U.S. MISSION TO UN AGENCIES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

READER
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VICTOR SKILES
USAID Representative, World Food Program
Rome (1973-1976)

Victor Skiles was born in Idaho. He attended the University of Idaho at Moscow and received his BA in 1940. He also served in the US Navy in Germany. His career has included positions in countries such as Greece, Israel, East Africa, Ceylon, and Afghanistan. He was interviewed by John Kean on December 4, 1995.

SKILES: Before I left Kabul I thought I was going fairly quickly to Rome as the AID representative to the World Food Program and the FAO, but that turned out to take more time than I had anticipated.

International organizations had always had a bit of a mystique for most of us. To the extent that we were internationalists, they were more than a little bit interesting but they'd never been a very big part of our operation or our consideration. They'd been somewhere out on the fringe. In the early '60s, we had a small cell in PPC which had come over from the State Department,

concerned primarily, as I recall, with the Columbo Plan and the UNCTAD, the trade and development organization of the UN. By 1972, a lot of changes had been made program-wise and in terms of organization. There was a fairly large group in PPC working on international organizations. Several people on the UN proper and what were known as the specialized agencies -- one separate unit on contact with the IMF and IBRD (which there had been for some time), and limited numbers with the other functions with other UN agencies. Part of the process, as you recall, and this refers to the organization comments earlier, had been a growing recognition of AID in a role of responsibility for coordinating U.S. development assistance abroad (without necessarily relieving other agencies of their interests or corollary roles as we will see later); and at the same time the desire on the part of AID and the adoption of policies to rely more on the international agencies both to shape and to carry out assistance programs. Now, most of us -- certainly myself included -- had an interpretation far too narrow, having in mind primarily the reliance on the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the IMF to set policies with respect to given areas -- given countries -- and to help the country provide the framework for programs within which the rest of us would work. This, of course, was not new, we'd been doing it for some time in the countries where IBRD had taken an interest and had sent out survey teams. They were able to pick our brains as well as everybody else's and came up with some very reputable country development programs. Where this was the case it was advantageous for us to fit into it. And to a lot of people, this meant that we were no longer so involved in overall development concepts and problems as much as we were involved in picking out parts of that process which we tend to define as the projects.

Q: Or sectors?

SKILES: Or sector programs, yes. But to others it meant more than that. It meant the other UN agencies also increasing their roles in the development business, hence in PPC an increase in their role of working with the United Nations agencies. This also relates, of course, to the revised style and role of USAID's reorganization work which was going on at that time and was part of the complex that I walked into and that explains, to some extent, why it took so long for me to get to Rome. Let me hasten to say, though, that the main reasons for the delay were frictions and disagreements that had built up between the groups and the people involved. When I went through Washington on the way to Idaho to indulge in that favorite pastime that we call home leave, I was advised that the job was all set up, that I was the chosen instrument to carry it out. There were a few little problems to work out with State but these would be taken care of while I was on home leave and when I came back I should expect to be going in short order. I suppose this was in mid '72, and, as it turned out those things had not been worked out with State and they weren't for quite a long time. I didn't get to Rome until April of 1973. So I had quite enough time in Washington to get a re-education -- something of an education on the international institutions and to work on various problems such as the one on implementation of the reorganization. During the process, I became convinced that some things we were doing with the international organizations were pretty bad, in the sense that, to use the example of the project approval process, what we were doing, it seemed to me, made it impossible for the UNDP to operate with any semblance of efficiency in carrying out a development program. It took forever to get clearance by members of the governing body for a project which UNDP wanted to carry out, partly because the function just wasn't taken all that seriously in AID / Washington, and there were not competent personnel assigned to the task of getting the job done.

Q: Let me see if I understand. Can you elaborate a little bit -- just to be specific -- whether the projects you were talking about were UNDP projects or USAID projects?

SKILES: UNDP projects. But the system that had been set up -- well, we'll come back to this later because it affects most of the whole UN system. The system that had been set up was for project clearance by members of the governing council of the international agency before the agency could go ahead with any kind of implementation. In AID Washington, there was a huge backlog of projects that had not been processed -- we had not said yes; we had not said no. I could just picture the guys at UNDP in New York holding their breath for month after month while we got around to deciding whether to clear a project or not. In other words, it just wasn't working.

Q: And was this a peculiar problem in the USAID relationship with UNDP or did other countries have similar problems or exercise similar foot dragging?

SKILES: I don't know how bad the problem was with other countries. Two points. First, especially if we are encouraging a growing role in development for them, we should do our best to try to bring about the conditions which will make it possible for the UN agency to be an efficient and effective operator of its program. Second, to the extent the U.S. takes on an operational role, we'd better get ourselves set up to do a decent job of operating. Frankly I did not find this in PPC - Program Policy and Coordination - which was the central body for United Nations activities in AID Washington. People were too busy writing papers, going to meetings, preparing position papers for an upcoming meeting - far less mundane things than making sure that the operational steps in a program of a UN agency were properly and expeditiously taken care of.

I think it will save time if I first try to sketch in a bit of the United Nations framework, then of the U.S. framework for working with the UN, then come more specifically to the FAO/WFP complex.

The UN is not a straight line hierarchy. It is not a top to bottom organization in the sense of approval, directive, and administration, though there are down and up reporting channels and in some phases coordinating devices. Generally speaking, the General Assembly and the Security Council are the entities we tend to think of as the UN, headquarters New York City. They deal primarily with political and security affairs. They are serviced to considerable extent by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), also in New York, with respect to economic, social, cultural, educational, health and related fields. Then there are a number of specialized agencies dealing with such things as Development (UNDP), child feeding (UNICEF), health (WHO), education (UNESCO). I wouldn't care to get into a discussion of the degree of independence of the top structure (UNGA, Security Council, ECOSOC), but it does seem to me that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD, or World Bank) are the most independent, perhaps FAO next, simply because it came into existence in 1945, even before the UN proper was organized. The World Food Program came much later (1962) and is a bit of a hybrid. Its title is UN-FAO World Food Program, which means that it does report to both FAO and ECOSOC.

Each of the agencies has a governing body on which the U.S. is represented. These are sometimes referred to as the legislative or authorizing authority. They set the policies, approve the programs and projects, the budgets and so on. Then the agency has the administration role.

On the U.S. side the State Department has the primary responsibility for international relations, conferences and organizations. These latter two head up in the Bureau for International Organization Affairs (IO), which functions on a fairly straightforward basis for political and security affairs, although the White House is a party not infrequently for the former and, as you can see, security matters pretty quickly get diffused or shared. For economic and social affairs and agencies there has been a greater tendency for the subject matter departments to take a leading role, and in more recent years (speaking now of the early 1970s) with increasing recognition of AID responsibilities in the development arena, the UN agencies' increasing involvement in development, and because it handles the funds in large part for a few other functions such as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, AID is involved. For the most part this responsibility resides in PPC which has a unit corresponding to IO in State.

For FAO since the early days (1945) the Department of Agriculture (USDA) has had the primary substantive responsibilities for liaison, but other agencies including AID enter into it - and keeping in mind State's basic responsibility, there necessarily are interdepartmental and interagency arrangements for backstopping in Washington. Obviously such an arrangement leaves plenty of room for jealousies, overlap, bureaucratic interplay and sometimes friction.

The UN-FAO World Food Program was started while George McGovern was in the White House as the first Coordinator of Food for Peace, a job that was subsequently passed on to AID. In simple terms WFP was to be an international worldwide institution designed to used food for feeding people, for economic and social development and for meeting emergency situations; perhaps primarily to improve nutrition levels, food accessibility, and try to help improve the possibilities that recipient countries might avoid a recurrence of the causes of the food problem. Donor countries make the food available, as well as limited amounts of cash. WFP is the Administrator. The governing board, called the Intergovernmental Committee or IGC, is made up of a couple dozen member countries one-half elected by ECOSOC and one half by FAO Council.

This FAO Council in turn is elected by the FAO Conference and serves as the governing body between meetings of the Conference every other year. Both the Council and the IGC meet twice a year. The Council has a limited number of standing committees which carry on between meetings of the Council;
IGC does not.

These, then, are the governing bodies for FAO and WFP - Conference, Council, IGC.

It is State's responsibility to follow the protocol and designate the delegation to each of the formal meetings of these bodies, but in practice the Secretary of Agriculture heads the delegation to the Conference, a senior officer of USDA (but not so senior as the Secretary) leads the delegation to the Council; and the leader of the IGC delegation rotates between USDA, usually

the Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Activities and the Coordinator for Food for Peace in AID.

We've been speaking of the governing bodies which set the policies, approve the programs and projects, authorize the financing and so on. With regard to the agencies, again keeping in mind State's responsibility for representation, the primary substantive contacts are USDA for FAO and AID for WFP. The backstopping in Washington for WFP follows in a sense the financing for Title II commodities (the grant program of PL 480) which is USDA for commodities and AID for administration. They participate jointly in the administration of Title II through an interagency staff Committee (which also includes Treasury, Commerce and OMB) as well as daily contacts. AID generally is responsible for program operations and USDA for commodity availabilities. To get Food for Peace (FFP) in context, I probably only need to point out that in 1972 the value of commodities for continuing operations were about 15 percent for WFP and 85 percent for non-governmental organizations and government to government programs, so obviously there is competition for commodities and a desire for consistency among clients. In AID it is FFP not PPC that backstops the World Food Program.

Backstopping for FAO is much more varied and follows along the lines of substantive interest. For AID I mentioned PPC in connection with the governing bodies, but it certainly is not the only unit interested and involved, and this applies even more so to contacts with the agency. There also are TA/AGR (agriculture staff of the technical assistance bureau), the regional bureaus (during my time for reasons which will become apparent later it was primarily the African bureau), the Office of Disaster Relief and FFP, the latter partly because of the relationship of WFP and FAO, and because FFP is concerned on a broader basis with world hunger and therefore special initiatives such as the World Food Conference. I also mentioned "primary substantive contacts" but of course this is only part of the story, partly because FAO is regarded as having more general capabilities than scientific agriculture as well a being part of the United Nations family of specialized agencies. The example closest to home is that PPC had decided to set up three jobs - one in Geneva, one in Paris and one in Rome - to help carry out the mandate to do more developmental activities through the specialized agencies. During the "period of patience" waiting for a resolution of the problems which already existed, largely between State and AID, or perhaps State and FFP, the Coordinator of FFP had put on hold the appointment for "his" job. PPC decided to go ahead with "their" Rome job along with appointments to Geneva and Paris, and once again I was designated to fill it. About this time the problems got resolved and the Coordinator insisted in going ahead with my placement in that job, so naturally we worked out a sort of compromise and I finally went out. I arrived on April 13th.

Q: How would you characterize your mandate in relation to those agencies as operating institutions?

SKILES: They are quite different. PPC was mostly interested in pursuing the policy to increase the use of or reliance on the international institutions rather than bilateral programs for development assistance. Influence is to be achieved both in working with the headquarters of the agency and through the medium of participation in preparations for and the meetings of the governing bodies. Financing of activities is to be through the regular UN channels. In the case of

Rome the specific target would be much more FAO than WFP. Food for Peace, on the other hand, has a more specific responsibility for commodities supplied with PL 480 resources and the mandate is to utilize the mechanism of the World Food Program to carry out a program of feeding and nutrition improvement with a concentration on development effects of WFP projects. Financing is from PL 480 and AID. Interest in the projects is rather universal and naturally the U.S. tries to see that they are consistent with or complementary to our bilateral programs. Commodity usage must also take into account another major FFP customer which is the non-governmental institutions. The mandate to FFP includes compliance or adherence to all those conditions and requirements, largely Congressionally mandated, that PL 480 works under. These go a lot further, it seems to me, than they do in the normal AID programs in terms of Congressional participation down to the nuts and bolts. It's partly because funding support comes from the farm and industry interests as well as the political interests, and because of the historically close relationships between the Administration and the Congress working through the Agriculture committees which in turn stay close to the industry and farm interests.

Q: Were these conditions related primarily to usual marketings, to non-interference in commercial trade or did they have to do with more on the development side?

SKILES: The conditions or restrictions deal more with things like usual marketing and non-trade interference. And of course, there are a number of other guidelines that have grown up over the years, such as self-help regulations with respect to selling commodities that are provided under PL 480, loan versus grant criteria, etc. But for the most part, I think it's a responsibility to the Hill and to the providers of the commodities to conform to commercial practices with respect to buying and moving commodities, to shipping and all this sort of thing. AID's interest goes beyond that, of course, to the feeding and development projects carried out by WFP.

Q: Now, the World Food Program projects that you were dealing with had what kind of characteristics?

SKILES: They varied tremendously, John. Improved nutrition and food supply always were primary considerations. The biggest projects were food for work activities - reclamation, irrigation, road building -- but a lot of school feeding, mother and child care and so on. One of my main charges was to encourage them, wherever possible, to have the types of projects which would also have a developmental -- which would be using food as a major input but which would have development or one of our other policy goals as a target. For example, when we enunciated the Women in Development movement, it was a fairly simple approach to try to make sure that projects financed or supplied by WFP paid attention to this element.

Q: Therefore, you'd have significant benefit for women's participation and women as beneficiaries of development action.

SKILES: Exactly. A significant kind of guidance was, in effect, an area guidance. We were placing heavy emphasis, along about that time, on a focus on the least developed countries. You recall, we go through swings on this thing. The islands of development concept was basically to take advantage of the promising areas --promising countries -- and try to make showcases out of them by ensuring that you got good development rapidly. This concept coincided with the

sufficiency argument - insure adequate assistance so the total development effort will bring about self-financing abilities. Now, it's almost the other end of the spectrum to swing over and talk about concentrating on the least developed or the poorest countries, but this is what was happening.

Q: Not only that but the poorest people in the poorest countries.

SKILES: Right. This is what was happening and we were pursuing the principles in the UN organizations as well as with our bilateral programs.

Q: These programs could respond to both emergency situations and participate in longer run, larger scale development actions, right?

SKILES: Yes, At the extremes, these are quite separable, but they tend to come toward the middle. This probably will come up later, but I thought my efforts to help improve the competence of both FAO and WFP to handle emergency situations were much more effective than any influence on the longer-term projects, about which their concepts usually weren't much different than ours would have been. We had many cases, for example, where, well you just think of India or Bangladesh, any of those countries that have food shortages, and it's easy to see how, in supplying food to help make up for the immediate problem you can devise work programs or training programs directed toward avoidance or amelioration of recurrence of similar problems in the future. The biggest projects WFP had, I suppose, were Indian Food for Work projects (as they probably were in the case of the bilateral programs) in which a lot of labor to improve water utilization projects, rural roads, etc. was "paid for" by the imported food. Food for Work. Now, when it came to real short-term emergencies, where food was the main ingredient, WFP wasn't all that well equipped to take care of those except on an individual country basis. They had no over-all emergency handling apparatus. We worked diligently at improving this capacity. So, in answer to your question now, sure there were a lot of emergency or semi-emergency type things in the WFP projects and progressively the real short-term emergencies. There were a lot of supplementary feeding programs in areas like school lunches, mother and child care facilities, that sort of thing, and in a much broader sense, in rural development projects such as in Egypt where you had a fairly substantial contribution to a fairly substantial undertaking.

Q: Yes, and I suppose, if my experience indicates anything, there were a lot of instances where we were seeking to use WFP as an instrument to get rural development through the construction of roads and other facilities in rural areas which could be accomplished largely through labor under Food for Work arrangements.

SKILES: Right. Those probably were the largest single category of projects in terms of WFP's use of food aid. Actually WFP's priorities, aside from direct feeding, were not all that different from ours in AID. The main difference is that they had very little cash to work with; food was the coin of the realm.

Q: Who were the people you worked most directly with in your Rome assignment?

SKILES: John, let me get one other thought in here before I respond to that.

Q: Sure.

SKILES: What I was talking about earlier was complications within AID and between AID and other U.S. government agencies in getting prepared for and in working with these international institutions. On the UN side, which is the point I wanted to get in before we get to the work relationship aspects, it's just as complicated. You have the General Assembly making supposedly political or security decisions, then it's up to some other body to carry them out. Sometimes, these are very useful, as they were during the '73-74 food crisis when the Assembly passed a resolution calling for a World Food Conference. Incidentally this was quite consistent with U.S. policies and initiatives at the time.

Q: But it grew specifically out of the perceived world food crisis of that '73-74 period, right?

SKILES: Right. But I was trying to lay the groundwork for a sensible answer to your query about who you work with by emphasizing three things. One is the complex backstopping in Washington for UN activities.

The second is the UN framework, which I'll conclude by repeating that each of the UN agencies has its own governing body, of which the U.S. is one of the members. Third is the U.S. relationship directly with the UN agency with regard to the programs it carries out, which is aside from the U.S. participation in the governing body, but certainly related to it. The second is the authorizing or legislative function: the third, the administration function.

It seemed to me that a couple of things happened in Washington in 1972, and one world-wide perhaps more in '73, which had a great deal to do with what I worked on, and therefore with whom. The latter was the increased recognition that the world in general was in a real food crisis situation - shortages were showing up everywhere and the available buffer stocks even in the U.S. were being depleted; the significance of FAO and WFP in this emergent situation had widespread recognition. The former related to changes in operating relationships between the U.S. and WFP on the handling of commodities for agreed programs, and greatly simplified my tasks in Rome on that front. This is going to sound like minor stuff, but to simplify the concepts, let's just say that the major change was to permit WFP to call forward (USDA does the buying) the commodities on a consolidated or program basis rather than continue doing it one project at a time. The technique is a "Blanket PA" - purchase authorization. The second was to give WFP much more latitude in arranging for its own shipping rather than being dependent on our process where the USDA...

Q: With all the 50-50 shipping provisions and all of the U.S. flag requirements and all that? Or, did those still apply?

SKILES: They still applied but it's much easier to do it on a bulk basis than it is on a project-by-project or commodity-by-commodity basis.

Q: In other words, as long as they complied in the overall, there were considered to be in

compliance. They didn't have to comply with these regulations for each small activity separately?

SKILES: Correct. Curiously enough that was a contentious argument for years, wasn't it? But I think by this time much of the argument had been dissipated so long as they conformed in general to the spirit of the requirement which was that at least 50 percent by type of shipping move on American ships. That wasn't so bad.

Q: My impression, as you talk, is that this was one hell of a complicated bureaucratic environment where you had to relate to many different policy centers in the U.S. Government and at the same time to examine many different issues that were funneling through WFP and FAO?

