazaar when all of this started happening.

So, communication was difficult around town. We didn't know where everybody was. Some of us had the portable walkie talkies at the time. My mother didn't know how to work ours. She could hear me trying to reach her at our house. From the embassy, I could see where the planes were bombing. I didn't know whether a bomb had fallen on our house or not. The telephone system went out right away. My mother was all alone with the two dogs and our gardener, Yaya, who spent the whole time under the dining room table praying. My mother mixed up a batch of martinis and sat with the dogs and enjoyed the whole thing. She had come back from her surgery having been told that everything was going to be alright – it was a tricky eye operation and she should be under no stress whatsoever. Well, my father as the day went along eventually heard that there were big things going on in Kabul and he got a little bit frantic because he knew that she had just arrived. His greatest fear was that she was stuck at the airport. He was able to reach me at the embassy by about midnight the first night. I was able to tell him that at least she was at home. I couldn't tell him anything beyond that. So, my mother was at our house, I was in the embassy, Jim was in the ambassador's residence. They were all hiding in a bathroom. Five of them, the Hecks, Larry, Jim, and Mrs. Elliott were all in this one interior bathroom that had no windows. In the embassy, we were fairly well protected. What was not known was whether or not the American embassy would become a target of this operation. That was always a matter of concern. So, we were in the embassy for two full days and two full nights until the fighting stopped. A line was maintained to Washington throughout most of this time from the embassy, but I'm not even sure whether that's true. Finally, the warden system got underway by means of the walkie talkies. My boss, Roger Lydan, the public affairs officer, was able to walk over from his house to my house and check on my mother and found out that she was fine. Then he was able to call me on the walkie talkie at the embassy to say that my mother was fine. So, when we all finally got home two or two and a half days after the coup started, the city was then quiet, although the first day and a half had been extremely violent and the noise was deafening, just unbelievable because it's a small city. There were 80-90 tanks firing away and at least four MIGs bombing the city... There were civilians in our neighborhood killed, but those were people, Afghans, upper class Afghans, who lived in these beautiful houses in our part of town and they had all gone outside in their backyard to watch the bombing. They were killed by shrapnel, not by direct shots. That could have happened to anybody. There was an American woman, part of the embassy community, who freaked out during this episode and was actually running around

out of control in her backyard. A neighbor saw this and was able to get her back in the house. A number of other American spouses had severe psychological problems after that because it was so noisy and so frightening. It was much more frightening than the later incidents, particularly because of the bombs falling. You didn't know who was flying around up there. In the end, most people think there were Soviet pilots, but of course, this is a matter of history to tell us. The accuracy of the bombing, with the exception of the bomb that dropped in front of the American cultural center and hit a water main and one that dropped near the Chinese embassy and the UN headquarters. Those were obviously mistargets. But the rest of the bombing on the police headquarters, on the palace, and elsewhere was pretty accurate. So, I don't know that the final story has been written as to who was flying those planes. But if we had known that they were Soviet pilots, we might have felt a little more comfortable about the accuracy of the bombing.

Q: As this was going on, were you trying to figure out what the hell it was all about?

TAYLOR: It was clear within a few hours that the army was overthrowing the Daoud government. Our Afghan FSNs had their ear to the ground. The FSN who worked for my husband in the Political Section was able to connect up with Ambassador Elliott at some point during the day and his stories from the bazaar said that it was the Hulky wing, the People's Party wing, of the Communist Party that had organized the military officers under Communist Party authority to overthrow Daoud. That became fairly clear within a day. Yes, everybody was trying to figure it out. The station chief was frantically running around trying to get his contacts lined up. Then, of course, the coup leaders themselves took over the radio. They got on the radio. By the end of the first day, by 10:00 pm, they were on the radio saying who they were. Many Afghans knew who they were. One of the persons was the pilot who became the hero of the Great Sauer Revolution and played a role in the government. He was one of the people supposedly flying around bombing the city. It was a small society. Everybody knew who these people were. They recognized their voices. At least within the first two or three days, it became clear that Hafizullah Amin, the disaffected Columbia University student, had become the head of government. He was one of the two heads of PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan), the other one being the unfortunate Nur Muhammad Taraki, who later got blasted away by Amin in a palace shoot 'em up over a year later. So, yes, I think that within a day or so, it was clear who those people were. What was not clear was the role of the Soviet embassy or the Soviet government. Certainly once the coup took place, even if the Soviets weren't behind it from the very beginning once it occurred, they leaped right in to take advantage of something that had fallen into their laps. I think the fact that that this hasn't been examined more closely is probably due to what happened afterwards, the 10 or more year running war between the Russians and the Afghan partisans or the Afghan mujahideen. People were much more focused on that rather than finding out who really was behind the 1978 first military coup d'etat.

Q: A assume calm returned in a day or two to the country.

TAYLOR: Tremendously so.

Q: You had a bomb outside your... What were you doing? Did you keep the cultural affairs center open?

TAYLOR: During those first three or four days, no. First of all, it was the weekend. But I think we reopened within about a week. The PDPA people were organized. They set about setting up their government. They were a bunch of thugs. I went to call on the Minister of Education within the first month or so. The new Minister of Education was a very uneducated man. He was drunk when I went to call on him. He had a huge revolver in his belt that fell off onto the ground while I was sitting in his office. I could see this was not going to be a useful discussion. There was one member of a prominent family, the Taraki family, who remained on at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He may still be there. No one could quite figure out why he remained, why he was allowed to remain on in a deputy function. He became the liaison with the embassy. It was pretty much established that westerners interests would be preserved, that we would be held safe, that there would be no attacks on Americans or westerners. Our programs, including our AID program, began to be restricted within months despite these assurances. So, business was pretty much operating as usual. Within the first month, the students were all back. For one thing, it was the one place they could get any information. I had access to the ABC News at that time on videotape, nothing like what we have now with the Internet. But I would get ABC News videotapes about two to three weeks late. Nevertheless, this was big news in Afghanistan. I would run those on a video monitor. Sometimes I used them as a seminar format to have a discussion group. But the little coverage that Afghanistan was getting at that time was available only at the American Cultural Center. Plus, we had the "Herald Tribune" every day. It was two or three days late, so that wasn't too late. The students for the most part were not afraid to come back. I think the English language classes were fully up within a month. It took them a couple of weeks to look around and say, "Is it safe to go to the American Cultural Center?" Some students never came back. Some were too concerned... There were always people worrying, "Is he a spy? Is he informing on me? Is he telling my faculty advisor that I'm going to the American Cultural Center?" That sort of climate grew and only got worse as time went on.

Q: Was there the feeling that this was essentially a group taking over that was hostile to the West or was it just sort of hostile to everyone?

TAYLOR: No, it was a sense that the group was hostile to the West, that it was going to become more difficult to do our work. Since it took, as it does in any situation like that, a while for it to shake down to see just how much authority and power these people were going to have and what direction they would move in, I don't think that we felt at first that we couldn't do business with them. I felt that some of the people they placed in the university and some of the people they put in the newspapers were pretty hostile, as well as completely uneducated and unqualified to be in their positions. That distressed me more than anything. The embassy was determined to keep the relationship stable as much as possible. AID made it clear that it was willing to continue with its projects and its participant training. But the moves to restrict the relationship came from the Afghan side as time went on, not really from our side. Up until the Ambassador's assassination. So, the Sauer Revolution was in April of '78. The ambassador was assassinated 10 months later. That really changed everything.

Q: What were you doing when Spike was killed?

TAYLOR: It was a workday and he was picked up from right in front of the American Cultural Center at about 9:00. I had gotten to my office at about 8:00. His limousine did go past in front

of that intersection at the Center every morning at exactly the same time. He did not vary his route despite the fact that our RSO (Regional Security Officer), Chuck Bowles, had told him to many times. This was a very difficult time for Chuck. I was at the office. The Ambassador's limousine was stopped by four guys who were dressed in police officer uniforms. When these guys stepped out into the intersection and told the driver to stop, the Ambassador told his driver to stop. That's the kind of man Spike was. There was some suspicion later on that the embassy driver might have been involved in this. He was very quickly cleared. The four "bandits," as the government later described them, took over control of the car. Our security guards, who were very uneducated young men from the provinces, did see this happen. They were interviewed by the embassy. They said that these four people dressed like policemen, stopped the car, got in the car with the Ambassador, and the limousine sped away. The driver was then told to take the Ambassador to the Kabul Hotel, which was a hotel downtown in the bazaar area, not a really great place, but it was alright. The four "bandits" by this time had their guns pulled. The driver knew that something was wrong. The "bandits" took the Ambassador from the limousine and dragged him into the hotel. The driver then sped away to the embassy to report what had happened. All of that took place within half an hour. He was picked up around 9:00. By 9:30, the driver had reported what had happened to the embassy. At the same time, the wife of the military attaché, Nancy Sandrock, was driving past the hotel on her way to do an errand. She saw this happen, but she didn't think anything of it. She thought, "Oh, the Ambassador must have a meeting at the Kabul Hotel and he's being escorted into the building by these police escorts." She couldn't tell that it was under duress. So, it was between that time and about 12:30 that day, just barely three hours later, that he was dead.

It was Jim who came over to the Cultural Center. He came over to start the investigation. He told us what had happened. Our PAO decided at the time, I think rightly, just to keep operations going as normal, not to alarm our Afghan students, not to close the library, not to do anything. But then by about 11:00 that morning when the Afghan police had arranged themselves by the hundreds across the street from the hotel and it was clear that they were going to start firing on the hotel where Spike was being held, that was when we in our establishment closed down and sent everybody home. We said there was a crisis in town. By this time, the rumors were beginning to start. The police had shown up in large numbers.

Jim was positioned at the Ministry of Interior. Because he spoke Russian, he was sent there to argue with the Minister of Interior, who was a Russian-speaking Afghan. Plus, the Soviet embassy security guard, whoever it was, that the Soviets had sent to the ministry to keep the ministry from giving the order to fire on the hotel. The chargé, Bruce Amstutz, remained in the embassy with an open line to Washington throughout the entire time. The instructions from Washington were, "Do anything to keep them from firing. Just keep the negotiations going. Keep them talking. Just don't let the Afghan police or the Afghan army open fire." The political counselor, Jim Space, the embassy doctor, and two or three other embassy officials were on the scene at the hotel.

Q: Bruce Flatin.

TAYLOR: Yes. And Buzz Van Arkes was the doctor. I'm not sure who the two other officials were there. Probably Chuck Bowles, the security officer. I think there was a fourth person. They

were at one point actually in the Kabul Hotel but far away from the action. Then, things got out of control. There was a Soviet officer from the Soviet embassy on the scene. According to Bruce Flatin, this gentleman appeared to be in charge, not the Afghans. It was he who gave the order at 12:00 or 12:15 to start firing on the room where Spike was being held. The reason that he said that he gave that order was because the so-called “bandits” had given an ultimatum of a time – let’s say 12:30 pm – and if they didn’t get what they wanted, which was never really quite clear, then they would kill the ambassador. So, the Soviet official on the scene said he had no other choice. Hafizullah Amin was later reported by one of our FSNs to have said in wherever his offices were, “Kill the Ambassador.” I don’t know if that is true, but an FSN who knew Hafizullah Amin’s personal guard said this was said. Then it was all over very quickly. There is a longer story to it. I’m not sure this is the appropriate time to go into it, what happened after the...

Very briefly, without any further comment, what happened after the fusillade from across the street where hundreds of machine guns and whatever weapons they had were firing on the room where the Ambassador was being held... The firing stopped. There were Soviet embassy officials in the hotel. There were our four or five people in the hotel. The Soviet embassy officials, not Afghans, rushed down the corridor – I think it was the third floor that the ambassador was being held in. The door to the room was opened. Bruce Flatin and Buzz Van Arkes and Chuck and the other people there all say that they heard at least three pistol shots, possibly four. There is a difference of opinion as to how many shots there were but there were clearly at least three. There is evidence that shows that Spike may not have died from the fusillade from across the street but from close to the head pistol shots. This is all something that requires much more investigation than I’m able to elaborate on right here and it’s never really been done. Two of the four so-called “bandits” were seen alive at the end of that episode, about 1:00. They were taken away by the authorities. By 5:00 that day, they were dead. The next day in the paper, there was a picture of all four “bandits” dead, lying on the ground with bullet wounds. The embassy was therefore never able to interview any of them. The other two “bandits” were killed in the room. So, I leave it to the reader to put all this together as to what really happened.

Q: The whole thing was so incredible. Why hole up in the hotel downtown? What was in it for anybody?

TAYLOR: And the confusion over what the so-called “bandits” really wanted. At one point, it was said that they were asking for the release from detention of some other “bandits” who had already been released from detention or who were dead or who were just no longer on the scene. Then it was said that, no, these people were just poor country bumpkins who were put up to this and had no idea what they were doing, that they were stooges of the Afghan government. I don’t think anybody at all thinks the Soviets were behind this. That Hafizullah Amin or somebody hatched this plot... I’m sure there are lots of different opinions. I just can’t believe the Soviets would have done something as stupid as this. If they wanted to get rid of Dubs, they could do it any number of ways. There was the feeling that Spike Dubs spoke fluent Russian, he was a smart guy... Some of my Afghan friends said, “Oh, the Russians wanted to get rid of him. He knew too much. He got around too much.” I don’t think the Russians were behind it.

Q: It sounds like the Soviets killed him.

TAYLOR: In the end, there is no question but that they gave the order to fire.

Q: And somebody went into the room.

TAYLOR: Somebody went into the room, gunshots were fired, the Ambassador appears to have been killed by close gunshot wounds, not by machine gun fire. I read someplace that one of the wounds that he suffered from the machine gun fire was a survivable wound. So, it remains to be written about.

Q: What did this do? How about your operations?

TAYLOR: We closed immediately. We had closed around 11:00 when we heard that there was a serious problem going on. We closed for security reasons. When the Ambassador was killed, we closed for a period of mourning as well as for security. We had coincidentally underway a production of Oklahoma that the Kabul Amateur Dramatic Society, in which Jim and I were very active, had proposed to do. We had a 27 piece live orchestra. This was how lively Kabul was in those days. We had 16 different nationalities. We had Marines singing and dancing. Spike Dubs was going to play the role of Ado Annie's father in the production. It was a role that Jim finally took over. So, we suspended every kind of activity out of respect for the Ambassador. Some people from Washington came out for the ceremonies that we had in Kabul. Mrs. Dubs, Mary Ann, came, of course. It was February. There was a lot of snow on the ground. It was quite cold. Everybody in the community, even people who didn't work in the embassy, even those who hadn't been there very long, was devastated, not just by the horror of what had happened, but they all loved Spike. He was just a person who touched everyone even in the short time that he was there. His wife was not there when this occurred. She had a job on the Hill at the time. But she had been there just a month or so earlier for a long time over the Christmas holidays. There was just tremendous grief, uncontrollable grief, in the embassy community. Jim's chapter in the book Embassies Under Siege deals with this particular period and what happened during the day that Spike was killed. What happened in the aftermath when the State Department officials came out, some of them from NEA, some of them from State Med, probably there were some Security people there, too. There was a very dignified memorial service held in the ambassador's residence. It was a very cold February day, but the place was mobbed. There must have been 300 people in the house and other 200 outside around who stood around the house during the long ceremony. There was no room for them inside.

Jim was asked to accompany Ambassador Dubs' body back to the States. He was asked by Mary Ann to represent the embassy. He came back to do that in the following week. The funeral at Arlington National Cemetery happened to take place on one of the biggest snowstorm days that Washington has ever had. The only thing moving in town was the funeral procession that did make it out to the Arlington Cemetery. Jim was staying with Mike and Carol Hornblow. Mike is now retired from the Foreign Service. They lived in Georgetown, so Jim was able to walk most everywhere. He also was able to get a tape from ABC of the funeral service and he brought it back to the community - I forget where we showed it, probably at the cultural center - for the community to see the funeral service. It was a very, very beautiful funeral service. Everyone was very touched by the whole process.

Q: Things were really popping out there.

TAYLOR: Yes. The same day that Spike was killed, the embassy in Tehran was overtaken briefly by student radicals, but then everybody was released at the end of the day.

Q: This would be a good point to stop. We'll pick this up the next time.

Today is March 30, 2001. You have come back from Spike's funeral.

TAYLOR: His assassination was February 14th, valentine's Day, 1979.

Immediately thereafter, there was a tremendous shift in the posture of the embassy as well as in our programs and in our objectives in being there. The Ambassador was not replaced. To this day, there has not been another American ambassador in Kabul. In fact, today, there is no U.S. representation in Kabul. But we carried on after Spike's death with a chargé, Bruce Amstutz, who had been DCM for roughly a year by that point. He has published a book on Afghanistan. I don't know the name of it. He had been in Pakistan just before coming to Afghanistan.

So, we carried on and began a reduction in the embassy. The AID program was beginning to be phased out anyway because of the difficulty of the relationship with the first Marxist government which was still in power. Spike's death didn't precipitate the phasedown in AID activities, but it certainly hastened it. So, between February, when Spike was killed, and June, the AID mission was virtually dismantled, leaving very few people behind. A reduction in families with dependents was underway as well so that by June, just about every dependent was gone. I remained as the only spouse there because I was working and had my own job.

What happened in this interim period on a social level was that the international community drew together, as you can imagine, under circumstances like this, quite closely. We had always been a closely knit international community, but you had at the same time the buildup to the opening with the Chinese taking place in the late '70s. Even the Chinese embassy, which had quite a vast representation in Kabul, began to come out of its walls a little bit more and was seen around town. The Pakistanis and the Indians were quite supportive of American efforts to keep their mission going and to be protective of what had happened to us as an embassy. The international community really rallied around a tragedy that was American but which they all looked at as a tragedy that happened to them as well.

Q: What was the feeling towards the Soviets? In my interviews with Bruce Flatin and your husband, the finger points at least at one level to Soviet complicity in maybe not the kidnapping but in the death of the Ambassador. What did that do?

TAYLOR: Yes. I agree with that statement that at least at one level the Soviets were responsible. I would even say they were responsible for Spike's death. I would also agree that it will probably never be known whether they were culpable in any way for the kidnapping and how the whole event started. But once it started, as others have said, and I probably said last time, they certainly became involved. Their distancing from the international community had actually begun a year

earlier with the Great Sauer Revolution of 1978. Their total backing for this military coup d'etat, which turned out to be a major coup d'etat with certainly a lot of Soviet military advisors if not actually Soviet military planes flying around and backing up and bolstering the Afghan army. Their withdrawal from the international western scene really began more at that time. Spike was a Soviet expert. About 10 months after Spike was killed the relations between the American embassy and the Russian embassy and between the British and the Russians was pretty strained. I don't know if I or any of the other speakers have mentioned that the night before the Great Sauer Revolution of April 1978, we had had a Soviet-American friendship night which was staged at the American Cultural Center, which I directed. I was the mistress of ceremonies for this evening. The Soviet ambassador was there. Our then ambassador, Ted Elliott, was there. We had a huge and beautiful buffet dinner in the library of our cultural center. This had been a tradition for three or four years before. Once a year, the Soviet and American embassies got together in Kabul for a Soviet-American friendship night. That particular date happened to be on the Tuesday before the Thursday coup. Little did we suspect after many rounds of vodka and toasts expressing friendship forever and the lessening of friction between the two countries, all of a sudden comes the April coup and finally in December of '79 the Soviet invasion. So, the estrangement process had begun by April of '78. With Spike's death, it only served as an emblem of the fact that we really had very little contact. My husband and I were the only Russian speakers in the embassy with the exception of the station chief, who by that time had gone on to something else and had left the country. There may have been other Russian speakers, but if there were, I didn't know about it.

But an interesting thing did happen to me in my job. Shortly after we began recovering from Spike's death, our embassy went ahead with the production of Oklahoma. I did the direction and the choreography. One of the counselors at the school was my co-director in this. We had a wonderful group of 60-70 people working on this production. We took a hiatus in honor of Spike's death. We finally decided that he would have wanted us to go on with this and we resumed it. My husband took over Spike's role. By April or so, when we put the production on for a week, Kabul had more or less come back to its normal, fairly vibrant self, except the Russians were really not part of this.

But the interesting thing that I saw as the director of the cultural center was when all of these political issues began to develop, there was a burgeoning in the activities at my center. We had always been the most popular place in town. We had 1,500 English language students in our English language center. We had 15,000 volumes in the library. It was the only open stacks library in the whole country. The library was packed with university students after class every day. The seminar room, the same thing. Whatever we had going on in the auditorium, reruns of silent movies even, could fill the house. Our center was located in what you would call the "new downtown" area of Kabul. The universities, the polytechnic, run by the Soviets, and the Kabul University, which was mainly backed by U.S. money, funded by AID when it was started and staffed by English speakers and even American staff to that date were on the other side of town where AID and the Russian embassy were located. Nevertheless, at the end of the academic day, the students and the faculty would pile on busses and come all the way across town, which was quite a journey, to the American Cultural Center. Even though there were more than the beginnings of real concerns of being identified with western institutions and even though the students were beginning to look more nervously over their shoulder, they were beginning to say

things like, “Well, maybe I shouldn’t come here every day,” they still were. About this time, the Soviets built a huge marble palace out by the universities.

It was a building really more appropriate for a city in Western Europe or certainly a First World city. The new director of the Soviet Culture Palace paid a call on me. This was after Spike’s death. He wanted programming ideas. He invited me out to his Palace of Culture, which was totally empty. It was just a marble mausoleum at the time. He sat me down. It was 10:00 am. He dragged out the brandy and the chocolates and it reminded me of being back in Moscow and going to meetings. My Russian was not as good as it had been in Moscow at the time, but I was still able to communicate in Russian. He spoke no English and, interestingly enough, he spoke no Dari, one of the two languages of Afghanistan. So, he couldn’t communicate in Dari. With my rusty Russian and his very excellent Russian, we tried to talk about how you run a cultural center. He seemed to be a very honest, pleasant young man. I don’t think that he was trying to get anything more out of me that day other than “What do I do and how do I do this?” I was open with him and told him how I built a program. I told him some ideas about how to gather an audience and how to build the audience and how to stay in touch with your audience and set up a Russian language teaching institution if they wanted to do something like that. I’m not really sure what my friend actually did with his programming. Every once in a while, the Soviets would have an ad in the paper that somebody or other clarinetist was going to come play at the Soviet Palace of Culture. Of course, the only ones who went to it were Russians. The satisfying thing for me and for us as Americans, but the unnerving thing at the same time, was that the students from the universities, both of them, even with this huge palace of culture right next door to their universities, still piled on the bus and they still came on a half hour trip across town to come to our little bungalow which was the cultural center. This said to me that the young intelligencia of the country really had no interest in what the Soviets had to offer at that time.

The Chinese were beginning to warm up. The great recognition of China was coming. This was ’79. We had opened up but had not really established diplomatic relations at that time. So, we had had the Kissinger opening, but we really were not allowed to have diplomatic exchanges, except that this process was going on during the year 1979. As the Soviets faded from the scene, clearly, they were pouring huge amounts of money into the country, but they were fairly isolated from the diplomatic community. As the Soviets faded, the Chinese were beginning to be our new best friends. They began to come out of their walls. One day, I got a call from them saying they would like to pay a call on the Cultural Center and would like to see our library and they would like to become library members and take books out. So, I conferred with the embassy and the embassy conferred with Washington and we decided this was a great thing. They came in groups of 10. They were all dressed in their Mao suits, all the same color. In the entire Chinese embassy, there was only one woman. She was the doctor. She was the spouse of one of the diplomats. Eventually, this became a more routinized procedure. They came to see movies in the early evening. They would ask me to schedule a special showing. One time, they all came to see “The Old Man in the Sea.” It was not a particularly good movie, but they loved it. The English was simple for those who didn’t understand English. They loved musicals, of course, of any kind. I got on the movie circuit as much for them at that time as even for the Afghans. So, this was happening. Then things became more formal and we were able to have more formal exchanges. My husband and I were invited to the Chinese embassy for the best Chinese food I’ve ever had in my life frequently as time went on. They became as concerned about the situation in Afghanistan

with Soviet influence there as anyone else was. They, of course, were close friends of the Pakistanis and every time we went to the Chinese embassy for a function, Pakistanis would be there as well. So, there were these shifting alliances going on in Afghanistan. You could say that the great game that had been fought over Afghanistan for centuries was still continuing, just different alignments.

Q: We're talking about events that led up to December '79. Was there the senses that the shoe was going to drop or something was going to happen? How were things going?

TAYLOR: Every day, particularly among the Afghans, there was a sense that something was going to happen. It became a giant rumor mill as those kinds of places become when you have a secretive government, you have people disappearing by the thousands overnight, particularly the intelligencia, the educated people, anyone with western ties. The U.S.-educated doctor who was the husband of the USIS receptionist disappeared within the first months of the 1978 coup or "revolution." Among the Afghans in particular, there was wild speculation about any number of dire things that might happen, including further Soviet military involvement. The same was true among the western diplomats, the Indians, and the Pakistanis, who would get together. Our social life increased dramatically during this time. Gossip and speculation were the business of the day. Nobody, however, even in hindsight, either those of us in Kabul or people at the CIA, people on the Soviet desk back in Washington, people in our embassy in Moscow, no one anticipated that the Soviets would go as far as they did December 27, 28, and 29 of 1979 by such a massive airlift of roughly 100,000 troops and rolled in tanks from the northern borders within a week's period. No one anticipated that the Soviets could have been so off the wall to do something that is not in their interest.

Q: Today, it looks like a monumental blunder that was one of the causes that helped bring down the Soviet Union.

TAYLOR: I certainly think so. It's hard for some people who look at the Soviet Union from a different perspective to see it that way, but for those of us who were in Central Asia, particularly Afghanistan, but Central Asia as a whole, there was no question that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan marked a serious change in the relationship with the United States. I mentioned the opening to the Chinese because it was another undercurrent that sort of fractured the communist world at that time. The history of the '80s tells us what happened to them during that period. I agree with you. Not enough attention is paid to that.

Q: I think it's one of the turning points. Going back to this period, you were talking about this new government that came in with the coup of '78. People disappeared. What was happening to the people who disappeared?

TAYLOR: Many of the people who disappeared were murdered in prison. Probably many others simply died in prison because the conditions were just unbelievable. Some who one would think would have been on the top of the list to be murdered survived for many years. We would hear reports from Afghan friends that somebody had escaped from prison or somebody had gone to visit the prison or somebody's grandmother was allowed to take food into the prison. The older women were sometimes trusted. They would come out with reports that someone who had not

been seen for over a year was indeed alive in the Pul-e-Charkhi Prison. Others in huge, huge, huge numbers just simply disappeared. I think that the disappearances and the deaths in the last 10 years probably far exceed those in those first early years when the Soviets had more control and had a say in managing the place.

A lot of people also disappeared into their homes, meaning that they were not even really under house arrest because the Afghans weren't that organized, but they just knew not to come out. They knew not to see people and they knew just to keep a very, very, very, very low profile. These would be people who, if they were not in jail, were members of what you would call the old intelligencia, the landed class, any connection to the former King or to the Daoud regime, or any of those who had western ties, the moderate middle class. There was a rising middle class. Those people were all in jeopardy. Some people who had land in the countryside felt they might be safer there. That was probably true for the first few years. But the communist regime which succeeded Taraki and Amin, the one that came in with the Soviets run by Babrak Jamal, became more brutal in the countryside. I think that the big name families who had taken refuge in the countryside in Afghanistan were no longer safe there. Those who had not left by '79 certainly made it a goal to leave in the early '80s. A huge number of western-oriented people left for Europe and the United States.

Q: While you were there, was there a conscious effort on the part of the embassy to help people go to the United States, key people?

TAYLOR: I think there were a few key people who were helped by the embassy and with assistance here in Washington provided by some former U.S. diplomats who had been in Afghanistan. On a large scale, no. I think we all individually helped certain individuals. I did a lot of work legally trying to help my staff get out if they wanted to and to try to make arrangements for them in Pakistan and those who were qualified to come to the United States. A year after of my return to Washington in 1981, I'd say 70% of my staff was in the United States, including those who were not educated, those that I thought would never be able to make it in the United States. The motion picture specialist, for example, who spoke no English, an older man with physical problems who really had no skills other than being our motion picture projectionist and could fix old 16 mm projectors and probably other equipment dating from the 1950s that we still had lying around in the '70s. He came with his wife, who had a serious heart problem, and their four children. The four children set themselves up driving taxis, fixing little things. They are now living a very, very, very nice life in Arlington, own a lovely house. So, I'm very proud of how the Afghans have done since they got to the United States. I would say that rather than being a concerted effort to help them in Afghanistan, most of them managed on their own. There was an enormous network to help them here once they got here. The Afghanistan Relief Committee, which I was very active in, was set up while I was still in Kabul. People come together over the issue of Afghanistan. For years, there has been a wonderful support network for Afghans. Every year for 15 years, there was an annual reunion of people who had served in Afghanistan, one of the few countries of the Department where this reunion still goes on to this day. People come from Hawaii, California, where they've retired and they still come back because they're so committed to Afghanistan. So, you'd have to ask a consulate person more about how we assisted Afghans to get out. Those that we assisted officially in Afghanistan were small in number. Once they managed by one means or another to get to Pakistan, I think our

embassy in Pakistan was much more actively involved. It was very dangerous for Afghans to get assistance from the U.S. embassy in Kabul, but the country being as porous as it was, it was not easy, but it was doable to get across the border. It was arduous. You could easily die or be killed. But that was really more the way it went. The American assistance to the Afghan refugee stream from Afghanistan took place more in the church communities, groups like the Afghanistan Relief Committee... The University of Nebraska has a big center of Afghans. Tom Gutiere was a Peace Corps volunteer there. He organized a big settlement center out in Nebraska. Just by word of mouth, this thing got organized in a way that's just extraordinary. We did big fairs with crafts and food and Afghan fashion shows and music to raise money to support people coming here. We had an Afghan refugee live with us for two years, a friend from Kabul. We had a four story brownstone house with an English basement apartment and he lived there. Another employee of mine and his family lived with us until they could get on their feet. He is now a GS-14 at the Voice of America. I think you would have to say the American community did quite well by the Afghans. Officially in Afghanistan, I don't know the whole story there.

Q: Before December '79, you've got events in '79 culminating in November of '79 in Iran. Was this something you were looking over your shoulder at or was this another country a long way away?

TAYLOR: Remember that the day that Spike was killed was the same day of the initial takeover of the embassy in Tehran, the one day takeover. Then they were released. It was rather quickly found that these two events were not connected. But we were aware all the time of what was going on in Iran and we thought about it. Yet once that initial takeover of the embassy in Iran ended, our focus turned back to ourselves. Little did we know what was going to happen to our colleagues in Iran at the time. The focus was really more on Afghanistan because of the Soviet angle there. That was the lens through which Afghanistan was seen. In the early fall of '79, there was another shoot 'em up in the OK Corral, as we call it, and Hafizullah Amin managed to gun down Taraki. So, they had their little shoot 'em up in Kabul in the palace. It was the PDPA, the same wing of the Communist Party. Hafizullah Amin and Taraki had come into power together in the Sauer Revolution of '78. But by September '79, they literally had a shoot 'em up. It was like a duel and Taraki lost. Amin emerged. That was September of '79, four months before the Soviets invaded, overthrew him, and installed Barak. In parenthesis, Hafizullah Amin was one of our classic failures as a Fulbright exchangee. He had gone to Columbia University and although we loved to tout our Fulbright program and I'm a cultural officer, he did not do very well there. He obviously had negative experiences and he came back with a fairly anti-American approach to life.

Back to September of '79, after Taraki was killed, Amin became increasingly ruthless, which brings us up to November of '79 and the takeover of the embassy in Tehran. You may also remember that almost the same day as the takeover of the embassy in Tehran number two was the attack on the embassy in Pakistan. Five or six people were killed and 80 were almost killed.

Q: There was a fire.

TAYLOR: It was the most terrifying thing. By this time, I was the only person left in USIS Kabul. We had gone from seven officers to two. I had an executive assistant. I was a junior

officer once removed running this whole thing, learning a lot. My executive assistant had gone to Pakistan for the Thanksgiving holiday to see old friends there. She went into the embassy on Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving, to get some local currency and was caught up in this whole thing and spent the entire time in the vault along with 80-some others who were almost all killed. It's an absolutely horrifying story. In the book, Embassies Under Siege, in which Jim wrote the chapter on Kabul, I think Herb Hagerty wrote a chapter on what happened in Pakistan that day.

So, we had three things going on. We had the increasing tension in Kabul but still no indication the Soviets were going to invade at any level. Then we had this horror going on in Tehran about which very little was known. There was very little known about who the student groups were, what their links were. It seemed as though there wasn't much connection with Afghanistan. Then there was this horrendous thing in Pakistan resulted from a false rumor coming out of Mecca. The rumor was that the Americans in Mecca had conspired to attack the Kaaba and violence that had occurred there. It was blamed on us and this rumor went wild in Pakistan. The Pakistani authorities did not stop the mobs from attacking the embassy. So, that was the background by the time December rolled around.

The American embassy was paired down. There were no dependents there. I was trying to keep the cultural center open, although I was having misgivings about whether we were feeding into the propaganda of the government. I didn't think so at the time. That's where we were when finally the big days came.

Q: You have to use hindsight here, but was there any indication that the government in Kabul, which had taken over after the shootout was all that estranged from the Soviets?

TAYLOR: They certainly didn't think so. Hafizullah Amin was a serious braggart and he didn't listen to people. There was always a struggle between the Khalq Party and the Parcham Party, which was more of a Maoist party. Then there were other fringe communist parties. All of these were very small cells. The communist movement in Kabul was extremely small. There were rumors about who was emerging and whose flag was waving. That did go on every day. But I have to say that nobody ever looked at this on such a grand scale. I had to laugh when you asked if Hafizullah Amin had any idea that he was falling out of favor with the Soviets. It seems now and even at the time it was known that the Soviets were becoming very concerned about the fact that opposition to the regime was spreading throughout the countryside. In the villages, the Communist Party officials' throats would be slit overnight. It was clear that the countryside was extremely angry about the infidels, meaning the Soviets. They were not cooperating with them. There was trouble for the Soviets. There was trouble for the Hafizullah Amin government. He had to put more and more people into prison. I don't think the Soviets liked that. For them, trouble was brewing, but it was brewing slowly. Then Hafizullah Amin being the egocentric maniac that he was really didn't have his ear to the ground. On the night of the Soviet invasion when the first huge aircraft landed with tanks at the airport, these tanks came rolling down the main highway from the airport that goes right past the American embassy. No more than a mile or two away, right next door to the American embassy was Radio Afghanistan. There was no television at the time. So, the only means of communicating with the country was by radio. A few blocks further down was the palace. So, on the night of the invasion, it was clear that

something had been happening for two nights preceding that. I believe it was Christmas Day and then the next day, the 26th. In the middle of the night, I said to my husband, “Why is that one airplane up there going around and around and around?” We went outside on our front terrace. There was three feet of snow on the ground. It was a beautiful, crisp, snowy, wintry evening. We looked up at the sky and you could see many planes. Even then, no one could have imagined what the Soviets were up to. So, when they finally did unload all this equipment and the tanks at the airport and they came rumbling down the main street, my husband was at the embassy... It was at night. We had had a dinner party at our house and there was clearly something was happening, so he left. He went to the embassy. He was up on the roof. He saw the tanks coming by. He and the Marines were there. He saw the tanks turn into Radio Afghanistan. The Afghan regime tanks which were guarding the Radio were all muzzled. They had their wraps on them. The Afghan soldiers were sort of lounging around on top of the tanks playing cards and smoking. The assumption was that if Soviet tanks are coming, these are friendly tanks. We don't know why they're here, but gosh, there's 85 of them coming down the road. So the Afghans – and my husband saw this with his own eyes; so did the Marines; so did everybody else who was on top of the embassy at the time, a very small group – the Soviet tanks pulled in and just blasted the Afghan tanks to pieces. I think there were four Afghan tanks. They got destroyed in about two minutes. Then it was clear that Hafizullah Amin no longer had the support of the Soviet government. After they blasted away at Radio Afghanistan and took the Radio, the rest of the tanks continued on into the city, took the palace, took other key places, and the fight went on for a couple of days. The Afghans were totally outmatched. It was just a matter of time. It was not nearly as bloody or as noisy or as long or as scary as the first Marxist coup of '78, which was truly frightening.

Q: Did you open the center that day?

TAYLOR: No, nobody went out of their houses. I had 60 people in my house, including Afghans, for what was to be a holiday party. We started the party early. There was always a curfew of around 9:00 or 10:00 pm. So, we had this holiday party beginning around 4:00. I had expected everybody to go home by 7:00. I forget when it was that Jim slipped into his jeans and his sweatshirt and said, “I'll see you later.” I remember saying to him, “We don't need heroes in the family, just wage earners.” That's what I said when he went out the door.

I forget what day of the week that was, but we were all holed up where we were. These 60 people stayed at my house for about the next day and a half. We did everything we were told to do. We filled all the bathtubs with water. If the electricity went off, the well wouldn't work. We closed all the blinds but kept the lights on inside. I think those were the directions we were given. We stayed away from all the windows. I was a bit concerned about these big firefights that we knew were going on right outside... We lived three blocks from the palace and the whole city was rumbling. We didn't know what was happening until the Afghans in my house tuned in the radio and heard that Radio Afghanistan had been taken over by Soviet-backed forces. They were then telling everybody else in my house what was happening. Then we realized that it was a Soviet-backed coup. The Soviet embassy was even named in the broadcast, if I'm not mistaken, telling everybody to be calm, that they had everything under control. So, nobody went out of their house for the next two or three days. Bruce Amstutz never did get into the embassy on that night. It was too dangerous. The shooting was live fire in the streets right outside your house.

They weren't shooting at Americans, but the possibility of getting caught up in it was rather high. I was afraid that any of these people in the firefight might take refuge in our garden or just come over the wall. They did, in fact, come over the wall by the embassy and streak across the lawn there with people shooting at them.

It was a good week or so before we reopened the cultural center. There was a lot of debate in Washington as to whether we should, whether it was safe. My position was that we should give it a try and see what happened. We did. The first day we reopened – let's say it was a week later – there must have been 2,000 people who came to the cultural center. We were normally very popular but we never had that many. The reason they came was because they knew this was the only place they would find out what was really happening in their own country. We were a source of news. We had newspapers. I had these ABC Television tapes. I didn't have any tapes from that week saying what had happened in Afghanistan, but nevertheless, people were there seeking information. Western press came within a day or two. Once the airport was reopened, the western press descended on us. I became the de facto press officer. It was shocking to me that these big name press guys – and I won't name any of them because some of them are still around – had not done their homework at all. It was shocking to me. I was a fairly young officer. When I was briefing them before taking them in to see our chargé, Bruce Amstutz, one of them – you see him on television a lot – said, “Well, who is this Babrak guy? Is this Babrak the U.S. ambassador?” At that point, I realized, we were just talking past each other on two different levels. I ratcheted everything down a couple of steps as to their level of sophistication. So, when we reopened and we had these mobs of people just desperate for information... As much as they were trying to find out from us what was going on, they were trying to find each other. It was a gathering place. It soon became an embarrassment to the Soviets and it became in the eyes of our security people dangerous to have so much focus on the cultural center. I don't know whether an added element was that I was a very young woman running this thing and we were separate from the embassy. We were in the middle of town.

Q: Were you posting up ticker tape bullet wounds on the wall and things like that?

TAYLOR: No, we had all our information inside. We allowed everybody to come in. We did not do anything on the exterior, but we had clipboards inside. It would have been provocative to do things outside. We ran the library normally. Again, there was no live TV there. The Afghans were listening to Radio Tehran, BBC, VOA. VOA did not have a Dari-Pashto service at the time. The BBC did.

Q: How did it develop? Rather quickly, the Soviets were in control of Kabul, weren't they?

TAYLOR: They had their people at every ministry. They had their people at every ministry before this happened. They just had more people and had more visible security. The troops were everywhere. To give them credit, they very quickly pulled the tanks out. I think the Soviets and the new Afghan government, Babrak and Company - who had killed enough people in the process or rounded them up and thrown them into Pul-e-Charkhi – felt that they were under no threat from anybody. They knew that the U.S. was not going to react over Afghanistan. So, the city was fairly calm within a week. Institutions began to reopen. But unlike the '78 coup and then the Taraki-Hafizullah Amin shoot 'em up, after the Soviet invasion, the citizens were just

wiped out, emotionally exhausted. They were normally a very talkative group of people and would talk about anything and ask questions. I think they were just so devastated by this that they were in shock.

After reopening the center, the next thing that happened in my life was that Jim was advised to leave very quickly. I don't know why this hadn't happened before because the Soviets knew this all along, but they decided that because he had been in Moscow just prior to coming to Kabul, he obviously was a CIA agent. It was just totally obvious to them. I guess our people came up with a list that they found. Jim's name was on this list. So, he was out of there in about 24 hours. We had two big Afghan mixed dogs, a parrot, a cockatoo, a huge houseful of stuff, and he left and I stayed. That was very early in January.

Within a few weeks, somebody – and I'm not sure who; I should probably find out – a group of people back in Washington decided that two things were happening at the cultural center. One, it was getting to be very visible because so many people were going there. It was becoming a target. Two, they felt that it was beginning to have some negative public relations impact. I didn't see that, but some people felt that by keeping it open that we were doing business as usual with the new government. I didn't feel that way at all because the people that we were remaining in touch with were not of the new government. The people the Soviets installed not just under Babrak but before him when Hafizullah Amin was in charge were just total thugs. They were uneducated people who really had no idea how to run a government or how to provide a service to the people. So, those people were not our natural audience. Somewhere around the middle of January, after Jim had left, the decision was made to close the cultural center to the public, which was really too bad because it was one of our few means of staying in touch with people. I guess the major reason was they felt it was just too dangerous.

Q: To put it in the context of the times, there was the Iran thing and everybody was very goosy about this. We were evacuating all over the place.

TAYLOR: That's right. We were evacuating all over yet we were keeping people in Kabul. I had sort of forgotten that angle.

Q: There is a bigger picture.

TAYLOR: That's right. And the place was indefensible. It was right in the middle of downtown.

Q: I'm sure nobody had the historical perspective to think of 1841.

TAYLOR: The British retreat. The worst one when everybody got killed was '41. I did remain on for another couple of months because I was trying to make sure that all of my employees got a fair retirement or annuity. We had so many people, unlike the State Department, on contract. We had 150 English teachers. We had janitors. We had little babas who would run around serving tea, who had spent 50 years with the American embassy in some way or another. I wanted to make sure these people got compensated in some way. The FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) got an annuity. Many of them left anyway. But it was these other people I was worried about. The greatest thing I've ever done in my career was to convince the hardheads at

AID that the \$150,000 or whatever they had in some bank account which was set up to pay for their participants to be trained in English at our English language center be used for humanitarian purposes. They were no longer sending anybody to America. They were going to just leave this money in this bank to be taken over by the Afghan government. I said, "That's nuts! Give it to me. With the help of the embassy administrative section, let me parcel it out among all these people who will have nothing for the rest of their lives. Their lives are destroyed. Little do they know how really their lives are destroyed." It took six weeks, which I now understand was a very short period of time, but it seemed like a very long period of time. There was nobody in AID left anymore. They were all gone. So, I had the support of my wonderful desk officer, Marilyn McAfee, who eventually became ambassador to Guatemala, fighting the battle with USAID at home. I was feeding her ideas with which she could fight the battle. Finally, they released the money to me. With the help of the embassy administrative section, I dispersed it. I was under personal pressure here because my father, who had been in the Foreign Service, was dying of cancer. He had been diagnosed with pancreatic in November of '79 just before all these things started happening. He died in March just four months later. So, I needed to get home at that point. They would call me up every day. They were in touch with my mother. They knew how ill my father was. Then the next thing they'd do is call me up and say, "Can't you stay one more day?" So, it was a personally devastating for me for many reasons.

Q: While you were in Afghanistan after this, was it apparent to those of you in the embassy of the enormity of what the Soviets had done as far as relations with the United States? Almost up to that point, Jimmy Carter was under the idea that we could do business with the Soviets if we're nice and all of a sudden there was this complete turnaround. Wheat embargo, don't go to the Olympics. It was very hardball. It wasn't so much concern about Afghanistan, but it was what the Soviets had done. Were you aware of how this was playing out in the States?

TAYLOR: I'm not sure. I don't think I was. Again, there was no "Herald Tribune." There was no television. There was no English language radio. Most of what I got was from embassy reporting, what was coming in from Washington. During my tour in Moscow I felt that we needed to do everything possible to move closer to the Soviets and we needed to use détente as much as we could and get as much out of it for both sides as we could. I was so mad at them by the time the invasion happened that I became very anti-Soviet for a couple of years afterwards. I know certainly how I felt, but I don't think that I knew how it was playing out in the States. We were so preoccupied with the events of the moment. Things were happening every minute. People were disappearing. We had no idea whether there would be more violence. We lived from day to day to see what new issue would break out the next day. By the time I got back to the States – and my next assignment was in Washington... My father was ill. I came back. I took over the Afghan/Iran desk. After all that, that's what they gave me. Certainly by the time I got back here three months later, I was very aware that things had changed for a long time between us and the Soviets and all the good work I had done in Moscow was out the window and we'd have to start all over again. By the way, when the American hockey team beat the Russians that year, you could have blown the roof off our house. We were so happy. We had Afghans with us that night. We had a little dinner and watched it on television. Nobody thought that the Americans would win.

Q: What about the government, Babrak? Was there any intercourse between that regime and the

embassy on your side?

TAYLOR: Not really. USIS, which had the most interaction earlier, ended our exchanges program quite some time before. AID, with whom we interacted a lot in relationship to the government, was gone. The embassy scaled back.

The scaling back was meant to send the Soviets a message in Kabul. I think they got it. Our administrative people... There was no more political section. There was no more economic section. Our administrative officer, Bernie Woerz, was really tied up with trying to get everybody – we had another drawdown after the Soviet invasion – and their stuff out of there. We finally got our two cars back – a year and a half later, but we got them back. Bernie did a heroic job. So, those kinds of embassy-ministry relationships at a midlevel continued. Bruce Amstutz remained on as chargé for a while. Eventually, another chargé came. We had three or four before we finally closed the whole thing down. As I understood it, the reason for having the embassy there up through '86 or '87 when we finally just said, “We’re out of here” was to do as much watching as we could but not in concert with the Babrak government and then after Babrak whatever other stooges were brought in. But mostly to confer with third country embassies and talk with the Brits and the Pakistanis. The Pakistanis and the Indians pretty much had the best ear to the ground.

Q: The Pakistanis and Indians in this case were kind of together?

TAYLOR: Actually, yes. I had a number of evenings at my house where I would invite some Pakistanis and some Indians. Yes. There was not the great disruption in their relationship that exists now. By the way, Lalit Mansingh, who was just named Indian ambassador to the United States, was the deputy in the Indian embassy in Kabul and is a good friend of ours and a wonderful man. As someone who just finished working on Indian and Pakistani affairs again, I’m very glad he’s here. He’s a wonderful man. I said a few paragraphs ago that we were all in it together. The international community drew together and although the Indians and the Pakistanis had their frictions at home, when they were in Kabul everybody had the same objective, which was to keep Afghanistan as neutral as possible and to keep as many influences out of Afghanistan as possible.

Q: Were you all looking for evidence of turning Afghanistan into a Soviet satellite?

TAYLOR: Oh, it was, but it didn’t need to be the Eastern European model. The population is a very different population. The geography is very different. But when I said it was a satellite, I meant that it was so easily dominated by the Soviets in terms of overpowering the existing government. We’ve all seen that of its “satellites,” Afghanistan was the least easy to govern for the Russians. There were people there who knew a lot about Afghanistan, more than I did, who said at the time – and Louis DePree was one of them – that the Soviets would never be able to last there. To me, it looked like they were there forever. They had all this fighting power. But those who said the Afghans in their own wily way would make life Hell for the Soviets were right in a way. Of course, there was a lot of humorous resistance. Even before all this happened, the Soviets were never allowed to come out of their embassy. You never saw Soviet women anywhere, although we knew they were in town. Every once in a while, a big bus full of

Russians would come from the Soviet embassy down to the street where we lived, which was in the bazaar called Chicken Bazaar. This was a wonderful place to shop and almost everything on the street was dirt cheap whether it was food or trinkets. It was a delightful, colorful shopping street. The Soviets would be very carefully controlled when they got off their bus and would be herded around from place to place. This was for the entire three years that we were in Afghanistan, in the good times and in the bad times. Of course, the shopkeepers would never sell them anything. They didn't want their money. This continued even after the Soviet invasion when people became more desperate. The Afghans knew the westerners were going. They knew the aid was stopping. They knew that our dollars were not going to flow into their handicraft stores anymore. They certainly knew the Russians weren't going to buy anything. But they wouldn't even sell them an orange. So, there was sort of a Gandhi-like resistance that developed that had developed toward the Russians for the two years that they existed there under the coups.

Q: You left there when?

TAYLOR: I left in late February of 1980. My father died in March.

Q: When you came back, you were assigned where?

TAYLOR: The Office of Near East and South Asian Affairs in USIA. I took over Marilyn McAfee's desk, which was all the basket cases of the world. I used to say that I had Afghanistan, where the Soviets had invaded, Iran with the hostages, Pakistan where they had just sacked our embassy, and the bright spot on my horizon every day was Bangladesh, the only place where we had a normal USIA program going.

Q: To get a feel for how Washington bureaucracy works, here you were, a relatively junior officer holding down a place under very difficult circumstances. Was there much interest in what you had been doing? Did anybody say, "Well done?"

TAYLOR: Yes, there was a lot of interest. Probably my career got put on the fast track because of that. We were invited to speak at the War College. I was invited a number of times to attend the director's meetings – this was not the State Department, mind you; I was never invited by the State Department to do anything – but through other means we were invited to the War College. My own agency directors and deputies would feature me at various places where they would trot out reasons why we needed more resources. Then after spending six months, maybe a little bit less, as the desk officer for these basket case countries, I was recruited to replace Kenton Keith as the executive assistant to the deputy director of the Agency, who at the time was Charlie Bray. Charlie was then a State Department Foreign Service officer, the spokesman. He became Deputy Director of USIA when John Reinhardt was our Director. So, we had two career people running USIA at that time. Kenton was the executive assistant to Charlie. When Kenton left to go to another assignment, Charlie had seen me in these various fora speaking about what had happened in Afghanistan and how our resources were used and whether they were effective or not, so he asked me to become his executive assistant. To the extent that being in a place with the focus on it helps your career, there is no question but that it helped mine. People knew who I was. That means a lot.

Q: Going to the time you were the desk officer, here you are in Iran, where we had nothing going except... What were you doing about Iran?

TAYLOR: There was nothing from a programmatic point of view that we could do in Iran. But four of the hostages were from USIA. I spent a huge amount of time with those four hostages' families. I traveled to conferences on Iran and spoke about the public affairs perspective, meaning what we had been trying to do in Iran to present the United States perspectives to counter what the Iranians were saying about us at the time of the takeover. I did a lot more domestic work on Iran. There was no work to be done in Iran itself. I got to know a lot of people at the State Department working on Iran. I was part of the Iran Task Force.

Q: I've interviewed Sheldon Krys.

TAYLOR: He was the executive director for NEA. He was involved in all of the things that I worked for. I was a worker bee. But just to staff a task force like that... There were 50 something hostages and each family had to have a point of contact. I just spent an enormous amount of time with our four families.

Q: How did you find the families reacting to the situation?

TAYLOR: They were all different even among four. There were two families that really were private in their grief, in their concern. They liked to talk to me. They called me a lot and they talked to my boss, but they never came to Washington. They never spoke to the press. But two of our other hostages, John Graves and Barry Rosen... John was our PAO in Tehran and Barry Rosen was the information officer. Their spouses, Bonnie Graves and Barbara Rosen, became quite famous and became the spokespersons for the hostage families. Barbara and Bonnie traveled in France and appeared on French television and had a lot of things to say about the U.S. government that caused some heartache back here. These were the two USIA spouses who were out of line, it would seem. But they had a point of view. The U.S. government from their perspective was not doing everything it should to get these people back. So, when I said that I spent a lot of time on the hostage families, I didn't know you were going to ask me that kind of question, but one of the reasons that I spent a lot of time was because Bonnie and Barbara were extremely upset and were very active and were very articulate and were in Washington constantly.

Q: There is this obvious frustration, but did they have a point of view on what we should have done or was it just that we weren't doing whatever should have been done?

TAYLOR: I hate to speak for them now after so many years have intervened, but I think one of their points if you went back to their public statements, which they made all the time – they were always interviewed by Dan Rather and Tom Brokaw – they were on the major networks once a week – was that we weren't doing enough internationally, we weren't working with our allies closely enough, that we hadn't pursued every lead, that perhaps we ought to negotiate a little bit more in depth with the Iranians, find out a little bit more about what the Iranians wanted, and somehow find a way to know the students better. I don't mean to say that they were totally estranged from the State Department process. I remember being in plenty of meetings of the

Task Force when Bonnie and Barbara were both present. But then afterwards they would come to USIA when we were still on Pennsylvania Avenue and really unload there and let us know that they were going to go out and speak publicly. I remember that their trip to France was quite notable. They met at the very highest levels of the French government and that was all on international television. It was election year in the United States. I had spent my whole career overseas. I had been 10 years overseas. I had never known these things could happen the way they did. So, I learned a lot about the way Washington really folds up its tent and everybody looks inward when something like this happens. Before talking any more about what Bonnie and Barbara were saying, I'd like to go back and look at what they did say, what their points were. I think part of it was that they felt, and this is an honest human reaction, that as time went on the Carter administration was tending to other business and the hostage thing became part of the woodwork, it became part of our everyday scenery, it was never going to change, and that we had somehow learned to live with this. I think that was basically what their message was.

Q: How about with Afghanistan? Was there much for you to do?

TAYLOR: Oh, constantly. It wasn't all USIA work, but it was in the sense that this was so new no one had ever dealt with something like this on quite such a scale. I spent a lot of time on visa issues working with the INS for our FSNs, trying to get them at that time to even answer the telephone. I went personally with FSNs to the INS offices. These were people who had legitimate entry papers to the United States. I was running a hotel at home. My husband, by the way, at this time was a senior watch officer. We were living in a temporary rented house because we didn't realize we were coming back from Afghanistan. Our own house, which was a wonderful brownstone on 22nd St. between K and L, where he could walk to the Department and I could walk to USIA, was lived in for a full year after we came back by our tenants, who would not leave. We were renting some unfurnished place. We had no furniture. We had 85 boxes which I refused to unpack because I knew I would have to pack them up and move them. My father had just died. Jim was working this swell job and was never at home. We shared a weekend once every nine weeks and by then he was so exhausted he was unfit to live with. It was really a very, very difficult year.

What I did professionally for the Afghans in addition to trying to sort out our own FSN problems, which was legitimate USIA business, was my involvement in Freedom House's efforts to get the Afghan story out. They would call on me – this was also part of my job – for information in building their story. I went to a lot of conferences. I was asked to speak and did some papers. Mostly, I gave speeches. I didn't have time to write papers. I went to universities that had Afghan studies programs. But we were not running an Afghan program by any means.

Q: Going to Pakistan...

TAYLOR: In our heroic way, no. I think the whole embassy set up shop elsewhere. The American Cultural Center in Rawalpindi had been sacked but it was salvageable. As I recall, we just reconstituted the embassy and made a band-aid, patched together, working set of offices around town in Islamabad. In my view, we did not make any useful entreaties to the Pakistani government as to how they failed us in an hour of need. I think that's another story that has never really been told properly. They did nothing to deter the mobs from attacking the embassy and

they did nothing to drive them away once they had.

Q: Was there the feeling that this was a policy or that this was just a failure?

TAYLOR: I don't know. The Pakistanis were very important to us because of what was going on in Afghanistan. There was the opening to China, so maybe it was a policy. But I don't think we would have upset the policy if we had made slightly more strenuous representations. But this was something that really went wrong. Where were the Pakistani authorities to keep this from happening or at least once it started happening? I mean, there were busloads of people. You don't organize busloads of people in Pakistan without somebody knowing about it. And they all headed toward the U.S. embassy. They had enough gasoline with them to burn down a brick and cement, concrete, building. I don't know how many police forces in the world can overlook something like that. And the only reason that everybody in that place did not die was because the Pakistani attackers thought everyone was dead. They couldn't believe that anybody would still be alive after the building had been burning for as long as it had. Either Herb Hagerty or Jim Thurber or one of the several people who emerged as heroes in that whole thing said they probably had about 12 minutes of air left in that vault. The heat had become unbearable. So, it was not that the Pakistani authorities came and drove the crowds away. The crowds drifted away because they thought it was all over inside. Only then did somebody from the vault pop through the hatch and see that all was clear and then they began getting people out. The roof was ready to collapse, which it did. The smoke inhalation was getting so bad.

I was on the desk only six months after I came back before I went to replace Kenton. I think that, being the troopers that we are as Americans, I think we just set up shop in temporary quarters until we could rebuild the thing. We had a USIS section pretty much fully staffed out there within a year. We've always had a huge staff in Pakistan. We had six or seven people out there quickly.

Q: What about Bangladesh? Was there much going on there?

TAYLOR: By the time the end of the day came around, if we got a couple of Fulbrighters out there and a couple of exchangees, that was the most I could do for Bangladesh. Plus, it was an Islamic country and we were withdrawing from Islamic countries. In the six months that I was on that job, I don't think that I did much for the program in Bangladesh. I am very sorry about that now, but I don't think I had much left by the end of the day.

Q: This had been from when?

TAYLOR: I came back from Afghanistan in February of '80. By the summer, let's say July, I was asked to replace Kenton.

Q: You did that from '80 to when?

TAYLOR: Replacing Kenton?

Q: Yes.

TAYLOR: Well, not very long. It was an election year. Charlie Bray and John Reinhardt were thrown out once the Reagan administration came in. So, I worked for Charlie from July of '80 until January of '81. I got thrown out of there, too. I was identified with them and no way was the new administration going to keep me in the front office. So, I was asked to be the executive assistant in the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau, the old CU, which had marched across town to be part of us. That two and a half year tour that I did there running a bureau of 550-600 people really gave me the administrative and management executive experience that I needed at that time. I had had such unusual assignments. Moscow was not a normal assignment for USIS. Kabul as it turned out was not a normal place for USIS. Working for the Deputy Director of the Agency was a very rarified thing. So, when I settled down into this huge bureau as the executive assistant to the two top people and saw an overview of all the programs and all the money that we had, that's where I really learned to be a manager.

Q: Today is October 30, 2001. What was your impression of how USIA fit into the foreign affairs establishment at that time?

TAYLOR: That's a good question. Of course, it plays a role even today. The government was very much in a crisis mode at that time. We had 54 or 56 hostages in Iran. We faced this trauma of our embassy being sacked in Pakistan with 12 people killed, I believe, a mixture of Pakistanis and Americans. The whole issue of the Cold War resurging to the forefront had come alive again with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. So, I was fortunate in being at these higher levels of the Agency to see the interaction between our agency and the Department. I will be the first to acknowledge that we've always been the junior agency. But I thought that there was a fair amount of really good and collegial back and forth between the "country team" of NEA in the State Department and those of us at USIA who were intimately involved in the Middle East/South Asian issues at the time. That included me not only because of my overseas background but because of my new position in the front office. We were invited to high level meetings. We always had to fight our way into the decision-making meetings where, as Edward R. Murrow put it once, we needed to be in on the takeoff as well as the crash landing. It was always a struggle to remind the people at the State Department – and again I remind the tape recorder that I'm married to one of those – that the public affairs aspect of any new or continuing policy had to be considered and preferably should be considered as that policy was being devised. I wouldn't say this worked all the time harmoniously and well. There were times when we would get frantic phone calls saying a meeting was about to be assembled in two minutes and could we get there across town. We always dropped everything in order to do that. But I would say the partnership was not troubled in any way. It worked in fits and starts. It was probably bumpy. But I think it worked and I think that the USIA was very supportive of the Department's policy when we knew what that was and how we could best fit into it.

Q: You being familiar with the Middle East, as we are talking, American airplanes are bombing Afghanistan, something we could never have dreamed of when we had our last interview.

TAYLOR: That's right.

Q: The question of today – and I ask it of the time you were there right after the Iranian takeover

of the embassy and that whole period shortly thereafter – is, what were we thinking about our message to the Islamic world?

TAYLOR: That's also a very good question. In summing up my own career, I'd have to say that although I did work in the Soviet Union and spent a lot of time on Eastern Europe and the Balkans and such, I've probably spent half my career worrying about the message to the Islamic world in some way or other. We spent hours, weeks, months, together with the Department around tables throwing out ideas as to how best to use the arsenal of tools that we had in USIA to get the message, whatever the message was, across. Primarily to get the message across that at all levels of Islamic society. We felt the United States could work in partnership, could be a friend, could be understanding, and could be respectful assuming that those conditions existed on the side of the Muslim world as well. To that extent, USIA had, as you well know, a series of programs that ran the gambit from our Fulbright exchanges program, which brings many scholars of different ages and different levels of academic achievement to the United States for periods of a year, sometimes two or longer, to our informational programs, our libraries, which welcomed scholars, journalists, and public opinion makers, and leaders of society into our libraries and cultural centers overseas. We would work with our colleagues in the State Department to brainstorm on ways to make all of these programs, whether it was a local library program on the ground, our speakers programs where we brought specialists from the United States to speak on subjects of mutual interest, or the exchanges of peoples program, the written material, the magazines that we put out in Arabic, (Span Magazine, for example, that was published in India so successfully for so many years; Al Majal, which was published in Tunisia) to make those instruments as compatible with U.S. foreign policy as possible and also as open and accessible to our Muslim audiences as possible. This has been something that's been in the minds of USIA people – now public diplomacy people – ever since I can remember and probably long before I entered the Foreign Service in the 1970s. The prospect of creating if not a mutual admiration society, at least a platform of understanding where we had an ability to get to the publics of the Muslim world what our policies, what our society, and what our culture was. Whether it was admired by them or not – and this is not just true of the Muslim world but every part of the world, the former Soviet Union, for example – was something else. But we felt that at least if we could get the truth of what governs our society made available in a variety of ways at a variety of levels – and I mentioned some of the program tools that we used – we had a better chance of going forward, working in partnership with other countries of the world, particularly the Muslim world in this case. The Arab-Israeli issue was, of course, always there and that had to be factored into everything else that we did. That was front and center, of course, all the time. It plays a great role in the public image of the United States in the Muslim world.

Q: Did USIS people abroad at that time and before have the task of monitoring what was being taught, looking at the textbooks within the society?

TAYLOR: Oh, yes. I don't know that calling it a "task" is a good way to term it, but it certainly was something that we were very concerned about. We were as concerned about what was being taught in the Israeli textbooks as in the Arab textbooks. We were concerned about what was taught in the Soviet textbooks. You would find just egregious examples in Soviet era textbooks on the whole history of the post-Civil War world in the United States. Certainly there was a lot to be said about slavery, the Civil War, the aftermath of the Civil War, and the condition of

African-Americans in the 20th century. But the extremely one sided nature in which this was put in Soviet textbooks was pretty shocking. We would work with Soviet educators as we worked with Arab and Israeli educators in the Middle East to write more in their textbooks about the openness of American society, and the great equalizing factor of free and open education. Those were things that we tried to do through our visitors projects, through sending an academic specialist to, say, Jordan for a year to work with the textbook and curriculum writing faculties of the public school administrations to try to just help them rewrite and shape their texts, particularly in the field of civil society, history, and social sciences, a little bit more objectively.

Q: There is an editorial in The New York Times today talking about Saudi Arabia, where according to the columnist, Thomas Friedman, the Saudis for some time now have in their textbooks at lower levels that anybody who is a non-Muslim, is an infidel, is an enemy of religion. Were we looking at the religious side of things or were we just worried about the American story as opposed to the other side?

TAYLOR: You have to be very careful when you're looking at the religious statements in a textbook of an Islamic society. Certainly as far as our dealings with the Soviet Union were concerned, we were more concerned about the portrayal of the United States because it was just blatantly egregious. I remember once when one of the major American exhibits came to the Soviet Union in the glory days when we would send a huge exhibit around the Soviet Union for 18 months and the exhibit would spend two months in each of six cities or such and we would have with the exhibits 20-30 young college age Russian speaking guides and they would be a mix of college kids. Inevitably, the African-American college kids among the guides would be asked things like, "Well, are you allowed to drive cars in the United States?" There was just such basic disinformation that you can't even imagine it. So, these kids would write home to their parents and say, "Send me pictures of the house, the car, the family dog, and all of these things."

What we found in the Middle Eastern textbooks was somewhat similar but not quite as blatant. Where it pertained to what they were saying about their own religion and other religions, my experience in working on projects with textbook writers was that we didn't much approach that. Rather, we came at it from a different angle, which was to talk about how civil society, just the subject of civics itself, is discussed in an American classroom. How we do role playing in ninth grade, where somebody is the representative and somebody is the mayor and people vote and what it means to vote and what it means to have basic freedoms. Instead of focusing on a statement such as the one you pointed out about infidels, we would say, "Well, here is something else you might want to think about in your textbooks," such as how do you raise a group of young people to be responsible members of society, how do you develop the thinking in young people – high school students and college students – that public service, working for the government, is something that is of value to them? By the way, we need to do that in our own country, too. But we would never, at least in my experience with U.S. curriculum writers and experts whom we would bring to, say, Morocco or Jordan or Syria, or Middle Easterners whom we would bring to the United States to spend a semester with one of the state curriculum textbook writing committees, one always had to be very careful about not picking out the religion per se but rather approaching this issue from a broader perspective of society and politics. It's very hard to unravel those things.

Q: Did you feel that Islam was just per se in opposition to American and western values?

TAYLOR: No. Islam is such a large and widespread religion as well as philosophy as well as a way of life. Broadly speaking, you could say that Islam is a faith that is very cautious about other faiths, but I would never say that it is opposed to the American or the western way of life. As conservative societies, forget about whether they're Islamic or not, conservative societies are very wary of western societies and our "fast way of life" and our perceived lack of a moral basis and our perceived indifference to religion. Religion in the United States in the view of most Muslim societies does not play as major a role as Islam plays in Muslim societies and that is a matter of concern for them. But I didn't see within the religion of Islam opposition to the United States or the western way of life. Certainly as we've seen there are factions and there are those groups of Muslims who have taken Islam as their banner and made it into something that most Muslims will tell you it is not. I think that I would agree that Islam is not what the extremists have made it to be, particularly in terms of extreme Islam's hatred of the West. When I was a student at the National War College in '90-'91, we read at Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Cultures." Everybody in the class was outraged about this. "This can't be." He was positing in his article, which became a much longer piece, and I think at Harvard it became the central part of some courses he was teaching, that now that the Cold War was largely won – this was '90-'91 – the next phase that we faced in the West was the clash of cultures, primarily the clash of western culture and Islam. I remember, we all said, "Oh, this is nonsense. This will never happen." That was just 10 years go. And now those students are generals.

JOHN M. EVANS
Staff Aide to Secretary of State Vance
Washington, DC (1979-1980)

Ambassador Evans was born and raised in Virginia and educated at Yale University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1971 and became a specialist in Soviet and Eastern European Affairs. His foreign posts were Teheran, Prague, Moscow, Brussels, St. Petersburg, Chisinau (Moldova) and Yerevan, Armenia, where he served as Ambassador from 2004 to 2006. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington, the Ambassador dealt primarily with Russian and former Soviet states' affairs. Ambassador Evans was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: Yes. What about with the Soviets going into Afghanistan, we got- we reacted very strongly to this; what was sort of, again, the feeling or the reaction around? Was this a concern of this is a new, you know, a really enforcing of the Brezhnev doctrine, that no communist state will become non-communist although hell knows what the Afghan government was at that time, it was a revolting communist state or something.

EVANS: Well, there were so many coups and counter-coups in Afghanistan that I've a little bit lost track of them, but you may remember that our ambassador Adolph "Spike" Dubs was assassinated. That would have been, I think, in 1978 and that was in the course of one of these

coups.

I should also mention the figure of Marshall Shulman. Marshall Shulman was brought in as a special advisor to Vance on Soviet affairs. Marshall had been teaching at Columbia for years; he was a soft spoken, fine scholar with good Russian and good contacts and I must say a very benign view of the USSR on the spectrum of American opinion. That is, he had a rather less negative view of the Soviet Union. He was all in favor of détente and he, in his soft spoken way, tried to persuade Vance, and I think successfully, that we could deal with the Soviets, and we did. After all, Carter and Brezhnev in Vienna in '78, it must have been in the spring or summer of '78, signed the SALT agreement, and there was the famous kiss between Carter and Brezhnev that was flashed around the world and didn't go down well in many quarters, but that's a Russian tradition and Russians kiss each other, but it looked soft, it looked weak, it looked wrong to the American public. But the invasion of Afghanistan in December of '79 was taken by Vance and Shulman, I think, as a double-cross by the Soviets.

I remember that the first indications of troop massing were coming to us, Soviet troops massing on the northern border, must have been in the middle of December and our intelligence people were very worried, but just on Christmas Eve Ambassador Dobrynin made an appointment with Vance. It had been my job in those days to meet Dobrynin who was coming in through the State Department basement under a special proviso that Henry Kissinger had worked out, and he brought Vance a beautiful Christmas present of a vodka decanter and little glasses to go with it, made of crystal. Now, Vance had vacation plans that Christmas that coincided, dovetailed, beautifully with mine. Because of his friendship with the Rockefeller family he was invited to spend the Christmas holiday in Williamsburg, Virginia, my home town, and to stay in the Rockefeller estate there, which is very... it's an 18th century house close to town. And I remember going to Bruton Parish Church for Christmas morning services and Vance, Cyrus Vance and Gay Vance, his wife, were there but during that day we learned that the Soviets had invaded Afghanistan and Vance had to cut short his vacation and I did too. We rushed back to Washington to deal with the fallout, which included intensive consultations on how to respond. In the end we responded by barring exports of oil and gas drilling equipment; there were some trade sanctions and we boycotted the Moscow Olympics.

Q: Olympics.

EVANS: One of the most unpleasant tasks that Vance took upon himself was to go to Lake Placid to meet with the International Olympic Committee and convey the American decision not to participate in the Moscow Olympics. I went with him on that trip and it went over like a lead balloon.

Q: You know, looking back on it, I mean, certainly the Olympics because then the Soviets didn't go to the next one and all and it- Once you get into that game-

Well I mean, did you, were you privy to any cogitation about what the hell were the Soviets about? Because, you know, for many it looks like a gerontocracy at the Politburo at that time; Brezhnev was seeming to be coming increasingly out of focus or something, you know, I mean, this didn't make much sense.

EVANS: Well, from the point of view of the old men, as you correctly put it, in the Politburo, when things got to the point they did in Afghanistan they felt in their bones that they had to respond to it, and what they were up against was the prospect of a fundamentalist Islamic state bordering on Central Asia where they had their own restive Muslim populations. And they simply felt they had to do something.

Now, it seems in retrospect that we were more involved in some of this than it seemed at the time, or at least than I knew at the time, and in particular Zbigniew Brzezinski went on record with the French newspaper "Libération" in about 1998 basically boasting that the United States trapped the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, set a trap for the Soviet Union and created a situation in which they would move in and then bleed themselves to death. Now, whether this is... I don't know to what extent we really triggered their response but it does... certainly Zbig Brzezinski believes that this was how we brought communism to its knees.

Q: Well, knowing how the U.S. Government works, the idea that we could plan ahead and do something like that seems to be a little bit out of this world.

EVANS: Whether we caused it to happen or simply took credit for it happening, I'm not sure, but after it happened there's no doubt about what ensued and that is that we started arming the mujaheddin who were fighting the Soviets and we went as far as to provide Stinger shoulder-held anti-aircraft missiles.

Q: Yes. As we're talking today, where have we evolved in Afghanistan? You know, you think about that barren piece of territory-

EVANS: Which has never been conquered by any outsider.

PATRICK F. MORRIS
USAID, Near East Bureau
Washington, DC (1979-1980)

Mr. Morris was born and raised in Montana. Educated at Georgetown University, Mexico City College, and San Marcos College, Lima, Peru, Mr. Morris served in the US Army in Europe during World War II, where he was captured and imprisoned by the German Army. He joined the newly established Point IV program in 1950 and worked with that agency and its successors in various senior level capacities in Washington, DC, in Paris and throughout Latin America. His final posting was in the Dominican Republic, where he served as Director of the US AID Mission. Mr. Morris was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Pat, where did you go after, in '79 you left and where did you go?

MORRIS: Well now we are coming to the end of my career.

Q: Yes?

MORRIS: I left the Dominican Republic in 1979, yes, in July I guess of 1979, came back to the States. I expected that I would probably have some kind of a position in the Latin American bureau but there was no job offered me before I left and when I arrived, I went on home leave and I, I am trying to remember. I do not recall exactly how it came about but somebody in the Near East bureau called me and asked if I were interested in taking over an office in the Near East bureau of AID that was going to become vacant. And since the Latin American bureau had not offered me anything I said sure. So when I came off of home leave I was assigned to the Near East bureau of AID, in an office which was sort of a collection of countries that did not seem to fit easily into a geographic unit that spread from Afghanistan, Iran; Iran at that time did not have an AID program but they had a large loan overhang which we were trying to collect.

Q: This is, of course, after the hostage crisis.

MORRIS: No, it was before the hostage crisis but we had already phased out our AID program under the Shah. When the Shah was still in we phased out our AID program but they were still paying off some of the loans and somebody had to take care of it so my office had that. I had Afghanistan, Yemen, Iran, Morocco and Portugal.

Q: Well how long did you do this?

MORRIS: I did it for about six months. I retired in March of- So I was not on the job long enough to visit any of those countries and not long enough to really have made any contribution to the AID programs in those countries. But I will never forget, and this may be the only thing of significance that happened to me while I had that job, I am trying to remember his name—Joe Wheeler. Joe Wheeler was the assistant administrator for AID for the Near East and I got a call from him one day and he asked me to go to a State Department meeting on Afghanistan. It was some kind of committee that he was on and, but he couldn't make it. So I went, I did not have much of a feel for Afghanistan yet, but the Soviets had- remember the American ambassador was killed.

Q: Yes, Spike Dubbs.

MORRIS: Yes.

Q: In '79.

MORRIS: Yes, he was shot in his office, I guess.

Q: No, he was shot in a hotel. He was abducted under very peculiar circumstances.

MORRIS: Yes. But anyway, of course there was no doubt in anybody's mind that the Soviets, the communist party in Afghanistan, was active and probably responsible for what happened.

And the meeting, I cannot recall exactly what the meeting was about, why the meeting was called, but the discussion really disturbed me. And here I was, a newcomer, and when a number of people wanted to bring up the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, whoever was chairing the meeting, and I do not even remember who it was, would immediately stop the discussion and say well, this is not why we are here, or something to that effect, and he would change the discussion around. It was very difficult for me to understand what the U.S. position was on Afghanistan at the time, but I left that meeting very disturbed that here, officially, we seemingly were ignoring or papering over something that had been reported in the U.S. press. Of course, I did not have any inside information at this point and there must have been lots of inside information.

Q: Right.

MORRIS: And yet it could not be freely discussed in a meeting on Afghanistan. I have never forgotten that. And years later a roommate of mine from Georgetown who worked in NSA-

Q: Which is the eavesdropping arm of the government.

MORRIS: Right. And he told me, of course this also years after he had retired, said that at NSA they could never understand why the Carter Administration was turning a blind eye to what the Soviets were doing in Afghanistan.

Q: Well, of course we did not. As a matter of fact at a certain point the Carter Administration revved up all things. We stopped our participation in the Olympics, we cut off lucrative grain deals for ourselves; we did all sorts of- we cut off exchanges. I mean, it was-

MORRIS: But that was after the invasion.

Q: Yes, after the invasion.

MORRIS: But see this was before the invasion; this was before the invasion. I think I retired a week or two weeks before the invasion.

Q: Well the invasion was on Christmas, essentially Christmas '79.

MORRIS: Seventy-nine, okay. So I was there then. But that particular meeting happened before the invasion. And then presumably, as a result of the invasion they finally took their blinders off to what was happening.

TERESITA C. SCHAFFER
State Department; Deputy Director-Pakistan, Afghanistan & Bangladesh
Washington, DC (1979-1980)

Ambassador Schaffer grew up in Manhattan and graduated from Bryn Mawr college. She served in numerous posts including Tel Aviv, Islamabad, New Delhi

and Dhaka, as well as numerous positions in Washington, DC. She was named ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives in 1992. She was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 1998.

Q: Then in 1979, you returned to Washington to become the deputy director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh (PAB), How did that assignment come about?

SCHAFFER: Initially, I was assigned as the deputy director of the office that handled Indian affairs. Howie has been assigned as PAB director. During the Spring of 1979, there was a shuffle in NEA with the former PAB director moved up and a new person was brought in to replace her. Then the decision was made that Howie should head up the India desk, rather than PAB. Since I couldn't work for Howie, another position had to be found for me. Howie was told that the India assignment was an offer he could not refuse. NEA had also asked the then deputy director of PAB whether he would be willing to move to the comparable position in the India office. That was all right with him; so he and I swapped jobs and I went to work in PAB. Both Howie and I were the logical candidates for any positions on the India desk or PAB. We were the right grade; we had the right "cone"; we had the desired background.

This is an excellent example of the assignment flexibility that is required to make tandem assignments workable. No one was harmed; it allowed me to continue in my chosen profession. This sort of flexibility has been lost; the assignment process today is much more regimented because it depends so heavily on the "bid" process. To undo an assignment becomes a major transaction today; even if an officer had informally been accepted for an assignment, there is no guarantee that it would necessarily happen. There are all kinds of rules about the extent of advance notification in bidding or unbidding and how the assignment panel must proceed. It is possible that today's process might have ended up with the same results as the assignment of 1979, but it would have been a much more nerve-wracking process; it could also of course have not ended as happily as it did in 1979. I am certain that for this particular set of 1979 assignments, it would have been much harder today to achieve the desired results.

I had some acquaintance with both Afghanistan and Bangladesh. We had visited the first in 1975 while stationed in Pakistan -- with two small children. We drove through the Khyber Pass in a driving rain. The car stalled, but fortunately decided to try again. We crossed the border with our 1 ½ year old chirping away in Urdu and the six week old having his lunch under my blouse. The Afghan guard was completely befuddled seeing only three people, but had four passports. Our efforts to explain that there really was a fourth passenger only flustered the guard. We drove to Kabul and spent a couple of days there and returned.