SKILES: Well, that's the way it seemed to me, yes. That's what makes it fun. And the other thing that was important to me, just as an individual, is that I not get lost -- not let all my time be taken up with matters like this which were essentially operational matters. Perhaps this is a good point to drop one of Jack Bell's old stories. Jack, as you recall, after having been the Mission Director in Pakistan, was our regional administrator in AID/W, and after a fairly short period on that job, he said that an individual's point of view seems to change a great deal depending on whether he's the operator of a vehicle or a pedestrian. I've always thought there was a lot of Mark Twain intelligence in that comment. And it was certainly true of us in Rome. I suppose you could say that my point of view was that WFP was a separate entity - an international organization set up to run a program - and that our role should be to make it possible for them to operate efficiently and effectively. We should exert our influence, but should not inject ourselves in an operational role or try to police them on individual operational steps, massaging and re-massaging. Those two simplifications that I mentioned in terms of WFP functions had, I think, a great deal to do with my opportunity to exercise a different kind of an ambition in Rome. These were the kinds of things that the USDA in particular wanted a careful look at. I remember Andy Maier (Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Activities, USDA) telling me when they were talking about a specific shipping problem and he said, "Well, hell, that's part of your job. That's why you were sent over here." Well, this was an eye-opener to me; I'd never heard that, but it was a matter of instantaneous recognition. Of course, that's one of the things that they were worried about when the job was set up, and what they'd been doing, apparently, for a long, long time: monitoring individual shipments, approving individual movements of commodities, even the charters. This sort of thing is automatically policed in Washington anyway - why try to do it in both places? And I had been able to back away from that almost completely, thus giving myself a much better opportunity for more effective participation in the planning and arrangement of WFP's program activities.

Now, having said this if I can digress for a moment, I was rather startled in thumbing through some old appointments calendars, to see how much time I really did spend on commodity problems, for example negotiations with WFP on commodities for projects. There was a lot more of it than I . . .one that was carrying out field programs in development.

Q: Now you seem to be saying. . . increasingly during this period, FAO came to be the implementing agent of some or many UNDP programs, right?

SKILES: Oh, yes. What I was going to say is that gradually they got more into that kind of thing and by the time I got there they had a number of field programs and the department that handled field programs supposedly was to be my main contact in FAO as distinct from WFP. They were appointing more FAO country representatives, but this fairly quickly ran into budgetary problems, and the movement was largely overtaken by critical short-term problems. By budgetary problems I mean basically that UNDP was to finance these activities for which FAO had been asked to supply the manpower, but UNDP didn't get sufficient money to carry out their part of the deal, so the movement was not progressing very rapidly.

Q: Now you happened then to be in Rome during this very critical period that we mentioned before of the severe world food crisis and a great deal of responsibility fell to FAO for assessing the nature, extent, and priorities involved in meeting that crisis. Isn't that right?

SKILES: John, now you're setting the framework for the next chapter. I perhaps digressed a little too much in trying to give some examples of the roles of other backstoppers who were interested in things other than the WFP operation. But even they, in AID terms, it seems to me, acknowledged that for something like the World Food Conference, AID simply is not the number one organization involved in it. There are some people who are interested and involved as you go along but the basic responsibility for it is not in AID. It's a bit of a dilemma because the underlying problems are basic reasons for AID to be in existence, and the search for improvements in agricultural production and relief to the food shortage problems are indeed among our main responsibilities. Yet when it comes to fostering an international conference on the subject we are not the main players. We do, however, have the front-line responsibility on assistance and emergency relief. So this is a pattern that I tried to replicate in Rome. If it was something that AID had a number one interest in then I thought I ought to get into it without too many restraints. If it was something that USDA or State has basic responsibility for, then we had to sort of weigh the pros and cons and decide who was to do what on it.

Q: State had representatives in Rome in the Embassy and were they stepping on your toes?

SKILES: From their viewpoint, of course, it's the other way around. As I emphasized earlier, State is responsible for representation to international conferences and international organizations. In Rome, the FODAG, so-called, is always headed up by a State Department officer, Counselor for FAO Affairs. Now the issues are not clear-cut and never can be, because the customers overlap. Because the interests of the backstoppers overlap, you're always going to have problems of this kind. Hopefully, they don't raise to the level of a crisis like they had before I went out and while I was waiting to go out. The competition between agencies and between parts of agencies continued during all the time I was out there. PPC always preferred to have its own man reporting directly to PPC, and they tried various proposals, usually in the form of sending out additional, more junior individual to concentrate on the World Food Program and have me freed up to work on developmental activities. Frankly, I wasn't all that anxious to have additional staff there, partly because a big part of the job was to keep from crossing wires with State. Second, the most important aspect is the degree of influence with FAO and WFP -- not really helped by additional staff. At the time I left, three different people were appointed: one just on Food for Peace, one on developmental activities, and one on African activities, primarily

the Sahel. Now, how it worked out, I don't know.

Q: The latter was because the second round of drought crisis in Africa was emerging, right?

SKILES: Yes, but I think more because after the original thrust for emergency assistance in the Sahel in '72, '73, '74, a Sahel Development Program was organized and separately authorized by the Congress and this was going to go on for some time.

Q: Yeah, I forgot about that. That's right.

SKILES: By that time both WFP and FAO were heavily involved in carrying out programs - often with special AID funding. There was a desire on the part of AID to continue this arrangement and build on it.

One of the African Bureau people involved in and responsible for a lot of the Sahel stuff in Washington and who did have a lot of contacts with FAO and some with WFP had concluded that it was better to try to work out of Rome than from Washington and I think this was basically behind that appointment. Well, to get back on track and get at your main point, it seemed to me that the most major influence of all on what I was to work on was simply the signs of the times: the development of a food crisis almost everywhere.

Production was down in crisis proportions in a great many countries, and even aside from this, FAO studies by then had indicated that per capita increases in food production were going down in the developing world as a whole. The population was growing faster than food production was, particularly in Africa.

Q: In Africa, you had some countries even where it was beginning to be apparent that you were having absolute declines in the volume.

SKILES: Yes. A number of other things happened at somewhat the same time. One of them is that the Soviet Union came into the world market because of crop problems in their area and they bought a lot of both food and feed. Another was the oil crisis, the embargo that arose out of the Middle Eastern problems, which created shortages of various kinds in various quarters, including foreign exchange in the U.S. as well as in most of the countries we were working with, simply because the price of oil for imports went up so much. We'll come later to the matter of fertilizers but fertilizer production was down; again there's a relationship to the oil embargo. Even in the U.S., our surplus food supplies were being drawn down and on a worldwide basis it was becoming apparent that there were going to be problems for some time in terms of total supply and even greater problems in terms of supply being in the places where it was needed. So it became -- in terms of my own working interests -- it became obvious that various elements of this problem were the things to be spending time on. Put another way, these were the problems that both FAO and WFP were going to be primarily concerned with.

I think this may be a good time to jump to the legislative side of the business because it brings in a lot of the stuff that you had in mind in the question you asked. Some of this is likely to be repetitive. The World Food Program was governed by an outfit called the Inter-Governmental

Committee, as I mentioned earlier, elected half by the FAO Council and half by UNESCO. It met twice a year and the delegation from the U.S. normally rotated in terms of its chairmanship between the Food for Peace Coordinator and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Affairs in USDA. These names will get confusing because for a long stretch there. . Well, as we said before, Andy Maier was the Agriculture man, he would head up one delegation; Hedges and AID would head up the next delegation, and then back to Agriculture. I guess, the way it worked was that the first IGC meeting I attended which was just about ten days after I arrived, was under the chairmanship of Agriculture, so Andy Maier was the head of the delegation. By the fall meeting, Andy Maier was the Food for Peace Coordinator so he still headed up the delegation.

Q: He came back again.

SKILES: He came back again but from a different position.

Q: That's interesting. That clarifies for me a confusion I had about his role. He happens to be a person I've had personal acquaintance with but not an official acquaintance with in these roles.

SKILES: Well, strangely enough, I had sort of tracked him around earlier but had never actually met him. He had been the administrative officer in Rome years earlier before he went to Kabul, and he'd been the administrative officer in the Embassy in Kabul but had left shortly before I arrived.

Q: And that's where I knew him.

SKILES: There was one other thing we had in common, that has to do with Agriculture. I hadn't actually met him until I started making the rounds in '72 to go to Rome and he was in the Agricultural function at that time. An old buddy of mine, named Ray Ioanes, was the administrator of Foreign Agriculture Service at that time and his first reaction when he heard I was interested in going was, "Go see Andy Maier. He's the one in Agriculture that looks out for that." Andy and Ray are old friends. Both must be good politicians.

Back to the IGC, it meets twice a year. This governing board has, I believe, 24 members. The meetings are held in the regular conference rooms at FAO -- very good arrangements, plenty of space, simultaneous translation facilities, all this sort of thing. The governing group approves the policies, principles, programs, ration levels, the projects which WFP is supposed to operate until the next meeting and considers the evaluation reports both on projects and on special subjects such as nutrition and the role of fortified foods. This conditioned my attitude. If we're doing all of this on the governing board level, that's really where it ought to be done rather than in the operating details. I saw a lot that could be done to help improve WFP's capacity to prepare well for these meetings, to sharpen the issues the governing board should concentrate on.

Q: So did it move in that direction?

SKILES: Oh, definitely, yes. The second organization is the FAO Conference. I really should have put it as the first organization because it's, by all odds, the biggest and the most important, and being the UN/FAO World Food Program the IGC really reports both to the FAO Conference

and ECOSOC. Let's deal with the Conference and the FAO Council together. The Conference is a group of ministerial representatives from the member nations, as I recall 108 at that time. The Council is an agent of the Conference, meets twice a year and among other things, does the preparatory work for the Conference. The Conference meets once every two years and puts on quite a show. That part of the Conference which meets as a Plenary, tends to run more to the political side than to the professional side. The Conference is divided up into three basic departments for carrying on the real work of the Conference. More later.

The Council, which is a much smaller organization, is the governing body between meetings of the Conference. Now, one of the idiosyncrasies at the time that I'm talking about -- the '73-'74 period -- is that the two main continuing bodies of the Council are the (A) the Program and Plan Committee, and (B) the Finance Committee. The ideosyncrasy is that the Program and Plan Committee was headed up by an American, a USDA official; on the Finance Committee, the U.S. also was represented, in the form of the State man, who was the Counselor of FAO Affairs in the Rome Embassy. Later, when he left Rome, he came back to State IO/AGR in Washington but he continued to function as a member of the Finance Committee of the FAO Council. This is almost a digression, but to me, those two things, plus the fact that I knew the State Department was not only interested in but jealous about its prerogatives with respect to the formal meetings and a fourth element which doesn't seem very big to us but was to them, goes by the label of "personnel" It's a little different than we normally regard personnel, but among other things, the various member countries were always trying to get their own nationals placed in FAO proper and WFP. We were no different. So those were the things I ought to stay away from -- try to keep my skirts clean on. But otherwise, responsibilities for following things were pretty much on a substantive basis. And anything dealing with assistance, whether food or agricultural (though the latter gets more contentious), and basically anything dealing with emergencies, seemed to be more my responsibility than State responsibility.

This is the basis on which we tried to sort things out. I would like to add "development" and that was true to a large degree, but FAO's ability to get into development activities relates directly to the Program and Plan and to Finance, so you can't lay full claim to that one either.

Q: And you found you had a reasonably good working relationship with the State people in Rome?

SKILES: Yeah. I thought so, particularly with the first FAO Counselor. With the second, I heard a few firecrackers back in Washington. And this, again, is the result of one of those normal, human reactions. The State man wants to feel that he heads an operational office and wants to be able to "supervise and direct" whereas AID generally tries to protect its position under a label such as "under the general guidance." (You may recall an earlier reference to the previous Ambassador. He can interject himself if he wants to. He is the President's representative. In my five years there he didn't). To some of them, depending on who the people are, AID is just a red flag, you know -- always has been. In other words, this is not unique to Rome. It's a problem with relationships everywhere.

In 1973, the Inter-Governmental Committee met within days of my arrival there, but in some respects, I felt like an old timer. I'd been on the job for 10 days. But the real point was that while

I'd been in Washington, I'd had the chance to participate in the preparations for the first meeting and this was a good education. I meant to use it earlier as an example of how the Washington agencies fit together on these various things, too. In effect the prospective leader of the delegation - the FFP Coordinator or the USDA man - chairs an interagency group which prepares position papers and in this case at least, much of the work was done by people from USDA. More so, I would say, than from AID though they were both very much involved in it, as was State. This was even more true of the preparatory work for the FAO Council; it was chaired by a man from USDA, although generally not the actual delegate who was usually higher in the pecking order.

Q: What were the issues that they were struggling with?

SKILES: Are you thinking mainly of WFP or the Council?

Q: The Council.

SKILES: I don't know that I can say what they normally would be spending much of their time with, other than to point out that FAO and therefore the governing body, has responsibilities for a wide framework of activities that we don't pay much attention to except in the AG staff of the Technical Assistance Bureau. The codex alimenteris, for example; commodity committees, for example. They have a Committee on fisheries, they have a Committee on wines, they have a Committee on grains, they had a Committee on international agricultural adjustment which we'll see later turns out of be a world food security program under the aegis of the World Food Council. There are just lots of these things going on and some of them AID normally is not really all that concerned about, but Agriculture and State are. As I suggested earlier, much of the work between sessions of the Council is done by standing committees of which the Program and Plan and the Finance Committees are the main ones, and their report to the Council is in some ways the most important. It controls the budget. One of my points in describing this background again is to illustrate that while State has the responsibility for conferences, it's really usually somebody else who's doing the work on the substantive content. Now, again, and in partial answer to your question, the concern with most of these items was overtaken in '73 by the concern for the food crisis situation and what to do about it. By this time, something resembling a World Food Conference was already under consideration. So the items which were pressing on an organization devoted to food and agricultural problems in the world, and having antennae opened for a likely worldwide conference to be held on these subjects, then naturally a good deal of their attention by this time was directed to the same problems that were going to be coming up later at the Conference.

Q: It became more macro -- focused on the world food situation than on the technical problems of individual commodities or sub-sectors?

SKILES: Yes. And, John, just to help make this clear, that particular meeting of the Council, which, I think, was in May of '73, was the last one (other than a short session) before the FAO Conference in the Fall. If you remember, this is held only every two years and it's a big hoe-down. So, most of the attention of the Council was given to what was going to be done at the Conference. Similarly, the Conference was the last meeting prior to what was going to turn out to

be the World Food Conference. (More on this later). So a great deal of the attention at the FAO Conference was paid to these same problems -- same subject matter. The second meeting of the Council that I became involved in was a split session; it met for about a week before the Conference and for a couple of days after the Conference to clean up and this was the pattern every odd year when you have two meetings of the Council and one of the Conference. And then on the even years, you generally have spring and fall meetings of the Council. The practice of the World Food Program governing body (IGC) was two meetings each year -- spring and fall.

Q: And in all of those, you were present as a participant and/or an observer?

SKILES: Yes. I guess on all of those, I was a member of the U.S. delegation. Observer in their terminology means something a little different - not entitled to participate, to "take the chair," but invited to attend, and sometimes scheduled to speak, as in the case of the representative of a different UN agency.

The delegations were designated in Washington and always headed by Washington people. I've mentioned the rotating chairmanship of the Intergovernmental Committee representatives, the FAO Council representative was a senior officer from the Department of Agriculture. And, so far as I know, the Secretary of Agriculture was always the chairman of the delegation to the Conference. At least that was true during the years I was there. Now, occasionally you'd have another headliner, such as the Secretary of State for purposes largely of making a speech, but the delegate was Secretary of Agriculture Butts even when Kissinger came as the President's representative to make a speech.

Q: Were those FAO Conferences pretty substantive?

SKILES: Well, I think they were. They dealt with a wide range of problems. I mentioned earlier that the real working part of the Conference was basically divided into three commissions. Meetings of those commissions were held outside of the meetings of the Plenary, of the primary delegates who were basically ministers of agriculture from throughout the world and essentially were making speeches. There wasn't much give-and-take in the Plenary, but they all had a word to say when their scheduled time came. In our case, one of the interesting features was that a re-reading of some of the speeches from a decade or so earlier indicated that it would be no mistake at all to simply read those same speeches again. The issues were pretty much the same.

Q: That is, because the real problems were genuinely still there and basically the same? Or because they babbled and said nothing?

SKILES: Because the problems were still there; the issues being faced were still pretty much the same; the emphasis on the cures didn't change much from a decade earlier to Mr. Butz's remarks that year.

Throughout the whole period it was recognized that the real problems were in the developing countries and only the developing countries could bring about the cures; that the outsiders would be glad to help and even to provide interim assistance, that sort of thing, but basically the problem was simply that production was too low in too many of the underdeveloped countries

and that this is what we'd have to do better at.

Q: And the developing countries, as I've understood it, it was often said that technology exists, the problem is we can't get it effectively out to farmers and have it applied.

SKILES: Well, there's a lot to that.

Q: But in those years, were any of the developing countries challenging the industrialized western countries over their highly industrialized agriculture very exploitative of the natural resource base and highly energy intensive, and destroying resources that were needed for the long run? Or was that not an issue?

SKILES: It came up from time to time, but I don't think it was as much of an issue. They were more interested in different kinds of adjustments. I'm tempted to say that rather than being concerned about our destroying resources in the industrialized countries, I think they were much more interested in transferring some of those facilities to their own area so they could take advantage of doing things that might result in higher production, even though it might also result in destruction of the common earth. But to answer the question another way, there certainly was a lot of interest in doing affirmative things to keep from spoiling the earth and the atmosphere, and straightening out the water supplies so that people could enjoy clean rather than poisonous water. Even in things like deforestation which many of those countries, as you know, are very guilty of, at least talking about the problem at the table they want to do something better about it. They don't want to see more destruction of their own forests, but a certain amount of exploitation is necessary.

Q: But to what extent was there discussion of issues like the terms of trade which forced many of those countries to over-exploit their natural resources or de-nude the land of forest when that wasn't the appropriate thing to do but the only thing that they had in the way of resources to redress their serious balance of payments difficulties? Were these issues on the table?

SKILES: Yes, very much so. And I guess partly because, to the extent that the Group of 77 countries brought up those issues in their own discussions, there was a means of getting them into the food and agriculture discussions. For example, not long before the UNGA decided to call for the World Food Conference, there was a meeting of the heads of state of the non-aligned countries in Algiers and they addressed a number of these issues and ended up calling for an international conference sponsored jointly by UNCTAD and FAO. This was one of the events taken into account and credited, alongside Secretary Kissinger's speech and application to the General Assembly, for a World Food Conference. It was credited in the resolution which was passed first by ECOSOC and then by the General Assembly as background for the conference. And then pretty much the same spokesmen were at hand during the World Food Conference and could have been at the FAO Conference. I should say, though, that I think these discussions were rather sterile because the developed countries consistently took the position that terms of trade were the province of other bodies such as GATT, rather than the agriculture bodies.

Q: Now that Conference resulted in the proposal to establish IFAD, the International Fund for Agricultural Development. What was the upshot of that?

SKILES: Well, you're getting a little bit ahead of me here, John. And I don't really know what the upshot was in terms of whether it became a very effective institution or just what its history was. It took quite a while for it to get going because it's coming into existence was predicated on a certain level of financial commitment to it.

Q: At the time, what was the rationale for having such an organization which in the agricultural sphere seems to me to be so duplicative of UNDP?

SKILES: The short answer is new money, but this really forces me to get back to what I had intended to be a train of thought in running through the various governing bodies and dealing to some extent with their legislative authorities over the programs of the specific international organizations involved. Then I was going to emphasize that the work of the FAO Conference in the fall of '73, was directed in large measure to the elements providing for an upcoming World Food Conference. And I might as well go ahead with that train of thought. Bear with me because some of this procedural stuff gets pretty thick, but I guess that's a way of life with the international organizations. The FAO Conference approved much of the Director General's proposals for responding to the ECOSOC invitation for the Conference to consider the matter and report back on its deliberations. The Director General, Dr. Boerna, to my mind, was one of the good people of the earth who has sort of disappeared since leaving that office. He and his staff had done a good deal more than provide for consultations and views. He pretty well laid out the program for what he thought the results ought to be. Then the Conference dealt with these recommendations, in large measure approved his proposals and approved the use of up to a half million dollars out of FAO's capital fund, so that it (FAO) could be in a position to promise the UN not only to be able to provide facilities in Rome for a World Food Conference but to be able if necessary to finance some of the secretariat functions that would be required.

I almost have to go back a step or two, John. I referred earlier to the meeting in Algiers of the Heads of State of the Group of 77 and Secretary Kissinger's first major speech after he became Secretary of State and to his proposal to the United Nations for a World Food Conference. ECOSOC took up the proposal to recommend to the General Assembly that there be a World Food Conference in the fall of '73 but before the FAO Conference. Now, what ECOSOC did was take these various elements into account and decided to provide for a UN World Food Conference, not an FAO/UNCTAD conference as the chiefs of state of the Group of 77 had proposed. So it was within this framework that the FAO Conference was asked for its views and was then able to come back and say that they had agreed that such a conference should be called and recommended that the issue be raised to the General Assembly for decision; that inquiries had been made and that November '74 would be a good time to hold the conference and the facilities could be made available within the framework of the FAO organization in Rome at that time. So these were elements of the resolution passed first by the ECOSOC Council and then by the United Nations General Assembly at the end of '73. ECOSOC had already created a preparatory commission and members had been designated to serve on the "prepcom." A secretary general for the conference had already been selected. I don't know just when it was legal to formally announce his designation. He was an "international citizen" Egyptian by the name of Said Marai. U.S. working group and we had quite a time, really because of the Israeli problem. Most of the delegations were also members of the Group of 77 and they wanted to go

ahead with a charter that would fence out the Israelis and, of course, the U.S. position wouldn't countenance that sort of thing. It got to be a very ticklish kind of engagement. Parker finally said to me that "We just can't get this sort of thing done in this conference environment. Isn't there something else we can set up to just concentrate on this one issue?" And I told him, "Sure." The head of WFP had a suite of offices in the FAO building, but he not only was not using them, he was out of town, so I called the Deputy and readily got permission to use the suite. So we set up headquarters there. I say "we" it was mainly Dan Parker and the Israeli representative and I, with various kinds of messengers and contact people. During the course of it, Parker had to call the White House two or three times. It worked out all right but it took the better part of a night getting some kind of a compromise which was agreeable to the two sides. This was just another example of how well the Group of 77 was kind of organized at that time. Well, this went on for some days. Each morning he would say, "I'm not quite ready." So finally, it was getting up against the gun, and one morning I just had to say, "If Bernstein's going to have this breakfast, it has to be laid on. So I've made tentative arrangements at the hotel to go ahead and do it and if you really don't object then we'll go ahead on the basis of this schedule and I'll explain to Bernstein that you're tied up with these other things and, while he's invited you, I'm sure it's not going to hurt feelings if you don't attend." I guess he felt he wasn't really quite in a position to object to it on that basis so we went ahead with the breakfast. Well, when Humphrey told me that he wanted to have a chat with the Minister of Agriculture for China, I could just picture the problems if I brought this up in the delegation and yet I realized that I shouldn't really be doing such things without the official delegation head being at least informed about it. So this was a bit of a dilemma but what I did actually is I put the dilemma on Dr. Boerna's platter and he said he would be delighted to take me out of this problem and the room number is such and such and what time do you want to do it? He thought it was a great idea to bring them together informally so he set it up and as I recall there were just four of us plus an FAO interpreter in a small room -

Q: Do it under different auspices?

SKILES: Sure. Dr. Boerna made the contacts and the arrangements. That was a delightful little meeting.

Humphrey was just a master at that sort of thing. He carefully explained that he was not there speaking as a U.S. representative, he was speaking for himself. He was a senator who sometimes people paid attention to and more often they didn't. But he had had for years a great interest in this food problem worldwide. "In our country we're doing something on soybeans and have made considerable progress on it since the beginning of World War II but we know that you people have had it much longer and probably know a lot more than we do about it and I wanted to pick your brains." He ended up by saying that, "I hope you'll be able to come to the U.S. one of these days. I'm delighted that our countries are officially speaking to each other now and that the President is making a visit. I hope you'll be able to come to the United States and see some real good farms." I doubt that he ever did.

Q: Okay. Does that cover the Rome front?

SKILES: I think so, but as long as I'm name dropping, one other little tidbit I might tell you along the lines of the emergency activities. Another interesting experience comes to mind - that

is when they had a very bad earthquake in northern Italy. It didn't happen until '76, I guess. Vice President Rockefeller came out to "show the flag" at the scene of the earthquake and the AID Administrator, Dan Parker, was to arrive a day or two ahead of time and meet the Vice President on arrival. Well, as you know, I had nothing to do with Italy; I was there to work with the international agencies, but the Minister of Economic Affairs was a man who had been our economic man in the Embassy in Ceylon when I was out there. He had the responsibility in the Rome Embassy for getting up a task force to handle U.S. backstopping in connection with the Italian Government and military, and while I had consulted with the task force a little I really hadn't much to do with it but when the Minister found that the Vice President and Parker were coming into North Italy nothing would do other than that I get out to the airbase near Rome and have a couple of the military guys fly me up to the base in Northern Italy near the scene of the quake and meet with Mr. Parker and be ready to help receive the Vice President, so of course I did. Spent several interesting days up there accompanying Parker for whom, naturally, some pretty impressive arrangements had been made. When you get him out of a business suit Parker is a delightful guy. He knew Italy better than I did. He'd been a race car driver before he got into the AID business and participated, as I recall, in the Monte Carlo race a couple of times as well as an Italian event called the Cinque Mille and toured all over Italy as a driver.

Q: All that and fountain pens too.

SKILES: Yes. Here's one of his fountain pens right here. Good one, too.

CHARLES HIGGINSON
Deputy US Representative, Food and Agricultural Organization
Rome (1975-1978)

Born in Massachusetts, Mr. Higginson graduated from Harvard University and entered law practice before joining the Foreign Service in 1961. During his career he served in Brussels, Algiers, Rome and Luxembourg, dealing primarily with international organizations such as the European Community (EC), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the OECD. In Washington Mr. Higginson again dealt primarily with international organizations and issues.

Q: Your next assignment was to Rome. What did you do there? What was that like? I believe it was from 1975 to 1978.

HIGGINSON: Correct. I was the deputy U.S. representative to the Food and Agricultural Organization in Rome. This was just after the World Food Conference. There was a major worry about the ability of the world to supply enough grain to feed. Mr. Kissinger promised that we would set up a rural food program and an investment bank to assist agriculture throughout the world. I came after that. Primarily, the problem was to put the whole thing together. The investment bank turned out to be a very tricky thing to negotiate. We didn't have the funds that were originally promised to put into the bank. My role was primarily to service the AID officials who were coming over to negotiate it. This did get me into many of the meetings.

What is the role of a mission to an international organization? In my mind, you know the people on the spot, the personal contacts, which can help the negotiators in Washington who come. Most countries utilize their on-site officials for these meetings. Therefore, this is a big advantage. The other thing is that you should know most of the secretariat. This can be of great assistance. It gets down to international conference negotiations. At various times, you have a position that is not going to be accepted. The question is whether to go to loggerheads or delay until you can get some new instructions from Washington. If you know the conference staff well enough, you know how much time the interpreters can do overtime. You know how long to delay so that there will be a halt for the evening so you do have time to get further instructions. The other major help to me there was an Australian from their Department of Agriculture who was very helpful in negotiations. We would take turns in taking rather extreme positions well to the right of what our final instructions were. Then he or I would come in with an extremely moderate, sensible position. The rest of the room would be so relieved to be away from the extreme position that we could frequently get what we wanted. There were only two countries who really wanted that in the room. At this time, the Group of 77 was fairly unified and were having meetings before every meeting. They basically were going into each meeting as a very large underdog. I still remember with great fondness this Australian. I talked to him about what our best approach would be in each of these meetings.

Q: The Group of 77 that you're referring to was the loose organization of the developing countries, the Third World. You say the United States and Australia were often together as major agricultural producers and grain exporters. Were we also close to countries like Canada and some of the other exporters?

HIGGINSON: Yes, we were quite close. Frequently, a lot of these countries basically would agree with our position and they had instructions not to rock the boat and to let the United States carry the ball. They would come on along. The Canadian mission was larger than the Australian mission and frequently had people from Ottawa over there. Therefore, the members of the Canadian mission had less autonomy than the Australian individual, who I might say was going well beyond his instructions. His ambassador was not pleased with everything he did, but he rather relished that situation.

Q: You were the deputy U.S. representative. Of course, the United States was the leading member of the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Council that ran the World Food Program. Who was the U.S. representative in those days? Did that person have the rank of ambassador? Was it Paul Burns?

HIGGINSON: I basically took Paul Burns' position. He was not the U.S. representative. At that time, FODAG was under the U.S. ambassador to Italy. Therefore, initially, the ambassador there was Mr. Volpe from Massachusetts, who was quite well-known in Massachusetts for the construction business.

Q: That's the governor.

HIGGINSON: I know him from the construction business because I was also a lawyer in

Massachusetts and there was a certain issue about the road that Mr. Volpe constructed that we took him to court on. Needless to say, he wasn't very pleased to see me suddenly arrive in the embassy. We decided not to talk that awfully much. He left almost immediately. Dick Gardener became our ambassador. Dick had been a deputy in the Bureau of International Organizations, so I had dealt with him there and knew him reasonably well. I worked with him very closely as far as the Food and Agriculture Organization was concerned. He was basically an international organization expert and was very interested in the FAO. Unfortunately, I remember taking him over to his first meeting with Mr. Sowumo, who was the new head of the FAO with U.S. support over the budget of the FAO, which the U.S. was trying to reduce some. It was a total disaster of a meeting. Dick Gardener said to me on the way back to the embassy that he was never going to see that man again. Much to my knowledge, he never did. But he also did follow up quite closely what we were doing and he gave us his advice quite frequently.

Q: You mentioned that a lot of what you did was to support officials from USAID who were coming to negotiating meetings and so on. What about the U.S. Department of Agriculture?

HIGGINSON: Every two years, the FAO have their annual conference. The Secretary of Agriculture is the head of the U.S. delegation and they have 15-20 agricultural experts there. I was usually put on the delegation (inaudible). It occurred twice while I was there. I made sure that the various papers got to all the members of the delegation, they knew what was happening, transportation and everything. I enjoyed working with the Department of Agriculture and was especially appreciative that they got me a Superior Honor Award for my efforts on their behalf. I wasn't totally certain that I deserved it. I remember one horrible occasion when Ambassador Young decided he wanted to change his speech to the FAO at the last moment. So, we were writing most of the evening. Then we sent it to Washington for approval. We got it back the morning that he was going to speak. I by luck had the best secretary, so she had to type it. As she was typing, we were sending pages over one at a time to FAO. Needless to say, that went awry. I was carrying the pages to Ambassador Young on the podium as he was speaking. There was a repetition of two pages and he got half way through repeating himself and had to excuse himself. Then I got him the correct pages. He carried it off beautifully. I was mortified.

Q: This was Ambassador Andy Young, the U.S. representative to the United Nations.

HIGGINSON: Right. He had come for this meeting.

Q: FAO being a specialized agency of the United Nations and he being, in a sense, involved in all of the different arms of the UN.

HIGGINSON: Right.

I liked working with international organizations because, unlike an embassy, you're not just an outsider. At the FAO, we pay 25% of the budget. We have a major influence on what they're doing and are sort of a stockholder in the organization. So, you're within it as well as looking at it from the outside. This gets you quite involved in the personnel assignments of Americans to the FAO. I was on the Budget Committee for the FAO, which again gets you into the intricacies of international organizations' budgeting practices.

Again, it's the importance of a large mission. Since we had five people in the mission, I could spend a certain amount of time really going over those papers and discussing them.

Q: The point you've just made about being inside the organization and a leading member, a stockholder with 25% of the budget and so on, all of this was quite different than your experience at the European Communities, where we had a strong political commitment to European integration, but we were an outsider, not a member.

HIGGINSON: Yes.

Q: Is there anything else we should say about FODAG? Rome is a big city. FAO is an important part of Rome, but obviously is far from the only part. It's sort of on the other side of town through a lot of traffic past the Colosseum. I'm sure that just living in Rome is a challenge at times, working there.

HIGGINSON: Yes and no. I had the virtue of going from Algiers to Rome, so Rome was paradise and everything worked compared to Algeria. So, we were very happy. It's much better to go north, my next post being Luxembourg, than it is to go in the other direction in Europe. The problem was that this was the height of the Red Brigade. Aldo Moro had been kidnapped. There were all sorts of security checks. You really did accompany your children around Rome rather than just letting them go free. But Rome itself, my wife was an artist and just loved it. The American Academy there is a wonderful institution.

Q: It's interesting on the terrorist side how quickly things changed in Rome. I was assigned there, as you know, and left in 1973 just two years before you came. I just don't remember that as a significant issue. There were some demonstrations related to Vietnam and other things in the time that I was there, but not a personal direct threat. It didn't exist.

HIGGINSON: That's true. I felt, being accredited to the FAO, that probably I was reasonably safe, that maybe the embassy personnel might be targets, but that they wouldn't target an international aid giving organization. But it did affect you. My youngest son was at the high school in Rome. The project was to make a volcano. The problem was that he needed some rather incendiary materials, which we couldn't get. So, we sent his mother off and we found just the store that had all sorts of chemicals. My wife went over there and got most of them, but one of them they wouldn't give her. She talked to them and said, "But I need this." Eventually, she showed her U.S. diplomatic passport and with some reluctance they gave her the final component. Then she left the store and walked right into the Italian police, who had been duly notified that somebody was buying the necessities for a bomb. They were even more nonplused than the storekeeper was of what to do with an American diplomat. They let her go, but it was an interesting experience.

Q: Did the volcano experiment go well?

HIGGINSON: He won his science fair with a very explosive volcano.

Q: The FODAG office was across the street from the main embassy building?

HIGGINSON: Yes, at that time it was across the street from the main office building.

Q: So, you were part of it, but you were a little separate.

HIGGINSON: Yes. You could have lunch over there if you wanted to. It was pretty close to the ideal arrangement. You had quite a lot of independence, but still the embassy was right there and you got to participate in a lot of these other embassy extras. Once a week, they took a classified pouch to Palermo, Sicily, and some FSO has to take a classified pouch down, so they divvied that up among the staff of the embassy. It was one of my wife's better vacations, seeing Sicily as the courier.

JOHN A. BAKER, JR.
U.S. Representative, World Food Program
Rome (1977-1979)

John A. Baker, Jr. was born in Connecticut. He received a bachelor's degree in international affairs from Yale University. From 1946-1949, Mr. Baker served in the U.S. Army and joined the Foreign service in 1950. His career included positions in Yugoslavia, Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and Washington, DC. Mr. Baker was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on September 23, 1992.

Q: You moved from that to going out to Rome from 1977-79 doing what?

BAKER: Well, I went out to Rome as the US representative to the food aid agencies.

Q: FAO?

BAKER: Yes, the FAO; the World Food Program; the International Fund for Agricultural Development, which was a new bank that was set up this time designed to draw in all that Middle Eastern oil money that had come out of the huge fortunes oil producing countries made out of the energy crisis in 1973; and then the World Food Council which was created because of the concern that population was growing and hunger was growing in the world.

All that came about because of the change in administration. In 1977, the Carter Administration came in and appointed a new Assistant Secretary for IO. He wanted, obviously, new deputies who would be with him for a four year period so those of us who were there were up for the usual scramble to try to get embassies and equivalent posts abroad because we knew we would not be kept on, didn't expect to be kept on because when administrations change they always assume that if you worked for the previous administration at that level that you were somehow on the other team.

I guess I was somewhat marked by certain parts of Washington public opinion because I had been the organizer of the campaign to improve our results in the General Assembly and some people in the Carter camp thought that was hardball and the whole Carter foreign policy was much more North/South oriented at the outset. Eventually, with Afghanistan and arms control, it went back to its East/West axis. But it came in with a North/South flavor and human rights, etc. So, I guess I was seen by some of those people as part of the bad old Kissinger team. That didn't help me a whole lot in coming out of the change with a big time assignment abroad. And I was also disadvantaged by the fact that the Assistant Secretary asked me to stay on initially, although I knew it wouldn't be for terribly long. But it was long enough that it kept me from competing for some of the posts I might otherwise have had a run at.

Anyway, I wound up working for the new Administration for about six or seven months as deputy and then getting to be chief of the small mission in Rome to the food aid agencies. But it was not an ambassadorial post, it was elevated to a ministerial post and, of course, next time around because a Congresswoman was interested in the job, it became an ambassadorial post.

Q: Fenwick.

BAKER: Yes. It was a pleasant place to be. I had served in Rome before, as you know, and I like Rome, spoke Italian and the job had a lot of autonomy. I knew the ambassador well, Dick Gardner. He was instrumental in my being nominated out there. Although he was very interested in the United Nations, he soon discovered that the Italian scene was going to take his full time, so he was pleased to have me do everything that had to be done at those international organizations -- to represent the United States in their governing bodies, etc.

Q: What were the prime concerns when you were there?

BAKER: Curiously enough, although these agencies were primarily aimed at the problems of the developing world, and although the Carter Administration had a strong orientation towards North/South relations in the developing world, my instructions had to do mostly with holding down budgetary growth and keeping the organizations' costs from ballooning. The principal thing that tended to make them balloon was that the Director General, who had been chosen by third world majority and was a Lebanese, was busily cultivating his constituency by creating a program of technical assistance grants, which was very much under his own personal management. This program was laid on to the regular budget and tended to cause it to grow. The slogan that I was instructed to work for was zero real growth. It was my job to organize the principal contributor countries to the FAO as a group to act in the governing bodies of the FAO to control cost. So that made me about as popular as a skunk at a picnic. The Director General very soon identified me as his principal nemesis in town and although I had polite relations with him and always did the right thing from a protocol standpoint, it was a fairly stiff relationship over those years.

In the World Food Program, it was a little bit different because that program does not have a regular budget with assessed contributions. It operates on the basis of voluntary contributions from the members, and the United States, having originally suggested that organization back in the days when McGovern was finding ways to move our large agricultural surpluses in

constructive ways, was a major contributor of food, of wheat, powdered milk and flour. The whole idea was to try to get those commodities to countries that needed them because they were hungry but then to distribute them to hungry people who did work in work projects of a development nature. So the food-for-work program was a significant part of that organization's work. The program ran into the usual hazards of how do you land and protect and handle food in tropical areas in developing countries and keep track of it and cut down on waste, spoilage and pilfering, etc. But it had dedicated people working for it. The US AID was the principal agency back in Washington that was responsible for our input into that agency.