I had visited Bangladesh while serving in India. I went to Dhaka as the Science Attaché and Howie was with me. I was given the grand tour of the International Center for Diarrheal Diseases Research for Bangladesh (known as ICDDRDB). This is the only international research effort in Bangladesh; it has done first class research in the field. It had been a cholera lab in an earlier incarnation. We also had the opportunity to go out on a river steamer; so we saw something of the country-side. We met all sorts of government people.

In fact, the PAB deputy director spent almost full time on Pakistan. I was the economic officer

for that country, in addition to being an adviser on economic matters to the other desk officers. I carried the major part of the load in liaison with AID for all the PAB countries, but I think it is fair to say that I spent 95% of my time on Pakistan -- in part dictated by the fact that 1979 was a year of crisis there. That was true even in my economic "hat" though we had no current program for Pakistan. We did have some projects that had been previously funded which were continuing. We still had an AID Mission in Pakistan; it takes AID a long time to close missions and program. And as I'll explain later, we spent innumerable hours worrying about the content of a new assistance package. There was also the question of rescheduling Pakistan's debt -- an issue in which AID was vitally interested because some of it was debt to AID. As a practical matter, that also meant that we and AID worked very closely on economic assistance -- current and prospective. Since I knew the assistance program and personalities in Pakistan quite well, I could contribute to the dialogue in a meaningful way.

To be entirely accurate, I have to note that the country directorates did not get involved in the assistance project proposals or even in the approval process. State would be involved if there were any major issues as well as approving the overall program framework and the funding level.

I worked for Robert Peck, who was the PAB country director. Jane Coon was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia. The Assistant Secretary was Hal Saunders, who was one of my professional heroes. He is an extraordinary person. He spent most of his time on Middle East issues; most of what was remaining was devoted to Iran and the hostage crisis. He did take enough time to assure himself that South Asia was properly followed. I clearly remember times that really capture the reasons for my admiration for Hal. The first time came when he was preparing to provide Congressional testimony on Pakistan. He had requested that we draft his opening statement; when that was done, he asked the drafter and others to stick around to discuss it with him. I happened to be given the task of drafting the statement. When we met in his office after 6 p.m. one evening, it was obvious that he had not had time to read the draft. When we had assembled, Hal, in his usual quite fashion, asked: "What do we really want to tell Congress?" When I heard that question, it seemed so obvious, but I also knew that very few people ever asked it. We went to work and developed some "sound bites" for him. Then we talked about some of the ancillary messages and the subtleties of the situation. Hal asked some questions, which we tried to answer. When he was satisfied, he thanked us; he asked me whether I needed to rewrite his statement. I told him that I surely did. He gave me back the draft and asked me to return it to him as soon as possible. It was a superb performance; here was an Assistant Secretary handling multiple crises, who was able to close his door and focus on Pakistan by getting down to the basic questions and at the same time, inspire his staff. We knew how busy he was; it was a rare insight into a very busy executive. He was obviously one of the most organized people I have even known.

The other example came right after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. A few newspaper reporters had asked for a briefing on the situation. Hal agreed to see them. They were requested to come to his office well after dark on a non-working day. We in PAB were exhausted after having worked a full day. Hal made his presentation, describing the situation. One of the reporters asked how many Soviet troops there were in Afghanistan. Hal patiently pointed out that we did not have an exact fix on the numbers, which he had admitted earlier. He gave the reporter

a range, but pointed out that the exact number was not the key; the fact that a sovereign country had been invaded by another was the important issue. The reporter than in very snide way said: "You mean you asked us to come here at this hour on a holiday and you don't know the exact number of Soviet troops in Afghanistan?" In response, Hal very quietly asked whether the reporter didn't want to rephrase the question. The reporter then realized how preposterous his comment was. He rephrased the question and Hal responded very quietly with the range he had given before and emphasized again the key issue. He said that if the same question was asked again, he would respond to it in exactly the same words. It was the only time that I have heard Hal come close to losing his cool.

Hal's staff revered him. He was a very nice guy, gentle, always under control, who had a superb touch for human relations. As I was leaving the Bureau, he wrote me a personal note of thanks; that was both unusual and unnecessary, but he did take the time to do that.

I found the work very stimulating. I did not mind working in the large Washington bureaucracy. I was very happy to return to the field of economics -- the subject in which I had received advanced training. My tour in the Science Office in Delhi was great, but I really welcomed the opportunity to return to my field of expertise. To the best of my recollection, the PAB directorate had six officers -- four on desks -- and 2-3 secretaries. Mike Hornblow worked on Pakistan political issues; Larry Benedict worked on Bangladesh; Ernestine Heck worked on Afghanistan and then there was one more officer in addition to Bob Peck and myself.

Our major issue with Pakistan concerned their nuclear program. That was followed by the spillover from the USSR invasion of Afghanistan. Those two problem areas had a major effect on our bilateral economic relationship. Just before I started to work in PAB, the U.S. had, for the second time, cut off assistance to Pakistan because of its efforts to develop a nuclear weapon. Pakistan has had a long history of economic challenges -- particularly the balance-of-payments problem. We kept pretty close track of that problem.

Over the course of the Fall of 1978, Afghanistan had been through a succession of crises. A Communist government had already taken over; it was not a very cohesive institution because of internal tensions. In December 1979, one Communist leader was assassinated and replaced by another. A few weeks later, on Christmas Day, came the Soviet invasion. For about two weeks prior, we were receiving lost of information about Soviet military build-up along the Afghan border. I think it was clear to all that something was about to happen. We held a series of discussions in rapid succession with the Pakistani Foreign Minister -- one before the invasion and two soon after. As it happened, Bob Peck was away for Christmas, leaving me in charge of PAB. At the highest level of our government, options for our response were being considered. One step that was taken was to dispatch Clark Clifford to New Delhi to brief the Indians on what was going on in Afghanistan and our thoughts about events there. Howie went along and I am sure you will find reference to that trip in his oral history. Clifford and he were the total delegation.

Before the Clifford party had a chance to take-off, Warren Christopher, then Deputy Secretary of State, made plans to go to Pakistan. But that soon became the "Brzezinski" delegation, with Christopher just a member of the delegation, and with enough members to fill a plane. So the

Pakistan visit turned out to be highly visible -- lots of limelight and headlines. It was on trip that an initial assistance package was offered General Zia; he rejected it calling it "peanuts" -- a somewhat infelicitous phrase particularly in light of President's Carter affinity for peanuts. Despite this un auspicious beginning, in fact that trip became the starting point for U.S.-Pakistan cooperation on the Afghan issue.

Soon after the Brzezinski trip, we hosted a Pakistan delegation in Washington. That was headed by Agha Shahi, who had been the Foreign Secretary for many years. In light of his experience, he tended to operate as the Foreign Minister. He wanted to talk about US-Pakistan relations, the U.S. commitment to Pakistan and the effect that the Soviet presence in Afghanistan might have on our bilateral relations. We had an elaborate series of meetings -- Secretary Vance spent a lot of time with Shahi and his delegation. I was the note-taker for the U.S. side in all of these meetings. The consultation did not result in any concrete operational results; we just promised to keep in touch. The most uncomfortable part of the discussion, in light of recent history, was about the U.S.'s commitment to Pakistan. In my view, this issue had been central to a dialogue which seemed to be at cross purposes for almost thirty years. We have had a number of alliance relationships with Pakistan, starting with the regional alliances like CENTO and SEATO. By 1979, neither organization was exactly robust. But in both cases, the U.S. view -- as stated in words in a number of documents -- was that we were interested in Pakistan primarily, if not exclusively, as a front line state in our fight against Soviet Communism. The Pakistani view, which probably reflected a lot of atmospherics at the time, was that the U.S. would be its supporter -- no questions asked. Of course, Pakistan's perceived enemy was India. The fact that there were Soviets in Afghanistan really raised this difference of national objectives. My guess is that the Pakistanis were looking for a much more positive statement about our commitment to it than anyone was willing to give in 1979.

The second set of meetings, a few weeks later, followed roughly the same format as the first one, except that the Pakistani delegation was headed by Ambassador Yakub Khan, who was one of the most remarkable officials in the government. He is still around, even though he is getting on in years. He had been a general, and had then served as ambassador to almost every major country, including the U.S. and the USSR -- which was the position he held when he was assigned to head this delegation. He is one of the most articulate, urbane and sophisticated people I have ever encountered. In 1979, the Ambassador was at the top of his game. Mike Hornblow was asked to meet Yakub Khan at the airport and then to drive him into the Department's parking lot in the basement. That was an effort to avoid as much press attention as possible. Mike had a particularly disreputable looking yellow VW at the time; it served well as a cover for the Pakistani.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, we made frantic efforts to restore aid to Pakistan, which had been suspended in the summer under the non proliferation bans then in place. At one point, I remember my phone ringing at 5:25 p.m. from the Secretariat; I as being asked to submit a memo by the end of the day to the Seventh Floor outlining what an assistance program to Pakistan might consist of, assuming that a \$200 million appropriation was forthcoming. I called the former deputy director of our AID mission in Pakistan -- he was working in Washington in AID. I suggested to him that the whole amount be spent on fertilizer. He suggested that half of the amount be devoted to roads; he told me that those funds too would be readily disbursed; that

was good enough for me and I included a road construction program in my memorandum. It took us about fifteen minutes to spend \$200 million -- which was about the length of time it took me to type the memo. Of course, this was not real money; we had both the opposition Congress as well as Pakistani rejection of our offer.

The Pakistani visits were useful in achieving communications between the higher echelons of both countries. There was a frank exchange of views on the strategic situation, but few operational results. As I said, the Pakistanis were more concerned about India; we shared some worries about India in light of some very pro-Soviets statements about Afghanistan emanating from New Delhi. The Soviet statements on Afghanistan did nothing to allay our concerns; they certainly helped the Pakistani position.

We were not able to convince Congress to authorize the resumption of assistance. But we kept on working on different formulations on what an aid program might look like. The only possible way to get some supplement appropriations would have been for the President to make calls himself. The time was not opportune -- this was April, 1980 and because the government was in the middle of one of its budgetary crises he turned down the suggestion. The bureaucratic machinery creaked along as it often does and by the time the recommendation went to the White House, the Soviets had already been in Afghanistan four months. Furthermore, there were other crises to worry about, notably the Iran hostages and the failed rescue mission, the Vance resignation, the advent of a new Secretary -- Ed Muskie. The new Secretary had to face this Afghan can of worms, which would have been tough enough for a veteran, much less a newcomer.

I fully supported our attempts to restart an assistance program for Pakistan. I started with the assumption that our aid cut-off had been spectacularly ineffective in influencing the Pakistani nuclear development program. Furthermore, the internal situation had changed dramatically. For years successions of regimes had been voicing great concern about Communism -- essentially to ingratiate themselves with us -- by the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, Pakistan had a very good reason to worry about its security. The Soviet invasion had an unsettling effect on Pakistan's internal political problems.

I must mention another major event that had an effect on US-Pakistan relations. I refer to the attack on our Embassy in Islamabad. That certainly had an effect on our bilateral relations. It was a major catastrophe -- four people were killed and many more seriously wounded -- which had been totally unexpected. Islamabad was built to be riot proof. So no one expected what happened.

When the crowd began to assemble, it seemed to come primarily from the direction of the University, down the road from the embassy. There was some indication of Iranian supply of equipment to the rioters. The Ambassador and the DCM were not in the Chancery when the attack began; both were at lunches. The DCM went to the Foreign Ministry as soon as he was alerted, to demand that security protection be provided, as required by international law and practice. He was told that the whole police department was in Rawalpindi, about ten miles away, providing protection for President Zia's talk about the importance of austerity while he rode around on a bicycle. A few policemen did arrive and may have provided some assistance to

people who had been eating in the Embassy Club, but it was a haphazard operation. The fire department and the military didn't show up until night-fall. The crowd finally dispersed, not under pressure from government forces, but because night was falling. By that time, it had set fire to the whole building. So the fact that our Chancery was assaulted and that Pakistani security forces did not come to meet their legal obligations until six or seven hours after the start of the disturbance, came as great shocks to us. It raised questions about the viability and competence of the Pakistani government, not to mention its attitude towards the U.S. I think there may have been some people in our government who suspected Pakistani government participation in the riot -- or perhaps "benign neglect -- ; but that didn't last very long. Our greater concern was not as much about involvement in the riot, but the degree of *Schadenfreude* that had taken place. It was at best evidence of major incompetence and at worst a sinister Pakistani plot.

Pakistani officials called and expressed their apologies. We told them in effect that we would send them the repair bill. The event certainly shook people up both here and in Pakistan; they were astonished. I think the government recognized that there were strains between our two countries; but a riot and mayhem -- unthinkable, particularly in Islamabad.

The winter of 1979-80 was also the winter of the great evacuation. Our Embassy in Teheran, including some staff, was taken over by the Iranian "students" in early November. Much of our staff from there was also in Washington awaiting developments. On November 22, our Chancery in Islamabad was torched. I was actually in the Operations Center when Peter Constable, the NEA senior deputy assistant secretary, spoke to Ambassador Hummel in Islamabad. The Ambassador resisted efforts to evacuate his staff; he thought Washington was over-reacting (and I don't think Mrs. Hummel wanted to leave). Peter told him that the Secretary had issued instructions to evacuate most of the staff and the dependents and that was the way it was going to be. And that is what happened.

In the next two days, something happened in Libya putting our staff there at some risk. There were rumors that a demonstration against us might be mounted in Dhaka on the Friday after Thanksgiving. Ambassador David Schneider requested permission to keep the Embassy closed -- an interesting sign of the times because a few years later an ambassador would have made that decision on his own authority. We have become so much more accustomed to crises that we now give ambassadors much more leeway that we did in the late 1970s. At that time, what was happening in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Libya were still rare occasions when all local US reactions had to be approved with Washington. I remember Hal Saunders turning very pale when he read the Secretary's instructions; he said if anyone wants to close down his or her embassy, they should go ahead. The U.S. could not stand any more assaults beyond the ones already suffered in Teheran and Islamabad.

As a result of all these incidents, sometime during the week after Thanksgiving, NEA was instructed to evacuate dependents from essentially all the post in the area, except India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka -- all the non-Muslim countries. By the time we had evacuated our staffs and dependents, we had about 1000 people evacuated to the U.S. The Family Liaison Office was a very new organization; that meant that most of the work-load of supporting this large group fell to the regional bureau. We tried hard to provide good services to the evacuees and I noted that different evacuees behaved differently. The desk was very much involved with the evacuees

from Pakistan and Bangladesh. Most of us had served in the area and had some feel for what it meant to have one's life disrupted -- especially just before Christmas. We sent to the post a weekly newsletter to which any of the evacuees could contribute. We also sent messages from the post to loved ones in Washington.

The Pakistan evacuees organized themselves. They had pretty well agreed on a *modus operandi* by the time they arrived in Washington. They had a couple of people who took upon themselves to know where all of the evacuees would be; they published a newsletter which would circulate to their fellow evacuees. They tried to keep the group in contact with each other as much as possible. Evacuation is always a terrible experience, but I think the Pakistan evacuees did a marvelous job of minimizing the hardships.

On the other hand, the evacuees from the Persian Gulf states got much less support, and were less self-reliant. They came from small posts; there had been no crisis in their country of assignment. That made many of those evacuees wonder why they had been pulled out. Furthermore, the Department gave to the posts' leadership discretion to decide how many dependents must leave. In most cases, for example, the ambassador's wife was not evacuated. So the selection from several of these posts was quite arbitrary and focused on the junior staff members. Many of the evacuated staff did not accept that they had any reason to be evacuated. They tended to assign blame somewhere in Washington. They did not organize; the desks did little to support them. These evacuees became as bitter and disgruntled a group as I have ever seen. It shows what difference embassy leadership and cohesion as well as the Washington support system can make. It was a lesson to me.

The Afghan situation was a major policy focus in Washington. The U.S. decided to boycott the Moscow Olympics and made various efforts to get other countries to follow suit. There was intense interest in how the Afghan mujahideen were faring as they began to organize for resistance. It was clear that a covert program would sooner or later be mounted.

I had no reservations about our efforts to dislodge the Soviets from Afghanistan. I thought it was the right move. It could have been viewed as the "Cold War rearing its ugly head again." It might have heated up the atmosphere unless some precautionary steps were taken. I also thought that the prospect of another Soviet satellite in central Asia potentially quite destabilizing. With 20/20 hindsight, I think an evaluation of our Afghan policy is more complicated than it was in 1979/80. I think that everyone who was involved in development of our Afghan policies has some things to answer for. That country has been dragged through some very miserable times and is still suffering. But at the time, I fully supported our efforts and I am delighted that the Soviets are not in Afghanistan any longer.

I didn't spend much time on Bangladesh. We had a large assistance program there, but it seemed to be meetings its objectives. Every once in a while I assisted the desk officer on some problem or another, but those occasions were few and far between.

RUDOLF V. PERINA

Political Officer
Moscow, Soviet Union (1979-1981)

Ambassador Perina was born in Czechoslovakia when that country was under communist control. He escaped with his family to Morocco, then Switzerland and finally the United States. The ambassador was educated at the University of Chicago and Columbia University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1974, Mr. Perina specialized in Military-Political Affairs at posts abroad, including Moscow, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna and Belgrade. In Washington he served on the National Security Council, specializing in Soviet issues. From 1998 to 2001 Mr. Perina was US Ambassador to Moldova. Ambassador Perina was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006

Q: What was the situation in the Soviet Union in 1979 when you got out there?

PERINA: Well, this was pre-Afghanistan so our relations were still pretty good. Jimmy Carter was the president and he put a great emphasis on human rights issues, but in our overall relations with Moscow there was a lot of interaction, a lot of exchanges and growing commercial relations. The invasion of Czechoslovakia had been forgotten, and the effort to build détente was underway. So it was an expanding bilateral relationship.

Q: Our Ambassador was Thomas Watson?

PERINA: I had three chiefs of mission. When I just got there it was still Mack Toon for about six months. Then he was replaced by Thomas Watson, the IBM president. But then he left after about a year and was replaced by Jack Matlock, who came not as ambassador but as Chargé d'Affaires between ambassadors. The most significant event during my tour is obvious. I got there around September 1979, and three months later the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. I do have a story about that. The invasion came at Christmas time, and it so happened that everybody was on leave for the holidays, even the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) was gone and the Political Counselor, Bob German, was in charge of the Embassy. It was the same thing in the Russian Foreign Ministry, or so they claimed. They told us after the invasion that the Foreign Minister was out of town but I doubt it. He just did not want to meet. So the Deputy Foreign Minister was in charge.

In any case, we received word a few days before Christmas that Washington had noticed these strange military movements along the Soviet border with Afghanistan, and we were instructed to go in with a demarche to try to find out what was happening. Bob German delivered the demarche because everybody else was on vacation, and he took me along as the note taker because I had the best Russian in the Political Section. I'll always remember that session. We met with Georgiy Korniyenko, who was First Deputy Foreign Minister. Bob German was a very polite fellow and in a very friendly way he said that we had noticed these apparent military movements on the border, and what is going on? And I remember Korniyenko saying, "There's absolutely nothing going on, and if there were something going on, it should be no subject of concern to the United States." In other words, he was saying that if something were happening, it was none of our business. So we got this complete brick wall. I wrote up the telegram, and then I

think it may have been the next morning or no later than two days after that suddenly we saw in the morning that Afghanistan had been invaded. The Soviets were also justifying it all as helping Afghanistan stave off a coup attempt engineered by the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). So it clearly did concern the United States, contrary to what Korniyenko had told us, because there was this effort to implicate us and in fact blame us for the whole thing. It amazed me at how blatantly and unabashedly Korniyenko had lied to Bob German. There was not the slightest effort by the Kremlin to reconcile what they told us before the invasion and what they said publicly after the invasion. Both things were totally in contradiction, and both were lies. It showed me for the first time how unashamedly people can lie in diplomacy.

Q: What was our initial analysis of this? I have never been fully satisfied by explanations of why the Soviets invaded another Communist country. It caused all sorts of developments which are still with us today. One of the explanations I've heard is that it was a bunch of old men in the Politburo who didn't know what they were doing. What was coming from our Embassy at the time?

PERINA: Well, the Soviets felt that Afghanistan was slipping away from them. The invasion was a fundamental miscalculation and not a rational move from any viewpoint. This in part explains why we ourselves were so surprised and caught off guard by it. The best explanation is that the Soviets just totally miscalculated at how difficult it would be to control the country. We couldn't figure it out even with the reputation that by then the Soviets had. They were willing to go into Hungary, they were willing to go into Czechoslovakia but nobody anticipated that they would really go into Afghanistan. And I think that really doubled the shock and then the desire to retaliate against them.

Q: So what happened in the Embassy after the invasion? Did all the doors shut on you or did you shut all the doors?

PERINA: Well, we were the ones who shut the doors, and it was a very intentional response. Our Ambassador by then was Thomas Watson, and we junior officers rotated sitting in on the morning Country Team meetings. I remember one dramatic staff meeting just a few days after the invasion when Watson came in and said, "We are going to retaliate. We are going to react very, very strongly to this Soviet action. I want from each section chief and agency head a list of things that we can do to the Soviets to show them how outraged we are." This was at the Country Team meeting. Then he asked right there for people around the table to give him examples of what could be done to retaliate against the Soviets. It was a very tense meeting because he then did call on people around the table. He would go, for example, to the Cultural Attaché, to the USIA person. That person would say, "Well, you know we have a lot of exchanges with the Soviets. We have student exchanges, we have professional exchanges, and so on. We could stop all these but it wouldn't be in our interest to do so because it took us a long time to develop these programs. We would just be punishing the people who are going to have greater exposure to the West. So I would not recommend that we do this." Then Watson went to the Economics Officer who said, "Well, we're selling a lot of wheat now to the Soviet Union and we could stop selling that. However, there is a lot of Congressional support for these sales. Farm interests want to continue selling wheat. We will get a lot of flack if we stop wheat sales so I recommend against it." And he went predictably from counselor to counselor and almost everyone told him things

that could be done but recommended against doing them. But of course, ultimately, we ended up doing almost all of those things. However, nobody even at that staff meeting suggested boycotting the Moscow Olympics. Nobody thought it would go that far.

I will always remember that staff meeting because it was so predictable how everyone tried to protect his or her bureaucratic turf. However, it was all for naught because the reaction from Jimmy Carter was very, very strong and we ended up doing all of those things and more. When it became clear that this was inevitable then of course certain people in the embassy became tougher than ever on the Soviets. I remember at a later staff meeting, after the decision had been made to boycott the Olympics, one person even suggested that the Embassy staff be instructed not to watch the games on TV. This of course was rejected by Watson as unenforceable and privately ridiculed throughout the Embassy. But it illustrated the mood that developed. The interesting thing was that for the rest of my time in Moscow, even though there were very bad bilateral relations in public, the Soviets never retaliated against the Embassy by shutting doors or cutting off our access. In fact, they always tried to show their desire for getting back to business as usual in private contacts. It was their way of showing that they hoped we would forgive and forget the Afghanistan matter and get back to building détente, which of course they very much wanted.

Q: Did you at all pick up from your seniors that the reaction to Afghanistan was largely shaped by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was the NSC adviser? Carter had come in with the idea of getting nice with the Soviets. One reason why Tom Watson was sent out there was to boost the commercial ties. Then Afghanistan happened and Brzezinski's position prevailed.

PERINA: Clearly, Brzezinski had a lot of input on this. The U.S. reaction to Afghanistan was very tough. We did suspend the wheat sales, we basically stopped almost all exchanges, and almost everything in the relationship was affected. And we even did what very few people anticipated and that was the boycott of the Olympics. That showed how really angry Washington was, and I think it even surprised the Soviets. They anticipated a negative reaction to Afghanistan and knew there was going to be fallout but I think they were really shocked by the boycott of the Olympics. As you know, there was a big debate even in the U.S. about this.

GEORGE G. B. GRIFFIN
Chargé
Kabul (1980-1981)

George G.B. Griffin was born in Turkey in 1934. He graduated with a BA from the University of South Carolina in 1957, and served in the U.S. Navy as a lieutenant overseas from 1957 to 1959. After entering the Foreign Service in 1959, his postings abroad have included Naples, Colombo, Calcutta, Islamabad, Lahore, Kathmandu, Kabul, Lagos, Seoul, Nairobi and Milan. Mr. Griffin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: You arrived in Kabul. Let's start when you arrived there after Nepal. What was the situation

like? How did you see it?

GRIFFIN: Well, there was monumental confusion. We were trying to do everything at once. We literally evacuated 1200 people from that mission in six weeks, and that was...

Q: These were mostly AID, weren't they?

GRIFFIN: Yes, and they were scattered all over the country, with a big concentration down south in the Helmand Valley near Kandahar, but the chancery in Kabul also was rather large. Soon we had a fleet of over 200 vehicles parked on the baseball field next to the chancery. Our whiz of an Admin Officer, Bernie Wertz, declared a huge fire sale and invited everybody with money to come. He accepted afghanis, the local currency which was considered worthless by most people. At the end of each day he went to the money bazaar with literally trunks full of money, and changed it all into dollars, which he got out of the country. It was an amazing feat. He also got some of the vehicles out. The last vehicle out was the embassy ambulance. The post had the first in-house clinic in the Service. It was headed by Elmore Rigamer, who eventually became Director of MED. He was a psychiatrist. He was sent there because mission kids were having problems, in part because there was a lot of dope coming into the schools.

Q: It was part of the circuit for the hippies and all that.

GRIFFIN: Right. Elmore had been transferred to New Delhi, and he came up and got the ambulance, put his operating table in the back, and drove it himself down through Jalalabad to New Delhi. That was very brave of him, because bandits and emerging "freedom fighters" along that road were popping off at almost anything they could see. Anyway, we got rid of a lot of stuff and closed the school. The school had just built a brand-new gymnasium, which the Marines and the rest of us used to get some exercise. In winter we played tennis in it.

Before all the old American staff disappeared, I tried to meet as many of their contacts as possible, to keep abreast with what was going on. We dismissed much of the local staff, but tried to keep the best, especially those who had good contacts. Cleaning out the chancery was another fun chore. It was abandoned in such a rush that I kept finding classified documents in every section. They were supposed to have been destroyed before I arrived. It was amazing where I found Secret documents, but we finally got it cleaned up. We decided to move the Marine House into the chancery, and gutted the administrative section to make room. We put in a kitchen, bathrooms, and separate bedrooms. I think it was the first time that's ever been done anywhere.

I made the chief FSN in the Econ/Commercial office weep when I told him to burn his card files on companies and people doing business with America. We also destroyed all visa applications, which upset the FSNs in the Consular Section. I finally convinced them that if the Soviets or their local allies got into the building and found those files, all those people would be dead. We did manage to ship out some files, and made photocopies of others before burning them, though getting our pouches through was more and more difficult. We soon ran out of burn barrel igniters, and our shredders broke down repeatedly. We learned the hard way what our colleagues in Tehran and Islamabad already knew – that document destruction is a tedious and dangerously

slow process.

Q: When you were there as Chargé, who were the core of your people, reporting officers and so on?

GRIFFIN: I don't want to get into too many sensitive things, but of the 13 non-Marine staff there were four administrative types – the admin officer, the GSO, the RSO, and one American secretary. That leaves nine others who were substantive people of all kinds. In the beginning we had a two-man military attaché shop because that was considered by some in Washington to be our primary mission – to see what armaments and forces the Soviets were bringing into the country. They often tested the limits, so the Soviets soon told us we were all restricted. They said we could not go outside Kabul, though we managed to get a few exceptions. For example, we were told we could not travel on a certain road. So we argued that it went to the only golf course in the country. We said that, like all Americans, we must play golf, and protested that the golf course was not a dangerous place, as there were no bandits nearby. We finally convinced them, but some Soviet officials and a busload of Afghan troops went with us the first few times. After that it was all right, as long as we told them when we were going.

We were also allowed to go to a couple of other places, such as the King's country retreat at Paghman, but that was about it. If we tried to go elsewhere, an APC – armored patrol car – would appear with its guns trained on us. The British Embassy was outside of town, so that was another road we could use. It was a palatial, movie-set site – almost unbelievable. Something out of the days of the Raj. But a fine place to go when we were invited. One evening, coming back from there, I was shot at. The nightly curfew had been relaxed a bit, and I guess a Soviet soldier at the checkpoint thought I was coming at him too fast. He fired off a round, which nicked the top of the car. I stopped and yelled at him that I was a diplomat, then slammed the door and kept going. I had to open the door to be heard, because the armored windows were sealed. That lit up the interior of the car, which satisfied the soldiers.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect was how much information we were able to collect, and how many people would find ways to bump into us and pass along information. We devised many ways to meet people. I did a lot of shopping and repeat shopping, and went to every social event I could. In a way, it was a lot of fun.

We dealt fairly regularly with the Soviet Embassy. We had business of sorts with the Afghan Government, but mostly did it through our FSNs. We refused to talk to them on substance, but if something had to be done, for example on a consular matter, or to get visas for new arrivals, I would go to the ministry and get it done. We closed the Consular Section, as there were no visa applicants and dealings with Americans could be handled on an ad hoc basis.

Q: A big question today still is, and one that I guess you all must have wrestled with was, why the hell did the Soviets do it.

GRIFFIN: I think they were concerned that militant Islam was rising up in Central Asia and they saw an opportunity to block it. Another theory was that things were falling apart in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, and the Soviets saw that as a chance to get what they had wanted

since Peter the Great – namely a warm-water, year-round port of their own. Ideally, that could have been one of the existing ports in Iran or Pakistan, but that would mean taking on potential enemies who would react, including the U.S. I suspect that they didn't think we would react to their adventure in Afghanistan, which they described as "responding to the pleas of the duly elected government in Kabul." They claimed that came from Hafizullah Amin, who had seized power from the Soviet puppet Nur Muhammad Taraki. But Moscow clearly didn't like Amin, who was not good at following orders. So, they invaded, killed Amin, brought Babrak Karmal, the exiled Parcham leader, back from Czechoslovakia, and helped him become Prime Minister.

As for the warm-water port theory, there's the bone-dry desert along the Makran Coast, between the Straits of Hormuz and Karachi. There is nothing there except a few fishing villages, so it's a rather ideal place for an oil pipeline, if you were so inclined. But in reality, I don't know what was on their minds. We probably haven't seen enough literature coming out of Russia yet to tell us the real story.

Q: You had such an elderly crew in the Kremlin that one can't help thinking that this may have been a last gasp of 'we'll show them' or something.

GRIFFIN: Could be. I do think that they were seriously concerned about the steadily deteriorating, unsettled situation to the south of them, especially the rumblings in the Central Asian republics. They may have seen this as another opportunity to expand the Soviet empire a bit.

Q: Let's talk about the situation that you were able to get. Right now we have troops in Kabul, of all things, as we speak and we're concerned about the warlords and the fragmentation of Afghanistan. What was the situation that you were able to get from your contacts and all?

GRIFFIN: As I said, amazing numbers of people would come talk to us. For example, I met Abdul Kadir, who was assassinated the other day on the streets of Kabul. He was from Jalalabad. We were both invited by an Afghan to lunch one day, presumably to meet each other. He didn't like the Soviets or their puppets in Kabul, and talked about what was going on in Jalalabad. I had no way to check his story directly or immediately, but over time what he told me turned out to be true. We tried to confirm every report we sent in, though we forwarded some without corroboration when they fit a pattern or came from a source we had found to be reliable at all times. I probably was at my most prolific in Kabul, which is saying something. We transmitted ten-page reports daily of any information we collected. We destroyed our originals as soon as they were successfully transmitted, and kept incoming classified messages no longer than 24 hours. That meant we had nothing to refer to, so if the Department or another post sent a message saying "reference Number 1234," we would have to send one back saying we had no idea what they were talking about, and to ask them to give us the context.

Confirming information wasn't as impossible as it might seem. We would talk to people, and then to others, and often hear the same thing from people who didn't know each other. Some real information did pop up in the press from time to time, and some came from other diplomats. There was a large diplomatic community, whose members – including the Poles, the Czechs, the Bulgarians, and other Soviet Bloc representatives – talked to each other. The Indians probably

had the largest embassy, aside from the Soviets. Because of my India connections, I got pretty friendly with the Indian Ambassador. There's a story there that I'll tell you later.

If I got one confirmation of a story, I would report it. I didn't wait for three or four. The process was also helped by, shall we say, national intelligence assets.

Q: You're referring to the NSA.

GRIFFIN: There were other interesting events, such as the time one of the Bhutto kids – Murtaza, the eldest – hijacked a PIA airliner as it landed in Kabul. After almost a week, the hijackers and their hostages flew on to other airports in the Middle East before they were stopped. When the plane landed in Kabul, there were four Americans – two couples – aboard. An Afghan negotiator eventually convinced the hijackers to let women and children – including the two American wives – go. We helped behind the scenes, working through the Soviet Embassy. The Americans were grateful, but remained fearful about what would happen to their husbands. They were eventually released, unharmed. In the process, we learned a lot of other things we wanted to know, such as how secure was the airport.

Q: Just to get the picture, we were under instructions from the President, "Okay, we're going to be a presence there but we're not going to recognize the government." Were we the odd person out on this?

GRIFFIN: Not entirely. All our NATO allies except Turkey had recalled their ambassadors and reduced their representation to a chargé. But my recollection is that they did deal with the Karmal regime. The only other embassy in a situation similar to ours was the Pakistani, which was an embassy in name only. They were surrounded as much as we were by Afghan secret police and the KGB. The Chargé told me he couldn't go anywhere except home and office. They could hardly get food. They did meet the PIA plane that flew in and went back to Peshawar once a week. That's how they got some household items, but they had real trouble with pouches. We were more successful with that. I think the Soviets decided that, while the main reason we were there was to spy on them, in the broader scheme of their relations with the United States, the Kremlin knew we must be tolerated. But the Pakistanis were seen as supporters of the Pushtuns, who were leading the campaign to drive the Soviets out, and were not accorded much tolerance.

Most embassies – certainly all the Western ones and the Japanese – had chargés d'affaires. All the Soviet Bloc and the Indians had ambassadors. The Saudis and the Iranians had chargés. That was because none but the Bloc countries and India officially recognized the Karmal government. But few were as standoffish as we were. Most had regular consular ties, and some had commercial ties. The most glaring exception was the Turk, who stayed after the Soviet invasion. He was a very senior, career officer who hadn't been offered another job by Ankara. He refused to leave and convinced his government, over the vehement objections of ours, that he could be of more use to both governments if he stayed in Kabul. I got to know him well because I was born in Turkey, and made sure he knew it early on. He and his wife were very nice to me. He even offered me a Turkish diplomatic passport, in case I wanted to "go into the countryside." Silly, because he couldn't do that either.

Q: While you were there, what was happening?

GRIFFIN: Well, in general, I got there at the beginning of reaction to the Soviet invasion, so there were all manner of fun and games. There were two attempted coups while I was there. After I left, Babrak Karmal was finally ousted by the KHAD chief, Muhammad Najibullah. I'm sorry; your question was?

Q: The Soviets came in in December of '79, and you got there in about the spring of '80.

GRIFFIN: I first arrived in January of '80, then went out, and returned in February, and was there until August of '81.

Q: What were the Soviets...?

GRIFFIN: The Soviets kept bringing in more military equipment, which we often watched from the roof of the chancery. Our embassy was next door to the main television station, and the Soviets didn't like us to be up there, but we went anyway. They often buzzed us with helicopters and other aircraft, to reinforce the message. From the Intercontinental Hotel over on a hill to the north, we could better see a huge Red Army camp under construction. One road along its perimeter was not prohibited to us, so we sometimes went there to check out the latest arrivals. They included self-propelled artillery, tanks, APCs, BMPs, rocket launchers, you name it. Most of Kabul was like part of a Red Army camp, which got bigger and bigger. The Soviets took over many buildings, established their own hospitals, and had multiple headquarters here and there. It was a real military occupation. In terms of numbers of troops, that occupation was probably bigger than ours today, and we have put in more troops lately.

In addition to trying to track all that, we wanted to know if any part of the resistance was being successful. We pretty soon heard about Ahmed Shah Masood, the "Tiger" of the Panjshir Valley. He was assassinated by fake photographers earlier this year. We got pretty accurate word about what was going on there. Sometimes the Soviets themselves would ask us, "Why are they resisting? We came here like brothers, but they keep making problems." Does that have a familiar ring today?

To get a flavor of what was going on, all we had to do was stand outside at night and listen, especially at the Intercontinental Hotel and other high vantage points in the city. From there, we could see the airport and, just beyond, the Shamali Plain. Almost every night we would see flares and helicopter gunships buzzing around, firing tracer bullets. There was rarely a day or night that there wasn't some sort of military activity in or near Kabul itself, much of it visible to us first-hand. We got believable reports about what was going on in the rest of the countryside, especially around Bagram and Shindan Air Force bases.

While we were trying to track any successes of the resistance, we could see that the government in Kabul itself was failing. It was made up of a miserable group of people who couldn't cope with the situation, and often didn't get along very well with the Soviets. They certainly weren't getting along with each other. Tribal and ethnic divisions, which have always been a huge factor in Afghan history, kept getting in the way. I suspect they will continue to do so. We began to see

that the Soviets were not settling in well or getting a good grip on things. It seemed that they had bitten off more than they could chew. I was debriefed when I returned to Washington at the end of my tour, and I said quite firmly that the Soviets could be driven out. I got fairly specific about how it could be done – essentially a covert operation at the outset, if we didn't have the guts to take on the Soviets with our military in that setting. I can't claim credit for starting it all, but I think what I said in my debriefing was a big factor in the eventual enterprise. I wasn't there to do anything about it, but I didn't think much of the way it was handled by the CIA. It was certainly my contention and impression that the Soviets were hanging on by their fingernails. I said they could and should be shoved out of Afghanistan, and that ordinary Afghans could make life so miserable for them that it would happen. This was met with a fair amount of disbelief but, in the end, my basic idea was adopted.

Q: How did you deal, one, with the Afghans themselves, the so-called government, and then with the Soviets?

GRIFFIN: Officially we didn't deal with the Afghans at all, but for example when we went to a function at the Soviet Embassy, Afghan ministers, sometimes including the prime minister, would be there. The Soviets often guided Western diplomats to one room and "friends" to another, so we didn't always mingle. But once in a while we did. Most of the time we only shook hands and said "Hello," but some of them wanted to talk to Americans. One or two gave us some of our best information, whether by design or mistake was hard to tell.

The Admin Officer and I, sometimes together, sometimes separately, went to Ministries on paperwork business – but never to engage in substantive conversation. If we ran into problems, or the Afghan bureaucracy would not deliver, we would go to the Soviet Embassy and demand action. They of course would say each time that they didn't run the country, as it was not theirs. We would reply that they had influence where we didn't. It usually worked.

An incident that became a crunch point in that process came one day when I arrived for work to find one of my officers in a high state of agitation. I was Chargé at the time. He told me that a Soviet soldier on guard outside the Embassy had marched in with his weapon, handed it over to the Marine Guard, and seemed to be asking for political asylum. We pulled out the consular "walk-in" handbook, which had a few helpful phrases translated into Russian, but the man seemed illiterate. None of us could talk directly to him because we had no Russian speakers on the staff. I called the Op Center immediately and asked for guidance. I was told to sit tight, and not do anything until they got back to me. I urged them to hurry, because the Soviets were bound to find out. Sure enough, by the time I hung up the phone, we were surrounded by a large contingent of Soviet military power. As the hours and then days wore on, the noose got tighter and tighter.

The soldier turned out to be a 21-year-old infantryman who was miserable in the Army, and especially unhappy with his bosses, one of whom had slapped him. He later told us he wanted out of that god-awful Army where the officers got everything, and the enlisted men got nothing. He told us a lot about life in the Red Army. We kept him for a week, under increasingly tight pressure. We were surrounded by tanks and sharpshooters perched on our perimeter walls. They wouldn't let us take vehicles in or out, so we camped in the Embassy. We kept cars parked

outside, and went out only to get food. They allowed us to walk out, but didn't want us trying to smuggle out the soldier in the trunk of a car.

We feared that the Soviets would try to pop him off, so we hid him as best we could. We didn't want him in the sensitive part of the Embassy, so we kept the blinds drawn and moved him around the ground floor at odd hours. He was near my size, so I gave him some cast-off trousers, a shirt and a couple of sweaters to wear. It was winter and very cold, but when he came in, he had no socks, and claimed they were not issued in the Red Army. When we seemed to doubt that, he said Red Army troops were supposed to be tough, and were issued no gloves either. He turned out to be an ethnic German from western Siberia. I brought the German Chargé over, hoping he could talk to him, but all the boy could remember was a couple of nursery rhymes in German, so that didn't work. Finally, Embassy Moscow sent us one of their political officers to translate. I guess we became a worldwide laughingstock in the press. Here we were, in the middle of a Red Army installation, and nobody spoke Russian.

Hawk Mills was out of the country on R&R and came back about five days later. The Soviet Ambassador had been pestering my secretary, getting more and more insistent, but I had orders not to talk to him. When he returned, Hawk did talk to him, and took in his demand to see the soldier under Geneva Convention rules on consular matters. Finally, the Department agreed to allow him to see the soldier, on the condition that our officer from Moscow do the translating, that Chargé Mills be present, and that the soldier agree to speak to the Ambassador.

So the Moscow Embassy officer – was it Bob Ober? – and I had a long go-round with the soldier for a couple of days. He kept refusing to listen to our explanations. He insisted that he would not return to his unit, and that we had to get him out of Afghanistan. He didn't want to talk to any Russian, or to go back to the Soviet Army, where he was sure he would be mistreated and beaten up again. I told him repeatedly that there was no way we could get him out of the Embassy. I reminded him that he had been on guard outside our gate, and ought to know how it was. At one point, I asked him if he really thought we could sneak him out. That slowed him up a little, but then he asked, "What about the CIA?" I told him it doesn't work like that; it won't happen. At last he realized he was stuck, and said that if we would guarantee that he could stay if he didn't like what he heard, and it was his only real hope, he would talk to the Ambassador and see what he had to say. We told him we would not force him to leave the Embassy.

The Soviet Ambassador couldn't have been more charming, and really did a snow job. He called the soldier "Sasha," saying his mother missed him desperately. He promised "Sasha" everything – back to his mother and family, God, apple pie – you name it. He would have a fabulous home to spend the rest of his days in, and would never have to serve in the military again – on and on. The kid fell for it, and went off in the car with the Ambassador in my clothes. I had slipped him phone numbers of Embassy Moscow, including Ober's. We never heard from him again. God knows what happened to him.

ERNESTINE S. HECK
State Department; Afghanistan Desk Officer

Washington, DC (1980-1983)

Ernestine S. Heck was born in Oregon in 1940. She received her bachelor's degree from Oregon State in 1962. Her career has included positions in Bombay, Saigon, Teheran, Niamey, Katmandu, New Delhi, Colombo, and Madras. Mrs. Heck was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in December 1997.

Q: Ernie, we're moving to the time, but you became Afghan desk officer. You were doing it from when to when again?

HECK: Actually I was the Afghan desk officer from the end of May of 1980 till sometime in November of 1982, so it was two and a half years. I had been on leave without pay for three years when my husband was posted in Nepal. In February of 1980 I was brought home on an emergency medical. My father was in the process of dying. I was out in Oregon in late January of 1980, and I received a phone call from Harry Barnes, who was then the Director General of the Foreign Service, who told me that my husband would soon be replaced as ambassador, and would I please stop by Washington and line up a job on my way back to Nepal, and so I did that. I thus learned in late February that I would be going to be the Afghan desk officer. This was at that point about two and a half months after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which took place in December, late December, of 1979. I was in somewhat of a pickle, because in 1980 Nepal was hardly on the information superhighway and there was very little information available, either at the embassy or elsewhere, on Afghanistan. I had been there, of course, and in fact my husband and I happened to be there at the time of the Communist coup that took place in April of '78. We got stuck in the country for a week because the coup had closed everything. But I had no access to any sort of documentation that I needed to, as we say in the Foreign Service, hit the ground running. Of course, Afghanistan by that point, because of the Soviet invasion, was a very big problem on our international plate. We left Nepal in mid-May of that year, and I left my husband and our menagerie, our dogs, in the embassy in New Delhi, where he stayed with the ambassador while I was sent up on my orientation tour. Of course, I could not go into Afghanistan. The Afghans wouldn't give me a visa, because we were very much perceived as an enemy at that point. I spent two weeks in May, when the temperatures are up in the hundreds, in Pakistan along the border at refugee camps and talking to various exiles, talking to the Pakistani government. The United States in that period - this was the end of the Carter Administration - very much counted on Pakistan as a close ally and worked very closely with Pakistan in dealing with Afghanistan, so I talked to a lot of Pakistani government people as well as to the Afghans. I took over the job at the end of May/beginning of June. The desk had always been a rather sleepy desk until 1978 when the Communists, the local-grown Communists, first took over the government, but until that point the desk was a very quiet desk, and the person who served on it was back-up for everything in Pakistan and also in Bangladesh. By 1980 it was more than a full-time job. In fact, it was more like a two-person job, but there was only one person, so the working hours very much were sort of seven to seven every day and on Saturday at least but not on Sunday. At the beginning when it was still the Carter Administration, we were not so deeply involved in trying to counter the Soviet presence. We were more concerned at that point with the political situation in the country. Of course, we wanted the Russians out of Afghanistan, but we were not actively engaged in getting them out in the way that we were later on. My job very quickly became a combination of just hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of briefing papers. The subject went

into every single high-level talk that our Secretary of State had, or that the seventh floor had, with other governments, so there was a constant writing of these documents; and the other part, which I found personally very difficult because it touched me so much, was dealing with the refugees. We had, of course, had a very big presence in Afghanistan. We were trying to protect the people who had worked for us, basically for USAID but also for the embassy and USIA. A number of them at least had gotten out. They were trying to get to the United States. They were living in refugee camps. To get them into the country involved documentation that they had in fact worked for us. Well, of course, the records were all out in storage in St. Louis, I believe. It was very difficult to prove a lot of things that people who had worked with them knew. So I spent an awful lot of time doing things that perhaps I would have done as a consular officer in other incarnations, trying to help people who were in the camps, basically in Pakistan but also elsewhere, or who had gotten as far perhaps as Rome, where the INS was processing them, or those who were caught in the United States, who wanted to stay and, therefore, wanted asylum. The stories were horrendous. The hardships that they underwent were terrific. I found that a good four or five hours a day had to do with taking care of refugee-related problems, either dealing with the Refugee Bureau to give them the sort of information they needed to make the State Department recommendations on these particular cases that they had to weigh in on, or in dealing with the refugees themselves. We had at that point two previous very senior Afghan diplomats who had been ambassadors to the United States here in the country. They took it upon themselves to call me regularly, as did every Afghan who was here, and I fielded things all day long. It was a very frustrating time, because I did want to help them and there was so little I could do. I acted as a facilitator, however, in a number of cases and tried to straighten out the awful problems that they were having with INS. I was very upset to see the way INS operated. I went down to the INS office here in Washington, the regional office for Washington DC, once at the behest of a man who was actually a royal prince from the old royal family, who had been the number two in the embassy here. He had been the deputy chief of mission. He was desperate to regularize himself. This was not in 1980 but a little later. He had been here long enough to apply to start the process of regularizing himself, but they had lost his records. There was a file with his name on it, and it contained the file of a single Vietnamese woman. Nobody could find his papers, and until they could find his papers, he couldn't apply for anything, and until he could apply for something, his kids would never be able to get into college because they would not be able to qualify. It was this sort of thing. In the meantime, he was selling ties somewhere, Brooks Brothers or someplace. I was very upset to see how the records were kept at INS, that they were all in cardboard files lined up on open shelves. There was no modernization there at all. It was very difficult. With the passing of time, particularly after President Reagan took over, our Afghan policy became very much more proactive. Earlier on there had been a lot of trying to focus things through Pakistan. President Zia was not at all happy with the United States at that point for some very AID-related reasons. He called offers that we had made for help peanuts and was generally not helpful, but when Reagan came, things did change and suddenly the United States became an active player. By that I mean the CIA got very much involved.

Q: I'd like to go back to the Carter time. This would be up to January of 1981. Being on the NEA side and you had this problem, everything was so focused on the plight of our people in Tehran and all, this was the focus, did you feel it was hard to get people to concentrate on what you were doing?

HECK: You're very right. The political appointees of people in our building, as in the White House, were entirely engrossed in what was happening in Iran, and for Afghanistan it was too bad, but it was Iran that was the engine that pulled all of our policy at that point. We got a few gestures from Carter. He refused to let our athletes go to the Olympics that year. This was not a State Department - at least it certainly was not an NEA initiative. I don't know for a fact that it didn't come from one of the other bureaus, Human Rights or Refugees, but this was a gesture that he made, I gather, thinking it would be relatively painless. But other than that, a little bit of tough talk, we didn't do anything about the Soviets either to protest what they were doing or anything else, because quite frankly I think we wanted their help in getting our hostages released, and they, although not in the forefront, were one of the players that could be drawn upon.

Q: Again, sticking to the Carter time, because there is a real division between the two times, were you able to get any help? Here you were feeling all these things, and yet we had a massive, you say, AID effort before. There must have been X AID people who were around who dealt with Afghanistan. I'm thinking of what happened after the collapse of Vietnam and trying to assist people there. Was there any effort made by AID to help its former employees, or were you able to co-opt any people to help them?

HECK: Well, I'm not sure that I would say AID as an organization but most definitely individuals who had served there. Afghanistan was a country very much like Nepal in that same period. People loved serving there. A lot of AID employees and retirees as well as from other organizations worked very hard to get individuals out of camps and into the United States. State Department officers did the same thing - State Department people, I should say, because it wasn't just officers, it was everyone. There was a great deal of individual effort, whether it was in vouching for someone or trying to make a case to some consular officer or some INS officer somewhere or trying to find some organization which would sponsor them coming to the United States as refugees, the IRC for instance. There was a good deal of that. In fact, I know of State Department officers who stopped in places in Europe to make a case for a specific Afghan to sort of grease the skids so that some friend who had worked for him or her could get a visa when the time came. Yes, there was a good deal of that, but we kept running into the fact that nobody higher up in the Carter Administration, as far as I could tell, was particularly involved in any particular case. We would run into things. For instance, a lovely woman who had been a very senior employee of USIA in Afghanistan and who was then in her fifties was able to come into the United States, and she was the senior child who needed to take care of her parents, rather her father, who was quite old. We ran into one of these things where they weren't going to let this man, who was about 80, come in because he had two wives. Well, of course, they were in different places. He had taken a second wife 40 years before and had provided for the first wife but had never been around her since then, and we couldn't get him. We couldn't find anyone in the administration who could understand the cultural mores there enough to let the old man come to the United States, so there he was in a camp in a refugee situation in Germany with the second wife, who was in her seventies by that point. There was a child here who could help but couldn't bring them in, and because the child was an asylee, I believe - she had been in the US when this had happened - she didn't have papers yet upon which to travel. She couldn't go to see him. He didn't speak German. There he was. It was that sort of thing we ran into constantly. It became easier after the administration changed, simply because there were more likely to be people in the next administration who were free, having solved the Iran problem, to concentrate on this.

Q: Who was the head of NEA at that time?

HECK: I believe it was Hal Saunders, but I would have to go back and look.

Q: We can check on that later on. How about Congress? Again, let's stick to the Carter period first.

HECK: There was obviously a strong anti-Communist, anti-Soviet rather, strain in the Congress which made for some pretty strong rhetoric, but there again it was of secondary importance to us then. I think we're all forgetting how very much Washington was tied up in 1979 and '80 with our people in the embassy in Tehran. We never were able at the beginning to get enough support to make a tremendous amount of difference on the Hill. People said all the right things, but we weren't prepared as a nation to go beyond that. We certainly were not going to go to a land war in Afghanistan.

Q: This is one of these things. I've talked to people who served there and saw the troops come in, and they couldn't quite figure out what the hell this was about. It was a coup against the Communist government. What were you getting about the rationale for this?

HECK: In April of '78 Prince Darood was the prime minister when the homegrown version of the Communist Party ran a coup in April of '78 and took over the government and murdered as many of the Dowage family as they could find and then hung the rug out on the street so everyone could see the bloody carpet where they had mowed down 30-some people. The original coup was something of a surprise to the Soviets, as far as we knew, and it quickly deteriorated into a particularly vicious form of back-and-forth between two branches of the Afghan Communist Party with lots of people being thrown into very, very awful prison conditions, lots of people being killed, prime ministers of Afghanistan dying under some very awful situations. The Soviets - this was Brezhnev - presumably did what they did to try to bring some order into the situation. For that a certain strain of thought in the American government had to be "thank God," because the Afghans were doing unto each other some pretty terrible things. When the Soviets came in, they would like to have made Afghanistan into a Soviet model if not a Soviet state. It deteriorated quite rapidly, and they ran up against the rocks of Afghan intransigents that we are seeing today in 1998. The Soviets, I think, thought they were doing good by sending the troops in and did not expect what they found out to be a very difficult situation. The United States, just as a reaction to any Soviet invasion of any other country, was bound to be against it even if intellectually perhaps we would have preferred to have a quiet Soviet-style Communism to what had already taken place, which was a violent, vicious, Middle Ages form of oppression. But, of course, the overriding thing was that it was the Soviets and, therefore, we were against their action. People tend to not understand how ungovernable Afghanistan has been since the beginning of time. There have been periods when there has been a king in the center who is the titular head of an entire nation. In fact, that goes back basically as long as the United States has been an independent nation. But in effect the presence in Kabul, the capital, was just that, a presence, and it was tolerated by everybody else because the presence in Kabul really didn't infringe upon their own region to any degree at all. When the Soviets came in, they didn't see this as the way to govern, of course. It wasn't the way one governed in the Soviet Union. They

tried to impose some order on Afghanistan. Well, it just doesn't work. They tried to make things better for women. They wanted education for all, both boys and girls. I don't see how we could be against any of that, but, of course, the Afghan people, at least the Afghan powers that be, were not at all pleased with this sort of thing. They didn't want power. They didn't want Kabul to interfere with what they were doing in other parts of the country, because it had always been a country ruled by local strongmen and sort of governed to the least possible degree from Kabul. So on one hand what the Soviets tried to do at the beginning was basically something that was pretty benign, but the Afghans themselves didn't allow that to happen. When the Afghans began to rebel against this by fighting, the fighting was totally homegrown little patches of people, different valleys, different subgroups of a major ethnic group, doing things individually. It took a long time for any amount of coalition to happen. By the time I arrived at the end of May of that year, the Soviets had been there for five months and a little over. There were at that point basically six major organizations among the Afghans, which were tighter or looser depending on which organization it was, each claiming to be the major rebel organization. The strongest group at that point was led by a man who is still quite active, and that's Govadene Hekmakyar, who had been trained as an engineer but who was outside the country in Pakistan and had been for some time. There were smaller groups run by religious leaders. There were a couple of groups run by men considerably older, secular leaders of the Pashtun people, who are the dominant ethnic group in the eastern half of the country and the group to which the leaders of the country had always belonged. There was at least one group which was not Pashtun, but basically the major groups were Pashtun-led, and the area in which they fought tended to be a semi-circle, a quarter moon backed up against the Pakistani border. On the Iranian border there were smaller groups which were ethnically and linguistically more tied to Iran. The refugees split in both directions. A couple of million of them by that time, almost 3,000,000, were in Pakistan, but there was also a large number in Iran. The ones in Iran we never had any ability to get to or to deal with. The Iranian government, for reasons of its own, supported groups on the Iranian side of the border fighting against Soviet powers in Herat and to the western side of the country. Pakistan was very much involved supporting particularly Govadene Hekmakyar's organization but funneling money and weapons into the various Pushtun groups on the border with which a number of Pakistani citizens had, I think, ties. Saudi Arabia was putting money and help in. It became quite an international cause, some of the Muslims for religious reasons and anti-Communist reasons, and also the West. We, even during the Carter Administration, had a number of young Americans - not a huge number but enough - who went over to sneak into Afghanistan. The theory was always that they were doing freelance journalism, and a number of them did, in fact, write things which they could then, if they could get in and get out, peddle to various American publications. Some of these sold their stories to valid organizations. There were, in fact, a couple of stringers for American newspapers who went in. *Soldier of Fortune* went in, of course; you would expect to see them there.

Q: This is a magazine designed for people who have a love of - military adventurists the title of the magazine implies.

HECK: Indeed, and these were always problems to us, because every once in a while one of them would get into trouble, would disappear, would be lost. In one case - I believe it was right around Christmas - somebody got killed inside Afghanistan, but he was not an American citizen. He was an Afghan citizen living in the United States. I do not remember if he was a refugee or

an asylee. This sort of thing was another problem that we had on the consular level. In the meantime we had maintained an embassy in Kabul. Because of the diplomatic saber rattling, we had put some very strong, strict constraints on the Afghan embassy here in Washington both in terms of numbers of staff they could have and in terms of the distance they could go from Washington. They in turn did the same thing to us. One of my major problems, although this was basically the responsibility of the NEA/EX, the executive part of our building, the administrative part of our bureau, but I did a lot of hand holding and taking care of our embassy in Kabul. I think we had 19 at the beginning and were knocked down to 15. This had to cover a variety of services. We had, of course, gotten rid of everything that was nonessential. There were no families. The tours were hard and short. The embassy had at least two branches of intelligence there plus the State Department people, and these men lived in a real fortress sort of a situation. It was hard for them to get in and out. We would only allow them to fly in and out on Indian airlines. They were not allowed to take the Afghan or Soviet flights, at least during the period I was there. So they could only go in and out through New Delhi, and there weren't enough flights and flights were crowded. Supplying them, keeping them running, and communicating with them were major problems. They were not allowed to keep anything classified at all, because they could be overrun at any point, and they were left in the meantime with this huge embassy, at least for a small number of men, filled with all the accoutrements of a rather large, family-oriented mission. I know it sounds funny, but we had things to think about like how to draw down the commissary goods. They had a huge commissary. We, as I remember, got rid of a lot of it by peddling it to other diplomats. What to do with the high school, what to do with the new scoreboard that had just been purchased for the athletic field at the school, a tremendous number of things to take care of, cars to get out because people had been sent out in a hurry. So there was a lot of things that I never would have thought of. Because it was an embassy running on the edge whose main job was to keep us as apprised as possible of what was happening in Kabul - you couldn't travel, of course, at that point in country - but they fed us tremendous amounts of very useful information on what was going on on the ground in the city and amongst the Afghan leadership that was the putative leaders of Afghanistan, led by Babrak Kamal at that point, whom the Soviets had put in. Because they were there basically at that point for the intelligence function for us - or as political reporters, perhaps you could say - I found that as a desk officer I got to do a lot of the things that they would normally do as an embassy. For instance, I had to write the human rights report every year. I wrote three Afghan human rights reports, and this was a report that really mattered, of course, because this was one of the few that raised a good deal of interest in the United States as one of the most egregious examples of how human rights could be violated. So there were that sort of reports which were dumped on the desk in addition to everything else, and lots of journalists who wanted to be briefed, people who were going out to the region to write on the story, members of the Hill who needed to be briefed, so I had a very busy job running between all of these various posts.

Q: You say you had to write briefing papers and talk about - again, back to the Carter period and then we'll move on. Did you have a problem sort of explaining that this was really a chaotic situation - there's always a tendency to try to simplify and say, well, it's the good guys against the bad guys - to give the Congress and the rest of our Department a feel for Afghanistan?

HECK: I think that there was a good deal of simplification. There were a number of people in my own hierarchy in the State Department who felt very strongly about the need to get the

Soviets out long before perhaps the Agency began to get more active in trying to do something along that line. Yes, there was a good deal of making it the good guys versus the bad guys. To its credit INR was persistent in trying to keep the State Department's nose pointed in the right direction, and it pointed out regularly, constantly as a matter of fact, how complicated and murky the situation was and how it wasn't all black and white. Yes, that was a constant battle both within the Administration and on the Hill. It was just easier to make it anti-Communist.

Q: Was there a certain amount of almost - the term is wrong but - chortling on the part of people within the Administration, State Department or elsewhere that you were getting? We had had our nose bloodied, as you and I both know very much, in Vietnam, and looking at Afghanistan and saying, boy, they're going to get it and come on in, fellows, get immersed in this and you'll really regret it, and aren't we glad you're doing that. Was there any of that feeling?

HECK: Yes, there was. Here again, I think that was particularly evident during the Reagan years among the conservative branch of the Republican administration. There were a number of people who felt that way, who really wanted to teach the Soviets a lesson and sort of pay them back, I guess you might say, for some of their actions in the '70s in Vietnam. I'm sure it was there among the Carter Administration people also. Looking back from a vantage point of 17 years, I think that among the Carter people in the White House and to a certain extent in the State Department, there was more of an interest in the human rights violations aspect of it among the Carter people. But, yes, there was a certain amount of showing the Soviets how things were.

Q: Did you get any feeling? This was happening at the top, but was it reflected down? Jimmy Carter had come in in 1977 with the idea that one essentially can do business with the Soviets, we can reach agreements, and let's not be confrontational and all. The big shock was apparently what happened in Afghanistan. Did you sense any of that being reflected down where you were?

HECK: I think that there was a feeling of betrayal almost by what Brezhnev did by ordering the incursion into Afghanistan, that somehow he was moving ahead on the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, and that this was unfair that the Soviets did it. Brezhnev apparently thought it was going to be an easy in and out, and, of course, he was getting very sick and he didn't have to pick up the pieces. I think that a number of the Soviet people probably felt the same way, that it was unfair going in, that there was no need to go in. When the Soviets first went in, they sent a number of troops who were close by, and that included people from Tajikistan, particularly Tajikistan, and from the other border states which had a large non-Russian ethnic population. A number of these people were reported - now I was not there, but this is the reports that we got - to become quite easily sympathetic to the Afghan position on the Soviet invasion and to begin to question their presence, the Soviet presence, in Afghanistan. There are stories that they also got very interested in the religion and the Soviets then began to withdraw the ethnic non-Russian troops in order to keep the "poison" of Islam from seeping back into the Soviet Union. Whether or not this is true or whether it was just a matter of logistics, it is true that there were more ethnic non-Russians there at the beginning than there were later on. So there was some disagreement even within the Soviet Union of what was happening, but they quickly found out that they had gotten themselves an ungovernable people in a terrain which is very difficult to handle, as the British had found out 150 years before that.

Q: 1939.

HECK: Yes, and the other two Afghan wars afterwards, all three Afghan wars - a very harsh people who take no prisoners basically and who do some pretty harsh things, so it quickly became a war of some unpopularity within the Soviet Union. They were not able to mount the sort of protest that has been seen in more recent times in Russia about Chechnya, but it was the same sort of feeling among a certain number of people whose sons were being sent off, that they did not like this war at all. In fact, one of the major crises that we had - this would have been, I believe, after President Reagan came in - a Soviet soldier, just a private, a kid, broke into the embassy, got into the embassy grounds and tried to seek asylum with us in the center of Kabul. Of course, there was a strong desire to be able to give him asylum in certain quarters in the government and great sympathy for his personal plight, but we had no way of giving him asylum. There we were with 15 human beings in the embassy, 15 American human beings in the embassy, and one Soviet soldier. What are we going to do?

In any case, the Soviets promised that they would treat him kindly and not put him into a prison situation, but we never heard from him or saw him again, and there was no way of knowing whatever happened to this poor schnook, who may have been taken out and shot the next morning, because life for Soviet recruits or even Russian recruits now in the post-Soviet army is not nice. Basically the Soviet soldiers soon learned that they were dealing with an enemy that was much harsher than they had expected, and it became a very, very hard situation for them.

Q: What were you getting - we're not obviously sticking completely to the Carter thing - in this earlier time about the Iranian support down near Herat? This was a time when we were, as you mentioned, focused on Iran, the Islamic revolution, and we had our people hostages from our embassy in Tehran and all, and you had these Iranians messing around in an Islamic thing in the western part of Afghanistan.

HECK: Well, the Afghans who live in the western part of Afghanistan speak a language which is very closely related to Farsi, to Iranian Persian, so their form of Persian made it very easy for them to go back and forth across that border. When the Soviets began to flex their muscles in Herat and elsewhere in the west, a number of refugees were generated across the border. Also, of course, Iranians had been receiving Afghans for years and years. Iran was such a much richer country that the very poor would very often go over there and would work in the bazaars as laborers and things like this, so there has always been the back and forth. The Iranians, beside the ties of language, the minority groups in parts of Afghanistan are Shias rather than Sunni Muslims, and so there was the religious support that Iranians over the ages would have given to Shias who were at that point being ruled by Sunni Muslims in Kabul and elsewhere. So there were ties that made it perhaps easier for the Afghans who went into Iran as refugees for whatever reason to live a pretty decent life. I'm not sure that either we or the United Nations knew a tremendous amount about what was happening to these people, because the Iranians didn't want the United Nations Refugee Organization or the various NGOs dealing with their Afghans. They preferred to have the rest of the world stay out of Iran at that point. I have a feeling, though, that conditions were probably worse for the Afghans who were in refugee situations in Pakistan. The fighting tended to be heavier around Kabul and environs, and those people, because they were closer to Pakistan, would have gone that way if they were going out as refugees. The Soviets

were notorious for trying to seed all the trails with land mines, little ones and the kind that a person stepping on one would do grievous damage to himself. There were a tremendous number of people coming out who had land mine wounds. Things were just a little bit harsher, I think, on the Pakistani side because of the amount of fighting and the number of troops, also because the terrain is much harsher on the Pakistani side.

Q: When the Reagan Administration came in, what was sort of the expectation prior to its coming? Had anything been said so that NEA and you yourself were sort of mentally bracing yourselves, or do you have any feel for it?

HECK: Well, certainly for the first time the White House got more openly involved in things having to do with Afghans. President Reagan and his NSC people were much more openly supportive of the Afghan freedom fighter in his noble struggle against the Soviet invader.

Q: You're saying this with a smile.

HECK: I'm saying this with a smile, because, of course, there was a good deal of interest in socking it to the Soviets here. We were going to bring down the Soviet Union, and in fact the Soviet Union has disintegrated, so I'm not denigrating this at all. I can remember public ceremonies at the White House that the President participated in with Afghan refugee and fighting group people. The NSC, the person who handled the region, would meet with these people as they came to the United States, and in fact I believe that five out of the six major groups then had their leaders coming to the United States in that period of 1981-82. The one exception was Govadene Hekmakyar, who did not want anything to do with the United States, but Rabonee, Mojavi, Galonee, all of the others came, representatives of Masood, who was the leader in the Panshir Valley, and an ethnic Tajik came. They were at that point given appointments within the State Department and the NSC and elsewhere in town, on the Hill. Some of them had some pretty triumphal tours around the city. With the arrival of the Reagan Administration, some of the conservative think tanks got very much involved in lobbying for the Afghan cause and anti-Soviet cause in Washington. The level of American perception of what was happening was raised, I think. Certainly the amount of American participation in what was going on was ratcheted up. The CIA got very much involved in supporting, in what I might call public relations ways as well as in other clandestine fashions, groups inside Afghanistan. It became a major focus of American policy to see the Soviets depart. It became an important thing for this government to get the Soviets out, and, of course, this was helped along by the fact that the Iranian crisis became resolved, if you can call it that, the minute President Carter got on his helicopter and flew out of town.

Q: What about dealing with the Afghan Embassy? Was there much with them? How did you see the Afghan Embassy?

HECK: The Afghan Embassy had only two or three people there for the whole time I was in town. The personages tended to change whenever the leadership in Kabul changed, so there had been a couple of permutations of this before I came on board. By the time I arrived and the Soviets were in Afghanistan, Babrak Kamal was the person that the Soviets had put into the leadership role in Kabul. At that point his chargé was named Spartak, which was the local

version of Spartacus, which was a hero of the Soviets, who saw Spartacus as an original Communist, if you can call him that. So Mr. Spartak was obviously a good, strong Communist, but when it looked like he was losing his job, he immediately asked for asylum. I think that I had three charges ask for asylum during the course of my two and a half years there, and we always accepted them at that point because it was another tweak at the Soviets and their lackeys in Kabul. But they were very much circumscribed. They weren't allowed to see anyone in Washington power circles, certainly not in the Administration. I don't know about the other branches of government, but within the executive branch of this administration, they never got any appointments with anyone. They were not included in diplomatic receptions. They were just non-people who kept the embassy open at that point. They were restricted. The small office at the United Nations fared the same way. We kept them on a 25-mile tether. I have often wondered if they ever followed that, because at the same time the FBI and the policy people in Washington told us they didn't have the bodies to keep this closely monitored, but these people were supposed to stay within a 25-mile perimeter of downtown Washington or downtown New York as the case may be. They were basically non-players. To the best of my remembrance, we didn't allow our State Department, people NEA or higher, to speak to the Afghan diplomats, so that when the time came, as it very often did, to ream them out for something or other, I would sit in and be the notetaker, and the person who did the knuckle slapping would be the number two in the Protocol Department, who would read them the riot act.

Q: This would be sort of pro forma in a way, wouldn't it?

HECK: Well, it was Richard Gookin, and he was the deputy in Protocol for a number of years, I believe. He did it beautifully. He was very, very good at this. I suppose he had had to do it for other countries which were on the pariah list of the United States for whatever reason. But we just treated them as non-people basically until such time as they asked for asylum, and then we would talk to them.

Q: Did matters of Afghanistan sort of get kicked up higher up in NEA with the advent of the Reagan Administration?

HECK: I think they always had gone through my office, which was Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and the relevant deputy assistant secretary who handled South Asia. That pertained in both administrations. But, of course, the political people higher up became more interested, I think, in Afghanistan when Mr. Reagan came. So it was on their platter more often and more likely to be talked about with some forcefulness. Whether decisions were made at a higher lever, I doubt, because certainly we all understood what the policy was and those decisions could continue to be made at the same levels they had been made before. As you know, the Assistant Secretary in NEA has always been almost totally immersed in Arab-Israeli issues, so having a deputy assistant secretary devoted to South Asia made that person perhaps a little more autonomous in that region than he might be in another bureau.

Q: Did you find yourself having a new set of principles with the advent of the Reagan Administration, sort of going on a round of explaining the situation and all that?

HECK: Explaining it to our allies, you mean?

Q: No, explaining it to our new political masters, you might say, new people coming in with the Reagan Administration.

HECK: It was very much a part of the briefing papers for everybody who came in, very definitely, but I think most of them were pretty interested in it already because of the anti-Communist factor and were relatively well briefed even before they came into the State Department.

Q: With the briefing paper - this, of course, is the traditional task of the desk officer - is it a good place - I won't say push your own agenda, but I mean it gives you a chance to emphasize those points which you consider important. Did you find this a useful tool or not?

HECK: I think that pushing one's own agenda is much easier on a country about which nobody else thinks, and Afghanistan just had too much attention. It was very apparent what our line was. The President had said it, the NSC said it, and certainly the political appointees within the State Department said it. So I think perhaps we had less freedom in terms of policy on Afghanistan than we would have if it had been the Bahamas or Sri Lanka, at that point or some country like that. On the other hand, it was very gratifying to be working on a country where you knew that the stuff you were writing was being read. So whether it was some sort of a briefing paper or whether it was just a report, when you sent it over to the White House, you knew that somebody did in fact look at it. As you know, that's not always the case in some of the other parts of the world. But this was a case about which Mr. Reagan and his Administration felt quite strongly. So in that sense it was rewarding to do this. There was also a good deal, particularly after President Reagan, of speech writing and speaking, speech writing for our superiors in the food chain in NEA. The Secretary of State, of course, had his own speech writers, and for the seventh floor things were written on the seventh floor, but I remember writing speeches for deputy assistant secretaries to use in explaining American policy in Afghanistan to various groups. I also remember going out and doing a certain amount of speaking on my own and doing a tour of radio stations and newspapers to pass the word about what we wanted to be known about Afghanistan and how we wanted to publicize it. Just as you had mentioned earlier or asked about earlier, as I said, there was a group of people who had served in Afghanistan who were very much involved emotionally in the issue. There was also a certain number of scholars who were very much involved emotionally for the same reasons I'm thinking of, political scientists and anthropologists and so on, social science people who had worked in Afghanistan over the years. They were very active in lobbying for more aid to the Afghans, whether that be food aid or weaponry, and they helped in many cases in writing articles for op ed pages around the country. In some cases - I'm thinking now of the center in Omaha at the University of, was it the University of Omaha? There was a very active group of people who had worked in Afghanistan who helped in humanitarian ways in settling people and helping arrange their smooth entry into the United States. It was interesting to watch the Afghan refugees come, because they in many cases came with nothing and, as so many refugees do, worked very hard to set up a new life. I only mention this because it was such a contrast in many ways to the hundreds of Iranians whom I had known personally who came to the United States as refugees a few years earlier with the fall of the Shah. They came usually with money, enough money to live relatively well or at least to get settled and to buy something and to move into a sort of a middle class life. The Afghans

came in many cases with absolutely nothing. I helped drum up furniture for houses, and I did a lot of the sort of things that one thinks about if one sponsors a refugee. I don't remember any of that with the Iranians.

Q: Was there in the White House, particularly NSC but maybe elsewhere, a sort of a Mr. Afghanistan or a Miss Afghanistan? This was a White House that the President presided, but there were an awful lot of people who were almost pursuing their own thing. Did you have any feel for that?

HECK: The NSC person during the Carter Administration who handled this and other NEA matters was Gary Sick, who had been a Naval officer. As you can imagine, his major interest was Iran. He was, of course, very good, and I admire him and his abilities and his breadth of knowledge, but during the last six months or so of the administration, which was the only time I was there, he was totally immersed in Iran and, in fact, wrote a book about it later. When President Reagan came in, he put in that position a man named Jeffrey Kemp, who is an ideologue, I guess one would say, a staunch anti-Communist. He himself was originally from elsewhere, from the English-speaking world. I don't remember whether it was from the U.K. or from Australia, but he had some very, very strong anti-Soviet feelings, and he got more involved on a day-to-day basis. Here again, I keep going back to the fact that he could afford to get involved, because the Iranian crisis to an extent disappeared when our hostages were allowed out on the 21st of January of 1981. But he was more likely to take an active role in looking for ways to make the Soviet incursion a little less pleasant and to keep them focused on the fact that they had to pull out. Of course, we used this as a talking point with the Soviets every time we spoke about the region to the Soviets. We were very strong on the need for the Soviet Union to withdraw and let the Afghans have control of their own affairs.

Q: What about within Congress? Often you find either a senator or a representative or a staff member takes this unto him- or herself and makes it a cause. Were there any people in Congress who were big players?

HECK: Of course, there were the anti-Soviets, the professional anti-Soviets. Aside from that, the person who comes to mind most rapidly is Congressman Bereuter from Nebraska, a moderate Republican. He represents the Omaha area, and I think part of his interest lay in the fact that there was a major academic and cultural interest in Omaha about Afghanistan. That's part of the reason he also was interested in things Asian, and I guess this was part of Asia. Today Mr. Bereuter is the chair of the subcommittee on East Asia in the Congress, so he is still there 17 years later. I was impressed by the fact that he actually wanted to know the facts, asked for briefings, wanted to know exactly what was happening on the ground. It was not a case of wanting to know all of the propaganda-type possibilities in the region but he wanted to know what was really happening.

Q: One of the things I recall being spread - and I must say I began to get very uncomfortable with some of the things that were put out because they reminded me of the propaganda of World War I - about dropping from airplanes exploding toys and all, which seemed very - the Russians liked children. There seemed to be some of those. Did you find yourself having to look at some of these extreme statements?

HECK: Yes. The exploding toys story went on for years. Here again, since I didn't actually walk these trails, I am extrapolating a bit, but, yes, there were lots and lots of mines dropped in various ways on trails and places where Mujahideen, the fighters, might go. Unfortunately there were also people who lived there or who passed through there, who were forced to deal with this. These were small, and apparently they had interesting shapes, so the story had become that they were toys. I don't personally believe that there were any toys made. I don't think the Soviets had any interest in blowing up little children, but I do believe - it's easy to tell by the number of children with hands and legs knocked off - that a certain number of innocent children, perhaps a disproportionate number, were injured. I suspect that it was because they were interesting objects and kids like to pick up interesting objects. But there were also adults who stepped on them, women who were going out for water or men who were walking down the trail, and of course a lot of people were hurt. One particularly interesting propaganda - or not, depending on how you look at it - story that went through and was very persistent had to do with yellow rain, about which we have heard in other places.

Q: Could you explain what yellow rain was considered to be.

HECK: It was considered to be some sort of poisonous rain that dropped on people and either injured or killed them, burned or killed them. A certain part of our intelligence community truly believed that the Soviets were disbursing yellow rain, spraying it from airplanes. Of course, it was the sort of thing that some of the journalists picked up because it was an interesting story and because it would have been a particularly damning bit of evidence. Ultimately, after we had trumpeted this and used it in speeches and so on for some months, it was determined that this was really bee pollen and apparently it's a natural phenomenon. Is pollen the right word? No, it's residue from bees in a certain period of the year and probably some pollen also. Anyway, it was a natural thing that took place in certain seasons of the year. The Afghans obviously were pushing these stories, both about the toys and about the yellow rain. They were looking for all of the things that they could find individually and in separate groups to get more support from the West and from other supporters, i.e., the Saudis, and the support did pour in. When I first arrived at the end of May of 1980, one would receive a visitor, some youngish person who had been in as a journalist or had somehow been up to the border talking to Afghans at length, wanting to tell us what was happening and also wanting to get the United States more actively involved in the problem. They would bring pictures, and the pictures would be of proud Afghan freedom fighters, and there would be a bunch of men standing around. At the very beginning it was always the village elder who was holding the gun and the gun tended to be whatever was at hand. Throughout the two and a half years that I was on the desk, the old men disappeared from these pictures, and it became the young men and the weapons got to be very modern weapons. There were shoulder-held missiles. There were, of course, assault rifles, AK47s and equivalents, and all of the things that go with them, and a lot of weaponry was being pushed in. The war began also to attract, as Bosnia did later, the groupies, and a whole series of Islamic young men from various countries who are, for whatever reason, the soldier-of-fortune types themselves came in and you would find stories about a Jordanian or an Egyptian or a Syrian teaching these Afghans how to fire a stinger.

Q: Stinger being...

HECK: A stinger missile, a shoulder-held missile against helicopters.