AID was also significant in IFAD, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, which we helped get started out there in 1977.

So it was that sort of work. I didn't feel that I was at the cutting edge of American foreign policy exactly...

ROGER A. SORENSON
Permanent Representative to United Nations Agencies
Rome (1979-1983)

Roger A. Sorenson was born and raised in Utah. He received a bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University. He joined the Foreign Service in 1960. Mr. Sorenson's career included positions in Calgary, Dublin, and Geneva. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy on September 25, 1990.

Q: You left Geneva in 1979 and went to Rome. How did that assignment come about and what were you doing?

SORENSON: Our ambassador in Geneva, Ambassador Vanden Heuvel, was transferred to New York as one of the ambassadors to the UN. He asked me to come to New York with him, but the thought of coping with life in New York on the income of a Foreign Service Officer was too daunting, and I declined. At the same time, however, I didn't want to remain in Geneva after Vanden Heuvel left and he was gracious enough to recommend me for the job of Permanent Representative to the UN agencies in Rome, which had just opened up. Happily, his recommendation was accepted, and I left for Rome.

Q: What were your functions there?

SORENSON: They were largely the same as in Geneva. There are four UN food agencies in Rome -- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Program (WFP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Council (WFC). My job was to coordinate and oversee the implementation of US policy with respect to these organizations.

Q: During this period, the end of the Carter and the early Reagan years, what was the direction

of what we were doing there, and did it change with the administration?

SORENSON: Not too much, with one exception that I'll come to. I say not too much because, from the point of view of our larger national interests, the basic issues remained the same. Once again, these were (1) the continual effort by the Third World to erode what they regarded as the advantages and prerogatives of the developed countries; (2) their ongoing effort to gain acceptance of the New International Economic Order (NIEO); and (3) their maneuvers to manipulate each of these organizations so as to make them instruments of resource transfer. Beyond these issues, the organizations continued to constitute playing fields in which East-West issues were contested, as well as the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Finally, as ever, we had to confront the bureaucratic aspirations and interests of the elected UN and agency heads -- aspirations and interests that were frequently not consonant with our own. Changing the guard at home had little impact on the way we saw these issues.

Q: Let me ask about our problem with transferring resources through these organizations, specifically in connection with food. Isn't our policy to do whatever we can to get food to people who need it? What was the problem?

SORENSON: The problem has to do with the nature of our treaty obligations to these agencies as defined in their charters, specifically our obligation to pay a fixed percentage of their respective budgets. Unfortunately, when the charters of the various organizations were drawn up we were not foresighted enough to demand some sort of weighted voting that would protect the big contributors from unwarranted demands on their national treasuries. The result has been that so called technical cooperation or technical assistance programs in the budgets of these organizations has gradually become a major issue, and it is not difficult to grasp the dynamics of the problem. The Third World, having the majority vote, has only to mandate vast and elaborate schemes of assistance through the budgets of these organizations and it becomes the treaty obligation of our taxpayers simply to pay.

To come back to your question: of course our policy has been to do whatever we can to get food to people who need it, but we want to do it voluntarily. For example, in Rome there is an organization called the World Food Program, which takes surpluses, voluntarily donated by countries that have them, and channels these surpluses to needy countries in an organized and highly efficient manner. In this case, the resource to be transferred is something that we give voluntarily. We're not obligated to give it because it's part of an assessed budget.

The point is that what and how we give must obviously be under the control of congress, which has become increasingly incensed over the issue. In short, congress will not live with a situation where the Third World can use these organizations as instruments to make levies on the American tax payer. Congress insists upon reserving this privilege to itself.

Q: Were we ever living with it when it was equivalent to a levy while you were there?

SORENSON: In the case of WHO, there was a period while I was in Geneva when the US simply refused to pay its assessment because a WHO resolution -- legally passed, of course, by

the governing body -- required the organization to divert increasing portions of its expenditures to the Third World. This doesn't mean that these expenditures were not well spent, or that some of them may not actually have been in our interest. For example, WHO operates an early warning system intended to detect the outbreak of serious infectious diseases -- Asian flue, for example -- early enough to enable us to develop vaccines to prevent them from becoming epidemics. In this case, money is spent in the Third World where these things frequently originate in a way that makes us among the primary beneficiaries. Congress, however, saw the resolution in terms of principle and dug in its heels, and they didn't care much whether we benefited or not.

Similarly, in FAO the governing body had passed resolutions that earmarked about 12 percent of FAO's budget for programs of technical cooperation, which was a euphemism for resource transfer. We strongly resisted this move, as did most of the other Western countries, with the result that the Director-General never really tried to get the percentage significantly enlarged. Of course, inevitably there would be fierce debates over the issue at each meeting of FAO's governing body, but this was part of the game. We simply had to make it clear that any enlargement of the program, or any abuse of it, would risk driving us from the organization.

Q: So it wasn't a matter of the Third World countries having a completely free hand.

SORENSON: Absolutely not. A good chunk of the money that they spend -- twenty-five percent -- comes from us, and we can always tell them that we simply won't pay and that we're getting out, as we did in the ILO and subsequently in UNESCO. To do this in accordance with the governing charters of these organizations, however, notice must be given. Thus, it is not quite as simple as walking out and terminating our obligations the same day. Still, the threat was there, and it is perhaps the only thing we have ultimately to control the outcome. Either that or pay whatever is levied upon us, sit back, and watch them spend it.

Q: Were you able to keep the other representatives informed of how we felt and keep riding herd on this thing?

SORENSON: Do you mean the other major donors?

Q: Yes.

SORENSON: In fact, there are informal mechanisms for doing this. Since the other major donors share our concerns, they have banded together and formed a coordinating body called the Geneva Group, named because it was first assembled in Geneva. Representatives of the major donors -- the OECD countries -- meet annually, and subgroups composed the OECD permreps to each of the UN agencies meet before almost every important meeting of their respective agencies, to coordinate their policies on budget and administrative matters that might affect the size of their contributions.

Q: Well then, your role was what? How did you fit into furthering American policy there?

SORENSON: In the case of the Geneva Group, since the U.S. was one of its co-founders, the

U.S. Permrep acts as one of its two co-chairpersons wherever and whenever the Group or a subgroup meets. We and the British, in effect, shared the job of coordinating a common position among the major donors on budget and administrative policies. This, by itself, was a busy job.

To answer your question in the larger sense, the role of the Permanent Representative and his or her staff was to follow the activities of each of the organizations to which he or she was accredited; to report developments to Washington; to work with policy-makers back in the department to formulate comprehensive and cohesive policies in respect of the organizations; to implement these policies and build support for them among other countries; in general, to promote and protect US interests as they relate to the various organizations and their work.

Q: When the Reagan administration came in, in 1981, did you feel any change in atmosphere about the role and all this? It came in rather ideologically distant, I would say, from the United Nations effort to begin with.

SORENSON: That's right. And, in fact, the Reagan administration and now the Bush administration have demonstrated this ideological distance over the past decade or thereabouts through a remarkable disregard for our basic treaty obligations. I mentioned earlier that our ultimate sanction is to withdraw from an organization and thus end our obligation to contribute. At the same time, however, this step must be take in accordance with the rules that govern withdrawal, to which we agreed when we joined, and which are applicable to all member states.

Unfortunately, instead of giving notice as we ought to do, thus terminating our legal obligation to pay, we have simply refused to pay while continuing to insist on the rights of membership. At the present time, we owe enormous sums in back payments to the UN system, which we've allowed to accumulate. We're like the member of a club who refuses to pay his dues but insists on continuing to use the club's facilities.

In my personal opinion, the irony of the US position is beyond belief. Originally we saw the UN system as a means of inculcating Western regard for international law, for treaty obligations, for civilized debate among nations. We saw the United Nations as a major vehicle for conveying our values. And now we ourselves have become perhaps the biggest renegade in the system. In some UN agencies -- FAO is one of them -- the United States arrearage exceeds the combined arrearages of all other nations combined. This is in total disregard of our treaty obligation. How is that for the leader of the free world to behave?

My feeling is that, if a UN agency doesn't serve our national interest, indeed we ought to get out. But we should do so in accordance with our legal obligation to give due notice. To say that, in the event we don't like the way an organization is being run or don't like what the majority is doing, we won't pay our bills but will insist on continuing to participate, is a sad commentary on our regard for principle. It means that we don't have any,

Q: Did you feel, say, from emanations from Washington, that they'd just as soon you would go away? I mean, not you, but your office and all that. After the Carter administration, was there a difference not only in instructions but also in the tone or the style as far as dealing with the United Nations organizations between the two administrations?

SORENSON: Well, certainly one suddenly began to see an increasing disregard for treaty obligations, which was deliberate. I shall never forget the first meeting of US permreps that I attended following the Republican victory. It took place in the latter part of 1980 in Geneva. Jeane Kirkpatrick was there together with the Ambassador to the UN agencies in Geneva -- some department store manager/owner from California. Somehow, the discussion came around to the question of US arrearages. I, together with a couple of other career Foreign Service people, took the position that, however we might feel about the activities or effectiveness of the UN and its agencies, we had a treaty obligation to pay until we gave legal notice to terminate the obligation.

Kirkpatrick greeted this view with a cavalier sneer, while the department store operator inferred that the view verged on downright treason and had, no doubt, contributed to the renegade attitudes being expressed, in his view, in UN fora. It was the first time that my loyalty had been impugned, even inferentially; it was also the first time that I had heard a responsible American official take what I re- garded as an irresponsible position on US treaty obligations.

No doubt about it, then. There was a distinct change in the attitude of senior people at the top. And with it, I'm sorry to say, there was a change in attitude among many of the career people back in the Department -- slavish types anxious to serve their political masters. In fact, some of the more pernicious changes in US policy with respect to holding back payments subsequently came from career bureaucrats who were duly rewarded with promotions, awards and other emoluments. There was an unparalleled loss of principle.

MILLICENT HAMMOND FENWICK
Representative, United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture
Rome (1983-1987)

Mrs. Fenwick was born in New York and raised in New Jersey and Spain, where her father was US Ambassador. She attended classes at Columbia University and at Bernard Russel's New School of Social Research in New York City, after which she worked a number of years in the magazine publishing industry in New York. During this period she became deeply interested in the Civil Rights Movement and ran successfully for public office in New Jersey before being elected to Congress in 1975. She served in that office until 1983 at which time she was appointed United States Representative to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture, serving there until 1987. The Ambassador died in 1992. Ambassador Fenwick was interviewed by Robert Miller in 1985, using material prepared by Ann Miller Morin.

FENWICK: Well, you know, I couldn't understand it, because the lead in the polls had been 20 percent. Wednesday morning, when I woke up, I thought, "It isn't possible. This hasn't happened. It isn't true." Thursday morning, when I woke up, I said to myself, "I am not going to think about this. I'm not going to go over what I didn't do or should or did do or what he didn't do or should have done--I'm just not--the good Lord knows best." I mean, maybe I'm just meant to retire.

After all, it wasn't too extraordinary. I was by this time over 70. When I was elected in '74, I was 64. When I retired I must have been 73, or nearly, so I thought maybe it's just meant to be, you know, "three score and ten" and so on.

But then an extraordinary thing happened. We had a session of Congress after Election Day. I was sitting at my desk. The telephone rang. "We'd be grateful if you'd come to the White House this afternoon at 2:30." And I said, "Okay." We didn't have a session, so I went, and two charming young people met me, and they said, "Would you be willing to work for the Administration?" And I said, "Well, I hadn't thought of that, but if I could be useful, I'd be happy to." In later meetings they suggested a couple of things. I said, "No, I don't really think I would be useful." Then they suggested this job in Rome. I said, "Yes, I think that would be very interesting; I'd like very much to try that." And so it happened. That must have been about, by the time we finished all these talks back and forth, probably the end of January or February. By June I was an employee of the State Department, and by September I had been okayed by the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee.

Q: Then actually you did have to go through the normal routine of being approved as an Ambassador, although the type of Ambassadorial work you are doing is not like, say, the American Ambassador to Italy or the American Ambassador to Spain, as your father was at one time. Could you explain all of that, please?

FENWICK: It's very different. It's just a title that is given to someone who represents the United States Government at an agency or organization the way indeed we had an Ambassador to the UNESCO, United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization and from which we've now withdrawn, in Paris. Ambassadors to the government or to the Quirinale, but they are (Ambassadors). If there are UN agencies in some country, you can be, in not all cases are, but you can be made an Ambassador or be given Ambassadorial rank. I guess that's it.

Q: That means that the problems of an Ambassador to a country are not your problems, and I refer to things such as entertainment, such as an enormous staff, a full embassy of people under you, all of the details for which an Ambassador's technically responsible.

FENWICK: Exactly, exactly. I have no large, permanent embassy. I have a rather modest apartment, and of course it's nice to entertain occasionally and we have an entertainment allowance, but I'm not very given to that sort of thing, and I don't think that this position really requires that. From time to time I have. Tomorrow I've invited to lunch with me at a restaurant here, so I don't have to go all the way home, the Ambassador from Kenya to the Food and Agriculture, because like me, he's an Ambassador to the UN agency, not an Ambassador to the Quirinale, not an Ambassador to the Government of Italy. But he and I are fellow Ambassadors to the Food and Agriculture Organizations. So I do some meetings of that kind, and I've had two or three, three or four, receptions in the house, in the afternoon, but it's not a feature the way it is in an embassy, in the real embassy.

Q: What are some of the things that your duties require? Yes, you attend all of the major meetings of the Food and Agricultural Organizations, and, by the way, would you explain

whether or not you are also accredited to the other food agencies here such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Program and the World Food Council?

FENWICK: Well, the International Fund for Agricultural Development is the one, the only one, to which I'm not officially accredited, because that was set up originally in a different way. The official American representative on that board of the International Fund--IFAD, it's called, International Fund for Agricultural Development--is the head of our Agency for International Development. It's a branch, you might say, of the State Department, but somewhat independent, and so we have a man here who is in the AID branch who serves as a surrogate or representative for the AID department and I am not, although I'm very much concerned with AID, with IFAD. It is a splendid program and I would like very much to see it supported and furthered, and I've written my colleagues about it. But I'm not technically--but the World Food Council, yes, the World Food Program, yes. And of course, the FAO, the Food and Agricultural Organization, as it's called; that's the big one.

Q: Yes. The nature of your work with these organizations?

FENWICK: Well, it's absolutely endless. It's absolutely endless. You get a letter out of the blue from some company in Iowa, let's say, or Kansas, and they have a system for bagging grain or something. Well, then, you turn that over to the World Food Program, which endlessly concerns itself with bagging grain for different emergencies and disasters everywhere. Or you have desire for some kind of training. One of our embassies may say that they would like some training, technical training, somebody could perhaps go to the college or university in that less developed country for courses. That's the Food and Agricultural Organization. Or you have, for example, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), you know, the waters, the maritime waters; NASA, which is space, space in the American government; Department of Commerce.

All of these departments of government want figures. I got a cable the other day from the Department of Commerce wanting the publications of the Food and Agricultural Organization on fishing, fisheries of the world, which they say are by all odds the best that's ever been published. Because FAO, the big Food and Agricultural Organization, is a remarkable organization in the sense of collecting statistics and data, whether it's soil, water, forestation, fisheries, crop production, population, all that sort of thing. Any part of our government that wants that kind of information is apt to get in touch and say, "Please supply that kind of information." Then, of course, there are people wanting to work in these organizations, and that takes quite a lot of time.

It's a very busy, busy--then we have to report to the government on the various meetings. We had a meeting Monday afternoon on aid to Somalia where they have a large group of refugees. WFP and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees asked us all to come just to listen to the problems there are in Somalia. And then yesterday morning we had one on Pakistan. That's the biggest. That's over two million refugees and the problems are tremendous, and we have to report. That's what I'm trying to do now, and that's why we'll have to be a little bit brief, because I have some cables to get out.

Q: That would mean that there is policy of the United States government even in relation to these various organizations by which you are guided?

FENWICK: Oh, indeed, indeed. And I am very much concerned because I'm very much interested in the guidelines of the International Labor Organization, which provide for the ways in which these enormous programs are going to be handled so as to make sure that people are treated properly who are working for food, part of their wages in food, in these various programs that are being worked out all over the world--Asia, Africa, South America--and we really have to be sure that our own programs are in line with the International Labor Organization programs. My responsibility is primarily the Food and Agriculture Agencies that are here in Rome that are conducting these big programs, to make sure that they are living up to the guidelines which protect the workers in these programs.

Q: What was the relationship between FAO and the United States government at the time that you came here, and what did you do to either improve that or to maintain what may have been good relations at the time?

FENWICK: Well, I think there must have been good relations because Gregory Newell was our Assistant Secretary of State for the International Organizations, and it was he who told the Director General of the Food and Agricultural Organization, Edouard Saouma, that he was going to be sending an ambassador. America had not sent an ambassador up to that time, so the Director General was very pleased, and I think that started off our relations on a very good footing. I have tried very hard to struggle for principle and not for whim or personalities or anything like that. There are disagreements between these agencies, you know, and they don't like to, as they say, blow the whistle on each other, and so you have to blow the whistle on them yourself, and get to the bottom of some of the things that are being said. But I think our relations are really much better than they were. So I'm told. People say that.

I'm very happy, because I don't pull any punches; I'm always perhaps a little too tactlessly frank, but I do think it's better. You can't have friends if you're going to lie to them, and there's no use pretending that things are different from what they are. I'm always perfectly clear: this is my government's position. Then I say, "And now I have a few personal words to add," and those personal words are a little more colorful than the words my government may have written down for me to recite, but they are along exactly the same lines, because never yet have I found, thank heaven, in this job, that my government has asked me to do something that I think is wrong.

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Q: When were you sworn in as Ambassador, and what sort of a ceremony was this swearing-in ceremony?

FENWICK: Actually, I was appointed, but my appointment awaited confirmation by the Senate, which was not in session, and so I took office; I came over here and really didn't get sworn in. It was all very interesting. I testified before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, but it was just before they were going to adjourn. You see, I was appointed, at least I was nominated by the President in July, and they were planning to adjourn. I did see Senator Kassebaum, and Senator Percy and others. And Steve Solarz, Congressman Solarz, unrequested, came, a Democrat on the (House) Foreign Affairs Committee, and testified before them on my behalf. But I don't think I

ever really got sworn in, except that I was just confirmed unanimously by the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate when they met in September. I was already here.

^t Q: Because of the circumstances of this nomination and this swearing-in and so on, and because of the special nature of this assignment, do you have any direct dealings with the White House, with the President, in the course of your work here?

FENWICK: No. No, I don't. I go through the Department of State exclusively. The Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations was Gregory Newell when I came. I liked him very much. Now I have Ambassador Keyes whom I don't know as well because he's only been here for a few months, and I only saw him in Washington last August for lunch once, so I haven't gotten to know him the way I did Gregory Newell. But I'm expecting the same happy--I like him very much so far.

Q: What special preparations, if any, did you make for this position before you came here, or maybe even after you came here?