Q: Basically against helicopters, which was the principal attack weapon of the Soviets in those times.

HECK: Yes indeed. Of course, other planes were used and they all had an ability to scare people, but helicopters were the major troop movers and attack planes, because they could get low and dirty. So the number of fighters increased and the weaponry got better and the training somewhat better, and the pressure on the Soviets grew. It became very hard for them. I can accept that they must have been very frustrated, their leadership in the field. The mujahadein in many cases were young men or middle-aged men who went off and did this. There were also people who might be considered a mojahid when people approached their village but otherwise were just farmers. People moved in and out. It was a people's militia and a very loosely formed one, if you can call it a militia. So it was very hard not to believe that any male over the age of about 12 and under the age of about 60 was a mujahadein, was a member of the mujahadein.

Q: Did you get involved at all in briefing or around the decision to put in our sophisticated weapons, particularly the stinger missile which was considered to be sort of key to the halting of the Soviet effectiveness?

HECK: What we were doing was pretty highly compartmentalized. No, we didn't; certainly not at my level in the State Department, I was not involved in any either participation in decision making or briefing thereon. I did work closely with my counterparts at my level in the Agency, but the decisions were made above them, and it was directives, I believe, out of the White House that went straight to the Agency and to higher levels of the State Department.

Q: What were you getting and able to pass on from INR, from the CIA and journalists about the freedom fighters, the leadership? There were accounts that they were doing an awful lot of sitting around back in Pakistan squabbling among themselves and making money off the weapons that came in and all that. Were you getting analyses of how this was going?

HECK: It was very much of a mixed bag. There were a few leaders who never left Afghanistan. There were some who basically stayed in Pakistan. The Pakistanis tended to control what went in through Pakistan and to whom it went. That was one major problem because the United States, for instance, might not wish it to be that way, but it was. There was a great deal of disagreement amongst these various groups, who were all in it for different reasons. Well, they were all in it to get rid of the Soviets, but they all saw themselves as the ultimate leader, and they had antipathy or worse toward other leaders, some or all leaders. Part of it was that some of them were determinedly religious and some of them were determinedly secular and some of them were a bit of both. So there were major things that pushed them that were at odds, at loggerheads, with the reasons that others were being pushed. A couple of the leaders - I'm thinking now particularly of Valani and Modadidee - who saw themselves as religious leaders leading this crusade against the godless heathen. Galani particularly was quite a, by Western terms, sophisticated, Westernized, religious leader. Then there were the people who were just the opposite, who were anti-West basically, seeing the West as godless as the Soviets, who just wanted the Soviets out but wanted

no part of the religious opium that they saw religion to be. So the only thing that kept a lid on all this was the overriding desire to get rid of the Soviets, and one has seen after the Soviets departed what happened. Now they're at each other's throats since they have all the weaponry and no common enemy, but it was a very fractious lot. This goes back to the good guys versus bad guys. We were so busy as a country playing up the noble freedom fighter that I think we did not pay sufficient attention to what a can of worms we were opening or helping to open in the process. I believe that the two Reagan Administrations and the Bush Administration afterwards really thought that things would calm down when the Soviets left, but instead it has gotten, if anything, worse in many ways.

Q: Were you trying to do any analysis or sorting out whom we should support and whom we shouldn't, or were things just moving so rapidly that this wasn't on your plate at this time?

HECK: Well, the major desire at that point was to get rid of the Soviets. So we would support politically almost anyone. In terms of where did our weapons go, here again it was a little compartmentalized. I was never part of that chain, but I think that we were pretty much constrained to support almost everyone again on the weaponry thing, partially because of our desire to get rid of the Soviets and partially because the Pakistanis particularly were supportive of the group that we probably distrusted the most and did see to it that some of our weapons got into the group that we didn't like particularly.

Q: Was there any sort of voice in the wilderness saying, "Hey, you'd better be careful about what you're sowing in this country for later on? I mean things such as the Taliban and these movements."

HECK: Well, at that point nobody ever thought of the Taliban. That was a very long way down the track. No, I think that we all, all of us who worked on the problem, to a lesser or greater degree really wanted the Soviets out. I don't think that the policy makers were giving much thought at all to what would happen after the Soviets got out. You see, I left early on, in '82, and the Soviets didn't leave until almost, well, it was the end of that decade. We were such a long way from getting the Soviets out that we hadn't gotten to that thought process yet.

Q: How about the Bureau of Human Rights? Were they taking an interest in how the Afghan freedom fighters and all, I mean, the role of women and things like this, or was this again focused elsewhere?

HECK: This was entirely focused - well, almost entirely focused - on the Soviets. Of course, we would have liked to have seen - the Human Rights Bureau would have liked to have seen - the women treated better. Basically, the real repression against women hadn't happened. The problems that we talk about today are those of the Taliban, and the role of women in Afghanistan. It had always been very subservient to that of the men, but it had begun to get slightly better in the mid-'60s when the then king, who by the time I came along was in exile in Rome, had decreed that the women of his family would no longer wear the veil, wear the chador. Even before the Afghan Communist coup, or before the Soviets came in, there had been women in some numbers in Kabul, not in the villages but in Kabul, in government offices and teaching and in hospitals and schools, so the real problems came after the Soviets left. The Soviets were

determined to make the role of women better, and the women who came out of Afghanistan into refugee camps found aid in that the NGOs who worked with them tended to pay attention to women. Thus, even though the refugee camps, which were huge, were conservative, there were hospital tents for women just as there were hospital tents for men, and schooling was provided for little girls just as schooling was provided for boys. Of course, they were surrounded by Pakistan, which, although a conservative Muslim country, certainly provides things like education and the right to be on the streets to women. So, up through the point that I was there - although it wasn't the way I would want to live, there weren't the tremendous pressures against women that there are today in Afghanistan. More to the point, as the Afghans were in such large numbers in Pakistan and were there longer and longer, what had begun in 1978 as a genuine welcome on the part of the Pakistani people for their Afghan cousins who were escaping the situation, it began to turn sour. The refugee camps were big, were always located on land which was unfit for anything else. It wasn't as if the farms were being cut up to hold them, but you can't have a long-term refugee population without beginning to run into problems between the community and the natives. In this case the Afghans, being enterprising human beings, a lot of the men began to get involved in things like the trucking business, and - you know what happens when you bring in cheap labor - the local trucking industry began to be pinched because the Afghans were willing to haul things more cheaply. So much goes by road in Pakistan, this began to be a sore point between the local people and the Afghans, but basically the Afghans were living relatively well, as well as one could live being a refugee. I think that the Pakistanis were very generous in their welcome to them. One good thing that I should mention because it is so extraordinary are the Kyrgyz from the Wokhan corridor, which is the narrow little neck of Afghanistan that runs up in the far northeast.

Q: It goes actually to China, doesn't it?

HECK: Well, yes, it touches China and what is now Tajikistan. It's very mountainous, very high, and the population of Kyrgyz, the ethnic group, was quite small and basically left alone by the rest of Afghanistan. They moved their yaks and other animals. I think they had fat-tail sheep. They moved them up into the higher reaches of this area and down depending on the season of the year, but were basically independent. Once the Soviets came in, one of the things that did happen was that it became very difficult, with the Soviet army being as it was in the country, for the numerous numbers of nomads to move their flocks, or herds rather. So the Kyrgyz were being forced out, and they were very anti-Communist for reasons that go back to the '20s when Kyrgyzstan was taken over by the Soviets. So these people had already become refugees, some of them twice in one lifetime, escaping the Russians once in the '20s, and then when the Russians came into Afghanistan, a number of them moved down into Pakistan and they were living in great misery at an altitude of only about 9,000 feet. This was much too hot for them and uncomfortable, and they were not suited at all to be refugees. It's one thing for a population that tends to be settled to live in a settled situation in a refugee camp, and it's a lot worse, I think, for people who tend never to settle to find themselves in the same situation. So one of the most interesting things that happened on my watch was moving a large number of these people out of the untenable situation that they found themselves in in northern Pakistan. Well, what to do about it. The Kurgiz language is Turkic in origin. Ethnically their features are rather oriental in nature.

Q: Mongolian.

HECK: Mongolian in nature, but anyway there they were, they were very unhappy, and they were picked up, adopted as it were, by Turkey of all things because of the language connection.

The Kyrgyz from the Wokhan corridor were moved and resettled by Turkey on Lake Van in eastern Turkey at an altitude considerably less than where they had been in Pakistan. They are there to this day. I would love to know what has happened to them, but I do not know.

Q: The Turks have made a great effort to reach out to Kyrgyzstan. I was in Kyrgyzstan about four years ago for a couple weeks, and they certainly made a great effort to insert themselves into things there. I'm not sure how effective it will be.

HECK: I think it probably will be relatively effective. Just as the Iranians have inserted themselves into countries which used to be parts of the Soviet Union which have a connection with Iran, usually by their language, so too the Turks have done that. It does make a certain amount of sense.

Q: When you left there in '82, what was your feeling about the Soviet effort? I think at one point, I recall, sort of the word of wisdom around was, well, if the Soviets want to really make the effort, they really can take care of this thing.

HECK: I think that was probably how most people working on the problem felt at that point, although I don't remember sitting around and talking about it. After all, the Soviets were a major world power. They had a tremendous army. They had modern weaponry that the Afghans didn't have. Certainly when I left in 1982, in November of '82, I did not dream that the Soviets would ever go out with their tail between their legs the way they did. I know I didn't have the proper amount of faith. I believe the true believers believed that it would happen. I didn't. I was happy to see the Soviet Union bogged down, but I didn't think it would actually come to what it did come to. Basically the Soviets learned, I think, somewhat of the same lesson that we had learned a few years earlier in Vietnam, that a really determined local population aided by geography and fervor...

Q: And international support...

HECK: A modern army can't handle a situation that is in effect medieval, and the Afghans chose to react to things in a way that we hadn't had to consider, or the Soviets hadn't had to consider, for some years, maybe some centuries.

Q: We have to go back to our Indian wars.

HECK: That's right. So there the Soviets were with a lot of fire power, but fire power doesn't do very well if you've got 20 men stretched across a large mountainside or hillside, each one of them behind a rock, so it just didn't work. But the Afghans had by that point impressed the Soviet fighting man apparently with the same sort of things that the Afghans 150 years ago had impressed the British fighting man, which means the ultimate cruelty and harshness of capture

followed by death. The Soviets were afraid of the Afghans. Of course, I hadn't appreciated this, although I'm sure that our military and certainly our people who handled Soviet affairs must have appreciated this - and that is how badly the Soviet recruit was treated in his own army, so that there was low morale in the troops and fear of being captured by the enemy.

Q: Kipling has poems about save one bullet for yourself if you're wounded on the battlefield for the Afghan women to come upon you.

HECK: Yes, that sort of thing, although I don't think the Afghan women were involved much in all this, but still that's the sort of attitude that the Soviets had. We even then were making at least some effort to follow through on leads where Afghans had supposedly taken as prisoners Soviet privates, trying to find out if they were still alive and could we get them and at least for humanitarian reasons try to help the Soviet Union get some of their own people back. At the same time, the Soviet troops - these are young men who are basically peasants themselves - there were things about Afghanistan which lured them, I guess is the word I would want. The bazaar area in Kabul particularly around Chicken Street, which used to be where a lot of food and shops were but also places to buy tourist type things, were full of things that the Soviet kids wanted, and there was a good black market going. For instance, even then two things that were just all over the bazaar were Soviet vodka and Soviet caviar, little tins of caviar. There were some stories of weapons being sold and so on, but I don't think in 1981-82 this was much the case, but certainly there was a lot of things getting into the bazaar like the caviar and vodka; and in turn they wanted blue jeans, other things from the West, which were available in the markets there and which continued to be available because trade went back and forth. In Kabul there is a large contingent of Indians and Pakistanis, most notable, of course, the Sikhs because they stand out with their turbans, but there is a South Asian contingent that are people who have run money changing and other operations in the bazaar, and things were coming basically from Pakistan, driven in through the Khyber Pass and Landikoto and the bazaars there. So there were things to buy, and these kids were willing to trade what they had to buy them. There was a good deal of that going on.

RUSSELL SVEDA
Science Officer
Moscow, USSR (1982-1984)

Mr. Sveda was born in New Jersey in 1945. After serving with the Peace Corps in Korea he joined the Foreign Service in 1975. His overseas posts with the State Department include Korea, where he served as Staff Aide to the Ambassador and in Moscow, as Science Officer. In Washington, Mr. Sveda was assigned as China Desk Officer and subsequently as Watch Officer in the Department's Operations Center. He also served as volunteer in the Sinai Field Mission. Mr. Sveda was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in June, 2000.

Q: When you got there, how was what was happening in Afghanistan playing from our embassy point of view and what we were picking up in the press and from our contacts?

SVEDA: When I got there, the Soviets had already been in Afghanistan for three years. We had already had a boycott of the Moscow Olympics, which bothered the Russians to no end. We just saw them putting their hand further into the wheat grinder. I think the Reagan administration was probably very happy about that.

Q: Was there any reaction within the Soviet Union about what was happening in Afghanistan?

SVEDA: Zero. I think that there were reports from time to time about how the U.S.-armed rebels were causing a lot of fatalities, but basically the Afghan government supposedly was in control and the rebels were being defeated. It was all very upbeat commentary. It was extremely reminiscent of the sort of commentary that we had in Vietnam prior to Vietnam being an issue.

EDWARD HURWITZ
Chargé
Kabul (1983-1986)

Edward Hurwitz was born in New York in 1931. He received his bachelor's degree from Cornell University in 1952. After serving in the US Army from 1953-1955 he entered the Foreign Service in 1956. During his career he had positions in Moscow, Seoul, Washington D.C., Afghanistan, Leningrad, and an Ambassadorship to Kyrgyzstan. Ambassador Hurwitz was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 1996

HURWITZ: I don't recall any major change. I was deputy director for exchanges, back on exchanges which were then going full blast. The first thing I did while on the desk was to go to the Soviet Union with a big delegation under Congressman Brademas, who at the time was Democratic Whip. There were all kinds of exchanges going on at that point, just prior to Afghanistan. There were parliamentary exchanges. We had the Soviet chairman of their supreme court. The atmosphere was very congenial on all sides. Some of these exchanges were of real practical value in health, space exploration, energy. Of course, Afghanistan changed that.

Q: Were you finding the Soviet internal affairs section a little more tolerant with exchanges prior to the Afghan business? Was their a loosening up?

HURWITZ: Not tremendously. They operated with many of the same problems. Let me give you an example. We were in the throes of negotiating a renewal of the overall umbrella agreement, under which all these separate agreements fit, and were trying to get things, for example, for exchange graduate students. We were trying to have the Soviets open up the fields, the specialties, in which we could send graduate students to. They almost never agreed and we hadn't reached any agreement on this renewal either. In other words they wanted to keep people either in pre-revolutionary fields or in technical fields. Someone could go over and study botany, but he couldn't study mass media in the Soviet Union. You couldn't study anything in the humanities after 1917. By the same token we wanted their people to send people over who

weren't just milking our technology by studying very technical subjects. We wanted them to study subjects in the humanities. They never agreed to that.

Another point of concern to them and this sort of reflects traditional Soviet approach, was to have a clause in the exchanges agreement which in effect would require us to turn back to them anybody who had defected under the exchanges program. There had been a number of ballerinas, etc. who had defected. So, we wouldn't agree to that. Indeed I was in Moscow as head of the negotiating team to try to renew the agreement in December 1979. We couldn't reach agreement on a number of these issues and decided to adjourn around December 15 and then resume after the New Year. Well, I left December 18, or so, and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan on December 27th, so the whole deal was off.

Q: Were you picking up any reflections of this Soviet build up to do something in Afghanistan?

HURWITZ: I certainly wasn't. One of the things we were watching at the time were sort of mutinies on the part of Afghans against the regime. The regime then was Amin who had taken over from the guy he had killed, Taraki. Amin had been an exchange student in the States, but what we didn't know, we always classified Amin as being installed by the Soviets. What we miscalculated, I think, was the Soviets viewed Amin as somewhat a threat. I think they even saw him, because of his studying in the US, as perhaps an American plant. But, no, I don't think anybody foresaw this at all. I don't know about the intelligence, I wasn't privy to special intelligence reports.

At that time what was the thinking of why the Soviets did what they did in Afghanistan?

HURWITZ: Well, to my recollection it was not necessarily a drive to warm water ports, or something like that. It was more an extension of the Brezhnev doctrine. That in retrospect they had some real concerns about Amin and where Afghanistan was heading. This might have been a move to head off a move by Amin to bring Afghanistan closer to the West, which would have meant that they had on their borders a problem. Certainly from Brezhnev's standpoint they would have seen it that way. Brezhnev had given us the Brezhnev doctrine in respect to Czechoslovakia. Of course, they weren't about to do anything with China, although they were in constant friction with them along the border. Their European borders, with the exception of Finland, were totally secured. And their arrangement with Finland was very secure. Now, Afghanistan could have in their terms represented a problem, one they were fully confident they could solve. They thought they could pull this off in a matter of days.

Q: I have talked to Jim Bishop who was there as political counselor, and he said they were trying to figure out and the Afghans were trying to figure out why the Soviets were in there. They felt they might be supporting the Amin government at first.

HURWITZ: Well, it was terrible intelligence on their part, terrible misjudgment and terrible lack of real knowledge of what their interests should be.

Q: During this time did you find that there was a conflict with the NSC, whose head at that time was Brzezinski, who was always seeing perfidious plots on the part of the Soviets, because of his anti-Russian, pro-Polish bias? Did you feel the NSC was trying to push us as far as we could go?

HURWITZ: No, I don't think so. We chalked a lot of the reaction up to Carter's sense of, perhaps, disillusionment. He had been disillusioned before, under false allusions before, tending to trust people. He said something to the effect that he was surprised.

Q: Did the seizure of our hostages in Iran by fundamentalist revolutionaries have any effect on how we viewed things in Afghanistan?

HURWITZ: I don't think so.

Q: Was there the feeling that that whole shoulder of our policy was falling a part or something?

HURWITZ: No, I think we viewed Afghanistan as something quite a part, strictly Soviets. Nobody was attributing what was happening in Iran to the Soviets at any point as far as I recall. I think Afghanistan was viewed as something very special for the Soviets.

Q: You were saying that people were thinking about ways to shut down things. Were people sitting around saying, "Okay, Ed, you figure out ways we can be nasty to the Soviets?"

HURWITZ: Absolutely. We drew up charts. Mark Parris drew up a very neat chart showing what we could do and how we could do it with a time table. Yes, we definitely were ordered to sit around and brain storm in a group to figure out what we could do that would hurt them and most desirably not hurt us. But, in a lot of cases we couldn't come up with something that wouldn't hurt us as well. The closing of Kiev is a good case in point.

Q: How about the wheat deal? We were selling wheat to the Soviets at very good terms.

HURWITZ: Well, those were private terms. We definitely didn't want to interfere with the commercial ventures. This was part of the game to figure out something that would hurt them a lot but not hurt us, and this was hard to do. One thing we didn't want to do was to interfere with the commercial side.

Q: How about the Olympics?

HURWITZ: Well, we boycotted the Olympics.

Q: Was there any feeling that this wasn't....?

HURWITZ: Not on the desk, I think we all went along with boycotting the Olympics. I don't remember any of us being any great sports fan or in any way enamored with the Olympic principle. I think it probably was a good thing. I don't like the Olympics much myself.

One thing, by the way, in 1980, on the Olympics, the Soviets came to the winter Olympics in 1980. Did they or did they not, I can't recall. At any rate, we were concerned that there would be defections from any number of Eastern bloc countries.

Q: Where were they held?

HURWITZ: Up in Lake Placid. So, they wanted somebody up there who had some experience in handling defections so they sent me up, which was very nice. I stayed in lovely quarters. They had a regular FBI team up there and myself and we didn't get any defections. But, that was the name of the game in that era, defections. But, of course, they boycotted Los Angeles.

Q: You stayed there until 1982. When the Reagan administration came in was there a change as far as exchanges were concerned and attitude towards the Soviet Union at all?

HURWITZ: No. The FBI was playing its usual game of trying to keep Soviets out, but the reaction to the Soviet Union, bilateral relations, really was not very different during the time I was on the desk. I know that Reagan came in and talked about the evil empire, but even he did as much with Russians in a sense as Nixon did with China. I can't recall what kind of opposition there was to Star Wars, for example. I don't think there much at the time.

Q: Well a lot of this came later.

HURWITZ: I am saying that if you want to take an issue where Reagan had a different point of view, his view really wasn't much different than the general view of the Soviet Union, which was part and parcel of our policy.

Q: I take it you were carrying on until 1982?

HURWITZ: That's right.

Q: Was it mainly shutting down meaning there wasn't much movement?

HURWITZ: A lot was shut down, but we did let a lot go through in the last analysis. We picked and chose. Those exchanges which we felt we liked and were as apolitical as you could get-- health, environmental protection--they went forward pretty much. The larger, big ticket issues like the Bolshoi Ballet, no, that was stopped. But, some exchanges kept going.

Q: I thought we might stop at this point and pick up next time when you left the Soviet desk in 1982. Where did you go?

HURWITZ: I went to Afghan language training.

Q: So we will pick it up at that point.

HURWITZ: Fine.

Q: Today is September 6, 1996. Let's talk a bit...do they call it Afghan or Farsi language training?

HURWITZ: They called it Dari. I got to Afghanistan and found that absolutely nobody used the word Dari, they all called it Farsi. This was an attempt to create a language which really was not different at all from Persian Farsi. The accent yes, and certain words, but it was basically South Carolina versus Boston.

Q: When I took what was called Serbo-Croatian, it was pure Serbian. I picked up an awful lot about the Serb mentality and the Serb outlook from my teachers at the Foreign Service Institute. When you were taking Dari did you get much of a feeling about Afghans and their outlook from your teachers?

HURWITZ: Well, I had only one teacher and I was the only student. He was very nice and is still here. He was a very good teacher and treated me very kindly having me at his house a couple of times, arranged to go out around the town with me just to keep me talking, and introduced me to a lot of his friends. I later found out, though, that he was not typical of all Afghans. If you really wanted to learn something about the Mujahideen, you couldn't get it through his sort of ethnic background. He was Afghan, yes, but he was I believe of Uzbek nationality, a pure Persian speaker, not a Pashtun speaker at all. When I got to Afghanistan it was quite clear that the differences in mentality, in outlook, and the differences in martial characteristics were very distinct, very noticeable. The Pashtuns, who were bearing the brunt of the struggle against the Soviets, were very different, very much warlike, different basically from the city dwelling Uzbeks or Tajiks who made up the population of Kabul. I am not saying it was irrelevant by any means, but it was less relevant to what we were really tracking which was the course of the resistance, the prospects of the resistance. So, to answer your question, yes, I got a good insight into this particular segment of Afghan culture, but none into the other, and I don't know how you could overcome that.

Q: You were in Afghanistan from when to when?

HURWITZ: I arrived in June, 1983 and left in February, 1986.

Q: What was the situation in Afghanistan in June, 1983 when you arrived and what had you been prepared to see and picking up from the desk before you went out?

HURWITZ: Well, the war was going on. Brezhnev had died and Andropov was very ill, so the Soviets had not yet shifted gears on Afghanistan, they were going full blast. I think the situation differed in my view than what the desk was talking in the sense I saw and reported this in very negative style in a cable, a much more gloomy outlook for Afghanistan than the story that was coming out of Washington. Now, the story that was coming out of Washington to a great extent was propelled by saying what we wanted to hear on the one hand and saying something that was really useful at the same time, and that is that the resistance is very strong. It is disunified, but perhaps there will be attempts to unify it and then succeed. In any event they are giving the Soviets a very hard time.

My view, when I got there, was that the Soviets were really dug in. That the opposition, resistance, and this was a view that was only strengthened and confirmed to me as time went on, was incredibly disunified, squabbling among themselves, and that there was on cause for optimism. In fact, I did a calendar year end telegram, titled something to like, "The Soviets Were Settling Down or Digging In." Of course, later, two major changes occurred. Gorbachev came in in March 1985 and in a speech described Afghanistan as a bleeding wound. And the second major change was the supplying of the Mujahideen with the stinger rockets, which really curtailed the usefulness of the main Soviet weapon in Afghanistan, the helicopter. It turns out that my assessment, not knowing what was coming down the pike on these two elements, was wrong. As events turned out, the Soviets pulled out.

However, one crucial part of my assessment turned out to be very correct and that is that the opposition would not unify. They were very seriously divided, having other things on their mind a part from just winning a war. This was clear because things were happening in Kabul and elsewhere that made it very clear this was no way to fight a war, the way they were doing it. Supplies were coming into Kabul, there was all kinds of commerce. The opposition, the Mujahideen and various groups, were letting this happen because they would be taking bribes. In other words you would have a Mujahideen group in control of one particular section of a road and you would have supplies coming in which the Soviets needed and which had they been cut off would have strangled Kabul, the only administrative unit that meant anything at that time. Yet, the goods and fuel came through and commerce continued. The market in Kabul was awash with all kinds of consumer goods. You could buy Japanese radios, German refrigerators, automobiles. My point is that the Mujahideen didn't cut this off. Each group was more interested in building up its own strength and reserves. They didn't think of the war in national terms, but in terms of their individual group.

There is one very interesting point on this score. I had a small Sony shortwave radio and I used to twirl the dial trying to pick up VOA and BBC in Farsi. I would pick it up and report it. I found out that every now and then, as I zeroed in on frequencies, you could hear local shortwave radio/telephone. They didn't have regular telephone lines and there was no such thing as mail, and you could hear these individual outfits talking to each other... "the truck is coming through and everything is fine, we took care of the payment." I reported on this as well as an indication that this is not a real war. I always used to raise the analogy of Vietnam back in Washington arguing with people who were drumming up this optimistic viewpoint, which was fine from a public relations standpoint, but not if we were deluding ourselves. I would say, "You know, these people aren't fighting like the North Vietnamese fought. They could have won the war two years ago if they had decided to do that, or could have done that."

What it comes down to is that we see in the aftermath of Afghanistan that you don't have a unified resistance and it is no longer a resistance, they won. But, they are still at each other's throat. So, that part of my assessment was correct. The basic part about having reason to think that the Soviets would pull out, I was wrong, but for reasons that I don't think anybody foresaw at the time.

Q: When you arrived in 1983, what was the situation as far as where you lived and where you worked? What was your job?

HURWITZ: The main function at the embassy, I should point out, really was to keep in touch, however we could, with the Mujahideen. I won't say that we really had direct contact with them, we didn't. And, I can't recall a single instance where there was such contact. Our major product was to keep tabs on the war. We did this by going around town. Lee Coldren was at the embassy at that time, an old Afghan hand, who was an inveterate antique and rug buyer. He had a lot of contacts from a previous tour. I would go one way and he would go another way around town, and we would talk to people. A lot of people were very interested in getting out stories of a battle in Herat or a skirmish just north of Kabul. We collated this stuff and did a weekly cable, a sitrep, it was called. This was a long cable which basically catalogued everything we picked up during the week. Now, here again the purpose was to report on this war, which was pretty well isolated from the world. We did have an occasional Western correspondent going in or listening from Peshawar, something like that. But, largely the war wasn't getting all that much attention. Our function was just to get this news out.

Q: Your job was what?

HURWITZ: I was Chargé. And there is a whole story connected with that.

Q: All right, let's hear it.

HURWITZ: The story is that as you know after this April revolution of 1978 you had a pro-Soviet government that wanted to come in and introduce all kinds of horrendous, from the Muslim standpoint, reforms--land reforms, putting women into schools, etc. This really was pretty good, but the Afghans weren't having much part of it. There were all kinds of strange groups at that time. I don't think it has ever been satisfactorily answered, but one of them kidnaped and killed Spike Dubs, who was the ambassador. After that we, of course, drew down the embassy. Up to that time the embassy was an enormous thing. The AID mission was enormous. There were perhaps a 1000 AID people, families and employees in the Helmand Valley where we had a big irrigation project. We had enormous property. We had cars all over the place, schools, commissaries. USIS had its own compound. And, of course, there was a complete drawdown by the time I got there. The embassy was only 18 people, including six marine guards. Most of the big embassy was build in 1963 or 1967. It had big grounds with an athletic field. That was simply occupied by a very few officers. The USIS operation was closed including an enormous, beautiful USIS library. I don't know where the books are now. So we were a small, besieged band, you might say. No families, of course. The only way in and out was Air India from New Delhi. There definitely was a feeling of being besieged. There were nightly rocket attacks. However, none of the Americans really felt threatened, we were not the bad guys, and the law of averages was certainly on your side. So, it wasn't particularly dangerous.

Q: Well, what was the Afghan government at that time and what sort of dealings did we have with it?

HURWITZ: The Afghan government was communist, the first secretary of the Party and also the president was Babrak Karmal. He was an early revolutionary even under Daud before the so-called April Revolution of 1978 had been brought in by the Soviets right after their invasion. In

fact, the plan was to have him sort of right on the tail of it. They had hoped to be able to either kill or capture the guy who was then in charge, Hafizullah Amin, but that job the Soviet police, the ministry of interior people, botched to the extent that the guy who was in charge of the operation, the first deputy minister of the interior, while being taken back to the Soviet Union, committed suicide on an Aeroflot plane on the way. The botched bit was killing Amin too soon so he couldn't hand over the reigns of power to Babrak Karmal. It was all faked, of course. Anyway Babrak Karmal was a creature of the Soviets.

So, he was in power. We, of course, never dealt with the government outside of the protocol section of the foreign ministry. The protocol chief was a very cultured guy, he didn't speak Russian. He had spent many years in the US and was always embarrassed about what was going on about him, but, of course, couldn't do anything. So, that was the only point of contact that we had.

Q: Was it ever contemplated at that point, either by the Afghans, as far as you know, or by us, to close down our mission?

HURWITZ: No, that issue never really came up. Our justification for staying there was adequate. Basically it was that our staying did not involve recognition of the Afghan government, only recognizes our continuing relationship with the Afghan people. I never presented credentials. As a matter of fact my going to Afghanistan is a long story and I will only give you part of it. We always felt that the Afghans, themselves, would turn down visa applications, so when I was sent there we never told them that I would be chargé, for one thing. We just asked for a visa for me. So, I went in and we never sent a note to the Afghans saying I had arrived in any capacity. We sort of tried to have it both ways and I think we basically succeeded having a presence there which we felt it was necessary to do, and also to show the Afghan people that the West cared. So, it worked out. They let me in.

Q: I am so used to the conventional things like when you have somebody arrested or you have to get something cleared, or there is a vote in the UN, etc.

HURWITZ: We never dealt with them on any issues except our survival. I can't recall any complaints we made to them. We really didn't treat them as a government. I mean our survival as an embassy. For example, at one point a Soviet soldier had defected, managing to get into the front door of the embassy and was there for a couple of days. Immediately the Soviets surrounded the place with Afghan troops while Soviet troops were in the background. I went to the protocol guy in the foreign ministry and complained to him. That was the sort of thing we did. When a Soviet helicopter was hovering over the embassy, we think to try to take pictures of our communications stuff on the roof, I again went to the foreign ministry and complained. At one point Soviet aircraft, the airport was quite close to the embassy, landing or taking off would drop flares to divert heat seeking missiles as they landed and took off. A lot of these flares would hit the embassy grounds, a number setting some dry grass on fire. So, I fired off notes to the Soviets and went to the foreign ministry. So, it wasn't a normal embassy in the sense that you make a demarche about an issue.

Q: You raised the subject of a Soviet soldier defecting. How did that work out?

HURWITZ: Well, he stayed a number of days. A nice young kid. And, then we did what we always do. I knew Russian very well at the time and I talked to him. He decided on his own that he wanted to go back. I said, "All right, we will have to do this. We will have the Soviet ambassador come and have a meeting." I gave the young man a couple of days to think it over. The Soviet ambassador came and sat down with his aide and myself, the embassy Agency guy and this kid. He said he would like to go back, plain and simple like that. We gave him his AK47 which he had brought in and he was on his way. I don't know what happened to him. He was probably sent off to prison but undoubtedly released soon after Gorbachev came in. In fact this may have been in 1985 when Gorbachev was already in.

Q: If you didn't have meaningful contact with the Afghan government, what about with the Soviets. They were sort of the pro-consul and you spoke Russian.

HURWITZ: I spoke frequently with the Soviets. I can't recall that I talked about why they were there, etc., although I may have. I did call on the Soviet ambassador and that sort of thing. He was an immovable real apparatchnik. He had been a very high official, the first secretary of the Tartar autonomous republic. He wasn't the type that you would talk to about maybe you were doing the wrong thing, nor would he give a bit of information. He was a pleasant enough guy, but nobody who you could talk seriously to.

Q: What was your impression of the Soviet military forces there?

HURWITZ: I did a lot of walking around town and they were all over. My impression was that they were bad. Everything that we see now in Chechnya, you saw a bit of then. We had a Soviet military hospital directly across the street so you could see these guys going in and out. I didn't talk to many of those. There was graffiti written on the walls. I remember one that had to do with _____. The guy said, "I would rather be home digging ditches in _____." And then you saw them in the marketplace very shabbily dressed. There was a lot of drinking. Their main purpose in Afghanistan apart from avoiding action, was to go if possible to the market and buy these things that I just talked about--the Sony Walkmen, the tape recorders and tapes. Little shops were filled with pirated Russian language tapes of Russian dissident singers who were very popular because you couldn't buy them in the Soviet Union. Of course, to buy anything they needed money and, of course, they were very badly paid. So, they sold whatever they could get. Gasoline from their jeeps. We had to get rid of one Marine who was involved in giving a couple bottles of Scotch to some soldier in exchange for the guy's AK47. The food shops were filled with caviar. We would buy caviar, 4 ozs, for a dollar. In fact, one of the communicators, had sent home two or three footlockers full of caviar.

Again, on this issue of Soviets selling things to get money, and this was before the days of the crumbling Berlin Wall when this became common, just before I had gotten there there had been a little flood in the embassy basement. Stored in the basement at the time was the unaccompanied baggage of the previous security officer. As a favor to the guy they took these footlockers out of the water and opened them up so that anything inside would dry out. They found them full of Soviet uniforms. We wondered what was going on. Then, a little later, the successor to this security officer, received a letter from "Soldier of Fortune" magazine. They had

received his last shipment and were waiting for more. There was a big market for the uniforms. Well, the guy got into a lot of trouble. This was going on. This is what the Soviets were doing. They were really disheveled, slovenly, no military bearing.

Q: Were you getting any reports about how they were conducting themselves on the battlefield?

HURWITZ: No, we were not. I can't recall anything specific along those lines. But, I have no reason to believe they distinguished themselves in organization or valor.

Q: It is interesting because it is still a time when in the United States, despite the fact that people on the ground were seeing this, they were still being described as ten feet tall.

HURWITZ: I can't ever remember pointing this out in a cable. I probably didn't. But, that was not the feeling from those who had seen it. Here again, the embassy was located on the main street going to the airport and part of our portfolio, so to speak, was to watch these convoys as they went by. They were just a bad looking group. A tank or an armored personnel carrier would pass by and guys would be lying on it with shirts off, etc. You don't expect them to be spruced up in a battle area, but on the other hand there was no evidence of discipline. They were in many ways a lot like the troops that were in Chechnya. They were conscripts, morale was low, and they seemed to be poorly trained.

Q: Were there any factions in Afghanistan of Afghans with whom you had contact? If so, what were you getting from them?

HURWITZ: Well, we didn't have any contact with fighters, so to speak. We had contact with merchants, travelers, businessmen, who had been in the area. So, we never directly discussed what different factions wanted. We kept reporting on it because it was a matter of record and almost a matter of course that there were these groups...Massoud, just north of Kabul, a Tajik, Persian talking group and the groups around Qandahar which were Pushtuns and never the twain would meet. That was all obvious then. Our line was that they would sort this out among them and we kept pushing and pushing, but without success. But the fault lines were very clear and noticeable. You could have troops, and this happened once I recall around Qandahar in the east near Pakistan, being assaulted by a major Soviet push to eliminate a group, and if the large and very, very effective force under the direction of Massoud just north of Kabul had just gone behind the Soviets and attacked them from the rear it would have had an effect. But Massoud wouldn't move to help the Pushtuns. And I have talked to a Pushtun in Pakistan and mentioned this to him but he said it wouldn't have mattered because the Tajiks couldn't fight. Even if they had come up behind the Soviets nothing would have happened, they would have run away. So, there was this constant bickering, which has turned into deadly combat.

Q: Were you there when we started introducing stingers into Afghanistan?

HURWITZ: Yes.

Q: Were you aware that this was going to happen?

HURWITZ: From the press.

Q: Were the Soviets making noises about this?

HURWITZ: I can't recall whether they did or not. Certainly not to me directly. Of course, the Soviet line when you did discuss the situation was "Why are you helping these criminals, these gangster?" They pointed to Babrak Karmal and said, "Look, you have a man here who is interested in the welfare of the people. Schools are operating, little boys are taught how to read, girls are going to school. Health care is being made more available." I must say in Kabul, as I look back on this later, there was a lot in what was happening that we would have had as a country no objection to. More equality for women, more education, a reduced role for religion in public life, a little bit more fairness in distribution of the goodies that society produces. I put these things in writing to the Department. I wrote about how the people of Kabul, which were basically the people I had daily and direct contact with, have very little problem with the kind of society that was developing and that they were as much afraid, if not more afraid, of what would happen if you had these groups coming in and taking charge. I recall in one cable sent towards the end of my tour having been in Kabul almost three years, I said that I had not seen one "Russki Go Home" sign. I had not seen one work stoppage. I had not seen one act of animosity towards a Soviet soldier. The merchants were eager to sell to the soldiers. Now you did have acts of violence but they were set up by Mujahideen who infiltrated from time to time. There were a couple of bombs that went off in restaurants.

Q: What about newspapers, media, Americans and others?

HURWITZ: There was nothing available, although VOA came through fairly well.

Q: How about representatives of American media?

HURWITZ: None whatsoever. The only American, who was not media but a serious observer, was Sig Harrison, who has written on Korea and Afghanistan. I think at that time he was associated with Brookings or something like that. But, he was the only visitor I remember coming in. Oh, the Baltimore "Sun" got someone in once. He happened to be Finnish but a Baltimore "Sun" correspondent.

Q: The Soviet rule was in place where you could see it and the Soviet role was not particularly oppressive. Our policy was to build essentially a backfire against this. How did you feel about that?

HURWITZ: I think the over all goal of having the Soviets leave was absolutely correct. Let me just step back a little. If the Afghans were not Afghans but let's say Polish or some other little bit more excitable group, I'm speaking basically about the Tajik, the Persian speakers, who were by far the majority in Kabul, then I think you would have seen more resistance. It gives the wrong impression to say this was really benign. They simply accommodated very well. I am not sure any other group would have accommodated.

Getting back to our overall policy. I thought our over all policy of somehow opposing it was right. As I say in the beginning I was pessimistic that we could really pull it off because the opposition was so terribly disunified and at each other's throats.

Q: One time when the Soviets went in in December, 1979, in the States you were looking at maps showing arrows pointing down towards the Persian Gulf and all that. Had we figured out what they were doing there?

HURWITZ: My best guess is that it was really a result of some sclerotic thinking on an aging Kremlin. It was the stupidest move they could have made. I, in fact, went back to old FBISs from about the time they went in or just before and in statement after statement everything the king of Afghanistan, Daud, who later became prime minister, said was completely neutral vis-a-vis the Soviets or the Americans. Or, it was indeed tilting towards the Soviets. Their military was almost totally supplied by the Soviets. The Soviets were infiltrating all over the place over the years. They had had a long, long relationship with Afghanistan going back to pre-revolutionary days. So, what was developing at the time was even more acceptable to the Soviets than their relationship with Finland in a sense. What did trouble them was that after Taraki was killed, Hafizullah Amin came in and they were very suspicious of him because he had been an exchange student in the States. They may have felt that he was getting out of hand. But, there would have been ways of handling that without invading the country and getting so mired down in this thing. It was simply a mistake. I don't think the question of moving beyond Afghanistan came into their minds.

Now, another element of miscalculation may have been that they thought we were moving in, which was the furthest thing from our minds. The real solution to the Afghan problem was to leave it. Who was that senator from Vermont, Aiken, the one who said about Vietnam, "Declare victory and leave."

Q: Benign neglect.

HURWITZ: Yes, and let this place slide into the oblivion which it so richly deserves. But, nowhere could that be said more aptly than about Afghanistan. So, I think it was just a gross miscalculation on its part. I think Gorbachev realized that. Gorbachev could have turned up the heat a great deal. They really hadn't put that much into it.

Q: They really hadn't. It was just enough to get them in trouble but not enough to get them out of trouble.

HURWITZ: Yes, that's right. It was a lot like Vietnam in a sense. Well, we did put a lot more into Vietnam than they did there. We had 500,000 men there.

Q: And, they had 100,000.

HURWITZ: Yes, something like that. And our casualties were greater. The bases that we set up and the logistics that were evolved. Well, it was a terrible mistake on their part.

Q: When did you leave Afghanistan?

HURWITZ: I left in February, 1986.

Q: Were you seeing a change in the Soviet Union at that time?

HURWITZ: Yes, they were beginning to feel out the UN which was beginning to be involved in negotiations.

Q: Did you see the Soviets being able to pull out?

HURWITZ: Yes, to declare a victory and leave, that sort of thing. Here again nobody could identify what was at stake for them. Nobody really thought about it. They had nothing really to lose except face.

Q: As the negotiations were going on what were you getting from the people in Kabul?

HURWITZ: Nothing. On the ground it just continued. There was no sign while I was there that things were letting up.

Q: Did you have any feel about your reporting to the desk? Was the desk wanting you to say things that you didn't want to say? Taking stands that you didn't feel was justified?

HURWITZ: I never got much feedback. I know the Agency was not happy. And, I know INR was not happy either. I came back on consultation and got some complaints from INR that I was taking too gloomy a view. But, nobody ever put anything on paper and it didn't particularly hurt my career in any way.

Q: Were we able to monitor what was happening to our AID projects or were they just sort of write-offs?

HURWITZ: Outside of Kabul they were write-offs, you couldn't leave. I don't know what happened to all of this obvious infrastructure that we had in Helmand Valley. Before I went there we had negotiated the sale of a school that we owned. But, everything else was at a complete standstill and we couldn't monitor it. We had about 18 people at the embassy which included 2 guys from NSA, 2 guys from the Agency, 6 marines, a security/admin officer, a GSO, a female secretary, two reporting officers, a political officer/DCM and myself, the Chargé. So, we couldn't get around very much.

What I did see in terms of US infrastructure or projects was, for example, about 20 cars rusting away, trucks, this whole USIS complex, food from the commissary that we had to bury so that people couldn't get their hands on it, tons of whiskey and beer.

Indeed I recall once when I was in Kyrgyzstan, Dick Moose came out in August, 1993. This was the time when we were just getting geared up in Kyrgyzstan having opened in February, 1992 but didn't get fully started until I got there in March, 1992. By that time people were thinking of

building a big embassy and I said to Moose, “Look, I feel very much influenced by my Afghan experience. You really have to wait and see what a country is going to develop into what our relations really should be, what our interests are, before we start putting a lot of stuff on the ground.” For some reason we poured billions into Afghanistan over the years all for nought. That was one lesson I think we have since learned well.

Q: You were there for three years and must have gone out or something, or you would have gone nuts.

HURWITZ: Well, it is very interesting, I think the marines loved it. There was always a bit of excitement not knowing what was going to happen next. I went around town being interested in what was going on. One of my real sources of enjoyment, I would go about three times a week, was to go to the local used book market. I would find the most interesting things from the Soviet standpoint and send them in or buy books for the Library of Congress. I got a commendation from the Library of Congress. In fact I got a \$1000 award for what I did. Finding things like Soviet classified military manuals on sale. The guy selling them couldn't read Russian nor Farsi, he was basically illiterate. You would buy them by the pound. I found one military manual in a junkyard. I sent it in and later got feedback from the Agency. It was a manual on how they updated certain aspects of the MI-8 helicopter. Now the Agency had gotten the MIA manual but this showed what they had done with the civilian version to make it military. They were very pleased with that. But, I found a certain degree of excitement in this. And, there was always the rug buying. Afghan had been considered one of the world traveler's objectives in the '70s. A lot of people overdosed on drugs.

Q: It was part of that drug route.

HURWITZ: Right. A lot of tourists went there because this was excitement, the silk route. There were shops where rugs were continued to be made because they had nothing else to do, the war wasn't affecting them. They all came into Kabul but there were no tourists to buy, so we would go shopping for rugs.

There was one restaurant which was located in a big Intercontinental Hotel which had at most two guests a day in it. We would take the pouch out to New Delhi which was sort of scary. First of all there was no radar in Kabul and very steep mountains ringed the city so you could get into trouble if you don't have visual contact. And then there were shooting of rockets every now and then which brought down a couple of planes.

It was a post that had enough excitement so it never got boring. There was a fairly active diplomatic community. The NATO countries were there as well as Pakistan, Egypt, Japan. We had friendly relations with quite a few embassies and there was a lot of socializing. There was a very strict 10:00 pm curfew.

Q: Which was not a bad idea. It gets you home on time.

HURWITZ: Right. The dinners began at 6:30 pm and were over at 9:15 pm and you were gone.

Q: We had a curfew when I was in Korea and loved it. It brought our teenage kids home and we didn't have to stay out late.

HURWITZ: Yes. I did a lot of reading.

Q: When you left did somebody replace you in more or less the same manner?

HURWITZ: Yes. However, the guy who replaced me didn't last very long and he then was replaced by the guy who closed it.

Q: Well, you left in 1986?

HURWITZ: Yes. The last Soviet troops left in February, 1987 and we closed it because with the departure of the Soviet troops all hell broke loose, as anybody could have predicted.

Q: It sounds like a terrible mess today.

HURWITZ: It is a mess. What happened in the embassy is very interesting. The front door was welted shut, we kept paying all the local employees. Indeed, about three months ago, the FSN of the Year was an FSN from Afghanistan. He managed to come out. I met him in his hotel room here and we had a long talk about what is going on. He somehow goes to Peshawar and manages to find his way with help through the mountains, picks up money (dollars I assume) and brings it back in and pays the staff. For doing this he got the award. He says the embassy is still all right. Nobody has bothered with it.

MORTON I. ABRAMOWITZ
Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research
Washington, DC (1984-1989)

Ambassador Abramowitz was born in New Jersey and educated at Stanford and Harvard Universities He entered the Foreign Service in 1960 after service in the US Army. A specialist in East Asian and Political/Military Affairs, the Ambassador held a number of senior positions in the Department of State and Department of Defense. He served as Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research and as US Ambassador to Thailand (1978-1981) and Turkey (1989-1991). He also served in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Vienna. Ambassador Abramowitz was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 2007.

ABRAMOWITZ: In 1985, I was again impressed with the competence of some of the civil servants. For example, Eliza Van Hollen (Chris' wife), worked on Afghanistan. I spent a lot of time with her. She was absolutely indispensable to my understanding of events and trends in Afghanistan. I thought she was the most knowledgeable and insightful person on this subject in Washington. I was always seeking her input and she came through every time. She was a gem.

During my time, Afghanistan was the major issue giving INR a voice in policy making. I became not an insignificant player in a huge bureaucratic battle in Washington. Much of the bureaucratic battle is described in George Crile's book Charlie Wilson's War and in a Kennedy School memorandum. The issue was how to help the Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion.

Shultz used to have weekly meetings of senior officials—assistant secretary of State, DoD and NSC every other Saturday morning. It was effectively something of an inter-agency bull session. During the summer of 1985, the Secretary convened a meeting on Afghanistan. I started the discussion with a briefing which was very pessimistic about the likely outcome of the fight against the Soviets. The Soviets had introduced new arms and new forces which would decimate the insurgents as well as the local population. They were making progress against the mujahideen. When I heard that Rich Armitage, the deputy secretary, was going to Pakistan, I asked whether I could join his group. He said "Sure." This was an opportunity to get into Pakistan without fanfare and to roam around relatively unfettered to meet Pakistan intelligence which was running the war and CIA and the leading Afghan insurgents.

I took the trip to Pakistan because I was concerned that the mujahideen were losing their war in Afghanistan. It was clear that Soviet air superiority, particularly introduction of Speznaz and more helicopters, was taking its toll, and that is the main reason I supported the transfer of the Stingers to the mujahideen. Some counter measures were absolutely essential if the Soviets were ever to withdraw from Afghanistan. That was the U.S. government's objective which I fully supported.

I mentioned earlier about the debate within the government about providing the Stingers to the insurgents. The debate was not whether we wanted the Soviets out of Afghanistan; everyone in Washington agreed with that. The issue was whether the Stinger was the right weapon system and whether the U.S. military could afford to transfer some of those weapons.

I spent two or three days there. I talked to some mujahideen, I talked to the our station chief, I talked to the Paks. I was trying to get some firsthand information about the progress of the insurgency. I was particularly interested in the CIA's views about the mujahideen's needs for better weapons, particularly ground-to-air missiles to offset Soviet air power. I had tentatively reached the conclusion that more of these anti-aircraft weapons were needed, but I was looking for confirmation. While the mujahideen had British blowpipes, they had limited effect against higher flying aircraft. My conversations and briefings reinforced my view that "Stinger" missiles were desperately needed and had to be supplied or the "Muj" would be severely hurt. The station chief told me that "Washington" was reluctant to provide these weapons. The alleged concern was that the mujahideen's use of these weapons would identify the U.S. as directly providing weapons to the insurgents. That was indeed a case made in parts of State and CIA. I thought this was a spurious argument since by this time, the Soviets were well aware of our growing massive support for the mujahideen. Other objectors pointed to Pakistan taking opposition.

In any case, I became a proponent of taking action. I felt that we had to do something to help the mujahideen against Russian airpower. I must admit that my stance did obliterate the distinction between intelligence collection and analysis and policy making. It was undoubtedly unusual for the director of INR to become so deeply involved in a debate on policy. In part, I was placed in

this position because I was the principal State representative on covert action programs. I became involved in part because my job in fact demanded it.

There were two people in particular whom were equally supportive of Stingers in the Pentagon: Fred Iklé and Mike Pillsbury, who had long been urging it. Senator Hatch was the most influential proponent on the Hill for supplying Stingers. Congressman Wilson was also a strong supporter, but on this issue played a lesser role than he had earlier on other issues dealing with Afghanistan, particularly raising the level of assistance.

The issue of providing Stingers became a bureaucratic battle with State/NEA and CIA opposing the transfer of the weapon system. Bill Casey didn't seem particularly involved, but I always thought he objected because his staff was opposed to the transfer, but I was never sure why Casey's position left me particularly puzzled since he would support any action against the Soviets. The U.S. military was opposed because it did not want to release any Stingers from its inventory. Armacost and I supported the transfer as did some parts of Iklé and Pillsbury.

We had meeting after meeting trying to resolve our differences. This went on for months during which more parts of State came to our point of view. Then someone threw in another monkey wrench: the story was that President Zia was opposed to the transfer of Stingers to the mujahideen. Pillsbury convinced Hatch that it would be very helpful if the senator would take a trip to the area to make his own assessment. I went on that trip. During his visit to Pakistan, Hatch of course had a meeting with Zia during which he raised the rumor that the Pakistani president was opposed to the transfer of Stingers. Zia refuted that quickly and decisively; he said if course his government was in support of such transfer since it would help the insurgents. That was the decisive psychological turn. The opposition had run out of ammunition; the military was over-ruled and finally they supplied Stingers from its inventory.

There is no question that the transfer had an impact. We used to get reports of the number of helicopters that had been shot down; they were not exactly reliable, but there was no question that the Soviets faced a radical change to the situation on the battlefield. Not only Stingers, but far more assistance was being given to the resistance. I can't say that the Stingers were the determinant factor in the Soviet decision to leave Afghanistan; I don't know, but there was no doubt that it was a factor in Soviet calculation of the costs of their venture. I won't go as far as the recent book and movie Charlie Wilson's War has gone in its finding that the Stingers were responsible for the Soviet retreat, but I think there is no question that they contributed to Soviet policy development. The reports of their accuracy I found a little incredulous.

Just a footnote here: when I was the president of the Carnegie Endowment, I saw Shevardnadze when I went to Moscow to begin creating the Endowment's Moscow center. I went with Strobe Talbott and Dimitri Simes. I said to Shevardnadze that I just had to ask him how important the supplying of Stingers was to the Soviet withdrawal decision. He got visible angry and said in no uncertain terms that the Stinger had nothing to do with the decision to withdraw. He would not acknowledge in any way that the Stingers played any role. The Soviets, they withdraw for their own reasons. Despite Shevardnadze disclaimer, I still believe they contributed to the Soviet decision to withdraw. There is no question that the provision of the anti-aircraft missiles gave the insurgents renewed vigor and passion and greater world-wide publicity. At the time, no one had

ever heard of Osama Bin Laden, although we were very aware of the questionable attitude and nature of the mujahideen. Unfortunately, the Pakistani really controlled arms supplies to the various insurgent groups.

The trip to Pakistan took place in January, 1986. On the way back, I got off in the Philippines. I stayed just a few days, but had an opportunity just to talk to a wide variety of people – politicians and non-politicians. The presidential elections were in full swing. I went to some of the rallies which were as enthusiastic as I have seen in a political setting. There was excitement in the air; people sensed that Marcos was coming to an end and that Aquino would win. Aquino was a very nice woman; not particularly impressive but very congenial, very dedicated, and very honest. At the first Secretary's staff meeting after my trip, Shultz asked me for my view of the Philippine situation. I told him that I was very surprised by the vigor and enthusiasm I had observed in the Philippines in the campaign. I thought Cory's meetings were more of a revival meeting than a political rally. It was an extraordinary movement in which people at all levels of society were participating.

EDMUND McWILLIAMS
Acting Deputy Chief of Mission
Kabul (1986-1988)

A native of Rhode Island, Mr. Mc Williams was educated at the University of Rhode Island and Ohio University. In the course of his diplomatic career he served in several South East Asia posts including Vientiane, Bangkok and Djakarta. Other assignments took him to Moscow, Managua, Kabul, and Islamabad. In 1992 Mr. McWilliams was engaged in opening US Embassies in the newly independent states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While his assignments were primarily in the Political and Economic fields, in Washington he dealt with Labor and Human Rights issues. Mr. McWilliams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005-2006.

Q: Well you left there when?

MCWILLIAMS: I left in '85, summer of '85.

Q: Where'd you go?

MCWILLIAMS: Into training for a posting in Kabul, into Dari training.

Q: So '85. How did you find, first place, why Dari? Is Dari and Farsi the same language or not?

MCWILLIAMS: It's similar. You can generally, if you're a good speaker of either you can understand the other one. But Farsi is the more elevated one. For example, when I would speak my Farsi influenced Dari in the markets in Kabul they would refer to me as a mullah because I spoke at an elevated level. It's interesting because I, we'll talk about it later, but I then went on to

Tajikistan which speaks a variant of Dari so you have Farsi, Dari and Tajik, all very closely related but different, different dialects.

Q: Well then, I mean, but Dari was considered the-

MCWILLIAMS: It was the lingua franca of Afghanistan.

Q: It was the language.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. The other language was Pashtun and I actually had a colleague, a deputy, David Katz, who had not only Dari and some Pashtun but also spoke Nuristani, which is a very minor dialect. He'd been in the Peace Corps in Afghanistan so I was always very impressed with anybody that had both languages. Another Foreign Services officer, Brad Hanson, has both Pashtun and Dari and speaks them both very well. I've always been impressed with that.

Q: Well then, how did you find the language as far as something to tackle and to learn?

MCWILLIAMS: It wasn't a terribly difficult language. Of course you had the script, you have Arabic script, and that was a bit of a challenge although I had a very good teacher and it was one-on-one training, which can be pretty rigorous because frankly one-on-one it's pretty intense.

Q: Yes.

MCWILLIAMS: But I had six months of that and as I recall I got a 3+/3 although I think that was a bit generous but it was enough to get me in.

Q: Well, you got to Kabul when?

MCWILLIAMS: Probably June or July, June of '86 I guess it was.

Q: And you were there until when?

MCWILLIAMS: Until June or July of '88.

Q: What was your job?

MCWILLIAMS: I was the acting DCM. We didn't have an ambassador because of the special relationship we had with Afghanistan at that stage, this is the Soviet-controlled regime. So I was the number two but not a formal DCM, was acting DCM.

Q: Okay, would you kind of describe what was the situation in Afghanistan at the time you got there in '86?

MCWILLIAMS: Well it was, obviously it was a Soviet occupied state and we as members of the embassy were not allowed to leave the capital of Kabul, which was very constraining over two years, basically living just in the city. It had a fairly large Western diplomatic presence. It was an

unusual relationship, though, with the government because we didn't formally recognize the Najibullah government. We had, all of us, the Western embassies, had relations only with the foreign ministry. You couldn't call on any other ministry of government so it was a very limited relationship and our responsibilities very frankly were to monitor the Soviet presence and the Najibullah, well actually it was Babrak Karmal when it came in but the Soviet influenced regime there. And in a real sense to be propagandists, that is, we would collect information obviously for intelligence reasons but also for the purpose of insuring that the international media were aware of what was going on in Afghanistan so that when there was a particularly brutal Soviet atrocity we'd make sure that got out, some failing of the regime we'd make sure that got out. Anything that suggested that the Soviet occupation was being resisted by the people of Afghanistan was something that we would attempt to get to the international media.

Q: What was happening in the field at the time when you got there?

MCWILLIAMS: It was actually a moment of transition because up until say '85, mid-'86 when I arrived the Soviets had pretty solid control of the country. What changed in '86 actually was the introduction of the Stinger missile. And there had been great debate in Washington as to whether or not the mujahideen should be given the Stinger missiles and the anti-aircraft missile which is very effective, state-of-the-art at the time. And the decision was made in summer of '86 to give them that weapon and that changed the dynamics of the military conflicts significantly because up until that time the Soviets had relied very heavily on helicopter lift to move troops and move supplies and so on and it gave them pretty good access to the entire country. However, with the introduction of the Stinger the muj were able to deny significant areas to Soviet penetration and Soviet control simply by making known to the Soviets that in fact a particular valley was defended by Stingers and that would keep them from moving their area assets, particularly helicopters, into those areas. So it was a very significant change in the dynamics of the military confrontation.

Q: Well before we get to that, I'm sure everybody sat around trying to figure this out and maybe we discussed the last time but what, when you got to our embassy there, what was the analysis of why the hell the Soviets did what they did in December of '79?

MCWILLIAMS: Oh yes. Well that's a fairly basic question. There's two lines of analysis, one that would suggest that the Brezhnev leadership saw an opportunity to penetrate into Southwestern Asia and simply took that opportunity. There's another line of analysis which is a bit more sophisticated which I think I would lean toward which is to say that there was an intramural struggle within the communist party of Afghanistan, a division, and one, the more radical element of that communist party in Afghanistan moved abruptly to displace the existing leadership which in fact was cooperating to some extent with Moscow and in so doing became a client state of Moscow. But I think to some extent perhaps not with Moscow's planning or intention but once it established itself Moscow felt committed to supporting that regime. Ultimately what Moscow did and this was in the first year really was to remove the failing wing of the communist party, failing in the sense that it wasn't really establishing itself because it was so radical, and to replace that wing with a more popular communist element which did survive for a number of years obviously. But I think it's still a question for historians to grapple with as to why the Soviets moved in when and as they did.

Q: I would think that you arrived and the Stingers were there. I mean, had arrived.

MCWILLIAMS: Well, they were just being introduced when I arrived so I remember that was one of the things that was an early theme in my reporting. Essentially we were a reporting machine out there and one of the principle objections we had was to determine whether or not the Stingers were having an effect and our assessment was that they indeed were.

Q: I would have thought that the introduction of Stingers would have made relations between our embassy, well America and the Soviets there and the party in power absolutely poisonous.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. They were essentially. I guess though to sort of tell tales the embassy up until I think '86 had been a fairly innocuous institution. I think this reflected first of all the leadership of that institution which to my mind wasn't as effective as it might have been but more importantly I think Washington didn't really conceive of the battle in Afghanistan as anything more than an effort to bleed the Soviets. I don't think anyone in Washington up until the introduction of the Stingers really anticipated that the Soviets could be defeated in Afghanistan and I think beginning in '86 we began to see things differently. So up until that time obviously the U.S. embassy and the other Western embassies were a maligned presence but they served Soviet interests by essentially enabling the Soviets to say well look, we have a going regime here that even has Western embassies. So it served a propaganda purpose for them. Beginning in '86, thanks to the Stingers certainly but also I think our posture at the embassy became a lot more aggressive and yes, there were some difficult moments as a consequence of the introduction of Stingers, our more aggressive posture and the fact that the Soviets, I think, began to see that indeed they didn't have a winning hand in Afghanistan.

Q: Well had we, I mean, in a way, the Stinger began to negate sort of this, but didn't we see the Soviets being the way that you would often portrayed in the American press, you know, a big red arrow pointed towards one India, two the Gulf states, to Iran, you know, I mean, you know, part of the great game.

MCWILLIAMS: Oh yes.

Q: I mean, but did we see the Soviets have this in mind?

MCWILLIAMS: Let me just back- I thought you were going to go as to the Washington perception. Very clearly Washington saw the Soviet penetration of Afghanistan as a direct threat to Pakistan which was not a strong regime and obviously its penetration would be a very serious loss for the U. S. in that region. But in terms of the Soviets ambitions, in the final analysis my sense is that they probably didn't perceive themselves as using Afghanistan as a stepping stone. That may have been in the mind of some Soviet dreamers but I think given the problems they faced in Afghanistan, particularly in the middle to late '80s, a venture beyond Afghanistan into Pakistan was unrealistic. Now that having been said I think in the death throes of the Najibullah regime, the Soviet presence, the Soviets clearly did try to intimidate Pakistan, the use of Scuds, these long-range missiles and so on. But I think this was not so much an effort to actually make gains in Pakistan but rather just an attempt to warn Pakistan to step back from what became a full

throttle support for the mujahideen.

Q: You say that we were monitoring how the Stingers were doing. Where did we get our information?

MCWILLIAMS: It was very difficult. The diplomatic circuit, the Western diplomatic circuit which by the way included the Chinese, shared information on a regular basis and each embassy had its own network of contacts that would let us know, give us some sense of what was going on outside. For example, I relied very much on rug merchants because notwithstanding the war the rug sales went on and these rug merchants would be getting rugs in from the countryside and as these rugs would be brought in obviously these sellers would sit down with the rug merchants...

Q: This is tape three, side one with Ed McWilliams. You were talking about the rug merchants.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. Well, in addition to, as I say, getting information off what was a fairly busy diplomatic net we, I relied on rug merchants who, because of their regular contact with people coming in from the countryside to bring rugs for sale through these merchants had a pretty good sense of what was going on outside of Kabul. But in addition to that I think one of the principle things we did was simply to monitor what the Soviets were doing in Kabul. There was a great deal of Soviet equipment in Kabul and as, particularly with the introduction of the Stingers and so on, the Soviets sought to adapt their military to these new threats and they were doing some very interesting things in terms of protecting their equipment. And one of our jobs out there was really pure intelligence, was simply to monitor changes in the Soviet equipment, what they were introducing for the first time, the BTR-80 as I recall was first introduced out there.

Q: What is that?

MCWILLIAMS: It's an armored personnel carrier. But as it happened and I guess I can speak about these in general terms, there was one other agency of government out there whose responsibility was more in this line to monitor changes in Soviet equipment and tactics. And because their numbers were reduced significantly at one point, I can discuss later, I was pulled in to do essentially ground work. My colleague was doing changes in air tactics and protection for air and I was doing ground stuff, which involved photography and simply taking notes. Also, as Kabul was really the base of operations for the Soviets, we would frequently encounter massive Soviet convoys leaving Kabul to go off and do battle and one of the things we would do, again this was much more on the intelligence side than the propaganda side, was monitor what was in those convoys, number of vehicles, type of vehicles, and also the routes they were taking out of town because the very limited nature of the road network in Kabul, when you saw a major convoy leaving on a certain road you would track it until it basically left the environs of the city and you could tell generally what direction it was going. This information would be fed back to our embassy in Pakistan particularly, and I have to assume that this information was fairly regularly shared with the mujahideen.

Q: Did you find that you were being monitored, harassed, shadowed, doing something?

MCWILLIAMS: Sure, sure.

Q: By whom?

MCWILLIAMS: Soviets. Well, I should say the Najibullah regime as well. They would track us in their cars and so on but we had several confrontations with the Soviet troops. I was fired on twice and at one point pulled out of my car and roughed up a bit. But this was just prior to a Gorbachev-Reagan summit so nothing was made of that one. But I should say that the shooting incidents basically entailed my driving at night by a Soviet base and missing a checkpoint. And then on another occasion I had actually gone behind the base to do some photography, something that was new and I was fired on as I left.

Q: Well now, again, let's talk about the embassy a bit. I mean, you say you were sort of the quasi-DCM. Who was the quasi-ambassador?

MCWILLIAMS: We had a chargé d'affaires.

Q: Chargé.

MCWILLIAMS: And Maurice Elam was the first chargé d'affaires and Glassman, Jon Glassman was the second chargé d'affaires. I won't go into great detail but the predecessors for Mr. Elam had not been very much interested in morale in what was in fact a very, very difficult post. Obviously there were no families available, there was constant monitoring and some harassment of personnel. It was a very small embassy and morale obviously in a situation like that is going to be difficult. Mr. Elam's predecessors were not very much focused on that aspect of it. And Mr. Elam, an old Oklahoma cowboy, sort of an iconic figure, chewed on a cheroot which he never lit, wore cowboy boots and a cowboy hat and so on, very taciturn, sort of a Gary Cooper type, very unassuming but in his own way very intelligent but he focused on the need for morale and he was almost obsessive to make sure that everybody was doing okay. He was concerned about the mails, concerned that people were able to use his swimming pool, which his predecessor had basically made off limits to the staff. He was just a wonderful man, in a sense really a father figure for the entire embassy. And it was a unique element of leadership from my perspective because I think the man genuinely did care about this staff. But he was also a very cautious man, which I think was appropriate, and although I never really gave him much credit for analysis, I did most of the analysis, most of the reporting, on a number of occasions he would sit down for example and brief Western reporters when they could get in. And I remember the first time he did this with his boots, his cowboy boots up on the desk, giving an analysis without notes which was, a briefing, which was simply superb, and I saw him in a new light after that. He basically feigned to be sort of just a rough, tough, simple cowboy but the man had a really good mind. He was a great leader.

Q: Well, how did we see, you know, from '86 to '88, how were things developing? What were you picking up?

MCWILLIAMS: Well, what was most interesting to me, I think, was what I wasn't picking up.

We were monitoring pretty steady gains by the mujahideen, getting back valleys, actually moving some refugees from Pakistan back into Afghanistan because they now controlled some of these valleys. What I was missing and this was really a flaw and a failure on my part, was the relationship among the mujahideen, who there were seven different principle mujahideen groups, eight if you count, and you should count the Hazaras. What I got glimpses of was some of the backbiting, the fighting between the fundamentalist groups and the more royalist, democratic oriented groups. On a couple of occasions I actually reported that, these disputes between Massoud, for example in Gubadeen and received very pained responses from our embassy in Pakistan that they really didn't want to see too much more of this kind of reporting, particularly reporting that would reach the media because it suggested rivalries and fighting between mujahideen groups. And I think very foolishly and unprofessionally I allowed myself to be swayed by the arguments well, you know, we're in this for the fight here and we don't want to be getting any bad propaganda out. The thing is we couldn't even report this in classified channels because they just didn't want that sort of information in Pakistan. And when I say they I mean the embassy and CIA basically.

Q: Yes, CIA, yes. Well, I mean, this is, of course, a problem that we've had everywhere with regimes. I go back to my Vietnam experience and all, you know, it's the same thing because, and you miss something if you don't get it. But the problem is if you talk about this, send it in no matter how classified it is, it will end up on a congressman's desk.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: Who has his own or her own agenda.

MCWILLIAMS: And might use it in ways- But I think the point being, from my perspective what I learned and it's rather late in my career to be learning this, is that often bad news is as important or more important than good news.

Q: Oh yes.

MCWILLIAMS: And I think frankly, although I had both a meritorious award and a superior honor award out of these years in Kabul, I feel that I really failed in that assignment because I didn't report the real story and what came to be perhaps the most important story which was to say the fact the mujahideen were not cooperating and there was a fundamental flaw within our ally, the mujahideen, and that was the political differences among them.

Q: Well were we picking up things which would become more apparent after we put our own troops in about the people can, the mujahideen can be, you know, different groups can be bought? I mean, were the Soviets playing the game? Were they able to do that?

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. I mean, well obviously, I mean, the Soviets had Afghans who were working for them, the communist parties, really one communist party but two factions. So yes, I mean, they certainly had people working for them but I think, you know, this whole notion that Afghans, as they used to say, they can't be bought but they can be rented. In point of fact though, inasmuch as the Afghans were faced with a foreign occupier, an atheistic foreign occupier by the

way, I think most Afghans were united in the determination to get rid of the Soviets. The trouble came in that each one of them, each party, each group, had an agenda beyond that that was essentially to avail themselves of the labors of power once the Soviets were thrown out. And I think we weren't looking to that.

Q: Well you know, looking at it from your point of view, you're on one side of the front in a way.

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: And you're working, you know, what are the Soviets up to and their allies? But it would be our embassy and the CIA who were practically sleeping with the Afghan leaders and Pakistanis across the border and I guess our agents were going across too. I mean, they would be the ones who would pick this up but you picked this up.

MCWILLIAMS: The failing was principally there. And you're right, I mean, sitting sort of on the other side of the front you were very limited in what you could do. For example, we had virtually no contact with mujahideen that would be coming into the city, for example. But on the other hand we did manage, a couple of times, to pick up, I remember specifically a report on fighting between Masood's people and Gulbadin's people. And where I erred was not in accepting the direction from essentially Islamabad to restrain my reporting on that sort of thing. You should never limit your reporting. If you've got it as fact it should go out. In a classified channel in some form, of course there's a chance of leak as you suggest, but it was not that I was insufficiently aggressive in seeking this information out but when it came to me I should have been reporting it and I held back. And that was, I think, a mistake on my part.

Q: We have been faulted here or there, a long history of Foreign Service reporting and all, and one of the ones that must have been prevalent when you were in Kabul was what had happened in Iran about our embassy being told don't report anything bad about the shah. But was that a lesson that you think it permeated it or was it still-?

MCWILLIAMS: No, I don't think so. And when we talk about it later, my experience in Islamabad pretty much confirmed to me that there are embassies, there are missions that will hold back on what they perceive to be the bad news, negative news. They'll try to shape it. I mean, it's one level of mistake to shape information so that the press doesn't learn something that you don't want them to learn. But when you're also keeping that information from policymakers within the administration by simply not reporting or reporting it erroneously, as happened subsequently to this in my career, then I think clearly a Foreign Service officer is not doing his or her job.

Q: Well now were you getting Washington types coming in and were you able to brief them?

MCWILLIAMS: No. We had, in my two years there we had one CODEL and the visits by senior officials were very rare because of course this was not a mission that represented itself to the country, well, represented itself to the government only insofar as we had contact with the foreign ministry so you're not going to bring in senior people to meet with Kabul officials. You just didn't do that. So my boss, for example, Chargé Elam, frequently was going out to either

Islamabad or to Washington, I'd say every month or two, in order to brief personally and to inform officials in person what was going on, which by the way gave me lots of time as acting chargé, which I didn't mind. But that was the way it worked essentially, very little incoming traffic which also for a Foreign Service officer is welcome because you don't have to deal with visitors so much.

JON DAVID GLASSMAN
Chargé
Kabul (1987-1989)

Mr. Glassman graduated from the University of Southern California and Columbia University. He served in numerous posts including Madrid, Moscow, Havana and Kabul. He was named ambassador to Paraguay in 1991. He was interviewed by Peter Moffat in 1997.

Q: Major change of scene in 1987. When you went to Kabul, that was quite a plum as an assignment.

GLASSMAN: I don't know if it was a plum. I volunteered to go and was able to study Dari (Afghan Persian) along with Russian for a year. The idea as you know was to report from Kabul on the Soviet intentions. The Soviets had come in, in 1979 - this is eight years later. They had about a hundred twenty thousand troops in Afghanistan, many of them headquartered in the city of Kabul. The United States and the other Western nations maintained embassies there. They were vehicles for reporting what the Soviets were doing and on the success of the Afghan Resistance. The reason the Soviets allowed the Western embassies to remain was their hope that over time the Western powers would recognize that a communist regime was permanent, would normalize relations. That was their gain from all this. We went in there and there were about twenty Americans. We were under fire constantly from the Mujaheddin who were bombarding the city with 60 to 250 ground-to-ground rockets a week. In 1985, the United States had provided the rebels with Stinger surface-to-air missiles. They were taking a healthy toll of Soviet helicopters and aircraft. There was a very interesting atmosphere in Kabul. The Soviets would be flying in supplies constantly because the road was often interdicted - they would come in all night. All night long this infernal roar as the Russian planes would come in one after another. They had a sort of AWAC observation plane over the city all night long. In the old Ambassador's residence where I lived, I would lock myself into a steel room every night and then we would radio communicate with the Embassy. Electric power was going out all the time as the Mujaheddin would blow up some of the power plants or power lines but these were always restored. When we arrived there, the CIA told us that the Pakistanis were running the operation and the rebels would finally definitely cut out the electric supplies which they never succeeded in doing. One thing we saw in Afghanistan was that frequently the reports which the Pakistani Army Intelligence Service (the ISI) would convey to the American Embassy Islamabad were much more optimistic than the actual results we could see upon the ground. Nonetheless, the Mujaheddin were exercising strong psychological pressure. We would send in the weekly situation report on the war. The way we were able to do this was we would interview, when I say

interview, our officers would go out and talk to Afghan storekeepers and also talk to embassy employees. Because the Afghans had an extended family network, we were able to gain on a weekly basis reports of how the war was going in every one of the provinces and cross check them and we would send in an unclassified report which would go to Islamabad and it would be rebroadcast by both the BBC and the Voice of America into Afghanistan. People who were out there fighting would know how the war was going nationally. The British did the same thing and we would coordinate our reports with them every week as we worked with the other NATO representatives.

Q: When these were broadcast, was there any sort of attribution?

GLASSMAN: No, it just simply said that in, say, Nangarhar province, a Mujaheddin group under Saladin or something, had realized an attack on a Soviet convoy and three trucks were destroyed. In addition to talking to the people we would send an officer out on the periphery of the city where the Soviet bases were and we would report when they were moving out on military operations, in which directions. We would also take photographs of Soviet military equipment. A lot of very dangerous stuff was done there with our people driving in the middle of the Russian convoys. Pulling in the car in the middle and taking photographs of the armor below the view of the driver and some standing at the end of the airport taking shots of aircraft/helicopters landing. So there was a lot of wild stuff going on.

In addition, we talked to the Soviet and Eastern European Ambassadors. At this time, in the late 1980s, a lot of the Eastern European Ambassadors were very independent so they would get briefed from the Soviets and they would provide us detailed debriefing so we were getting a very good picture of what the Soviets were telling their allies.

Ambassador Nikolai Yegorychev was the Soviet Ambassador during a great portion of my tour. He was the former First Secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party. He was a very important man under Khrushchev but had been removed and had been out for a long time, had been brought back in and by this time was a very hard line guy. He was constantly conveying threats that, if the United States continued to supply Stinger missiles, they would take revenge - some patriotic Afghans would shoot down American planes bringing supplies to Pakistan. When an aircraft carrying Pakistani President Zia al-Haq, and American Ambassador Arnie Raphel blew up in mid-air he came to see me, the only time he actually visited the American Embassy. The Soviet Ambassador denied to me the Soviets had anything to do with this. I asked him if the Afghan Communists had anything to do with it. He said, "I don't know." I can tell you that the night Zia's plane was downed, the Afghan communist troops were celebrating, firing shots across the sky, really celebrating the death of Pakistani President Zia. They thought this was the key to a future victory.

Q: Could you give us an idea of the size of your mission?

GLASSMAN: Initially 20 people, then we were reduced to ten. As these rockets were coming in, there was obviously fear that Americans would be killed. Sometimes there were some spectacular things happening in the city. Once the Resistance hit the ammunition dump at the airport, a Soviet ammunition dump; we were only a mile away. There was the most incredible

explosion you can imagine. Flames going a thousand feet into the air, not smoke but flames, shells exploding and going everywhere. We were all on top of the embassy and the Marines were cheering. I said, "You shouldn't cheer because they're going to start hitting us next."

Washington understood, of course, that our situation was dangerous. It was less dangerous than you might think, however, because the city is six miles wide. So you fire 60 or 250 rockets into the city with kill radius of maybe, say, 30 yards or so and in that six mile-wide city a lot of people will survive. And at no time were any Americans injured while we were there even though we were sitting next to Radio Afghanistan. One occasion I remember we were having dinner in the Chinese Embassy. The Chinese at that point were on our side. We were having dinner for our departing DCM when a rocket hit right next door on the French Embassy. The wife of the Chinese Ambassador leaped to the side of one of our officers but we were fortunate nothing happened. On another occasion, a fight broke out behind the Embassy between the two regime factions. The Afghan Communist troops at the Presidential Palace and their rivals were firing mortars back and forth across the city, just an incredible thing to watch. No one was hurt.

When Bush was elected and was inaugurated, the Soviets had by then signed the Geneva agreement which pledged them to pull out by February 1989. There was fear in Washington that, if we remained, the Mujaheddin would come in and kill all whites including us. Most of us in the Embassy had beards, which distinguished us from the Russian troops. The Russian troops were only permitted to have mustaches, except for the Spetsnaz, the Russian Green Berets. We had beards to look a little bit different. There was the sense that if the Mujaheddin came in, they would kill all foreigners. So in the meantime, the CIA produced green armbands with the inscription "Allahu Akbar"- God is Great. We were going to wear them, but the Administration got very nervous and finally ordered us to evacuate the post. We were burning all our documents. We arranged for a charter flight from the Afghan communist airline by paying them \$10,000. James Baker, the new Secretary of State, said, "It isn't quick enough." They wanted us to leave more quickly and sent in an Indian Airline plane. When we said we were going to evacuate, our local employees got very upset because they thought they were going to be possibly killed. So we were instructed by the State Department to pay them six months salary (about \$80,000), which we paid them and committed to come back and pay them and which people did over the years.

The embassy has been closed since February 1989. When we left, we moved all these special armored vehicles into the basement (the vehicles had port holes for automatic weapons, gas dispensers). We had metal containers made for everyone's possessions and we took them to the airport to meet this Indian Airline plane that was coming in. At the airport, the Afghan Communists were insulting us, calling us cowards and all kinds of things were happening. Finally we loaded our possessions and got on the plane and, after almost running into a Soviet plane coming in, we got out to India. Just before leaving, I had a ceremony at the monument honoring the deceased Ambassador Dubs who had been killed in a hostage taking incident, and I had an American flag walking out and that picture appeared on the front page of *The Washington Post*. When we arrived at New Delhi Airport, we were going to have a press conference and Baker sent a message saying he didn't want a press conference because he didn't like the photo because it reminded him of Ambassador John Gunther Dean when he had withdrawn from Cambodia carrying an American flag. He said, "It looked like we had surrendered rather than won." Anyway, we held the press conference. Later, we brought back a flag. We had several

flags. One we gave to Baker, which is still in the State Department, to be returned whenever we go back. I also took one out to President Reagan in California, gave him a flag which had flown on the day of the Soviet invasion and the day when we left which coincided with the Soviet troop withdrawal.

Q: Knowledge of the Soviet Union, and the Russian language helped you in your time there?

GLASSMAN: Very helpful, we talked to both Ambassador Yegorychev and Vorontsov who succeeded him during this time. The Soviets were also threatening, saying they would not be pulling out but we were able to observe in various ways their preparation for pulling out so we didn't have to believe what they were telling us. Other things happened there; Kabul was a city under siege. Only about eight kilometers, outside the city, there was a place called Karga Lake. The Soviets had a paratroop detachment out there on top of the hill. Below the hill was the old golf course which had been pock marked by rockets and mortar rounds, with holes out there six to seven feet wide. We would go out there just to have a little recreation. Sometimes there would be firefights across the lake with Mujaheddin who were across the way. One time, *The New York Times* correspondent was in there and he'd been told by Najibullah and the Afghan communist authorities that the war was over. I said, "We'll take you 15 minutes outside Kabul and show you it's not the case." We went up there, shooting started and he believed us. One time we were up there at Karga Lake and a BBC film crew was being held by Soviet paratroopers. It turned out that this film crew had seen the Soviets fishing in the lake with hand grenades and the Soviets didn't take kindly to that. I told the Soviets that, "These guys will just turn over their video tape and let them go on their way." and they were ready to do that. I left and came back 45 minutes later and they were still there. The British Chargé d'Affaires had shown up and some other diplomats were there. A Soviet Lieutenant Colonel said, "Look we're going to take these people in to talk with General Varennikov," who was the head of the Soviet operational group in Afghanistan. He said, "You diplomats get on your way. We're not interested in you." We diplomats were standing there and said, "No, we don't want the journalists to be taken off separately, we're going to be with them." The Soviet Colonel said, "Okay you can be with them, we'll take you all in then." So he called up three tanks and he lined up all the cars, the diplomatic cars, and then lined up one tank in the beginning, one tank in the middle, one tank in the end, then we start motoring with them. I rode with the Soviet Colonel, who was telling me how discouraged they were in Afghanistan. He said, "We're going to take you to see General Varennikov," which was great because I had never seen General Varennikov. We went about 15 kilometers around the edge of the city and were off the main road. We came to a high-rise building over there and he said, "Wait here." We waited there about an hour and then it came down from headquarters that General Varennikov had decided to make a gesture of good will. He decided to release everyone, but this was great because this was the headquarters of the 40th Soviet Army. We, the United States, had never known where it was located. So of course we went back later, took pictures of the approaches. After that, it was under constant attack by the Mujaheddin the rest of the war.

Q: You mentioned Najibullah. Did you have much to do with the Afghan leadership?

GLASSMAN: No, we were banned by the State Department as were the other Western powers from dealing with the Afghan communist government; the position was this is a puppet regime,

so the only official contact we were allowed to have was with the Protocol Department of the Afghan Foreign Ministry which would give us customs permits and things like that. We would never talk policy with them at all. Najibullah had been a physician who was in charge of the Afghan secret police. He was reputed to be a person who had developed new techniques to keep prisoners alive under torture and I can tell you that torture was occurring because they had several prisons in Kabul. One was right in the central part of town. You could park outside and hear screaming in the night as people were being tortured. Najibullah was a beastly fellow.

One of the worst things that happened while we were there was, as you may recall, that the USS Vincennes in the Persian Gulf had shot down by mistake an Iranian passenger plane. The USG determined that the Iranians had sent out teams to get revenge. One of the teams was sent to Afghanistan in an attempt to kill us, and we were instructed by the State Department to approach the Soviets for protection. You can understand the irony of this, because here we were paying all this money to arm the Afghan resistance and we had to approach the Soviets for protection. I forget whether Yegorychev or Vorontsov was the Ambassador but they said they would be happy to talk to the Afghan Communist Government, which they did and from then on whenever I went out of the embassy I had to be accompanied by a detachment of Afghan communist soldiers with rifles who went with me. They were on me like glue the rest of my time there.

TERESITA C. SCHAFFER
State Department; Deputy Assistant Secretary, NEA
Washington, DC (1989-1992)

Ambassador Schaffer grew up in Manhattan and graduated from Bryn Mawr college. She served in numerous posts including Tel Aviv, Islamabad, New Delhi and Dhaka, as well as numerous positions in Washington, DC. She was named ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives in 1992. She was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 1998.

Q: Then in 1989, you were appointed as deputy assistant secretary. How did that come about?

SCHAFFER: In fact, it came about in extremely awkward circumstances. The Bush administration had just begun; Dick Murphy, who had been the Assistant Secretary, retired the day after inauguration. There followed a long inter-regnum in NEA. In March or thereabouts, the rumor began to float around that John Kelly was to be the new Assistant Secretary. He had been our Ambassador to Lebanon during the Iran-Contra affair; he had returned from Beirut and was awaiting an onward assignment. Soon after the rumor began, John settled into the Assistant Secretary's office, but made sure that we understood that he was not the Assistant Secretary -- not yet even having been nominated.

In April I went to the West Coast on a speaking engagement. On a Friday evening, I got a frantic call from Howie, informing me that Kelly had decided to fire all of his deputies, including Howie himself. He told me that I should call Kelly right away to make sure that I would be considered for one of the deputy positions. I swallowed hard because I knew that Kelly's action was a

terrible blow to Howie even though it had been made clear that the action in no way was a reflection of the high regard that Kelly and the system had for him -- as was also true of the other deputies.

I thought about Howie's suggestion and eventually did call Jock Covey, who was slated to be the principal deputy to Kelly. A couple of days later, while still on the West Coast, I got a call from John Kelly. I had considered myself as a potential candidate for one of the Near East deputy assistant secretaryships because that was the area that I was working in -- i.e. Egypt. To my absolute astonishment, John offered me the South Asia deputy assistant secretary position -- to succeed Howie. I told him I would like to think about the offer a little more, including talking to my husband about it. Howie took the position that such an assignment would in fact be sweet revenge -- one Schaffer for another. So I accepted John's offer, but as you might expect, this move raised a lot of eyebrows in Washington. There were certainly a number of people who wondered what kind of nails I ate for breakfast. It was certainly a very friendly succession. Howie had had his first ambassadorship; so we agreed that my career would now take precedence. So he did not scramble for another glamorous assignment, but rather decided that the time had come for him to begin his work on his book on Chester Bowles. At the time, the Department had a mini think-tank in FSI -- which did not last too long. But Howie went to work there.

I had met John Kelly, but barely knew him. He had some familiarity with my work through his reading of the cable traffic while he was an assistant secretary-in-waiting. I obviously had some reservations about working for John, particularly in light of his action on Howie and the other deputies. But the job was very interesting both because it covered not only South Asia but the all economic issues in the Bureau, and therefore a great opportunity for me.

I have already mentioned Covey as one of my colleagues; the others were Skip Gnehm -- the Persian Gulf deputy -- and Dan Kurtzer became the "Peace Process" deputy. This team worked quite well. We all had been picked at the same time. Kelly tried what I thought was a good idea, but which unfortunately never worked out. He wanted to take his deputies for a week-end retreat at some pleasant and bucolic place. Spouses could come, but their expenses would be personal and not Uncle Sam's. But various spouses didn't want to incur those costs and something always arose which forced postponement after postponement. So nothing came of the idea which was unfortunate because such a week-end would have been a good opportunity to engender even closer working and personal relationships.

There were two aspects that were difficult. Kelly had a well known temper which meant that if someone messed up, the brunt of his ire would fall rather suddenly and with some vehemence. John would get over his displeasure, but this had a definite impact on the South Asia desks. Traditionally, those desks got less attention from the Assistant Secretary than did the Near East desks; John was quite good at devoting an hour per week exclusively to South Asia issues. But I found that in order to make sure that he got the briefing he needed, I would have to have a rehearsal to make sure that the messages were brief and concise so that he would not get impatient and start yelling.

The second awkward aspect had to do with Jock Covey, who is probably the most organized

person I know. He is also extremely bright and a phenomenally quick study. But he does subscribe to the "control" management school. So each of the DAS', in one way or another, clashed with Jock. He considered himself as the DCM of the Bureau -- i.e., second-in-command -- through whom all that is headed for the assistant secretary is passed through. When our memos became stuck on his desk -- even though we might already have reached agreement with John Kelly on what the memo might say -- then we raised a fuss. This problem was never fully resolved. Skip Gnehm had the most trouble with this system; eventually he left to be our Ambassador to Kuwait, during the build up to the Kuwait war and the war itself. So he was not a DAS for very long. His successor, David Mack, had a style which was more in tune with the Bureau's practices and the tensions were somewhat reduced. But it was not a system with which any of us deputies was entirely comfortable.

The leadership of the Department paid attention to South Asia mainly when there was a crisis. That has been and continues to be the general practice. I think this practice is detrimental to our policies towards that area. This is particularly true for India and to a lesser extent, Pakistan. India is a large country, but it does not have a status in the world that it thinks it ought to have. So the dialogue that it should have with the major powers, especially the U.S., would be greatly enhanced by continuing attention and even contact between Cabinet level officials from both countries. Our relationships with India would be particularly improved if our secretary of State or his deputy or one of the under-secretaries were to engage in a much more consistent conversation with the Indian government on subjects other than South Asia, as we do with some other major powers. It was always difficult to engage the Department's leadership on issue related to India in the normal course of events.

During my tour as DAS, there were a couple of occasions when the leadership had to focus on South Asia -- very intensely. Afghanistan, for example, was still a very hot subject for most of my tour, even though the Soviets withdrew soon after I took over the job. Our Embassy in Kabul was of course closed, but the issue of our support for the mujahideen was very much on the front burner. It was true that this issue was handled primarily by Mike Armacost, Bob Kimmitt and Arnie Kanter, the Under Secretaries for Political Affairs during my tour. Mike left for Tokyo soon after my assumption of the DAS duties; Kimmitt had a close personal relationship with President Bush and went to Bonn. So I served under three Under Secretaries, although only briefly for Mike.

Before I became DAS, when the Soviets withdrew, the U.S. expected that the communist government would fall rapidly -- some one was foolish enough to predict in writing that it would be gone within "24 hours." In fact, the government stayed in power and a prolonged struggle ensued. There were negotiations with the Soviets in Geneva about what policies we both would pursue after their withdrawal. Because the Soviets were not willing to halt their military supply pipeline to Afghanistan, we decided to continue arming our friends. This was a bizarre covert operation which was discussed in considerable detail in the American media. We liked to call this policy "positive symmetry" -- in contrast to "negative symmetry" in which neither side would arm its allies. So the fighting continued. In the period after the Soviet withdrawal, I think there was an expectation that the mujahideen, having fought the Soviets so well with our military hardware, could with little difficulty remove the puppet government out of power.

As time passed, we began to look at some alternatives, although we always insisted that Najibullah would have to leave, using some non-military approaches. The rebels formed what was called the "Afghan interim government," which was certainly interim, but hardly a government. It was headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan; it consisted of representatives of seven different guerrilla-cum-political groups. We spent a great deal of time bucking up -- trying at least -- the Afghan "interim" government. We tried to enlist the assistance of the Pakistanis and the Saudis in the hopes that this government -- or some elements thereof -- could garner enough support to be recognized as the government of Afghanistan, thereby marginalizing Najibullah and his cronies.

Our goals were first of all to replace the communist government and secondly to achieve some kind of political coherence so that we could speak with some confidence about a new Afghan government. At the time, we felt that our arms supply operations supported our goals. I believed that our actions were justified, although by the time I got involved there were a lot of people, including myself, who had considerable concern about how the arms were actually being distributed; we just didn't know -- we were spectators, mostly uninformed spectators at that. The control of the distribution was handled by Pakistani intelligence agencies. We wondered who it was that was actually getting our arms. The issue came to a head when the role of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was considered at the time to be a ruthless fundamentalist leader, became a subject for discussion. He was the mujahideen leader we loved to hate. Many thought that he was the darling of the Pakistani intelligence services, even though they vigorously denied it.

Hekmatyar had begun his career twenty years earlier with contacts with the Pakistani intelligence community. Then he was considered to be a young leftist student. It seemed to me that kind of career -- from left to far right -- suggested an opportunist. I wasn't convinced that he was not the main recipient of our arms; I thought that if he were that was a major mistake. I will admit that there weren't many better choices because none of the mujahideen leaders seem to command a very broad base of support and loyalty. Like the society they represented, these leaders were split by ethnic and tribal groupings. So while we spoke repeatedly about the need for a government with broad support, we in fact had very little to work with.

The situation in Afghan evolved during my three year stint as the DAS in charge of the region. In the Spring of 1992, Najibullah's regime finally collapsed soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I should mention that a few months earlier, Secretary Baker went to Moscow right after the abortive coup that took place in Russia. At that time, he negotiated an agreement with the Russians in which both sides promised to stop military supply to their respective friends. I should mention that the process of negotiating this agreement was fascinating. We had actually been discussing Afghanistan with the Russians at least since late 1989 or early 1990. I participated in those discussions; I accompanied John Kelly to Helsinki for the first discussions in the process. Not much was accomplished then, but the meeting was a useful first step.

The theatrics were very interesting. John Kelly, in introducing his team, said that he was sure that his Russian counterpart would be interested that two members of the American delegation were related to Russian field marshals. He was referring to Michael Malinoswski and to Teresita Schaffer -- my great great uncle was Finland's Marshal Gustat Mannerheim, who had started his career as a Russian officer. The Russians were very interested in this tidbit.

At the lunch following this first meeting, I sat next to one of the two Russian political counselors attached to the Russian embassy in Helsinki. Since Kelly's announcement, this Russian had checked up on who my Finnish relatives were and what they were doing. So we spent some time at lunch talking about my family. At one stage, he said that the Russians had always liked Mannerheim because they felt that he understood their country. He added that the Russians were in the process of rediscovering the Czar's foreign policy, which was based on geography. They had come to the conclusion that Mannerheim had understood that policy. This comment was followed by a long pause; then came the statement that the views he had just expressed were his personal opinion -- he seemed very proud that by 1990 a Russian could have a personal opinion.

Subsequent meetings took place in New York at the UN. I remember two or three of them. Kelly headed the first American delegation; after that, John Wolf and I jockeyed for who was going to be in charge -- a difficult problem since we were at equivalent rank representing two different bureaus in the Department -- he IO and I NEA. Our opposite number was Brontso, who was the Russian UN permanent representative whom the Russians designated because of his earlier experience in Afghan issues.

I don't remember the details of the discussions, but I do remember that we discussed the possible ingredients of an agreement as well as the key issue of military supplies. But the talks did not find common ground. Eventually, the Afghan issue became more pressing. The Russians appointed a new ambassador to Washington, who was alleged to be close to the Kremlin. This new ambassador and Under Secretary Kimmitt began another round of discussions, covering much of the same ground as we had. But it was clear that by this time the Russians were interested in finding a solution and that agreement to stop military aid from both countries was getting closer and closer. One interesting aspect of the total process was that when the Russians left Afghanistan in 1989, it was we who were interested in a suspension of arms supplies but the Russians resisted. But by 1992, the positions had shifted and although we covered this up with a lot of verbiage, it was we who had been the more reluctant party. It was the Russians who were pushing for an arms cut-off. This was probably due to their confidence in Najibullah's staying power which was still important to them. We had become less confident that we were backing a winning horse.

Kimmitt and the Russian ambassador worked on a draft joint statement to be issued by both governments. Kimmitt kept his negotiating close to his vest. Occasionally, he would invite me and Peter Tomsen [Special Envoy to the Afghan Resistance] to his office where we were asked for our views on specific language. Sometimes, Mike Malinoswski, Kimmitt's special assistant, would ask me a question, but it was never clear to me if Mike was doing this at Kimmitt's request or on his own initiative. I remember being somewhat nervous about this process in part because I was never convinced that I had a full view of the proceedings. I was convinced that there was a separate US-Russia effort to show the world that the two powers could solve problems peacefully and Afghanistan became the show-case for this initiative.

I might just expand briefly on Peter Tomsen's role in the process. Afghanistan was a cause with a large following in Congress. The old Cold Warriors and the people interested in refugees could coalesce around the issue of Afghanistan; to them it was the cause of the decade. Some of these

people on the Hill felt that the Department was not paying sufficient attention to the issue. Congress -- primarily the intelligence committees -- finally persuaded the administration, under threat of legislation, to appoint a succession of special high level officials on Afghanistan. Charlie Dunbar and Maurice Ealum were both based in Washington, in NEA. They would travel periodically to the region; they spent a lot of time in Congress. But I don't think they had very much impact -- either in State or on the Hill. Following those came Ed McWilliams; he unlike his predecessors, worked in our Embassy in Islamabad in the late 1980s. But that did not satisfy the interested parties on the Hill; so McWilliams was instructed to continue reporting through the Embassy, but his messages did not need the approval of the Ambassador or anyone else at post. So he sort of reported to ambassador Oakley -- had to by law -- but it was a very loose relationship. In fact, his base was in Washington.

McWilliams was followed by Peter Tomsen. He was given the personal rank of ambassador. He was based in Washington, but spent at least one-third of his time in South Asia and the Middle East. I was accustomed to the McWilliams model. Ed is an unusual guy; he is a very energetic political reporter. He told me once that he loved insurgencies; he was fascinated by them. He decided early in his stint as the Afghan expert that our policy toward Afghanistan was wrong -- not in terms what we were doing, but in terms of whom the Pakistani middlemen were backing. So he focused on that issue; he felt that our support should swing to Ahmad Shah Massoud, another guerrilla leader. He was probably right except that Massoud was a Tajik, a small minority in Afghanistan. So Ed and Bob Oakley had a very difficult relationship -- as Bob did with much of the Embassy. Oakley made it clear that when Ed was about to leave he did not cherish the thought of a successor with the same charter.

That was one of the reasons that Peter Tomsen's assignment was set up differently. The other reason was that the Afghan watchers in Congress were obsessed with the idea that the special Afghan "expert" needed a higher rank. Peter had been a senior officer and therefore was certainly a logical choice to be anointed with the personal rank of Ambassador. So for this assignment, he was called "Ambassador Tomsen"; he later went out to head an embassy. Peter was also an unusual person. He is very much of a loner; he does not share information very easily. He was an excellent political reporter. He is very energetic; loved his assignments overseas; dreaded Washington tours. He dealt with his Washington colleagues as an embassy might deal with the desk officer or other Washington officials. He had an awkward bureaucratic home base in Washington; he was considered a part of the Under Secretary's office, but was physically located in NEA from which he drew his administrative support.

Peter had one staff assistant and one secretary -- a very modest infrastructure. He sat across the hall from the Afghan desk officers -- two of them. So when Peter was in Washington, he became the most difficult bureaucratic relationship that I had to deal with. He also had a difficult relationship with the Afghan desk. Peter did not fit into a neat organizational chart, either on paper or in his mind. He wrote papers which did not fit a recognized role as Washington has defined it from time immemorial. He would convene meetings -- which I squirmed through; all ended inconclusively. I had learned, particularly from my experience as President of the Dhaka American school board, that after a certain amount of debate, the chairperson would rule that the group had reached a decision and would then make assignments to the meeting participants. Peter could never bring himself to reach that point, but at the same time resented anyone at his

meetings trying to reach conclusions and define an action program. After all, these were his meetings. So we were faced with almost non-stop awkwardness in our interactions with Peter. As I said, he would spend many weeks overseas; it was clear that his relationship with the Embassy in Pakistan was just as awkward as with us. He did not fit into either Islamabad or Washington. I don't think he realized how demanding he was. He would ask for things that he probably should not have demanded -- e.g. assistance from his control officer in the Embassy which was not appropriate -- things he should have done himself.

He would periodically file long, long cables -- of course uncleared and unapproved. Invariably his judgments and those of the Embassy would be slightly at odds; any effort to reconcile these views was always difficult. Peter spent a lot of time in Peshawar, as he was supposed to, seeing various Afghan leaders. He did the same in Baluchistan. To his great frustration, he only got into Afghanistan -- Kabul -- at the very end of his tenure -- after Najibullah's downfall. But, as I have suggested, he never fit into a bureaucratic process with which we felt comfortable and on which he could have had some impact. While his reporting on his conversation with Afghan personalities was always fascinating and did raise some new insights, I had real problems with his judgments about a number of policy issues. I felt that he had also been captivated by Ahmad Shah Massoud and to a lesser extent by the former King of Afghanistan whom Peter met in Rome on a couple of occasions.

After my experiences with special envoys, I have come to the conclusions that such assignments do not fit the State bureaucracy very well. Some extraordinary people may be able to make it work, but they are rare. I don't like the model for another reason: it almost automatically degrades the work done through the normal chain of command. The regular organization is almost forced to spend an extraordinary amount of time trying to figure out what this new appendage is trying to do.

The current administration has used the "special" designation quite often -- largely because the senior officials find it easier just to turn to one person instead of having to listen to the views of a multitude of interested bureaus and offices. But I think in fact such a "special" office or person complicates an assistant secretary's already complex assignment. In fact, that person does not and could not take over all of the work that is involved in the U.S.'s relationship with another country. So in fact, what appears to be a unifying concept to the senior officials, becomes a divider in the real world. The "special" focuses on the problem, but the desk can not ignore that problem as she or he goes about his daily routine. So at the bottom of the bureaucracy, the "special" appendage creates more work than it saves.

The one case with which I am familiar which ended up working quite well was the Kirby "peace process" operation which I described earlier when I was on the Egypt desk and we had a common deputy. This was an arrangement rife with peril except for the fact that the three of us had a clear understanding that we needed to be in very close contact in order to make it work. We were all on the same policy wavelength and our offices were all within ten feet of each other.

We were really not privy to the composition and magnitude of the U.S. arms supply program. We did have enough information to make some educated guesses which I think were reasonably accurate -- at least on what kinds of weapons we were providing. Many of the decisions on this

issue had been made long before I became the DAS.

I did not know where the Kimmitt negotiations on cutting off arms supplies were headed and, as I said, was somewhat nervous about the whole process.. That is not surprising since the area specialist is usually nervous about a negotiation in which she or he did not fully participate, and this one was really part of a much broader process between us and the Russians. In any event, the negotiations had not come to closure when all of a sudden the political situation changed in Moscow. As I said, Baker went to Moscow right after the aborted coup in the fall of 1991. Baker was accompanied by Bill Burns, who at the time was the deputy director of the Policy Planning staff. Bill was a young officer who had risen through the ranks very rapidly, but never let that go to his head. He found ways to keep in close touch with the experts in whose issues he was being involved. After Dennis Ross, the S/P Director, assigned the Afghan problem to Bill, he began a concentrated indoctrination course. Before leaving for Moscow, he wrote down all the telephone numbers where I might conceivably be found -- in case he had to get a hold of me in a hurry. That was a clue that Baker wanted to settle the Afghan issue during his stay in Moscow. In fact, Burns did call me a couple of times, essentially to discuss some specific words or phrases. After each conversation, Burns reminded me that our discussion had never taken place. I should mention that I had given him my entire file on the draft statement that Kimmitt and the Russian ambassador had been working on. I circled some of the key words or phrases which had a history to them and which were deemed to be important to the Afghans and the Pakistanis. The Burns calls were clearly unauthorized and perhaps even in contravention of specific orders not to discuss what Baker was working on with anybody.

In the end, there was a joint statement issued in which both countries pledged that beginning with the new year -- which was less than three months away -- no arms would be shipped to Afghanistan. By then, I think that was a wise outcome. It seemed to me that a continuing weapons supply program was only contributing to the continuation of hostilities with no certain winner in sight. If the Russians were willing to halt their support of their clients, we should reciprocate and halt all arms shipments to Afghanistan.

There was a substantial body of opinion in the U.S. -- but not in the U.S. government -- that we should unilaterally halt our supply program -- which included Stinger missiles -- because it was not helping in attaining our political goals and it was just arming lots of people over whom no one had any real control. We had already witnessed the purchase of a Stinger missile by one of the small Gulf States -- Qatar, I think -- from an Iranian middleman. That sent a real shock wave through the U.S. intelligence community and the government in general, including Congress, particularly since there were widespread rumors of other Stingers being peddled in the area. It was becoming evident that we might well encounter serious problems if our supply program were to continue. We were really not privy to the composition and magnitude of the U.S. arms supply program. We did have enough information to make some educated guesses which I think were reasonably accurate -- at least on what kinds of weapons we were providing. Many of the decisions on this issue had been made long before I became the DAS.

While discussions were going on at higher level about the termination of the weapons supply program, I had a number of discussions with people in the Russian embassy. One of that staff was a counselor -- or first secretary -- who was the expert on South Asia. He would ask to see me

periodically and we would talk about the situation and its evolution. As you could well expect, our early conversations were well guarded; we became franker as time passed. The first time we had a really candid substantive exchange was in April, 1992 after the Russians had requested formal Foreign Ministry to Department of State talks on Asia. By their definition, Asia included both East and South -- from the Pacific to Iran -- which included Afghanistan. The Russian government sent a delegation to Washington; it spent most of its time talking to the East Asia Bureau, but it also spent an afternoon with me.

As luck would have it, while the delegation was talking to the East Asia assistant secretary, the crisis in Kabul came to a head and Najibullah was overthrown, taking refuge in the UN mission in Kabul. We had received an assessment cable from Pakistan and some news reports. I sent that material to the head of the Soviet delegation with a note that it might be of interest to him. The next day, that official opened the meeting with a comment that although he was still interested in covering all major issues in Asia, he wanted to know our assessment of the safety of the Russian embassy and its personnel in Kabul. They were obviously concerned that with the downfall of Najibullah, their staff might well be at risk. Nothing in fact happened, but I did believe that the Russians were right to be concerned. I thought that the Russians' question was particularly revealing as it came out the first moment of what was to be a wide ranging dialogue.

After the Russian chairman raised the issue, we had a very frank exchange of views. What was particularly striking was how close our two assessments of the situation in Kabul was. Both sides had essentially the same judgment on the political instability in Afghanistan then evident and likely to continue in the foreseeable future. We also agreed in the main on who the winners and losers were in Afghanistan. Obviously, the Russians knew more about the government which had just been overthrown -- they had a huge presence in Kabul and we had none. We knew more about the mujahideen. We asked a lot of questions about what their diplomats in Kabul were reporting. Both sides had reached the same conclusions about the Afghan situation.

The arms cut off did not have an immediate impact on the level of fighting in Afghanistan. The three months lead time that the Russian-US agreement provided gave all sides in Afghanistan an opportunity to stock pile arms and ammunition. The lead time was absolutely necessary because the supply system had so many people involved -- particularly our process -- that without it we would have been immediately in violation of the agreement. The time was required to shut down the pipeline.

By the time I left, Najibullah's government had fallen; he was still alive as a refugee in the UN mission. There had been some negotiations -- unsuccessful -- to try to get him some safe passage to India; the mujahideen had absolutely no interest in that proposition.

Eventually, Najibullah was hung from a lamp post. In light of the instability in Afghanistan, I was very pessimistic about that country's future by the time I left the DAS job. In retrospect, I was not convinced that our 1989 decision to continue our arms supply program had been wise. Of course, that was with 20-20 hindsight; at the time, I think almost everyone agreed with it. By 1992, I wondered if we had been right in our judgments; we might have been better off just to unilaterally cut off the supplies and encourage the Russians to do the same.

Even more fundamentally, I became very pessimistic about the influence an outside power like the U.S. could bring to bear on situations like Afghanistan. I didn't feel that any of the mujahideen leaders were interested in our views much less to go along with any of our suggestions. Once the Taliban became the ruling group in Kabul -- long after I had left the DAS job -- this problem became very acute. We now have a bunch of rather young people, inexperienced in governing, whose concept of religion and politics leads them to the conclusion that what the rest of the world thinks is of no importance. That means that all of the traditional things that diplomats do to try to persuade the leadership of another country to change behavior or at least to bring greater coherence to its policies and to bring their actions in greater conformity with world norms did not work in Afghanistan; they had a very disparate leadership which had no interest at all in the views of anyone else. Periodically, we have tried a variety of approaches to the Taliban including alliances with people who had far better connections with the Taliban -- e.g. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia which was prepared to spend vast amounts of money and had Islamic credentials. We have participated in various international groupings to discuss the Afghan problem; there was never much disagreement on what was wrong in Afghanistan, but to develop a strategy which might have some chance of success had proved very difficult. By now we have had three or four special UN envoys who were creative and resourceful, but have never been able to have any influence in Kabul.

I think it is worth noting that even after the withdrawal of the Russian troops, the fall of the Najibullah government and the cessation of arms deliveries, the U.S. maintained considerable interest in Afghanistan. One reason we did not change was because of inertia; we had been worrying for so long about that country that it was very hard to stop. Then there is the humanitarian reason: about one-third of the Afghan population had fled or had been murdered. Many were still refugees in neighboring areas, particularly in Pakistan whose future was important to us. There was also the problem of chaos in Afghanistan that might have spilled out over its borders. We don't like chaos, particularly in areas where we have a major stake such as South Asia. This is not the "domino" effect that we have worried about in other parts of the world; this potential spread of chaos was much messier and very difficult to assess. It was more like an epidemic against which no vaccine had yet been discovered.

Our main concern was the stability of Pakistan, closely followed by the danger of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism to troubled areas: Kashmir, parts of the Middle East. Today I think we can see that this danger has become fact -- Kashmir for sure and other unstable areas as well. There is some evidence that these fundamentalists have shown up in Egypt and in other parts of Africa.

In addition, we were and are concerned by the narcotics trade. If you take Afghanistan and the Northwest frontier area of Pakistan, you will find the second largest opium producer in the world. In the early 1990s, there was essentially no control over the growing of opium and its distribution in that part of the world. It was essentially a booming enterprise from which various entrepreneurs made a fortune -- if they didn't end up murdered or imprisoned. These issues were in play at the beginning of the decade and are still alive and well today. I think despite that fact Afghanistan does not command as much high level attention today as it did ten years ago. I certainly don't think that Mike Armacost's and Bob Kimmitt's successors spent as much time on Afghanistan as those two did. The Secretary's opportunities to look at Afghanistan are few and

far between -- at least until the bombing of our facilities in Africa. My real concern about Afghanistan is that I don't see what we or anyone else can do to bring it back into the family of nations. I see the problem, but not the solution.

C. DAVID ESCH
Afghanistan Desk Officer
1993

Mr. Esch was raised in Wisconsin and educated at the University of Oregon and Vanderbilt University. He joined USAID in 1987 in the Office of International Training, and in 1989 joined the Foreign Service, working in the Office of Education Study of Human Resources Development (HRD). Continuing in this general field, Mr. served in Moscow and Ankara with USAID. He also served in the State Department as Desk Officer for Pakistan and Afghanistan and in the private sector dealing with educational development. Mr. Esch was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.

Q: Well, we can come back to it. After you had your tour in Pakistan, what was your next assignment?

ESCH: I returned to Washington and became the Pakistan-Afghanistan desk officer for the two countries and did that for about six months while I tried to pass my language requirements to stay in the Foreign Service. I spent a month in Guatemala since I was studying Spanish and once again did not pass the test. After the experience with the desk I left the Foreign Service.

Q: Do you want to speak about your experience at the desk?

ESCH: Yes. Pakistan and Afghanistan programs, while they were not large at that point, because they had come down quite a bit in size from their heyday, were still very high profile programs in so far as the Administrator's office went, and in so far as specifically the Regional Administrator for Asia went.

Q: What about Afghanistan?

ESCH: That program was always difficult because you were doing a cross border program and you were never really having Americans into Afghanistan, except in very rare exceptional cases. You were dealing with Afghans who were taking things over, so things like payments for teachers for teacher training or teaching were always difficult on documents or evaluations of programs to see what was really done.

Q: You were carrying out a regular type program?

ESCH: We were trying to carry out a fairly regular type program and this was in the days before the Taliban made their moves or even developed, so there was real hope in several periods that

peace would come and there would be a whole bunch of people ready to actually move back into universities and help out. I was very impressed by some of the teacher training that was done by AID in the sixties in the U.S. Some of the teachers were still around and AID was helping to upgrade them and bring them up to date.

Q: Go back and remind us of why we were operating in the country...why we couldn't be in the country.

ESCH: Primarily because of the internal war... At that time it became internal. Earlier it had been the Russians supporting the government in Afghanistan so we weren't there. We were supporting the Pakistan government and some of the groups in Afghanistan in their fight against the Russians. We turned, then, when the Russians pulled out and the groups started fighting amongst each other and different days or different parts there were moves to support or withdraw support in different ways from different groups. There were a lot of maneuvering. The hope was that one or two of them would join together and bring peace.

Q: The issue for us was primarily security?

ESCH: Primarily security but here was some intent on development as well, meaning that there was some effort to get people back to normal life, to get them out of Pakistan and to be there. That was part of the intent with the schools and clinics and things, because they had become a great burden upon Pakistan-all the people who had become displaced people.

Q: There was no direct assistance since the cross-border was closed.

ESCH: Yes, was closed off.

Q: Can you tell me about that?

ESCH: I think if I remember right, that the closing of the Afghan program was partially due to the economics of AID itself, and having to make a choice, and the people on the Hill went along with the choice. The Afghan program did not look like one that was going to turn around anytime soon, therefore it was in for a very long period. There was no political support anymore for that. They just didn't have much of a voice within Congress or within the agency.

Q: Anything else inaudible.....in that position how did you find it?

ESCH: I found it very good to be a desk officer, because you really do learn a lot about other agencies. In my position I had several things to do with the Treasury, several things to do with OPIC and Import Export Bank as well, because the closing down of the AID project was impacting some of the major investments by U.S. private corporations in the energy sector.

ESCH: Well, because AID's money had to be pulled out, the whole deal was very rocky. A couple of generator plants did not go on and only one did. They consolidated all their resources to do the one but not the other two. There were going to be three. The power sector was really impacted by AID's pulling out. Not that AID had that much money in it but AID's money was

key to quite a bit of other money.

ANTHONY C. ZINNI
Commander-in Chief
CENTCOM (1997-2000)

General Zinni was born and raised in Pennsylvania. After graduating from Villanova College he joined the Marines, which became his lifelong career. His distinguish career took him to Vietnam, Okinawa, Philippines and Germany, where he served in senior level positions. Attaining the rank of General, Zinni served as Commander-in-Chief of CENTCOM, where he was deeply involved in worldwide missions including Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. General Zinnia was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: Well CENTCOM, you were in CENTCOM both as deputy and the commander from when to when?

ZINNI: '96 to 1997 as the deputy. '97 until 2000 as the commander.

Q: Talk a bit about at that time how was CENTCOM seen as an instrument. How about Afghanistan? Did we just write this off?

ZINNI: Yes, I think in my time there if I had to look back and see something we should have done better, we never put pressure on the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. They got a free ride and sanctuary. We blew up any consideration of supporting the northern alliance until after 9/11 or, at least encouraging them or supporting them in some way. It was difficult to get support for places like Uzbekistan that was a major drug route for Al Qaeda and Taliban were using them to move the drugs through. And they were running their own operation, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and others. We didn't, we weren't giving enough support to make them worry about their own backyard.

I think at the time there was hope that we could convince the Taliban to expel Al Qaeda or come around. Remember, Bill Richardson went and the Saudis were making offers, we were going there and trying to talk to them. I think there was still a belief that at that time that the Taliban could be either pressured or brought around or cajoled to clean up Al Qaeda. That probably was naïve. We probably shouldn't have done that. We didn't even have a war plan for Afghanistan. You could direct it with war plans but in retrospect, it was a free ride. It was a sanctuary with a free ride. Maybe naïvely hoping that somehow the Taliban would come around. We should have realized the Taliban was not going to come around. We needed to do something about it. But you know, we were focused on Iran and Iraq and Korea and other things, Kosovo and everything else that was going on. The Nairobi bombings were somewhat of a wake-up call, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, but still, you know, it wasn't anything that people had to, were thinking through. After the embassy bombings when the president wanted to find targets for Al Qaeda, and we shot those targets, we shot those camps, there was a 50-50 chance you might have civilians in that camp. It

looked stupid. You destroyed a bunch of jungle gyms so it was worth a shot. We could not not take the shot. And then the CIA came up with these targets in Khartoum which I didn't understand.

Q: They blew up an aspirin factory.

ZINNI: Yes and there were more targets. We got rid of the other ones. They wanted me to shoot this one and I shot it because, you know, at one time twice removed it seemingly supported some program. And that made us look even worse. That one I never understood. It wasn't even on my target list. It was a surprise to me.

ALPHONSE F. LA PORTA
Political Advisor to Commander of NATO Forces in Southern Region
Naples, Italy (2000-2003)

Ambassador La Porta was born and raised in New York and educated at Georgetown and New York Universities. After serving in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965. During his career the ambassador had several assignments in Washington in the personnel and administrative field. His foreign assignments include Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, New Zealand, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission, and Naples, Italy. In 1997 he was named Ambassador to Mongolia, where he served until 2000. Ambassador La Porta was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: Okay, well, what about how did the attack on the United States by Al Qaeda and all the subsequent move to Afghanistan affect what you were up to?

LA PORTA: From the U.S. Naval Forces in Europe standpoint we were a supporting command, therefore it was our job to get the forces through the Strait of Gibraltar or through airfields in our region and get them to where they needed to be, whether in Central Asia or elsewhere. We did not have a command and control responsibility, so our job as a supporting command was to monitor those activities and be an "enabler" in order to get those forces to CENTCOM. In the NATO context we kept what the British would call a "watching brief" on developments in Afghanistan because to the extent there were problems that engaged NATO forces. There were air forces that went through Northern Europe or NATO AWACS involved were coming out of Holland. Operation Active Endeavor was a defensive response to counter terrorism and NATO was a full-fledged operator in the maritime area.

We did some planning in the POLAD office. We were asked by Admiral Johnson to figure out that, if NATO did take a role in Afghanistan, what might that be? How might that be constructed? What kind of command and control arrangements would be appropriate and how Southern region interests would be affected. I had an officer on my staff who quickly got very smart about Afghanistan and Iraq; he was also the officer who handled our Greek and Turk problems. During the post 9/11 period we had to become a lot more expert on terrorism and WMD; my British officer became the WMD guy and he had to know a lot more about chemical

warfare and other things. One of the things that we did from the POLAD office was to sponsor small meetings within the command like seminars. We brought down a British WMD expert from London to talk about chemical, biological, and nuclear warfare. We did half-day seminar to educate our senior commanders on the issues, terminology, etc. We had another program on counter terrorism and we had a seminar for the command on the rule of law.

One other thing that I was very pleased with was that we linked up with CSIS here in Washington, DC – the Center for Strategic and International Studies that is headed by Dr. John Hamry. John Hamry was deputy secretary of defense during the Clinton administration and was a good friend of Admiral Johnson's. We worked with Simon Serfaty of CSIS to run a two-day conference in Naples for military commanders from Central Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, people from NATO and our usual Southern region allies on challenges to this Southern region from transnational threats.

KENTON W. KEITH
Coalition Information Center
Islamabad, Pakistan (2001)

Ambassador Keith was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri. After graduating from the University of Kansas he served with the US Navy before entering the Foreign Service in 1965. An Arabic speaking Officer, Ambassador Keith served as Public Affairs Officer and/ or Cultural Affairs in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Syria, France and Brazil before his appointment as US Ambassador to Qatar. His Washington service included several tours in senior positions with USIA. Ambassador Keith was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: Today is March 15, 2002. Since we last spoke you returned to service following the events of September 11. Can we go over this period?

KEITH: In late October 2001 I was asked if I would return to active duty service on a limited appointment to go to Islamabad, Pakistan, establish an information center for the coalition, and serve as media spokesman for the coalition. For several weeks, conversations had taken place between the White House, the Department of State, Pentagon, the British prime minister's office and the government of Pakistan about the establishment of the center. Major issues of staffing and location had already been addressed, and much was in place in Islamabad when I arrived in November.

On a daily basis the press contingent in our briefing center was composed of the world's television networks and correspondents of its major newspapers. But of special relevance to the Center was the Islamic press. Usually, more than half of the audience was composed of journalists from the Muslim world, including Pakistanis, Arabs and East Asians. My staff and I engaged actively with the Muslim media. We made a special effort to work with the Arab press.

I made myself available for background and on- the- record briefings and a number of on camera interviews.

My job was two-fold: First, to counter the misinformation that bedeviled our efforts in Afghanistan, basically involving developments on the military front, but also on the impact the war was having on innocent civilians. Second, to counter the belief in much of the Muslim world that the Coalition was engaged, not in a war against terrorism, but a war against Islam. The basic hostility of the Islamic media was a reflection of public perceptions throughout Islam. Reaction to our bombing was extremely negative. The Coalition was believed to be acting without authority, without proof of a case against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, and especially without the proper regard for innocent life.

Q: How long did you stay in Pakistan?

KEITH: It was an expensive operation to run, with a staff drawn from various countries who had to be supported. We decided to close down the operation when Kandahar fell to Coalition forces and the so-called Northern Alliance, marking the end of major combat operations. There was still fighting going on in remote areas, but the Taliban was a spent force in terms of being able to take and hold territory.

Q: What do you think your center accomplished?

KEITH: Well, certainly we took the media field away from exclusive exploitation by the Taliban ambassador in Islamabad. We were able to refute his outlandish claims as soon as he made them, rather than waiting for many hours while London and Washington reacted. But did we change the anti-Western attitudes in the Islamic world? No, I think not. And of course Bin Laden is still at large.

But we did leave on a rather optimistic note. The Coalition can be proud of the fact that the widespread starvation predicted for the winter of 2001-2002 in northern Afghanistan by international organizations was prevented by a truly massive effort, at the heart of which was the U.S. Also, there is some room for optimism for the rebuilding of Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai seems to have the respect of most of the political factions in Afghanistan, and has gotten off to a reasonably good start as interim leader. The Bonn pledging conference has established the will of the developed world to come to Afghanistan's aid with billions of dollars. I would say that the elements are in place for a positive, if challenging, future for the country. But the U.S. and our coalition partners will probably need to assist Afghanistan in many ways for years to come.

JAMES DOBBINS

**State Department; Mission to Afghanistan, Representative to the Afghan Opposition
Kabul/Bonn (2001-2002)**

Mr. Dobbins was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1942 and graduated from Georgetown University. He served in a number of posts including Strasbourg,

Paris, London and Bonn. In 1991 he was named ambassador to the European Community. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: What happened to you?

DOBBINS: Well, I had been assuming that I would leave the department at this stage. I had been doing job interviews and looking for other opportunities. From a financial standpoint, it certainly made sense to retire. I had 37, 38 years of government service at that point, so financially I had incentives to leave and do something else, and then 9/11 came along and I was asked to do Afghanistan, which I did and which kept me in service for another, I guess, six or eight months.

Q: What were you doing in Afghanistan, or should we try this another time?

DOBBINS: Why don't we do one more and we can probably wrap it up with Afghanistan?

Q: Okay, well, then we'll talk about Afghanistan the next time, and we'll also talk about what you've been doing in Rand.

DOBBINS: Okay, sure.

Q: Okay, today is the 28th of April, 2004. Jim, first the dates. In Afghanistan, when did you get involved in Afghanistan.

DOBBINS: I was asked to become the representative to the Afghan opposition in October of 2001. I engaged in some shuttle diplomacy in the region and then represented the U.S. at the Bonn conference, and then we installed a new government and then I went to Karzai's inauguration and raised a flag at the embassy in mid-December, and then came back and continued to oversee Afghanistan on an interim basis from the State Department until I left. I left on April 30, so 1 October to April.

Q: In the first place, what were sort of your orders, your instructions, whatever you want to call them? What were you supposed to be doing?

DOBBINS: The idea was to try to form, as quickly as possible, a successor regime to the Taliban, which would have brought acceptance and legitimacy in Afghanistan itself and would prevent the opening of a power vacuum and perhaps a continued civil war once we and our allies in Afghanistan had succeeded in ousting the Taliban. So the initial mandate was to represent the U.S. to the various elements of the opposition to the Taliban, some of which were expatriates, some of which were actually fighting in Afghanistan itself, to see whether a broad coalition among them could be formed, which would allow a successor regime to be quickly installed. My task was to represent the U.S. to them and to the other countries involved that had an interest in Afghanistan, so essentially to do the international diplomacy attendant on the military campaign, which was then just taking shape.

Q: Well, in the first place, what was your relationship with the Pentagon and the military side of things?

DOBBINS: The Pentagon were quite supportive of this. They recognized a need for this piece to be put in place. I flew down and spent a day with General Franks, the CENTCOM (Central Command) commander, who was very interested in this. He briefed us in some detail about his intentions, his plans, where the campaign stood. I spent some time at the Pentagon, met with Paul Wolfowitz, and spent a lot of time at the CIA getting briefed on their operations in Afghanistan. Then, I formed a team, which included representatives of the JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff), of OSD and the CIA, as well as State, who traveled with me and participated in all of these discussions.

Q: What was sort of the international practical interest in Afghanistan?

DOBBINS: Well, you had the countries that had been pulling apart for 20 years, which were Pakistan, Iran, India, Russia, principally. You had the other neighboring states that had varying interests, but were less significant: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan. China has a tiny border. It didn't play any significant role. I already mentioned Iran. Then you had our allies in Europe: Germany, France, the UK, principally, who were prepared to contribute to both operations against the Taliban and then to peacekeeping in the country. We had Japan, which was a major potential economic donor. Those were the major countries. The forum for bringing a number of them together was called the two-plus-six mechanism. These were the neighbors of Afghanistan plus Russia and the U.S. So the neighbors were Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, so it was two-plus-six. They met in New York initially at sub-ministerial level, and I attended that meeting for the U.S., along with Richard Haass from the State Department. Then the next day we met at ministerial level and Colin Powell attended that meeting.

That meeting authorized and mandated Lakhdar Brahimi, who was the UN secretary general's special representative for Afghanistan to call the Bonn conference and to bring the elements of the opposition together. We had been hoping that they were going to get together of their own accord, and there had been various schemes to do so, but one side or the other always pulled back, so we decided to take the initiative and have the UN call the conference. Then my job, essentially, was to round up the participants and make sure they actually were prepared to show up.

Q: Well, of the neighbors, in the first place, how did you deal with Iran? We didn't have diplomatic relations with the country.

DOBBINS: I saw that was going to be critical and I secured an agreement from Powell that I would be able to deal with them normally in any circumstances involving Afghanistan. They participated in these meetings in New York.

Q: Was that their UN representative?

DOBBINS: Their foreign minister.

Q: Oh, their foreign minister came.

DOBBINS: And their deputy foreign minister, who was my colleague in Bonn, came as well, so we met them there on a multilateral basis, but there I did not have any bilateral dealings with them. Powell did shake hands with the Iranian foreign minister, which was observed and photographed and commented on, at the conclusion of this meeting, of this multilateral meeting. But then, my next discussions with them were in Bonn. They sent a delegation and we met quite frequently. We scheduled a meeting every morning in which the Italians and Germans also participated. But then I also saw them sort of casually. We were all in the same building and attending meetings and meals and often they and I would show up first for breakfast, so I'd go over and sit at their table and we'd have an informal conversation over breakfast in the morning, and then we'd have a more formal conversation. By and large, I met with them at least a couple of times a day, and over time they became quite helpful.

Q: I would have thought that they would have had a certain sympathy for the Taliban at one point, or had they sort of shut this extreme Islamism or not?

DOBBINS: They may have had at some fairly distant point, but they had been supporting the Northern Alliance in trying to overthrow the Taliban for a number of years. The Taliban was anti-Shia, was very repressive of the Shia minorities in Afghanistan. At least for a time, the Taliban were actively promoting the drug trade, which tended to go through and disrupt Iran. The Iranians had something like, I think, 2 million Afghan refugees in their territory whom they desperately wanted to ship back to Afghanistan, and they knew they couldn't as long as the Taliban were in control. So they had a major incentive as regards refugees.

The disorder along the border had been very expensive. They'd lost several hundred, by some count, several thousand, border police to areas in Afghan drug incursions and other things, so they were paying significant costs and had made a significant commitment. They were the principal source, I think, of training and arms for the Northern Alliance.

Q: Did they have any warlords under their jurisdiction or support?

DOBBINS: They supported most of the Northern Alliance elements. The warlord who was in the area who was closest to them was Ismail Khan, and just by reason of proximity they probably had more influence and more support for him than for the ones who were more distant and more difficult for them to reach. But they certainly were supporting the Tajik core of the resistance as well.

Q: At any point, I mean, in the formal, informal conversations, particularly the informal ones, did the thought of, "When are we all going to get back together again?" come up or not?

DOBBINS: You mean U.S.-Iranian?

Q: Yes.

DOBBINS: Well, they knew that my brief didn't extend that far. They would occasionally try to pass along information. For instance, when this ship was seized on its way to Palestine with arms, they made clear that this hadn't been authorized by the president and that he was as

annoyed and puzzled as we were, and if we had any information as to who was responsible, they would appreciate it. But, by and large, we stuck to Afghanistan.

Q: In the meetings and all, were they a positive force? Was everybody sort of really working off the same script?

DOBBINS: There were some differences. One of their core desiderata was that the shah of Afghanistan not return and reassume that office, since that would set, from their standpoint, an unhappy precedent. The shah, king as we called him, but the shah of Afghanistan in fact did want to return but was not looking to reassume the throne.

Q: He was an elderly man, wasn't he?

DOBBINS: He was an elderly man, and while some of his supporters had more grandiose ambitions for him and his role, he was prepared for quite a modest role. There was a significant royalist sentiment at the Bonn meeting, and this was an area where the Iranians were particularly sensitive. I think for a while they talked very positively with us but were sending less positive signals to some of the Afghans. When I called them on this and said that it was important that everybody be hearing the same thing, they altered their behavior and became considerably more helpful, not just in what they were saying to me, but what they were saying to the Afghans as well.

Q: Well, did you have any feeling that there was a division within the government? One always hears about the hard-liners and the less hard-liners and all.

DOBBINS: Yes, there were some, and occasionally there would be veiled allusions to these difficulties. I don't think there were that many, though, on Afghanistan. There were ones in other areas. For instance, they made pretty clear that probably others in their government without the support of their president had shipped these arms to the Palestinians, so yes, there were allusions of that sort. On Afghanistan, there weren't too many. The Iranians proved quite helpful on a couple of occasions.

First of all, they're the ones who insisted that the document, which emerged from Bonn, commit the Afghans both to democracy and to cooperation with the international community and the war on terror, which no one else had thought of. It was the Iranians who put both of those into the Bonn document. Then, in the concluding hours, the Iranian deputy foreign minister and I, along with the German and Russian and Indian representatives, sat up until 5:00 in the morning with the Northern Alliance representative, essentially bargaining him down from his maximal demands for number of seats in the government to something that was more acceptable to the rest of the group assembled there. So the Iranians played a quite helpful role.

Then the Iranian foreign minister was the most senior representative at Karzai's inauguration. He apparently heard that Ismail Khan was having some thoughts about whether he would show up, and so his plane flew into Herat on his way to Kabul and picked up Ismail Khan and brought him along, just to make sure that there was no doubt as to the full support for Karzai. So they were quite helpful throughout this process and continued to be. I met with them in Geneva a couple of

months later, and they offered to be helpful in building an Afghan national army. I met with the Iranian general who had been in charge of assistance to the Northern Alliance throughout the war and had been active in Afghanistan throughout this period. They offered to quarter, clothe, feed, pay and train 20,000 men. I said, "Well, some of that might be all right, but if you trained them and we trained them, then they might have conflicting doctrines," and the general just laughed and he said, "Well, we're still using the manuals you left in 1979, so you don't have to worry about that."

I said, "Well, maybe they'd have conflicting loyalties." And he said, "Well, we're still paying the troops you're using to chase down the Taliban. Are you having any difficulties with them?" And I had to admit we hadn't. They wanted to be helpful in Afghanistan, and while there may be elements of their intelligence service that were operating on a different agenda, both their military and their Foreign Ministry were trying, insofar as one can tell, to be supportive of the same goals as we were.

Unfortunately, there was no receptivity to this in Washington. I briefed Powell on these discussions, particularly the ones with the Iranian general and the offers, and he said, "That's very interesting. You have to brief Rice." So I'd brief Rice and she'd say, "That's very interesting. You have to brief Rumsfeld." So I finally briefed everybody in the situation room, all of them, and they listened and there was no discussion and there was never any follow-up. Powell sent a personal thank-you note to the foreign ministers of everybody who participated in the Bonn conference, except the Iranian group, who had been among the most helpful.

Q: What about on the Pakistan side, you mentioned, for example, the intelligence service. From the press or reading of the paper, I had the impression that the Pakistani intelligence service was almost in bed with the Taliban or something like that.

DOBBINS: Oh, more than that. The Taliban was a creation of the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence).

Q: Now it's sort of the chickens had come home to roost at this point. How did you find Pakistan dealing with this, with you?

DOBBINS: They were in a difficult position. Musharraf had, in the aftermath of 9/11, undertaken to abandon their commitment to the Taliban and had taken a number of steps in that direction. I met with the head of the ISI, the Pakistani intelligence service, in New York, a week or so after I took over. Then I met again with him in Islamabad, and I did that a couple of times, as well as meeting with others in the Pakistani government, the Foreign Ministry. There was always a question of whether they had completely severed their ties, and there were always reports that there were elements within the ISI that weren't fully under control and were continuing to support the Taliban, despite Musharraf's probably genuine desire that they not. And, of course, the Taliban and Al Qaeda elements are continuing to operate out of the areas of Pakistan that border on Afghanistan.

But, by and large, because the Pakistanis were so unpopular in Afghanistan as the result of their support for the Taliban, our effort was to neutralize them. They weren't likely to be helpful. We

just didn't want them to be unhelpful. They came to the Bonn conference, they had the bad judgment of sending their ambassador to the Taliban to the Bonn conference, which people raised eyebrows at, and he sort of sat in a room by himself and didn't get to talk to anybody much, because very few of the people there – this was a conference of anti-Taliban elements, so Pakistan had very little influence with them. There was a lot of antagonism toward Pakistan. But the Pakistanis by and large didn't make any difficulties. They went along with this unhappily but more or less cooperatively.

Q: Well, your brief was not the military campaign. I'm thinking along the Pakistani border and all, which the battle still continues there. Did that intrude or was it somebody else's problem?

DOBBINS: At the time I took this, the military campaign had hardly begun. While I was actually on the road, Kabul fell. I flew into Afghanistan and met with all of the Northern Alliance leadership just a few days after Kabul fell, and at that point there probably weren't more than 200 American soldiers in the whole country.

Q: This is tape nine, side one, with Jim Dobbins.

DOBBINS: And secured their agreement to come to the Bonn conference. At the Bonn conference itself, the Taliban had been chased out of most of northern and central Afghanistan at that point, but were still holding Kandahar and some of the south and Hamid Karzai was leading a group of insurgents that were besieging Kandahar and trying to force them out of there. He would call me every couple of days from the front for bulletins on what was happening in Bonn. I was kept apprised of the military situation, but I didn't have any real role with respect to it, no.

Q: This brings a question then, by the time you left in April, was there concern on the part of American military commanders or other people you were talking to that the United States was looking ahead to doing something in Iraq and so was limiting itself to Afghanistan or not?

DOBBINS: It was pretty evident that the administration wasn't going to commit the resources to Afghanistan that would have been needed to establish a stable and secure environment and allow reconstruction to go forward. When Rumsfeld first came to Kabul in early December and I met him at the airport and briefed him, he was going to be meeting Karzai and Fahim thereafter, and he said, "Well, what are they going to say?" And I said, "Well, they're going to ask for a larger peacekeeping force."

The Pentagon had reluctantly agreed to support a 5,000-man peacekeeping force for Kabul, which the British undertook to organize, so Rumsfeld said, "Well, what would a peacekeeping force take for the country as a whole?" And I said, "Oh, if Kabul takes 5,000, maybe it would take another 20,000 to at least secure the other major metropolitan areas." And he just blanched and shook his head, that clearly it was well beyond what he was prepared to support, and in fact the Pentagon opposed other countries participating in such a force, even without our participation for six months or so. Then, after six months or so, he changed his mind and was prepared to support it, but by that time countries that would have come in had lost interest and moved onto other issues. So it was definitely a missed opportunity.

Similarly, at the Tokyo donor's conference, where I accompanied Powell, we just pledged again the money we'd already allocated for Afghanistan. We had no new money, and the amounts that were being talked about at Tokyo, while they sounded big, were astoundingly small against the size of Afghanistan and the scale of its needs. Kosovo, after 11 weeks of air war, got 25 times more assistance in the first year after the war than Afghanistan got after 20 years of civil war on a per capita basis from the United States and from others in the international community. So it was pretty clear that this was definitely going to be a resource-constrained effort, and that the administration regarded this simply as the opening campaign in a broader war and didn't want to get bogged down, didn't want to make a major commitment and wasn't prepared to commit large-scale military or economic resources.

Q: Was Iraq a subject at all, just in talking to the American military and all?

DOBBINS: It was a subject here in Washington often enough. It was clear that there were elements in the administration that wanted to turn next to Iraq, and that was kind of common knowledge. I had mentioned this to Powell and Armitage several times. I mean, wasn't telling them anything they didn't know, but at this point it wasn't a certainty and I, frankly, at that point, had difficulty taking it very seriously, since there didn't seem to be any very compelling need to invade Iraq, which was quite obviously being adequately contained and constrained through the measures that were underway.

Q: Incidentally, were you running across in dealing with this, dealing with our own government, the Bush II administration had come in, and particularly Rumsfeld and all, with a real aversion to what was called nation-building.

DOBBINS: Right.

Q: Was that still a prevalent attitude?

DOBBINS: It was, and it was one of the things that colored their refusal to consider putting peacekeeping forces throughout Afghanistan. We had a number of discussions, interagency discussions, on this, and I was pushing the necessity. British diplomats were also pushing the necessity. The Pentagon was resistant. The military was resistant just on the usual grounds that they're resistant to getting committed to things and having their resources tied down. They didn't take a principled opposition to peacekeeping as a role. But I remember at one point, Elliott Abrams, who was in charge of an office in the NSC, which had some relevance to this, although it wasn't the office that was in direct charge, circulated a paper which broadly attacked the whole concept of peacekeeping and argued that it had been demonstrated not to work, which I was rather flabbergasted by.

So yes, the sort of ideological opposition to peacekeeping and to anything Bill Clinton might have done was an element. I don't know that it was the dominant element. I think the dominant element was a desire not to get bogged down in Afghanistan and lose our freedom of action vis-à-vis Iraq, but it was at least a secondary element, and it was probably important in the initial opposition of even allies doing this.

Q: Going back to the Russians, what sort of role did they play in this?

DOBBINS: Since their own forces had left Afghanistan, they had continued to back various elements there. They continued to back with money, equipment, and the Communist leadership that they had left behind. When that leadership was overthrown, they supported what became the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, so they were supporting the Tajik and Uzbek resistance to the Pashtun-dominated Taliban government. They, along with Iran and India, were the principal sponsors of the Northern Alliance. They were quite influential, and they were helpful. In fact, in the end, we had gotten a deal or close to a deal in Bonn, but it needed to be ratified by the Northern Alliance leadership then in control in Kabul, and I asked Colin Powell to get the Russians and other governments that might have some influence there to exert their influence, and he spoke to the Russian foreign minister. And the Russian ambassador in Kabul went in with a note, which the Northern Alliance foreign minister later told me was quite influential, because it said, "If you don't accept the deal that's been reached in Bonn, you should not anticipate any further Russian assistance," which he said definitely got their attention and was taken very seriously. So I think the Russians, like the Iranians, proved very helpful. Of course, the Russians were also facilitating our access to military facilities in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Q: I would think that maybe in the greater field of foreign affairs the Russians would say, "Fine, you do this," but I would think there would be the grinding of the teeth of Soviet military people to see American boots on the ground in Central Asia, in what had been the Soviet Union.

DOBBINS: I suppose so, and there may have been conservative elements that were opposed to this, but in addition to my discussions with the Russians and the envoy they sent to this meeting, we had fairly broad exchanges with them here. Armitage and his opposite number, the number two in the Russian Foreign Ministry came with a big interagency team and they spent a whole day discussing not just Afghanistan, but the region as a whole, but principally Afghanistan. So there were very extensive discussions with them, and they had made their choice and saw that this was an opportunity to develop their relations with Washington, and they did so successfully.

Q: How did you find the various groups in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance and others who were involved, when you initially went to make contact with them? Was the alliance really a close-knit one?

DOBBINS: Well, the first group I went to see was the royalists. I went and called on the ex-king, who lived outside Rome, and met his entourage. I then went to Pakistan and I met a number of the expatriate leaders who were living in Pakistan, and then I met the Northern Alliance foreign minister in Uzbekistan, in Tashkent. We had a meeting there and gave a press conference, and he said he would come to the Bonn meeting, although it wasn't yet decided that it would be in Bonn. He said, "I'll go wherever it is," and that was an important breakthrough, because they had been equivocal about whether they were prepared to participate before that. Then I flew into Bagram Airbase to meet the rest of the leadership, including Rabbani, who was their president and Fahim, who was the defense minister, and Qanuni, who was the interior minister, and a number of other generals and assorted dignitaries.

The Northern Alliance had some coherence. They were fighting together. They had lost

Massoud, who had been killed just around 9/11, also by Al Qaeda terrorists. So they'd lost their most charismatic figure, but they were still pulling together, and Fahim, who was acting as the defense minister, was apportioning aid that was coming in from the United States and the Iranians and the Russians to all of the factions. He wasn't holding it all for himself. But clearly, the individual military leaders had a good deal of autonomy and expected to play a political as well as military role. And there was a tension between Rabbani, who wanted to stay, and most of the rest of the alliance, which recognized that if they were going to form a broader coalition government with legitimacy and with adequate representation from the Pashtun elements, which most of them didn't represent, he was going to have to go and be replaced by somebody. So I got a clear sense from the foreign minister, the interior minister and the defense minister that they were prepared to see a new person brought in, and in fact, Abdullah, the foreign minister, suggested the name of Karzai as somebody that would be well suited to the task of leading the new government. He recognized that Rabbani would need to go, and he made clear to me that I ought to make clear to Rabbani that he had to go.

Q: Could you talk a little about Rabbani and your impression of him, and where had he come from?

DOBBINS: Well, he had been president. He had become president after Najibullah was overthrown. He was a dignified, older man, came from a religious upbringing and he was a religious intellectual, I guess, theologian. I mean, he wasn't fundamentalist in the sense that the Taliban was. He didn't hack off people's hands. But he was a conservative Islamic leader and was also a somewhat divisive figure. He had led the Northern Alliance through some of the worst elements of the civil war, and clearly was not a figure around whom the nation could rally, but with us he played a fairly straightforward role. He wasn't enthusiastic about leaving, he maneuvered to try to prevent it, but in the end he accepted it with good grace, participated in Karzai's swearing in ceremony and played politics thereafter in a not irresponsible way.

Q: Well, as you went into this, Afghanistan having a culture that's not ours, were you getting good briefing on what makes Afghans tick? I mean, tribal rule, tribal agreements and that sort of thing?

DOBBINS: Reasonably so. The U.S. had turned to this and begun to generate a lot of briefing papers and a lot of background material on Afghanistan, and people who had been Afghan experts and largely on the fringes of things suddenly became more sought after. I recruited one mid-grade Foreign Service officer who had a lot of experience in the region and had followed it for years, a guy named Craig Karp, who was a bit of a maverick in the Foreign Service, but who knew a lot about Afghanistan and about its policies. He'd been on the Policy Planning Staff, and Richard Haass, who was the head of the staff, recommended him. He looked a bit like an Afghan. He'd served there and he had the beard and spoke the language, and so I had him as my principal State Department guy on the team. Then I had people from OSD and JCS and CIA, some of whom knew a lot about Afghanistan, others of whom, like me, were just learning. I got support from the Bureau of South Asian Affairs in the State Department. I felt I was getting enough information to operate on, and obviously as I went around, I talked to people. I'd found out, having done this four or five times, that you don't necessarily need to know why people hate each other to know how to get them together again. The reasons they hate each other are

multiple, but the techniques you have for reconciling them are fairly limited, so while it's useful to know where the fault lines and tensions are, you don't necessarily have to have followed every turning point in their national history for the last 500 years. Afghans were, it turns out, a lot less conflicted than Yugoslavs. Yugoslavs hated each other for centuries. The Afghans, by and large, their complaints went back 20 years or so. They didn't start with the 9th century when you asked them why they were having difficulty getting along with the guy in the next room. With Yugoslavs, you got a multi-century discourse whenever you asked that question. With the Afghans, basically, they sort of feel they were all getting along fine until the place collapsed under the Soviet invasion. Their grievances by and large were grievances of the last couple of decades.

Q: Was Karzai a well-known figure before? He sort of burst on the stage, very charismatic, at least on TV.

DOBBINS: I wouldn't say he was well known. He was younger than most of the people I was dealing with, not terribly younger, but younger, I guess. Maybe he was in his late 40s, early 50s. Most of the people I was there with were a little older than that. He was from a fairly prominent Pashtun family, had been a participant in the resistance to the Soviet Union, had been a junior minister in an early Taliban government, but then had left. I think his father had been prominent, had been assassinated by the Taliban.

He had been active in the opposition to the Taliban, particularly internationally. The Iranians, the Russians, the Indians, all knew him pretty well, all had a favorable impression of him, and they all raised him with me as a possibility, before I had met him. I had spoken to him on the telephone, but I hadn't met him. So I would say he was one of a number of people in that category, of émigré leaders from prominent families. But he was one who had managed to maintain good relations with a very broad spectrum of people, which was unusual.

I think the first person who mentioned him to me as a possible successor to the Taliban and to Rabbani was the head of the ISI in Pakistan, and then the next person who mentioned him to me was the Northern Alliance foreign minister, who said he would be a good candidate, and then the Russian Ambassador and then the Iranian deputy foreign minister raised his name as a possibility. And all of them said they knew him and thought highly of him. He, of course, at that point was being supported by the U.S. in his insurgency efforts in southern Afghanistan, so he had an unusual ability to win the confidence of a wide variety of disparate governments and individuals.

Q: Did you find within the CIA, the Pentagon or Congress or something, in Iraq we had this exile group of Iraqis who had gained the year in the U.S. government. Was there anything comparable to that in Afghanistan, or were you given a fairly clean slate to deal with as far as advocates within our government?

DOBBINS: Well, there was less. There hadn't been much interest in Afghanistan on the part of the U.S. government prior to 9/11, and any efforts to undermine the Taliban were fairly modest. So some of the opposition figures were known in Washington, but they weren't prominent here. They hadn't found patrons within the administration. So, in that sense, yes, I had a pretty clean

slate in the sense that I wasn't getting pressure to favor this group or that group.

Q: Well, how did things develop as you went around to the various groups? In the first place, was there such a thing as you could sit down and talk to the Northern Alliance, or essentially were you having to talk to – I hate to overuse the word warlord, but various centers of power?

DOBBINS: There were four groups that ultimately were represented in Bonn, of which the most important was the Northern Alliance, and it had a single representative there. But at the same time, that representative made clear that he had difficulties with his own constituency. He had to satisfy a number of different constituencies and couldn't necessarily speak for Rabbani as president, particularly on the issue of whether he was going to be replaced, so we did need to talk to the others and we did. Zal Khalilzad, who was on the NSC staff at the time, was effectively my deputy in the Bonn negotiations. He was a native speaker of Afghan, and so he called Rabbani, he called Fahim, he called Ismail Khan on the telephone during the conference at various points to press on them certain positions.

I communicated with Fahim and Karzai through CIA channels. So, yes, we worked people who weren't at the conference site as well as those who were. In addition to the Northern Alliance, there was the royalist group, called the Rome group, because that's where the king was. There was a group of people who were more associated with the Pashtuns and with the Pakistanis, and then there was a fourth group of people who were more associated with the Iranians. So there were four groups, not all of equal weight. The Northern Alliance was the most important. The royalist group was the second-most important, and then the other two were smaller and less significant, but they all had to agree to the end, and there were 40 or 50 Afghans at the Bonn conference.

Q: Well, how did the conference go?

DOBBINS: The conference took place in a large conference facility where all of the participants and at least senior members of the national delegations had quarters. We all ate together in a big dining room. The Afghans and the UN met. The national delegations didn't actually attend the sessions. The sessions were between the Afghans, with Brahimi chairing, which began to develop a document, which ultimately became the agreement and, in effect, the new constitution of the government, or interim constitution. We were all kept apprised of the results and then worked with the Afghans on the fringes. So I had a suite and I would meet through the day with either delegations of people or individual Afghans, and then we would meet again with groups of national representatives or individual national representatives to work out different points, to try to agree on what we want the Afghans to agree on. The Afghans wanted us to do things. They wanted commitments on a peacekeeping force. They wanted things from us. So it was a bit like a mini United Nations, with a smaller number of countries and people, but it was multilateral diplomacy of a fairly traditional sort.

Q: These phrases get bounced around in the papers. I'm not going to pronounce it correctly, but they were all talking about having this loya jirga, or something. What was this called?

DOBBINS: The loya jirga, it just means a grand council, is the translation, and it's been a

traditional Afghan device, sort of proto-democratic. It represents the tribal and clan leaders of the society who periodically get together at a national level to debate and decide on big issues. And in the case of the Afghans, it effectively became a constituent assembly. You had one six months after the Bonn agreement, which endorsed and somewhat extended the government. It made it a somewhat larger government, and the interim government became a provisional government at that stage. Then you had one a few months ago which adopted a new constitution.

Q: As you were putting this thing together, all of you were doing with, did you have any feel, concern, were there groups within Afghanistan, either represented or not represented, that concerned you, that might be a really divisive group that had some power?

DOBBINS: Other than the Taliban, who were on the run at that stage, the Bonn meeting was broadly representative. The problem was that since the Taliban had pretty much monopolized leadership in the Pashtun areas of the country, which are probably more than 50 percent of the population, the Pashtun element in Bonn and the Pashtun element in the resultant government were less dominant than the Pashtuns felt they should be. Karzai was a Pashtun and the Tajik and Uzbek and Hazara, which are the Shia elements, which had composed the Northern Alliance, had a stronger position. They had the bigger ministries, for instance, in the government, so there was a perception, which has been a continued source of unhappiness on the part of elements of the Pashtun society, that they are underrepresented in this arrangement. Of course, the degree to which the military commanders like Ismail Khan and Dostum would respect the results was unknown, although by and large they did express their support, and by and large have proved willing to be gradually co-opted by the system and play within its rules, within some limits.

Q: Was the opium trade something that we were concerned about?

DOBBINS: Not at that stage. It certainly wasn't anything we were prepared to do anything about. The Taliban had effectively banned it, so it wasn't an immediate issue, but it was clear that the Pentagon took the position that they were not going to allow U.S. forces to be used in any respect in a counter-narcotics role. They were not going to use them to prevent cultivation, they were not going to use them to prevent manufacture, and they were not going to use them to prevent transporting.

The British made an effort by using money to buy the crops and by being willing to use their forces, at least in a limited fashion, to protect those who were supposed to be on behalf of the government destroying crops and interfering with the trade. But the U.S. has not put any significant money into this, and it's certainly not been willing to engage its forces. Nearly all the drugs go to Europe. None go to the United States, so our view, I guess, although it's not one that anybody ever expressed to me in these terms was, "It's not our problem." This attitude has since changed.

Q: What about India? With Pakistan so involved in this thing, I would have thought that the Indians would have seen this as a good chance to stick it to the Pakis or something like that.

DOBBINS: That was a problem. The Indians had been supporters of the Northern Alliance and wanted to help the new government, but they recognized to the degree the new government

became identified with them, it would be more difficult for Pakistan to acquiesce and more tempting for the Pakistanis to once again destabilize it. So while the Indians were quite helpful in Bonn and I worked quite closely with the Indian representative there, they had to be somewhat discreet in order not to sort of inflame the Pakistanis into again proving unhelpful. The Pakistanis were the one country that actually did have the capacity to completely disrupt this arrangement if they tried. But by and large, the Indians were prepared to be discreet and not use this occasion to make the Pakistanis even more miserable than they were.

Q: Was there on our part a concern that you were getting from others, saying, "Don't push the Pakistanis too hard because Musharraf is not in complete control. He's got his fundamentalist element, which is very strong in Pakistan, and we have to be a little bit careful about this."

DOBBINS: Yes, I stayed with our ambassador to Pakistan on both of my trips.

Q: Who was that?

DOBBINS: Chamberlin, Wendy Chamberlin. This was a real preoccupation with her. We were putting a lot of burdens on the Pakistanis. They were proving quite helpful in a number of fashions, but Musharraf did have significant opposition and there was only so far he was going to be able to go. By and large, however, as I've said, what we were looking for the Pakistanis to do during the period I was there was essentially to be passive, to not interfere with what we were doing, and they were with some exceptions willing to accede to that.

Q: Did the NSC play a role in what you were doing?

DOBBINS: Well, yes. Zal Khalilzad was the senior director of the NSC, and he was my deputy in the Bonn meeting.

Q: He was a native Pakistani. He's now there as ambassador.

DOBBINS: Native Afghan.

Q: But did he come with an attitude, because most people who come out of a country come with an allegiance, which almost gets magnified when they come to the United States and go back to the native country?

DOBBINS: He'd left fairly young. He may have been eight or nine or something like that, so he certainly had kept in touch. He knew a lot of the Afghans, he kept in touch with them over the years, and so he was well informed and was well known to many of the Afghans, but no, he didn't come with a bias and worked quite happily with me, and for this period under my direction. He succeeded me as the president's envoy for Afghanistan, and we worked together as a team, and he was extremely helpful because of his command of the language and his knowledge of the individuals. But on the political issues of how to share power in Afghanistan, there weren't passionately felt views in Washington and I was given pretty much a free hand. Essentially, anything we could get agreed was likely to be treated with a sigh of relief in Washington.

Q: Well, by the time you left in April, how had things gone?

DOBBINS: Well, initially they had gone well. The initial phase of the campaign was brilliantly successful; a new government had been immediately installed. The government was very progressive, saying all the right things. Karzai was telegenic and cooperative and moderate and broadly popular in the country. We were still trying to do this on the cheap. We still hadn't asked Congress for any money by the time I left, so we had virtually no money for any of the programs that needed to be done. We hadn't started training the police. We hadn't started training the army. We were just talking about all these things. We were still resisting an expanded peacekeeping role in the country, and opposition in the south and from residual Taliban elements in Pakistan was beginning to build. It was, in many ways, an opportunity that was being wasted.

MARY A. WRIGHT
Political Officer
Kabul (2001-2002)

Ms. Wright was born in Durant, Oklahoma in 1946 and graduated from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. She has served in numerous posts including Managua, St. George's, Tashkent, Bishkek, Freetown, Palikir, Kabul and Ulaanbataar. She was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: We're talking about September 11, 2001 when the World Trade Center in New York was destroyed by al-Qaeda group operating out of Afghanistan.

WRIGHT: Yes, and then when the decision was made that one of our responses to September 11 would be to go into Afghanistan and take out al-Qaeda and the Taliban, I was sitting in Hawaii as frustrated as everyone else who wasn't hands-on with the U.S. government responses. When it became apparent that military operations were being successful and al-Qaeda were on the run and the Taliban were moving out, there was the conference in Bonn, Germany where various Afghan groups came together and agreed that they would form an interim administration. With that decision it was obvious that a U.S. embassy would be reestablished pretty quickly. So I decided it was time for me to fly to Washington to lobby to see if I couldn't be a part of the reopening of that embassy. I had closed and opened embassies and had been in military operations both as a military officer and in the Foreign Service, being involved in Somalia and Sierra Leone and previously in Grenada with the military. I had the experience that I hoped Washington would value and let me go.

So I walked the halls of the State Department putting out my CV and hyping my background up, to no avail. I was told by the South Asian group, "Thank you very much. We've got people who have been in this area." I said, "Well, I have at least been in Afghanistan because thirty years ago as a hippie I traveled through Afghanistan on the back of a truck. At least I've seen the land." "Well, but you haven't been working the issues," and "Thank you very much. We'll get in touch

if we need any help.” I went back through one last day pleading, “Don’t forget me. I really want to do this. I’m in Hawaii. I’m not doing anything that’s important and I want to help. Let me help.”

In fact I went so far as to go to the European bureau to say, “I know the Central Asian countries are all helping out on this. I’ll be glad to go to one of those countries to help our embassies there.” Quickly I was identified to go to Turkmenistan to help. When I got back to Hawaii I was making plans to go to Turkmenistan when the South Asian bureau called. They said, “We’re rethinking and you may be higher up in the pecking order than we thought. We just wanted to let you know. Could you be prepared in a couple of weeks to go to Afghanistan if we need you?” I said, “Yes, I sure can. That would be great.” About two days later they called back and said, “We’ve done some more evaluation. Could you be ready tomorrow morning?” *[laughs]* “We’ll have a ticket at the airport and you’re to go to London, pick up a visa to Pakistan in London, and be in Islamabad in two nights hence. The plane taking in our first team is departing for Afghanistan night and we want you on that plane.” I said, “Fine. Great. What’s my job going to be?” “Well, you’re going to be the political officer. We’re sending in a communicator, an admin officer, a political officer, a security officer, and a public affairs officer and that’s going to be our first team.” I thought, well, that’s good. I wonder what happened to all these other people that really know the area and have been working the issues. *[laughs]* So I started reading more books on Afghanistan really fast and getting familiar with all the Afghan names I would need to know.