FENWICK: I've learned an awful lot. I was really best prepared, perhaps, by being a farmer myself some years ago, a dairy farmer and chicken farmer. And working for consumers, oddly enough, in New Jersey, as head of the Consumer Division in the Department of Law and Public Safety, that was invaluable. Of course, Congress was a very good experience, too, the whole Foreign Affairs Committee, listening to the arguments about the agricultural bills, all of that experience. There's no substitute for it in my books. I think it all helped. But no special courses or anything.

Q: What was it like, the first day on the job here, your first time as an Ambassador, your first time in a special Ambassadorial assignment? What was that day like to you?

FENWICK: Oh, it was terrifying, of course. I had a meeting with all the staff, and I said, "From now on every cable that goes out I'll have to see, and will go out with my approval and signature." I think that was quite a shock. I don't think it was terribly happily received, but it's worked very well. I have a wonderful staff, and I've always had very, very fine cooperation.

But I was terrified the first day going to the Program Committee, because I thought they'd all be such, you know, expert experts, and there I would be with my amateurish approach. Not at all. It was wonderful. I, with Mr. Ngongi of Cameroon and Mr. Palmer of Sierra Leone, we sat together and called ourselves the "gang of three." We understood things from the same point of view. It was remarkable, really, awfully lucky. Because, you see, try for the simple, practical approach--I'm not interested in global approaches. I don't think they work. It isn't that I'm against--I wouldn't be against them in principle; I'm against them in practice. Because I see these huge ideas that simply don't produce down at the level where people are trying to live and people ought to be, as Deng Xiaoping has said so clearly, bringing about a revolution in China.

You've got to put some money in the pockets of the peasants in order to encourage them to higher production, otherwise you won't get the production. What's the result? China now leads the world in the production of wheat and in the production of cotton. I was bowled over. I didn't

realize that, too, their production goes up, in the last seven years 12 ½ percent a year. We, who used to lead in the world in the production of cotton--13 million bales of 480 pounds each--China makes 23 million! The Soviet Union is a poor third down there in both wheat and cotton. And I tell you, it's really a remarkable situation. That's what interests me, what works. And if you don't approach people with respect and some concern for their dignity, you're not going to get anywhere, either. You just cannot order people around and expect them to (produce). As Deng Xiaoping, again said that now we have the system of responsibility, and that the ordinary Chinese peasant (everybody calls them, I call them small farmer) is making money, so he's producing more, so he's buying, and little industries are springing up. That's how the nation gets to be economically sound. It's from the bottom up. You can't do this from the top down.

Q: You mentioned the Program Committee. That was, of course, at FAO, the organization to which you were assigned?

FENWICK: Well, I'm assigned to really three organizations--FAO, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations; the World Food Program and the World Food Council, which are the three. There is a fourth here in Rome, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, but I'm not really accredited to that. Mr. McPherson, who's our AID chief administrator and a wonderful man, is our head representative to that organization, and the AID man here in the office, Al Furman, is the one who represents us on the executive meetings.

Q: Just how large a staff do you have?

FENWICK: There are two AID people. There are two AID people, one agricultural, and then there are three of us in the State Department, but actually the agricultural and the AID are a little bit separate, you might say. They have separate reporting. I sign all the cables but they have separate funding and so on.

Q: Do you, like other Ambassadors, have an official deputy?

FENWICK: I have my deputy, yes, Deputy Chief of Mission Ed Parsons. Awfully nice, very good man. I've always had a Deputy Chief of Mission. Then we have one more in the State Department who does all the complicated employment in the various UN agencies and also everything to do with, oh, taxes and income and all those technical details.

Q: Did you appoint your own deputy or was he already here when you got here?

FENWICK: No, the one that I had when I first came I met when I was in Washington. He was proposed and I said, "Certainly." I had no particular--and he was very good. He's now the head of the commission, the Southeast Asia Commission, with its headquarters in Sri Lanka, in Ceylon. Then he was succeeded by Mr. Parsons, who also I had never seen but was proposed by the State Department. I have no particular axe to grind, you might say.

Q: I suppose you have the normal staff meetings and so on, with your staff?

FENWICK: Every Monday morning we meet the staff, yes.

Q: Do you have any special problems with the staff, or perhaps I should put it another way: how would you describe your personal relationships with the staff, with other women officers who might be in the Embassy here, and particularly with the wives of some of the male officers?

FENWICK: Well, the women here on the staff, marvelous. Now, there's, no--I'm not being polite either, they are absolutely terrific. They work hard and long. They undertake to help out when one is ill or has gone home on leave or something. It's really a terrific sense of morale and sharing. In the Embassy here there's only one woman in a, what might be called a higher position. Very, very able, Miss Katherine Kemp. Miss Kemp is the Administrator and heads all the work of running this, you know, the administrative details of the Embassy. So I have something to do with her. I like her very much.

As for the wives, you know, when do I see anybody, come to think of that, except the people who come to see me on business? I leave home at 8:00 in the morning. I arrive here at the office. I'm very busy. I leave, if we have Conferences, at 9:00 for a 9:30 opening of the Conference. I usually have, when Conferences are on, a reception. I'm lucky if I get home by 8:00, 8:30. Generally speaking, if it isn't the time of the Conference, I get home before 7:30 or by 7:30 as a rule; sometimes it may have to be a little later. If I have an official dinner, of course, it may be 12:00 or 1:00. But there's no time. I don't know any of the wives of the people in the Embassy except Mrs. Rabb, the wife of our Ambassador, who's an absolute dear and has been wonderfully kind to me, as indeed the Ambassador has, too. Whenever one of my colleagues arrives from Congress, my former colleagues, I'm always included. Awfully nice atmosphere.

Q: That would bring up the question, having mentioned your busy schedule, does this job allow you much of a private life? Do you have any time for recreation or entertainment of a personal nature?

FENWICK: Well, that's just laughable. There isn't any private life. I'm not allowed to go, I'm not allowed to walk on the streets or take a taxi or go in a friend's car, so that every time I do anything I have my wonderful driver, and a young man who sits next to him in the front seat with a gun. And it doesn't make things easy. I don't want to cost the taxpayers extra, and if I'm going to something they have to be there, and they have to see me home, ride up in the elevator to the front door, and I tell you, I have no private life. I have no, none. Once a week I try to see my sister-in-law, who's Italian, and one or two of my old friends, so that once a week I do generally have a night to myself, you might say. But those are early; I get home around 10:00.

Q: When you say that you're not permitted to walk on the street, that you're always accompanied, would that be because of possible dangers, personal dangers, in relation to your job?

FENWICK: Yes, that's it. Apparently the Embassy gets these threatening letters, so I said, really, maybe they threaten the Ambassador and I can see that, but I cannot see that I am so vulnerable or interesting to anybody. And the security people came to see me and said, "Please don't take that attitude. Please do as we ask. Our jobs are on the line. If something happened to you, it would be headlines." I don't want to risk their jobs, so I go along.

Q: Would you say that because of your job, you're head of mission, to use a semi-formal term, actually isolates you? In other words, that old story of "command is a lonely post."

FENWICK: I suppose so. to some extent, yes. I hadn't heard that. But I think it is, because you've got to keep everybody's secret. People come to me in this mission, or citizens, and they very often have private, personal problems that they don't want to have go any further, so that you have this feeling of responsibility and loneliness in a sense. I remember, at one point during all these conferences and things, one of our early mornings, I said to my staff, "Now, you're going to have to present your information very briefly. I feel like an overloaded circuit." That was really the way I felt--an overloaded circuit. Too much coming in, trying to keep it all separate. Trying to make sure that none of these confidential cables were mentioned in places and times when they shouldn't be. Really quite a--"overloaded circuit" really did describe it.

Q: Does the idea or the concept of the power that you hold, at least formally, officially, as an Ambassador, ever intrude upon yourself? What sort of an impact does it have on you personally, this concept of being powerful if you want to use that power to its full extent?

FENWICK: Absolutely zero, zilch, nothing. I don't like power. I don't like a sensation of power. I think the most dangerous thing in the world is to get to a point where you feel you're powerful. I'm absolutely against it, root and branch. I don't--I think--one of the things I've seen--people trip because of this desire for power, and I absolutely don't feel powerful. Maybe that makes it easier, because I guess a lot of these people who do trip feel powerful or enjoy it and perhaps feel more powerful than they really are.

I'm happy to feel that I'm a hard working person, with a point of view, and I have my two cents' worth to contribute. So has everybody else. Everybody, everybody, has two cents' worth to contribute, just as good as mine, probably. And mine is as good as theirs, probably. I mean, we're all in this together, and it's hard enough, you know. I think it was Aristotle who said, "Nobody knows the whole truth, but each one of us has some part to contribute." I think that is both a prescription for self-respect and for respect of others. I've got my two cents' worth; you've got your two cents' worth. Let's get together.

Q: Obviously, some of the things you have just said would indicate problems in this position to you or to anyone else holding it. But are there any special problems that you have found in this job, perhaps relating to the usual inspections or distinguished visitors, or things of this nature?

FENWICK: I love the inspections. I was very happy, I've always been happy to see the inspectors. We've had them twice and they've been a joy. I love people who are trying to find out the truth and not only the things that feed their bias; that to me is one of the most disconcerting things.

Yes, and now, you asked me what have I discovered that I don't like. That's what I don't like. I don't like the fact that I'm reluctantly coming to see that many of these agencies simply are not willing to live up to their mandates, or in some cases are delightedly exceeding their mandates, increasing their bureaucracy. It really is maddening, and one agency will not blow the whistle on

another. When they do, it's considered to be an absolutely--I know of one case in which one agency did point out that between $130 and $200 million was missing in that agency, at least not accounted for. Nobody thought it was corrupt; it was just careless, clumsy, bad administration, and they felt that it shouldn't really be presented to the group, the governing body.

That's crazy. Of course it's got to be presented to the governing body. I mean, aren't we supposed to, aren't we supposed to govern? Can we govern if we don't know what's going on? Is one agency not supposed to say when another agency isn't living up to its mandate, especially when one agency is supposed to be interested in having certain standards to live up to? When they find that another agency isn't living up to them, they don't say a word? I think that's terrible. I think they ought to communicate with somebody and say, "Look. These standards are not being adhered to." Otherwise, everybody goes along thinking everything is fine. Well, it isn't fine.

This is to me the most discouraging and distressing part of this business. The agencies really don't, they don't make conditions, they don't explain to governments, what are the conditions of the project they're planning. It's as though they were looking for clients, as though they were Bloomingdale's and Macy's looking for clients and not wanting to put too heavy requirements. Now, I think that we're dealing with sovereign nations; nobody expects you to be able to say, "Do this and do that." But the project that you offer can have certain characteristics, and if the government says, "I won't put up with those characteristics," then it seems to me the agency should say, "Well, we'll try to work out something else." But you don't give in. You don't just give in and get rid of any kind of principle or even common sense. It's unhappy.

Q: I suppose that would fall into the class of unresolved problems that you face.

FENWICK: It is indeed an unresolved problem.

Q: How would you characterize your personal relationships with other diplomats accredited to FAO and to the other UN food agencies here, especially the Iron Curtain diplomats, or perhaps even the Third World diplomats?

FENWICK: Well, I think they're very good, really. I have several friends among the African representatives and one friend who is in the Warsaw Pact countries, awfully nice man. We don't agree; there's no use pretending that we can sit down and have a little heart-to-heart about how important the citizen is and how the free press is absolutely essential to the proper functioning of a state. We have profound disagreements, but that doesn't mean that we don't talk happily about things we do agree about, which is the desirability of increasing the welfare of the little farmer at the end of the road. Now, they may not see the approach to the solution of that problem the way I do, but it doesn't mean that we can't have nice talks. The ones that sometimes disappoint me are those countries that know better, so to speak, that should be taking stands on principle, and like the agencies, just don't.

Q: What about your relationships with the Italian officials here and with the local people here in Rome?

FENWICK: Oh, I love Italians. I love Italians. I'm devoted. I have very happy relations with the new Ambassador from Italy to FAO. I don't know him very well but I was very fond of the old Ambassador, Ambassador Francisi, who had a wonderful second--a woman called Signora Dellacroce. She was absolutely terrific, and when he didn't appear, she appeared and she represented Italy so well. We were a very happy working relationship.

The British, they've had a wonderful person, Peter McLean. He's gone back to England. Now I have another friend, Ron Deare, who represents Great Britain. We had a wonderful woman from Norway, Mrs. Rahaven. She unfortunately has been called back to the Foreign Office of her country, and I haven't gotten to know the new one yet. But they're all friends. Ambassador Martin of Belgium, very, very fine representative of Belgium. Mr. de Bey of The Netherlands. Mr. Leiber. I could go down, one after another.

Q: Do these relationships result sometimes in friendships?

FENWICK: Yes, but they're very official friendships. Frankly, I haven't much time and I don't entertain as much as I should; I know that. And I ought to be making more personal friends of these people whom I like so much. They are personal friends in a way, but I only see them officially.

Q: How have you been treated by the press here in Italy or in Europe generally, and even in the United States? You as the woman Ambassador, former Congresswoman? How do they treat you in this job?

FENWICK: Terrific. I really am endlessly grateful to the press. I have never in all my life, and I've been dealing with the press for 50 years, told any member of the press anything in confidence that they've betrayed. Now, they don't always say everything I say, but I'm not Mount Sinai; I don't have to have everything. But the general flavor is so faithfully reported. I think I've had great luck with the press, in wonderful people. I had one disappointment only. A member of the press asked me for a certain letter. I gave him the letter and he only printed one clause, wouldn't print the whole sentence, and so that was a little disappointment, but that's the only one I've ever had, and that's pretty good--in all these campaigns. This happened in the campaign for the Senate; I suppose there's always more pressure there.

Q: Are there any special problems that you have here in Rome as one of three American Ambassadors? There is, of course, Mr. Rabb, whom you've mentioned, the American Ambassador to the Italian Government. There's Mr. Wilson, the Ambassador to the Vatican, and you as the Ambassador to three of the four UN food agencies. Does this present any problems, and maybe, is there any complication because of the fact that you are a woman?

FENWICK: No, I don't think there's any--there are no problems. I don't see Ambassador Wilson so much because when my colleagues arrive, and friends from America, they generally get in touch with the Embassy and they ask to see me and the Ambassador. The Ambassador arranges that I can come to the tea or dinner or lunch or whatever it is that he's giving for the Congressmen. I have such happy relationships with Mr. and Mrs. Rabb, the Ambassador and Mrs. Rabb. They've been wonderfully kind to me; we understand one another. I go every Friday

to a country-team meeting at 10:00 in the Embassy and listen to what the Ambassador has to say, and the Press Secretary, and the DCM, and the Commercial Secretary, and the Military Secretary, all of the different components of the Embassy, so that I'm kept abreast.

Q: What would you see as your major success or successes, maybe even failures, I don't know, since you've been here, and were success or failure related in any way to the fact that you are a woman?

FENWICK: I don't think that much of this has anything to do with being a woman. It's awfully hard to tell, if you're going to be absolutely flat honest, something that you advocated in the end of January, beginning of February of 1984, if it is now increasingly the policy, have you any part in that? I have no idea whether I have. Certainly, I cabled the State Department at the time, "We cannot stop what we're doing but we have to change direction," and outlined what I thought should be the direction. We are moving in that direction more and more. Have I got anything to do with that? I don't know. I think Mr. McPherson and the people in the State Department probably had the same feeling that I did, so that I can't really say that I think that that change, which I think is essential and most important, comes from me. I have had very nice letters and notes and cables, saying they appreciate the work we're doing, and so on, here in this mission. That's nice, but I can't think of any earth-shaking thing except this real change of policy.

Q: But you did actually propose or suggest or talk about the change which has come about?

FENWICK: I cabled a long and very carefully thought-out cable on three grounds, really; the reasons and the way I thought it ought to change. Human and ecological were the first. Second, the practical. And third, the political. those were the three sections in which I divided my remarks. The one that I care most about is the human and ecological. And the practical, because, you see, they all hang together, really. If you don't devise something practical, you're never going to be able to save the forests and the water and the soil and you never, if you don't do that, are going to benefit the human beings for whom, after all, it's all designed.

Q: Do you do much traveling or public speaking locally or internationally as part of your job?

FENWICK: No, I don't. I've been to six African countries. I've been to three East African and three West African, and I may go to Central Africa this January/February, I don't know; I'll see. There's a meeting in the Congo in September, and I may go to that and delay any traveling until then. That's expensive for the public, you see, if you go and then pop in at Cameroon, maybe, at the same time you're going to Congo, they're so near.

Q: You have already said that you don't do as much entertaining as you think you should, but does this position that you hold now require special entertainment for special occasions, special holidays like now, Christmas time or the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, things of that nature?

FENWICK: No, our Ambassador takes care of our national holidays like the Fourth of July. He gave a wonderful one last year. Really, he did, he and Ruth Rabb did so well. They had this huge garden party which they have every Fourth of July in that lovely garden of the Villa Taverna, our

Embassy. And, with great tact, they had the Alpine, the Alpini, the Italian Alpini Brigade or division--I don't know what you'd call it--anyway, the band that belongs to the Alpini Division. They played the "Star-Spangled Banner" and everything. It was so nice, and the Italians were so happy to see this crack regiment band. He and I, the Ambassador and I, conducted the band together. It was great fun. That's the kind of thing that the Embassy does, and extremely well.

I have had a couple of receptions, big, you know, 100 or more, at the house, and in the spring it's possible because there's a terrace. I haven't a very big apartment and it's not convenient for entertaining, really, except in the spring when the long, narrow--quite long, narrow--room can open up onto the terrace. So, I've had, I think, about three or four of those since I've been here.

Q: We've talked about contributions that you have made, or hope that you have made. Would there be any special contribution that you made to the Service because you are a woman?

FENWICK: Meaning the diplomatic service?

Q: Yes.

FENWICK: I don't think so. We've had very able women Ambassadors, so I don't have to prove anything--I don't have to prove that women can function, because that's been done over and over. We had a wonderfully able woman in London, Anne Armstrong from Texas, and everybody--Labor, Conservative, Liberal--everybody that spoke to me said what a wonderful Ambassador she had been, so there's no question that on the international scene women have proved themselves. We've had lots of gentlemen that weren't so ornamental and we've had some ladies, I'm afraid, who haven't been so ornamental, either. But whether ladies or gentlemen, whether men or women, it depends entirely on the character of the person and the quality of the person who happens to get the appointment.

Q: In your time here in Rome, have you ever been received by Pope John Paul?

FENWICK: Yes. When Ambassador Block was here--I mean Secretary of Agriculture Block, a man I greatly admire--wonderfully fine man; I'm very, very fond of him. That's his picture over there. He was very popular here, too, by the way, made a great hit by being so straightforward, so kindly, very tactful, but principled. He didn't give way on anything in which he believed. Anyway, he and his wife and daughter had an audience with the Pope, and I went along with the daughter in my hand, and her friend. We all went together and were received by Pope John XXIII.

Q: You were not received in your own right as Ambassador, per se?