I packed my bags, locked up my condo in Honolulu and walked out. And what a fascinating experience that was to be flying into Pakistan, go into that beleaguered embassy with so many people working out of it, and then to be taken out to the airport and put into the back of a C-130. When we were on the tarmac ready to board the plane, the aircraft crew said, “You’d better get your heavy coats out of your suitcases because it’s fifteen degrees and snowing at Bagram Air Base.” Thank goodness I’d been able to shop in London. I’d bought a heavy coat and some heavy pants because I didn’t have any in Honolulu. In my quick shopping trip in Honolulu before I left, there was nothing to buy for winter weather.

When the plane landed at Bagram Air Base, the back end of the plane came open and some guys with blue lights on their helmets came on board. It was perfectly black, no lights anywhere. It turned out that the Air Force was doing all operations at night with no light so that there would not be visible targets. As a result everybody was wearing night vision devices, except us. The State Department doesn’t give us night vision devices. Everybody else could see what they were doing but we were stumbling along. This big voice says, “You had better follow right in my footsteps because there are land mines everywhere. If you step off this path, you’re going to be dead.” We all walked like little ducks right behind the blue light. *[laughs]*

We walked out to a car on the side of the runway, got in and stayed in that car until dawn. Then we started on the drive into Kabul – two hours from Bagram into Kabul. We got to the embassy about seven in the morning. Oh, what a pitiful old building that was. It had been twelve years since we had occupied the building. Windows had been blown out and rockets had landed on the top of it from the fighting between the mujahideen, not the fighting with the Taliban. We were met by our staff of the embassy that had been on the payroll for twelve years. Sixty local staff members were there to provide a presence primarily to keep out common looters. Most were

guards and gardeners and a few did minor maintenance on our twelve-year old cars.

And then we embarked on the great adventure of reestablishing our diplomatic presence. We barely beat Hamid Karzai and the interim administration's arrival. We were there about three days before they got in. We drove around Kabul initially in our small twelve year old Volkswagen Passats. We were not the first persons into the U.S. embassy building. We had been preceded by a Marine force of a hundred Marines who secured the area to make sure that there were no booby traps or grenades on the grounds to harm anyone. They were there to protect the embassy and were in the process of building a fortress out of it, which we certainly needed. The probability of a direct attack on the embassy is still very great, in my opinion. In those early days we were anticipating that elements of al-Qaeda would take a direct shot at that American flag that was riding high above the embassy. With low walls around the compound, it was, and still is, a vulnerable place. I think we are really lucky that there has been no major attack on the embassy. We were also preceded by a small team from the South Asia Executive Office who made a quick assessment of what was needed to get the building into operating condition. They made their assessment and zipped back to Washington to get funding for the renovations.

With the arrival of the interim administration, we began endless rounds of talks with members of the administration. Endless groups of people from Washington began arriving. Our first guest was Ambassador Jim Dobbins, who was the special envoy to the Northern Alliance. He then became the first special envoy to work directly with the administration in Kabul. He stayed long in Kabul though. He said he would never take a shower in Kabul; he would not stay long enough that he needed to take a shower. So he would stay a day and a half and leave and then stay out for a week or so and then come back in for a day.

We only had one flush toilet and one shower for 110 people. The Marines were digging outside latrines and most were taking showers out of buckets. We were trying to find food for everyone. We certainly had plenty of MREs, or Meals Ready to Eat, but those got old fast. We asked our local staff, "What are you guys eating at home? What's the food situation here?" They answered, "Fine. We've got food, lamb, chicken, vegetables..." "Well, by chance do any of you have friends or relatives that cook? Industrial size cooking?" One of the mechanics said, "My brother's restaurant is open." We asked, "Oh, it is? Well, how about if he'll bring some tasty dishes so we can try them?" After tasting the food and going to the restaurant and cautioning the owner strongly, "We think there is a great probability that Al-Qaeda or Taliban supporters might try to poison us if they know that we're getting food from your place. Can you keep quiet about providing food to us?" We had concerns about having our food brought in on one level, but we felt comfortable with the brother of one of our most trusted local employees. So from then on our lunch meal arrived in the backend of one of the twelve-year-old Passats. The meal was served on plates we had bought at the market. We had very few sicknesses and everyone ate well although most lost weight while in Kabul.

Q: Afghan food is great.

WRIGHT: It's wonderful.

Q: They have Afghan restaurants here in Washington. It's really first-class cuisine.

WRIGHT: Yes, and Hamid Karzai's brother has an Afghan restaurant in Baltimore. The food situation improved dramatically. In the morning we would have the nan, flatbread that was carried in by one of the mechanics we designated as our local chef. We had pulled out a stove and a refrigerator from the USIS (United States Information Service) warehouse where we had probably fifty electric stoves and fifty refrigerators that had been in storage for twelve years. We up a little kitchen in hallway of the bunker where we were staying. It was truly a bunker, dug out of the ground. It was built to protect our local staff against rocket attacks during the mujahideen era. We had a women's dorm – five beds for women and five beds in another room for men. Eventually the third room became a dining room with a much watched TV. We had a small bathroom with one toilet and one shower. We kept coffee going twenty-four hours a day, hot water for tea, and flatbread. Finally we got in some jams. One day asked, "How about yogurt? Is there any yogurt available?" and our mechanic, now chef, said, "Oh, I make yogurt." So he started making yogurt in little plastic cups.

For the evening meal, because we had had a large lunch from the Afghan restaurant, and because it was so cold at night, all we wanted was soup. So our cook made a pot of soup for ten. As more and more people started coming in on the civilian side, the pot grew from a little ten-person pot to two giant cauldrons on two stoves to feed sixty people. Virtually everyone liked the meals and felt that they were getting plenty to eat, although we all lost weight while we were there because of the intensity of which we were working. The Marines were taking care of themselves on the food scene although when we had extra soup we always called them and when they had extra meals they would call us. We had an excellent relationship with the Marines.

Q: What was the situation? What were you doing as political officer? In the first place, was there an ambassador?

WRIGHT: No, initially Washington had not designated someone from our small team as Charge d'Affaires. We called back to Washington and said, "Okay, who do you want to kind of be the titular leader of crew?" Fortunately all of us got along very well so we were all saying, "You do it." "Oh, you do it." It didn't matter to us who was the head because we all did our individual jobs so well that it was going to work no matter who it was. Janine Jackson, the administrative officer, was an OC level. Janine was the senior ranking officer and was designated the Charge for the ten days until Ambassador Ryan Crocker, the DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) from NEA, arrived. He was the first official Charge d'Affaires. He stayed for two months and was followed by the first ambassador, Robert Finn, who arrived in late March.

Q: Well, you were there from when to when?

WRIGHT: I was there from December through March. In early April I left.

Q: As political officer what were you doing?

WRIGHT: I was talking to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the various issues that Washington needed to have clarified, setting up appointments for the stream of people coming in from Washington. Jim Dobbins visited several different times as the special envoy. Next General

Franks, the commander of CENTCOM (Central Command) arrived. I set up all of the meetings with President Karzai and with Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah. (end of tape)

Many of the Afghans appointed to the interim administration had not lived in Afghanistan for the last twenty years. Many were fearful of the security environment. They were hopeful and fearful. They were hopeful because they knew this was the grand opportunity for Afghanistan to get on its feet, but fearful because they had no base of operations. They had no homes, no cars, and no telephones. They didn't have anything. Most lived in the old ramshackle Intercontinental hotel – intercontinental only in name – no running water, electricity little of the time. It was difficult tracking them down, because there were no telephones. You had to physically go search for people or send runners out to search for them to get appointments or talk to them right then about what we needed to find out. Initially there was a lot of discussion on the economic side of getting the country back on its feet: central bank information, how much money is really in the bank. We talked with Karzai about security, his own personal security, which is still something of great concern to us.

I remember vividly the day that we discovered how poor Karzai's security was. I was coming through the front gate of the embassy compound. An elegant Afghan gentleman was standing at the gate. He held up an American passport so I stopped and said, "Who are you?" He just opened up the car door and hopped right in and I thought, whoa, what's going on here? He said, "I'm an American citizen but I'm Afghan. I'm Hamid Karzai's uncle and I need to talk to you about some problems we've got on security." He said, "This is the only identification I have left. Everything else was stolen from me and I need for you to write some sort of statement that I can use in case this passport gets stolen." I said, "What happened? What got stolen?" and he said, "Hamid and I were at the mosque yesterday," on Friday, "and a big crowd was around us. Both Hamid and I both were pick-pocketed. Everything that we had was gone. Then we got outside the mosque, somebody had taken our shoes and so we had to walk back to the palace barefooted." I said, "What do you mean you had to walk back to the palace? Didn't you have a car?" "No, we just decided we'd walk down the street from the presidential palace to the mosque." I thought, oh god, we've got major security problems.

We called back to Washington saying, "We've got to do something fast on security for Karzai. He's not recognizing the security aspects of his position." Security training for his bodyguards began quickly. We brought some Afghans to the U.S. for personal security training. Quickly, we had some military squads looking after him, but DOD didn't want that responsibility. The State Department didn't want the responsibility either. Initially we were having challenges getting enough diplomatic security officers for the embassy, much less for the President of the country. After the assassination attempt on Karzai, Department of State provided his security, and at the same time continuing to train those Afghans that will ultimately take over his security. He, as an individual, is so important to the future of the political process that we must ensure he is protected.

Q: While you were there you were having to be concerned about his safety.

WRIGHT: Yes, because if he was assassinated the whole thing would potentially fall apart.

Q: I realize this was a chaotic time but was there a feeling that things were coming together?

WRIGHT: Yes, everybody was very hopeful. It's still, in my opinion, a real long shot if this whole thing works, but it's the best opportunity that the Afghans have had for a long time. So many Afghans want this to work and will do everything they can to make it work. That said there are too many warlords with too much power and too many weapons. Unfortunately the U.S. decision that we would not support an expansion of the international security assistance force (ISAF) outside of Kabul is something that is coming back to bite us. From the very beginning our embassy was recommending that the international security force be expanded to other areas of Afghanistan. Washington steadfastly said, "No, we don't want ISAF to be involved outside of Kabul. Although it won't be U.S. troops that would be going out to these outlying areas, we're going to be called upon as the rescue force and we don't want to be obligated to evacuate people or defend people all over the country." The U.S. put roadblocks into virtually every other organization's prognosis that a security force was needed in all the outlying areas. The Brits already have kind of done a unilateral move and they've put some troops up in the Mazar-e Sharif area and that area has calmed down some. Control of the country, not just Kabul, is the key to the ultimate success in Afghanistan. The U.S. is going to have to bite the bullet on having ISAF outside of Kabul at some time.

Q: There's been the charge laid that we went into Afghanistan, we took care of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, more or less, and then we didn't follow through.

WRIGHT: I think to a great extent that's true. We should've had a much more aggressive aid program to help more with health and education. On the security side, we started pulling out forces way too early and did not keep enough forces to consolidate the initial victory. With the number of attacks that the remaining coalition forces are taking, you can see that things aren't over. I wouldn't say that there's a buildup of Al Qaeda or Taliban forces, but there are still plenty of people out there that can cause us trouble.

Q: While you were in Kabul, was the ghost of Mogadishu in your thoughts? Were you thinking, "Are we really going to make it?" All it would have to take is seventeen people killed and we'll pull out. Was this a concern?

WRIGHT: Indeed it was. I was very pleased to see that we have hung in there despite a lot of casualties. The problem, it seems to me, is that we have changed our focus too soon. Even though we still have some troops in Afghanistan, to divert the focus off Afghanistan and start the operations in Iraq, have undercut what should've been done in Afghanistan. We have left Afghanistan in jeopardy. We should've stuck with Afghanistan, gotten that further down the road before ever trying to bite off Iraq.

Q: Did you find any problem going in there as a woman? You know, because the Taliban does horrendous things to women. How did you find that?

WRIGHT: I found there were no problems. I certainly wanted to be sensitive to the traditions of the Afghan people. Women in Afghanistan wore head scarves. For international women, it was important to have a scarf on in a mosque or in the presence of religious leaders. I always carried

a scarf around, but I only wore it in situations where I felt it was appropriate. The rest of the time there was no problem at all in attire. Of course you dressed appropriately. Because it was so cold in December, January and February, I generally wore dress slacks. In my dealings with the senior leadership of the interim administration, and with some of the lower level bureaucrats that were still part of the bureaucratic organization through the Taliban years and were held over, I had no trouble at all, no problems at all.

Q: Going back to the time when the South Asia bureau said, "We've got experts," and all of a sudden they decide that they need somebody who thirty years ago had been a hippie in Afghanistan as a political officer, this is supposed to be the person who comes in and really knows who does what to whom in the tribal thing and all. You know, it's a complicated society. Did you find that the South Asian bureau – why had this happened?

WRIGHT: That's something that I still have not figured out, nor have the people who still maintain to this day to me that they should've been the first ones to go in. The only thing that I can figure out is that it was my military background and my experience in crisis situations in Somalia and Sierra Leone. Having been in combat operation environments and my ability to be a liaison with the U.S. military were the major factors. I think they decided that that my general crisis experience was of more value than the intimate knowledge of Afghan affairs.

Q: I think it's a wise choice but it shows that your selling job up and down the corridors, with your papering of the corridors of the fourth floor, or whatever it was, with your CV did help.

WRIGHT: Well, it's true. I think the State Department is a people organization and if you really want to do something and if you take the time to really push hard, you've got a chance, even though you may be a long shot.

Q: Well, and you had the qualifications. Your qualifications are really unique and also they weren't...I mean the Somali thing and the Sierra Leone thing. By the way, on the Sierra Leone thing, did you get any recognition for all of this?

WRIGHT: Yes, I did. Ambassador Hirsch nominated me for the heroism award which I received, as did our RSO (Regional Security Officer) who did some pretty dramatic things. So I'm infinitely grateful to the ambassador for his recognition and for the Department for theirs. We both received our awards from Madeleine Albright in a very nice ceremony. So that was a nice touch.

Q: When you left Kabul, it was a short time but I guess this was a period of intense activity, wasn't it?

WRIGHT: Oh, it was. You were just exhausted by the time four months came along. I actually had taken off for one week in the middle of the time. We started giving people time off about every two months to get some rest. But by that time Washington were identifying Farsi and Dari speakers and others that had the true expertise and language ability to work better in the environment.

Q: How did you find the American military? How well prepared did you feel they were for ending up in this very peculiar operation which was put together in quite a hurry because of the events of 9/11?

WRIGHT: The Special Forces were doing some extraordinary things out in the field, working initially with the Northern Alliance and particularly General Dostem. I flew with Zalmay Khalizad, the U.S. presidential special envoy for Afghanistan, to Mazar-i-Sharif and met with the warlords Dostem and Mohammad Atta and some of the other northern warlords. There we met some special operations officers, who regaled us of tales of riding horses out through the Afghan mountains. They did a remarkable special operations job. As we moved into the consolidation period, the military brought in civil affairs units that had soldiers with Middle Eastern expertise. They did a fine job.

We don't seem to focus on too much is the role of the CIA. The CIA had a huge paramilitary operation. The CIA's role was the most remarkable part of the whole operation. The number of CIA operations people that were there was amazing. There was essentially a CIA army and air force. When our Special Envoy needed to travel to other parts of Afghanistan, we rode on CIA contract planes, rather than U.S. military planes. It was much easier to get aircraft support from the CIA than the military.

Q: Was this called Air-America? [laughs] Like Vietnam.

WRIGHT: Actually they didn't have a name on the aircraft but it was the same type of operation. The CIA had their own pilots, their own planes, their own combat helicopters. To see them in action was impressive. I don't have a clue what the numbers are, but the resources that they brought in to their headquarters in Kabul were impressive. We would go into their warehouse area and drool over the things that had. We were very good friends with the chief of CIA operations and his senior staff. When the book is written about CIA operations in Afghanistan, I think it will be a bestseller.

Q: When did you leave?

WRIGHT: In early April of 2002.

Q: Well, then what?

WRIGHT: Before I went to Afghanistan I had been selected as the DCM of our embassy in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, one of the places left in the world that I've always wanted to go in my quest for isolated, faraway parts of the world. As I left for Afghanistan I got a call from the ambassador in Mongolia who said, "Ann, I hear you're going to Afghanistan. Please don't bail out on me and stay in Afghanistan." It was a real temptation because Afghanistan was so interesting and had all the challenges that I've been trained to do. It was hard not to say that I wanted a one-year assignment to Afghanistan, but I had made the commitment to go to Mongolia and I did want to see Mongolia. So I went ahead and headed on to Mongolia and got there in July of 2002.

MICHAEL METRINKO
Chief Political Officer
Kabul (2002)

Political Advisor to Embassy
Herat (2003)

Michael John Metrinko was born in Pennsylvania in 1946. He graduated from Georgetown University in 1968. After entering the Foreign Service in 1974, his postings have included Ankara, Damascus, Tehran, Tabriz, Krakow, Kabul, Tel Aviv and special assignments in Yemen and Afghanistan. Mr. Metrinko was interviewed in 1999 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

METRINKO: But I mean doctors do that. I went to Afghanistan; I went off to Kabul.

Q: What was your impression before you went? I have an interview with Ann Williams who went. Did Ann Wright go with you?

METRINKO: Ann got there with a group of four or five others late in December, mid-December. I got there in mid-January. I replaced Ann.

Q: Well, the reason I asked was that when they put together this crew, here you had a very important thing, opening up an embassy in a country which was under sort of siege in the middle of a war, but very important to make it.

METRINKO: Under everyone's microscope.

Q: Under everyone's microscope. I mean here is the Department of State with all its expertise and particularly you have a bureau who in theory should be able to reach in and come from active duty people and all of a sudden I mean I have you and I have Ann Wright. I don't know about the others who were retirees, they're not part of the active process.

METRINKO: Ann was actually not retired at the time. She resigned later.

Q: But she had no experience in the area.

METRINKO: No experience in the area. I had experience in the area and I also have the language. I don't know if they even knew that.

Q: This is the thing, you know, it doesn't sound like, was it that the well was empty when they reached in the South Asian cadre of people to go to Afghanistan I mean as far as personnel?

METRINKO: I'm not sure. I can't answer that question. I don't know what sort of planning process went on. I was sort of amazed myself when I got there and discovered that the people

there, one or two had had experience in the area. They had been to Pakistan for example. They'd been the Afghan watchers, but in general very few of the Americans assigned there knew a damn thing about Afghanistan or the region. We got there, when I got there it was an embassy under siege. I lived in a bomb shelter for awhile because there was no place else to live. I shoveled out my own office before I could get in my own office.

Q: Okay, let's talk about it. How did you, you went there when? In the first place you were there from when to when?

METRINKO: I was there altogether from mid-January of the year 2002 until mid-August of 2002. I went originally on what was supposed to be a one or two month assignment. It got extended.

Q: Well, what, when they assigned you there, what were you to do?

METRINKO: I went there as chief of the political section replacing Ann.

Q: Yes. She said her time in Afghanistan had been as a hippie back in the '60s I think going there in a pickup truck with a bunch of other kids you know having a good time.

METRINKO: Well, she had had less experience in the area than I had. I had had my seven years in Iran so I spoke the language. I had been to Afghanistan in 1970 on a drug trail. I was in the Peace Corps. I spent a week in Herat basically getting stoned at the time as a hippie. I got back there in 1995 briefly just for one day to do an inspection of a refugee camp down near Dowlatabad, but I had been responsible for Afghanistan when I was an office director in the population refugees and migration. The Afghan refugee problem had been part of my responsibilities. So, I had followed it more or less.

Q: You were bringing in something. What did you see when you arrived there?

METRINKO: I have to disassociate my memory from my last couple of months there from what was there a year ago or a year and a half ago. When I arrived in January of the year 2002, Kabul was a city that was it seemed empty and dark. Dark because there was no electricity, empty because much of the population had abandoned it. There were whole huge parts of the city where no one lived. It was a city filled with wreckage, not from our war, but from previous wars. The whole western quarter of the city was in ruins from the wars. A whole third of the city or so, a quarter of the city, had been leveled by Afghans fighting Afghans. Every building that we saw was damaged. Window glass was missing from every public building. Most of the wiring had been ripped out of buildings and sold to get the copper. Telephone lines didn't exist. Telephone poles didn't exist. Electric light bulbs didn't exist. They'd all been taken down and sold. There was very little traffic. People who had cars... The number of shops that were open was minimal. It looked grim, depressing. Smoke always hung over the city because the only way to get heat was to burn wood or charcoal. Therefore, anyone who had heat was doing it from a wood burning stove. It had always been a city with pollution problems. Pollution was very, very heavy.

Q: It's in a bowl.

METRINKO: In a bowl sort of, yes and sort of not a mist, but clouds and dust hung out over everything. There had been a drought for five years straight so it was all very, very dry. Lots of feces around because there were animals in the streets and the streets were never cleaned. The embassy compound when we arrived was surprisingly in good shape when we arrived. We proceeded to wreck it afterwards, but it was a very large many acre compound in the grand style of the '50s and filled with trees and gardens which had been kept in very good shape by the Afghans who had continued to work there. The embassy itself never closed completely. FSNs continued to staff it, not the chancery. The chancery was closed and sealed, but the Taliban never entered the chancery so it was closed, sealed and every office was fully furnished. There was paper on the desks, things like that. They had just simply locked up the building and walked out after parking all the cars in the basement.

The gardens were quite lovely. Flowers were in bloom. Roses, other flowers. The embassy gardeners continued to work at it. When I arrived there were already about 100 U.S. marines there, again combat marines. They blocked off the main entrance to the embassy and were using a small entranceway out to the side. The marines. When I arrived the embassy had a high stone wall around it, pathways, gardens, lots of trees; it was fairly green because it was irrigated. The number of people keep rising only exponentially. It was just bursting at the seams within another month or two. When I arrived it wasn't so bad yet. We had marines who had occupied basically the entire main floor of the embassy. It was their floor and their job was to lay endless miles of concertina wire all around the embassy compound blocking off pathways, blocking off buildings, putting it on top of the stone wall. Then between the marines and diplomatic security, they cut down almost all the trees in the compound to get a line of sight in case they were attacked. Someone said the line of sight also means that you're exposing yourself because now the enemy can see you, but this was not marine or diplomatic security logic at the time. They just cut down all the trees. The gardens went, too under the bulldozers and under the trucks and under the cars and everything else, they simply disappeared. It was a mess.

When I first arrived the marines had the entire main floor of the embassy, the chancery. The chargé, Brian Crocker, and his wife were using what had at once been the ambassador's office at their home or their residence. A number of us were sleeping in what had been built as a bomb shelter on the embassy compound. It was at least 10 or 12 of us in this small sort of underground rooms. Some of the people were staying in areas that had been cleaned up inside the chancery, the communicators, the diplomatic security ref there. Slowly over the next several weeks we cleaned office by office. Every office had to be sort of checked by a bomb squad of course and other things. We started to clean offices out one by one and started to function from the offices. We also cleaned out some of the larger rooms in the embassy and moved our living quarters up there. The reason I say that. In this bomb shelter there was a common room where we ate and we could watch a little bit of TV and we had one e-mail or one Internet screen, the only one on the compound. There were two other bedrooms, one for men, one for women and there was a bathroom. In the hallway the cooks did the cooking. So, all the dishes, well, the marines always ate by themselves in the chancery. All the civilians ate down there and we were eating from dishes that were washed next to the toilet everybody was using and next to the shower. In fact you'd have to stand in line waiting, it was either wash dishes or take a shower. Wash dishes, go to the toilet. It was unhygienic to say the least and all the food was piled up right next to where

you were sleeping, too. I got to know the sleeping habits or at least the sleeping clothing of too many Foreign Service officers. It wasn't a pretty sight.

It was interesting. There was a great deal of camaraderie because we were down to essentials. You didn't have to dress well. There was no attempt to dress up. You couldn't in fact. We wore very casual clothes because everything was filthy. We were doing as much physical labor as [anything]. I'm trying to think of the other conditions there. The number of usable bathrooms for the people there was minimal. A hundred marines I think shared one toilet. When we moved out of that bomb shelter which was maintained as a residence for a very long time... In fact it was just ripped down a few months ago so it was maintained as a residence for about a year and a half. When we moved into the chancery building, there were about 40 or 50 of us using two toilets and one shower. It was an old men's room that was just converted. They took out one of the toilets and turned it into a shower stall and they kept the other toilets and there was a sink in there, too. This meant that if you wanted to take a shower you had to get up very early in the morning - and I'd get up around 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning to get my shower - because there would be a line very quickly afterwards. I slept in a room that had been the room where the ambassador's and DCM's secretaries had slept and that was our dormitory room for about five months until July as a matter of fact.

Q: All right, let's talk about your work.

METRINKO: My work was self-invented. I was political counselor. I was also head of the economic section. I was also as it turned out by default chief of the consular section so I had three jobs. When they discovered that I knew consular work, CA sent me a commission in the mail. Gary Ryan signed a letter saying I had a consular commission for Kabul, for Afghanistan and so I was blessed with a very, very good FSN who had remained in the consular section. He had been hired during the Taliban period. His father had been the chief FSN in the consular section for about 30 years and in the true Afghan way when he retired he recommended his son and his son had taken over his job. He was a godsend. He was really great.

Q: On the consular side, what were you doing?

METRINKO: What was I doing? We had innumerable lost passports. We had innumerable inquiries about adoption. Everyone wanted to adopt an Afghan child. We had several arrest cases involving Americans actually.

Q: Who were the Americans? I mean other than.

METRINKO: Afghan Americans.

Q: Afghan Americans.

METRINKO: Yes. Afghan Americans would come back after being away for years and years and years. We had one repatriation case of a woman who had mental problems, an Afghan, American. I was also trying, CA had sent in a very experienced consular officer for about two weeks at the very beginning to look at what was there, to open up the files, to destroy old files, to

ship things back that required shipping back because everything had simply been left there including a lot of fairly sensitive consular case files. He had worked it out; he and I got along very well when he realized that I knew consular work. He knew who I was and we talked about it. He suggested to CA that instead of his coming back because he was also a rover and it made a lot of sense just to give me the commission and to let me stay there and do the job part time along with my political work. There was certainly a relationship between the work symbiotic relationship if you will. Consular work is very closely related to political, political to consular. Using my consular hat I could get into see the police, I could get into the president, I could get into hospitals. I could things like that and using my political work, I could do things that impacted on consular work. In fact it was the ideal consular political relationship.

Q: Well, arrest cases. One had the feeling that there really wasn't much law there.

METRINKO: One has the feeling there still isn't very much law there. Law is a personal thing there. If you're rich or if you're powerful, law has a different meaning than if you're a normal Joe Schmo on the street. There was law. One potentially thorny arrest case got resolved because the people involved in it all had money and they straightened it out for themselves. They told us about it afterwards. I didn't have to go to see any prisoners. We didn't have any that were in prison. Although I did an inspection of the local prison. The repatriation case involved local police officials, but, no that was different, too.

Q: How did you, with the mental case, how did you get him or her on the plane?

METRINKO: With difficulty. A departing Foreign Service officer agreed to escort the person down to Islamabad. Much of our consular caseload was handled by Islamabad. You couldn't get a visa for example in Kabul. You had to go to Islamabad, although we could send visa cases, of the VIPs, we could send the package down to Islamabad to be processed. That's where we would send the passport applications and things of that sort. We would do the paperwork and then send it down to Islamabad since we didn't really have the other necessary things. In the case of repatriation, I had her escorted down to Islamabad and then escorted from Islamabad all the way to the United States, but by FSOs who happened to be traveling and agreed to do it, in fact, volunteered to do it and a good thing, too because it was a person who needed help and shouldn't begin a case, the person should not have been traveling overseas.

Q: Well, then, tell me about this time between January and August, the political situation and what you were doing.

METRINKO: January to August saw the Afghan government had only been in office for about three weeks at this point, three weeks to a month. Among other things that I saw was the raising of the new Afghan flag over the presidential palace, the opening of several new embassies, one assassination, followed later on by another assassination of government ministers. The first one I knew, the minister of transportation. I saw the government starting to form come to grips with its own problems to realize that it didn't even have a grasp on what the country was like anymore. I was very much a part of the first grand council that was summoned to sort of talk about, discuss and formalize what the transition government would look like. In fact, I was seconded to the United Nations for a couple of weeks in the middle of the summer so that I could go off and do

some election work in the provinces with groups of Afghans.

Q: Was the United Nations supervising this?

METRINKO: Yes. The United Nations agency for Afghanistan. It was supervising setting up the elections and I volunteered. Well, I should explain this. I wasn't the only political officer. I was the political consular, a title that we designated for me, the DCM and the chargé and I. I was there as the person who was going to stay. I stayed January to August. In the meantime we had a full series of TDY people who had come in for three weeks, a month, and come and go and come and go. Sometimes we had three or four officers. Sometimes we had just me. It depended. Most of the time I had deputies. It was difficult because it meant that portfolios kept changing. There was no consistency, no continuity. The DCM also handled a lot of the political work. Everyone did. Throughout this period we had innumerable visits by Zalmay Khalilzad. You spell that ZALMAY, first name, KHALILZAD, the president's special envoy for Afghanistan. He came in and would spend any time from a couple of days up to several weeks in Kabul dealing directly with the Afghan government.

Q: How effective did you find him?

METRINKO: That's a question that would fill an entire tape. Zalmay Khalilzad was an Afghan American who had been born and brought up in Afghanistan. He certainly knew most of the new government cabinet members - I mean knew most of the warlords - because he had been dealing with Afghanistan off and on for most of his life. He'd been involved in the Department of Defense and State Department before as a political appointee. He had dealt with Afghanistan then. He knew people from his own studies, his academic work. He also has followed it his whole life. He was of course surely interested in what happened there. He spoke [two languages] along with English. He had gone to school with some of the leaders either in Afghanistan or later on in a university in Beirut. He certainly had the President's ear back in the White House and the head of the National Security Council, Condoleezza Rice. That having been said, I'm not sure how effective he was. He caused as many problems as he helped things there. He's been named as the new ambassador to Afghanistan. I found his approach, his personality and his work to counterproductive myself and the antipathies of what I think of as good diplomacy.

Q: In what way would you strive?

METRINKO: Well, there was a problem in Afghanistan that's continued up until quite recently where there were too many people who represented the United States government at a high level. We had a military occupation of the country. The general in charge of the U.S. military effort there whether it was General McNeil saw himself as the lead American in the country. If you had 8,000, 9,000, 10,000 soldiers under your command, a couple of large bases and U.S. military stationed all over the country in small towns and cities you are indeed in charge of a large portion of the country. He was conducting a military campaign there. We had a very large CIA presence there which had its own headquarters building in the middle of the city heavily protected, fortified and all the traffic walked off around it. We had the U.S. embassy there with Ryan Crocker as chargé and then Robert Finn who was the ambassador. We had as time went on this gets into my second assignment there already, but we had an ambassador who was in charge

of coordination for development, Bill Taylor. We also had a political advisor out at the army headquarters who was also an ambassador and had ambassadorial rank as ambassador to the army operation there, the military operation. So, we had a general, two other ambassadors in addition to the State Department ambassador plus the head of the CIA all of them with entree with clout with some degree of power and not all of them necessarily talking to each other about what they were doing. To give you an anecdote that will best explain this. I heard this from President [Karzai]'s brother; he's a friend of mine, several months ago. This was at a time when President [Karzai] was thinking of getting rid of Ismail Kham, I-S-M-A-I-L, new word K-H-A-M, who was the warlord governor and military commander of Herat Province. President [Karzai] called in the British ambassador and these were the words he used in front of his brother-in-law. He said, "I've just spoken to three different American ambassadors about the American viewpoint on getting rid of Ismail Kham and I've gotten three conflicting viewpoints. Can you please tell me what the British view is?" Now adding to the mixture of American ambassadors I have to also had the President's special envoy who came and went came and went constantly and was on the phone when he wasn't there. So, you had [the envoy], you had Ambassador Taylor, you had Ambassador Finn, you had Ambassador Jackovitz, you had the CIA director and you had the head of the army operations. That's six. It was incredibly inept on the part of the State Department and Defense to do it that way.

Q: Well, did you see the, I mean was there the conflict that seems to be going on or has been going on for the last two years between the State Department and Colin Powell and the Department of Defense under Rumsfeld and I'm particularly talking when you get to the Department of Defense you're talking about the civilian leadership, the rotating leaderships is almost a different matter. Did you get that?

METRINKO: Yes, absolutely. Let me give you an example first before I address that question, an example of the sort of lack of cooperation or the lack of coordination between the various government entities. The second day that I was in Kabul I was taken to an impromptu with the President in his palace. It was myself, it was the chargé, it was a visiting director of AID and we went out to see _____ in his office and it ended up being about a two hour meeting and we sat there and talked development. This was the introductory to the head of AID. _____'s brother was also in the meeting. In the middle of the meeting the phone rang or no a messenger came in and handed [him] a piece of paper and he said, "Gentleman, excuse me, I have a very phone call and I have to take it." He left. He was gone 15 or 20 minutes and he came back and he said, "Thank you for waiting. I'm sorry. That was Mr. _____." He sat down and we proceeded. He didn't tell us what [he] had said in his 15 or 20 minutes of conversation calling from the NSC nor did _____ ever tell anybody what he said to _____. That's an example of the sort of thing that was going on there when one presidential, you know, the president's special advisor calls the head of the country and the chargé doesn't know what's happening.

Q: You keep saying the chargé...

METRINKO: Oh, because Brian Crocker was sent there in December of the year 2001 as chargé. He was there until approximately I want to say March when he was replaced by Robert Finn who came as ambassador. He arrived there as chargé and he was in fact I swore him in as ambassador on the steps of the embassy because I was consular officer and I could take his oath.

Q: Go back to where, were you seeing the State civilian leadership of the Pentagon conflict played out?

METRINKO: A little bit, yes. I can't answer the personal relations of say the ambassador or Ambassador Taylor with the head of the military operation. I had the feeling it was pretty good. At least within limits, but the fact was that one had all the toys, all the money and did not have to explain or say anything at all to the other. So, we would find out about military operations afterwards for example. One example I can give is when what's the deputy, oh, the deputy over at at DOD.

Q: Wolfowitz?

METRINKO: Wolfowitz, thank you.

Q: Paul Wolfowitz.

METRINKO: Paul Wolfowitz came on a visit. Everybody came on a visit. Half of the U.S. congress, you know it was their various times on visits, everyone with any sort of grasp at all or anyone with any degree or title at all wanted to show up in Afghanistan during that first year to say he or she had done that. Paul Wolfowitz came on a visit just after we had had the problem of an attack on a wedding party. I was sent up with.

Q: You might explain what.

METRINKO: Okay. In very late June or early July, it was either the last day of June or the first day of July, 2001, 2002 now, yes 2002. There was a military operation near the town of Dehrawod, D-E-H-R-A-W-O-D, and in this particular operation a large group of people who were celebrating a wedding were apparently attacked by U.S. military forces. It happened to be women and children. It was the women and children's part of the wedding. A large number of women and children were killed. A larger number were injured. They were basically bombed. The U.S. military was acting on information that there may have been "terrorists" or Al Qaeda people present at the gathering. It claims it did not know it was a wedding. We heard about it the next day because it happened at the home of someone who happened to be close to one of his huge supporters and [he] was fighting to get back to Afghanistan. He was told that his friend and his friend's family had been killed in this attack. We set up an investigation team and went quickly. We heard about this late in the evening and by early the next morning I joined a special forces team and a group of Afghans including one minister and two deputy ministers to go up by helicopter and then by vehicle by land to visit Dehrawod to see what had really happened to begin the investigation. We conducted the investigation. We spent about two days up there and came back to Kabul to report to the president and to the ambassador together in a joint report. Two days later Wolfowitz showed up and I was asked at a country team to give a briefing about this operation and explained what we had see and Wolfowitz interrupted me and said, "You sound like you believe the Afghans' version." He said it in a very sort of peremptory way. I said, "Well, I'm only reporting what I saw" and he dismissed it and said, "No, it didn't happen that way." Click, his line shut down. He was in denial. I returned to that same village a while later,

about a month later when a fuller investigation team with people on it who could actually do measurements and do forensics and things like that came through. I accompanied them up to the same area with the same special forces team, but it was interesting.

Q: We have a real problem I think, it's unfortunate it's gotten very political, but it's much more serious than that particularly with true believers, the civilian true believers in the Department of Defense. Well, now as a political officer what did you do? I mean what were the politics?

METRINKO: What were the politics? That's a good question. What did I do day to day? Afghanistan was a country with no internal communications. We had no idea what was happening in the rest of the country. You could not telephone across the street. Eventually the United Nations gave telephones to the various ministers and to the various ambassadors so that at least we could telephone to the various ministers, but not to the ministries. There were several different phone systems in the country, none of which worked. If you wanted to set up an appointment you had to leave a note or discuss it first and then set it up that way and then go back later for your appointment. We had no idea what was happening one minute's drive out of Kabul. The military had a better idea, but not much better as it turned out in many cases. I would say there was nobody in the embassy at all who had a grasp on what was happening in the country and I include myself in that because I know how big the country is. I know how disparate and how you know, sort of remote villages and towns can be.

Q: What about the CIA because they've been renowned for having operators all over the country?

METRINKO: Well, they had a lot of people who couldn't speak a word of the language and ran around in beards and funny clothes and thought they had a grasp of what was happening. I would dismiss all 99% of them as amateurs. They thought that carrying a gun, growing a beard and wearing a bandana around your hair qualified you as an expert. It doesn't. Very simply, it doesn't. What happened there was similar to what happened later in Iraq. Everybody had their little group, their little friends who would report to them what they wanted to report about this area, this town, this tribe, etc. You had the Afghans who had been out of the country for a whole generation, they had been out since the 1970s, 30 years almost who thought they were experts. You had Afghans who had never been there who were showing up. You had a whole series of people like that. The instant experts. Americans who had once been there 25 years ago coming in. Almost none of whom could speak the language. You had a lot of disassemblage, bits and pieces of information. What I did on a daily basis in the embassy was number one man the front gate of the embassy, which was a job in itself. We had an embassy compound that was heavily fortified and was getting more and more fortified everyday. There was no feasible way to bring most people into the chancery. Most of the visitors who would show up. It is the Afghan tradition as its a tradition I think in every country when a new government takes power, anybody who wants part of that power, anybody who wants to get anything done shows up and plays homage. Afghans started coming in in large numbers, tribal groups, city groups, town groups, professional groups, people who were looking for jobs, people who were looking for favors, people who were trying to get their nephews out of American prisons, etc. They started showing up at the gates. I was the political officer who spoke [the language]. I got called down to the gates constantly.

We had something else happening at the gate. We had a force protective unit from the U.S. marines, a group with which I had never worked and which I came to hold very quickly in the highest esteem. These were marines. Marine trained, but longer hair, beards, they were there to gather information that would protect the embassy compound and the American presence there. They weren't there to protect the American diplomats, they were there as sort of the outer reach of the marines there.

Q: These were Afghans?

METRINKO: No, no, these were Americans. These were American marines, but as it turned out some of them had mixed parentage or they were dual nationals. They had gone through very [training], some of which could speak [the language] quite [well]. They had Arabic training. They were also versed in the country. They had studied it. They were supposed to be regional experts and indeed they were. They were really a good group to work with. So, what would invariably happen, one of them would be assigned almost 24 hours down at the main gate, they did this in rotation. They would be the ones to sort out and sift out the people that came. If you had a leader who showed up saying, I have information about 25 stinger missiles and this and that and the other thing and I wanted to turn it over to you, then they would be diverted to the correct person. If somebody came in who wanted to talk about politics, they would call me and I spent a chunk of each day, sometimes several hours a day down at the gate dealing with the people to the extent where they set up a special meeting room. I had innumerable and this happened, when I saw innumerable, everyday, sometimes a couple of times a day tribal groups coming in where I would have five or ten or 20 or 30 men, what they called the white beards, the tribal elders, coming to see the ambassador. The ambassador never wanted to see them, coming to see me it meant. I shouldn't never wanted to see them, my job was to sift out the ones he was supposed to see. They would come to discuss problems, conditions, what was happening in their province, what was happening in their tribal area, the help they needed. In the true Afghan way, nobody knew who was in charge yet. Remember when I say there were no telephone communications, there was also no national TV system. The radio system was in shatters, you know, in shambles as well. There were no newspapers that reached the whole country, so the country had no communication with itself. Nobody knew. If you were living out in a small town, you really didn't know what was happening in Kabul and you didn't really know about the American presence or anything else. It was all new. People would come to the embassy sometimes mistaking it for the CIA or for a wide incredible variety of reasons, everything from hey I'm an American citizen, hey I want to get a visa, hey I wanted to go and study in the United States, I need help. My younger brother was captured by Americans in uniform who took him. We don't know where he is and nobody will tell us. We don't know if he is alive or dead and this happened four months ago. In many cases that happened. My job was to sort out all that. I found it rather refreshing. I was also supposed to be meeting and dealing with a number of officials in the country, dealing with the clergy, did that a great deal, both from meeting people by chance at the gate to just going out and paying calls. Full days. All of those who were there the first many months worked I would say 20 hours a day. It was a function of necessity because we had nothing else to do, but to work. The only place I could sit in a chair was in my office because there were no other chairs. I could go and sit outside. If I wanted to sit in a real chair, I had my office chair sitting in front of my desk in front of my screen on my computer. I didn't have a

chair in the large room I was sharing with eight or ten other men.

Q: Did you have any time, what were you sending back?

METRINKO: A barrage of reports on everything possible because nobody had reported from inside of Afghanistan since the year 1989. Everything from biographic reporting on the new leaders on officials, condition reporting to who may have killed the minister of tourism, I mean everything, the whole spectrum. There was no, we didn't know the economy yet. We didn't know the commercial system yet. We were trying to sort out who the political players were as the Afghans were because politicians their representatives, their envoys were coming in drifting back to Afghanistan in dribs and drabs. They had all the anti-Taliban politicians, they had all left the country, and they were gone. They started coming back, one after the other as a matter of making contact with them, getting to know them.

Q: By the time you left, were you seeing a country that was in complete disarray or were you beginning to see it beginning to knit together?

METRINKO: I'll give you an example. One of the first or second month that I was there, we had a visitor come in from INR in the Department who wanted to do a study of the police, what the police were up to, who they were, what they were. This was important to me both for consular work and for political work. I was the control officer and he and I spent about a week together just visiting police stations all over Kabul, talking to police officials all up and down the line from the new chief of police to the minister of interior people to policemen on the beat so to speak, going out to the police academy. One of the questions I asked in one of the first meetings of a police official was, "Okay, you're here, do you have contact with police officials [there] and in other cities?" He said, "We know there must be police out there, but we don't know who they are because we have no way to reach them, we have no way to contact them. There are no phones." He said, "In theory do we have contact? In fact, no, I can't give you any names because I don't know any of these people or who they are." These are some of the top ranking police stations in Kabul. That was in the year 2002. 2003 there's a radio network that links the police. The police go from the provinces to training at the new police academy in Kabul. So, is the country coming together? Yes. Is it coming together fast? No. Is it coming together fast by Asian terms? Probably yes. I'm not pessimistic about it.

Q: Of course we have a problem with our time frame of reference. It's not their problem. What were you getting at that time during this particular period?

METRINKO: [Karzai] was quite popular, but nobody knew very much about him. There was not a great deal of biographic information about him. He was sort of picked and chosen by the foreigners to head the country. He was very presentable. He spoke excellent English. He spoke all the politically correct words. He could be charming. He is charming. He was recognized by warlords and by the various power brokers all around the country as the one person who could appease all the foreigners with money. I think that there are a great many people, warlords in any particular city or town there who would like to be president of Afghanistan, but they also all know that they don't have the ability to represent Afghanistan to the foreigners who give the money that keeps Afghanistan running. So, he is in power because he can do that. He's the

ultimate fixer.

Q: What was your impression of the work of the NGOs, the non-governmental organizations, both American and foreign and international?

METRINKO: That's another question that would take a good hour of discussion. I'll put it this way. NGOs went to Afghanistan not asking what Afghanistan needed or what should be done, but they went there with their own specialties and then proceeded to ask monies that they could apply their specialties to Afghanistan. In general the development assistance work for Afghanistan was not well coordinated. I say this specifically about AID. I say this about the NGOs, the IOs, despite the meetings, the talk there is not a great deal of coordination and not a great deal of expertise. Huge amounts of money was thrown down rat holes.

Q: Mike, we're sort of running out of time for this time. Obviously we want to come back again, but again, I'd like to put at the end here, let's talk about your impressions during this first period in Kabul of some of the, why you didn't think the NGOs and the AID works were not, I mean, what rat holes you saw money going down or you know, misguided efforts there. Also, I'd like to ask you, you raised it before and I didn't pick it up then, but could you tell me about how adoptions because this is always a very sensitive thing on the consular side, how that was all working and then something about other armed forces which were picking up with armed forces being there. I think other groups have been doing this, the Germans, the British, and others who had sent troops there.

METRINKO: Even the various different American armed groups, which are very different.

Q: All right, let's talk about that during this specific period and also foreign influence. I mean, what you were seeing.

METRINKO: American?

Q: Yes, but also, I'm thinking of particularly Pakistan and also about the Taliban at this time. Then later you came back, you went to Herat and that was from when to when?

METRINKO: The first time I was in Afghanistan during this period I arrived in January. I left on a short break in July and then I, no I left on a short break in June, came back and left again in August to go to Yemen. I was in Yemen for four months as chief of the consular section. I left Yemen in January of 2003 with an onward assignment again to go back to Afghanistan and arrived back in Afghanistan in March of 2003 and I was there until August, six straight months.

Q: Okay, so we will talk, we'll do those questions I asked about the first time in Kabul and then I would like to talk to you about being a consular officer in Yemen again and then we'll go back, okay?

METRINKO: Okay, I can come back if you want. I can come back anytime.

Q: This is an addendum with Mike Metrisko done after our last series of tapes. Mike, let's do Kabul the first time. You went to Kabul when?

METRINKO: I went to Kabul in January of the year 2002.

Q: Okay, how did that come about and in the first place how long were you there in Afghanistan?

METRINKO: I was there in Afghanistan that first time from January 2002 up until August although I had a short break in June for about two weeks.

Q: How did you come about doing that?

METRINKO: Well, this all follows from the Twin Towers.

Q: You're talking about 9/11?

METRINKO: 9/11.

Q: The Trade Center.

METRINKO: The Trade Center and the realization that Afghanistan was involved, the Taliban had supported Osama Bin Laden, etc. and all that great history that we now have etched into our minds. What happened is that I heard that there might be an opening at the embassy? It was in the newspapers that the embassy was going to be reopened. I also heard the Department was looking for volunteers. I called up and volunteered. I was remembered in the Department because I had been in Yemen the preceding year. I had spent several months there. I got a call back from NEA/SA/EX asking me if I was really interested. Yes. Telling me they would definitely like me to be on the list of people going, but just weren't sure exactly when, whether it would be the first group to actually open up the embassy or slightly after that. Then there was silence and it went back and forth like that for a while. You know the State Department never follows up on anything. Eventually I got a call in December again saying they wanted me to go and finally got a date of the second week in January to depart the United States. Of course the Department being the Department I had to get my own visa to go to Pakistan and I had to do everything like that myself.

Q: When you went, you got there in January?

METRINKO: I arrived there in January. The embassy had been opened at that point for less than four weeks.

Q: What was the situation in Afghanistan and in Kabul when you got there?

METRINKO: When I arrived in Kabul in January of 2002 the city was still very quiet, rather grim, very dark. There was no electricity in the entire city. The weather was not cold thank

goodness because, at least not freezing cold because people were still using wood and I think manure as well to burn for fires. There was no such thing as oil or gas deliveries or electricity for heating your home, so the entire city was overhung with a miasma of smoke, smoke, dust, grit in the air. There had been a drought for five years preceding this so the city was very, very dry and at least a third if not more of the city was in total ruin. No electricity, a huge ruined section of the city where no one lived, just block after block after block of demolished buildings. These were buildings that had been demolished in the war [against the Soviets and] was not part of the Soviets and not part of our bombing of the city.

The embassy compound itself was still recognizably the old embassy compound prior to its closure in 1989. It was a very large compound filled with trees, flowering plants, lots of roses, lots of other flowers. Even winter flowers were coming up because the gardens had been very well taken care of by the FSNs who stayed in the embassy.

Q: I think we covered part of this. Do you remember what we covered?

METRINKO: I don't remember, I'm sorry.

Q: Okay, well let's keep going.

METRINKO: Yes. Inside the embassy we had more than 100 combat marines and we had a fairly large staff although relatively few from the State Department. It was more military. The Office of Military Cooperation OMC, various other, AID was starting to come in force. When I arrived in January though it was still very small. Brian Crocker was chargé. His wife was there as the sort of general housekeeper and she should have gotten a medal for her work. There was a very small political section, myself and Ann Wright. Ann Wright left quite shortly afterwards. Ellen Eyre, E-Y-R-E, came in shortly after that. There was no economic section per se. The consular section consisted of one FSN and originally [an officer] who came in for about two weeks just to look at the office to sort of shovel it out to see what files were there to see what could be salvaged from the old consular supplies. It was an embassy where the entire bottom floor was taken over by the marines. They used it as their living space. Most of us stayed in the bomb shelter. We slept in there. Bit by bit started to open up the offices. They had to be swept of course, in both ways. Both to look for traces of eavesdropping equipment as well as to sweep them out because they hadn't been touched by 1989. The building itself was in relatively good shape although it soon became apparent that there was not enough water and there was not enough sewage capacity for the people who are now living in it. It had never been designed as a residential building. It had only been a building for people to work in and for guards to stay occasionally at night. What happened is that suddenly there were upwards of 200 people, 160, 170, 200 living on the compound and there was no sewage capacity. So, things like that had to be taken care of. The trees started falling down one after the other. The marines diplomatic security decided that they need a line of sight in case there was an attack on the embassy so they started cutting down the trees and the shrubbery. Concertina wire started going up very quickly. It had already started all around the perimeter walls and then all around everywhere so that when one approached the gate that was the only egress from the embassy. It was an old gate used in the past by the motor pool as opposed to the visitors. The visitors' gate was permanently sealed off. The new gate was surrounded by a serpentine of concertina wire which made it very difficult to

come and go and lots of little marine barricades and lots of barriers. It became part of our daily conversation. Huge, plastic heavy plastic containers, soft containers that could be shipped easily and that would then hold hundreds or thousands of pounds of soil; dirt, sand and you could build them anywhere. You could stack them so you had walls of [sand] barriers going up. They were easy to do. All you had to do was put one down and just like a trash bag start to fill it, except in a square container that had a framework around it. Easy to ship.

The embassy wall which had been a rather pleasant old stone wall became, was soon covered by heavy metal plates stretching all around the perimeter. Plates that went from the top of the wall down below the sidewalk because they dug a sort of trench to install the walls in. The walls were extraordinarily ugly. It looks like a huge metal box now when you look at the embassy. By huge I mean it's more than a block long and a block wide of a metal wall. There was some sort of amusement in all this because the children from the neighborhood soon discovered that if you threw one stone at the wall it sounded like Big Ben. The first time this happened the marines went crazy of course.

Q: Oh, God. You were what, the head of the political section?

METRINKO: I was in charge of the political section. The job kept changing in title. My actual visiting card and business card said political counselor. I was also in charge of what was supposed to be an economic section and there was the political military designation for a while, too, so I had all those titles, political counselor, POL/MIL officer, political economic counselor and because I had a consular background. As soon as Alan _____ left CA, Consular Affairs sent me a commission in the mail and made me the head of the consular section, too. From January until I think it was July when the consular officer finally arrived I was also the head of the consular section.

Q: What were the consular duties?

METRINKO: Embassy inquiries about visas, which we were not doing and I don't think, are still being done there. To get a visa if you were an Afghan, if you were a real VIP Afghan we would take your passport and send it down to Islamabad. In some cases we actually sent officers down as couriers to take these down when we had high ranking government delegations leaving Kabul to go to the United States for example. The average person could not get a visa simply could not get a visa. We had a fair number of lost passports or passports that simply expired because Americans, American journalists, business people were rushing into Afghanistan and their passports expired or had expired or they would suddenly realize they had no pages left and they wanted new pages. We would again take those and send them down to Pakistan. I had many inquiries about adoption including one family, an Afghan American family that I believe carried out an adoption although we could only tell them that we didn't know anything about the Afghan adoption laws, that they didn't really have any at that point. We had a couple of arrests, one solid arrest case and a couple of other possible arrest cases, possibly not. They were all settled fairly quickly and one repatriation of an American Afghan who had mental problems and came to Kabul.

Q: What was your solid arrest case?

METRINKO: The solid arrest case, well, solid in the sense of an Afghan solidity which is rather fluid. An American Afghan family, young men had returned to Afghanistan, they had money and they had a position in the past. They had property left over from previous regimes. They opened up a business enterprise that was actually very lucrative and got into a major fight which resulted in a street fight which actually resulted with people getting injured by knife wounds because of a problem they were having with tenants. The fight ended up with police and ministry of interior officials actually battling it out on the street with each other. Everybody was of course claiming to have friends in the Afghan government back in the United States and the United Nations. They were arrested, they were taken, they were held. By the time I met them they were already out and they never went back to prison as far as I know. Yes, indeed there were Americans, they were beaten and they were held and that was that.

Q: Contact with the government on doing political work. Were there really parties or was it sort of a well-warned situation?

METRINKO: In the beginning it was all individuals and contact was, well, when I arrived there in January there was almost no government. Within one day of my arrival because we had the head of AID visiting, I found myself in President [Karzai]'s office sitting there and having tea for two or three hours in a long meeting. It's not often that you get to meet the president of a country the first or second day. I was sitting there with my jeans on, too by the way because nobody had good clothes with them. I had been told to just bring jeans and sort of nothing decent because there was no way to clean anything. I would say that contact with the government was extremely good, perhaps too good. We could walk into [Karzai]'s office whenever we wanted to. We could get into the palace whenever we wanted to. We could and did meet all of the highest-ranking present and former officials of the country including the former shah when he returned. I immediately met with him. I met with the warlords. I met with the leading clergy and they sought us out, too. If we hadn't gotten to them, they sought us out. I was dealing directly with ministers, directly with the Ayatollah's other high ranking clergy.

Q: Did you have the feeling, I mean obviously this is what we were all looking at, were things beginning to coalesce, to gel or not?

METRINKO: It's hard to say because we didn't know very much about the country at that point. There was no communication system in the country. We knew a bit about what was happening in the palace. We knew a bit about what was happening on the streets. You have to remember that we had no FSNs, or very few FSNs, and almost nobody who spoke [Pashto] or [Dari]. I was one of two officers in the political section and we were the two officers in the embassy who spoke it for the first couple of months. We had no real connection with anyone out in the provinces except for some of the military teams and they didn't really know what was happening politically out in the provinces and also they weren't reporting to us. We did not do a lot of traveling in the beginning. In fact the embassy still doesn't do a lot of traveling because traveling was difficult. You couldn't go anywhere by car. There was no surface transportation or travel whatsoever. You could not go very far by plane because there was no plane system in the country. You had to go by UN planes; UN helicopters or by military flights and military flights were at best a chancy thing. It was hard to organize them, arrange them and they didn't want to do it just on the drop

just because somebody from the embassy wanted to travel. There had to be a very good reason. It was after all a war zone at the time. I remember when INL sent someone in to do a survey of police.

Q: Who was that?

METRINKO: INL, who did they send, God I can't think of the name now, I'm sorry, but from the Department. We wanted to do a survey of the conditions of the Afghan police force. I think he arrived probably in late February and I devoted a major part of a week to go around with him. Number one it was very necessary for me as a consular officer to know this, but it was equally necessary for me as the political officer to know this, too. What were the police doing? We started by going to meet the minister of interior then worked our way down to the chief of police with introductions and then through various precinct commanders. One of the questions I asked first was what about police in other cities, other towns, other villages and what the police commander of Kabul said was, "We assume there are police out there, but we don't know who they are. We have no communication with anybody. We don't have a phone system. We don't have a radio system. We're just assuming that our former police who have taken up their jobs just like we have. We don't know." This was true of the whole country. You could assume that things were happening, but unless it happened to be a town or a city where there was a reason to go, where [there were] pretty heavy American contingents already, you really did not know what was out there.

Q: What about you know, during the heavy point of the war, it was certainly one's observation that we had special services and CIA types all over the country doing things. Was there a net of that nature or not?

METRINKO: There was that. There were a lot of guys running around doing stuff. I don't think the policy of what they were doing was ever carefully coordinated or coordinated at all with the embassy. Originally I was in on the briefings that they would give, but then they decided that the briefing should be limited to the ambassador only or to the chargé only. So, nobody.

Q: When you say they, who was it?

METRINKO: The CIA decided this.

Q: CIA.

METRINKO: So, within about a month or so the political section was excluded from all briefings by the CIA. They used a variety of gimmicks you know saying we have to get new clearances for you. We have to do this; we have to do that. We have to get this signed off by our headquarters, but they were lying. I don't know why they decided that nobody from the embassy besides the chargé or the ambassador should be involved.

Q: So, essentially there wasn't a team out there?

METRINKO: Not a team that involved cooperation of the CIA or the military who were actually

fighting. We had a very good relationship with the military's, the side of the military house that was doing cooperation. Military cooperation, building up trying to build up the new Afghan national army, trying to provide military assistance and in other ways. We had at least the political section had very little to almost no relationship to the people who were fighting the war. I'm not sure to what extent the ambassador did for the chargé. I know they went out to briefings would receive briefings, but the briefings were I would say not very good. We had a great many military people and CIA people who were assigned to Afghanistan like State people who had never been there before.

Q: It sounds like all of a sudden there was a lot of publicity about soldiers and CIA people with global position equipment on horseback and all, but you know and I know, going through the Vietnam experience, it sounds great, but you don't give somebody a couple of weeks training and plunk him down into a situation and really get very much out of them.

METRINKO: They didn't as far as I could see get very much training at all. We certainly got no training to go there. The training for Afghanistan was shameful I'd say for everybody concerned. There was none. When the Department called me and we started to talk about my going to Kabul very early in December before the embassy actually opened I told them that I was free and that I would just as soon join the group that was in training at NFATC. I had this look of just amusement from the person I said that to and he said, "What group in training?" I said, "Well, you're opening up an embassy. It's even been announced in the newspapers. It's been announced at press briefings. You're getting people together from the Department. The place has been closed to us since 1989. I assume you have people, a core group of people now in training at NFATC." He said, "No, we have nobody and there won't be anybody." He said, "We're just picking people at random and sending them there." That was the State Department planning for opening up the new embassy.

Q: I think it's important to understand, it sounds like the CIA again, it sounds like it was kind of doing almost the same thing of throwing people in or you know, I mean, maybe all right is helping direct fire or something like that, but I mean did they seem to have a cadre of people who knew what they were doing?

METRINKO: No, not at all. Well, when I think of knowing what one is doing I think of people who are regionally aware who have a smattering at least of the language and know something about the culture, the history, the morays of the country who know where they are, who can sort of blend in to what they are doing, who can meet people, make friends, establish relationships with people. Using those criteria, no, the CIA was a zero. They were very good about passing out big bags of money, new SUVs and wonderful little satellite radios to people, but as far as any real knowledge of what was happening, where they were, what they were trying to get done, the past, the present, the future, was zero.

Q: In our previous set of interviews, we've talked about your experience in Iran, Peace Corps, Kabul, Tehran, prison and all that. You've gained a great deal of experience in this area. How much of this was transferable both in language, but also in society and the way things operated in Afghanistan?

METRINKO: An incredible amount of it. Being in Afghanistan in the year 2002 and the year 2003 was very much like in fact incredibly like being in the Peace Corps in Iran in 1970. I would say that there's that many years between Iran and Afghanistan, 35, whatever, 34. The way people acted was the way the villagers around my Peace Corps site acted. Especially in Iraq, the language that I spoke was [different] from Iran. The foods that we ate were extremely similar, the way we sat, what we talked about, the interests of the people, they way they acted, the way they dressed, everything was very much like Iran, not Iran of today, but the Iran that I knew in 1970. Part of that is because so many Afghans had been to Iran, a couple of million who had gone there have lived there have come back, but part of its also due to the general sharing they have of culture and of language and of history. My own experience, I never, from the first moment that I arrived in Afghanistan I felt that I was thoroughly familiar with my surroundings. I knew how to act, what to do. I knew what was likely under the counters and the stalls and the bazaar. I could recognize the goods. I knew what everything was used for. The patterns, the music, the art, everything was extremely, extremely like Iran. Now, in the entire time 2002 and 2003 that I was in Afghanistan, no Afghan ever asked me if I was an American without exception they would always ask me, they would assume I was from Iran and they would ask me from what city I was from in Iran.

Q: What would you tell them?

METRINKO: I would laugh and I would tell them I was an American and on several occasions I was told I was lying. Number one, an Afghan teenager told me I should be proud to be an Iranian and why was I trying to conceal it. When I went to buy material in the bazaar once for my Afghan clothing the shopkeeper that I was dealing with kept asking me what city I was from in Iran. I kept telling him that I was an American, that I wasn't Iranian and he looked at me because I always spoke [Farsi], I never spoke English on the streets. He looked at me and he said, "I've lived in Iran for ten years. I know you're an Iranian. What city are you from?" I finally said, Tabriz. He said, "Oh, well, why didn't you say so?"

Q: Well, you said for Afghan clothing, what was this?

METRINKO: Afghan clothing is very similar to Pakistani village clothing. It's a long, well, very wide baggy pants which are cinched with a rope or a drawstring and cotton of course and a tunic that goes over that. Now there are differences in quality, there are differences in style. If you're in Herat and you're an older person you wear only white. If you're in [other] areas you wear very dark colors, dark green, dark brown, dark black. If you're younger in other areas, they have a very large amount of embroidery on the front. So, I have all kinds of these costumes.

Q: Oh, were you getting this to fade into the thing?

METRINKO: No, I was getting it because it was comfortable if I went out to someone's home. Everyone sat on the floor and you can't sit on the floor with a pair of tight pants on or jeans on. It's far more comfortable to dress Afghan style. Also, I had a long beard. I carried prayer beads. Nobody would notice me on the street when I walked like this.

Q: Yes. What about, what were you getting from your contacts going out to dinner and all? How

did they see things developing at that time?

METRINKO: Everybody wanted change immediately. It wasn't going to happen immediately. Everyone talked about how evil the warlords were and how America had to get rid of the warlords. That also was not going to happen because we had several different policies about the warlords. But I say everyone; the people who were my contacts were a limited group of people. I had a number of younger Afghans who had always been in Afghanistan that I met through the embassy or as I start going out and meeting religious figures or other people. I started to see a large number of tribal elders who were coming to the embassy on a daily basis because they thought they were supposed to. We were the new power in the country; therefore, they were coming up to introduce themselves to the new power. I would get called to the gate whenever one of these groups came and I would bring at least a sampling of them into the embassy to small meeting rooms that we had down by the main gate and sit and talk with them. I'd say that my contacts were non-existent. I knew some women of course, but I don't know what the women of the country were thinking. I do not know what villages were thinking at the time unless they were talking to us in the embassy.

It's a bit hard to explain. It was still rather chaotic out in the countryside and there was no network of information or communication or transportation. When you think of a bowl of spaghetti, you think of a bowl of spaghetti that's all been chopped up. You might think you had a strand and you would discover it was only an inch long and it wasn't a strand. So many of the Afghans were in the same boat, however because the new government was coming in from abroad. Some of them had been in America, had been living in other countries, they'd been in Pakistan, they'd been in [Iran]. They were coming in to take high government positions. A lot of the younger guys in the place, the gophers, the ones who were running around doing speeches, etc. were coming in bright and fresh from England and the United States. They didn't know anything about Afghanistan. I mean they could speak [Pashtu] or [Dari] because they had learned it at home, but they really didn't know anything about the country and they were perhaps less prepared for it than many of our military and CIA people were.

There were very few, I never met anyone I don't think with the possible exception of a few top leaders to whom other people came and gave constant reports. I never met anyone who seemed to have a grasp on the whole country.

Q: Well, did you, were people looking over their shoulder for insurgents or the Taliban at that time or not?

METRINKO: They didn't need the Taliban, they had themselves. We've met the enemy and the enemy is us. There wasn't so much talk about a resurgence of the Taliban at the time. The Taliban were there. The government bureaucracies did not disappear. The police had not all disappeared. The schools had not all disappeared. Various ministries had not disappeared during the Taliban area. The people stayed and the guys simply cut their beards when we came in. It's amazing how peoples have a wide tolerance for stupidity at the top of their leadership, but in general much of the bureaucracy, much of the commercial, cultural, social life of the country did not change when we came and the Taliban left. Much of what we call Taliban activity was really tribal or it was rivalry or it was old feuding. I'd had this explained to me over and over and over

again by tribal elders, you know, the old men who had come in with their long white beards and would sit and talk for an hour or two. They would laugh about some of the things that were happening. What they always said was you American soldiers don't understand this, but you know, what they think is a Taliban act is really a feud going back more than 100 years in that particular family. I have to agree with that. I would say that even today much of what we call Taliban is not, it's simply, commercial rivalries, land grabs, power grabs, power struggles or ethnic problems using Taliban. When you say was there a fear of Taliban resurgence, no. It was more a fear of, it was not a fear, it was just a fact, the warlords, generals, high officials, other rich people, people who had power at the local [level] and the landwards were trying to grab what they could in this great realigning of property.

Q: What in your language ability and moving around, what role did you play with the ambassador?

METRINKO: Our first chargé was Ryan Crocker. Ryan Crocker has been described as the most self-contained person in the Foreign Service. He shares no information and he doesn't really ask questions. He falls into that category of officer who believes they know what is happening and they do not need either counseling advice or expertise. That having been said we certainly traveled quite a bit together. We went to meetings together. I did reports, which he would routinely sign off on. The entire time I was there I never once knew if he thought my work was good, bad or indifferent. Then again, nor did anyone else, which is fine. It's just, not a criticism; it's just a statement.

Q: Just the way he was.

METRINKO: Just the way he operated. The ambassador was a different story. The ambassador was Robert Finn. Finn came in I think around April I want to say if I'm not mistaken and Finn came in with a very good background of the general region. He had already been ambassador in Tajikistan. He spoke Tajik. He was a serious language scholar. His Turkish was excellent. He was bilingual in Turkish and English and he and I had known each other since we were in the Peace Corps together in Turkey back in the '60s. The relationship there was I'd say quite a bit better. He had a very good sense of humor. He liked to sit and talk about things, which made a big difference.

Now, having said that, we had other ambassadors as well. He had the president's special envoy who came back and forth and back and forth sometimes for a couple of days, sometimes for a couple of weeks. He shared with no one. He I don't even think shared very much with the ambassador. He was also an ambassador with that title and he was carrying out his own sort of relationship with the Afghan government. I remember the very first meeting that I mentioned when I'd been there for two days [with] myself, Ryan Crocker, and the head of AID sitting in [an] office for a couple of hours. Right after we'd been there for about an hour talking about development plans and AID's assistance program for Afghanistan a man came in with a note and he gave it to [Ryan]. He looked at it and said, "Excuse me, gentlemen, I have an important call that I have to take. I'll be back quickly." He came back about 20 minutes later and all he said was, "That was [the] ambassador from Washington." He sat down to continue the conversation. He never told us what [the ambassador] had said. There was that. I don't think our ambassadors

talked to each all that much. I would include General McNeil in that. General McNeil was the head of the American military forces in the country. He had his own relationship with the government. The head of the CIA there had his/her own relationship with the government. Later on well into the year 2002, Ambassador Bill _____ came out to handle assistance programs. I believe, I've been told that his relationship with Finn was far, far better, was very good, very close and they worked together quite well. He was also there with the title of ambassador. We had [a] political advisor to General McNeil and to the military. He also had the title of ambassador on his business cards. So, we had in Kabul itself three permanent civilian ambassadors, plus one visiting special envoy who came out constantly and was always on the phone when he wasn't out there, plus a military general who really had all the toys in the game.

Q: Tell me about the general and what was his relation do you think to the embassy and his political advice.

METRINKO: I don't know. When I was there the first year they would come to meetings, but not all that often. There was a defense attaché's office of counselor in the embassy, which also did not seem to have very much to do with the actual military combat forces of the country. They were supposed to be a liaison. We had the office of military cooperation in the embassy, which also did not really; it was not really part of the active combat operations going on. How the defense attaché's office, the office of military cooperation and the physical fighting army there cooperated, you'd have to address that to them I think.

Q: You've got an army fighting in essentially a civilian area. Did you feel that the army that was going out in the field was sensitive to being and understood the ocean in which it was dealing or the area it was dealing?

METRINKO: I'd say the answer is a flat no. Even many of the military people assigned to Kabul itself in the office of military cooperation and certainly many of the paramilitary assigned to the CIA in Kabul seemed to have no clue about what or how ridiculous they looked and acted on the streets. The standard gear, now, we were slowly, quite steadily, slowly, but steadily getting into law and order of a sort in Kabul and there was a very strong attempt by the [central] government backed up by the embassy to show that things were returning to normal, the people were dressing in normal clothes, that they weren't going to carry weapons in the country nor in the city. In fact weapons were banned in the city of Kabul unless you happened to be an American soldier or one of the international soldiers. The American military, especially the paramilitary associated with the CIA went around looking like a combination of soldier of fortune and Fredericks of Hollywood in this sort of weird military getup with lots of leather things and extra holsters and bandoleras and places to put guns and knives and bandanas and neck scarves, weird shirts. They looked like they had come out of a Rambo movie and they sort of loved doing this. So, if you went into a normal restaurant, there weren't that many decent restaurants in the beginning, but if you went to a normal one for lunch or dinner and happened to be seated in the same room as a group of these guys it became ludicrous after a while. They were covered with weapons. Covered with strange gear, none of it standard military gear and it looked like a while bunch of Rambos sitting there. They had no sensitivity, no sense of, they acted like they were, they had conquered Afghanistan.

Q: Did you get any feel for the station chief and the ambassador, how they got along and how supportive things were between the two or not?

METRINKO: I think there was a good relationship there as far as I could see. Very friendly, social and professional, but again, that's something to address to those guys.

Q: You stayed at the embassy during most of this time, didn't you?

METRINKO: During the first time I was there, yes. I lived at the embassy except for a two-week period when, let me qualify that. I left the embassy to go to other places in the country several times. The first time was with the chargé on a one-day trip to. In June I took a sort of leave of absence from the embassy for about ten days or two weeks and I was seconded to the United Nations organization assistance agency for Afghanistan and went off as an election observer. This was absolutely great. I used to wander around myself usually with an FSN in Kabul. I could get away with that. Number one, nobody knew what I was doing. Number two, I was often out as the consular officer as opposed to the political officer and I would take the consular FSN with me. So, I could disappear and sort of come back several hours later. I guess the DS people decided that I knew what I was doing on the streets, but this was the first time my trip with the UN that I was really and truly off on my own. The UN provided what they called the UN security blanket. DS accepted this. As it turned out when I arrived in [Herat], the UN security blanket was about 150 miles away and consisted of somebody who would sit at a desk and receive phone calls. This was great. I got to wander all around those two provinces for quite a long period of time with a bunch of Afghans who were also newly employed by the UN to help run elections.

Q: How did the election go?

METRINKO: Well, this was the election, it was when they were choosing the representatives from the towns and villages who were going to represent those regions at the regional loya jirga, grand consuls and then from the regional grand consuls they were then going to select a smaller number to go to Kabul for the major grand consul, loya jirga, L-O-Y-A J-I-R-G-A. It went great considering nothing like this had happened in a very, very long time that the entire world was watching it and that nobody knew quite what to do.

To give an idea of how much state work had to be done by the international organizations, my very first day in Kandoz I was out with the regional _____ representative who by the way was a former Soviet military officer who had done training for the Soviet troops who invaded Afghanistan and he was retired from the Soviet army. I was talking to. It was the day when in a very small town outside of Kandoz people were gathering together to select representatives to go to the larger counsel down the road. There were at least 1,000 people, maybe more, you know, milling around a big field, going into groups and back and forth and up and down and it was taking them forever. The UN man had explained everything. Other people had tried to explain what they were supposed to do, but there was still a lot of chaos. It was a combination of ethnic groups as well. There were Kajiks there, there were Turkmen there and there were Uzbeks there. This was an area where there was a mixture. Of course there were no women there. One of the men started to talk to me and he said, "We're having a problem doing this because this is the first

time in more than 15 or 20 years when we've been able to get together in a group." I looked at him and said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you couldn't form a group under the Soviets and it was too dangerous under the Taliban as well. If too many people were in a group they would get arrested. So, we don't know how to talk to each other in a big group." Something as simple as that. Lord knows it would have been much harder if there had been women there to talk to them, too. Although that happened in a [cases]. I did several of these. I spent time in Kandoz. I went up to the town of Nahrin where there had been a major earthquake earlier that year.

Driving over the mountains in northern Afghanistan now, everything was dirt of course, driving over the mountains with a rickety old SUV and coming down, literally driving on mountain slopes. There was no real road because people don't use vehicles that much. They use horses or donkeys. There was a kind of track that we called it and coming down off the mountains, it was a plateau surrounded by high mountains. I looked around and thought that it was the most beautiful place I had ever seen in my life. It looked like Shangri-La, that's all I could think of. It was late spring. The grass on the plateau was deep green. There were a million small poppies out and the plain was extremely as flat as a table and it went for miles and miles and you could see herds of horses in the distance and incredible birds of bright plumage. It was just so beautiful.

Q: You mentioned poppies. What was the situation drug wise?

METRINKO: The situation drug wise. Well, in theory the Taliban stopped the cultivation of poppies or at least they stopped most people from cultivating poppies so I believe they could just concentrate a little bit of the poppy production in their own hands. In the two years that it's been independent, Afghanistan has turned into the world's second largest producer of poppies or opium. It's an amazing accomplishment aided and abided by all sorts of people. Everybody grows poppies. All the major landlords, all the major warlords, major government officials, police officials, military commanders, everybody is involved in it. Everyone makes excuses for the Afghan farmers as well. The excuse is going along these lines: if [a farmer] tries to raise corn or wheat he would only make \$400 a year and its backbreaking work and if he just turns his fields over to poppy cultivation he could make \$5,000. It's true. If I go into a jewelry store and grab a bunch of jewelry I can make a lot more money than I'm doing right now, but I also know that it's illegal. Afghans don't care. The concept of law that we have, the rule of law, is simply an alien concept there. If it's something to their advantage, they simply ignore the morality and the illegality of it. The government ignores it. The military ignores it. They tend to aid and abide it in general.

Q: While you were there was the opium penetrating particularly the youth, which seems to be a problem, you know. First it seems only benign, you sell it to those stupid Europeans and Americans, but then it starts to enter your own culture.

METRINKO: That's an interesting question. Now in the entire time that I was there, how many months? Seven plus six, 13 months that I lived in Afghanistan going out constantly being in villages and small towns, living whatever passes for a normal life I never once saw opium used, not once. I was told over and over that Afghans do not use it. They sell it, they deal with it, they package it, they produce it, they, you know, raise it, they do whatever you want to do with it, but

they don't use it. That having been said, if I compare, I've compared Afghanistan of the year 2002 to 2003 to Iran in the year 1970. In Iran in 1970 I knew lots of people who used opium and it was used fairly routinely, socially, in all classes, villages, all the way up to the top level of society. I never once saw it being used or even smelled it being used and I can tell the smell. I know that one. The only time I saw something like that used was when I had taken over the two DEA guys, the new head of the marine corps security detachment and the new head of the, the new RSO from the embassy to meet the northern alliance commanders who have the northern alliance army base right across the street from the embassy. As we were all sitting on the ground just sort of chatting the commander lit up a hash cigarette and one of his deputies did, too and they offered them to us. I thought it was great watching the DEA people and the marines sort of sniffing and pretending they weren't there. That was the only time and that was just whatever, probably just hash. It certainly wasn't opium.

Let me say this, too. I was in Afghanistan in 1970 and I saw it used then. I could smell it. I watched people using it. I mean Afghanistan was on the drug trail in 1970. It was no longer the silk trail or the spice trail. It was the drug trail. I saw nothing like that in 2002 2003. I did see fields that were under cultivation and I saw certainly in village houses stacks of opium plants and it was used as thatch sometimes on sheds and out buildings, the stocks with the pods. Only the one time and one man out of hundreds and hundreds of hours, thousands of hours of my being with Afghans did I see somebody actually using it and that was hash.

Q: What about do you remember you told me off make or not, I'll make sure it gets on here, about visitors from Washington.

METRINKO: Visitors from Washington were extremely concerned about this. Everyone from congress and we had at least half of the congress out there the first year I was there. Everyone from congress brought it up immediately. It was important to them. It was for us up until later on in the year of 2002 it was a bit of a moot point because we simply couldn't get anywhere. We didn't know what was happening. We had indications. We had reports that it was being grown, but we sure couldn't get out there to see it. It was not part of the U.S. military mission to wipe it out. Perhaps it should have been, but it wasn't. For visitors it was very high on the agenda.

I remember once early on when a congressional group was out there and we were giving the normal country team briefing and since I was the political officer at the time and the economic officer and in theory also, there was no one else there to do it, responsible for tracking drug production, they were asking questions about it, you know, why aren't we doing more. I looked at the congressman and I said, "Congressman, we don't have a functioning toilet here in the embassy yet. I share one with about 100 other men. How far do you want me to go trying to eradicate the poppy production on the other side of the country?" It was just, the first year it was I'd say impossible. Now, the British got excited about it or exercised about it and they came into the program to pass out large sums of money to people who would then promise to destroy the opium. Afghans like most other people are quite willing to accept large sums of money and promise anything knowing that you will go away. The British would come and hand out sums of money and the Afghans would say yes, yes, yes, we're going to burn it right now and the Brits would leave. They would then get two sources of income from the same crop, like the Iranians and like others.

Q: Speaking of handing out money, obviously it's no secret that this is how the CIA gets many of its support and informers and all this. Did you find yourself being warned off by the CIA, you know, you're seeing Genghis Khan or something like that and all of a sudden he's one of their sources.

METRINKO: No, I'd say just the opposite. Very much the opposite. Several times I was asked if I would meet with particularly people that they were interested in because if they said we can't support them financially anymore, but this person is worthwhile maintaining a relationship with. It happened several times. That was one. The other thing is the way it worked, it's no secret that, I mean people, everyone in the city knows where the CIA headquarters in Kabul was. In fact, it was brought home to me very quickly once. I had mentioned before standing at the main gate. We had no communications with the city, very few with government leaders. There was no phone system in the country. People who wanted to see us would simply show up at the embassy and they would give their names or pass a note in to the heavy contingent of marines at the main gate who were there working with the local translators or just local new staff, security staff. I would be called down constantly to the main gate because it was a political group. We had. Do you know what an F hawk is?

Q: No.

METRINKO: Well, it's protection. The marines had a very, very good force protection unit assigned to the embassy a couple of whom were linguists. I mean they spoke decent Persian and these were marine Intel officers whose job was to do Intel work to protect the marine presence in the city. This de facto meant protecting the embassy because the marines were the embassy. We were all part of the same unit. One of their guys would stand down at the gate, too and their job was to sift through who was coming through the gate to see what direction they should be sent in. They developed a real knack for it. We had lines of people showing up. People who wanted jobs, people who wanted to bring in stingers, people who wanted to give us information, people who wanted to rat on their next door neighbor, people who wanted compensation for having lost property during our attack, people who were looking for their relatives who we had put in prison or people who were just curious who wanted to see the embassy. Also, people who were coming in from the provinces and knew they were supposed to pay a courtesy call on the embassy because we were the new power brokers of the country.

The main gate was a gate. It was a big iron gate that opened into a driveway. All the vehicles came in that way. There was a small passenger entrance as well. There was a lead to sort of jerry rigged little security box there along with a larger area that was sandbagged. Afghans would come to the main gate. They would be turned over immediately if they needed something or wanted something to the marine who was doing Intel work. He would determine if they should be set aside to be dealt with by the CIA or if it was a matter for my office and me or if it was something they should be doing. I found the criteria; I found their selection process pretty good. They would call me when there was somebody they knew I would find interesting whether because it was an official who just wanted to pay a courtesy call or because it was somebody who wasn't really CIA material, but we often traded these people back and forth. I would sometimes get called to see if I would meet with the person, for example, call directly by an

Afghan or an emissary of the person. I met a large number of high-ranking Afghans because they sent emissaries in. I would determine for example if it came up that the real reason for the meeting was because they had stingers or some sort of.

Q: When you say stingers.

METRINKO: The stinger rockets.

Q: Yes, we were trying to bring them in having supplied them during the war with the Soviets.

METRINKO: We were trying to buy them. Well, if it was that, then I would turn the person over pretty quickly to the marines, who would then turn them over to the CIA. It just depended on what the reason for the person's being there was and again, sometimes the CIA would realize that the person was really a straight political contact and they didn't want to deal with this so they would turn him over to me. But we did, it was sort of like a meat market down there and we traded meat back and forth.

Q: I'd like you to talk about Paul Wolfowitz coming out and an incident that had happened prior to that.

METRINKO: The incident was the bombing in early July by the United States of a wedding party in the village of Dehrawod, D-E-H-R-A-W-O-D. There was reason to believe that former Taliban officials were going to be gathering or at least present at a wedding in Dehrawod. There was a military operation going on in the area. The military believed that one of their planes was being shot at by the people who had collected for the wedding so they called in an air strike. The wedding party or the wedding area was bombed. This happened I think probably on July 1st or so. It happened and we found out about it by late that day because the whole [place] was bombed and the wedding party happened to be good friends and supporters of President [Karzai] in fact. It was his staunchest supporter in the area, the person who had helped him had supported him, who had stayed with him actually when he was fighting against the Taliban. This thing Afghanistan was a dearth of information. It was decided to send a team up immediately to investigate what had happened. A team to go up on the ground. The team was going to consist of special forces, a team of ministry of interior and other Afghan officials including the minister of tribal affairs because familiar with the area and myself as sort of a liaison or bridge between the military team and the Afghan officials. We found out about this, this was all decided late one evening and we were supposed to stage at the airport the next morning at 7:00. The Afghans were there early. I was there early. Special forces showed up several hours late because they couldn't get their helicopters in the air to come from about a 15 minute ride to the VIP section of the airport. They arrived very late with apologies. They had had mechanical difficulties and we flew from Kabul Airport to the town of Tarin Kowt. We were supposed to stage in Tarin Kowt and go up over land from there to _____. A decision was made by the special forces person that he needed more support and so we called in; he called in support for more special forces to come up. They had to drive up. The military U.S. military team, paramilitary team I should say that was at Tarin Kowt did not support us in this. They did not want to go to Dehrawod at all and so they had no vehicles or any other way to help us get up there I believe because they had been part of the actual military operation two days before and did not want to return. The military

team arrived very late. It took them far longer to get there, to get to Tarin Kowt than they'd thought and they arrived the next morning. Our departure was delayed and delayed and delayed. We finally departed and because we took the wrong road since no one had brought any guides ended up going up streambeds, riverbeds, etc. It took about six hours or so to get to our destination as opposed to the two hour drive it was supposed to be over what turned out to be a good road we found out.

We arrived, did the investigation which because of our very nature had to be cursory. None of us were trained investigators; we could look for things logically. I could look around at the sight and try and determine and try and see what it looked like compared to a normal Afghan house, whether this indeed was the way a wedding would have taken place, things like that. We stayed overnight in Dehrawod and then the next day. You know, I don't know if we stayed one night or two nights. We stayed two nights I believe because, yes, it would have been two nights that we stayed there.

Q: How were you received?

METRINKO: Well, very strangely. In the village of course people were extremely angry, very emotional. They were extremely quiet, silent, but we had enough high-ranking Afghans with us, ministers and generals, etc. and we also had a lot of firepower with us. We had about 25 special forces guys with big weapons. They showed us the site, took us around and showed us where people had died. The bombs had hit the side of the, had hit the wedding party where the women and children were, not the men. I might add that no weapons were ever found that might have been shooting at the airplane. Also, well, it's like the investigation with the investigation, but we stayed for one night at least, possibly two nights, my mind is blank on this already in Dehrawod at the government guesthouse. It was two nights. It was two nights that we stayed there. I stayed one night sleeping in the guest house which was a large compound with the military and the next night I went and stayed with the minister and the other Afghans at the home of a local official which was far more comfortable. We were received emotionally, but not with over hostility. People were very angry. A great many women and children had died they believed and said.

I did one of the strangest things I've ever had to do in my Foreign Service career at least. The second day we were there when the governor, the general who was with him, the Afghan general who was a deputy minister of the interior and the minister of tribal affairs. The local clergy decided to call everyone together, all the men of the town and area together to have a large prayer service in the mosque. None of my military companions would come to this. I represented the United States government at this ceremony, which had about 1,000 armed men sitting. I sat against the wall of the mosque in the front under where the preachers stand with a couple of the other officials. The commander of the special forces unit did come. He sat in a different place out of the crowd really. I was the one who sat up front and I was the one pointed to as the representative of the American government. It was not easy because everyone of them was heavily armed. Normally they don't carry weapons to the mosque, but they did this time. Then again.

Q: Were you and your military colleagues convinced that this was what it was portrayed as a wedding party?

METRINKO: To this day I do not know what happened there. What I saw was a total absence of blood. There was no blood at all anywhere. A couple of specks, a couple of drops here and there. We walked through a large double compound. We walked up on the roads. There were lots of holes from probably bullets, but no indication of how long the holes had been there. This of course is a big mud wall compound, adobe mud compound. When I asked about blood I was told that it had, they had destroyed all the bedding, all the quilts, all of the mats, the carpets that the blood had seeped into. They finally brought one sort of quilt out to us to show us that was all slashed up, but there was no blood on it. The problem I have with it is that I did not see any indication myself that blood had actually been spilled there. That having been said the clinic insisted that a large number of people had been brought in wounded, hurt and others had died. People who had been wounded were actually seen in Qandahar by military representatives who went down to the hospital in Qandahar. We were shown places where people were buried, but we did not exhume any of the graves to see how long the bodies had been there. I guess what's important is that the people there believed this had happened. They came in one after the other to report to the minister and his staff the names of the people who were killed, wounded, their identifications, etc., daughter of so and so, sister of so and so. When we left they had a whole long list of names of the killed and the dead and the wounded with full identifications. I don't think Afghans would lie about that, but I'm not sure. I don't think so many people would lie about it. I guess I came away from there feeling that yes, indeed something had happened, a lot of people had died, been injured, but a slight hesitation in my mind, did it really happen in the place that we were looking at.

Q: What about the military side of the investigation? How did they feel about it? I mean were they going in to essentially to justify the military action or were they going in to take a look?

METRINKO: The guys who went in there as part of the investigation team and it really wasn't an investigation team, not really. They weren't trained police; they were just guys in uniform. None of them had been part of the operation so we all went in pretty open-minded. Our conclusions I guess because we hesitated. The Afghans were adamant that this had happened and when we came back two days later we went straight from the airport to give a briefing. It was quite clear then that the Afghan team believed that this had happened. These were the people who had died, these names, this number of people. The Americans were more hesitant. Something had happened, but we could not describe it in detail. What happened was that some time after this Wolfowitz came in on one of his quick little jaunts.

Q: Oh, Wolfowitz, the assistant or deputy or under secretary of Defense?

METRINKO: Yes. I gave the regular political briefing during the country team presentation to him, but then the ambassador said that I had also been the officer who had gone with the military team to Dehrawod and I gave a description of what we had done up there. He got angry, quite angry and his comment was, "You sound like you believe the Afghans that this actually happened." I said, "Well, I'm just giving you the evidence. We did an investigation. Our conclusion was that something had happened, but we weren't trained police investigators." He wanted to dismiss the whole thing as though it was a figment of the Afghan imagination. In fact I understand that when he came back to Washington he complained that the political officer there

was touting the Afghan line.

Q: Today is the 21st of October, 2003. Mike, before we move on to Herat, let's talk about Afghan civilian compensation for war damages and prisoners of war.

METRINKO: I wanted to bring this up because it sort of fell into a combination of the political and the consular field and covered duties of mine in both those offices. When we attacked Afghanistan to drive out the Taliban and to try and locate Osama Bin Laden we damaged a considerable number of buildings destroyed private homes, the homes of people who were in no way involved with the government or with any effort to attack the United States. We also killed a fair number of Afghan civilians. We destroyed a number of businesses. In Afghanistan there is no insurance if your home is destroyed. There's no such thing as life insurance. There's no such thing as medical insurance especially at that time these things did not exist. This meant that if we destroyed a civilian residence the chances of the family being able to rebuild a house were exactly zero. People built houses over the course of a generation. Very few people had the money or the resources to simply build some place to live in.

The best example of this that I can give is a meeting that I had with the head of the police academy early on in my first stay there in February of 2002. I had taken the representative from the State Department from I&L over to meet the head of the police academy. We were discussing police programs, police policies, etc. This was clearly an important person. He was a very pleasant, very sort of cooperative officer, one of the old breed of police officers who were coming out of the woodwork and taking up their positions again. When our first meeting was finished he asked me if he could speak about a personal problem and I said of course. He said, "I sent a letter to the embassy when it reopened in December about three months ago, but I've never had a reply. Did during the American attack on Afghanistan a bomb hit my brother's house? My brother and his wife and several of their children, his wife's sister and his wife's father were killed. A couple of the children survived. I'm now taking care of them. I'm responsible for them, but the house was demolished in this attack. Will the U.S. government ever pay any sort of compensation? These children are now my responsibility, but they have no income, they have no resources, they have nothing left because everything was destroyed when the bomb hit the house." I asked him for a copy of the letter that he had sent to the embassy. I took the letter and presented it once again to the Defense Department, the representatives at the embassy. All of those letters were basically going into a black hole.

Later on in the spring we had a large demonstration at the embassy in front of the compound of people who had lost family members or their homes or their businesses in the American attacks. They were asking about compensation. It wasn't a violent one, but it did take about an hour and a half or two hours to talk to the people and to dispel the crowd. This problem kept surfacing over and over again. We would get letters sent to us by the new Afghan government that had been forwarded to them by various people. There weren't a lot, but there was a steady trickle and looking at the problem I realized that by spending just a couple of million dollars because housing costs were cheap at that point, it was the property that was expensive, not the houses, spending a couple of million dollars, compensating people for a lost bread winner, a lost

caretaker, a child, whatever or agreeing to pay medical expenses for people who had been injured by the American attacks. We could have gained an incredible immeasurable amount of good will from the people. The military stopped that. They refused to consider it. They said they didn't want to set a precedent for a future war or past war. My argument was that they could simply declare this something that was unique for the case, an exception, not a precedent, but to the best of my knowledge nothing has ever been done. The result is that we created quite quickly a class of enemies to the United States when we didn't have to. Granted they had been killed in conflict. It was not necessarily their conflict. They were civilians. They were innocent and we could have taken care of the problem quickly, precisely and to the credit of the United States. Instead there will always be a few thousand people who will say that the Americans killed their mother, their father, their sister and their brother, their daughter, their son.

Q: It sounds like the lawyers take over. The lawyers are all powerful and they have no concept of the repercussions.

METRINKO: If I started to give my opinion of the lawyers in the State Department and the Department of Defense, this would be an x-rated oral history.

Q: All right. POWs.

METRINKO: POWs, well, are they POWs?

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: The Defense Department, the White House, refused to consider Afghans who were arrested by us as POWs. The standard operating procedure was to capture people, to take them not to notify anyone that they had been captured and to simply imprison them, whether it was a dark room at Qandahar or sending them out to Guantanamo in Cuba. Families were not notified. Families had no access. I had a constant round of visitors usually tribal elders, groups coming in from villages and towns, coming to the embassy to ask how they could find out about their son, their brother, their uncle, the village school teacher who had been arrested by the Americans. I worked out a sort of arrangement with the International Red Cross that was in Afghanistan because they did have access although they had very limited access. They weren't happy with their access. In fact they were very unhappy with it and they were routinely not notified by the Department of Defense when people were being moved from one prison to another taken out of the country or changed. There were very good reasons to believe that we were mistreating prisoners. In fact, during one Red Cross visit to a prison they saw two Americans and quite clearly Americans escorting someone who had a hood on his head and the Americans identified themselves as CIA. Then sort of caught themselves and whisked the man with the hood on out of the way and disappeared.

I think that probably the stories the prisoners are telling now, the ones who are being released from Guantanamo have a great deal of bearing in truth. Granted it was a violent time and we were trying to locate people who might have ill will towards the United States, might be planning an attack on the United States, but what we have done is basically tossed out the principles that the Red Cross supports and that we used to support. The problem with this is

metafold. Number one it goes against what we think of as the American way of life and our principles. But number two and I go back to my time as a consular officer, I routinely visit or have visited American prisoners in foreign jails. We were not allowing the families, the lawyers or the legal representatives or the embassies of people who were captured by us to be visited, to visit their prisons. It makes it very difficult for me or another consular officer to go to a prison in Yemen in Saudi Arabia, wherever and say I demand to see my American citizen prisoner. We have thrown out that entire principle. That was one of the principles of which the Foreign Service, the State Department is founded. Access to prisoners in time of war. We've allowed the Defense Department to simply toss that away and I think it's going to have pretty serious consequences down the road. We have certainly lost a huge amount of good will in the Red Cross and the international community and much of it I think was probably due to our own incompetence. Many of the people were probably not really serious prisoners. They were picked up. They could have been dropped off just as easily. It was because there was a lack of confidence within the interrogators as to whether or not they should let someone go. It was a lack of original awareness. It was also a lack of language skill. It's going to have consequences all down the road. Talk about creating enemies. The combination of not paying compensation for damage that we caused and then simply imprisoning people and not letting their mothers, fathers, etc., husbands and wives see them or know about their status. That has created a huge amount of ill will in many, many thousands of people and it seems to be to me purposeless.

Q: Well, Mike, this brings us to Herat, but it also brings me to a chance encounter I had this morning. As I was walking to an interview, I met an old colleague of mine, Liz Raspolic, who was with Peace Corps and then served with me in Seoul. She was also ambassador to an African country. I mentioned I was going to interview you again and she said she understood, this is sort of corridor gossip, that you got kind of crosswise with the bureau in South Asian Affairs. From what you've been telling me, you are not a bland person.

METRINKO: No.

Q: This is what goes to make the Foreign Service. You've got people who are calling things are seeing things from a different perspective and are maybe more attuned to the culture. Was there anything to this? Did you get any feel that you weren't a team player or something?

METRINKO: No, not particularly. In fact, when Ambassador Finn talked to me about Wolfowitz, he laughed because he said he had been part of the complaint, too. He had been complained about.

Q: Well, so this may have just been something.

METRINKO: Yes.

Q: Okay, the Herat thing. How did this come about?

METRINKO: I had talked to the embassy before I left about the possibility of my coming back and being one of the representatives at a PRT, a provincial reconstruction, I forgot what the T stands for. Reconstruction Center, yes, PRT. These were now, a PRT, the concept of it has

changed over time. It's changed since day one. It was supposed to be and is supposed to be a combined military civilian contingent living out in the provinces in smaller towns, smaller cities that would provide an island of security, help the NGOs and the IOs coordinate their assistance and development efforts and also help extend the hand of the central government into the provinces to show that the central government was indeed helping to develop and assist, helping to reconstruct buildings, do public works projects, etc. The concept of it was fine on paper. The reality of it is something a little bit different. I'd give it a score of probably a solid 80, not a failing score, but not a tremendously successful score either. One problem was that despite the Defense Department's wishes for the American military to coordinate NGO activity, the NGOs had none of this. They were having none of it. In fact they didn't even want to associate with anyone who was carrying a weapon or wearing a uniform. They wanted the soldiers to wear uniforms and to stay out of their way and to stay out of their activities and to sort of not be there. In fact there were a couple of confrontations between NGOs, IOs and American military because of this absolute different concept of the military role and the NGO role in Afghanistan.

In general, in theory rather, the central government out of Kabul will eventually have representatives on these PRTs. In theory there will be AID representatives. In theory there will be a State Department representative to do political work and in theory they will be otherwise staffed by civil affairs, people from the U.S. army who are well versed and trained in providing development and assistance work in conflict areas.

Q: It sure sounds like CORDS from Vietnam.

METRINKO: I know. I kept saying CORDS, but I was the only one of my generation there so nobody else knew what I was talking about. It sounds like CORDS. We all know how successful CORDS was. Nothing like basing an idea on a previous failure. Having said that, originally I think the United States wanted these to be concentrated in American hands but very quickly came to the conclusion that other countries had to take part, too. Number one they were becoming very expensive and number two we wanted to show this was a multi-national effort, not just an American effort. Now, that was the philosophy of them. The reality of them is rather different. There are parts of Afghanistan that don't want to have any development or assistance from the West. It has nothing to do with Taliban or Al Qaeda or anything like that. It's just that they don't want Westerners there. The tribal areas don't want us mucking about telling them to educate their women or to build schools or to build this or to build that. They simply don't want anyone there doing that. Afghans are throughout their history have been a bit xenophobic. That's fine, they don't want it in certain areas.

There are other areas like Herat where they wanted the money from us. They wanted us to rebuild the buildings, but they really would have preferred that we do it long distance and send a check. They didn't much want an armed U.S. presence in Herat province, at least the governor there didn't want it, the local government didn't want it. I'm not sure what the people of the city wanted. I think maybe they probably didn't much care one way or the other, but certainly the governor did not want the Americans there, any sort of military force.

Other problems stem from our ability to staff such an organization. For example, I saw two different teams of soldiers come and go. One was there when I arrived in March. They left in

approximately July. The next team that came in was there for a month and a half when I was there. The problem with the teams was that they were good people, they were all nice people, but they were all reservists who had very little or no experience at all in assistance or sort of development projects. The coordination they did with the NGOs was minimal because the NGOs didn't want to talk to them because they were in uniform carrying weapons. The projects that they did were supposed to be quick impact, but quick impact had already passed its time. You do quick impact in your first month. By the time I was there a year had passed or more, a year and some months had passed since our arrival in Afghanistan. I saw for example school buildings that we had put up, we had paid for, had had constructed that by the second year were already in a state of collapse because they were so poorly built. I saw a whole series of projects that AID had done without coordinating them in any way with the military in Herat, which were simply sad, sad, pathetic little projects. For example, one teachers training college, a large building they were putting up on a hillside where the plaster and cement work was so bad that if you just sort of slapped the wall chunks would fall out of it. They were continuing to construct this with very shoddy base materials.

Q: Where was the problem, lack of supervision or just the Afghan construction?

METRINKO: Lack of supervision. No, you could do beautiful buildings in Afghanistan. They have mosques and other buildings that have been up for a thousand years there, hundreds and hundreds of years. You can do great stone buildings. I went, the head of education for Herat Province took me out one day and we spent the whole day looking at ongoing projects, things that were being done, both U.S. military projects, AID projects, other NGO and IO projects. He took me to one school that was being put up by one of the NGOs and the place was spectacular. Extraordinarily well built, solid stone, beautiful stone floors, good electricity, good plumbing. The American buildings were basically shells with latrines out in back, with bare wirings hanging from ceilings for lights. We were building sort of ghettos, ghetto buildings.

Q: Why, I mean, what was behind this?

METRINKO: Again, it was a matter of timing and the belief that you should do as much as possible with the money that you have as opposed to doing a few things well. I could go on. The city of Herat had money. There was a considerable amount of money coming into Herat from customs fees, from taxes, from other sources and all up and down the street that I lived on, all around the city, incredibly fine homes were being built covered in white marble-stained glass windows with a big courtyard, swimming pools, all sorts of amenities and luxuries in them and yet the same people who were building their beautiful mansions were letting their kids go to school under tents. They simply did not seem to care very much. We could build the schools, but the chances of anyone taking care of them are probably pretty slim. There is just not a concept of responsibility for public buildings that way. I would have said after being there that we should avoid projects in the big cities, move out, let the Afghans do things they can do themselves. If they want school buildings they can put them up themselves instead of building luxury homes. Perhaps we should have been concentrating on major public works projects, for example a highway system to unify the country, to allow communications and transportation around the country, and not wasting time, materials, assets and people doing a whole series of piddling little projects that took up too much time and effort.

Q: Talk about the NGOs. What was your impression of the NGOs? How were they, what they were doing and the relationship?

METRINKO: I came to the conclusion after a few months in Herat that the NGOs were not part of any master plan to develop and assist Afghanistan. The NGOs had come to Afghanistan and each of them had some expertise in some particular form of development. They presented their areas of expertise as what should be done for Afghanistan and because everybody was trying to throw money at Afghanistan they were given lucrative contracts to do what they wanted to do. If you look at a list of projects that we have paid for, the United States government has paid for, in Afghanistan, it looks sort of like...

Q: You were saying that it looked like a garden.

METRINKO: It was a garden that was just thrown together, bits of it overgrown, flowers here, some dead things there and just a miscellaneous hodgepodge of projects and public works. We spent an inordinate amount of time doing pissant little projects for women, everything from little sewing machines to teaching embroidery classes to paying to have child care done or things that were fine, but not essential at the time. We have been building little tiny schools all around the country, but probably not allowing for them to be maintained down the road, putting buildings up that will not be easy to maintain and they are ghetto buildings already after one year or a couple of months. When I looked at the projects for Herat for example, there were things like helping women plant a women's garden. Well, that's fine, but we're in a major city of that part of the world. You don't have to spend \$40,000 or \$50,000 helping a group of women plant a little garden. We were paying farmers to clear out the underbrush in a forest area. This is insane. We were paying people money to clean up their own wells. If an Afghan family is not going to take the initiative, make the effort, expend the energy to clean its own well in front of its own house, screw them. This is not something the American taxpayer should be paying for. A great deal of money and time were spent on all these little tiny things.

Q: Now who was calling the shots on this?

METRINKO: That was the problem. The lack of coordination on development and assistance was beyond [belief]; it was pandemic. I could never even get a cohesive list of what development projects, what assistance projects had been funded in Herat Province by the United States government. It wasn't because there was ill will in the embassy. I don't think the embassy knew. There are a great many different organizations that do funding and in Washington they do not work together. This is a real failure on the part of our central government here. For example, inside the State Department itself you have money that comes from DRL, you have money from INL [Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs]], you have money that comes from the Refugee Bureau, you have money that comes out of AID and you have money that comes out of Cultural Affairs. These people don't talk to each other.

The best example I can give is this. I was out with a combination of special forces and civil affairs people in a town about a day's travel away from Herat. We had gone out there to spend a couple of days basically looking out over the town and doing some site reports about it. The

morning that we were departed we had all of our SUVs, these sport utility vehicles, lined up on the road outside the town for a final check and two SUVs pulled up alongside. Out of one of them steps what was clearly an American. He looked American, he sounded American, he was carrying some sort of semi-automatic weapon in his hands and he had a revolver on a belt. He was wearing U.S. army sort of camouflage pants and he had a polo shirt on and a baseball cap. In unmistakably American English he said, "Hey, you guys American?" I said, "Yes, we're American. Who are you?" He said, "I'm the State Department representative here." My reaction was, "Excuse me?" He said, "Yeah, I'm with the Department of State in Washington and I'm up here doing some projects." I said, "Really?" The head of the military team was looking at me and looking at him and I said, "Which office in State?" He said, "With the embassy in Kabul." I said, "Really, I thought I was the Department of State representative in this part of Afghanistan. What exactly are you doing?" It turns out he was a former special forces guy who had retired and gotten a job with a private company that had a contract with INL.

His company had a contract with them to put a radio network in for the Afghan national police. They were putting it in all the provincial centers so that the police could talk to one another. Now, he had two SUVs and I think they had diplomatic plates on them. He had another American with him, also armed. He had an escort of Afghan police including the one of the provincial police's top ranking people. Then he told me he had spent the day before with the governor of Herat at a meeting. Now, he was doing a project, U.S. taxpayer money, funded by the Department of State, great. I asked him how he had gotten the cars. Did he drive all the way from Kabul because you're a long way from Kabul, maybe 500 miles? He said, "No, we had a C-130 drop us off yesterday. They brought in the cars for us and they dropped us off yesterday morning and then we met with this [group] and then we came up here." I looked at the army guys who were with me and they said, "Do you mean a C-130 arrived at the airport yesterday?" "Yeah." Well, as it turned out he did have a project that he was working on. I went back, I was seething about this, so was the army because the army commander who was with me was the commander for the whole area and he didn't know a C-130 had arrived the day before at the airport that he was responsible for. We go back to our team house and I sent off an e-mail asking the DCM and the head of the political section and Bill Taylor, who was the head of development assistance at the embassy, what's going on, who are these people? They're armed and they're introducing themselves as Department of State. I don't like this. Are they Department of State? Who are they? The head of the political section came back and said I have no idea. It's the first time I'm hearing anything about this. The DCM answered a day later. He said, I have to check; this might be an INL project. But it was like nobody had bothered to coordinate it inside the embassy. Nobody had bothered to coordinate it with the Department of State representative there and it was basically a display of incompetence and stupidity on the part of the State Department, this lack of coordination.

Now, that having been said, I'd had a meeting just the week before with the head of police for the whole province, on which I had sent in a report that was distributed inside the embassy. He had talked about the problems with communication with other police facilities. They had the report and yet it never occurred to anyone to think that maybe they should tell me there was a project like this going on that my taxes were paying for. This was one example of what was happening all the time there. I was really angry about that. Fine, I could understand how it could happen.

Not long afterwards an AID officer who was responsible for projects out in the provinces was in Herat on one of her periodic site visits. She had been there for a couple of days. She was staying with us. I was invited out by a newspaper reporter who had just come in and wanted to have coffee with me at the United Nations guesthouse. I went over to the guesthouse and we were sitting there having coffee and an American guy walked up and introduced himself and said that he was there working with AID. I looked at him and said, "You're here with AID?" He said, "Yeah." He handed me a card and indeed it was an AID business card. I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I work with the Ministry of Finance. I'm here as one of the inspectors and an advisor to the ministry of finance. I've been here for a couple of months now. You know, I stopped over at your house before you arrived and I just said hello to people about two or three months ago. I should have gotten back, but I never did." Well, here we have somebody from AID living with the United Nations number one, which is contrary to all of the security restrictions that we had. That's fine, I won't even get into that part of it. I went back and told the AID person who was staying in our house for a few days. She had no idea. She had no idea who the person was. The AID director in Kabul did not know there was an AID contractor living in Herat and working at the ministry of finance. He apparently went ballistic when he found out. Now, the Ministry of Finance happened to be one of the most sensitive ministries in Herat for all sorts of American policy reasons. We were having a major problem. The central government was having a major problem with the governor of Herat collecting customs and other taxes and refusing to send the money to Kabul. He was keeping all the money for use in Herat by himself. The Ministry of Finance was totally involved in this. Here we had an American AID advisor who was part of this, looking at this, but no one knew he was there. It was just this sort of lack of coordination. Unfortunately it could be seen all up and down the bureaucracy and the structure, the infrastructure of both military and State and development, that we had constructed in Afghanistan. You never knew what the other hand was doing on projects.

The last example which is really quite funny. The civil affairs team was going to build an office building and school for the administrative women's affairs branch in Herat. This was a great project. The women were studying and working and they were centered in what was a very small, somewhat ramshackle, house, very inadequate and not easy to get to, etc., very inappropriate for school facilities. They were trying to teach women, widows, other women who were breadwinners, skills that they could use out on the market. We had the money for the school. We talked about it up and down. We went through all this with the Ministry of Planning with the Department of Education, with the Ministry of Rural Development and with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Fine. We submitted (I say we because I thought of myself as part of the army team there) a proposal to the authorities. It was approved by the American authorities after they had vetted it with the central government and then we presented it as a project proposal just as sort of an info to the governor of Herat. He called us into a meeting and he said. He had told the Ministry of Women's Affairs director in Herat that he didn't want it done because another building was already being put up by the American government for that same ministry; why were they doing two? We didn't know what he was talking about. I have to admit that this was a combination of American incompetence combined with an Afghan sort of stupidity. It's a great combination. The head of the Ministry of Women's Affairs knew indeed that AID had also put a project proposal in to do exactly the same sort of building. They were doing it through IOM, the International Office for Migration, the national organization of

migration. She hadn't told us this. We'd been talking to her for about two months about a building project. AID and IOM had been talking, but AID had never told us what they were doing and we had never told AID. We only found out when the governor called us in and said he couldn't accept this because it was a waste of money to put up the same building twice in the same place. We had no idea what he was talking about. While we were sitting in her office and she was sort of looking up in the air trying to avoid our questions, the phone rang. Her deputy or one of her office workers went over, answered the phone, turned to her and said, "It's the people from IOM. They want to have a meeting with you so they can bring over the plans for the new building they're doing." I immediately said, "What? IOM is putting up a building for you?" "Oh, yes, maybe, perhaps." We left and went over to IOM and found out that IOM, which was the contractor for USAID, was indeed far down the road in planning for this. AID had agreed to it, they had the money, etc. This is the sort of lack of cooperation that we had faced, that all the NGOs, the IOs, the American government and its military civilian hats face there all the time, aided and abetted by Afghan willingness to grab as much money as they can while the grabbing is good.

You asked about my opinion of the NGOs in general. On a scale of one to ten, a solid five. Neither very good, nor very bad. They were there to do their thing and to get paid well for it. There were some groups that were there because they were Christians who were proselyting in a very sort of quiet manner. I won't even touch that. It's something that I think is counterproductive and it could lead them to get killed like it led my missionaries to get killed [elsewhere].

Q: I have to say that I think our experience and we're talking about several centuries of experience, Christian missionaries have done almost zilch, nothing in Muslim areas.

METRINKO: They've put up a lot of good hospitals.

Q: Good hospitals, but I'm talking about conversions.

METRINKO: Oh, conversions, no, zero.

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: Zero, I know. The occasional person who goes to work on the missionary compound and is getting a salary is fine, but that's it. I know and I agree with that completely. But on the other hand without them I know [that] much of the school system in Iran would not exist. The best schools in Iran were built by missionaries in the 19th Century. Absolutely fine schools and they continue to this day.

Q: I won't say exactly because I don't think anything is exact, but particularly as you described it, what was your job?

METRINKO: What was my job? That's a good question. My job was something that I kind of created for myself. My job was to be the political officer in Herat. This meant four provinces in western Afghanistan because the country was divided up into sectors. My job was to get to know

the political leadership in my area, to explain American policy to them, to report back to the embassy on what was happening in the provinces. The military teams that were in Herat and in other sections of the country did indeed do reporting, but their reporting was not analytical. Their reporting, military reporting, is more like a diary. You give long lists of everything you did during the course of the day and you send it up that night and it goes into some vast maelstrom of facts and figures. The problem with the military reporting was that it was just that, it was this huge amount of data, a fair percentage of which was inaccurate or basically simply wrong because they could not speak the language or did not know quite what they were seeing. Much of it was fine, but much of it was also useless. It's also incredibly boring to read because it's just long lists of what we did today. They did give equal prominence to meeting with the governor along with getting bread from the bakery. They don't do analysis; they're not supposed to. It's a different way of looking at things. I was supposed to sit back, think about what was happening, look at the area, look at trends, look at the future, look at the past, talk about what people were saying and thinking and that's what I did.

Q: What was the situation there? In essence was really the war over and we were reconstructing or was it still a war time situation or how did you see it?

METRINKO: I don't think there's ever been a time in Afghanistan when there wasn't some sort of political violence going on. When you had lulls, when there were no foreign invasions, you had the tribes and families having feuds. That's of course continuing. Is the war over? No. It might have been except that the warlords are playing games. There are a number of political figures, military figures in the country who are trying to carve little bailiwicks for themselves. Afghanistan today is perhaps best compared to early Renaissance Italy or medieval Italy with lots of little mountain cities, lots of villages, lots of little areas controlled by lots of little wardlings and this happens because again there's no way to communicate with the rest of the country. So, the little wardlings, what do you call them, war lords or generals or khans or whatever title you want to use for them, basically have a great deal of political, military and social control over their immediate areas. Sometimes these wardlings band together. Sometimes they fight each other. It has not been a particularly sanguine type of administration for the country. This is what prolonged the civil war. It prolonged the conflict in Afghanistan for at least an extra ten years. This is what led to the destruction of Kabul. It wasn't the Soviets bombing Kabul. It was the stupid little warlords playing their games and trying to destroy each other, all of it for personal gain. I did not see any indication whatsoever that any of the warlords I met had any moral, religious or philosophic fiber to them. These were not people interested in Afghanistan. These were people interested in their own power, lining their own pockets and they were quite prepared to let the country go to hell if it meant that they could become richer.

Q: In Herat, what were you seeing? Was there a warlord in Herat?

METRINKO: We had the best of the bad lot, yes. Let me say one thing about Herat first. Herat was perhaps the most peaceful city in Afghanistan. Herat was certainly the most prosperous city in Afghanistan. Herat was only about five hours, no, only about four hours, three and a half, four hours from the Iranian border. It was a fairly decent gravel road that went to the border. All surface transportation. All surface cargo traffic that came out of Europe had to come through Herat to reach Afghanistan. Europe wasn't that far away from Herat. It may sound funny, but

you can cross Iran in two days' travel and you're in Turkey and two days across Turkey and then you're in Europe. So, it's close. This was the way that the tourists traveled up until the mid-'70s. There was lots of ground transportation; busses would go to Kabul from Europe. With that having been said, Herat had not had any recent damage. The [Soviets] had not fought over the city the way they had over Kabul. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find a building in Herat that had been demolished and that still needed renovation. We were looking at one point for a building to reconstruct or remodel as the headquarters for our office. Under the military regulations for assistance, you can renovate or reconstruct something that exists. You cannot build from scratch. You can't build something brand new on new land. You have something that exists and renovate it. When we talked to the governor and the mayor of the city about this, the governor simply laughed and he said, "If you were in any other city in Afghanistan, there would be lots of places. There's nothing in Herat. It's all been rebuilt. We have no buildings like that now." He's right. He also of course didn't want us in his city so even if he had been wrong he still would have said that. The city was prosperous. Houses in the city could and did cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. The homes could be palatial. I saw many homes, many homes in Herat that could very easily be situated on Foxhall Road and would look quite appropriate there.

Q: Foxhall Road being probably the premiere residential area of Washington, DC.

METRINKO: There were homes that I would love to be able to look at.

Q: Where's the money coming from?

METRINKO: Well, that's a good question. There is and was and has been considerable trade between Iraq and the West. There are two sources of money. The first one first. Legitimate trade from Herat that exports carpets. It's a carpet-exporting center for Afghanistan and the carpet bazaar in Herat had hundreds of good carpet shops. They export wool. They would export things like nuts, raisins, dried fruits, agricultural products, lamb, sheep, etc. They also export workers. The people who left Herat during the time of conflict went to Iran in general. In Iran they worked, they didn't sit in camps. They sat in camps, they lived in camps very often, but they also worked. Heratis have been going to Iran to work for from my own experience back in the 1970s, I remember Afghans coming at that point before there was ever a war or simply any kind of problem in Afghanistan. Because they went to Iran they learned even better buildings, trades and they had known that in Afghanistan when they came back they built buildings following the Iranian models. This is why you had beautiful homes, some very beautiful public buildings as well.

I had to do a just a quick sort of study once for the Bureau of Trade here in the United States where they were questioning an Afghan's request, I'm sorry it was from OPIC, Overseas Insurance Cooperation, O-P-I-C, where an Afghan had requested a loan. He had described his business partner or his sources of supply in Herat and I was asked to go and talk to some of these people and see if it was legit. Well, that's when I discovered that a great deal of people in Herat had partners, I mean they had offices in Dubai and offices in Iran and sometimes in Europe as well. It was all for the export of things like wool, agricultural products and they were doing quite well. The other source of supply. I'd spent an afternoon once with the minister of housing who

was visiting Herat. As we were driving around the city I pointed out a street of brand new beautiful homes and I said, "Will you please tell me where people who always say they're making \$30 a month are getting the money to do a \$300,000 home?" He said, "They're all drug smugglers. The city is famous for it." Opium. We would get reports about major city officials all the time who were involved in this, major government officials.

Q: Was this something we just observed or was there a problem to do something about it?

METRINKO: We had no problem to do anything about it. Nothing at all. I kind of doubt that the names of people were even being put into the program for visas.

Q: How did you relate with the military?

METRINKO: Whose military?

Q: Our military.

METRINKO: Oh. I thought they were great. I had a lot of fun with them.

Q: They must have felt like strangers in a strange land.

METRINKO: You know, they did, but they adjusted pretty quickly because we had a strange living arrangement. When I got there we had three different houses. Two of them on one street within a block of each other and another one several miles away. The one several miles away was occupied by the special forces. The other two were by civil affairs. We all seemed to get along quite well. Of course there were personality differences based on personalities with different people. Different people with different people and that's fine, you're going to have that in any group. In general it worked out very well. I was the imbedded civilian. The military were not what you'd call. I mean they were professional, but they were also all reservists. They all had lives outside of the military and they understood civilians because they all were civilians or within a month of becoming one or a month or two of having been one. They wore uniforms and basically pretty competent. I had no problem with their military abilities whatsoever. They certainly kept up their skills. They had steady training programs themselves. They went out and did shooting this, that, all sorts of drills outside in one of the closed out military areas for the Afghan army. I'd say enough discipline tempered with common sense that they were not in a military base in the United States. Actually they had to sort of meld into the civilian atmosphere they found themselves in. One thing, when I talked before about the competence of the people who were sent to do public works projects and assistance projects, I would say that the military has a lot of training it has to do for their people because they pull people out of areas where they really did not have training to do engineering work, public works projects and put them into this without really giving them any training. You can't quite do that. We do it all the time in the State Department. We do it in other places, but it's difficult. It's when the military talks about their resources and says they have a million or two million or three million people they can throw into a situation, yes, they have the numbers, but it doesn't mean that those people have the training and the background and the experience to do the job that's required of them. For everyone there it was very much a learn on the job type thing.

Q: What about the Afghan authorities military, civil at this particular point in time? How did you find dealing with that?

METRINKO: They were at least to our faces universally friendly, pleasant, easy to deal with. I had rather little relationship with the Afghan military authorities there. I knew them, but a very limited, I had just paid some courtesy calls. That was it. I would see them at functions. Our special forces team was responsible for maintaining a relationship with the Afghan military. With other civilian officials in the governor's office, with the ministries, all of the ministries in Kabul had branches in Herat staffed by people from Herat, but selected by the governor of Herat, but approved by the ministries in Kabul. We had very good relationships with the ones we dealt with all the time. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs for me, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Women's Affairs, etc. I'd say very cordial relationships to the point where we were also invited out by them. They occasionally would extend personal invitations to their homes or the gardens.

Q: You were mentioning an awful lot, I don't mean to be derogatory, but sort of piddling little things that were being done in order to improve the lot of women which of course had really caught our attention because of the horrible things that the Taliban had.

METRINKO: Politically correct.

Q: The Taliban and many of the inherece that might not be Taliban, tribal people, what was your impression of how that was working and what was happening?

METRINKO: In Herat it probably wasn't happening or working very much, just like it not happening or working very much in the rest of the country. There has never been as far as I know a government or a culture in Afghanistan that believed women were equal to men. Women have been kept under wraps, shrouded for all of modern Afghan history. One of the kings of Afghanistan back in the early 1930s lost his position as king because of a photograph of his wife circulated showing her with short sleeves and he was tossed out as king for that. Now this was in the 1930s. To this day even though they pay lip service to the concept of equality, there is no one in the government of Afghanistan who really believes in it. President [Karzai], despite his Western education, the fact that his family lived in America, Europe, etc., the fact that his wife has a very good education, there has never been a photograph of her in the press that I know of and she is never brought out in public. So, no one sees the president's wife, no one sees the wife of any official there. None of the officials of the country believe that women are equal or should have public access no matter what their education might be or their status. When we go in and talk about programs and projects for women, the women who are allowed to take part in this are the widows and sort of the women who have nothing else. The women who have no male protectors or no other way of getting assistance whatsoever. Afghans don't talk about women, they don't joke about women, they never discuss their wives, their mothers, their daughters, unless it's a daughter who is very, very young, like under the age of four. They simply don't. It's just a subject that with a normal Afghan you don't even raise. I've been in places where I've seen thousands of men wandering all over and no women at all, even in the small towns, you don't see women. Now, it's great that we are trying to improve the lot of women there. It's not

going to be done by teaching them embroidery or by giving them money to clean up a garden. It will be done over the next generation when the country gets fully exposed to what the rest of the world is. Having said that, women do teach, girls in Herat go to school in huge numbers. There were in, the statistics for the number of students in Herat Province was something like 400,000 students in the province almost 50% of whom are girls.

In the first year of school, the first grade 100,000 students, in the second grade 90,000. The other 200,000 were spaced out from grade three to grade 12. This is because schools have reopened; girls have been allowed to come back. What Afghans have learned I believe from being refugees because there are several million who are refugees is that women have to be educated. This applies to the younger ones, now, the ones who are coming out. What we are looking at is an Afghanistan that will change tremendously in the next several years as more and more girls are educated. Right now what we have is something like a 90% or 95% rate of illiteracy for women. The mothers, people whose sisters, aunts and the grandmothers are all behind walls and behind their veils. It's almost like a lost generation. As far as resource allocation is concerned, probably there's not much you can do there.

Q: Well, again, how about TV and the Internet and all this?

METRINKO: It's all changing rapidly. When I got to Afghanistan in January of 2002, there was nothing of the above. Television stations starting opening up. The Taliban had television, but it was city by city which meant that there were studios in each of the major cities and you could get transmission only if you lived in that particular city. There was no cooperation or coordination between the various television transmission stations. So, if you watched television in Kabul last year in 2002 because it was controlled by adherence by the minister of defense, what you got was, "what is [he] doing today and if." In Herat the local television station was like a Muslim religious channel. All you had was sort of unhappy singing, music where you just had question and answer sessions, where there are just speeches or what is the governor doing today, what did he do yesterday? I'd be on TV quite frequently as a matter of fact because every blessed visitor who went to his office was filmed and it was part of the news. Every time I went to see him I was on the news that night.

Now, what was also happening, the wonders of modern technology. You could get a satellite dish in Herat and get something like 226 channels from around the world and lots of people had this. There were satellite dishes on every building, not every building, not the village houses in the city, but anyone who was middle class had a satellite dish. The very first dinner I went to in Herat at a private house, occurred oh, maybe I'd been there for about ten days and some Afghan guys at a soccer match invited me for dinner. They were university students. I went to their house for dinner. We were sitting on the floor in their huge sort of reception room and the father and the uncle were there in their long white robes and these guys were there. They were having a very traditional meal when a couple of the little girls from the family, aged maybe 6, 7, 8 years old, came in and asked their father if they could watch TV and he said yes. They went over to the TV in the corner and switched on the European version of MTV.

Q: You might explain what MTV is.

METRINKO: MTV is the basically a music program that shows the latest in music videos. I think it's gotten a bit too much. They turned on a program where I'm sitting with a couple of old men in beards and we're talking about Islam philosophy and American assistance to Afghanistan and out of the corner of my eye I am watching nude dancing. No one thought there was a problem here. Now, these university students told me that they'd had a satellite TV in that house all through the Taliban and kept it concealed. They were rich. The rich have satellite TV. We had a satellite TV in our house for our use and we got 226 channels. Of course it was always kept on AFN, the Armed Forces Network, but you could get channels from all over the world including directly from the United States. Now, what did people listen to in Herat? Herat radio was sad; it was limited scope, not much imagination, very little planning or programming. Herat television was the same. [Iran] was only five hours away by car. We got broadcasting from [Iran] and anyone who had a TV could pick up Iranian television stations. You had a pretty good range of Persian language transmission and good music, good shows, good movies, good films, etc. The Iranian version of the news, always the Iranian versions of the news.

Q: Well, this brings up another question. We obviously have been concerned since 1979 about you had a certain role in this about Iran and meddling in other countries in spite of the Shiite village and all this. What were the Iranians, what was the Iranian influence here in Herat, which was called the window onto Iran or the door to Afghanistan?

METRINKO: I approached it with a certain sense of irony because we had 10,000 or 11,000 American soldiers occupying the country of Afghanistan. We had soldiers in all of the major cities and in some of the non-major cities in units like the one I was assigned to and were conducting military operations. It's an American guard forces that lives with the president in the palace and protects him. So, talking about Iran interference in the country of Afghanistan is a bit, but having said that. Iran and Afghanistan share a language. They share a culture. They share a religion. They share a common border. They share travel and history. They share literature. They share music. This may be less true for the [more distant] areas, but it's very, very true for Herat. Herat and [Iran] have been linked throughout history in every possible way and very often in history they were ruled by the same person as the two ends of the property of the local leader. In Herat today if you want to go to Kabul you have to drive 400 miles over a dirt road. It takes two full days and there are security problems along the road. You get stopped. It's a hell of a drive. No one does it. There are very high mountains between the two cities, 400 miles of mountain. It makes it an unpleasant and difficult in bad weather to get anywhere. On the other hand, if you are living in Herat and you want to go to a good furniture store, you want to buy nice clothes, if you want to go to a good doctor, go to a good dentist, if you want to go to a good school, all you have to do is drive a couple of hours and you're in one of the most developed cities in Iran.

Q: Any motor problems in getting through the guards?

METRINKO: Not really. If you want to go to work, you have to get a work visa. But for most people if they're just going for a couple of days, it was no problem at all. I've been told that. Certainly anyone who had a serious medical problem went to [Iran]. Now, out of all of the young men I knew in Herat, let's say 100 right here, I'm counting the guards that we had, other people I'd met, the young students that I'd met, the young guys who worked in the shops and the stores that I would talk to, every single one of them without exception had been to Iran. Many of them

had studied there and had lived there for a number of years. Not one had ever been to Kabul. Over the last two and a half decades, travel to Kabul had simply become impossible. It was either war or the Taliban or there was no reason to go there. Kabul had nothing to offer. The good university had sort of disappeared in the 1970s in a political maelstrom. So, if you wanted to go to a good school and you sure weren't going to go to Kabul. If you wanted to get anything at all, a medical checkup, there was no reason to go to Kabul, there were no good doctors there either. People simply went to Iran. Now, having said that, Afghans were not treated well by the Iranians. Iranians think of Afghans as being-

Q: Hillbillies?

METRINKO: Hillbillies, even worse, far worse. At their best the Iranians treat Afghans the way the we treat- (end of tape)

At worst they could be treated very, very harshly, badly. The Iranians dislike Afghans. They think of them as inferior. The head of security in Herat was talking about Iran once. He gave me a list of reasons why he disliked the country. He had had lots of problems with the country. His mother had lived there because she didn't want to come back to Herat so he'd have to go and visit her, but he hated doing it. He said even when, he said, the Iranians look down on us. He said, when I'm talking to an American whether or not I agree with the American, I know that the American is looking at me as an equal. He's talking to me like I'm a real person. He said, when Iranians talk with me even though I'm a high ranking official, they look down on me. He said you could see it in the way they talk and the way they act. He said even when they call you "brother" when they're being Islamic, they mean you are the younger brother, you're not the equal brother. Talking to another, I remember a woman who was [one] of the representatives, talking about her time in Iran. I asked her how long she had spent there and she said she mentioned the number of years and she said they were the unhappiest days of my life. I have no good memories of Iran. You would get this over and over again. It was sort of like they had to be there because they had lost their homes, they had lost their jobs, conditions had gotten so bad in Afghanistan, they'd have to run away, but they didn't like being there and the Iranians treated them like they were savages.

Q: The refugees from Herat were not any of them from Pakistan?

METRINKO: No, they weren't.

Q: These were ones that had gone to Iran to be refugees.

METRINKO: Yes, they went to Iran because to go to Pakistan was a two day trip and you'd be going through much of the country that you were trying to get away from.

Q: Also, they would find themselves in essentially an alien culture.

METRINKO: Yes, so the Heratis tended to be far better educated than other people in Afghanistan. Even the women, it was a higher level of education for women in Herat than in other parts of Afghanistan and this was traditional. I think quite a bit of it because of this

relationship with Iran. What is the significance of Iranian involvement now? Well, if you're the governor of Herat you have to be on good terms with Iran. A big part of your electricity comes on lines straight out of Iran into Herat Province. All of your trade coming from the West, all of your machinery, your cars, your busses, your trucks, anything that is being imported into the country is coming through Iran and the Iranians could turn off those spigots immediately. All of your younger men from the villages and towns who are job hunters have gone to Iran to look for work. They either have in the past or they are there now. Many of your friends probably many of your relatives still live in Iran because they simply have not come back to Afghanistan not trusting that it is secure yet. So, you have that. You have the cultural influence. You listen to music from Iran. You listen to the radio from Iran. Our cook had spent several years in Iran and the radio station that you played in the kitchen was also the [Iranian] radio station. The soap in our house was from Iran, the detergent, lots of the food in our house came from Iran. If we bought new furniture, desk furniture, you know, paper, things like that locally; it was always from Iran. There is a very, very strong relationship. It's not one based on love, but it sure is based on necessity and good business.

Q: Well, then Mike, you're an old Iranian hand and had been as we documented before, very much versed in Iranian affairs. Were you getting any reflection of what I consider the ongoing civil war revolution in Iran sort of between the modern and the Islamists and I don't know, you've described it differently. But I mean I assume you couldn't help but being picking up vibes.

METRINKO: I've talked to a lot of Afghans who had lived in Iran, had visited there including people who had seen the actual demonstrations by the students and seen the reaction, but I wasn't getting what I considered really good information. They didn't go there for that reason and they generally were in the eastern part of Iran and not in the places where there was a problem. Now, they did talk and even joke a lot about how Iranian friends would tell them how lucky they were that they had the Americans. They said that Iranian friends would congratulate them for having the American army there. They would say they wished it would come to Iran, but that's as far as they could go with that. I don't want to talk about Iran unless I go there and see it myself.

Q: No, no, I understand, but I was wondering, you were getting reflections. Was Mashhad, where did it fall in the Iranian political spectrum?

METRINKO: Mashhad is a very wealthy city, which sits smack dab in the middle of the saffron industry. It's centered there. It has an incredible income because it possesses the shrine of the leading Iranian saint. Every good Iranian does pilgrimages there whenever there's a life crisis or lots of other times. It's a manufacturing city, a major cultural, political and economic influence on the country. The previous religious leadership of Mashhad that was there until the Iranian revolution was shunted aside and the previous religious leader of the city was put under house arrest. He has only come out of house arrest in the last three or four years and is still adamantly almost anti-Khomeini and anti-Islamic government. He's known for making comments in public even now that he's out from under house arrest. That having been said, it probably will not play a significantly role in the political life of Iran.

Q: Well, now, we're coming to the end of this episode aren't we, don't you think? Is there

anything else?

METRINKO: I guess [we are]. What's happening now, when I left Afghanistan in August of 2003 the PRT, the future, was being talked about. They were expanding. More countries were taking over more of the PRTs, New Zealand, England, Germany, etc. The security profile is changing there. NATO is now in there as the international security force. I understand that the security presence of ISFA, International Security Force for Afghanistan, is going to be extended to other cities in the country, so things are changing. Whether this will improve the security of the country or simply embroil what we call a green-on-green law I don't know. You know, the expression green-on-green?

Q: No.

METRINKO: Green-on-green is when local people fight and up until I left certainly the standing rule was we do not get involved. If the local governor and the local police chief want to go at it tooth and nail we let them. We're not supposed to be involved in local warfare. It's probably a good idea because it was never quite clear to me whether the Department of Defense, the Department of State and various other agencies were supporting the same leaders in Afghanistan. In fact I would say that we weren't.

Q: Well, I've just finished interviewing someone who was essentially DCM in Mogadishu when we were going against Aidid and this is where we got involved in a green on green war. It came out badly and it usually does with this type of thing.

Mike, one final question. I have a certain malice of forethought in asking this because I think we've been over this before. You had these experiences. You obviously spoke the language and all. Did you find that you were able to pass on your knowledge through debriefing or something other than sort of chatting with people in the corridor? Did anybody sort of ask you what you were doing and how things were going and that sort of thing?

METRINKO: In the State Department?

Q: Yes.

METRINKO: No. Well, I know that my reports were well read. All of us and because we had representatives in several different cities when I was there from the State Department, it was a bit strange. We were doing reporting, but getting no feedback and never seeing a final version of what we did and sent up to the embassy.

Q: You would send it to the embassy and it would go through its filter I guess then?

METRINKO: Yes and then it would go off. I never once saw an incoming piece of traffic to the embassy because I didn't receive traffic out in Herat. Therefore, I did not know at all what the embassy was reporting. Remember the old cases in the 1700s of what they used to call the wolf children? Children who were found in the woods and had been raised without any human companionship. Sometimes I felt like that as far as my reporting was concerned. I was out there.

I was doing things like meeting people, talking to people, representing the American government or the American Embassy anyway, that part of the government, and doing reporting, but all of it without any sense of being part of a system or an organization. I was just out there and my salary was being put into the bank, but no one ever told me what they wanted me to say, what they wanted me to do. I was told that they trusted me to do whatever I thought was necessary. Now, I don't know whether that was a failure based on lack of planning in the State Department or whether they just felt that they could get more from me if they just let me do my own thing.

Q: Now, was there any attempt made to get your people doing your job in other places all together to chat up?

METRINKO: Oh, no.

Q: I was in Italy and every once in a while they would bring the consuls general together to talk about what was happening in Italy and here is a place that's so crucial.

METRINKO: No. I spent six months in Afghanistan, in Herat rather and in the whole six months I went up to Kabul once in the middle of my time. I only went up because the Afghan student who was living in my house in the United States had come back to Kabul to visit his parents and I wanted to see him. I found out quite by chance that one of the other State Department people from one of the other PRTs was also in the embassy, but we had no relationship either by communications or any other way [with] each other. The embassy certainly did not. There was never a general meeting, in other words, of those of us who were out in the provinces with the political section or with any other section in the embassy. No one coordinated this.

Q: How about your reports, e-mails, were they circulating around, were you able to read traffic from other people?

METRINKO: No because they all did the same thing. They sent their reports directly to the political section.

Q: I come out of the Vietnam era and I remember a lot of my colleagues who were provincial reporting officers and they would go to the political section and many of them were not very happy with what came out. I mean was there any, did you pick up any of that or is it just a blank?

METRINKO: I don't think there was any great degree of disagreement about the country between myself and the political section. The political section in Kabul did no traveling at all. It was locked into its office in Kabul and because of the constant security, the perception of constant security problems, apparently rarely left the environs of the embassy. It was also a transitory section; people changed all the time. They're weren't assigned for very long and no one had the language there. One person had a language, I take that back, in the economic section. I had no sense of unity with the political section. I sent my reports to the political counselor, the head of the section, the job that I'd had the previous year. He was receptive and I understand that most of my stuff went out without being changed, but I've never seen it. I've only seen one of my finished telegrams out of all the things that I wrote; so I really don't know how much they were editing or changing what I was saying.

There were two ways they could have handled this. We live in the age of e-mail. I could have gone to Herat and I could have sent draft copies of informal copies of all of my reporting directly back to people in Washington. I chose not to do this at all because in my time with the State Department I had been both assigned to consulates outside of the capital city and I'd been assigned to capital cities. I believed that people in the provinces should coordinate what they're doing through the embassy. I saw no purpose in trying to run my own reporting program, reporting independently to Washington. I could have. I don't think anyone would have noticed actually, but I told the head of the political section that I would not send anything to Washington at all. Now, I started to send some things directly to Washington my last month just because it was no longer clear to me that anyone was taking care of any of the reporting. There had been so many changes in Kabul that I didn't even know if my reporting was going out at all and no one seemed to know. There was just this whole flurry of changes. The whole political section changed. There was a lack of personnel, no secretary, etc., so I just started sending things directly, but sending the original copy by e-mail to Washington, to Kabul. Other than that I wanted to be a team player. The ambassador and I would exchange e-mails about once a day, usually on fairly minor things. I would send [my drafts] to the ambassador, the DCM and the political section. Without fail either the DCM or the ambassador would always say good job, nice report, great report, something like that. That would be it. I don't know if that was true of others who were doing my job in other cities because there weren't very many who had had political reporting experience. I don't think any of them had regional experience; so they're things may have been a bit more edited.

Q: All right, well, I'm not sure if this is the end of your saga, but we'll type this up. Any thoughts about going out again?

METRINKO: I'm supposed to be going back to Kabul in the very near future in the next few weeks, but not with the government. I'm going and taking a job with a private foundation.

Q: What foundation is that?

METRINKO: Well, I'm still talking about the offer with them, it's with the Asia Foundation. The job is interesting. It's a contract job. It will give me a lot more independence of movement than I would have in the embassy. The work is all involved with helping set up the framework for the coming election and also for doing political analysis of the election, but not [just] politically correct.

LEON WEINTRAUB
Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement
Washington, DC (2002-2004)

Mr. Weintraub was born and raised in New York City, educated at Hunter College, Brooklyn College and the Universities of Pittsburgh and Wisconsin. After service in Liberia with the Peace Corps he entered government service, first

with the Navy Department and then with the State Department Foreign Service. His service in Washington and abroad involved him with a variety of countries and issues including African Affairs, International Organizations, Narcotics and Peace-Keeping operations in Africa. His foreign posts were Bogotá, Tel Aviv, Lagos, Quito and Geneva. Mr. Weintraub was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: Well then, you left that pleasure spot and where did you go? This would be your last story.

WEINTRAUB: Well, I have to admit, for those of us who have served in Africa, we think of ourselves as a special group. You know, it takes something to serve there. As much as I enjoyed working with the people in the region, the embassies of the region, I think the Africa bureau has a lot of people who do a lot of assignments in Africa. But, from one perspective, it got to be discouraging because there was hardly ever any good news coming out. So as much as I thought about upping for another tour, another assignment, and really getting a solid lock on what was happening, it just was very discouraging. So looking around then, and as you know, as people are bidding for their assignments, the bureaus of course are looking for people to fill assignments, someone had advised me about an opening of something I wouldn't have considered otherwise in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, what people affectionately refer to as "drugs and thugs," the INL Bureau.

This was in the year 2002. Eight or nine months after 9/11, we had obviously gone into Afghanistan not much later after that -- I forget exactly when we went in, October maybe, and by this time we had brought about a certain amount of stability, we had an interim government in Afghanistan at the time under Mr. Karzai. And we were preparing to ramp up significantly the resources against drugs in Afghanistan. Afghanistan had been a traditional supplier of poppy, opium poppy for opium for heroin; most of it in fact had supplied the markets of Europe but it's a fungible kind of a commodity, so whatever wasn't used in Europe could come here. I think most of our heroin came from the Golden Triangle.

Q: Burma-

WEINTRAUB: Southeast Asia, right. But it was affecting our allies -- the British, the Germans, the Dutch. A lot of their heroin, most of it, was coming from Afghanistan. And, you know, there was a job to do. So the INL bureau was going to get a large increase in resources, and they needed to ramp up the office that handled that part of the world. Obviously, the bulk of INL's drug fighting capacity was focused on Mexico and Colombia. The largest amount of resources, the largest amount of personnel, was fighting the battle in Mexico and Colombia -- a little bit in Bolivia as well. INL, you know, practically had its own fleet of aircraft and of speedboats in the Caribbean. They worked heavily, of course, with the U.S. Coast Guard. So let that be on the record that that area was by far the larger battle.

As a result of that focus, virtually all the rest of the anti-narcotics battle, for all the rest of the globe I should say, was in this one other office; Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Far East. Basically we in this office had all the anti-drug programs in the rest of the world. In Africa it was mostly the trade, not so much the production, but mostly trying to stop the trade and a lot of that

was focused on both Nigeria and on Nigerians. Of course, a lot of Nigerians in the trade were not necessarily resident in Nigeria anymore; they're in South Africa or in fact in Southeast Asia as well. In Europe, there was hardly anything in the way of production, so we didn't have a lot of things going on in Europe, but we offered a certain amount to help to law enforcement agents. In Southeast Asia, we had heavy programs in Thailand. Obviously we couldn't do much in Burma since we had no decent relations with the government of Burma. We had some programs in the Middle East to help some governments. We also had a program in China, but by far the largest program in the region was in Afghanistan. And we had small but growing programs in Central Asia, the five central Asian former republics.

Q: The stans.

WEINTRAUB: The stans. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The five "stans." And they were obviously the weak link in trafficking of Afghan drugs. The bulk of the drug products of Afghanistan was going out through Iran and Pakistan, no doubt about it, that was clear. The Iranians had a kind of a no-nonsense attitude toward interdiction, as far as we knew. It was our belief, much as we didn't get along with the Iranian government, certainly, that in fact the Iranians were doing what they could to stop it, to intercept it.

Q: Did we have any unofficial or side contact with the Iranian enforcement people?

WEINTRAUB: Not on a bilateral level, but we would meet with Iran and other countries at the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime in Vienna. Whenever that agency had meetings about Afghanistan, obviously Iran was right there. They have a large eastern border with Afghanistan, the western border of Afghanistan with Iran. And as a matter of fact, when I was in Geneva in the mid-'90s, working on a variety of UN bodies, if the Iranian delegate was there and we shared a concern about the budget, we could certainly discuss multilateral issues with them. But obviously it was kind of *verboden* to discuss any attempt at bilateral issues. I believe that our friends in DEA, in the Drug Enforcement Administration, wanted very much to work with Iran. They thought this would really be essential and probably would be pretty exciting too. But obviously with Iranian support for terrorism, with Iran's foreign policy rabidly anti-Israel, with Iran's nuclear endeavors, we were in no mood to loosen the reins, if you will, on U.S. government officials to do anything with Iran in an official, bilateral way.

As a matter of fact, we had no problem with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, UNODC, spending resources to help the Iranians; we had no problem with that. So, as Iran was trying to seal the Afghan border there on the west, we had large amounts of drugs going out through Pakistan on the south and east. And we were spending a lot of money with Pakistan after 9/11, with Musharraf's declaration with us in the war on terrorism. The U.S. military and the State Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration were doing a lot in Pakistan. So as it became more difficult to get the drugs out of Iran and through Pakistan, although still not grossly difficult, there was no doubt that the drug lords were taking the other route out through the north into Central Asia. They weren't going out eastward in the direction of China; that wasn't the market, but they would go up north, through the "stans," through Central Asia into Russia, which was a market by itself, and then of course into Western Europe, into Turkey and then all over Western Europe.

So the “stans” had just gotten independence from the Soviet Union about 1990, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and they were, for the most part, run like “little Russias.” The people who had been in power under the old Communist regime suddenly became nationalists. They changed their name to some other kind of a political party and – surprise, surprise – they were elected leaders of the new governments. So these were for the most part pretty autocratic governments, pretty repressive governments, with the kind of law enforcement system you would expect to have in those governments, not the kind that engenders a willingness to cooperate on the part of the population to help them.

The U.S. had bases in Uzbekistan to fight the war in Afghanistan and in the Kyrgyz Republic. Of course, Tajikistan was just emerging from a civil war so we didn't have anything there. But we had bases in the Kyrgyz Republic and in Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan was kind of out of bounds; we barely had a functioning embassy there. This was the guy, I forget his name – Turkmenbashi – but this guy really had a cult of personality much like our “friend” in North Korea. Supposedly -- I never did get to Turkmenistan because the embassy did not go out of its way to welcome visitors -- but supposedly in the capital there was a statue of the supreme leader, a gold plated statue that supposedly revolved around on a pedestal such that he was always facing the sun. I mean, this gives you an example. And he had something like a Qaddafi green book that he or his wife had written or prepared, and this volume was supposed to replace all the textbooks in school. So this was “Mr. Loony Tunes,” if you will. And he was just the worst of not a great lot.

The others in positions of authority – they told us what we wanted to hear. Oh, they knew the importance of democracy, they knew the importance of opening their market, by all means, but Rome wasn't made in a day, you know. You Americans can't be impatient, you know, the people aren't used to it. It was the same story we heard for decades in other countries. But we did want to work with the law enforcement agencies to help intercept the flow of drugs which we knew were coming into Central Asia. And it was always a tradeoff, like all of foreign policy is. You want to accomplish something, but you don't want to, if you can help it, reinforce a police state or reinforce the autocratic elements of a state that was a police state and might not be one a few years later. You don't want to reinforce the wrong side of law and order. So we had to work very carefully, very gingerly, if you will, with the forces of law and order.

There were other elements in there; we had our human rights programs in there, funded by the human rights bureau, we had human rights programs funded by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), election monitoring, and other human rights programs. The European Union was doing programs there because the drugs that came through Central Asia and Russia, they were really destined for the countries of the European Union so they wanted to stop smuggling of drugs and also of people, they wanted to eliminate the illegal trafficking of persons, of prostitutes. They wanted to stop economic migrants. So the European Union was really a lot more interested in Central Asia than we were. They – in a manner of speaking – wanted to push the wall protecting the EU back as far east as they could, so they were eager to work with the law enforcement people.

Q: What were you doing with this?

WEINTRAUB: Well, I was managing or overseeing our counter-narcotics programs in Afghanistan and Central Asia. We had a couple of people in Afghanistan who were funded by INL to run our extensive anti-narcotics programs in that country. In Central Asia, however, it was difficult because we were not using INL funding for those programs, we were using funding that came under what's called the Freedom Support Act. This was a large pot of money, as I understood it -- and I'm not an expert in this. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, our Congress agreed to pump in large amounts of resources to Russia and the other constituent republics and the former Warsaw Pact nations, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states, -- countries formerly behind the Iron Curtain. So, we were using Freedom Support Act funds, which was a large pot of money appropriated by the Congress. Basically, as I understood it, the intention was to centralize, in one spot in the State Department, responsibility for the allocation for these funds for strengthening democratic institutions in the former Soviet Union (FSU), and it was large amounts of money. The funds could be used for democratization, for strengthening labor unions, for agricultural development, for educational development, for law enforcement, for free elections; almost anything across the board. Rather than disperse it among a lot of different agencies, such as the Departments of Agriculture or Education, it was all given to the State Department. To manage the funds, within the European Affairs Bureau, the Department created an office -- I think it was slightly below the level of the assistant secretary, called the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia. They said, here's the money, you're the point man, you're responsible for it. Well, a lot of that money was farmed out to operating agencies. So USAID got some of the money, Department of Agriculture got some of the money, DEA got some of the money and some came to INL for anti-drug programs. So we spent, rather than spending INL-appropriated funds in Central Asia, as we did in Afghanistan, we spent these other Freedom Support Act Funds in Central Asia, to countries designated as members of the FSU.

Given all that background, we also were unclear how far we were going to go. I mean, unlike in Afghanistan or Thailand, where we knew this was going to be a long-range program -- so INL put people in the embassies and supported people in the embassies -- in Central Asia you did not have a cultivation problem and so we didn't know how long our programs were going to be operating there. We didn't know the long-range nature of the governments, how long we'd be able to work with those governments, how democratic they'd be, how repressive they'd be, or how cooperative they'd be. So we did not have INL people in any of those embassies in Central Asia. The way we'd have to do it was to have the ambassador, have the embassy assign one person to be the point person for INL-funded programs. It might have been a political officer, it might have been an admin officer, it might have been an economics officer, and that would be part of his or her portfolio.

In Uzbekistan, for example, DEA didn't have people but the Department of Justice had people. The Department of Justice had a whole series of programs on how to alter the legal system so it became much more analogous to a western legal system, if you will. So the Department of Justice had people there and they funded legal reform activities of the American Bar Association. There's a whole unit of funding from Freedom Support Act to Department of Justice to the ABA; they have a large element. DEA had people there as well, but DEA is mainly doing intelligence and operational-type activities with law enforcement, whereas our job in INL was not to get involved in operational activities but to work with the law enforcement agencies, and to make

sure they understood what the mission was and to help train them. So we ended up with some kind of support from other Americans in all the embassies. It might be in Uzbekistan from the Department of Justice – these folks could talk to people at senior levels in the ministry of justice. The DEA people could speak to operatives in the field when needed, but our element in INL was, you know, somewhere in between.

I mean, so some element of the U.S. government might be operating at all levels of law enforcement in certain selected countries -- from the political level of the ministry to the bureaucratic level, and then to the operatives in the field. But it was very difficult. The programs were not huge by any means, but they were growing, and it was frequently the case that INL activities would be implemented when the designated person at the embassy had the time to do that. I'm sure that in most cases the ambassador had an agenda, and the embassy had an agenda for all these other elements of the mission program plan, and so it was really difficult. So in a way that was a bit frustrating. It never really got, I don't think, the amount of attention it deserved in Central Asia compared to South America, or compared to Afghanistan. As I said previously, it was not a problem of cultivation. It was the trade. Most of the product ended up in Europe, not in the United States, so it was hard to --

Q: Hard to find it.

WEINTRAUB: Hard to focus attention on that, but the stuff was coming out of Afghanistan and it was hard to find it and hard to track it.

Q: Now, turning briefly to Afghanistan, I have been part of a program of interviewing people who have come back from these, what they call PRT, Provincial-

WEINTRAUB: Reconstruction Teams.

Q: Reconstruction Teams. We have them out there; they're very much like the old CORDS program.

WEINTRAUB: Right, in Vietnam.

Q: And when I ask them about poppy cultivation, they say, well, basically it has a low priority because this is what, I mean, they're trying to establish a firm government, a viable economy and for many of the provinces this is what they do. And so at least the people I've talked to, and these are fairly recently out of there, they're not -- they're kind of turning a blind eye. Some of them; some aren't.

WEINTRAUB: This was a sore point, all the time I was there, the much lower priority given it by the U.S. military forces in Afghanistan, compared to the embassy and certainly compared to INL. Supposedly, the U.S. government and the U.S. forces and the coalition forces in Afghanistan that fought and overthrew the Taliban, they relied on working with the so-called Northern Alliance forces in Afghanistan, they helped them to throw out the Taliban. Now, depending on the intelligence people you speak to and what you read, a lot of the commanders, these so-called war lords in the Northern Alliance, in fact also are drug lords. They control the

borders leading into Central Asia, going into Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, and nothing gets out without them earning a profit on it -- and that includes both licit exports and drugs as well. So you know, there is that factor that these were our original alliance partners to throw out the Taliban and the military, in all our discussions with them, and obviously we were in frequent discussions with them, never really did place a high priority on drugs -- neither eradication nor interdiction.

I mean, I heard one military person say they don't want to antagonize the guy who's behind them, the guy who might be "watching his back." And obviously the military, the U.S. military and the coalition forces, rely a lot on the members of the Northern Alliance to pave the way, to feed them intelligence. Obviously, the last thing they want to do is have these people call into question their alliance with the United States and other members of the coalition. So the military was very hesitant to get into fighting drugs. It was always after some important event that the anti-drug campaign would begin in earnest: -- Let's get the constitution done and then maybe we can do it. And then, well now we've got the next election, let's wait for the next election, the presidential election. And now, well now we've got the parliamentary election. It seems there's always another event that they have to wait for. We at State Department, we tried to push them a lot but the military -- the resources of State Department compared to the resources of the military are obviously not comparable, one might say.

And I remember, I think it was January '04, maybe January '03, I remember in the morning while I was getting dressed to come into work I had the radio on, and I was listening to national public radio. They had an interview with a soldier out in the field in Afghanistan, somewhere at some kind of a roadblock, and they were checking for weapons. They were checking vehicles for weapons, and I guess the interviewer asked the soldier, well, you hear a lot about drugs. What are you supposed to do, or what do you do if you find drugs, something like that. I forget his exact words, of course, but it was something like that. And the soldier said, "Drugs? Oh, that's not my job. We've got enough on our hands to worry about the weapons." So even though the military often mouthed the right words -- the senior levels at the official level never said "That's not my job," they always said "That's not my job right now." And, by the way, if we come across it we'll stop it, but we're sure not going to go out of our way. And here was a guy who in fact did come across it and still didn't do anything about it. So this went on and on and on. And you know, probably it hasn't been resolved yet. It was still continuing when I left -- about what is the military going to do about drug smuggling.

So when I was in INL we started a large -- well, maybe moderate -- scale eradication program, applying this program not through use of herbicides, not through use of spraying, but through the process of physically uprooting the plants or slashing them with machetes. This was a huge endeavor, obviously very labor intensive. We hired a contractor and the contractor had to rely upon the Afghan military to secure a perimeter of a certain location. They would map out different areas for such activity -- we worked a lot with the British on this process. Under the agreement of the interim government after the overthrow of the Taliban, among all the coalition, different members of the coalition assumed different responsibilities. The U.S. was primarily involved in training the military. The British were in counter-narcotics. The Italians were in setting up a judicial system, the Germans a police department. The Japanese were to help in demobilization of the military and getting the soldiers back into civilian life. All members of the

coalition had something special to accomplish. And our people worked very closely with the British, who had the lead on drugs.

The British, with the Afghans and intelligence agents, they would pick areas that would be a target for eradication. A contractor, working with the Afghan military, would go in to secure an area, put a perimeter around an area so targeted. Then, through the use of police and hired labor - depending on the region it might be local hired labor, it might be outside labor -- they'd go in that area and within a day or a couple of days they would hit the fields that were targeted. This was just getting started in 2004, in early 2004. They would eradicate in that area and then they would retreat and then they'd hit another area of about similar size; they would plan another raid in the area. But it was all we could do to convince the military to feed us intelligence. When they're fighting people in the hills, wherever they fought, they often did come upon some caches of drugs, but they were supposed to report it, make sure where it was, investigate it. But we were advised in no uncertain terms that this was not their priority - their priority was hunting the bad guys, hunting the terrorists in the mountains. So, I mean, there was - I don't know if a "disconnect" is the right word, but we were not pulling in the same direction, there's no doubt about it.

Q: Well Leon, I'm looking at the time now.

WEINTRAUB: I'm okay, I'm okay for- I have another half hour.

Q: Well, I really am not. I was wondering, shall we- what were you doing? Were you- is there anything we really should cover or?

WEINTRAUB: Well, basically I was the manager, the Washington, D.C. manager and supervisor of the people in the field doing our INL programs in Afghanistan and Central Asia. In the summer of 2004, kind of in my last months on active duty, I even had a chance to go to Kabul for a couple of weeks. As the program was being expanded, geared up -- just at that time, one of our persons at the embassy was getting ready to transfer, another was going on home leave, someone was doing something else, and our ambassador -- who's now our ambassador in Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad -- was getting annoyed that here we were ramping up our INL program and there's nobody around to do it: to work with the contractor, to work with the ministry of agriculture, to work with the anti-narcotics police, and to work with our British and other allies. So it was only going to be for a period of two weeks to fill a gap, and it was fairly obvious you're not going to send someone who's not familiar with the program. So you're in a meeting, and people are looking around and saying, who can we send there for two weeks who really knows the program and will not need a long "break-in" period? And it was kind of obvious that, yes, I knew the program. So I got a little two week visit to Kabul, and I had a chance to attend some senior level meetings with -- actually with the president of Afghanistan, who just so happened to convene a high level meeting about what to do about drugs while I was there.

Unfortunately, at the end of the year of '04, the reports came out in fact that opium production expanded again, considerably. But as a matter of fact just about a month ago there was the latest report -- these are estimates put out by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) -- that in fact there had been a decline in cultivation, a significant decline, about 15 or 20 percent in the

acreage identified as under poppy cultivation. It is unclear, of course, how accurate those reports can be, but there was apparently only a very small decrease in the actual output, only like a two percent decline, and this was apparently because the weather conditions were so very highly favorable; the amount of rainfall, the amount of moisture. So even though you cut back the area under cultivation by 15 to 20 percent, in fact the output only fell by about two percent.

So, overall, it looks like a moderate success story, probably due in some part to our efforts but it is still a long way from being out of danger of becoming a so-called narco state. You simply don't have the elements conducive for free markets for trade in agriculture, for trade in cotton or corn or whatever crops there might be. Roads have to be rebuilt, bridges have to be rebuilt, and markets have to be rebuilt. And it's easy to grow a crop when someone brings you the seeds, as the poppy traders do -- someone who will give you an advance, someone will come to your field and pick up the harvest from you. You don't even have to take it to market and wonder, "Is the price, when I'm ready to sell it, going to be as good as it was when I planted it?" You know, a price is negotiated beforehand with the drug dealers.

So, it's a tough sell and it's still an uphill battle as far as I can tell, but for me it was an exciting part of the world, I hadn't been there before. I made a few trips out to Central Asia, and I also went to Afghanistan. I worked with different people, and got involved with a different approach to foreign policy. So again, it's kind of emblematic of the type of a career I've had in the Foreign Service. I served in different regional bureaus -- a number of geographical bureaus, as well as different functional bureaus; I covered quite a range, from human rights to law enforcement. So it was fine.