FENWICK: No. No, because you see, I'm Food and Agriculture and I'm not even representing the United States at the Quirinale or anything, so it's a special sort of sideline, you might say.

U.S. Representative, Food and Agricultural Organization
Rome (1989-1992)

Gerald J. Monroe was raised in New York State and attended City College in New York. He served in the US Army and entered the Foreign Service in 1959. His career has included positions in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Germany, China, Switzerland, and Italy. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing on March 22, 1999.

MONROE: Well, I went back to the department to be a liaison officer very briefly with the states, state liaison, intergovernmental liaison. I did that because they were bringing in a political fellow who wasn't quite there yet. Then when he got there, his feet weren't quite on the ground yet. Then I was discovered in the fifth, as I put it, like being discovered at the drug store, I was at the fifth floor coffee bar whatever it was, a little cafeteria there. An old pal actually from college days walked in and said, "Say, you are a food manager aren't you." I said, "Yes." He said, "How would you like to be our firm rep in FAO?" I said, "Well, I don't now, what is it all about?" I don't want to go out there to talk to any of those people because the people that I know who have done that, one had a heart attack, Touissand, a very nice fellow. He did have a heart attack. The other one came back, and the third one, Jack Direkey was sent off to Uruguay and was there three months. "No," he said. "I would take over. The ambassador was going to be recalled, and you'd be assigned as his DCM and when he left, you would take over." A long period ensued, several months when I was angling not to go out as this fellow's deputy, wait until he leaves, and then I will go out. Then you know, what was the White House going to do about this? Administrations were changing. Were they going to send someone else out, a political appointee. Of course, it did require six months family separation. Evangie, was at that point State Vice President of AFSA. She had to finish that up, and there was a question whether she could get a job there. She eventually did because of her credentials in handling central American communist issues.

Q: In political sections.

MONROE: In political sections of the embassy, but that happened later. Finally I was told go in January. I think people sympathized with my not wanting to work for that ex-Congressman given the track record. But come the end of January 1989, I was told, you go now. I was called on vacation in Vermont, and told, go.

Q: And you went. Were you deputy or were you in charge?

MONROE: I was in charge, but I wasn't, I didn't have ambassadorial title because they had withdrawn it with Ecker. Now, that was both good and bad. I mean, the good part of it was, for decades the thing had been an embassy.

Q: A mission. A separate mission from the embassy.

MONROE: Yes, that's right, with an ambassador as the principal. So, nothing changed. The embassy didn't get it back. We were on the top floor of this magnificent villa, that Ambassador

Robson, Reagan's ambassador to the Vatican had acquired at great expense. The difference was our part wasn't decorated very well, theirs was.

Q: The Vatican mission was in the same building?

MONROE: It was their building.

Q: It was their building, but you were using part of it.

MONROE: We were using part of it and paying our share which I had to re-negotiate. We had more Americans than they did. They had 13 locals. We had two locals. One was my driver, bodyguard, Chiaso, you know, because he could deal with Italians, and could speak Italian. Well, he was Italian. The only problem was he couldn't speak much English. Then there was someone, a woman in her 70s who had been working for AID since the war or something, and was in Rome, and was still working for AI D. AID had two positions there.

Q: In your office?

MONROE: In my office.

Q: You say you had more Americans than the Vatican Embassy. How many did you have?

MONROE: I had myself and another State department officer, a deputy, who was a mid-career officer, agriculture was too when they arrived because the principal was relatively low ranking for agriculture. Generally agriculture sends very senior people to those highly visible kinds of positions. The AID people both of them had separate budgets. One was to IFAD or the International Fund for Agricultural Development which is essentially an agricultural bank. That is the best way to describe it. And the World Food Programme. The agricultural fund, I said was under the aegis of policy planning at AID. The World Food Programme, of course was its own division, a food aid division which had an assistant secretary equivalent. So it was three agencies and four budgets. The administrative overhang was rather daunting actually that was the one that was in negatives.

Q: The administrative...

MONROE: Well, the requirement to administer the place proved to be far more difficult than I envisaged.

Q: You didn't have an administrative officer.

MONROE: No. We had first depended on the, you know, EUR was attempting to be very cooperative but both embassies were not. They were remarkably uncooperative. Some of our contracts for cleaning and what have you were still held by the embassy. Looking back to a time when we were around the corner from the embassy on the villa St. Daniel or whatever it was. Some were handled by the Vatican. Of course, I kept arguing that the Vatican should take over all of these contracts if they choose or will take them over, but give us a contract option. Well,

what they eventually did was give us a, they did give us an accountant who worked at the embassy but was less committed to us. He was a dedicated...

Q: This was the Rome embassy as opposed to the Vatican embassy.

MONROE: Right. I argued strenuously that the mission should be integrated administratively. Actually I thought that all three should be I mean as they do in Brussels, because the Vatican had an administrative officer.

Q: The Vatican was completely separate from the embassy in Rome administratively and every other way.

MONROE: Well, all of us were dependent on Rome's communications. Technology was such at that time that they didn't have the small post kits available for the kind of setting we were in, which was a complex communications setting in a modern country more or less.

Q: When your office would send a telegram to Washington, it would be signed by Monroe?

MONROE: Yes. I mean I moved in there operating just the way Eckert did. That is the way I operated until the day I left.

Q: Nobody else ever came so you

MONROE: Well, I was never given the title of Ambassador because every time I was offered it from someone on the hill, they later found that person wanted the job, Phil Christianson for example, from Helm's office wanted to turn it into an embassy. Then another Congressman, influential Congressman, he didn't want the job, but there was somebody he wanted to give it to. A member of the black caucus, Donnely, I think. Something like that. Then Hecht, Senator Hecht from Nevada, remember him? He wanted it very badly. He called me and said, "Where is the nearest golf course?" I said, "All the golf courses are far out," and they were. I wasn't lying. I said, "I have never heard of one, but there must be one. I'll ask. I am sure Italians play golf." Well, he became very distressed at the visibly, I mean audibly distressed at that over the phone. I could hear as I sort of thought out loud. Well I think I know some one who must belong to a club. Well, I will ask at the FAO. Maybe he will know. But, in any case, yes, that went on. Every time I asked something for our administrative types back in IO, his response would be well I just got a call from the hill. They are interested in sending out so and so. He had a perfect ploy, but I am fighting for you. I don't know how many were interested except the ones that called me.

Q: As far as the State Department and maybe the White House was concerned, you were the acting permanent representative.

MONROE: NO, I was the permanent chief of mission. That was the title they finally got around to giving me sometime in April.

Q: And you were there about what, two and a half years or longer?

MONROE: Three years. My wife was there two and a half.

Q: And besides dealing with the two embassies, your main purpose was to deal with the food and agricultural organization of the UN and the World Food Programme and IFAD.

MONROE: IFAD and numerous legal entities I didn't know about but which I had to sit on the finance committees of, if you don't mind my ending with a preposition.

Q: What was your sort of main area that you worked on and what were the main problems you were dealing with?

MONROE: Well, initially, we had horrible, when I arrived, the day I arrived, I actually called on this, the director general of the FAO the day I arrived. The relations between the United States and him personally were just in the gutter. I mean just...

Q: What was the name of the director general?

MONROE: His name was Soloma, Edward Soloma. He was of Lebanese origin. He had come up the usual way in the FAO which is firm rep job at the FAO, division chief or something and then runs for director general and wins. We had not supported him for his third term. He had already served two terms. We supported him for his first term as a technocrat. We supported him for his second term because everyone serves two terms, but not his third term. We supported someone from Benin whose coming didn't make much of a showing.

Q: By the time you were there, this was his third term.

MONROE: This was his third term, so he was angry at us because we hadn't been supportive. He was angry at us because we were already falling into arrears, nothing like we ultimately fell into, and had only paid part of our dues our obligations. I was a member of the finance committee, ex-officio, as well as the program committee and a number of other committees, OECD. Multi-lateral life is one meeting after another because there are all of these little groupings. The place was a mini UN, I mean a mini New York in that sense. They all operate pretty much the same. You have the Geneva group which is a formal group of interested major donors. We had a lot of informal groups. We were unique because we weren't divided between Western Europe and others in the G-77. We were divided between OECD and non OECD which made for a rather slight variation. There were satellites who were members. Of course this in the descending days of the Soviet Union, but they were still there more or less. The Soviet Union had never taken up its seat, so that set of issues didn't arise. We didn't have east-west, but north-south was, you know, north-south conflict was the way in which someone kept power.

Q: In support of the south.

MONROE: He had the support of the south. So I began to call on everyone I possibly could. I had seen mistakes made. Dare I say Ambassador Whittlesey was not very diligent in making calls, so many people refused to talk to her, she found.

Q: Because she had not called on them.

MONROE: That's right.

Q: To introduce herself.

MONROE: That's right, so I decided that I was going to call on every African, every Latin American and Middle Easterner. All these were geographic groupings within.

Q: And all of these were representatives of their country at FAO.

MONROE: Well, I called on everyone. I called on ambassadors which many times they preferred. Most of my colleagues in the western group I met the ambassadors of. They invited me to a luncheon or something of that sort. That was easily done. I didn't really have to call on them, but I did have to call on African- (end of tape)

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Q: This is June 9, 1999. Gerry, we have been talking about your assignment from 1989 to 1992, which was U.S. permanent representative to the UN food agencies in Rome, head of that mission. I think the other day we were talking about some of the things you tried to do on an ongoing basis to keep in touch with the variety of other delegations from Africa and all parts of the world. What were some of the main issues you had to deal with in that period? Were we fully paid up, or was this kind of the beginning of the difficulties we had paying our full share of the expenses to the UN agencies that subsequently come to affect all of the United Nations contributions?

MONROE: I think several things coalesced very severe relations, and probably our relations with the UN system was no where as bad as it was with the FAO. The reasons were several. There was an underlying problem with the UN system generally where the administration was concerned. I arrived just at the change of the Reagan Bush administrations. We had been falling into arrears during the previous two years. We had had several ambassadors. These people were political appointees. One was a prominent Congresswoman by the name of Millicent Fenwick who in general was very positive toward the FAO, toward development, and she for whatever reason was able to get along with Salma in a very positive way. Indeed she was frequently instructed not to take positive action but did that Salma considered helpful. As a matter of fact, someone called me just yesterday and asked to talk about. Excuse me, someone who is working on a biography of Millicent Fenwick, and they wanted to talk about the Rome years. She was fluent in Italian; she was fluent in French which was Salma's first language if not Arabic. I never knew which. French seemed to be the language he preferred to use. Then, when she left, she was replaced by an extremely conservative ex-congressman from upstate New York. His views more or less conformed to the views of many conservatives both on the hill and in the administration. Therefore, relations just fell into the cellar. Salma and Ambassador Eckert finally made their peace just before Eckert left, but much harm had been done. A considerable amount of negative reporting on Salma was done, negative impressions were drawn during the conferences and council meetings and assembly meetings and so on. So that in many instances, I would say that that part of IO that handled the FAO, we were involved in a cold war you might say. It was one

of those cases where the desk officer loved to hate his client. And of course the feeling was reciprocated. I think Salma felt for several reasons, one is that this was his third term, and we had not supported him for a third term while we had for the first two elections. Incidentally it runs about six to seven years. It is a lengthy hold on the office. Salma had first been elected in '76, so this man had been running the FAO for a number of years. During that time there was a considerable controversy attached to his name particularly where the first African famine of the '80s occurred or during this Ethiopian civil war and the tyrannical regime of Mengistu, and the FAO's actions during that time, the FAO's efforts to whatever their efforts were did not meet the standard the U.S. government expected to be met, nor did they meet the standards of the World Food Programme. That began, I think, the animosity between Salma and the Australian director general of the World Food Programme. I think I described that last time. There were already two strikes against anyone who went, three strikes if you count Eckert who was not Salma's favorite person. What one found when one made the opening call an Salma was a lot of hostility. Now this was before we managed to stay in by just giving him enough money to retain our vote. Several other things that happened during that first year. The council president was a prominent agriculturist from a member country. The term was three years. These people were elected. It was held to be the U.S. turn which is frequently the way things operate in the United Nations system, regions and to the degree countries within those regions have turned. As a major donor country it was pretty much felt it was time for the U.S. to head the council. We hadn't actually had that position for many years, several decades I think. A Belgian ran against, the Belgian current representative ran against the very prominent person that we found, the number three at Agriculture, and actually had been in the industry very well known grain broker working with Cargill, so this was a prominent man in American agriculture. He lost because many felt some had brought pressure to bear on the governing council membership particularly the G-77 or the developing countries.

Q: Who were sitting on the council at that time.

MONROE: That's right. I think the answer is he did. I think he clearly didn't want an American to win. He argued that it was inappropriate given the level of our arrears. In any case with this in hand, with that loss in hand and several other political things we had for the first time, a Palestinian resolution was introduced by the Egyptians of all people. We didn't really expect that. Well, the usual team flew out both from Israel and the United States to deal with this. As it turned out, I dealt with it mostly and a DAS from IO. We met constantly for the better part of a week with various middle eastern caucuses, and seemed to be making headway. We also had a very long afternoon with the Egyptian ambassador. We thought that perhaps we were watering this down to where it would be acceptable to the Israelis and to ourselves for that matter. One of the pluses of the FAO was that it had been remarkably unpolitical over the years. I think that was one of its strengths, probably one of the few left by this time. Certainly in terms of the way Washington viewed the agency. Well, the possibility of the usual kind of Palestinian resolution which was political without question. Palestine was already or the territories that the Israelis called it were already benefits of a fairly significant FAO program, so we could see no particular gain to be made except in the political arena. In any case, I think inexorably we were going to lose that one as we do in all agencies. We got a little more support there because even the Australians abstained. We got more extensions than we expected. Normally the Australians follow the EC's road on this sort of thing. They essentially support Palestinians resolutions.

Notwithstanding their surprising level of support, we still lost the vote by a fairly significant number. It wasn't two votes to a hundred and sixty eight as it usually was the case in that sort of thing. In any case, Washington was very upset with that. I think that tilted the boat in favor of just getting off it and letting the FAO go slowly out to sea. There was no question that the organization, had we left, I knew the Canadians would leave, the British would have given very strong consideration to leaving because by this time no one in the donor community if you want to call it that because that is the way the real division is. It wasn't so much contribution levels as it was donor and beneficiary or G-77 versus members of the OECD, however one wants to call it. I think at the UN it was Europe and others. At the FAO for whatever historic reason it was the OECD group. Therefore Washington decided we were going to get out of this thing. Now, there was not total unanimity even among the conservatives. The farm belt congressmen wanted to stay in.

Q: The Department of Agriculture?

MONROE: The Department of Agriculture definitely wanted to stay in simply because they found it a convenient venue for technical exchanges and because the FAO ran a structure of independent research organizations who were regionally organized. The Agriculture Department felt that this was of value relationship, not critically important to the agricultural welfare of the United States. In fact the United States technology was by and large the driving force of the agency. That said, much was learned from others obviously. Some of the G-77 had the largest seed banks in the world and so forth which was worth having access to through the FAO. But that did not mean to say that the Secretary of Agriculture would not have been influenced by the political world of the White House obviously. I think this whole Palestinian issue which was very barely caught. Of course, what happened was, as frequently happens with this sort of thing is the EEC persuaded the middle east that they were going, the middle eastern caucus that they would support them, or I should say the French, that they would support this resolution, so the ground was cut out from under us. Try as we might, we had much more negotiating success with Syria than we did with France as it turned out. Not unusual I suspect. With that behind us, I got to go over with my Agricultural attaché and hand this $15 million check to the director general. It was one of the most unpleasant interludes in my entire career. I never quite dealt, even Soviets, I never quite dealt with a foreign interlocutor who was literally in a rage, I mean stomping about the office. It was almost carpet chewing.

Q: Why was he so enraged? You were giving him $18 million for his organization.

MONROE: Well, he needed 56 from us. That's what he felt, plus we owed another $70 or $80 million at that time, I don't recall. The total indebtedness was far beyond $18 million.

Q: Was he objecting also to whatever instructions you had to tell him?

MONROE: Oh, absolutely. I mean, he was convinced there was some sort of conspiracy. Indeed he never got above the personal in the entire three years that we worked together most of the time. It was just in his background. As he put it, he had been there whatever 15 years and he still had all his teeth. Probably an old Lebanese saying, an old Arabic saying, but whatever, I think it pretty much personified the man, his personality. Many people, many Americans and indeed

many other Europeans considered Salama personally corrupt. I think that was not the case. He lived modestly. I was unaware of anything irregular in his dealings with the system, the UN system except the way in which his pension was calculated. The UN has several figures for income levels. One is used for pension purposes. The gap between that and what he actually made was the widest probably in their system. Other than that, I could find nothing that could indicate crooks, you know skimming money from projects or anything of that nature. What was terribly corrupt was his use of permanent representatives from the third world. Many of these people don't receive or regularly receive instructions. Indeed they may not receive instructions in most matters of importance to other members. So they will vote in expectation of a permanent job at the FAO when their permanent representative status was concluded. This had happened enough to suggest that perhaps there was more than merit involved. Indeed Salama himself had been Lebanese special representative before he got a job with the FAO. I will say he seldom delivered. I mean it was probably, there probably were other aspects leading to his decision. None of them were based on merit. I know he did choose the Saudi for head of the newly arranged state of the middle eastern office which had been closed for years. It was quite clear that man was not up to the job, but there was a close relationship between Salama and that particular person. This, of course was not unknown to the department, and they had a view that this sort of maneuvering lended to the Palestinian resolution - i.e. that essentially what Salama had told us was that if we were to vote for the, rather if we were to support the budget and pay or make a good faith effort to pay, this Palestinian resolution might go away. That was certainly a very plausible interpretation of what Salama had said both to me and the assistant secretary. It was after the assembly conference. The Assistant secretary had no doubt and what's more whether he had doubt or not, and I had little doubt as well, he just didn't... I wasn't surprised, let's put it that way. I didn't see it as the worst thing that ever happened. It made sense to me, and I think the thing to have done was just what we did do, stay in but make clear that we were most displeased.

Q: How close in sequence were these steps? This all happened in 1989, the Palestinian resolution was passed, and soon after you delivered the $18 million.

MONROE: It was a matter of weeks. The conference ended the second week in December and I had to have the check in his hand by January 2, which is when I delivered it. I have forgotten what the [connection was], so when the relationship between these events and the payment of that $18 million was really, they were intimately associated.

Q: Was there also a debate though as to whether maybe to pull out entirely and not pay the $18 million?

MONROE: Oh, yes. I'm sure that was the assistant secretary, the Secretary of Agriculture's view and some Congress people, but I know there was very strong opposition even among some Republicans from the farm states. On the other hand, the foreign affairs committee, some powerful people on the Foreign Affairs Committee were very strongly disposed toward our leaving the organization. Had we done so as I mentioned before, then the organization itself would have unraveled. The Canadians would definitely have left. The British were giving it serious consideration.

Q: Did you make a recommendation?

MONROE: Well, yes. From the very beginning I said we just have to see it through. Salama wasn't forever. He wasn't the FAO. He was a very shady character who had become director general of the FAO. He was about as bad as the system then had, but there had been worse. There were worse then actually from one point of view. Salama was competent. One could never claim that he didn't know the business, and he didn't know the organization. He certainly didn't know how to handle Americans for sure.

Q: Who was the Secretary of Agriculture in this period?

MONROE: Yider.

Q: He had quite a bit of international experience himself.

MONROE: Quite a bit, and he had come to the conference. You know, he was there for as per usual, three or four days. Of course, everything went wrong that could from Salama's point of view. When I gave Yider the traditional conference party at my residence, Salama first accepted and then didn't show.

Q: Was this meant as a sign of displeasure with the United States?

MONROE: Obviously, and the Secretary noticed it. It might have been pointed out to him by somebody which I suspect. But he said, "Well as a major donor, he should have appeared." He certainly should have appeared after saying he was coming.

Q: Did he have an explanation?

MONROE: No, he really didn't. He apologized to me later personally, you know on a personal basis, which was his way, but he didn't, and he muttered some excuse in French which I didn't catch. I think it was meant to be an affront. Because, he went for example, somebody saw him in the Secretary of Agriculture's entourage of the Algerians. It turned out that the Algerians and Egyptians had been the people who had tabled the Palestinian resolution. So, there was a good deal of animosity or a good deal of negative energy from the Secretary of Agriculture as he left Rome. He really felt that he had not been treated very well by Salama. Salama believed that he had been similarly mistreated and not given appropriate regard given his status.

Q: All of this I think happened in the first year you were in Rome.

MONROE: It happened during the first year. I then decided that we needed to go to the United States, my mission needed to go to the membership and convince them that we were serious about the affair. That our concerns were well-grounded. There was a problem, a serious problem with the FAO, which others were aware of. I renewed my efforts to deal with Africans particularly. We were most successful, my staff and I were most successful with such countries as Cameroon. Ethiopia was going pretty well, but then the fellow defected which created another drama of it own.

Q: In the sense that he defected to you?

MONROE: Yes, at a cocktail party. So he stayed for dinner unexpectedly. I then turned him over to the embassy, but it made it difficult to renew relations with the Ethiopians. I believe Mengistu was still there, or if not, someone like him. I don't recall the exact position this fellow was in, but it was obviously very serious. I also developed very close relationship with the Bangladeshi perm rep who had worked at the UN both as a permanent representative for his country but also doing special missions for the Secretary General. The same could be said of the Brazilian ambassador who was a superb diplomat. I saw him for awhile. We had about four or five lunches when I probably said that I think what we need to do is to get a country with a skilled diplomat such as yourself to figure some way to stay in this organization. He agreed to look into that. He did. He got the Argentine on board. I think there had been a change in the Argentine point of view as far as the United States was concerned. At least I was told that with a new president who is still in office. The view was that we would look at, we Argentina, would look out for out interests but we would not take on the United States. There was no real reason to, and we would try to be helpful to the United States where it was consistent with our own interests. They saw our staying in the United Nations system as in their interest. So, they helped in dealing with the Latin American group. This led to a little group of Latin Americans that I met with periodically which helped get Puerto Rico into the FAO, an interesting side bar.

Q: Puerto Rico was a member of the FAO?

MONROE: Was. They decided not to remain a member when there was a change of government, a change in the governorship. In any case, that was very difficult for the Latin Americans to swallow. They didn't like that.

Q: They probably felt that Puerto Rico was not an independent nation.

MONROE: Well, they wanted it to join as an independent nation. There is a special status at the FAO which had been developed for European, for British colonies. Puerto Rico joined under those special arrangements. Also, Puerto Rico didn't pay, so that added to our arrears. It wasn't much. It wasn't a serious matter.

Q: How were the relations with the western Europeans in this period? Coming back to the election to the chair of the council, I could understand why a number of countries would not be very happy about voting for the United States given this acrimony and problems that had occurred, but one of the problems was that we were competing with a close ally, friend, Belgium. You know, if there were going to be two candidates for essentially the same family, then others had to pick one or the other.

MONROE: Well, that was right. In fact it was the OECD who said it was our turn. It was that group.

Q: Our turn meaning...

MONROE: ...that we should run someone.

Q: We, the United States?

MONROE: The United States. It was only Belgium in that...

Q: Belgium is an OECD country.

MONROE: They are, and we understand the Belgian government had first instructed him not to run. He had been a very important colonial governor in the Congo. This was his principal contribution. He purported to be absolutely, totally, fully devoted to the aims of the G-77 because of this terrible experience with his as he would have put it. The whole title was independent chairman, and so he said that our person could not be independent because he had worked with Cargill. His position was that he would be under the instructions of Cargill, which was nonsense of course.

Q: But did things begin to improve with the western Europeans in this latter part of your time?

MONROE: Yes, we had, well, the French could not be reached. They were a solid supporter of Salama because he was Francophone. Everyone else as a I said, as a matter of fact, this reform minded group that so-called group that existed while I was there, when I first arrived, and really had nothing to do with these issues that I was discussing earlier, that is to say the bi-lateral issues. They were the result of Scandinavian skepticism about the honesty and the effectiveness of the programs that Salama was running in various underdeveloped countries. This was a result of something called multi-bi which means that effectively countries like Denmark and Finland will not have a very developed technical assistance agency of their own. It would be just a few people in the foreign office. They will use the UN system to deliver their aid through trust fund contributions. It is a complicated system, but the short title is multi-bi, multilateral/bilateral. The only problem with it is you have to trust your multilateral organization and you have to be certain that you can account for the monies you put in trust for multilateral organizations to use. As this became a problem, the Camberly group was formed. The whole problem with the Camberly group was at first it was designed to find systems and approaches for accountability rather than looking at the whole policy construct. Furthermore, we thought the Scandinavians would never do anything particularly serious to bring the FAO up short and get it cooperating. One of its major weaknesses was its total unwillingness to cooperate with other members of the UN system such as the World Health Organization which there was a real link there. I already mentioned the World Food Programme and several links, also other agencies, for example, UNDP, the United Nations Development Program which was a trust fund of the Secretary General. That organization had traditionally been run by an American. Parenthetically it no longer is. It is run by a British citizen, so I suspect that reflects the reduction in our contributions. Of course, UNDP was held to be under the control of the donors. It almost had a form of weighted building. I might mention it later because my next assignment really dealt with UNDP. In any case, our technical judgment was UNDP should be closely associated with FAO and other specialized agencies in order to have a resident representative there who was responsible for the entire country program where ever they might be, be it Ghana or Cambodia. Salama didn't see the world that way, so we had a technical problem with him. You know, his view was that he

was very turf conscious to put it bluntly. His view was only FAO knew how to do scientific agriculture, and they were the only ones who knew how to apply these tools to the development populace. The Europeans were worried about that. We were not the only ones to conclude that. I don't think they were interested in the United Nations Development Program as we were, but I do think they felt that greater coordination and cooperation was absolutely essential if they were going to get their money's worth. I formed a group myself to replace the Camberly group. I think it became known as the Monroe group actually. It was about eight or nine, or ten European perm reps including Australia. Again it was more structured, more obvious than the little group with Latin America that I also had. Their job, their aim, our aim was to bring FAO at least to a point where we could argue to our governments that it was beginning to turn around as Salama's last term came to a halt, came to an end, excuse me. The organization itself was going to change from within. We were attempting to influence individuals within the organization, the assistant secretary or the assistant director general level, not in any political way, not against Salama, but toward greater coordination, for example, forestry and so forth.

Q: Now were you there when his term did come to an end and the question of an election to a successor came up?

MONROE: I left the year before.

Q: But you were involved with the election of an American to the World Food Programme?

MONROE: Yes, I was. That was a very curious agency. It was begun in the ‘70s. The story I like best, there are lots of stories about how it was born, but the one that I thought was the nicest was that Henry Kissinger and the Shah of Iran got together and Henry Kissinger said we are going to need something besides oil to make this food conference of 1974 and the oil conferences and so forth during the same period, make sense to the world at large. So the World Food Programme was created, largely with American and Iranian money, oil money and American commodities. That's as good a story as any. I think the possibility of a multilateral food agency struck everyone as constructive for a number of reasons. It did allow us, for example, to deal more effectively with the first Ethiopian crisis, the first Ethiopian famine created by this dictator, Mengistu, in a way that no individual European country could have worked it. I said it was extremely difficult even for the World Food Programme because there were no NGOs in Ethiopia at that point. Normally the World Food Programme tends to broker food to NGOs and to other agencies such a the United Nations Children's agency. I'll call it that because the intercession no longer need be an emergency. It was designed initially for European children after the war. But that is an example of an agency that does a lot of feeding, that deals with refugee situations focusing on women and children obviously. But in Ethiopia, I believe World Food Programme had to develop a distribution system of its own which was not really what it was cut out to do, but it did this and it did it effectively all things considered. I think that may have been one of the reasons why Salama and Ingram became estranged. There was considerable disagreement as to when to declare an emergency, a food emergency.

Q: Was the World Food Programme under the FAO or was it separate?

MONROE: No, it was separate, but it was part of the FAO to the degree that the secretary

general and the director general of the FAO chose the secretary general of the World Food Programme. "Executive director of the World Food Programme" was his title.

Q: So the Secretary General of the United Nations and the head of FAO jointly select the executive director of WFP.

MONROE: Exactly. And WFP used FAO administrative support.

Q: It was located in Rome.

MONROE: At least then, yes. It was located in Rome but it had a totally separate organization, had a separate headquarters.

Q: And you were the U.S. representative.

MONROE: I was the U.S. representative to that. I had a very senior AID official who dealt with the day to day stuff. But I dealt probably more with them with their executive secretary than any preceding permanent representative. One, I had known him from an earlier job when I was in EB and working on food aid conference which was another, I think I described that in an earlier time. But Jim Ingram was having a lot of problems at that point administratively and every other way with the FAO, so I was in constant communication with him.

Q: Did he then decide at some point not to seek another term.

MONROE: He had had his two terms and that was traditional. And he was of a panache. I think he was looking forward to, he had a years teaching stint at Oxford and then going back to the outback in Australia where he came from.

Q: And then we decided that we would like to see an American replace him.

MONROE: Well, again, in discussing this with the OECD, they agreed it was now, it was still the donor period, and incidentally the distinction between donors and beneficiary was very sharp in the World Food Programme. For obvious reasons it was delineated institutionally. The donor group, which was more or less like the OECD group except it included Argentina.

Q: A major wheat producer.

MONROE: Major wheat producer and a member of the World Food Aid Committee in London. We were not in the best position to convince Salama that this was a good thing to do. First we had to arrange for an amicable divorce between the World Food Programme and the FAO where administrative matters were concerned. The department had decided and I had endorsed the notion that it wasn't working.

Q: So that there should be a complete separation.

MONROE: A complete separation of administrative, not to change the way the executive

secretary was appointed, but rather to let them administer themselves because they had a considerable amount of expertise in brokering ships and freight forwarding and so forth, marine insurance. So they had different needs basically. Their people did different things, and it was very hard to get expense accounts reconciled and so forth and so on. Of course the will wasn't there either on the part of the FAO in everyone's judgment. We needed to call the Secretary General into the picture of the United Nations which the department did very effectively. They started sending to various meetings, they started sending a representative from the UN in New York, from the UN secretariat to attend these meetings. Happily it was an ex-Foreign Service officer with whom I had quite a long friendship, or had had. I mean we hadn't seen one another for approximately 15 years, but we had been friends for awhile, went through FSI or something like that. His name was Jim Baker, but not Jim Baker the Secretary of State. It just happened to be Jim Baker. He came frequently, and he told me that the secretary general was very reluctant to take a position because traditionally he had just let the FAO make the choice and preceding secretary generals had as well. He said however, he sensed what the problems were, so if we could come up with what I call an amicable divorce, if this thing could be made to work, then he would appoint an American of our choice. The Europeans had already picked the American unfortunately. He was the head of operations at the World Food Programme.

Q: And they wanted to see him promoted.

MONROE: They wanted to see him promoted because they knew his capabilities and they knew he was largely responsible for the good that the World Food Programme had done during the African crisis in the mid-'80s. That was not the person we chose. As a matter of fact it was Secretary of Agriculture took me aside and said the choice was a woman by the name of Catherine Britini who at that point was head of several of the feeding programs in the United States, the WIC program- (end of tape)

Q: Had run for Congress; had been defeated, a conservative from up New York State. She had been in the Department of Agriculture for some time, so she had some experience, not with the World Food Programme though I suppose.

MONROE: No, she hadn't. Very little international experience. The problem that she confronted at least with the Europeans was that she had had insufficient experience. Everyone holds the job to be one of the more difficult in the system because of the kinds of decisions. To give an idea of the kinds of decisions, I used to sit up with Ingram late in the evening while he struggled with whether to send a boat into Asmara. The last one had been fired upon, but people were in desperate straits outside of Asmara, and the trucks were lined up on the dock. He ultimately sent the boat in. I can recall his agonizing over that decision. I got that into a letter that the Secretary of State wrote him as he left office and everyone was aware of these kinds of decisions, two a day, that this man was making. It was one of the reasons he wanted to leave quite apart from his relations with Salama. The Europeans had difficulty envisaging someone like Britini taking some of those.

Q: Well, I know that today in 1999, she is still the head of the World Food Programme so tell us how you arranged for her election or selection.

MONROE: Well, the maneuver the department began with I think was a good maneuver. They sent cables to all of Africa. As a matter of fact, my successor was running that part of the program.

Q: From Washington.

MONROE: From Washington. Asking our people to go in there and make a demarche for Catherine Britini's selection. Salama called me in to say even before the first cable left the department I suspect, to say that this was nonsense. It wasn't an election. There is no way a permanent rep, at last he admitted it, the permanent rep population from that part of the world was going to tell him something he didn't want to hear.

Q: So how did you respond to that?

MONROE: Well, I said we just feel that we want you to feel comfortable with your decision. So then if these countries after meeting her and evaluating her background feel that she is the one they would like to represent their interests at the World Food Programme as the beneficiary community, I think then you would feel more comfortable.

Q: Was it his inclination did we think at the time that he was going to select the American who was the operations chief at the World Food Programme instead of backing a candidate that we endorsed?

MONROE: No there was no feeling of that. As a matter of fact, Chase let it be known that he was going to leave.

Q: He was the...

MONROE: He was the person, yes. This person decided the best thing he could do was get out of town as soon as a new executive secretary was chosen. The Danes then quite by surprise, put up a senior diplomat, which is essentially what Ingram was for us, had been for Australia, to run. Run, by that I mean to attract Salama's attention and give him an alternative to selecting Britini. This was not a good thing actually. He was very smooth obviously. He had a lot of international experience. He was very much your typical UN executive, diplomatic background, very smooth, lots of contacts around the world and so forth and so on. NO agricultural experience that we could determine. Then there was talk of running a minister of something or other from Sweden. This was a woman who had had at least experience with UNICEF, with the dealing with children. It began to look as if the OECD group was not going to support our person, not because they didn't think it was time for the United States, they just weren't convinced that our choice was a good choice. Since major donors are major donors, and they want to be certain that their money and their commodities are being appropriately handled. So I set out to convince them that Ms. Britini had the requisite background in the sense that she was well aware of the problems that arose in trying to feed large groups of people and so forth. She came out on several occasions, on every possible occasion actually to Rome. She toured Africa. She took my AID attaché with her to do this which was a good idea actually. I think it worked very well for both of them. To make a long story short, I had advised Washington from the very beginning that none

of this, you know, we can work on countries, but Salama was going to choose to do this only if he thinks its.. So what is really going to count is the budget debate and the budget negotiations at that conference that was coming up. The conference where Ingram's successor had to be appointed. That would happen at a major assembly conference.

Q: We could be current or at least eliminate our arrears, that would make a big difference.

MONROE: That's right. So, I asked that the financial person from IO come out, and she did, a very capable person. I went in to see Salama's financial, technical people, and we said what we would be willing to do. Primarily we based our position on as full payment as possible. We were now in the Bush administration, and Bush was pro UN because of his previous experience. By that I don't think he was going to do anything radical about supporting the UN, but I think he felt we should pay our current dues. The question of arrears was extraordinarily complex and remains so at the UN. Very difficult to get the Congress to agree to arrears payments. We felt that we could get a little arrears out of them if the FAO agreed to use these arrears for a predetermined projects if we could agree on one. Because these are windfalls for the agency effectively and actually no longer had any need for the money in the truest sense. We were paying almost up to the penny on our current, and I knew we were going to so, I mean I got a call from someone I knew on one of the key committees in this thing. It looked as if we were going down the right track. What then became the issue was the zero based budget. We had always insisted on the no growth budget.

Q: In the FAO.

MONROE: In the FAO. Zero budget growth. Salama said that was our ideology; that was our religion, and it was wholly unrealistic given the arrears situation and so forth. Of course there were many members who never paid, mostly G-77. Of course, every time someone paid from the G-77, they would get up and say we are going to pay our $23,000 which was the minimum you could pay. The minimum you had to pay as a member. Then they would say no matter how much we are suffering and how many people are starving, we are still going to make this payment because we think it is our duty. That was another one of Salama's maneuvers, which he never tired of. I mostly didn't arise to his baiting except at one point when he accused us of stealing from other members because we weren't paying. I then made a statement about how the American system operated and whatever else we were doing, we weren't stealing. Of course, given the amount of money we had spent on the agency at its beginning and over all the years, this was nonsensical. In any case, I believe that whatever happened in the autumn of 1991 it was really going to be based on zero based budgeting. Some sort of an agreement would be worked out finally.

Q: When was the agreement reached?

MONROE: Finally the agreement had to be made with the director general. We did; we had lunch in his office. It was the first time in our entire stay that the agency ever permitted that to happen. We actually had lunch catered in his office, and had the agricultural attaché there, had this financial advisor who was superb. He had his financial advisor, his administrative people. We worked on as usual it became a very complex arrangement which no one could understand,

which was part of the most people who were privy to the background would not understand, which is not unusual at all. It is actually two budgets is what it mounted to. It was like UN payday. I was very reluctant to do this incidentally because I knew the higher of the two, the virtual budget as opposed to the real budget, would be the one that he would want to work on for the next round. But in consultation with the department, we decided to take the arrangement with its faults because this was the only way we could be assured of one, a zero based budget outcome. It would maximize Catherine Britini's chances, and I think he made that clear. It would begin, it was one way of getting a little bit of arrears out of the Congress because they were interested in Catherine Britini by this point, at least some of them were. So, all in all, that is what happened. Everyone was happy. He appointed Britini, signed off and left.

Q: He was involved in her selection as well.

MONROE: Yes, he had to be.

Q: Were the African countries that had been lobbied, did it really make any difference what they thought?

MONROE: I don't know whether it made any difference where Salama was concerned. I mean it was something he could point to if he were criticized for her in his own little group whatever that was. You know, his group of perm rep supporters and what have you who had the base of his power. Without question, however, that group remained loyal to Catherine Britini throughout her tenure and remains loyal to her. Once she took office, and we overlapped for... I made the welcoming speech for her at one of the program committee meetings, so I was there then. I guess we went to a few African dinners together where some of the African group had gotten together and threw her a party. So I could see he had very good relations with this part of the beneficiary community, and things have gone on apace. She made some enemies in her own office.