Lawrence Cohen
TDY
Bamiyan (2003)

Mr. Cohen was born and raised in Pennsylvania and was educated at Dickinson College, and the Universities of Pennsylvania, Tel Aviv, Chicago and Northwestern. Entering the Foreign Service in 1980, he served variously as Economic, Political and Political/Military Officer at posts in Mexico, Honduras, India, Hungary, Nigeria and Brazil. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington Mr. Cohen dealt with Foreign Assistance and Environmental and Scientific matters. His last post was in Afghanistan, where he had two assignments with Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Mr. Cohen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: What happened Afghanistan-wise?

COHEN: Since I served twice in Afghanistan, I will break this up into two parts. In 2003 I arranged to go on a three month TDY to the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Bamiyan.

Q: Would you explain what a PRT is?

COHEN: The U.S. military established a string of small bases in the major urban areas of Afghanistan. The initial PRTs were established in Gardez, Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Bamiyan. The PRTs copied the (arguably) successful CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support Program) model that the USG used in Viet Nam to win “hearts and minds.” (Let’s not focus on the end result in Viet Nam.) PRTs provide local security through patrolling, extend a foundation to deliver reconstruction, and support good governance and institution building. In essence, PRTs are platforms where military and civilians work together to expand development efforts and assist local government within a more secure environment. USAID officers served at the PRTs along with State representatives. In Afghanistan, PRTs were somewhat of an experiment. When they were established, it was not immediately clear how they were going to operate.

I heard about the Provincial Reconstruction Teams earlier in 2003. I exchanged messages with Washington about serving for a few months on one. Finally, we sealed the deal. I would serve in Bamiyan in the middle of the Hindu Kush in one of the country’s poorest, most rural regions. Bamiyan was also a relatively benign part of the country, which pleased Marla who vetoed other PRT possibilities including Khost and Kandahar. I really wanted to go to Mazar-e Sharif, but that State position had already been taken. Tom Hudson actually went out there at the time.

I reached Afghanistan in September 2003. I reached Kabul on the same flight from Baku as a staff delegation from Capital Hill, majority staff director Charlie Flickner from the House Appropriations Committee. I stayed one week at the embassy, which at the time consisted of the old chancery building -- in a pretty bad state of repair -- and ubiquitous white trailers which bunked up to 12 men, or women, per. Some permanently assigned personnel had their own half trailers, but not the TDYers. For us, toilets and showers were about 150 feet away in a specially configured trailer. Behind the trailers, the new chancery was under construction. On the other side of the road in front of the compound, a field eventually became the second compound, called later “Café Compound.” In 2003, embassy facilities occupied only one side of the main road. The embassy suffered from chronic overcrowding. Within the chancery, staff sat on top of each other. The political section consisted of one room with perhaps seven officers squeezed among the desks, cabinets, safes, and bookshelves. The USAID office, which channeled perhaps a billion dollars into the country, consisted of two small rooms and a series of desks disguised as cubicles. There was no room to stand.

After one week in the capital, the new USDA representative to the PRT, Manuel Ayala, and I flew on an UNHAS (United Nations Humanitarian Air Services) aircraft to Bamiyan. The U.S. Department of Agriculture assigned personnel to a few of the PRTs to develop agriculture-related projects. The UNHAS planes were twin engine Beechcraft with perhaps sixteen seats. To reach Bamiyan there were few options. The U.S. military flew helicopters and occasionally C-130s transports from Bagram airbase when required. But there was no regular service. The International Committee of the Red Cross also flew its own aircraft. Between the ICRC, UNHAS, and perhaps one or two other aircraft, that was the extent of air service into the Bamiyan valley.

Bamiyan is located at 7,800 feet elevation and is surrounded by high mountains. As the crow

flies, it is perhaps 120 miles west-northwest from Kabul. But the crew better have oxygen. The mountains between Kabul and Bamiyan reached over 17,000 feet. By vehicle, the trip took most of a day. In the depths of winter, driving depended on snow conditions at the mountain passes. The famous Bamiyan Buddhas destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 looked out over Bamiyan village. It was a picturesque but impoverished valley, noteworthy primarily because it was the center of the Hazarajat, the heartland region of ethnic Hazara. Hazara are Shia, considered descendents from the Genghis Khan-led Mongol invaders of the 13th Century. Hazaras look somewhat Mongolian, and not at all like Afghanistan's other ethnic groups such as the Pashto. Being primarily Shia, they differ from the rest of Afghanistan's Sunni population.

On September 23, we landed at the rock strewn airstrip. The UNHAS flight disgorged its passengers midway down on the north side of the landing strip. The PRT compound was just on the other side, the south side. We had our luggage. No one from the PRT met us. It was impossible to walk with the gear. An NGO (non-governmental organization) vehicle graciously gave us a lift to the front gate of the PRT. We walked into our new home.

We reached Bamiyan, as I mentioned, on September 23, 2003, the day that the United States turned over command of the Bamiyan Provincial Reconstruction Team to New Zealand. The U.S. enlisted a number of countries to assist in Afghanistan. This was the *true* coalition of the willing. New Zealand, a nation of just four million, did not have to step up, but it did. The Kiwis committed to Bamiyan.

By the way, other countries took on PRT commitments as well. Germany established a PRT in Konduz; the United Kingdom took over Mazar-e Sharif. The Kiwis really lucked out with Bamiyan.

The PRT change of command ceremony took place that day. The U.S. flag was lowered; the New Zealand flag was raised. As part of the ceremony, New Zealand soldiers performed the *kapa haka*, a traditional Maori song and dance with much warlike symbolism. The New Zealand rugby team, the All Blacks, stage the *kapa haka* before taking the pitch against their opponents. Their effort at the *kappa haka* was a bit ragged. With practice, the Kiwi soldiers later became quite proficient.

The name for the New Zealand PRT was "Task Force Crib." Since this was the first Kiwi team in Bamiyan, it was called "Crib One." Each rotation of troops through the PRT added a number to Crib: Crib Two in December, Crib Three a few months after, etc.

Local dignitaries at the transfer of authority ceremony included the provincial governor, the Bamiyan mayor, and the provincial police chief. Afterwards, the Kiwis served lunch. The American officers and soldiers walked to the airstrip and embarked on helicopters for Bagram. Manuel and I were now guest residents of the New Zealanders. We had never even had a chance to meet the Americans before they departed. The previous State Department PRT representative, Keith Kidd, left a week or two before we arrived. At the time, USAID had not yet placed anyone in Bamiyan. We were assigned a hooch, a small barracks made of plywood.

Q: You use the term "hooch." I think it comes from Vietnam.

COHEN: Perhaps. The barracks certainly seemed like a Vietnam-era structure. The PRT was constructed by the Americans earlier in 2003. When it was constructed, the American military utilized inexpensive building materials, including plywood. Each hooch was raised off the ground up six or so stairs to the front door. Since the PRT was situated on a slight rise, fewer stairs led to the rear door. The Spartan hooches had no windows. Roofs were plywood with the roof trusses were left open -- no insulation, simple drop bulb lighting, bare walls. In each hooch the Americans had installed a kerosene stove for warmth. However, the Kiwis immediately removed them since they were a fire hazard.

The barracks that Manuel and I entered already contained four American soldiers, all that was left of the U.S. team. They were holdovers of a civil affairs team (CA teams or CATs) responsible for continuing and completing the various civil projects begun by the U.S. military. The Bamiyan Civil Affairs Team consisted of a major, two sergeants, and a private. All were reservists. In fact, 96 percent of all U.S. army civil affairs personnel are from the reserve. Funding for the military civil affairs program came from a pot of money specifically for emergency relief. The program pushed money out the door for quick impact projects such as schools, wells, and retaining walls. Numerous projects were started in the province. This CAT team remained behind to see these projects through to completion.

There were six of us in the barracks: Manuel and myself, the major, and three enlisted men. We each occupied a section of the barracks. Parachute strung from the walls served as privacy curtains. We utilized primitive bookshelves for our clothes and personal items. My bed consisted of a board with a four inch foam pad that served as a mattress. The major used an army cot. Manuel and I arrived on a warm day, a late September Indian summer day. In Bamiyan, however, the weather turned cold very quickly. By the first week of October, the hooches were becoming a little frigid at night. Without the kerosene stoves, removed by the Kiwis, the hooches were unheated. A fire was the last thing anyone desired. But the Kiwis were not yet prepared for any alternative. Temperatures dropped to minus 20 or minus 30 Celsius by December. Then, living in unheated plywood hooches would have no appeal at all!

The Kiwis had ordered insulation material. By late October, the insulation material reached Bamiyan. We spent days installing the insulation material into the walls and ceilings of the hooches. After the insulation, plywood was hammered into the vertical beams and onto the roof trusses. We placed the insulation anywhere that we could.

The second step was to provide heat. The Kiwis decided to go electric. They hung overhead electric space heaters from the ceiling. The heaters looked like fluorescent light fixtures. They were certainly a great idea -- if there had been sufficient electricity to run them. I will get to that later.

The PRT mess hall was a larger plywood structure located uphill from the hooches. The Kiwis served plenty of tasty, healthy food. At least, it was better food than found at American dining facilities (DIFACs.) On Fridays, the day off for the local cooking staff supporting the Kiwi cooks, a Kiwi squad assisted with cooking and kitchen duties. Fridays were always "grilling days," steaks, burgers, even lobsters.

The Kiwi military had a tradition whereby each of the various military contingents or services had their special day. There was infantry day, armored unit day, artillery day, engineer day. The U.S. Marines celebrate November 10 as the birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps. On those days, the honored unit did some sort of special set up. Perhaps, the birthday of the Kiwi engineers was in October. One day the engineers placed their cranes in front of the mess hall. On infantry day, the camp was awakened to the loud rat-tat-tat of a 50 caliber machine gun. I wondered what the locals were thinking that morning!

I am spending a lot of time providing a physical description of the PRT.

Q: Well, I think that it gives a feel.

COHEN: I describe something unique not found in other Foreign Service assignments. The Bamiyan PRT was located next to the airstrip -- not that Bamiyan airstrip was a thriving airport. UNHAS (United Nations), ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) and, of course, U.S. military aircraft utilized the airstrip. Occasionally, a large C-130 would land, maybe bringing some VIPs. Large Chinook helicopters from Bagram carried the big loads; Black Hawks conveyed personnel, VIPs, and mail. A few planes landed each day. When a plane landed, it was no secret. The PRT was only 100 yards off from the airstrip.

The compound itself was surrounded by HESCOs – large gray wire mesh square bags filled with rock and dirt. They formed a formidable bastion around the PRT perimeter, the outer wall for the compound. They were very thick, heavy, and blast-proof. Once filled, it was almost impossible to move one unless unfilled. Razor wire lined the crest of the HESCOs.

The front gate had a small guard house and guard tower. A 50 caliber machine gun looked out over the airstrip and the road which descended towards Bamiyan proper. If I said town, I am exaggerating. Bamiyan was a village. The airstrip and the PRT overlooked the central town. A dirt road wound down a hill, past a small plateau called Government Hill where Bamiyan's ministry and provincial buildings were situated. The town consisted of one principal dirt street with small shops that stretched for three or four blocks. Beyond that buildings razed by the Taliban had not yet been repaired. Behind the shops, a half a side street away, stretched potato fields. The main drag had recovered since the Taliban controlled Bamiyan. The Taliban devastated everything in the village including the commercial section and the Buddhas in 2001. Hundreds of locals were slaughtered by the Taliban.

Q: Was this because they were different?

COHEN: The Taliban possessed particular hatred for the Hazara because they were Shia. In the eyes of the Taliban, the Shia were apostates. The Taliban slaughtered Hazara by the hundreds. No Bamiyan family was unaffected. The Bamiyan valley had been, more or less, depopulated. Orchards were razed, livestock herds destroyed; there was nothing in the valley until after the Taliban were kicked out. Slowly, Hazara refugees started coming back. The bazaar, this one small street, served as the valley's commercial center.

Between the airstrip and the town itself was Government Hill, a small plateau and open area. At the center of Government Hill, in a field of perhaps four acres, stood a destroyed Russian tank, picked clean of all extraneous items. The tiny governor's office and police station were there. The *qadi*, or local judge, had his chambers next door. Various government ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture, for example, also served the community from this spot. I noticed early on a New Holland tractor that stood in front of the Ministry of Agriculture. Following a conversation at the ministry, I thought the tractor required repair. I convinced a visiting U.S. sergeant who was a mechanic to inspect it. The tractor was okay. I was misinformed or the victim of miscommunication. The tractor could not run because the person with the key was in Kabul. The African Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) worked out of a newer building on the hill. A primitive mud brick prison – I use the term loosely since the place was nothing but a mud-walled compound with sealed rooms – held a few prisoners. One, in particular, was a man accused of particularly heinous murders. His penetrating eyes and wild hair reminded me of Charles Manson. Bamiyan clearly needed a new jail.

Various NGOs placed their compounds in the area between the airstrip and Government Hill. The United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) had two compounds, offices and residences, as did the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Among the NGOs represented in Bamiyan were the Aga Khan Development Network, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Doctors without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières). The Provincial Reconstruction Team was located on the opposite side of the airstrip.

Viewing Bamiyan east to west, the valley was shaped like a “Y” with the main commercial area at the crux of the Y. To the west, two valleys followed rivers, streams really for most of the year. A maze of irrigation channels provided small farms access to the water. Without irrigation, farming was not feasible. The place was bone dry in the summer. The winter snow pack fed the streams, although snow during the early 2000's was certainly irregular. During Taliban times the Hindu Kush snow pack had been inadequate for good agriculture. Moreover, to punish the Hazara living in Bamiyan, the Taliban destroyed much of the irrigation system. After the Taliban fell in late 2001, heavier snowfall returned to the region. Popular opinion attributed it to the will of Allah.

Local inhabitants were very poor. Bamiyan is one of the more impoverished areas of Afghanistan which, of course, is one of the poorest countries in the world. As I explained, the Hazara had been persecuted by the Taliban. Many were massacred; families lost all their possessions, including property, to the Taliban.

Bamiyan had no institutions of higher learning, only a few primary schools with hardly any teachers or textbooks. One “university,” a couple of small outbuildings really, had been targeted and destroyed during the U.S. air assault in 2001. Reportedly, the Taliban had used the buildings as a headquarters. With USAID funding, the U.S. was constructing new university structures for the campus, with anticipated completion in early 2004.

The potato served as the region's primarily agricultural crop; skimpy wheat cultivation complimented the dependence on potatoes. Bamiyan's famous orchards had been destroyed by the Taliban. We were told the Taliban killed or took away about 95 percent of Bamiyan's

livestock.

Manuel and I arrived in Bamiyan at potato harvest time. In every field around Bamiyan town, families stacked mounds of potatoes. Children as young as two and three sat on the ground and sorted the potatoes by hand. They separated eating potatoes, the larger ones, from the seed potatoes that would be put aside for the next year's crop. For hours on end the children separated the potatoes. In the wheat fields, the threshing technology seemed no different than techniques used 3,000 years ago. To separate the chaff, the farmers tossed the wheat stalks in the air with simple implements. Rollers pulled by oxen crushed the wheat. I described the agriculture of Bamiyan as "biblical," straight out of the "Book of Ruth." Mechanized methods of farming were rare. There was no husbandry no agricultural extension had yet reached these people. The only mechanization I observed were the trucks that hauled the potatoes to markets in Kabul and elsewhere. The trucks were loaded beyond the brim with potatoes.

Bamiyan is a beautiful place. From the Provincial Reconstruction Team compound, one looked north over the valley towards the sandstone ridge where the Buddhas had been located. Where the Buddhas had been large cavities in the rock now existed. Hundreds of openings, caves chiseled by Buddhist monks and others in the 6th and 7th Centuries and earlier, pockmarked the panoramic cliff. An intricate network of cave passages had been carved out inside the mountain. Of course, the Buddhas were gone. A pile of rubble rested at the bottom of each of the 55 meter high cavities. The Taliban took the Buddhas but left the rubble.

Continuing to look north, the Hindu Kush stretched above this sandstone bluff. At different times of the day, the sunlight hit the mountains at various angles which made the vista starkly colorful and textural, especially when the snows began in early November. As November and December went by, the snow pack progressed down the mountains towards the valley. To the northeast of the PRT, about a kilometer away, the ruins of an ancient citadel, Shahr-e-Gholghola, covered a hill. Enraged by resistance in the valley to his conquest, Genghis Khan in 1221 destroyed the valley and killed every living thing in it. More recently, the Shahr-e-Gholghola ruins were utilized as defensive works by both the Russians and the Taliban. It was still peppered with landmines; shell casings and rusted ammunition boxes littered the place. A cleared trail marked by red painted rocks led to the top. The hill's devastation was quite complete. It was impossible to discern what destruction was modern and what dated back almost eight centuries.

Just east from the Provincial Reconstruction Team, the land fell into a ravine about twenty-five meters down. On a flat area in this small valley, the Afghans occasionally performed *bushkashi*. A very traditional sport in Afghanistan, *Bushkashi* consists of horsemen vying to pull a headless goat or sheep over a goal line. Do not ask me the rules. I suspect there are none. Behind the PRT to the south, the flat land rose gradually for half a kilometer until reaching a string of tall well rounded hills. The closest was called PT Hill, PT for "physical training." A serpentine trail looped up the hill. The Kiwis hiked or ran the trail. It was a challenge. The PRT is at elevation, over 8,000 feet. Some of the Kiwis make the hike before breakfast. If done briskly, you could do it in about an hour. Soviet-dug trenches along the top of the hill formed a defensive arc. The hill was pimped with landmines so hikers had to stay on the trail.

Behind PT Hill the Hindu Kush rose quickly, up to 16,000, 17,000 feet. In that direction, the

Hindu Kush's appearance, back-laced by the sun, differed dramatically from the northern vista. The southern mountains appeared more jagged than those to the north. The mountains did not seem to be part of the same range. West from the PRT, beyond the airstrip, was a patch of green, one of the upstream valleys of that "Y" I described. Miniscule little hamlets hidden by willow trees crept up the valley.

That is a physical description of Bamiyan.

Q: What about night? Being high up you could really see a star-filled sky.

COHEN: Bamiyan had no electricity grid, nor a square foot of pavement. Except for satellite phones, it did not have telephone communication. Bamiyan was as isolated a place as I have ever been. Because of the lack of light, the night sky was brilliant, especially during a new moon. During one full moon, I tried to read a book by moon light. While successful, given the eye strain I do not recommend doing it all the time.

During a new moon -- and if the persnickety generators were not operating which at the PRT was quite often -- the compound was completely black. In the cave-like darkness you had to be very careful where you walked without a flashlight. Left over from the American presence, the generators were not Bagram's finest piece of donated equipment. As the compound expanded, demand for electricity surpassed the generator capacity. Under a new moon, a walk in the compound could be dangerous. You could trip and break a neck.

Dawn and dusk were most impressive. The dawn light coming over Hindu Kush was unforgettable. Morning sunlight first hit the mountains behind the Buddhas. I took one photograph in December of a full moon at dawn. A full moon in daylight is on the western edge of the horizon. To get such a picture especially with the Hindu Kush backdrop, was special.

In September, the weather was warm and sunny. But autumn came very quickly. By mid-November, temperatures fell below freezing. At night it was downright frigid. By early December the temps at night dropped to minus 20 Celsius. The PRT continued to suffer generator problems. Electricity had to be rationed. The principle consumers of electricity included the various hooches, the laundry, the latrines and showers. The mess hall and kitchen were a higher priority. The communications unit and command post received the highest priority. Thus, the hooches were last in line. When the temperatures dipped, electricity to run the heaters remained sporadic. Within the hooches, temperatures dropped at night to as low as minus seven Celsius, about 20 degrees Fahrenheit. I slept in my clothes with flannel sheets below my warm winter weight sleeping bag. Despite gloves, a scarf, and a hat, I still shivered all night.

There was a silver lining which people do not necessarily think about. When the weather is cold and you are active, your body burns lots of calories. Great for watching your weight! You shiver all the time. A person can lose weight even when eating a high carb diet. But there were no other benefits. On those few evenings when we did have electricity, the hooch temperature crept above the freezing mark. It was not a dramatic improvement, but enough to make, comparatively speaking a big difference in comfort.

When Manuel and I arrived at the PRT, our hooch had a television. The American PRT had AFRTS (Armed Forces Radio and Television Service) boxes attached to a satellite dish which brought in the signal. Our first week, we had television. Then, for some unfathomable reason at the beginning of October, the connection was broken. We never could figure out how to get the TV system functioning.

The Kiwis were not eager for AFRTS, but they were very desperate for TV. The reason was simple. In autumn 2003, Australia hosted the Rugby World Cup. No sport in New Zealand is more important than rugby. The Kiwis installed a satellite dish and rigged it for the Sky Network. All the World Cup games were shown. A large screen television was set up in the mess hall. Soldiers not on duty spent game day afternoons, evening in Australia, watching the games. The “All Blacks” did well that year until the semi-finals. They lost to their Australian rivals. That was a bitter pill. I learned quite a bit about rugby from the Kiwis.

The Kiwis were a wonderful group. Under Colonel Neville Reilly, the PRT was a happy base. I sensed less of a hang up about rank than among the U.S. military. Soldiers respected rank but were more casual about it than the Americans. New Zealand, I should point out, was part of the U.S.-led coalition, not a part of the NATO command. The Kiwi PRT followed U.S. rules, including Centcom’s General Order No. 1 which prohibited alcohol at the PRT. Despite the “dry” environment, the Kiwis had a relaxed attitude. Everything was “sweet.” Most everyone was on a first name basis. There was no saluting. They welcomed us on their patrols.

From the Americans, the PRT inherited beat up, high mileage Toyota High Lux pick-up trucks. Because of Bamiyan’s road conditions, Toyota Hi-Luxes were probably the best *used vehicle* option. The UN and the NGOs drove newer Toyota Land Cruisers. Heavy vehicles were useless in most of Bamiyan province. The Kiwis also had a couple of Humvees; God knows how they ever got up to Bamiyan! Of course, Soviet tanks made it to Bamiyan so I should not be surprised. Many roads were not buttressed or wide enough to take heavy tract vehicles, with the exception of the Russian-built Kamaz trucks which could go anywhere.

If they had not been on their last legs, the Toyota Hi-Luxes would have been okay. The Americans procured these vehicles from a Pakistani shyster named Khan. The U.S. taxpayer paid top dollar for rental of the vehicles. They were abominable. Each had at least 100,000 tough miles on the odometer and broke down constantly. They were rattletraps. The Kiwis outfitted some with a 50 caliber machine gun on the rear bed. The gunner sat in a comfortable captain’s chair and enjoyed a wide swivel for the 50 cal. In a convoy of four High Luxes a 50 caliber machine gun faced forward from the lead vehicle. At the convoy rear, the 50 cal. faced rearward. Usually, four Kiwis occupied each cab, windows open for security. If I went along, I sat in the back seat. Because of road conditions, travel was very slow. We crawled on mountain roads. The NGO Land Cruisers, always white and low mileage, flew by us.

The Kiwis divided Bamiyan Province into four patrol areas. Four infantry squads, each responsible for a different patrol area and led by a lieutenant, covered the province. The PRT consisted mostly of army personnel with a scattering of navy and the occasional air force officer. The medics were navy. There were no Kiwi civilians. The PRT commander, Colonel Riley, was a real gentleman. Every evening, the officers met after dinner at the tactical operations center

(TOC) for a general meeting. Manuel and I participated. When a USAID representative arrived at the PRT, he attended as well. Everyone provided a report, the J-1, the J-2, operations, personnel, intelligence, etc.

Q: Did the PRT include Maoris?

COHEN: A few of the soldiers were Maoris. I cannot say whether they were pure blood. To do the *kapa haka*, there had to be Maori to teach the other soldiers.

In 2003, the PRT hosted a few VIPs. In late October, New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark visited Bamiyan. To my knowledge, she was the first head of state to visit Afghanistan outside of Kabul. During her visit, the soldiers performed the *kapa haka*. For New Zealand, the PRT was an important, high profile military obligation. The presence of a military contingent in Afghanistan drew much attention back in Wellington.

At least half a dozen female soldiers served at the PRT. The women had separate showers, but the latrines were for everyone. Both showers and latrines were located on the downhill side of the PRT, the airstrip side. Fortunately, our hooch was close to the latrine side of the compound. On winter mornings -- and I resided in Bamiyan only until mid-December, in January and February it was much colder -- I sprinted 30 meters from the barracks to the showers or the latrine. Water was a constant problem. The PRT did not yet have a well. Water was trucked by tanker from a nearby spring. Logistically, even though the PRT was a small base, maintaining and supplying it was quite a challenge. The Kiwis shipped food, ammunition, fuel, etc. from Kabul. New Zealand did not have the extensive logistical supply chain available to the Americans. The PRT mechanism depended on U.S military support from Bagram for air supply.

Q: How did the PRT deal with the language problem?

COHEN: The PRT housed about half a dozen interpreters, mostly young men. A few learned English while held in Taliban prisons. All were Hazara. Many Hazara not killed were imprisoned by the Taliban. The "terps" had their own hooch and their own VCR/DVD player. Every barracks seemed to have a VCR and DVD player, including ours.

Q: VCR is a videocassette recorder.

COHEN: Right.

Q: Which was a system for playing movies.

COHEN: The soldiers purchased movies, usually DVDs, in the local bazaar. The movies were knockoffs, pirated copies that had all sorts of flaws, available usually for a dollar each. In a place as rustic and rural as Bamiyan, there were not many options for entertainment.

I described the PRT environment. Let me elaborate a bit more on a description of the region. East from Bamiyan proper ran the Kabul road. At about 17 kilometers, the road split. The east fork ran through the Shebar Pass, at 9,800 feet (2987 M). That narrow, rutted dirt road reached

the main Ring Road near Charikar, a few miles north of the military base at Bagram. The south fork, in no better condition than the Shebar road, cut through the Unai and Hakigak Passes that were even higher than Shebar. The road transited Wardak Province and hit the Ring Road southwest of Kabul. On a mountaintop at the fork itself, stood the ruins of the Red Fort, Shahr-e-Zohak. A redoubt of impressive stature when Genghis Khan invaded the valley, the Red Fort held out against the invaders. According to my understanding of history, Genghis Khan's favorite grandson was killed during the attack. That really pissed off Genghis Khan. The Red Fort and, as I mentioned earlier, the entire valley including Shahr-e-Gholghola in Bamiyan proper was laid waste at his orders. The Red Fort is a nice archaeological ruin. However, the ubiquitous landmines discourage visitors!

Less than 10 kilometers west of town was Dragon Valley, Dara Sokhtdar, a geologically fascinating site. At the upper end of the valley stood a huge natural wall formed over eons of time by percolating water. The wall ran for almost 200 meters across the back of the valley. The base of the wall was perhaps ten meters wide. Along the top ran a deep, meter-wide crack that transected the entire wall like the scaly spine of a dragon. According to legend, a dragon terrorized locals, demanding each day a young girl and the occasional camel to eat. Until that is, Islam's dragon slayer Hazrat Ali split the beast in two with his sword and sparking a mass conversion to Islam. The depth of the crack was about four to six feet, no more than a couple of meters. At the very end of the wall, thermal water seeped from a tiny spot, creating minute rimstone dams, supposedly the tears from the eyes of the dragon.

About seventy-five kilometers west of Bamiyan in the Koh-e-Baba mountain range is a more famous geologic feature, Band-i-Amir Lakes. The string of seven lakes is truly a natural wonder of the world. In March 2008, a State Magazine cover story described Band-i-Amir. The cover had a crisp picture of the deep blue water lakes. Coincidentally, in May 2004 earlier I wrote a State Magazine Bamiyan article and included a photo of Band-i-Amir. The seven lakes and their retaining walls formed naturally when cold carbonate-saturated water seeped from the surrounding Cretaceous clastic rock. The natural process created massive limestone dams, fifteen meters in height. The deep vivid blue water of the lakes is evidence of high carbonic concentrations. In ordinary times, Band-i-Amir would be a tremendous tourist attraction. I am not exaggerating its stark beauty.

A few months after I left Bamiyan, I wrote a short article for the NSS News entitled "Are There Caves in the Hindu Kush?" In the article I described Band-i-Amir and Dragon Valley and included a couple of photos. Dr. Calvin Alexander, an old-time caver and Professor of Geology and Geophysics at the University of Minnesota, contacted me. He asked for more photos of *Band-i-Amir* which I sent. He got back to me immediately. The geology of the lakes, he said, appeared to be remarkably similar to geologic features sighted by the Mars Surveyor on the Red Planet! His photographs confirmed the uncanny resemblance. One more piece of evidence for Mars' hydrological history.

Bamiyan Province's spider web of steep valleys contained tiny habitations. It is amazing where people can live. Rugged dirt trails, one can hardly call them roads, led up these hidden valleys which the Kiwis patrolled. The locals led a tough existence on small plots of land. Although not as widespread as elsewhere in Afghanistan, some poppy was being cultivated. Poppy provided

farmers a more attractive rate of return on investment than wheat or any other crop.

Ten rugged hours north of Bamiyan was a former American fire base built when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in late 2001. Fire Base Romero, named for a soldier killed in battle, was situated in a strategic passage between Mazar-i-Sharif and Bamiyan. To swing behind the Taliban to get to Kabul from the rear, the pass was a logical strategic location. When the Taliban front collapsed north of Bagram, I assume the base was not really required. The Kiwis turned the abandoned site into a patrol base for the northern portion of the province. They repaired and occupied a corner of the former fire base.

During the short period of its existence Fire Base Romero was the largest American fire base since the Vietnam War. Numerous wooden barracks had been partially constructed. As I noted, the Kiwis occupied only a tiny fraction of the facility. The American CAT team I described earlier hired local carpenters to bang down the wooden barracks. They hammered the wood into simple school furniture. I participated on the delivery of some wooden benches and desks to a local primary school which contained both boys and girls -- in segregated classes, of course. Not quite like turning swords into plowshares but a similar theme.

Q: No artillery?

COHEN: No artillery. Romero was a fire base without the fire set smack in the middle of a high mountain range, near the village of Doabi. From Bamiyan the road to the fire base zigzagged through stark landscape and numerous little hamlets. Semi-warlords, armed mujahideen militia, alleged Taliban mullahs, etc., kept things active. I traveled to the fire base with a TV journalist from New Zealand, Cameron Bennett. At the fire base, we filmed an interview which was aired on New Zealand TV on their equivalent to the U.S. program 60 Minutes.

Q: Why don't we discuss what you were doing?

COHEN: In 2003 when I was in Bamiyan, no playbook yet existed for State Department representatives at non-American PRTs. (In fact, no real playbook existed for officers at American PRTs.) PRTs were still a new, evolving concept. State Department representatives, it was felt, would serve as facilitators, but facilitators for what? What does "institution building" really imply? What does "capacity building" mean? What is the relationship with non-American military? The Kiwis took their orders from Wellington, not Washington. What is the division of responsibilities with the USAID representative? Invariably in the PRTs, the USAID representatives were not direct hire employees but contractors. To mediate and resolve disputes how involved does one get? There was no formal guidance.

Before reaching Bamiyan, I conferred with the charge d'affaires David Sedney. "Larry," he said, "you are going to get a lot of demands to write cables and do traditional political officer reporting." That was all well and good, he said. However, your *raison d'être* really is to think strategically. I thought that was an excellent piece of advice. Try not to get caught up in the daily grind of meeting deadlines and writing reports. Think how to contribute to the strategic issues and how to mold policy. David's advice was really the best. I think all PRTers should follow that line.

If the Kiwis were suspicious of my role, they never let on. Except for an Iridium satellite phone that worked sporadically and must have cost Uncle Sam quite a bit for calls, I did not have my own communications; I depended on the Kiwis completely. To use the Iridium phone, I had to position myself in an open area, usually at night. I pointed the phone antenna upward to catch, hopefully, one of the company's 66 low orbit satellites passing overhead. Since they were in low orbit, the satellites passed over very quickly. Calls could be swiftly cut off. In the Hindu Kush the phones were notoriously unreliable. That was how I communicated with the outside world. I got through to Washington and Brazil easier than I could get through to Kabul. I called Marla in Brazil. But to get through to the embassy on the Iridium phone was difficult. To be outside in the wind and chill of a Bamiyan December night while placing a call is not easily forgotten.

With my embassy laptop I produced reports. But I had no secure method of delivering reports except through the New Zealand military communications system. The Kiwis had their own communications link which went to Wellington. The PRT had an Internet hookup, again, satellite dependent and unreliable. To send messages and reports, I used Hotmail.

Q: Hotmail is a form of e-mail.

COHEN: Correct. I used a Hotmail account to communicate to the embassy and the rest of the outside world. Two years later in Herat, I utilized a Yahoo account. I kept most of what I wrote completely unclassified which cables went to the embassy on the open Internet. For sensitive stuff I could access the Kiwi military system. It meant, however, that communications transited Wellington, then perhaps CENTCOM command in Tampa, then Bagram before reaching the embassy. It was a very circuitous route with no assurance that it would get to the right recipient at the other end. I contributed each evening to the PRT's daily operations report which went through the Kiwi system every day to Bagram. I told the embassy that this report was the best source of information. It certainly reached the defense attaché. However, the embassy political section persistently seemed to have difficulties either getting access to it or remembering to do so. And they were so overworked.

Q: What sort of things were you doing?

COHEN: Good governance and civic development were critical areas of attention. I did not think specifically in those terms. The Kiwis and I met with Governor Mohammad Raheem Aliyar, police chief Fahimi, the local militia brigade commander Neg Mohammad, the head of intelligence Paikar, and various other ministry officials stationed in Bamiyan. With Governor Aliyar, I acted as sort of an advisor without being an advisor. We sought to influence the governor into making proper decisions based on justice and reason. The police chief was a tougher nut to crack. Fahimi looked like the late actor John Belushi out of the movie Animal House. His dark beard and wild hair seemed to swallow his face. But it was his Mongol eyes that really caught your attention.

One particularly renegade militia sub-commander, Sirhan Wafa, operated out of the southern part of Bamiyan Province, the districts of Waras and Panjao. He caused havoc among the local population, mayhem and even murder. The PRT received numerous complaints about him. The

provincial authorities threw up their hands. The Kiwis were being cautious about how to approach the issue. Fortunately, in early 2004 the UNAMA political officer, Gayane Afrikian, traveled to the area and convinced Wafa to turn himself in. It was a courageous effort on her part. We had other cases like this one.

I examined Bamiyan's social situation and ascertained the needs of the inhabitants. Maintaining a close liaison with NGOs was critical. Manuel, the U.S. Department of Agriculture representative, and I observed Bamiyan's harvest. The desperate need for basic agricultural technology and extension services was obvious. For example, the potato harvest absorbed a considerable amount of child labor. Children who otherwise might have been in school sorted potatoes for weeks. At one corner of the PRT was a pile of scrap wood. One afternoon soon after our arrival, Manuel hammered together a potato sorter. The next day we placed the sorter on the rear of a flatbed truck and carried it to a nearby potato field. Manuel placed it next to a pile of potatoes for the farmers to test. The potatoes were placed in the top of the sorter; the smaller potatoes fell through the narrow slots. Those that fell through the slots were the seed potatoes for sowing the next spring. The width of the slits determined what size seed potatoes fell through them. The larger eating potatoes were collected at the end of the sorter. It was simple technology. The farmers tested it and provided comments.

With the feedback of the farmers – to widen or narrow the slots -- Manuel took the sorter back to the PRT and made the adjustments. Lo and behold, he had created a low technology innovation that potentially saved an enormous amount of labor, mostly child labor! How to get sorters to Afghan potato farmers and allow children to attend school rather than sort potatoes? For the cost of scrap wood, perhaps some Afghan entrepreneur could manufacture these sorters in a cottage industry and develop a market for the product.

Before I reached Bamiyan, I conversed with the public affairs officer in Kabul, Roy Glover. Roy suggested I develop an International Visitors (IV) program targeting mullahs from Hazarajat. He wanted a program with Shiite mullahs who might travel to the United States on a multi-week IV program. I thought pursuing this was a good idea. In Bamiyan I discussed the idea with the senior representative of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, Jawad Zohar. Jawad, a very pleasant fellow, agreed to set everything up. We worked quickly since Ramadan was fast approaching. Jawad sent word throughout Hazarajat's hamlets. Many tiny villages had only a tenuous connection by radio. To others, a message was sent by foot. We set a date in late October for the interested mullahs to come to Bamiyan where I would interview them.

On the appointed day, the Hazara mullahs arrived at Jawad's MFA office, only a few hundred meters from the Buddhas. In a reception room, I met the mullahs, twenty-five in total. All but three were Shia Hazara. One by one, using one of the young interpreters from the PRT, I interviewed each mullah. Their backgrounds were uniformly humble. Almost all claimed to have been with the mujahideen. Hardly any had formal education beyond receiving basic religious education at madrassa. Their answers were pretty standard and I suspected the interpreter may have biased or tilted the answers a bit. Yet, all the mullahs had a presence that I found appealing.

I rank ordered the IV candidates and sent the names to the embassy Public Diplomacy (PD) section. I also crafted a report on the views the mullahs expressed which to me seemed

remarkably more liberal about women than I expected, and far more open-minded than the three Sunni mullahs. "If you addressed an American audience, mixed with men and women, how would you feel?" I asked. "How would you respond to questions about the rights of women in Afghanistan?" I took it all down, wrote up the IV nominations, and drafted a report for the embassy.

Q: Did anybody from the embassy check on you?

COHEN: A few embassy and Washington visitors reached the PRT. Department of Defense Deputy Assistant Secretary for Stability Operations, Dr. Joseph Collins, flew in by C-130 aircraft with a small delegation. The embassy refugee and migration officer, David Rollman, visited USG-funded refugee projects around Bamiyan. A three person General Accounting Office (GAO) team performed some site visits. Before I arrived, Senator John McCain visited Bamiyan. Reportedly, he upset the U.S. soldiers who prior to his arrival vigorously cleaned the PRT -- no cigarette butts on the ground -- in preparation for the visit. When McCain arrived in Bamiyan, he visited the Buddhas then reboarded his helicopter. He did not meet the soldiers or tour the PRT as planned.

Our most important visitor was Prime Minister Clark who spent a day and a half at the PRT. She visited the Buddhas and hiked up Shahr-e-Gholghola. The Kiwis took her around the bazaar. She met local officials and thanked them for their kindness to the New Zealand PRT. The PRT held a dinner in her honor. I will get to another facet of her visit in a moment.

An unusual visitor was the "richest Kiwi," a telecom magnate named Alan Gibbs. The Kiwis described him as the Bill Gates of New Zealand. Gibbs rented a Russian helicopter to fly to Bamiyan with some friends from Kabul. Among his passengers was Robert Young Pelton, author of [The World's Most Dangerous Places](#). The PRT gave Gibbs and his friends the red carpet welcome and we briefed him. Gibbs allowed me to return to Kabul on the helicopter. It was my first and probably last flight on a Russian helicopter. The cabin was spacious and carpeted, quite a change from flying in a Blackhawk.

Let me return to the Helen Clark visit. A few days before her scheduled arrival, Manuel and I attended a PRT conference in Bagram. We prepared to depart by helicopter early the next morning to Bamiyan. This was two days before Prime Minister Clark's visit, so everyone at the PRT was preparing for the visit. To reach the tarmac from our overnight barracks in the visitor tent was our first challenge that morning. Bagram's main artery, Disney Avenue, is a hardtop road that runs the length of the base and parallels the tarmac. From 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. every morning, the road was closed for PT (physical training). Joggers in gray military togs ran up and down Disney Avenue. We started from the wrong side of Disney Avenue from the airstrip. Since we had heavy luggage, we needed a vehicle. Just trying to cross the street cost us valuable time! The Military Police treated us as if by crossing Disney Avenue with our damn vehicle, we were committing an act of moral turpitude.

What does that say about the U.S. mission? Is it to carry out orders, assist Afghanistan, and get out, eventually? Or is the mission to do PT? In Bagram, PT apparently took precedence over anything else for one hour each morning. A group of Kiwis had to drive back to Bamiyan, an all

day slog up the mountains. They could not get out of the compound until 7:00 a.m. because Disney Avenue was closed for PT! We finally got our gear and ourselves across to the tarmac. We waited to board a Blackhawk helicopter to Bamiyan. A half dozen Kiwis needed in Bamiyan to prepare for the Clark visit were with us. Cases of food to be served during the Prime Minister's visit, not the regular army chow, and ammunition would also go with us on the Blackhawk. If the U.S. President were visiting, the military would not serve MREs (meals ready to eat).

While we waited on the tarmac, the chopper pilot came over to speak with us. He had bad news. The helicopter did not have enough room for all of us and the boxes of food and ammunition. Some of us were going to have to remain behind. He instructed the Kiwis to stay. They responded that they had a mission. "Sorry, there is no room." We spoke to the pilot and convinced him to take a couple of the Kiwis. Finally, he relented. Then, he would not let the boxes on board. Again, there was discussion about weight, etc. and he again allowed some of the 50 cal. ammunition onto his Blackhawk. Manuel and I got on the plane. The other Kiwis and all the food were left stranded.

As we prepared for takeoff, I noticed another Blackhawk about 100 meters away was being loaded with military. I did not think twice about it. We took off and headed for Bamiyan. The other chopper flew parallel to us. We landed in Bamiyan. That other Blackhawk landed as well about 75 meters away. We descended and unloaded the ammunition. From the other helicopter, soldiers emerged and started taking pictures of the Buddhas. We were perplexed. Not enough room for the Kiwis but enough space on a second flight for these joy-riders? The two choppers were on the ground for five minutes. Then the soldiers with their cameras reboarded the second Blackhawk. Both helicopters, the one we disembarked from now empty, took off and returned to Bagram. If I was flabbergasted, imagine the Kiwis and Colonel Neville Riley. The Colonel is hosting his Prime Minister coming in a couple of days. Soldiers, food, and ammunition sitting at Bagram could not get up to the PRT, bumped for picture-taking joy riders.

I was pissed. The Kiwis were upset but were way too nice to make a federal case out of this. Not me. I wrote a scathing message about the incident in the daily report that evening. I mentioned in an aside that Colonel Reilly commented that if this is how the New Zealand PRT is treated, perhaps the PRT would be better under NATO command rather than the U.S.-led Coalition. That statement got attention. I copied my report to the embassy. It was read by many key folks. Soon after, Colonel Riley received a phone call from the American commander in Bagram. He was told to come down right after the Clark visit. I assume it was ostensibly one of those "come to Jesus meetings." The Colonel was put on the carpet. But the Americans promised that such behavior by Bagram air control, bumping the PRT folks and allowing military tourists to fly, would not be tolerated again.

The Kiwis did nothing wrong. It had been atrocious behavior by American Air Force air traffic folks at Bagram. Although Colonel Reilly was initially unhappy with my method, I sensed that after the incident, my prestige among the Kiwis was solidified because I stood up for them.

The U.S. base at Bagram was a complete disaster. Much of what goes on never reaches the U.S. press. Bagram, the former Soviet air base, is the principal U.S. military facility in Afghanistan.

Thousands served there. Unfortunately, Bagram seemed to possess too many officers and enlisted men with not enough to do. In a military environment like that, all sorts of inane rules crept into the mission structure. Soldiers just walking on Disney Avenue had to salute superior officers. Everyone was constantly saluting. Officers and enlisted men arrived in Bagram by airplane. Many spent their entire one year tour in Bagram and never left the wire. Some went stir crazy. Perhaps that was the rationale for the second Blackhawk. Soldiers just needed to get away, even if only for ten minutes to take pictures.

If I ran Bagram, I would attempt to assure that all personnel on the base had an opportunity to get off somehow, whether it be on a civil affairs mission to paint a school or whatever. Carry your weapon, wear body armor. Do a little patrolling. But force soldiers to do more than sit on base, hunkering down with nothing to do but run to the clam shell gym or eat greasy Halliburton-KBR food -- hamburgers, hotdogs, fried chicken, French fries -- at the DIFAC. Bagram reflected all the worst attributes of our efforts in Afghanistan.

In 2006, not during my time in Bamiyan, I returned to Bagram with Italian officers from the Herat PRT to attend a PRT commanders' conference. By this time housing facilities at Bagram were vastly improved. Yet, the senior Italian officers were assigned lodging in a tent while the rest of us were assigned billets in "Motel 8" where eight or ten visitors had cots in a large room. Motel 8 was far more comfortable than the tents. To billet senior officers in tents was incredibly poor treatment.

In my view, the worst morale buster which exemplified the poor treatment of our soldiers was General Order No. 1. General Order No. 1 applied to the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) in the war theatre. The order stipulated zero tolerance for alcohol consumption. General Order No. 1, I believe, was a post-Vietnam reaction to the abuses that took place in Vietnam. To me, zero tolerance for alcohol meant many things, most of them negative. Soldiers of all ages, all fields, and all professions serve in the U.S. military today. Many are reservists and National Guardsmen, perhaps in their 40s, some in their 50s, and not a few are in their 60s. I met National Guardsmen who were grandfathers and grandmothers, people whose life experiences varied widely. They served in the National Guard by choice. Most are quite mature compared to soldiers of previous generations. Many were called back to active duty and deployment. Did the military command not have enough respect or trust in these people to allow them a beer once in a while? What message did this send? Afghanistan is a war zone where plenty of tension and repressed energy never gets released.

The Brits had a much better idea. Over Thanksgiving I spent a week at the Mazar-e-Sharif PRT run by Great Britain. Tom Hudson, a retired Foreign Service Officer served at the Mazar PRT. The trip afforded me an opportunity to compare PRT operations. The British commander allowed his men when off duty a two beer limit between 7:00 and 9:00 p.m. There appeared to be no abuse. The soldiers enjoyed a beer, watched television, read a book, hung out. This made sense. The British treated their soldiers with respect and provided them a chance to unwind. The PRT mess line had Indian/Pakistani cuisine -- quite a few Gurkhas served at the PRT -- and British food. Under Colonel Davis the PRT functioned well. At the time Mazar-e-Sharif was an urban PRT; when authority was transferred to Sweden a year later, the PRT was relocated to a site outside of town.

Unfortunately, since the Kiwis came under American Coalition authority, not NATO or ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force, the New Zealand PRT followed General Order No. 1. Before the end of the Crib One rotation, Colonel Riley allowed one blowout party with beer. Too bad I missed it. I was in Mazar at the time. I understood from Manuel it was a real blast. The soldiers completely unwound from the tension from all the missions. Before I left Afghanistan for the second time in August 2006, I commented to Ambassador Ronald Newman that, in my opinion, General Order No. 1 was the biggest detriment to morale amongst our military.

Q: What had happened to the warlord _____?

COHEN: Dostum? I am not expert on the political machinations of warlords in Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh Province. Two rival warlords dominated the Mazar region, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek warlord and Ustad Atta Mohammad Noor, the Tajik. Both led major Northern Alliance Mujahideen factions against the Taliban. By 2003 after the establishment of the Interim Transitional Government under Hamid Karzai, a mini civil war almost broke out in Balkh between the two feuding warlords. Forces loyal to each attacked the other side. Karzai brought Dostum to Kabul where he became, in early 2005, chief of staff to the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. In 2004 Atta was appointed governor of Balkh Province. He was still governor when I met him in February 2008. Dostum's wings were clipped.

Tom Hudson stationed at the PRT in Mazar admired Dostum – I am not sure why. Dostum had switched sides repeatedly since Soviet times. His warlord influence over northern Afghanistan among the Uzbeks was fairly pervasive, in the same order of magnitude as Ismael Khan's influence in Herat and Karim Khalili's influence among the Hazara in Bamiyan.

I visited Tom in Mazar. The day before Thanksgiving 2003, Tom a U.S. major assigned to Mazar-e-Sharif, Monty Zimmerman, and I traveled to Uzbekistan. Major Zimmerman drove Tom's official car. The Brits did not trust Tom behind the wheel. The PRT escorted us to the bridge at Termez. We went through formalities with the Afghan border authorities, basically just drinking *chai*. The border guards were from Dostum's faction did not care about passports. They treated us respectfully.

We crossed the Soviet-built Friendship Bridge. A new border crossing facility stood menacingly on the Uzbek side, built, I believe, with World Bank financing. The facility was state-of-the-art - - and completely unused. What commerce crossed between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan? Despite the lack of business, Uzbek customs and immigration procedures kept us there two hours. Finally, the head of the border station shared borscht and other local food with us. Tom's excellent Russian helped tremendously. We made our way into Termez proper where, for documentation purposes, we had to meet somebody from the United Nations office who had "invited" us to Uzbekistan. The documentation process was Byzantine. Literally, to enter Uzbekistan a visitor must be invited. From Termez we drove to the U.S. logistics base at K2, Karshi-Khanabad, since closed down. We gassed up the vehicle, visited the PX (Post Exchange) and the APO (army post office), and continued two more hours to the ancient city of Bukhara.

Tom was familiar with Bukhara and led us to "Sasha's bed and breakfast", a quaint B&B with

pleasant rooms. We visited the city's ancient mosques, mausoleums, and markets. Late Thursday, Major Zimmerman and I returned to K2 for Thanksgiving dinner with the troops. We returned late that night to Bukhara. Since a small Jewish community still existed in Bukhara for Friday evening I suggested we attend Jewish services. Tom and I went to Shabbat services where we met a young American Chabad rabbi, David Holtzberg.

Q: Chabad meaning?

COHEN: The Chabad-Lubavitch movement promotes Judaism and Orthodox Jewish traditions, particularly among poorly served communities throughout the world. I had met Chabad rabbis in Ukraine, Nigeria, and elsewhere. They provide religious support in the most out of the way places. Chabad men generally dress in traditional black suits so they are easily identifiable. Judaism does not have missionaries. There is no proselytizing in Judaism. But to support fragments of Jewish communities that still exist is considered a mission equal to performing a good deed. Over a Shabbat meal hosted by a local family, Tom and I enjoyed speaking with David. We told him about our work in Afghanistan. David became very excited. He said he had been trying to get to Afghanistan and even had an Afghan visa. David explained that his mission was to seek the lost Afghan torah. The Jewish community of Kabul, consisting of just two men who occupied the dilapidated Kabul synagogue, had shared possession of the ancient torah when the Taliban minister of interior confiscated it. Both Jews were taken into custody and tortured. They were eventually released, but the torah disappeared. David's mission in Afghanistan was to try to find it.

I first learned about the synagogue from a Jewish USAID officer at the embassy. However, this was the first time I received a full explanation about the torah. Tom was moved by David's story and offered to take him back with us to Afghanistan. Tom instructed David to meet us at the traffic circle outside the K2 base at noon on Sunday. This was Tom's idea, not mine.

From Bukhara, Tom, Monty and I traveled to Samarkand. We visited more sites and drove to K2 on Sunday. After tortuous entry procedures at the K2 checkpoints which cost us much precious time – Tom had a case of wine in the trunk and K2, being under infamous General Order No. 1, would not allow it onto the base -- we fueled up and mailed our newly purchased carpets and other knickknacks. Then, we returned to the traffic circle. We were a little late but David was waiting for us. The four of us drove back to Afghanistan.

When we arrived at the PRT with our passenger, the Brits were chagrined. But Tom was unfazed by the commotion. Since David kept strict kosher, he never entered the mess line. He lived on sardines and bread. Our next major challenge was to get David to Kabul. We lent David some cash since he arrived in Afghanistan almost penniless. Regular flights between Kabul and other Afghan cities were still in their infancy. First, Tom sought placing David on a military flight; that did not work out. Finally, he got him on an Ariana flight to Kabul. By this time I had already departed for Kabul and Bamiyan via UNHAS flights. Imagine a rabbi in Kabul. David visited the synagogue and interviewed Ishaq Levin and Zebulon Simatov, the two Jews. After a couple of days in Kabul, he flew out on a weekly flight to Tashkent.

David's mission was unsuccessful. He did not locate the missing torah. But I did visit the

synagogue. The Jewish community of Kabul was, as I said, down to two men. Ishaq Levin was in his mid-70s; Zebulon Simatov was 40ish. The rest of the Jewish community had fled the country. Many Jews left Afghanistan in 1967 after the Six day War; others departed during the socialist regime and following the Soviet invasion. By the time the Taliban took power, the entire community was gone except for the two men. Most went to Israel, some to the United States. As long as Jews lived in Afghanistan, the torah remained behind with them. Because of the maltreatment by the Taliban, both men suspected the other of ratting them out. Even though both resided in the decrepit synagogue, they refused to communicate with each other. Ishaq lived in the former sanctuary, Zebulon upstairs in one of the side rooms. They hated each other. This situation persisted for years following the end of the Taliban regime. I met separately with both men in late 2003. I spoke with Ishaq through my pidgin Hebrew, with Zebulon through a little bit of Dari and a bit of English. It was quite a revelation.

I tried to enlist assistance from Afghan authorities in the search for the torah. While common belief held that the Taliban would have destroyed the torah, I suspected the Taliban might have preserved it since the torah contained the word of God -- if the Taliban were aware of that, a big if. A Taliban official might have attempted to hide or sell it. I prepared a short memo to Ambassador Khalilzad giving what I knew about this issue. I also visited the assistant to then Minister of Interior Jalali, since it was the Taliban minister of interior who allegedly took the torah. I believe Tom even tried to enlist congressional attention back in Washington, although I do not see how that might have helped. We just tried to keep the issue percolating. There has been no progress on finding this torah, and I do not think we will find it.

Two postscripts to this saga: In January 2005, Ishaq Levin, the older of the two men, died. The state of Israel repatriated him back to Jerusalem where he is buried. Today, Zebulon Simatov is Afghanistan's last Jew. I last saw him in 2006 and again tried to see him in October late 2007, but he was not in.

Postscript number two occurred in 2006 when I was assigned to Herat. At one time, perhaps a century ago, Herat was the center of Afghanistan's Jewish universe. As recently as the 1960s, it had at least four synagogues. During the mujahideen times, all were either destroyed or in the case of one, converted into a mosque. Although the Jewish community no longer exists, the cemetery is still watched by an Afghan caretaker.

In the city museum in Herat, a barebones place that was rarely open, I noticed a portion of a torah scroll locked in a glass case. Torah is written on parchment; the museum appeared to have about 20 feet of a torah scroll. The museum caretaker knew vaguely it was Jewish, but had no idea what the scroll was. In the case the Hebrew lettering was upside down since no one was even aware of the script. I could not read it through the glass case and wanted to get a closer look. I went to the provincial minister of culture who was a contact and asked permission to have the glass case opened. He gave his approval. The caretaker took out a key chain with about 1,000 keys on it. He played dramatically with the keys until he found the right one to open the case. We extracted the scroll and laid it out so that I could photograph it. My pictures did not come out well but well enough. I sent them back to Washington to Rabbi Lia Bass in Arlington, Virginia. She said that at least one portion of the parchment was from the Book of Exodus and another possibly from the Book of Deuteronomy. This is insufficient evidence that this was a part of the

lost Afghan torah. I do not know its age or how it got there. The museum people were not helpful. It is probably the last remnant of Judaica in Afghanistan, except for the cemetery.

Q: How long would a normal torah be?

COHEN: Perhaps around 120 feet for a typical torah. A torah contains every chapter from Genesis through Deuteronomy, written in columns, and there are, I believe, 245 columns. So it depends on the width of a column in a particular torah

Just to find a bit of a torah scroll in Afghanistan is quite remarkable. I will get to that a little later when I discuss my Herat experience.

I want to offer one other story that serves to illustrate Afghanistan. Before I left Bamiyan to return to Brazil, I was invited by the National Directorate for Security (NDS) chief Paikar -- NDS is the Afghan intelligence service -- to the Kabul wedding party of his son. He provided me a date, time, and the venue, a wedding hall in Kabul. Normally, those three pieces of information would be sufficient to find an event. In mid-December I reached Kabul where I stayed at the embassy. Motor pool provided me a ride to the wedding hall on the north side of Kabul. I reached the hall more or less on time which is quite early for Afghans. I sat around and met some people. A few spoke some English. They asked who I was. I explained I was invited by Paikar in Bamiyan, etc. They did not react, one way or the other. I was served nuts and *chai*. Eventually, the wedding party began. There was a band and a partition between the men and women; the men were on the right, women on the left. The party became quite crowded. I was treated like a guest or honor. Men came up and spoke to me all evening. Some wanted me to dance, men with men. It was quite an event.

I was surprised that I never saw Paikar. At his son's wedding, would he not be present? Being that Paikar was from Bamiyan, I assumed it would be a Hazara wedding. It did not occur to me that a Hazara would marry a Pashtun or something like that. Anyway, the event is going on, the meal is served, the dancing, etc. Eventually, the embassy vehicle returned to pick me up. A thought struck me like a thunderbolt. This was not the right wedding! Sure enough, there was not a Hazara in the hall. It was a Tajik wedding. How could I know the difference between a Hazara and Tajik wedding party?

By the time this thought occurred to me, it was time for me to leave. I congratulated the family, expressed my appreciation, gave kisses on both cheeks, and left.

THOMAS R. HUTSON
UK Provincial Reconstruction Team
Mazar-e-Sharif (2003-2004)

Thomas R. Hutson was born in Nebraska in 1939. After receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska in 1962 he served in the US Army from 1962-1967. His career has included positions in Teheran, Belgrade, Winnipeg,

Moscow, Lagos, Taipei, Belgrade, Bishkek, and Mazar-e-Sharif. Mr. Hutson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in April 1999.

Q: We will focus today on your time in Mazar-e Sharif, Afghanistan. When were you there? What were you doing there?

HUTSON: I was there from July 23, 2003 to January 12, 2004. I got that assignment on a fluke. When Jerry Bremer came out of retirement to become our chief representative in Iraq, I volunteered to join him there. But, after months of waiting, nothing materialized. I had read an article in the "State Magazine" by a Richard Norland about working in Mazar-e Sharif. I called my friend Don Norland - a retiree - who suggested that I call his son Dick quickly because he was on his way to an overseas assignment. I did that and Dick suggested that I call Pat Haslach. This was the week end of the Fourth of July. I went in on Monday and two weeks later I was on my way to Afghanistan. Pat is a wonderful officer who just yesterday had her confirmation hearings to be our ambassador in Laos. They don't make officers like her anymore!

Q: What did you find in Afghanistan in July 2003?

HUTSON: I first of all should make it clear that I do not claim to have known much about Afghanistan. I had served in Iran many, many years earlier and knew some people who had served in Afghanistan. I was the CG in Moscow when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. I resigned in protest of the Carter administration's policy on that action. I followed events there passively: my first boss, James "Maurice" Ealum, had been chargé there and one of my last bosses, Ed Hurwitz, had been chargé there. So I knew people who had known the country well over a period of years. But when I went, I can't say that I was up to date.

When I arrived in Afghanistan, I spent about a week in Kabul getting ready to be the State Department representative to the UK provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Mazar-e Sharif. This was the first the non-U.S. entity of the sort. I spent about six months there. I probably went to Kabul every month or six weeks.

When I arrived in Kabul, we lived in a huge compound which was continuously under construction. By the time I left, the compound was in a continual lock-down status. We lived in "hooches" - containers. I bunked with eight or nine other guys in one of these edifices. The mess hall served some of the worst food I ever had to look at or eat.

I did not know what was going on outside the compound. That was one of the great curses of being assigned to embassy Kabul, although I am sure it happens in other places as well - e.g. Baghdad. One lives in a cocoon. The security situation was not terrible. Mazar-e Sharif, which was north of Kabul, was considered to be a lesser security risk. The tension there stemmed primarily from factional disputes between warlords, some stemming from drug trafficking. This was in contrast to the Kabul-Kandahar corridor which was a real security problem; it was a very unstable situation. A good friend of mine was in Gardez, as the AID representatives. He told me that on 42 separate occasions his compound was subjected to mortar fire. That never happened in Mazar-e Sharif.

Q: Who ran the American operations while you were there?

HUTSON: That is an interesting question. When I arrived, Ambassador Robert Finn was in charge. He was summarily sacked soon after my arrival. I had known him slightly when he was the DCM in Zagreb. I had heard good things about him. When I arrived in Kabul, I called on him only to be told by him that he was leaving. My understanding was that this was the result of a house-cleaning operation; the ambassador, the DCM were removed. The AID director was fired a little later. That was Craig Buck with whom I had worked earlier in Central Asia and Bosnia and Kosovo; he was the best as far as I was concerned. But the powers-to-be just wanted a different team in Afghanistan. The current ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad was then just going through confirmation hearings. I guess Washington wanted to give him a free hand. There were also the Rumsfeld people who filled the slots of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Group (ARG). That was not a bad idea; in fact something like that occurred in Bosnia when I was the deputy special representative for economic reconstruction. There were a half dozen other special envoys - all political appointees, all of whom acted somewhat independently driving our ambassador crazy. In the Afghan situation, the ARG came directly under the authority of the ambassador. That made sense.

Q: In Kabul, what were your colleagues talking about? Were they happy? Did they think things were going well?

HUTSON: They were miserable. First of all, there were unhappy with the personnel sweep at the top. They thought Bob Finn and DCM Brad Hansen were good people. They thought they had been shafted. The staff began to bail out. There was one person in the political section who had requested to be extended for a year and would have been the deputy political counselor, changed her mind when the changes were announced. She felt the way the wind was blowing. She decided to leave without the extension. The Department summarily cashiered two female officers who were at FSI for Dari training. I knew both. They were within a couple of weeks of leaving; were all packed only to be told that their assignment had been canceled.

The chargé was a very bright, capable officer, but lacking confidence. He was sent to Beijing as DCM—I guess on the theory that if you have screwed up in one place you can get a bigger job.

Q: What was your assumption as to what laid behind this house-cleaning?

HUTSON: I had a hard time understanding what was going on. I still don't fully understand it and I suggest you talk to some of the people who were involved. I was on the periphery and didn't know the actors very well at the time. I knew Craig Buck. I had just started in Mazar-e Sharif when I heard that he had quit. He was one of the best AID directors I ever met. I had heard that he had quit. The next time I was in Kabul, I was standing in line at the mess hall when I ran into Craig. He was a complete professional who never spoke ill of any of his associates. He told me that he said to headquarters to take "this job and shove it." The word had reached him from the White House that changes in AID directorship was being contemplated. That was unusual in itself.

Q: Tell us about the new ambassador.

HUTSON: The new ambassador was Zalmay Khalilzad. He was a former Afghan citizen which in my mind raised a question about the wisdom of former nationals becoming the representative of the United States. I can't say that from my experiences he was a bad choice. I thought he did a pretty good job, although many people have very strong views about "Zal". I never heard any specifics, but I did hear a lot of discontent. A former boss of mine, who had been chargé, knew Zal when he was working for the Rand Corporation and later for the NSC. He used to say that he didn't want to be mentioned if I were writing or speaking to Zal. He came to Kabul after serving on the NSC where he had been responsible for Afghan and Iraq affairs.

The first thing that I heard was that the some people in power were not nearly as interested in having him in Kabul, but rather wanted him out of the NSC. He got to Kabul shortly before December 5, when Rumsfeld came for a visit, to Mazar-e Sharif. I had never met Zal, but I managed to establish a sort of relationships with him through Thomas E. Gouttierre, the dean of international programs at the University of Nebraska. That is where I hang my hat as a diplomatic associate. The dean was the sponsor of a center on Afghanistan studies. He had been Peace Corps volunteer and Zal's basketball coach. So he knew everyone in Afghanistan. The dean never said anything, either positive or negative, about Zal.

But through him, I did meet Zal. He came to Mazar-e Sharif about 45 minutes before Rumsfeld. The secretary was coming to meet the local warlord, Dostam and the Tajik warlord Mohammed Ustar Atar. I remember I had to fight with my British colleagues to be bale to use my own vehicle to go to the airport. They wanted to know why I had to go. I told them that it was after all my ambassador who was coming in. I told the British that in the Foreign Service it was customary to greet one's ambassador when he arrived at your post.

So I did meet Zal and perhaps a three minute conversation - some of it in Dari. Later, I tried to call on him on a couple of occasions when I was in Kabul. But I was always short-stopped by the DCM. I don't think he wanted me to see the ambassador since I was viewed as a maverick—a reputation gained from my colorful cables. I tell it as I see it. The cables I wrote were all unclassified since we had no facility in Mazar-e Sharif for secure communications. I think the DCM would have liked to shred my reports and perhaps would have liked to fire me, but I was receiving enough praise from readers of my cables in Washington that he couldn't really touch me or my messages. I never really got a feel for what Zal was doing; his personal staff was huge which was separate from the embassy. As I said, he supervised the Pentagon people in the ARG; then he had many special assistants and press people. I had never seen so many people devoting their time to the press.

Zal was confirmed around Thanksgiving. There was an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* about what this new ambassador was going to do. It was rather visionary. I later saw some e-mails which convinced me that he was not the author of the pieces coming out of Kabul. About Christmas time, there was an article in *The Washington Post*. Dick McGraw, who headed the P.R. staff in the ARG. He had worked for Rumsfeld in private industry (where I met the secretary briefly) and later became the deputy spokesperson for the Pentagon. I remember seeing McGraw in the cafeteria and mentioning that I thought the *Post* was pretty good. He said that he was surprised it had come out as well as it did since about 20 people had a hand in writing it. It put the most positive spin possible on what was going on in Afghanistan. I began to wonder why

the American taxpayers should be paying the salary and associated costs of so many people in Kabul whose sole job was to write glowing press releases that would make the operation look good in the American media. Was that a necessary expense?

Q: I want to go back to the story you tell about the two women Foreign Service officers who were in Dari language training only to be reassigned from Afghanistan to somewhere else in the world. Did that represent a bias against women?

HUTSON: I don't think so. I think it was more the fact that they had been approved for assignment by a preceding regime at the American Embassy in Kabul. They were not chosen by Zal or David Saidny, the DCM. I knew one quite well; she worked for me as my deputy when I was with the OHR. She may not have been right for the Kabul job; she has moved up in the ranks and is now the deputy head of our office in Pristina. I think after their jobs in Kabul were washed out, both went to the Sudan or Somalia. The other woman was a pol-mil expert; I think she was fantastic. But as I say, the change in assignments came because Zal and his team had not selected these officers; they had been selected under a previous regime. It sort of reminds me of Holbrooke who when first assigned responsibility for Bosnia, just fired everybody working on the issue and brought his own people in.

Q: Let's turn to Mazar-e Sharif. What was the situation there when you arrived.

HUTSON: Mazar-e Sharif had a population of about 500,000 people before the war. It then grew to about 1 million due to the influx of refugees and displaced persons. It is one of Afghanistan's major cities. It is a major trading center with a long history. It had been the center of the northern alliance - the group that eventually assisted us in overthrowing the Taliban.

I got there on July 30. It was hot-hotter than anything I had ever experienced - 135%. It was dusty-no rain had fallen for six months. I had two vehicles and lots of security guards. It actually turned out to be relatively safe. As I said, I was assigned to a British unit from the Second Royal Anglian Rifles. I worked with the best possible English commander; he was fantastic. He had served in Northern Ireland, in Bosnia and Kosovo. He knew instinctively what had to be done.

I didn't really know what to expect. I didn't have a title; no one ever told me what to expect. I just created my own job description. First I was known as the "U.S. representative." When an AID officer was assigned to Mazar-e Sharif I became the "U.S. State Department representative." I was viewed as a political advisor (POLAD). The DCM said that we were "agents of change". That was our job.

As I said, the British colonel - Richard R. Davis - was fantastic. He was an engineer - a very tall man, about 6'6", soft spoken. His unit was the first non-American unit; the previous ones were all American. Each of them had had a POLAD attached to them. I was the fourth since the job was established. My predecessors had been in Mazar-e Sharif for roughly three months each. The Department kept looking for someone who would stay for a whole year but had not been successful. I ended up staying for six months, before being relieved by another officer in January.

It was a fascinating assignment. It was without a doubt the most challenging and interesting and satisfying assignment of my almost 40 years of service.

The colonel's nickname was "Dickie." That sounded very strange to our American ears. I had a Foreign Office colleague who I well remember one day raising her hand and saying: "Dickie" as he was talking to his troops. I could never have called him that! He was the age of my son! He was damn good. My only problem was understanding his British accent.

I mentioned that Rumsfeld came to Mazar-e Sharif. That was a big deal. The British invested a lot of time and effort into this visit. They did a fantastic job. Rumsfeld was accompanied by the British ambassador. The latter had his own plane and used to visit us every week. He viewed the Rumsfeld visit as a standard by which he would be judged. The colonel was asked to extend his tour by a few days so that he could brief Rumsfeld. Of course, the secretary was well guarded; you can hardly imagine all the security that was devoted to his visit. General Barnhart, who was the commander of all U.S. forces in Afghanistan - and one of the best I have even encountered - came up a few days before the visit to make sure that all was in order. I might parenthetically add that if we are at all successful in Afghanistan, much of the credit should be given to General Barnhart.

When Rumsfeld came, we met in a little room, not much bigger than 15' x 15'. We of course had a big screen in it for the Power Point presentations. I sat next to Dickie. The colonel started his briefing, only to be interrupted periodically by Rumsfeld who was having a hard time understanding him. Rumsfeld, as you may know, is hard of hearing and with Dickie's accent, that made for a difficult briefing. But Dickie was non-plussed.

Q: What were you and the British doing in Mazar-e Sharif?

HUTSON: Our mission was disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). Also we were involved in security sector reform (SSR) - police, institution building, etc. We were starting almost from the ground when it came to institution building. The police had been and was still to some extent corrupt. We were not involved in the drug growing and trafficking business. That was specifically excluded from our mission. I was supposed to report on war crime issues—when I finally got my reporting instructions - but neither the British or the UN had no interest in that issue. Therefore we did very little on that score.

We covered five northern provinces. By the time I left, we had teams and safe houses in each of those provinces. We had British special forces (SAS) who were great; they didn't tell us what they were doing but they went all over the countryside doing what they were supposed to do. A lot of these troops were reservists - 007 types. I think they were very good, although I have no idea whether they ever found any of the "bad" guys. I spent a lot of social time with them, but they never once mentioned their assignments; they were curious about me because I spoke Russian and Farsi. They concluded that I was a CIA employee. In fact, the Russian served me well because the Soviets had occupied that territory for several years. When I called on the chancellor of the university, I took a Dari translator with me only to find that he had studied in Moscow; from then on we spoke in Russian. Eight of the nine faculty deans had studied in the Soviet Union. In general, I found that many of the worthwhile contacts had been trained in the

USSR and I could speak with them in Russian.

Q: As an example, why did you call on the chancellor or the deans at the university?

HUTSON: I am a “hearts and minds” guy. That is not very popular today or then in light of our experiences in Vietnam. Furthermore, I was viewed as a person who trashes USAID. I like to see taxpayers’ money spent well because I come from a poor part of the U.S. - southwest Iowa, south-central Nebraska. We needn’t need curbs and culverts built in Mazar-e Sharif when we don’t have them in Webster County, Nebraska. They should be built at home first. So I was a vocal proponent of tackling the issue of “hearts and minds” before worrying about some of the infrastructure. At the university, I became quite interested in the journalism school. In fact, I am still working with the New York School of Journalism to set up an exchange program with Afghanistan; I think that will happen. The Journalism School had six faculty members, all Soviet trained - half women, half men. Those female faculty members were some of the most effective people I met in Afghanistan. More than half of the students were female.

The radio and TV stations were all controlled by the local warlords. There was no independent media outlet. There were no newspapers as we would know them; they were some rags. The editors kept coming to me for money, which I didn’t have. That also got me into arguments because I would raise the question whether the appropriated funds were AID’s or ESF (Economic Support Funds) - an assistance program managed by the Department of State. Of course, it was all taxpayers’ money, but that answer didn’t resolve the issue of control. My British friends did not want to engage in the “hearts and minds” struggles, nor did my USAID colleagues. Interestingly enough, when the new U.S. ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, came on the scene, that is all he wanted to do. He considered “hearts and minds” an important matter.

For months, I would talk to the faculty and students at the university. Some would come to see me - they called me: “Mr. Tom.” I kept telling them that I had no resources to provide their programs. One day, a couple of students came in and said that they wanted to talk to me, but they had a secret - i.e. no interpreter. So I dispense with his services. Their English and my Dari were good enough to have at least a basic conversation. They told me that I had the picture all wrong. I didn’t seem to understand, according to them, that there were young men who would cross the border from Pakistan, from Egypt, from Chechnya, etc. These people had money in their pockets and a message. The Americans and British were viewed as occupiers. What we really needed was to bring some American and British Muslims to give out the same messages as we did; they however would have credibility. In fact, we did have some American Muslims working in Afghanistan, but we paid them \$150,000 to work for Bearing Point; they drove around in a white vehicle and live in a compound so that they have little if any contact with the younger generation of Afghans and whoever crossed the border.

So I suggested that we would establish a program for these students and their contemporaries using the domestic Peace Corps as a model. We would expose them to American “values” and then, at a very modest salary, we would send them into the countryside to help their countrymen. They could even have white vehicles. They would be expected to talk to the villagers about the future of Afghanistan. I asked these two students to draft a proposal along these lines; nothing ever came of it. One of my interpreters, whom I trusted, said if we gave money to fifty Afghans,

one of them might give us an honest day's work.

Then we switched our focus on the mullahs. That is the traditional way to get information out to the Afghanistani population. That has some promise. The Department's ECA (Educational and Cultural Affairs) Office - part of the public diplomacy bureau - had already committed to get in touch with 25 mullahs. We took them in groups of fives. In fact, I had two in the first group of Shia mullahs to come to the U.S. I think that is the right approach; bring these religious-secular leaders to the United States and let them see by themselves what democracy has to offer. What is needed is the will to enlarge this program, which we called "Islamic America." I don't care if along with all of our progress they also see our worts. I think these leaders will be so amazed; they will have never have experienced anything like that and have no idea how Islam is practiced in the U.S. Even the deficiencies - i.e. some of our actions against Muslims after 9/11 - will be accepted by these Afghans as necessary; in fact, they would probably be surprised that we didn't take more severe actions.

USAID was slow to pick upon this possibility. We really didn't have a propaganda ("minds and hearts") dimension to our programs. I think Zol wanted that. But I was flabbergasted that it had never developed before his arrival; it was such an obvious approach.

Q: Was there a reluctance to deal with the religious ailments in Afghanistan?

HUTSON: Not at all. I never could convince my British counterpart of the advantages of the "heart and minds" approach; he was dismissive of the idea. He was very skeptical of possibility of success in that approach, but never stated his reasons. My USAID colleague, who had been a Peace Corps in Afghanistan during the 1974-78 period, said that we couldn't do that. She started with the premise that the Afghan were good people and all they needed was stability which would be followed by prosperity which would be followed by a pro-U.S. point of view. I personally don't think we have a prayer of making Afghanistan stable and prosperous. My views, as expressed to anyone who would listen including the university students, was always that the U.S. was in Afghanistan out of the kindness of the American heart, nor because of the kindness of the Afghan heart. We were in Afghanistan because we never wanted to experience 9/11 again, and that meant pursuing terrorists and potential terrorists wherever they might be. That was the sole reason for our programs. The students would look at me and nod, but I am sure they really did not understand regardless of the language that was used. They just did not comprehend what American presence in their country was all about.

Q: Did you find that the more virulent strain of Islam was being promulgated by the mullahs in the Mazar-e Sharif area?

HUTSON: I don't think so. The area was hard to penetrate. For example, I knew that the program to send mullahs to the U.S. was going to be announced soon. That meant that we had to nominate some candidates for the program. So I decided to travel around our area to make some contacts and get some suggestions. I remember I went to the largest Shia mosque in Mazar-e Sharif. I met with the chief mullah and his deputy. First I had my interpreter collect whatever information was necessary in order to nominate one or both of these mullahs. There was one question on the standard International Exchange program questionnaire which asked the

candidate whether he or she had any special interests in the U.S. Both of these guys wrote that they wanted to take their families to the U.S. and settle there; they did not want to return to the U.S. I had to tell them that that was not an acceptable reply.

We had some conceptual approaches that we could never get across to the mullahs. I felt very comfortable with them. One time, the embassy's political counselor came for a visit. It was on a holiday. We tracked down Atta, the Tajik warlord who was in the mosque at the shrine. This was in mid-winter and it was cold. We took our shies off of course and in bare feet ran across the marble floor of the mosque, including some parts that were outdoor. The warlord was there praying. I had been at this mosque often enough that people would greet me or wave to me. I never felt threatened at all, although I would not say that the potential for some anti-American activity does not exist. So far, at least in the north, we were perceived as honest brokers who brought hope for the future to Afghanistan, not to mention as the best avenue for the people there to get out of the country.

Q: How was the "Warlord situation" during your six months in Mazar-e Sharif?

HUTSON: I would almost have paid to do what I was supposed to do. Ambassador Khalilzad was the key American. The Uzbek warlord, General Dustin will tell you that within an hour after 9/11, he called Khalilzad who was then on the NSC staff and pledged his loyalty to the U.S. He supposedly said that he was on our side. By doing that, he managed to survive—as he had for the last twenty years. I would see him, I guess, every other week and would spend hours with him. We are both story tellers; so we would sit and tell each other stories. I got a lot of information from him.

I would write up reports on these periodic meetings, which were well received in Washington, but sent tremors through the embassy in Kabul. I would have frank conversations with Dustin about war criminals, such as Milosevic. I pointed out that he had been essential to us in the Dayton peace process, and then I would ask "Where is he now?" I would talk about the Shah of Iran - another essential American ally whom we had failed when he needed us. Then I would refer to Aristide in Haiti. Dustin had never heard of Aristide or Haiti, for that matter. I pointed out that he had made a deal with the U.S. which enabled him to survive. I would then suggest that he, Dustin also consider making a deal which would enable him to leave the "warlord" business. I even offered him a job as executive producer for a couple of movies I was trying to produce. I said I didn't care where the money came, as long as he brought it. I would bring some cigars which I would get from a Gurka battalion which had replaced the British troops in Mazar-e Sharif. The Gurkas were great; they would do anything for me. I said that we would go to Grenada, which I knew from my chargé days. Dustin always complained about his health problems - he had gum problems; there were rumors that he had cancer. I told him that he could first class medical care in Grenada and that he could just go there and relax. I don't think he considered any of my suggestions very seriously, but I kept telling the embassy people and to some degree the people in Washington, to make Dustin an offer he could not refuse. He should have been removed from that part of the country - or even from the country.

Q: Was he a problem?

HUTSON: If you had picked up within the last month any western journal or newspaper, you would have read about fighting in northern Afghanistan. That was a bunch of crap. There was no way Dostam would blotch his copy book with Ambassador Khalilzad or with President Karzai. He is unhappy with the president because Karzai would not appoint him minister of defense. Dostam said that if he were the minister, he would take care of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. He sees himself as an Afghan; he is a major force in the Northern Alliance and will remain a major force in future Afghanistan. Dostam will not be a problem as long as Khalilzad stays in Kabul; he will keep him in line.

Q: Was there another warlord in the northern region?

HUTSON: It was sort of embarrassing. John Negroponte, who is to be our ambassador in Baghdad, was the U.S. representative on the UN Security Council. He brought the whole council to Mazar-e Sharif to meet Dostam and Obtak, the opposition leader. In fact, no one really cared about Obtak and it was embarrassing the Security Council even sought him out. Dostam was the chief player. Obtak was a Tajik - big and impressive - but he didn't have the clout or the aura that Dostam had. I used to call Dostam a babyface Stalinesque Tito. He was just fascinating - to me and everyone else in the region. Dostam and Obtak were allies in the Northern Alliance; now they will have dissipated from time to time, primarily over the control of drugs.

Q: What was the drug trade situation at this time?

HUTSON: We were not charged with following that aspect of Afghan life. I did hear that opium cultivation and drug trade was about 40% of the economy. Mazar-e Sharif was a trading center. So most of the disputes between various factions and tribes had to do with who control what part of the process. Many of the drugs moved through Mazar-e Sharif as they moved north. Dostam controlled the so called "Freedom Bridge" going from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. Nothing seemed to use the river for transportation, but the bridge was busy. If anyone was paying customs, none of it was going to the central government.

Q: I thought that that border had been technically closed.

HUTSON: That is right. Uzbekistan is one of the most corrupt and dyspeptic nations in the world. It is on the verge of blowing sky high, either from its population's dissatisfaction - the per capita income is less than \$300 or from outside influences. We would visit beautiful Bukhara or incredible Samarkand and see all the infrastructure provided by the Soviets. But they had no money. The people were desperate.

It was never clear to me what Dostam's connection with President Islam Karimov was. Uzbekistan made a choice, very early in the game, to provide us with a military base, which we used to tranship humanitarian relief supplies and may find other purposes for later. So we are beholden to Karimov, even though he is undoubtedly one of the worst autocrats in the world.

In the last month or so, there were about 40 fundamentalists killed. Karimov is trying to keep a lid on that group. I don't think he will be successful because there is such general dissatisfaction with his regime among the Uzbeks.

Q: How was Karzai viewed?

HUTSON: He is the president of the transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan. He never visited the north. He was viewed as a weak figure, afraid to leave the American-provided security blanket in Kabul. We provided his security detail, called in the embassy something like “Karzai’s protective forces.” It was a contract with an American civilian organization.

Karzai was viewed as a very nice man - not particularly strong, as I indicated. I think since Ambassador Khalilzad arrived, he sits at his right hand and gives strong advice. I don’t think it is bad advice. I remember Dostam on the occasion of our first meeting - which took place while Khalilzad was going through his confirmation hearings - saying that he should not be the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan; he thought that he should run for president - he would be elected overwhelmingly. He was not joking; his comment was just a matter of fact.

Khalilzad was born near Mazar-e Sharif. That was his home town. From a group that was identified as future leaders, he was clearly a member. He left Afghanistan while still young and stayed abroad while the Soviets occupied the country. He got involved with think tanks, including RAND. That led to some tours in DoD. He has written some books. I don’t think he ever became a professor, but certainly had close connections with academia. He knows everybody and everybody knows him. I must say that there are some people whom I respect who live in this think-tank world, who are quite negative about him.

Q: He sounds like an “operator” (used in a positive way). There are some who are very effective but who are not loved or respected.

HUTSON: I think that is an apt description for the ambassador.

Q: Tell us a little more about your activities in Mazar-e Sharif

HUTSON: I was essentially a political reporting officer. That’s what I did, even though I was also a consular officer. There was a lot to write about. For example, the police in Mazar-e Sharif. The police was fractionalized. They split the town and behaved often like thugs. Some put up check points. The British took the lead and convinced minister Julali - who was an American citizen and had been the head of the Persian language service at VOA - to send 300 Kabul-based, non-Tajik, non Uzbek law enforcement personnel to replace some of the police then in Mazar-e Sharif. So we had to write papers on how this transfer of responsibilities would work I should mention that Dyne Corporation had a contract to train 50-60,000 professional policemen. We viewed our 300 men unit as a pilot project in this major effort. When they came, one could see immediately major change in the city. We closed the checkpoints and sent people back to their barracks. The Kabul-based police took over. The only problem was that Kabul never paid them. So eventually, they ended up doing the same thing their predecessors had done - exacting bribes, etc.

Before leaving Afghanistan, I held a briefing for the American country team. I got up and with considerable vigor made the point that if we couldn’t pay 300 policemen, how in the world

would we ever pay 50-60,000 of them? I didn't see a solution. That was a major problem. Furthermore, even if there were a functioning police system, there were no court system or adequate facilities to process the criminals. For example, in 2002, there was an American who worked for the NGO Octet - a French organization with which we had a close working relationship, who was part of a convoy of goods which was hijacked, was raped - repeatedly. Fortunately, there was one Afghan in the French NGO who managed to finger three of the criminals who were brought to justice. The fourth was tried later, but the fifth escaped and was on the loose. Actually, he was in Ibek and people knew who he was and what he had done. He was under protection of the local warlord. We decided to after him and went to Dostam for assistance. On November 3, I went to see Dostam about this case and was met by one of his subordinates - a general Rozzi - a Soviet trained officer. He told me that they had gotten him (the fifth perpetrator). He asked me what he should do with him. I told him to turn him over to the transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, as a previous letter had so instructed, who would then prosecute him. He threw up his hands looking at me as if I had lost my mind. He said that there was no justice in Afghanistan. Two days later, he was freed. That is the way the law was enforced in Afghanistan then.

Q: What were the British doing in what was really their "sector?"

HUTSON: The British were extremely active, progressive. They would not enter the drug fight or war crime issues. They saw their mission as being the eyes and ears of the alliance in the five northern provinces. They tried to influence the warlords. We achieved real disarmament. There was fighting in October between the two main factions. That gave us some leverage. The British decided that the heavy weapons could not be used anymore. They told the faction leaders that they had to turn those weapons in to them. And they did. I have pictures of serious Soviet tanks, artillery, APCs, etc. which were turned in by the factions to the British. We really achieved disarmament. The British were perceived to be far ahead of any of the allies. They had a much lower profile when it came to force protection. I was concerned about that policy because a vehicle full of explosive could have been driven up very close to my bedroom. If the Americans had been in charge of force protection, there would have been a major separation between the Rada and the barracks of at least 100 meters. Not the British. They intentionally minimized the separation because they thought it was important to be seen as maintained contact with the population. I had hard time arguing against that policy even though at times it made me uncomfortable.

The British were ahead of all other allies on police issues, disarmament and demobilization, integration. They were very active on women's issues, institution building - e.g. judicial system building. It was wonderful to work with them; they knew their stuff.

Q: What about some of the non-governmental agencies? What was your impression of the work they did in your area?

HUTSON: The UN Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) was very suspicious of what we were doing. We courted them. I recommended to the British commander that he invite a UN representative to his meetings and that one of the British officer attend UNAMA meetings. We got in bed with them. It paid off big time. We used to get visitors galore. One time, an American

colonel came to see us - she later became the head of one of the PRTs. She said that the U.S. military tried to marginalize the UN efforts. I thought that was really stupid. We could not have operated without UNAMA. They had much better sources of information having been in the region for many years. So what started out to be a contentious relationship, ended by being a lovefest.

To a large degree, this relationship was true for most NGOs as well. There were two NGOs with whom we had tensions, in part because we used a heavy foot on a couple of medical efforts we were making. One of these NGOs was NFS and the other was "Save the Children-UK." They just told us that they didn't want us anywhere near their medical programs. We would bring in teams of American medical teams, including veterinarians (which is probably our most effective program since no one else brought any veterinarians). We would enter an area and perform an intensive treatment program - perhaps as many as 2000 people and 2000 animals per day. That really had an impact. Of course, the UN wanted to have the financial resources so they could conduct a similar program of their own. They felt that they were much more likely to sustain the effort much further than we would and to some extent they were probably right.

But beyond those two NGOs, the British relationships with the NGOs were great. They had one advantage: they had a bar. We invited people to share a drink with us. When they drink and play with you, strangers become friends and barriers are broken.

Q: What about the UN? What was your impression of its staff in Mazar-e Sharif?

HUTSON: We were very fortunate; we had very fine UN people. There was Michelle Lipner from New York; she was very skeptical at the beginning about our mission. She was particularly concerned about a State employee being there, but eventually we eased her concerns and we had a good working relationship. A Canadian lady was her deputy and she was also very good. The UN mission had two political officers; one had been in Mazar-e Sharif for years. If I wanted to know what was going on, he was my best source. There was a retired Hungarian colonel who was the head of the UN security efforts as well as protection of all NGOs. We found the UN group very helpful; they would give you any information that one might need. So we worked hand in glove with them. We were blessed by the presence of a top-notch UN staff.

Q: Was there any residue of Taliban presence in the northern provinces?

HUTSON: Yes, but they were too busy being involved in the drug trade and other criminal enterprises. When I first arrived, we had an ODA team in Mazar-e Sharif. I don't remember what the acronym stood for, but it part of DoD. It was made up of special forces reserves. They were perceived to have been in Dostam's back pocket. Whenever Dostam went anywhere, they would be around. The British commander told the ODA team that Mazar-e Sharif was his area of responsibility and that unit was withdrawn. Before they left, they talked to us. We found that they had a lot of good information. They were predicting "gloom and doom" - i.e., that Al-Qaeda and the Taliban would return to go after us. That did not happen while I was there. Whatever they were doing in the northern provinces did not interfere with our duties. They were too busy, as I said, cutting deals with the powers-to-be.

Q: We forget that the Taliban had long before this time had moved from being religious fanatics to a corrupt group interested primarily in its own well-being.

HUTSON: That is true. The only positive contribution the Taliban made earlier was to shut down the drug trade. I can't of anything else they did for the benefit of Afghanistan. They were "evil". There was nothing so inspiring as seeing the little girls in their black dresses and white scarfs carrying their school bag walking down dusty roads on the way to their classrooms. It was such pictures that convinced people that we had done the right thing in Afghanistan.

Q: Were women moving ahead in the northern provinces?

HUTSON: They were not free from "tradition." You would not have seen any of them uncovered. There were all kinds of NGOs which focused on women's issues - e.g- micro-enterprises, etc. The University of Nebraska at Omaha is training a dozen female teachers at the present and has been doing so for a number of years. The schools in my area were reopening. So I think the answer to your question must be a "Yes." There was progress, but of course I don't think their status will ever reach the levels that we consider desirable. They have their own culture. We should be prepared to make the long term commitment. The day I left, a journalist was talking to my British commander and me; he wondered how long a commitment might be necessary. We answered almost simultaneously; the colonel said "40 years" and I said "Check with my grandson." We thought it would take that long before anyone could judge whether our intervention in Afghanistan would have any impact.

Lawrence Cohen
Member PRT
Kabul/Herat (2005-2006)

Mr. Cohen was born and raised in Pennsylvania and was educated at Dickinson College, and the Universities of Pennsylvania, Tel Aviv, Chicago and Northwestern. Entering the Foreign Service in 1980, he served variously as Economic, Political and Political/Military Officer at posts in Mexico, Honduras, India, Hungary, Nigeria and Brazil. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington Mr. Cohen dealt with Foreign Assistance and Environmental and Scientific matters. His last post was in Afghanistan, where he had two assignments with Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Mr. Cohen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: You left Brazil when?

COHEN: I left on June 1, 2005.

Q: And then what?

COHEN: Marla remained in Brasilia. She had one more year to go in her assignment. I went

back to Washington, took some time off, and then had five or six weeks of Dari language training. My assignment was again Afghanistan. I spent much of the summer in preparation. I did have a medical issue that complicated my life with the Medical Unit. I received my medical clearance just days before getting on the plane.

I arrived in Kabul on September 29, 2005. In preparation for the PRT assignment in Herat, I spent ten days in Kabul. I flew to Herat on a PRT Air flight. PRT Air had been set up since I last departed the country in December 2003. It consisted of no less than one and no more than three twin engine Beechcraft piloted by South Africans. Personnel traveling to and from provincial reconstruction teams had first priority to fly on PRT Air, but it was also available to military and other civilian personnel on a space available basis. PRT Air addressed, in part, one of the biggest problems we faced earlier: how to move about the country. But for a few months, it was notoriously unreliable as the contractor sought to resolve various maintenance issues.

We had just taken off when the October 8, 2005 earthquake struck northern Pakistan. We never felt a tremor.

Upon my arrival in Herat, the PRT USAID officer, Kim Pease, met me at the tarmac. She handed me the keys to the U.S. quarters on the PRT. At the time, she was the only U.S. civilian at the PRT. My predecessor Tom Hushek had departed months earlier. Kim was leaving on the same PRT Air flight for a week of work in a neighboring province. We just passed each other on the tarmac. The Italian soldiers picked up my gear and we went into town to the PRT.

Q: The Italians?

COHEN: In April 2005, five months earlier, the Herat Provincial Reconstruction Team had been turned over by the U.S. to Italian control. The Herat PRT was one of the first set up. Herat is an important city in western Afghanistan, commercially buoyant and the port of entry for much of Afghanistan's imports. The Italians were new in the PRT business. Apparently, during the turnover process some bad blood had arisen between the Italians and the Americans. I detected some fallout. But the Italian soldiers were nothing but pleasant to me.

The PRT was located in the center of the Herat city, in a walled compound whose contours followed the property lines of houses procured for the PRT. The properties were sutured together into one facility. The neighborhood consisted of houses and apartment buildings. In the compound center, a hardtop parade ground served as the PRT's central open area. On the small cement pitch, Italian soldiers played football (soccer) every Friday afternoon. Seven interconnected townhouses stood on the south side of the open ground. A rich Herati had constructed the interconnected townhouses for his sons. The mess hall and kitchen occupied the entire basement level. I suppose the patriarch intended his family would dine together. Officers and enlisted men lived in separate quarters. The U.S. apartment was at the west end of the seven townhouse complex on the second floor. The previous U.S. commander, State Department diplomat, and USAID representative had shared the apartment. After the turnover, we kept it. Below the U.S. apartment on the first floor were billeted enlisted men and women. They shared a bathroom. It was a "family" atmosphere.

It was ideal. I rolled out of bed and went downstairs to the mess hall for breakfast. The cuisine at the mess hall was Italian.

Q: Oh, how sad.

COHEN: Terrible. After tolerating embassy food service or the unchanging greasy KBR (Kellogg Brown and Root, a Halliburton company) food found at a U.S. military base, this was a pleasant turn. For quality food, I lucked out with both Bamiyan and Herat.

Q: When you say KBR?

COHEN: Kellogg Brown and Root had the service contract for U.S. military mess halls, the DIFACs. The food was typically appealing for American pallets: fried chicken, burgers, macaroni and cheese, soft drinks. At every American base, the cuisine was identical and predictable, and not necessarily healthy. At the Italian PRT, wine was available as was cold beer. Breakfast was typically continental and less exciting: croissants, cereal, fruit, and yogurt. Coffee was okay. The PRT did not serve bacon, scrambled eggs, pancakes, or grits. Lunches and dinners were generally tasty, and grilled peppers were always available. I believe there was one Afghan kitchen cook whose sole duty was to grill the peppers. The main dinner platter often included a fish or meat dish. Always, at least two and usually three pastas were offered -- never just one.

When I arrived, I was advised to dine only with the Italian officers at their table. I often did, but not always. If there was a seat available for dinner, I joined the officers, usually including the commander and/or the deputy commander. Most officers spoke English, some spoke it fairly well.

Just as in Bamiyan, at the Herat PRT a minute contingent of American military still remained from the American presence. In Herat, it consisted of a US Army major, Major Tony Oliver from Oregon, Captain Hanes from Kentucky, and a couple of enlisted men. We usually ate together.

Major Oliver served as advisor and mentor to the commander of the Sixth Brigade of the Afghan Border Police (ABP). The Sixth Brigade headquarters was about fifteen kilometers west of the city on the road to the Iranian border. Tony sought to build the brigade's capability and especially the leadership skills of Colonel Mohammad Ayoub, the commander. Despite the importance of his mission, the major received meager support. As ISAF forces gradually backfilled U.S. troops, U.S. military authorities in Bagram and Kabul intentionally neglected western Afghanistan. Major Oliver did not have sufficient budget to sustain the border police, but he tried mightily. It was a constant frustration for him. I will get into that later.

Captain Hanes and the two enlisted men were remnants of what had been the PRT's CERP program (Commanders Emergency Response Program). CERP was designed to get humanitarian relief support and reconstruction funds out the door quickly. The Herat CERP program consisted of school construction, bore wells, retaining walls, etc. In some ways the CERP program paralleled the USAID effort. When the transfer of authority (TOA) from the U.S. to Italy occurred, the CERP program was being phased out. But it took awhile for the pipeline to clear. The leftover U.S. soldiers monitored the pipeline. It took about ten months from the time of the

TOA until the pipeline of CERP reconstruction projects was fully completed. Kim Pease, the USAID representative, was a contractor. She had served at the PRT during the American presence and continued managing the huge USAID program.

In the apartment, Kim and I each had a bedroom. Since the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) representative departed months earlier, we used the vacant room for guests. By the standards of PRTs throughout the country, we probably enjoyed the best living conditions. Compared to the hooch in Bamiyan -- shared with five other Americans with the latrines 30 meters away -- the Herat PRT was luxurious. We shared a bathroom, a living area, a small kitchen with refrigerator and washing machine. I do not believe any other PRTER lived anywhere near as nicely as we did.

Kim advised me right off the bat to keep the apartment off limits to Italians. We needed our own space, she argued. Kim never completely trusted some of the Italian soldiers. An Afghan came in daily to do some janitorial stuff. The apartment was our private space. The current PRTER (May 2008), Palmer Roselli, still occupies it.

I will continue with a description of the PRT. In a three floor building near the main gate, Kim and I had our office area. The ground floor of the building served as a conference room for the Italians. On the first floor, the State Department and USAID representatives shared a conference room with about a dozen chairs in various states of repair. On the second floor, the Italian military assistance staff, including Afghan engineers, had their offices. The three floor building was perhaps 150 meters from my apartment door, a short commute! My office overlooked the interior compound and the motor pool. Kim's office faced the street. I had a desk, storage cabinets, and a laptop computer. Kim and I utilized a small kitchen. The Afghan handyman and janitor prepared *chai*. When Afghan guests came by, we served *chai* and *kishmish* (dried raisins and nuts). In Kim's little office, spread sheets on the walls listed the myriad USAID projects in her area of responsibility.

In a similar building next door, the Italian civilians had their offices and living quarters. The Italian Foreign Ministry-led development assistance team worked parallel to, although not necessarily in coordination with the military civil development team upstairs from us. Ambassador Carlo Ungaro, a retired diplomat, served as the Foreign Ministry advisor to the PRT. In September 2006 he married an American, Marion Douglas, in a ceremony at St. John's church next to Lafayette Square in D.C. The Italian military did not pay much attention to the work done by the civilian arm of the PRT. Their attitude towards the non-uniformed Italian personnel was exceedingly patronizing. This lack of cooperation, I believe, worked to the detriment of the entire Italian program. With more military cooperation, the civilian side complained, it could achieve much more development programming.

In the motor pool just behind our building parking was tight. I drove a Toyota Land Cruiser provided by the embassy. Kim utilized an identical Land Cruiser. Both were shipyard gray and had tall front end radio antennas attached to the front bumpers. The Italians drove white Toyota Land Cruisers, Prados, with little Italian flags on the front fender and the emblem of the Italian PRT on the doors. The Italians wanted Afghans to know they were Italian, and not American. It was a very naïve belief. The Afghans, initially, had no clue about Italy, except that the soldiers

were not as friendly or supportive as the Americans had been. I'll get to that later.

The PRT utilized Afghan staff. A young friendly man, Ali, served as the PRT receptionist. The PRT employed about half a dozen interpreters, all left over from the American presence. The interpreters shared a room office which really doubled as a lounge. None of the staff actually belonged to me. Until my last month in Herat I had no FSNs. If I required the services of an interpreter, I requested one in advance from the Italian military upstairs. All the Afghan staff liked the Americans and bemoaned the PRT's turnover to Italy.

Since the PRT was a military base, procedures needed to be followed. When I left the base my first week in Herat, the Italians would not permit me behind the wheel of the Land Cruiser. They insisted I be a passenger. However, after a week, there was a sudden change of policy. The commander informed me that the PRT could no longer drive USG vehicles, ostensibly because of liability issues. To me, that was no problem. I trusted my driving skills and common sense over those of some 19 year old private who learned how to drive on the streets of Napoli! The Italians continued to provide me an escort. By driving my vehicle, I freed up one of the soldiers to hold a weapon, a shooter. When I left the compound by vehicle, the Italians provided me with two soldiers in my vehicle and two soldiers in a chase vehicle, one of the white Toyota Prados.

The process for departing the compound was straightforward. By the afternoon the day before I wanted to drive off the PRT, I had to submit a written request form to the PRT's tactical operations center (TOC). I informed the TOC of my mission, where and when I would be going, and when I would be coming back. If I had a meeting with the governor at 10:00 a.m., I left the compound at 9:45. I would meet with the governor and perhaps have another meeting or two, then return to the PRT. The Italians were always very accommodating about providing me with an escort. The Italians figured out that because I asked for vehicle support every day, it would be better just to give me a dedicated escort. I had little difficulty getting out of the compound. Kim who did not drive had constant headaches getting out of the PRT in her vehicle.

The Italians constantly rotated their soldiers. Enlisted men rarely stayed longer than four months before they rotated out, a very short deployment. The officers stayed slightly longer because of the need for overlaps. Meanwhile, the civilians remained but did take frequent vacations in Italy. During my tenure, I got to know four PRT commanders and two regional area command generals (responsible for the four western provinces of the country.)

Q: What were you doing?

COHEN: First, I served as the eyes and ears of the embassy. I wrote reports and cables although I considered this a secondary responsibility. "Think strategically and provide guidance to the mission." That was my personal motto left over from my experience in Bamiyan.

Capacity and institution building were vital elements of the job. I worked closely with USAID, the NGOs, UNAMA, and others, to foster better governance among Afghan institutions. With local governmental authorities, I subtly mentored my interlocutors. I occasionally mediated disputes that usually included the government as one of the parties. Dispute resolution was a factor in so much of what we did. Of course, I served as the liaison with the Italian PRT. At an

American PRT, serving as a liaison with the PRT commander is less of an issue. "Diplomacy" with U.S. military leadership was relatively straightforward. But when dealing with a PRT run by another country, another level of diplomatic complexity must be addressed. My role included being a diplomat to the Italian PRT, in addition to the Afghans. Having lived with the Kiwis in Bamiyan, perhaps I was better prepared than most to go on to a non-American PRT.

Q: What were the Italians up to? What was their job?

COHEN: The Italians were new at the PRT business. They arrived in Herat with preconceived notions about their reputation, their ability to improve on the American methods, and their overall mission. For the Government of Italy, delivering development assistance in an Italian manner was a priority. A non-aggressive security posture followed. During my initial period at the PRT, the Italian assistance program was just getting started. It takes time to build capacity for delivering reconstruction projects and development services. A budget may exist. However, a cadre of engineers, contractors, and cohorts are also required. Projects must be identified and prioritized. As USAID officers know well, development work is neither simple nor instantaneous. The Italian PRT was inaugurated in the spring of 2005. When I arrived in October, the assistance program was just beginning to get solid footing. For example, some schools had been constructed. However, the program was slow in forming and in size it was miniscule compared to what Kim already had on her USAID plate. But, over time the PRT expanded its expertise.

The PRT's other primary mission was to provide security. Here the Italians fell down a bit. Security takes many forms. At most American PRTs, the security posture is heavy -- think Humvees. Most U.S. PRTs are located in Afghanistan's more unstable, insecure areas, particularly in the southeast. In Herat, an urban environment with a friendly population, that made no sense. Instead, security depends on getting close to the people, to businesses, to residents, without heavy vehicles and brute force. Driving heavy in the city just did not work well and it alienated the people.

The U.S. PRT in Herat had conducted foot patrols. To me that was an excellent tactic. The Italians in their Land Cruisers -- not Humvees or armored vehicles which might have been understandable -- seemed to the locals to be afraid of the environment. The PRT seemed cautious in projecting security. Its vehicular patrolling was conducted within a tight driving radius from the PRT. For many months, perhaps a year, the PRT did not allow its soldiers to overnight outside the compound. When the Americans ran the PRT, they went out for days at a time to the far corners of Herat province. They slept in the villages and got to know the people. The Italians always returned to the PRT by 5:00 p.m. Thus, they could not go far.

Herat, unlike most of Afghanistan, is a city with much hardtop. However, outside the city and off the main highway arteries the province is laced with washed out gravel and rutted dirt trails. To get out, you have to commit to time and rugged driving. Towards the end of my tour, the Italians extended their patrolling and began to go out for more than one day. The decision by the PRT commander was commendable. Also, I understand that the Government of Italy is risk adverse to any casualties. To accomplish their mission, the Italians had to extend the radius of their presence.

When it came to patrolling, there was no comparison with the Kiwis who often sent patrols out into the Hindu Kush for two weeks or longer. From Bamiyan the Kiwis patrolled in Waras, Panjao, and even Dai Kundi in northern Uruzghan Province. (Dai Kundi eventually became a separate province.) Not too far as the crow flies but as far as the moon by vehicle, especially in winter. If the mountain passes were closed by snow, the Kiwis drove three or four days just to reach these areas via Kabul! These were mega-trips. I took only a couple of short trips with the Kiwis. The average vehicle speed was sluggish on the mountain roads. Once reaching a safe house, the Kiwis remained there. The Kiwis soldiers met with the local authorities, the villagers. They provided assistance and mediated disputes. That concept of extended security presence had not really sunk in yet with the Italians. They had to learn on their own.

And for some reason, the Italian officers got it into their heads that the Afghans would like them simply because everyone likes Italians -- and that they were not Americans. This thinking was backward and shortsighted. The Americans in Herat had been well-liked by the Afghans, in part, because the Americans were not afraid to mingle with them. The Italians seemed so fearful. The Afghans can literally smell fear. They have no respect for it, and, thus, had little use, initially, for the Italians. This changed gradually. But it was Italian behavior which had to adjust, not Afghan.

Q: Was this a carryover...?

COHEN: Most Afghans received little or no formal education, especially the Afghan generation of the late 1970s through 2001. During Soviet rule, some academic institutions existed. But not institutionalized education. Most Afghans did not know what Italy was; they did not know what Europe was! Most Afghans had never seen a globe or a map of the world. In my experience Afghans really only understood four foreign nationalities. Everyone fell into one of these four mega-groups: Pakistanis, Persians -- or Iranians, Afghans did not like the Iranians or Pakistanis, but I suspect Pakistanis were a bit lower on the scale -- Russians whom the Afghans hated, and Americans. The least amount of hatred was saved for the Americans. A Brit or Frenchman or Italian fell into the American category. Most Afghans could not differentiate between an Italian and an American. Was Italy a province of America? To them, Italians were white and Christian, just like the Americans. Over time the Afghans learned to differentiate. But initially, this was all new and beyond their comprehension. The Italians did not grasp this, nor I think did the Spaniards. The Spaniards operated the PRT in Qal-e Nau, Baghdis Province.

Q: I want to take you back now to my initial question. They are out there and learning what?

COHEN: Gradually, the Italian PRT learned to work with various Afghan authorities, the mullahs, the local *shuras* or councils. The Americans were not uncomfortable sitting with the Afghans and listening to them. The Kiwis understood this very well as did the Brits. It took a while for the Italians to get it. They needed to spend time in villages. As I explained, the Italian PRT initially conducted only presence patrols around Herat city and along the main roads. They did not really provide security.

As the Italian assistance mission was beefed up and the development people became more

proficient, the PRT combined development with security. For example, they extended their reach to villages to evaluate assistance projects. A PRT cannot separate security from the other aspects of the mission. Security goes hand in hand with capacity building and development assistance. Assistance – schools, bridges, and wells, etc. – requires a stability platform, especially for NGOs. The NGOs provide an incredible amount of assistance throughout the country. But NGOs must feel safe to enter into those areas that most need help.

Q: The Italians go to the villages and speak with the local people. What are they doing? Are they looking projects or how things have been working?

COHEN: Initially, the PRT mission was “familiarization” with the Herat environment. This took some time. Because of the short deployment rotations, the PRT essentially relearned everything over and over every few months. On his first day in command, May 2006, I urged Colonel Zambuco to get to know the PRT’s neighbors. Safety and security depended on their support; the neighbors were suspicious of the PRT and unhappy with the enhanced threat the PRT brought. I recommended that the Italian soldiers get out of the vehicles and walk. The Americans, I pointed out, had foot patrols. You can stop, talk, and drink *chai* with the Afghan men. The colonel learned quickly and worked to build stronger ties with the community. At one event, he invited the locals to come to the PRT for pizza. I wish I could say pizza and beer, but we’re talking about Afghanistan.

Q: The other part of the equation is the bad guys. What was happening around you?

COHEN: Before I get to that, let me add a bit more about Kim Pease, the USAID representative. She had a very difficult time with the Italians. Whereas I drove, Kim could or would not drive. She had a difficult time reaching many projects she was handling throughout the province. Kim managed millions of dollars in assistance projects. She needed to monitor how this money was being spent. She depended on the Italians for movement. Most of my mission was within Herat city. I worked with provincial authorities, the university, etc. Most of Kim’s work was beyond the city limits, usually in remote areas. The Italians were reluctant to provide her with transportation. Kim became extremely frustrated. The Americans had provided her much greater mobility.

Q: Yes. What was happening outside the compound as far as bad guys?

COHEN: From the security perspective Herat was considered more benign than much of the rest of the country. The Taliban had been routed out of Herat and out of western Afghanistan in 2001. Ismael Khan (IK), the local warlord, had run Herat before and after the Taliban. I will describe IK in a second. Herat was an ethnic mix of Tajiks, Hazara, Turkmens, Iranians, as well as Pashtuns who were a sizable minority. Compared with other regions, Herat’s security posture was favorable. As time went by, however, Herat began to suffer from increased suicide bombings and other attacks. Plus, the political scene contributed to increased kidnappings and other criminal activities. Security deteriorated over the year that I was there.

In 2005 the United States pulled its soldiers from western Afghanistan, except for one PRT in Farah, the next province south. NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

provided the backfill. Unfortunately, the introduction of ISAF initially left a void. The U.S. had provided millions of dollars in development assistance. The pipeline of projects required constant refilling since the development need was so desperate. The U.S. had been doing a good job; then, it seemed to the locals we just walked away. The USG assumed the Italians, the Spaniards, and others would fill the void. Over time, they likely will. But they could not fill the entire gap.

The U.S. departed precipitously from the north and the west in order to focus on the south and east. The void made it easier for the Taliban and other criminal elements, drug lords, former militia commanders, to slip back and reassert their power and influence. In our lingo for the short-sightedness, we referred to the mission as “Operation Not Iraq.”

IK, Ismael Khan, led the mujahideen in Herat, first against the Soviets, then against the Taliban. He and his Jamiat Islami party *owned* Herat, especially the customs house. As Herat’s governor on and off until 2004, he was a kind of benevolent dictator, a Mussolini-type autocrat. That summer in a dispute with another warlord from the Shindand area of the province, Amanullah Khan, green on green fighting took place. IK’s son was killed. President Karzai pulled IK out of Herat and gave him a ministry in Kabul.

IK ran Herat as his own fiefdom. The Herat customs house directed its revenue through him and he used a portion of the money to develop Herat. Since most of Afghanistan’s customs revenue is collected at the Herat customs house, this was a large chunk of change. IK worked with the Iranians who extended a power line to Herat. While most of Afghanistan lacked electricity, Herat at night was lit up. When Karzai pulled IK back to Kabul, his minions still controlled Herat. From a distance IK sought to pull the province’s strings. Meanwhile, in 2005 Karzai appointed Sayed Hussein Anwari, a Hazara from eastern Afghanistan who had been Minister of Agriculture, to be governor. The central government was trying to assert authority in Herat. Although there was a USAID customs reform effort at the customs house, some heads there needed to be rolled. The systematic corruption could not be rooted out easily. Eventually, the minister of finance forced out the incumbent customs director, an IK holdover. Although the new Kabul-appointed customs leadership was not much better, at least more revenue started to flow into Kabul’s dry coffers.

Ismael Khan and his people continued to cause trouble in Herat. His motive, I suspect, was to spark a popular call for IK’s return to the province. I sensed IK was feeling the pinch of his lost customs revenue since the reform effort got going in earnest in early 2006. Things came to a head in February 2006. IK henchmen sparked a riot during the Shia holy day of Ashura, the 10th day of the month of Muharram, commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Mohammad. The events were premeditated. IK’s Jamiat sub-commanders launched attacks on Herat’s Shia, especially Hazara. IK, I suppose, planned to highlight Governor Anwari’s “inept” leadership, forcing President Karzai’s hand. IK would return with accolades to again lead Herat. Pretty simple and it almost worked. Karzai, perhaps foolishly, perhaps naively, or perhaps even shrewdly, sent IK to Herat to mediate the conflict. It appeared Karzai was hanging Anwari out to dry. But popular support for IK’s return did not materialize. The riots subsided, since there was no real underlying cause. Sectarian violence had been rare in Herat, and after a couple of weeks the city returned to normal – except for the wounded and slain. After

one week in the city, IK returned to Kabul. Many who predicted Governor Anwari's imminent departure from office were wrong. He is still in office even now (May 2008). I last saw him in October 2007.

IK's grab for total power in Herat was unsuccessful. However, he remains extremely influential in the city. A warlord of his stature cannot be brought to earth by the governor or anyone else at the provincial level. President Karzai is the only person who can take him down, and so far he has been unwilling to do so. During the difficulties Karzai reportedly asked Ambassador Neumann to deal with IK. The Ambassador correctly told the president that IK was an Afghan issue, not ours. Until warlords like IK are cauterized from Afghan society, the problems they cause will continue to fester. Then there is the issue of poppy cultivation. Especially in rural areas, the Taliban are filling the governing vacuum. This keeps the cauldron boiling.

Herat's complex situation was a challenge for the Italian PRT. In a sense, the Italians relied even more than me on the interpreters. I developed a broad range of contacts which helped me quite a bit. But the constant turnover of PRT personnel created a dependency on the interpreters and others.

Let me comment more about my relations with the Italians. The Americans at the PRT were not a part of the PRT leadership. I did not attend daily meetings; for the most part the Italian command did not want me around their internal workings -- which were conducted in Italian in any case. Perhaps they thought I was assigned to the PRT to observe their operations. I understand this may have changed somewhat with my successors.

On the other hand, I enjoyed a very positive social relationship with all the Italians, soldiers and officers. I spoke freely and frankly with the commander and his staff. The ISAF Regional Coordinator for Western Afghanistan, RC-West, an Italian Brigadier General, had his headquarters within the PRT until spring 2006. The RC-West consisted of staff from various ISAF member countries: Spaniards, Lithuanians, Hungarians, as well as an American captain. As I said, the regional command was led by an Italian BG. In June 2006, the coordination function of RC-West transitioned to a commander function; RC-West became RAC-West for Regional Area Command-West. The RAC-West HQ shifted to the Spanish-led forward operating base (FOB) at Herat Airport. RC, later RAC- West, meetings were conducted in English.

Note the two separate entities: the PRT and the regional ISAF command. The regional area coordinator/commander was higher in rank than the PRT commander, a colonel. This created some friction between the two. On the whole, however, the bifurcated system worked as well as might be expected. The PRT focused on provincial issues, including security, development assistance and relations with local administration. The regional command took a broader view of things, although it did not ignore Herat specific trends. Note that there were PRTs in Qau-i-Nau (Baghdis Province - Spain), Chacharan (Ghor Province - Lithuania), and Farah (Farah Province - United States).

You asked about security. The first major attack against the Italian PRT occurred on December 20, 2005. A suicide bomber attempted to ram a northbound convoy on the Ring Road just north from the airport. The explosion lightly wounded a couple of the Italian soldiers but destroyed the

Land Cruiser in which they were traveling. Smart driving by the Italian soldier limited the injuries. At the time, I was just a couple of kilometers from the attack location, accompanied by the Herat Chamber of Commerce on a tour of the Herat Industrial Zone, right across the highway from the airport. I did not hear the explosion although the others in the group claimed they heard something. The Italian soldiers were fortunate, the suicide bomber was toast. Immediately, the PRT radioed my escort and ordered us into the Spanish-run Forward Operating Base at the airport. We reached there in minutes and remained in the compound for a couple of hours. In the meantime, the Italians dealt with the attack site. They feared another attack, although once the suicide bomber blew himself up, a second attack was unlikely. Finally, a convoy was organized to run back to the PRT in Herat proper.

I drove the third car in the five vehicle convoy. Because of fears that another suicide attack on the normal driving route on the Ring Road, the Italian officer in charge directed the convoy to a second road near the Marco Polo Bridge, a rarely utilized route over the Hari Rud River. There had been no rain in months. The dirt roads were inches deep in dust. The convoy commander wanted us to drive fast and close to each other. He believed such driving would prevent a suicide bomber from entering the convoy. It was a tactical blunder. Because of the high speed and the thick dust, the first vehicles on the dirt road raised an impenetrable wall. By the third vehicle – me -- the dust cloud left zero visibility. We're driving a curvy dirt road at high speed. It was a terrible driving risk, much greater than the possibility of an attack. The Italian soldier next to me did not have radio communications with the other vehicles. Finally, I said I had to stop to allow the dust cloud to dissipate. Good thing I did. When the dust cleared slightly, we were fifteen feet off the road heading straight through freshly made mud bricks towards a steep canal. Another second or two and we would have had a serious accident. The driver in the vehicle just behind me was not so cautious. A second later he slammed into my rear, destroying the spare tire on the rear rim. Damage to the front end of the Italian Land Cruiser was more serious.

I describe this incident as an example of panicked thinking and perhaps shock. Certainly, the suicide bombing was serious. Understandably, adrenalin was flowing. However, rushed behavior can compound the consequences. Had I launched into the canal or been more seriously rear-ended, the bad day could have been terribly worse. I realized this immediately, even before we left the Spanish FOB.

The next serious attack on the Italians occurred on April 8, 2006. It was about 8:40 in the morning. I was in my office which, as I said earlier, faces inside the PRT. Facing the front of the building next to my office was our conference. There was a loud boom which shook the building. In the conference the glass from the windows were smashed. A suicide bomber had tried to attack the PRT. He set himself off about 60 meters from my office. There were perhaps four fatalities, all Afghan, including a PRT guard and passing pedestrians. One man had been pushing a cart. A number of Afghan militia soldiers were contracted to protect the PRT from the outside. The compression from the explosion crushed the hour and minute hands on the clock in the conference room.

At the point where the suicide bomber went off, a large white marble house stood between the street and the PRT. The house had a tall, solid wall. In front of the house, a small guard shack that belonged to the PRT was completely leveled. Windows up and down the street were broken.

Body parts were evident, even on the roof of our building. However, in his excitement the suicide bomber detonated himself somewhat prematurely. The main PRT entrance was at least another 70 meters further down the street. It was easy to mistake the small guard shack for the PRT one just ahead. One of the Italian civilians whose office did face the street suffered severe cuts on his arm and was evacuated to Italy.

This was certainly a major attack and it shook up the Italians. The PRT command immediately took steps to restrict traffic on the streets surrounding the PRT. Jersey barriers were placed to slow traffic. Additional car checks were set up at the ends of the blocks. It was a wake-up call.

Q: You suggested the Italian PRT thought that it might be less susceptible to attack because it was not American.

COHEN: There was that sense, yes.

If the December attack was not enough of a wake-up call, then April suicide bombing was. The homes along the street suffered damage. Residents were understandably both angry and bitter. Their resentment against the PRT boiled over. Some local residents sought to force the PRT to relocate. More than the PRT, provincial authorities nipped the effort quickly. The PRT commander at the time was not one of the best. The Italians tried to convince the residents that not only would the new security procedures reduce the likelihood of a similar attack, but that locals would not be unreasonably inconvenienced. The PRT leadership could no longer ignore the neighborhood in which the PRT was located. But still, there was little PRT effort to engage the locals in a traditional Afghan manner. The April attack was certainly significant. But it was only after the next suicide attack, which was not even directed at the Italians, when I believe the point was finally driven home.

The next suicide attack in Herat against the westerners occurred on Thursday, May 18, 2006. I will get to the incident in a moment. First, I will provide some context.

Just to the northeast of the airport, the Regional Police Training Center (RTC) managed by a Department of State contractor, DynCorp, served to train national police. From its exterior, the RTC looked like a maximum security penitentiary with high eight meter walls topped with razor wire. The RTC periodically received poorly launched rocket or mortar attacks. While not very accurate, the occasional attacks were more than a just nuisance. I suspected the attacks were condoned by the neighboring village. A dirt road to the RTC also served the local communities. RTC vehicles tore up and deeply rutted the dirt road. Millions of dollars had been invested in the RTC and its fancy up-armored vehicles, including a black stretch Humvee, affectionately called the "War Wagon" by RTC personnel. The War Wagon, which reputedly cost \$350,000, was an emergency vehicle only, for use in evacuating the center when under attack. The airport, the logical point of embarkation in an emergency was just a mile away. Yet, not a dime was spent to improve the road. The locals were probably resentful and wanted to send a message. It exemplified the RTCs poor community relations.

DynCorp also trained the Afghan Border Police (ABP). Major Oliver whom I mentioned earlier, developed a strong mentoring relationship with the ABP Sixth Brigade commander Colonel

Ayoub. By now, Major Oliver was gone. No one had yet replaced him. Instead, Kabul instructed DynCorp, without direct supervision, to train and mentor the border police at Islam Qala, the main border crossing point with Iran. From Herat proper, the border is a good ninety minute drive, closer to two hours with heavy vehicles. From the RTC, tack on an additional half hour. DynCorp trainers drove each day to Islam Qala in a convoy of up-armored Ford F-250s. They departed the RTC each morning at about the same time, drove the same route through Herat city, and returned to the RTC after a couple of inconclusive hours on the ground at the border. It was extremely poor security tradecraft and, I felt, accomplished almost nothing at the border.

Q: The border of what?

COHEN: Afghanistan and Iran. Islam Qala was the name of the border village. Commercial and pedestrian traffic crossed each way. Hundreds of trucks from Iran entered Afghanistan every day. The border police truly needed assistance. DynCorp was contracted to train them. But the ABP also urgently needed logistical support. And trainers who visited for only a couple of hours in the middle of the day were not much use.

Actually, Major Oliver and I had seen this problem coming. Seven months earlier, I urged the head of the Afghan Reconstruction Group (ARG) Ed Smith who also led the recently-established Border Management Initiative (BMI) that a small site a few kilometers from the border and across the main road from a police station be fixed up and used as a base or safe house for police trainers operating at the Islam Qala border. USAID had already refurbished two small buildings for the ministry of finance. The compound had three walls and two guard towers. The border police had never moved into the buildings. Instead, an “agreement” between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Refugees and Returnees (MoRR) allowed MoRR personnel to utilize the compound. The MoRR worked with UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) to assist Afghan returnees – of which at this time there were almost none. It was a great deal for the MoRR officials stationed there. The post was overstaffed since they had hardly any work. Understandably, the MoRR people did not want to vacate. To use the compound for police trainers, the MoRR staff would have to relocate elsewhere and the compound fixed up to our security standards. I sought alternative MoRR space. I negotiated with the UN and MoRR. I even obtained a commitment from Ed Smith, the head of the Border Management Initiative, to contribute funds for renting alternative MoRR lodging. All came to naught.

DynCorp was not excited about the compound proposal. I admit it was an imperfect solution. But it was an inexpensive fix. The facility already belonged to the ministry of finance. A place to crash, a change in routine, could have provided flexibility for anyone working at the border. The Ministry of Refugees and Returnees staff could have relocated to a nearby building for little cost, perhaps a few thousand dollars. The border police post was across the road. Colonel Ayoub supported the effort.

In my view, good security depends on a few critical factors. The most important is to be unpredictable. Any way to change time and routes contributes to a better security posture. It sounds pretty simple. With almost no money, we could have then taken possession of the facility and turned it into a functioning safe house which would add the unpredictability element to those working at the border.

It did not work out that way. Instead DynCorp trainers drove every day to the border. Ultimately, they were targeted. A suicide bomber in a taxi waited for the three vehicle DynCorp convoy as it skirted around Herat. The taxi clipped the second vehicle and exploded next to the last. I was at the offices of the Provincial Council when the attack occurred, just after 9 a.m. One DynCorp trainer, Ronald Zimmerman, was killed; two others were injured, one seriously.

Where the attack occurred, the road was next to a hill. About fifty feet above the road just at the point of the suicide attack was the Thousand and One Nights Restaurant, frequented often by expats. As the targeted vehicle was burning -- I am convinced this is what happened -- the ammunition inside the vehicle cooked off. I believe the exploding ordnance echoed off the hill where the restaurant was. The convoy survivors claimed they heard small arms fire directed at them. However, an explosion like that also affects hearing. Panic can also set in. The DynCorp personnel started shooting uphill. They shot up the restaurant, fortunately no one was hit and damage to the structure was light. Restaurant staff told me later that they ran for cover.

DynCorp swore that they had been under small arms fire attack. When an attack occurs, I assume the first reaction is to fire back. I later interviewed the restaurant personnel and other witnesses. There was zero evidence of a follow-on attack after the suicide bomber. For example, no shell casings were found. I was convinced that just as in other highly publicized IED incidents out of Afghanistan and Iraq, this was a case of a stress-related, even panicked response. Fortunately, no one was hit by the DynCorp personnel. As I mentioned, the attack occurred in the morning.

Events then started unbeknownst to me. An embassy investigative team flew to Herat to investigate the attack. The FBI team consisting of two special agents and an assistant legal attaché was met by the U.S. military Quick Reaction Force (QRF) stationed at the Afghan National Army (ANA) training base, Camp Victory, located about ten kilometers south of the airport. Neither the FBI team nor the American command at Camp Victory notified provincial authorities, the Italian PRT, the regional (RAC-West) coordinator, or me that a site investigation was planned.

Late in the afternoon, the FBI team and the QRF reached and secured the attack site. The QRF cordoned off the road, the main highway around the city. The U.S. military QRF utilized Humvees with fifty caliber machine guns. A Humvee was placed at each end to seal the site. While common practice elsewhere in the country, security cordons such as this one were not the usual procedure in Herat.

Within fifteen minutes of setting up the roadblocks, an Afghan truck driver who worked for the municipality of Herat approached the cordon. With hand signals the U.S. soldiers ordered him to halt. The driver did not understand English. He panicked and tried to drive around the cordon. The soldiers plugged him full of bullets. He was killed immediately and his truck slid into a nearby channel. The FBI team contacted superiors in Kabul who gave permission for the team to "withdraw from the incident location."

About fifteen minutes later, I receive an urgent phone call from Yosefi, my Ministry of Foreign Affairs contact. Yosefi asked me to visit the governor immediately; he briefly explained that

there had been a shooting and an Afghan was dead. Yosefi picked me up at the PRT and took me to the governor's residence. Governor Anwari was distraught and irate. I called the embassy and I learned about the investigative team for the first time. I called the commander at Camp Victory, responsible for the QRF. The team had yet to report in – the Humvee trip from the site of the shooting to the camp took the better part of an hour. At the PRT and at RC-West, ISAF regional headquarters, the Italians were livid that they had not been informed of the investigative team and the security cordon. The American commander at Camp Victory was later called on the carpet. He was responsible and failed to keep the appropriate authorities informed, but it was not totally his fault. The embassy failed to keep me or anyone else apprised of the plans. The FBI report on the incident whitewashed the entire episode.

Someone in the embassy, probably the Regional Security Officer (RSO), had sent the investigative team to Herat immediately after hearing of the suicide attack in the morning. No one in Herat other than the U.S. colonel at Camp Victory was informed. Without coordination with local authorities, including the PRT, the Americans violated "rules of engagement." Moreover, Heratis were not used to this type of cordon, common elsewhere in the country. Local Afghan police and the PRT easily could have supported the investigative mission. It was a bad scene and not unrepresentative of much that was going wrong in Afghanistan. Coincidentally, that day the Italian PRT was having a change in command. For the new commander it was a real eye-opening experience. Later that evening, some locals set off explosions nearby. I believe a small bomb that had been placed near the Indian Consulate, perhaps two kilometers away. It was not an attack, but everyone was jittery that night. I discussed my thoughts on how to improve PRT security with the new commander.

The American investigative team departed for Kabul the next day on a military flight. They refused to say anything to me. Two hundred yards away from the hanger where they awaited their flight, the RTC DynCorp team was sending off their colleague who had been killed. A special plane had been sent to bring Ron's body back to Kabul. Once the planes departed, one with the body, the other with the FBI team, I was stuck with the compensation issue of the Afghan truck driver who was killed. The driver left a widow and twelve or thirteen children. Herat city authorities were extremely upset about the incident. The local press and the malcontents in the mosques spoke out viciously against the Americans that Friday.

Herat Mayor Alhaji M. Rafiq Mojaddadi was taking a lot of flak. The driver had worked for the municipality. The mayor was under terrific pressure to do something. In Afghan culture, compensation for an accidental killing is important. Honor is at stake. The U.S. military refused to get involved. I recommended to the embassy that compensation be arranged for the family. After extensive back and forth with the embassy, USAID authorized its local contractor, IOM – which was reluctant to get involved but had little choice -- to disburse six thousand dollars to the family. Six weeks later, I handed the cash to the widow (in *burka*, so I have to assume it was the widow!) in the mayor's office. My synagogue in Arlington took up a collection of both clothing and cash. I presented the additional money to the widow a few months later. My successor, Van Ram, collected the clothing from the synagogue and he placed it in his household effects shipment, using his extra airfreight weight. He later distributed the clothing to the family.

The shooting of the truck driver completely overshadowed the earlier suicide attack on the

DynCorp convoy and left the U.S. with a black eye. But the situation could have been far worse. If my position had been vacant or if the officer did not pay attention to the incident, we could have lost a lot more goodwill in Herat.

The U.S. is still viewed fairly favorably in western Afghanistan. But while the image of the United States is still somewhat positive, it is shaky. Small incidents have tremendous ramifications. Bad decision-making, particularly in security practice, by military, by contractors or whomever, can undo all the good that we do with our development assistance.

During the following weeks, I attempted to reverse the negative publicity from the incident. Kim who departed Herat a few months earlier had numerous finished projects that had not yet been dedicated. In collaboration with Herati provincial authorities and IOM, USAID's contracting agent in Herat, I helped preside over the ribbon-cutting of new schools and other facilities. These ceremonies demonstrated that the U.S. cared about Afghanistan's development.

Q: We are going through a bad period now because the actions of private security firms, Blackwater being the major one, but there are others, in Iraq-

COHEN: Blackwater had a presence at the Regional Police Training Center (RTC), operated by DynCorp. A small contingent of Blackwater personnel provided advanced, paramilitary-type training to the border police: how to set up a perimeter, cordon a street, exit vehicles quickly, etc. The Blackwater trainers, many of whom had been Special Forces, taught techniques that might save police lives in Afghanistan. They also provided their trainees with basic equipment: webbing, vests, belts and boots. Too bad the training only lasted a few weeks.

Afghan policemen do not have the same functions as police in our country. Whether border police or regular police, all Afghan police personnel require extraordinary, even paramilitary skills to survive. Unfortunately, the police trainees remained at the RTC just eighteen days, barely enough time to become acclimated to the RTC culture. A cursory two or three week training regime is not sufficient. The majority of DynCorp personnel were themselves police officers from places like Alabama or Texas. Their skill sets were geared towards the conduct of police work in the United States. I questioned whether these skills were relevant to the unique circumstances of Afghanistan. The trainers were probably quite expert in catching speeders and writing traffic tickets. But had they never been in a situation where their lives were in constant jeopardy, where they were at risk from the most innocuous by-stander? Had they gone up against armed insurgents like the Taliban or vicious drug lords and warlords? Were they constantly outgunned by the bad guys? Were they paid less than peanuts like Afghan police? So I found the DynCorp training effort inadequate. The State Department touted how many Afghan policemen were being trained, in the many thousands. But the training was terribly cursory and delivered by trainers who, in my opinion, really did not know what they were doing.

Typically, a rural policeman arrived at the RTC wearing sandals and his normal street clothes. The prospective trainee looked the same when he graduated eighteen days later -- no uniform and wearing his sandals. DynCorp argued, disingenuously I felt, that provisions for the police trainees were the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior. The ministry allegedly had a warehouse full of police equipment and uniforms that donor governments, including the U.S.,

gave them. These items should have been allotted to the policemen. True enough. However, if a police trainee is wearing neither boots nor a uniform nor even a belt, how well can he be trained? What kind of pride is he going to possess in being a policeman? It was the responsibility of the trainers, in this case DynCorp which received hundreds of millions of dollars from its USG contract, to obtain those items by whatever means and provide them to their trainees.

Right about the time when this was happening, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, visited Herat. I escorted him to the RTC. He saw the situation for himself and later mentioned it to President Hamid Karzai in Kabul. Eventually, uniforms and equipment were juggled loose from the ministry warehouse. But DynCorp really should have cared about the situation without being pushed. The company wanted to demonstrate the rising numbers of trainees being channeled through the RTCs throughout the country. It seemed to care less about the caliber of the police. In the case of Blackwater, the trainers tried more diligently to prepare the police trainees for whatever encounters might be faced.

Q: Let us talk about influence of Iran during the time you were there.

COHEN: Iran is the primary conduit for commerce into Afghanistan. Much of Afghanistan's drug trafficking exits the country via Iran. Cheap Iranian and third country goods flood Afghanistan. Import tariffs provide a major share of the GOA's revenue. Customs revenue collected by the Herat customs house was vital for government operations. It was essential this revenue reach central government hands and not the pockets of the local warlord – in this case, Ismael Khan. Hundreds of Afghans waited each day in front of the Iranian consulate. Many sought jobs in Iran which for Afghans was an economic magnet. The Iranian consul general was a "big man on campus," literally and figuratively, in Herat. The Government of Iran funded numerous development projects in Herat province, including the highway between the border and Herat city, about 120 kilometers of hardtop. Many claimed it was the best hardtop road in the country. The Iranians constructed schools. When I was there, a high capacity fiber optic line from Meshed, Iran to Herat was inaugurated. Iran put a lot of attention and resources into western Afghanistan. Despite the significant development assistance coming from Tehran, there generally was no love lost between most Afghans and Iranians.

The GOI was not being totally altruistic. It perceived payback. Afghanistan was a place to dump Iranian products that had no other market outlets. Items that could not be sold on the world market or even sold in Iran could be dumped in Afghanistan. I mentioned chicken imports earlier. Frozen poultry that had thawed, was expired, or had been sourced in third countries suffering from avian influenza entered Afghanistan unimpeded and until about 2006, usually uninspected. This *laissez faire* commercial system extended to all kinds of products. To its credit, and with the assistance of the American businessman I mentioned earlier, the health inspection service of the Ministry of Agriculture and Afghan Customs improved inspection techniques and reduced significantly the import of unhealthy food products.

Except for crude oil, carpets, pistachios, saffron, and a few other items, Iran produces few products that are globally competitive. Afghanistan was a captive market. From this perspective, commercial involvement in Afghanistan was in Iran's national interest. And a more prosperous Afghanistan that could purchase Iranian goods was also in Iran's national interest. On the flip

side, the drug trade affected Iran in a deeply negative fashion. Iran has a huge drug problem with, reportedly, over a million drug addicts already. Iran is a very significant conduit for opium into Europe.

Q: With opium was Iran seeking its payoff?

COHEN: I suspect there was a tremendous amount of graft and corruption among Iranian officials, especially along the border. The money was big. Iranian border guards were paid to turn their heads and allow traffickers to come through. On the Afghan side, Colonel Ayoub, commander of the Sixth Brigade Border Police based in Herat, knew his poorly-paid men were susceptible to graft. He sought to enforce some integrity, although we could never be 100 percent sure about his own integrity. I enjoyed a very close relationship Colonel, later General Ayoub. The drug traffickers were well armed and flush with cash. The border police were out-gunned and often over-matched by the drug traffickers. This was probably not quite the case on the Iranian side of the border. Still, with so much money, bribery was easy. Given its own drug problem, Iran needs to halt the flow of drugs. Even the ayatollahs must understand that opium is not good for their people. General Ayoub was eventually killed in a daring December 2006 attack at the bridge over the Hari Rud, most likely by those involved in the drug trade.

Iran had a strong political interest in Afghanistan. The GOI did not mind tweaking the United States by keeping the pot boiling. I believe Iran prefers that Afghanistan not be completely stabilized. They are probably happy that the U.S. presence in western Afghanistan has been greatly reduced. Except for Afghan National Army (ANA) trainers, the PRT in Farah, and small Special Forces units, the U.S. military had withdrawn from western Afghanistan by mid-2005. U.S. elements in the west were absolutely minimal. Everything had been turned over to ISAF (International Security Assistance Force), specifically the Spanish, the Italians, and the Lithuanians. There was a political interest as well. Iran wanted a friendly governor. Under Ismael Khan, Herat's governor on and off until 2004, a cozy relationship existed with Iran. Even after IK became minister of energy and water, he likely retained his ties with Iran. In exchange, Iran provided significant development assistance into Herat, including electricity transmission lines. Herat was lit with, mostly, Iranian electricity. Some power came from Turkmenistan.

The Afghan-Iranian relationship is almost incestuous. Afghans tend not to like Iranians who are perceived as over-bearing. Afghan citizens were being mistreated in Iran. Hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees still remained in Iran. Periodically, Iran forced them to leave. Afghans in Iran were perceived not unlike Hispanic wetbacks in the United States. They did the menial labor for low wages.

I did not have much to do with the Iranians, of course. I was preempted from doing so. The first time I met the Iranian consul general was an accident. I had been invited to an Iftar (post-Ramadan) dinner at a Herat guest house. When I arrived, I was asked to sit on the pillows at the place of honor near the governor. The man sitting next to me was the Iranian consul general. That made for an awkward situation. Ambassador Ungaro, the Italian MFA representative sitting across from us almost split a gut.

I suspect the Iranians had a good spy network in Herat. I just assumed they could listen to

anything I said or wrote. I did not care. When I was reporting back to the embassy and used my Hotmail or Yahoo email accounts, much that I wrote was subtly intended for them. I felt that it did not matter what they heard or saw by that time. They were just everywhere.

When Heratis spoke with me about Iran, they blamed everything under the sun on Iranian machinations. Afghans themselves rarely took responsibility for their own issues or problems. Others had to be blamed. In conversations with me, the boogeyman was always Iran. When Afghans spoke with Iranians, I suppose the reverse occurred.

I will mention Turkmenistan, Afghanistan's northern neighbor. Even though Turkmenistan and Afghanistan share a long border, there is little commerce between the two countries. Turkmenistan had been a part of the former Soviet Union, part of the problem in the eyes of most Afghans. During the decades of turmoil, Afghans did not seek refuge in Turkmenistan, USSR. Although Turkmen electricity flowed into western Afghanistan, there was little interaction between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. At the border, trucks crossed infrequently. At the train railhead, few trains came over. Scrap metal from Central Asia transited Afghanistan on its way to Pakistan. Unlike Iran, there was no real cross border trade and no cross border pedestrian traffic.

At the end of 2005 I visited Turkmenistan. To enter Turkmenistan, I walked about a kilometer and a half from the gate at the border proper to the main Turkmen border station. One clearly entered the communist world, even more severe than Uzbekistan which I had visited in November 2003. After two days in Merv, possibly the world's largest city in the twelfth century but only a Soviet-style eye-sore in the twenty-first, I could not wait to get out. Everywhere, Turkmenbashi's (Turkmenistan's Communist dictator Saparmurat Niyazov) visage gazed down from murals, statues, paintings, the television, and even the currency. His was a true cult of personality until his death in December 2006. I never felt welcomed in the city. When I reached the Afghan gate, I was warmly welcomed by the Afghan border guards. Their first question to me: green or black, as in green or black *chai*? Imagine being relieved to be BACK in Afghanistan!

There was a Turkmen consul in Herat. In fact, the diplomatic community consisted of the Iranians, the Turkmens, the Pakistani and Indian consul generals, Ambassador Ungaro at the Italian PRT, and me. The Afghan foreign ministry had a representative office. Both the Indian and the Pakistani consul generals were very friendly. There was no evident rivalry or tension between the two. We had frequent dinners together. It was our own diplomatic corps. The foreign ministry representative office in Herat performed liaison and consular services for us. Their role seemed almost to be advisory.

Q: What about the poppy business?

COHEN: Most poppy that transited the western region was grown elsewhere. Western Afghanistan is not Afghanistan's major poppy producing region. But it was easy for poppy grown in Helmand province and elsewhere to reach Herat. Like the rest of the country, Herat benefited from the trafficking. To traffic opium out of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran are essential. Trucks entered Afghanistan at Islam Qala, the main border station, filled to the brim

with all kinds of items. The trucks left empty – unless opium was hidden inside. Used vehicles, mostly cheap East Asian models and Toyota Corollas, flooded across the border and sat in huge car lots just to the west of town – before reaching the Herat customs house. Opium paid for these imports. I considered this flood of imported vehicles and other luxury items the money laundering from opium.

For Afghan farmers, cultivation of poppy was a no brainer. No other crop provided the rate of return that poppy did. Attempts by the NGOs, funded by USAID and others, to come up with alternative livelihoods -- saffron was a big one being touted – met with mixed success. Vegetable growing projects were launched. Simple food processing projects such as canning tomatoes were established. No commodity compared to poppy for ease of cultivation. Few products had the guaranteed market that poppy had. From the farmers' point of view, poppy may have had large risk due to international eradication efforts. But the crop provided a real cash return. Also, drug lords and Taliban commanders who controlled rural areas frequently ordered farmers to grow poppy. The threat was real. Even if a farmer preferred not to defy the government edict against poppy cultivation, he was under tremendous pressure to grow poppy because of this intimidation.

I feel our drug strategy is backwards. We try to conduct a “bottom up” approach by destroying poppy fields. This effort alienates rural communities and gives them incentive to provide sanctuary for Taliban elements. If the government destroyed your poppy field, would not you be bitter about it? Perhaps you would not be able to feed your family that winter. A Taliban representative comes along and offers the farmer money to provide sanctuary for some fighters or put an IED (improvised explosive device) out on the road or take a potshot at a policeman. The money provided by the Taliban is far greater than revenue earned from any other source. It becomes a matter of economics. Addressing this problem from below does not work. It must be addressed from the top. We ought to target the drug lords and corrupt politicians. Go after the laboratories, and finally the cultivators. Also, Afghanistan must get better control over its borders.

Until the end of 2005, no banking mechanism existed in Afghanistan, except for the *hawala* system. Opium flowed out of the country. How did the earnings come back? It could not really return in cash since (a) there was no real banking system, and (b) there was nothing significant to buy. Payment came back to Afghanistan in product. I stood at the border and watched truck after truck enter Afghanistan full of cheap goods, carpets, old vehicles -- jalopies that are going to be resold in Afghanistan. Nothing left the country; the tractor trailer trucks departed empty. Nobody in the real world is providing cash credit to Afghans. No bank, factory, or trading company is providing credit to Afghan purchasers. Why is all the trade going one way? This is the ledger balance for the poppy. Rather than cash which does little good anyway because there is little to purchase, goods come back. That is the cycle. I believe this is the cycle that requires attention. It necessitates cooperation with the Iranian government. You cannot conduct drug eradication in Afghanistan without involving Iran, and I assume Pakistan. Follow the money. We spend millions of dollars to cut down poppy crops, which can be grown three months later in the same location. No one can patrol every field in Afghanistan. We alienate the farmers. Many are being ordered to grow poppy by local warlords and drug lords. The poppy crop has reached record levels. Our current strategy does not work and will not work as long as we take this tack. Moreover, Afghanistan's economic well being which we do not want to puncture depends on

poppy.

Q: Is there anything to do to eradicate the drug trade?

COHEN: You cannot eradicate poppy completely. Afghanistan is a rugged place. There is no way to prevent poppy from being grown unless the incentives for cultivation have been eradicated. As long as the price is attractive, farmers will try to grow it. One method may be to reduce the price of poppy. If the farmer gets less for his poppy, that is a disincentive to cultivate it. Alternative livelihood crops make sense. Provide alternatives but do not force them down the throats of the farmers. Let the farmers make the right economic decisions. It makes no sense to continue destroying a crop that can be easily replanted. We do not want to piss off farmers who then turn around and lend support to the Taliban. Repurchase of poppy and destruction does create a moral hazard situation whereby farmers may prefer not to stop growing poppy and be subsidized. Ultimately, however, somehow poppy prices have to come down to levels comparable to other crops. Economic tools have to be employed to reduce poppy cultivation, not just force.

I have not given much thought to the methods of going after the money. I am not an expert. The answer, I suppose, must be both supply and demand driven. As Iran is discovering, to their chagrin, if opium is available and nothing is done on the demand side, demand will just keep rising.

Q: Did you have any role in the drug business?

COHEN: No, I did not. The anti-poppy program was run out of the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) office in Kabul. USAID promoted alternative livelihoods programs. Various projects that promoted alternative crops had mixed success. Frankly, our engagement with poppy eradication could have put people like me in greater danger. Had PRTs engaged in drug eradication, PRT personnel would have risked becoming a target. PRTs should not make waves. PRTs have their hands full just dealing with local security issues, including the Taliban.

I understand the Taliban and drug lords often worked together or were one and the same. At least from the PRT perspective, as long as the rural population did not feel persecuted and development assistance continued to flow into the communities, there was a benign acceptance. If PRT personnel destroyed poppy, alienated Afghans could have made everything more difficult.

Q: Let us talk about Herat, religion and the mullahs. What was the role of mullahs?

COHEN: There are mullahs all over Afghanistan. Many so-called mullahs are no more mullahs than you or I. Often, a mullah was simply someone who called himself a mullah and was uneducated.

Q: We have such issues with preachers.

COHEN: Those who are not ordained. Note though that Mullahs have a significant role in

Afghan society.

A Shiite-Sunni divide did exist. In Herat the sectarian divide was not as deep as the ethnic. Sunni and Shia generally lived peacefully as neighbors. Most Shia were Hazara, an ethnic group generally viewed unfavorably by other Afghans, especially the Sunni Pashtu. The Taliban, as I mentioned earlier, had persecuted the Hazara unmercifully. In Herat, animosity lay dormant. However, in February 2006 the hatreds surfaced during the Shia holiday of Ashura which commemorates the martyrdom of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad.

Q: This is when they beat themselves?

COHEN: That is correct. The 10th day of the Muharram is commemorated by the Shia. During Ashura, Shiite clerics led prayers and delivered sermons at Herat's main mosque.

I mentioned these riots earlier. On this particular Ashura, local hoodlums associated with Ismael Khan (IK) and his Jamiat Islami instigated anti-Shia attacks. At the time I was out of the country. IK's henchmen launched violent anti-Shia disturbances. Riots broke out throughout the city. Even the PRT was targeted by demonstrators. The violence was clearly premeditated. At least a dozen Heratis were killed, more were seriously hurt. Later, Shia representatives told me the hospital had turned away wounded Shia seeking treatment. I cannot confirm this allegation. I believe the disturbances were launched by IK loyalists, in part, in order to portray Governor Anwari, a Hazara and a Shiite, look weak. President Karzai then undercut the governor further. Apparently panicked by the disturbances, he instructed IK, his minister of water and energy, to go to Herat to mediate an end to the crisis. IK immediately flew to Herat where he was received by his many loyalists. He met the governor and other local authorities.

I returned to Herat about a week after the riots. A tense ceasefire covered the city. Discussions seeking to resolve the crisis had gone back and forth. As I said, Herat traditionally enjoyed sectarian tranquility. The riots had been a shock to the system. It did not take Sherlock Holmes to investigate its causes. I was certain that Ismael Khan's henchmen were responsible. In my view, Karzai had blundered by sending IK back to resolve the crisis. Because of Karzai's cavalier treatment of Governor Anwari, many believed the governor would be out of office very shortly. Even I supposed a grace period of a few months might be all the time the governor had left in Herat. There was fear that IK or one of his loyal sub-commanders would replace Anwari.

This is what IK probably calculated -- that Governor Anwari would be crippled and the people of Herat would clamor for him to return and retake the reigns of provincial power. He would then serve as both governor and minister, a concentration of power second to none in Afghanistan.

Why would he want to do this? Why return to Herat when he is already a minister in Kabul? I thought it was the money. The government had begun to put the clamp on the Herat customs house, a huge source of revenue. Customs revenue collected in Herat formed a large portion of GOA-generated revenue. When IK was governor, his people ran the customs house. He took the money for his Herat projects, and for himself. Only a small portion of the revenue reached central government coffers in Kabul. He was no longer governor but until early 2006 his cronies remained at the customs house. With our pressure, the GOA replaced the top people at customs.

IK's control over customs and its revenue was severed. It was hoped revenue would now flow straight to the central government. I suspected IK did not want to lose control of the money. He likely strategized that his triumphant return to Herat would allow him to regain control over the customs revenue. There was little chance of that happening given our focused attention to customs reform in general. But I believe this was IK's elaborate scheme which led to the Ashura riots. Like the dog that did not bark, the riots just did not fit the city's history of sectarian tranquility.

Much to his credit, Governor Anwari proved to be adept at both politics and diplomacy. He demonstrated competent leadership following the crisis and he survived in office. He was still governor two years later.

I enjoyed a close personal relationship with one of IK's key lieutenants, Haji Baqi. Mike Metrinko who had served at the Herat PRT earlier had suggested I contact Baqi. I found Baqi friendly and informed. When I knew him, Haji Baqi was working at what I called the Ministry of Kamaz, the ubiquitous Soviet trucks. I am not sure it was a real job but it did provide the Haji some patronage. If there was any subtle message that needed passing to the IK people, I trusted Haji would take care of it.

I will relate a funny anecdote about Haji Baqi. One evening in his house, we were conversing. His teenage son was serving tea. Out of the blue, I asked Haji how many sons he had. Haji Baqi answered "fourteen." "No," I said, "I asked how many sons you had, not how old you son was." The boy turned to his father. "Father, you have seventeen sons." He did not even learn how many daughters he had! Big families were the rule. The antiquities dealer, Haji Sultan Hamidy, an ancient man who for decades had a well known handicrafts and antiquities shop across from the main mosque, told me he had eighteen children from two wives – twelve and six. Hamidy also operated the blue glass factory where a hunchback hand blew the glass in a small room a few doors away.

During my assignment I sought to promote women's issues. It was a hard slog and I wish I had had more success. For example, a group of twenty teenage girls had formed up a basketball club, something absolutely unique in Herat. The girls received uniforms from the Italians. They practiced in a decrepit barn-like building in the central park. I knew that the Public Diplomacy (PD) section at the embassy was planning to bring a basketball coach to Kabul to work with local basketball players. My request to PD to have the coach come to Herat kept bouncing around PD and was eventually brushed with the ultimate excuse: security concerns by the Regional Security Officer. In another instance, a half dozen handicapped women who also happened to be journalists started a women's newspaper called *Tahime*. To my knowledge, it was the only one of its kind in the country. To keep publishing each week, the newspaper needed some support. Operating expenses for one year were \$5,000. They needed a digital camera, a printer, and some office furniture. I submitted a request for funding to Counterpart International which was managing an USAID small grants program. The paperwork was totally out of proportion to the level of help being sought. We asked the Italians for help and they donated computers to the women. But I was not successful in getting funding from Kabul for the group.

Let me sum up my observations. In some ways little has changed in Afghanistan since the

turbulence of the 1990s. Warlords retain the levers of power; they are represented in high level government positions. They are still influential and powerful. But their hold on Afghanistan is weakening. The question remains who or what will fill the void.

The 2005 parliamentary elections contributed to the current “warlordism.” President Karzai decided that in the parliamentary elections there would be no primary or run-off system. Instead, it would be a plurality system with no threshold for being on the ballot. Anyone who wanted to run for public office could run. By law a certain percentage of parliamentarians had to be women. Dozens competed for each parliament seat -- and many candidates represented no more than a neighborhood constituency, a street, or one village. The vote was spilt exceedingly narrowly. The winning candidate often achieved victory with no more than one and a half percent of the vote! Who were the candidates able to muster one or two percent of the vote to win? Often they were the Jamiat Islami or candidates loyal to IK or another warlord. Even though the vast majority of Afghans did not prefer these candidates, they were usually elected.

During those elections, there were occasional examples of candidates winning with ten or even fifteen percent of the vote. One female candidate in Herat, Fauzia Galani, won with an amazing low double digit percentage. (According to my sources, she won overwhelmingly simply because her campaign posters and election photo showed she had a beautiful face and showed a scandalous wisp of dark hair over her forehead.) Many candidates were elected with less than two percent of the vote. The make-up of the new parliament tilted towards the warlords, Islamists, and hard-line factionalists. Perhaps, this represented a premature birth of the democratic political process.

Afghanistan does not yet have political parties in the traditional western sense. But give USAID credit for its democracy program run by NDI, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs based in Washington. I participated in a few of NDI's events. According to NDI, in early 2006 twenty-nine political parties were registered in Herat alone! That was too many. I urged at NDI gatherings that the parties consider consolidation. Most parties, I observed, shared the same views.

The political process was just beginning. It will take some time to take root. In the interim, many who win elections will be those who represent the existing power bases, including warlord factions.

Q: Anything else about Herat before we move on?

COHEN: I have one more story to tell. You spoke about mullahs. A very curious incident took place with me as the centerpiece. It involved one of the main instigators of the Ashura riots, a so-called mullah named Farouk Husseni. He was slimy, but I did not always choose my contacts. We were discussing Islam in my office. He invited me to the Friday prayers at his mosque April 21, 2006. To show respect, I readily agreed. This was a unique opportunity.

Fridays are a day off for PRT interpreters. At the time I was actually interviewing candidates to serve as my assistant, or FSN (Foreign Service national). As part of the interview process, I asked candidate finalists to escort me to a meeting and provide interpretation. I wanted to

observe how they performed. On this particular Friday, the candidate I had asked to assist did not show up. I was prepared to leave for the mosque and still had no interpreter. I tried to track him down. I finally reached a family member who claimed the candidate was at the hospital with his sick mother, an extraordinary lame excuse for someone seeking a prestigious job. I did not have an interpreter but went to the mosque anyway. I figured it would be disrespectful not to attend.

I showed up at the mosque without an interpreter. My Italian escort waited in their vehicles. Before prayers I met with Houseni and we sat for about half an hour and communicated the best we could. It was not much. He presented me with a Koran. I attempted to read some Arabic. He invited me to sit in the front row for prayers. We went through the entire prayer service. I stood up when everyone else stood. I sat when everyone sat. I could not follow along. I did not understand a word of what was happening. As the prayers ended, the mosque filled with men. It became very crowded. Armed security appeared. This, I thought, was quite curious. Finally, at the very end of the prayers, Houseni announced something. He called me Abdullah; my new name is Abdullah, he said. He announced, in Dari of course, that I had converted to Islam. Houseni also had contacted the local vernacular press which showed up.

I was really upset. The congregants reached out to touch me. There was bedlam. The guards tried to keep order. I made it out of there, barely. Reporters tried to ask me questions. I emerged from the crowd and I got back to the car. The Italians escorted me to the PRT. I contacted the embassy and gave them a heads up on what had happened. Sure enough, the press had gotten a report out quickly. The embassy was already getting BBC and Reuters inquiries as to the American diplomat in Heart who converted to Islam. I had to nip this in the bud. I prepared a statement that denied the report which the embassy used. I explained it was a misunderstanding. I had not converted. To set the record straight I gave an interview to a local journalist. The embassy did some small damage control. It was a one day news story. But I was really pissed at Houseni.

A week later I had my chance at revenge. Houseni apparently learned that I was unhappy about the episode. I had poured out my venom to the governor, to Haji Baqi, and others. I explained what had happened. All of them condemned this behavior as un-Islamic, that Islam no longer forced people to convert – although I am not sure that is true.

Houseni contacted me. He wanted to come by the PRT to discuss things. I said fine. Beforehand I arranged to have two officers, an American and a Hungarian, wait next door out of sight. I also put a tiny tape recorder in my shirt pocket. Houseni came by my office. We were in the conference room and I let him talk. By the way, all the interpreters at the PRT were so scared of this guy they refused to interpret this meeting for me. Finally, Hashim, one of the better interpreters, stepped forward. Houseni claimed the incident at the mosque was a misunderstanding. He tried to be apologetic and finished what he had to say.

Finally, I spoke. “Under Islam, is not a mosque, God’s house, a sanctuary of peace? When inside a mosque, is it not the safest place in the world?” Houseni answered “of course!” “Then, why would I require armed protection in God’s house? Is it not a violation of God’s tenants to enter a mosque bearing arms? Does that not violate the sanctity of the mosque?” He could not readily answer. I continued. “When in a mosque, God’s house, must not the sanctity of the holy place be preserved? To pray, communicate directly with God?” He responded yes, of course. “Then why

did you allow journalists to enter God's house, to disturb my own communication with God, and disturb everyone else's? Is that not improper in a house of God?" He could not answer that one either. I took his Koran that he had gifted to me. I kissed it out of respect and handed it back to him. I said I cannot keep this holy book which was given to me in false pretences. He must take it back. I had in my office a New Testament Bible, left by one of my predecessors. I handed it to him. I said take this as my gift to you. I called in the two officers who had been listening through the wall. I lectured Houseni whom I knew had instigated the Ashura riots. I told him that if any more sectarian problems arose in Herat, this city, any violence, then he would become my guest - at either Guantanamo or Bagram!

I tried to shake him up but am uncertain I succeeded. Since then, there have been no serious sectarian problems or riots in Herat. I suspect the message drifted back to Ismael Khan. But I understand Houseni is still making trouble in Herat.

That was my story about becoming a Muslim. Some people in the embassy did not permit me to live it down. Every time he would see me, the DCM, Dick Norland, called me Abdullah!

End of reader