Q: Her own office meaning the World Food Programme staff.

MONROE: Well, in the executive suite as it were because she really tried to fire all of Ingram's people, and that didn't quite work because many of them were UN civil servants, and they just couldn't be fired from one day to the next. But in general she did well. People supported her. She appointed an African as director of operations. He came from the Cameroon. My sense was that he was effective. It is always hard to measure how effective, but certainly he didn't fall on his face as some people thought he might.

Q: Certainly the food needs of the world had advanced in the period we are talking about.

MONROE: They have. She had Bosnia in that part of the world where there was considerable...

Q: Lots of things in Africa, Afghanistan.

MONROE: Lots of things in Africa, Afghanistan. North Korea has been one of her major efforts. I still see the fellow, my AID attaché who left government service. Worked in Latin America for a time, for the Latin American agent of the FAO. Then he became a consultant, and he has

consulted for the World Food Programme in terms of organizational change. They are trying to be more decentralized. Well, they started out as a very decentralized agency. They had to be brought to Rome because of this need for administrative affairs. So, I would say, she has done the job.

Q: Okay, is there anything else we should talk about your time in Rome? I am sure there are lots of other things.

MONROE: There are that we could talk about, but I think that that's, I think I learned a lot about bilateral diplomacy in the very real sense and the techniques of dealing with perm reps who can't leave the room without cabling their government and perm reps who hardly ever hear from their government, the free standers as we call them. Also the fact there is a power structure in all of these organizations. There are cliques that cut across regional lines. There is the G-77, an extremely strong organization caucus you might say. It is a caucus in some agencies, not all, but in some agencies it can deliver a lot of votes when it has to.

Q: Would you say that you, as the United States representative, had very little leeway without instructions, without checking with Washington, or did you have a fair amount of autonomy and independence, chance to take initiatives?

MONROE: Well, as much autonomy as you could possibly want. Sometimes even more than one might have wanted. I think for several reasons. It was a specialized agency. It wasn't, you know, the security council after all. Secondly, for a long time, the desk officer left and wasn't replaced. Nobody thought of replacing him since we got along well. I had, I was in total agreement with my DAS if not always the assistant secretary, probably hardly ever with the assistant secretary if he deigned to look at, I mean he had a lot of other things on his plate fortunately. I think once he had decided to stay, he didn't care any more. He thought I was doing it as well as anyone could. The people who were somewhat more troublesome who were the other agencies. We also did fisheries which was not a problem except on one occasion, which would make a good problem in a school if there was a school that taught diplomacy, a good case study. I think I should mention one thing before departing. I did have other agencies to which I was accredited including several legal agencies which just happened to be there, something called UNIDOIT. It was a magnificent organization. It met, these were learned attorneys from all over the world and they were attempting to codify a global civil code, and had been since 1930. This old League of Nations organization that met in a beautiful villa. I only handled their finance, I was only involved in their financial matters, but it was a good deal of fun. We were also involved in finding who did [what in] this organization that was involved in art restoration. It was a UN agency. It was involved in trying to catalogue stolen art. It was a very interesting organization. They had me over to lunch once to show me the organization; I never had anything else to do with them. And then an agency that had sprung from AID but had become an international agency that gave advice on legal systems for third world countries. In other words, they would send specialists out to do a commercial code, legal code.

Q: And all of these agencies were based in Rome.

MONROE: They were all based in Rome.

Q: Which is why you as the multilateral U.S. representative got involved with them even though they had nothing to do with food or agriculture.

MONROE: That's exactly right although the brass plaque said special representative or permanent representative to the UN food agency resident in Rome. It was a long time, so we didn't think we needed anything more on the plaque and couldn't think of anything else to say. I very seldom, I only went to those institutions when there were problems with finances, and there were from time to time because they were denominated in Swiss Francs, so the Lira-Franc arrangement was troubled. That was their problem. The others, I think the people providing legal support to third world countries had had some problems with the Italian government in a status problem. Someone argued that was because the FAO had a related but not similar I should say program where they went out to talk about agricultural law and sent experts out. Anyway, we finally solved that with the Italian government and took care of that.

WILLIAM HARRISON MARSH
Food and Agricultural Organization
Rome (1992-1994)

William Harrison Marsh was born in Pennsylvania and raised in Pennsylvania and Michigan. He attended Cornell University and served in the US Air Force while attending the School of Advanced International Studies and Princeton University in Japan. He entered the Foreign Service in 1960, wherein he served in Vietnam, France, Belgium, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Switzerland, and Italy. He was interviewed by Lambert (Nick) Heyniger and Vladimir Lehovich on December 3, 1997.

Q: Let's go back, I pushed you much too fast. You had an idea, an interest while you were still in Geneva in going over to Rome?

MARSH: Yes, I did. Partly because it was Rome and partly because of the subject matter and partly because the Food and Agricultural Organization had the worst reputation of any specialized agency in the United Nations. Because I had helped the reform movement in the Geneva Group I mentioned there in Geneva, in which we tried to achieve budgetary sanity and transparency and accountability in all of the UN agencies there and elsewhere I returned and was assisting the Assistant Secretary. It was John Bolton, who was a remarkable fellow. Many considered him very acerbic. I considered him as very purposeful and very effective. He was always very decent to me so I had no complaints at all.

I was thrown immediately into work at Rome on a TDY basis to work a divorce between the World Food Program and the Food and Agricultural Organization. So I went to Rome I think seven times in two years. I went to London twice, because I went to the International Maritime Organization to try to work the way out of some thickets there that had developed. Then in addition I was given the job of obtaining success for the candidacy of Catherine Bertini to head

the World Food Program, to become its Executive Director.

The World Food Program has been something of a sleeper in the UN system. It hasn't had very high visibility, but there have been years in which we've given it more than a billion dollars altogether for its emergency feeding, for its developmental programs, for its refugee assistance programs and all that sort of thing. So it is very important to the United States both in terms of humanitarian affairs and its high political objectives.

I was told that I was to work single-handedly to get endorsements from UN member countries, particularly those associated with the World Food Program, so that Catherine Bertini would be named to head it. She had had no international experience but had been Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Nutrition, and in particular for food stamps in the United States, where she had run, incidentally, something like a 26 billion-dollar program. So it was a great deal of work. I sent out 175 telegrams, made innumerable phone calls and finally ended up getting 75, 76 endorsements which prevailed therefore on a very reluctant Director General of the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization], and a sometimes ambivalent Secretary General of the UN, to name her. There is not an election. The head of the World Food Organization is named by the UN and the FAO acting together.

Q: So there is a lot of sort of behind the scenes diplomacy?

MARSH: Oh, yes. I went to conferences at Copenhagen, Nairobi, and a number of other places. It was very exciting. I did a lot of traveling that time and then in 1992 went to Rome, this time as Permanent Rep.

Q: Tell us a little bit about why you wanted to go to Rome. Had you now sort of developed a really keen interest in multilateral affairs? Or was there something particular that you wanted to accomplish in Rome?

MARSH: Well, there was the effort to revitalize and reform the FAO. I had that in Rome and I had already worked at that and achieved a certain reputation for what I was able to do with it. And, yes, I did like multilateral diplomacy though it was a lot of work, a lot of work. Then I wanted to be a chief of mission and whereas in the '83-'84 period good friends had sort of wafted the notion of an African embassy past me, I didn't want it. I didn't want it for family reasons, I didn't want it for substantive reasons and I didn't want it for tombstone reasons. Tombstone reasons…I know too many people who have had an African embassy and zip afterwards. Therefore I didn't want to be out and defacto dead at that time. I wanted to work right up until age 65, when I would retire.

Q: Sometime after I retired did the Department increase the retirement age from 60 to 65?

MARSH: Well, the Act of 1980 increased it from 60 to 65.

Q: Okay. So, you were chief of mission?

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: Did you get the title or rank of ambassador?

MARSH: No, they had taken that away when my predecessor was named at the post.

Q: That's a disappointment.

MARSH: They apparently saved something like $900,000 a year by doing away with an ambassador's residence, a DCM-ship and the ORE that goes along with those. They saved that money. But, again, everything has been driven in recent years by money, money, and money…the lack of it and that sort of thing.

But at any rate I had two years in Rome, not three. John Bolton was succeeded by a new Assistant Secretary whom I found entirely unsympathetic and who found me entirely unsympathetic, and one who had no interest whatsoever in reforming the FAO, then headed by perhaps the biggest scoundrel in the history of United Nations organizations.

Q: Who was that?

MARSH: That was Edouard Saouma, the director general of the FAO. He was a man who was corrupt in every sense of the word but whom the assistant secretary decided needed to be befriended. So I served my time, having been elected to the Finance Committee of the FAO, having served as co-chairman of the Geneva Group again, having been elected as head of the OECD Group there, and having been considered a very effective and well-liked American permanent representative. I am happy to say that when I visited Rome again, after having left in September of 1994, when I visited Rome in October of 1997, they did everything but spread their coats in the streets for me, and greet me with hosannas and applause! I knew that I had been very successful. I had received 27 letters in 1994 from foreign colleagues expressing regrets at my departure and so forth, which I have carefully saved.

Changes of administration can be very difficult things. Occasionally you will get people who are completely unsuited to the job. One of them was my ambassador to Morocco and I curtailed. The second and final one was the Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs and I curtailed.

I came back to the Historical Division and spent a very pleasant year and three quarters, largely working at the CIA and at the Eisenhower and Truman Libraries. Largely compiling documents for the Foreign Relations of the United States series that dealt with extraordinary operations and clandestine operations of the United States. That is to say the overthrow of Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 and the restoration of the Shah in 1953.

Q: Wow. Not, interestingly enough, Vietnam?

MARSH: No. It's very interesting. I reviewed the volumes for 1964 and 1965, four volumes in all, two each for each year, on Vietnam. I made a number of suggestions and they just sank like a stone. Everybody's mind is made up on Vietnam. Nobody is of an open mind concerning it.

Even when you suggest such a simple thing as putting maps in the first volumes and putting some bit of military information there to discuss the buildup and the fortunes of major U.S. military operations within Vietnam. Historians are not prepared to listen to that. Their minds are made up.

Q: Okay, now with your agreement I would like to ask you two things. Number one, I would like to take you back to Rome when you were the perm rep [permanent representative] there and ask you if you could give us perhaps just two or three of the highlights of your two year tour there. Sort of important things that you thought were going on and your were working on there.

MARSH: For one thing is the extension of the World Food Program's activities to cover humanitarian crises such as Somalia, Rwanda, Central Africa and that sort of thing. I think matters of extreme human urgency. Secondly as I mentioned, the very uphill Himalayan struggle to reform the FAO itself which is an organization very largely out of tune and out of pace with the crisis of agriculture throughout the world.

Q: Is it one of these UN organizations that some people say are over-staffed and have too many people who have been there too long?

MARSH: Over-staffed, too many people there too long, and located in a very bad work climate. That of Rome is very, very bad. The bureaucracy of Rome is beyond belief. The stupor and the arrogance of the Italian bureaucracy astonish me. I had no idea of such a thing. All I can say is that it is quite a change to go from Geneva to Rome. Everyone should do it the other way around so as to end up with the efficiency of Geneva!

Q: This is a UN organization which after all does not deal so much with the problems of the developed world, that is to say North America or Western Europe, but it deals with the problems of the developing world. Would it be better therefore, for example, to have the FAO in a country like the Philippines or some place like Nairobi or even a country that really has food problems, like India?

MARSH: You mean to situate the FAO there where the need is great?

Q: Yes.

MARSH: Well, you know, the FAO was located in Washington until 1957 and then as a sop to the Italians, to give them prestige in their new post-war identity, it was moved to Rome. Rome is not an important intellectual center, particularly in the field of agriculture.

Q: Someplace that you think about when you think about food.

MARSH: That's right and so it is very difficult for people to keep up their expertise in a place like that. Plus the fact that most people coming to the FAO don't even speak Italian. What I'm trying to say is that if the FAO were still here in Washington it would be a piece of cake for people at the FAO to keep up with the state of the art. The great state universities, and Cornell University, are so close to deal with exigencies of all kinds.

Q: You have large non-profit organizations for example, like the FORD Foundation, which are very active in certain parts of the world in trying to improve agriculture and better strains of wheat and things like that in the Philippines. I think it would be easier to follow that kind of stuff. Are you familiar with, for example, a French agronomist named Rene Dumont?

MARSH: Yes.

Q: Where would Rene Dumont think that the FAO should be?

MARSH: You may have one guess, and that would be fine.

Q: Paris?

MARSH: That would be fine because at least you would have access to everything in the French language, whereas having access to that in the universities in Italy in Italian…thank you very much! Not much help!

The practices of the FAO… for example the Legal Advisor at the FAO went from Rome to Geneva of the same plane I did. I was going from Rome up to Geneva for a high level meeting on the Geneva Group. I stayed in a third class hotel, having flown coach; he stayed at the Inter-Continental having flown first class. Now first class for a one hour flight in Europe just doesn't make any sense at all.

Q: Nonsense.

MARSH: It's ridiculous. So the principal contributor of approximately one fourth of the budget of the FAO is in steerage shall we say, and staying at the flophouse shall we say, and an FAO functionary is in glory!

Q: So when Madeline Albright, our Secretary of State, is trying very hard to persuade the American Congress to pay up our arrears to the UN, you think it would be helpful if the UN for its part showed more effort to economize?

MARSH: No…not necessarily. Well, I think it should economize for other reasons, let's put it that way. But point of fact is that I take a very orthodox position with respect to payment of dues. These are Treaty obligations of the United States… pay up and shut-up about the past! But talk a lot and act a lot for the future. Pay it. Besides which, I don't want members of the Congress complaining about the 'perquisites' of foreign officials because I may laugh myself to death!

Q: We still all fly in and out of National rather than Dulles!

MARSH: That's right. That's right.

Q: Okay, Bill, one final question. You have had an unusually, in my opinion, an unusually long and, if I may also say so, a distinguished career in the Foreign Service. I think it is 36 years.

Most of the rest of us have served considerably shorter time, at least these days. I wonder if you could take five minutes and give us some of your thoughts of what the Foreign Service should be doing and what the United States Government should be doing now, that we are not. In other words an overview of the lessons learned in your career.

MARSH: When I first came into the Service there was a gentlemanly code in effect, *noblesse oblige*, if you will, and one wasn't supposed to complain about salary or about 'perquisites' or something of that sort. So we did without or we paid ourselves for things in the public interest. Times have changed and today's young people demand gratification and reimbursement. They also want to budget their time themselves, rather than having some old DCM or Department official tell them to do this or that. I found for example that the notion of a forty-hour week was very well installed in my people in Geneva. If I asked them to take, perhaps, two hours on a Sunday to go and meet a Delegation, see them to their hotels and then work with them throughout the rest of the week, some people were very, very begrudging, openly begrudging, of even two hours on Sunday. I think we need to take these realities into account. Times have changed.

I think we have to understand that there are great costs to the three-year career.

Q: The three-year career?

MARSH: That's right, which is now becoming people who want to come in for a single tour. I think there are too many people in the Department who say this is great because then we can use lower paid junior officers all the time and not have to have these high-paid old fogeys like Marsh, who has been around for 36 years. There is a cost. There is a terrific cost in that sort of thing.

I think that we also in the Department are suffering from a terrible complacency, ever since 1991, and that complacency is the wolf is dead, hurray, what with the evaporation, the collapse of the Soviet Union. There are plenty of crises that have taken place and will be taking place, actually we have been very lucky, much too lucky. How well wired in are we with the decision-makers?

Q: The decision-makers overseas?

MARSH: Overseas, yes. For example, it has taken two efforts by the IMF apparently to bring President Suharto of Indonesia around to accepting the austerity that his situation has imposed on the country.

Q: This goes back to something that you were talking about earlier, that political reporting from overseas posts is pretty good. But oftentimes economic reporting, particularly macro economics in terms of let's say South Korea's overall economy or Thailand's overall economy or Indonesia's overall economy and the concerns about possible collapse…we don't do a good enough job on that?

MARSH: I think we worry ourselves to death with respect to that. What we need to think about

is much more pragmatic, namely to what use can a given set of reporting be? Tailor our reporting so that content and subject matter and timing and so forth correspond to policy-makers' needs, that kind of thing. We have got perhaps too much of an academic focus. Saying what a given political or religious minority is thinking about at a particular time in a particular country is going to be of interest, even though we are talking about Western Europe, for example, rather than some fomenting Eastern society.

Also we need a sense of proportion about things. I remember one time when there was a cable from New Delhi on Indian reaction to a given policy move. This is some time ago, a decade or so ago. It was 24 pages long! Now did they really expect Washington to read 24 pages on that sort of thing? Besides which times have changed and we have got to change with them.

For example, with respect to a hijacking in Geneva soon after I arrived there, CNN had found a way to get its people on the airfield. My Security officer was unable to get on it. Washington was having simultaneous filming and stories from the airport, real time work. The mission couldn't possibly compete with that.

The wire services, television services all of that kind of thing plus the fact that you've got now electronic mail moving at incredible rates. That means that you are going to get narrative reporting, not very analytical but that is going to be taken care of. What we are going to have to deal with then is to get the interpretation of the news analysis in as quickly as possible. Our processes where you go through supervisory layer after layer even at a small embassy overseas just make that ridiculous.

I admit to being something of a Luddite here, but we have become idol worshipers, we worship the computer now. All I want to say is that I have my reservations about it. You know, with his quill pen Thomas Jefferson didn't do a bad job, so stop knocking those of us who still rely on handwriting. I incidentally found out my nickname from Rome. It was 'Mr. Fountain Pen' because my staff thought it was so archaic and unusual that I had an ink fountain pen, as a matter of fact.

But in any event, is it cost effective? Is it truly cost effective to spend all this money on computers, to be training people in computers, to be having officers do all their own secretarial work? Maybe you should set up steno pools and maybe you should set up secretarial pools…note the difference between those two…and all that kind of thing rather than having substantive officers do it.

Another thing, too, is that once you put a computer in front of an individual, remember, he has got direct access to the world…or she does. No DCM is going to be able to guarantee that a disgruntlement is not going to reach a Senate office, or that an ultimatum is not going to go to a local critic of the United States. This is a different world because you are putting a huge communications tool in the hands of everybody. And, also, let us fact it…they haven't found out a way yet to make these free from penetration by adversaries.

Some nerd in Columbus, Ohio is even now reading what you are writing on your machine.

Q: Yes. In terms of running an embassy and presenting a sort of united policy front. With the proliferation of American government agencies abroad now the ambassador and the DCM are having a much more difficult time sort of keeping track of what is sent back to Washington from their post with or without their permission.

MARSH: That is true, but, Nick, there is something else as well. It is that for a lot of people the difficulty of the job is in leaving the mission or the embassy and going out and seeing the local contact and having a discussion in Heaven knows what language, then making notes on it and then coming back and writing it all up and reporting to one's superiors about it. How much simpler it is just to stay in front of that machine.

End of reader